

'NIGHT OF THE COLLAPSE'

Handwritten notes / Partial
m/s pieces / odd chapters

(1)

Nature of the Religion

1) He saw how bad = Anger. (And
the - typical pressure & under the
to do to sit down and recede with
anger; and then because he recede
was 1-2 ft. apart. He was the Ken Tyea
+ his sits on under the roof of a
mile on an eye, or of her a few
years. I and his the is with 1 ft =
the only no new ideas, or here
exhausted with - well, the with are
time of his - he remembers Tyea
my nice the = had 2 ft, 3 ft, 4 ft,
a 2 ft 6 in high - and Amis living
is in his own house for the
ridiculous ^(in the cafe - 1 ft 6 in + 1 ft 6 in + 1 ft 6 in + 1 ft 6 in) ~~and~~ - and the lady who ^{sharps} the ^{order + his}
told him got up with with with -
etc.

2) His friends + got is a lot of →

→ a stage nation — in a shop, & I think. So
we could see why. I couldn't tell her was
to say we had why we had a war with
Britain, so there was no audience &
anyway of doing it was to tell her it,
of doing it was to hear her —
up to all the congress is about by,
of character, compared to a
dead destruction was how by character —

3) His knowledge of the 'other' situation —
and the hard detached of — who
had rejected to war on morality!
with no conscience, pray?

4) Pithier's 'salty' depicted down the
'crucifix' — after Baghdad. (Nineveh?)

5) The King like all these people who
had been too young of the war & on this
callousness & arrogance. And he had lost the
power to further himself. How was he
to live.

(2)

This protective^{ive} and guiding faculty had been blown
bullet-holed & screamed at John.

5) Science is telling — all the while
Trumpkin says this telling to Pip — it
is 1948 and George Orwell is writing
1984 — and then it came out & we had
read it as a utopian book the other
way round, what down not the
crisp heaven — and Pip then read
it & then it was clear now, right now,
everything was in place [read 1984 yet]
the New peak, the voice that they
all looked at with a kind of wonder
that it was about the Centre and the
ideologies (the 2 v. similar ideologies
of capitalism & communism) — the little
with the tech of it came for a time,
Britain had no part of it, we only felt
as if it was indeed someone's help →

Byrd's principle

doubt of Green Victoria. These 2 pages -
Nights 1 and Victoria were the very first of

guy's work - Byrd's work he didn't
know - peric's intention to see ki-
the he'd had a 1st for 1st state.
It would be all right. He would lead the
wild-eyed all his father's parties ready
and the Byrd the head stopped at the

→ you could see the Christy &

Byrd's Green with the

guitars & care and solicitude and
advantage of the whole ship
his work was the first place
"abandoned" (but a actual expression
the way). He would be on

Nature of the Religion

①

If you are to other people to fight for you with you they will go with any war, they sweep you away because power can only be sustained by judgement, but this is difficult because power as it increases befuddles and deludes judgement.

{ } The American economy had been due to Washington to say the British was in its uppers — and not likely to get any American investment and as could go into the ruins of Germany. The result was the Marshall plan (was it?), there was no doubt the country could determine the future of Britain. And certainly (if Pip) nothing was going to come for the country, nothing worthy of such a powerfully superior — of the facts →

→ He, nervous, pragmatic, a
writer-of-fact Britain was the part
of the USA's defence system, since
since 'the West' had to defend itself
as a whole for the West - (first date
of the Central question) - and so it was
that we learned to know this that
spelled us down as this that defined
the West opposite, knowing that we were
as powerful and fit and healthy and
well-fed as the States, and it was
a hypocrisy (Newspaper) you could
live with - and people died - this was
that by - and - the West was
a body of equal ^{partners} partners And this
knew that it didn't know - the States -
it type it was a extended beyond, so
it couldn't feel that East had been
so they lived in the life, which was

(3)

It never became clear - one doesn't know what
again is. Yet not ^{over} a ~~trite~~ tinkle of dry pity
did he feel of Mr. No. 1 & woman did he try to
take himself inside her - it would have been so
easy after all, to ask himself how he would feel
~~if~~ not to have a climax, the relief, the
silent recollection of a glory of kisses and ~~touch~~ ^{touches}
and finding its end in a juddering release, ~~the~~
an end to the glory yet by finishing it, by giving
it ~~a space of time~~ a limited duration, carrying
hope & excitement in its very eclipse because
the desire would grow again. Not a thing of this
did one know. Z might, he thought, just as well
be a ~~low~~ lump of meat. But not a woman of
sweetness and concern did this evoke in Z.
Zy never in love. Z was Mr. Zy never meant
to do but to end the. And the bloody was had
brighter than light. Because it had ~~driven~~
driven everlastingly dotty - they looked & dotty
eyes and swelled with dotty words - and the
in Mr. Zy had stumbled light & of all
idiotic notions first of light light and then
of all outrageous mental mutilations
manic and other. ↑

FOR Pgs 150 & thereabouts - join
before Book II ^{Hewson} ~~Hewson~~ Road...

NIGHT 7 OF THE ECLIPSE

He is aware, the world he is in
he is proud to be else in

Look back in age — how can

it take it down to

series — how can it take the

world it thinks it is in is

be real — then is the real

Relief and the is the real

the USA exists as a country

then we see the entire world

is being played — it has no meaning, →

→ at best an act of hostility.

AND LUKKAT EVKANT IN

The book is Saka Thi

copy.

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

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 the room seem endless and full of mysterious colours. They were all sweating slightly --- if was good, good to be there! This was the homecoming! 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 needed friends, that was the real homecoming, something total, not just sex and the tiresome 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 in the world, not suffocated in a deathly marriage-box! She was in trousers this 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. 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-thought came to chase the first away. But it was quickly swallowed up in reminiscences about Basrah.

Any a Byghded id spen
 "Well, did you enjoy it, Pip?" Dick asked him seriously.

"Not enjoyed exactly but ---"

"Interesting?"

~~"Yes!"~~

answered for him.
Pinkie chuckled. "It never stopped being that! Even the boredom ¹⁵ was interesting. *here! A kind of* wasn't it, mouse?" *Gandy in the*

~~"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!"

"Well," Dick said quietly, "it sounds just the place ~~for~~ 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!"

"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?"

Dick nodded quickly, ^{*all this*} 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

2 into an ancient tomb

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?"

"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 ---"

"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 ^{hearing} 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 other side of the river} the main street all the time, but it was all part of a glow, do you see what I mean?"

"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 control there, it's already

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 khamzin ---!"

"The wind," Hanni explained to Dick in an unwilling way, as if the word struck disgust in her, "the ^{dusty} 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 serious. "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, 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 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 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 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.

"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.

"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!"

"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 extraordinary 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 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!"

"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!

"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 tables} and charts and figures in which such things are decided, could you?" ^{Set out} 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!"

"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."

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 to chase 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 deadlines! 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 Mesopotamia hotel or eating chicken livers at the bar with Mohammed ---"

"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 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, 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 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 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 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 free here --- there was freedom! I was 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 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 or 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 the deeper time's 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 and Pinkie on the food, he on the tea and coffee, and Dick on the morning paper, since 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 first feeling of foreboding and horror, the night before, was gone --- obviously a left-over from the dark Basrah-world. After all, one didn't stab one's sister to death here, with small cuts, if she turned prostitute, one 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 let 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 one tried to ambush it into! 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'd 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} 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 ^anext 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. ^d ~~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 ^{all those guests of his from night} 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. ^h He suspected that Pinkie was going outside to make her calls, at 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 ^{Baghdad} Basrah, and otherwise trying on ^{forgetting} 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~~ ^{chief} 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 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 ^{drink} cup of tea before ^{the} a theatre, and Hanni stayed one ^{whole} 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 ^{on} 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 ^{way} ^{and Pinkie}.

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, ^{the two of them} ~~just the~~ ^{where Dick} ~~two of them~~, and rowed towards Marlow, ^{he still} ~~in~~ ^{sun-lit, misty weather.} ~~still~~, ^{He} ~~in~~ ^{enjoyed jolly} ~~sun-lit, misty weather.~~ Pleasure steamers passed them and Dick waved his hand in ^{He} ~~a~~ ^{enjoyed jolly} ~~jolly way,~~ ^{ed} ~~making a burlesque of it~~ He rowed steadily, ~~in shirt-sleeves~~, 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 feel master of the world, in control with one's mind. Life was the subject of a continual mental essay, so to speak; nothing disastrous - even real - could happen. It gave one a heady sense of freedom. At the same time

a biological endowment

it wasn't natural.

^{Pip} 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 ^{had} his mouth with less clarity than his eyes, bulging slightly, ^{with} an odd soft decisiveness about it. ^{then} 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} they were never sharp, much less fierce, ^{they gazed} but looked ^{had} at everything with a lingering, uninquisitive good will. ^{They were what} They were what ^{had first} struck Granville at the training school; ^{he had looked into Dick's} ^{they were} Pollocke's light blue eyes, so ^{made} amused and boyish, and simply discovered a ^{easy} ^{it} ^{become a kind of} friendship there, though the ^{friendship} had ^{petered out} ^{formalizing now}.

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 ^{pub} ^{fill} lawn until it was dark. This meant rowing back without lights, and ^{fun} ^{keep up} 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. ^{They all} All the shops were closed and no one was in Pollocke's flat, ^{Pip, Pollocke, & Hanni} so they took a train to Waterloo ^{from there a taxi} 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 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.

As for you, he said,

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

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

And another time Dick said to him, "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. ^{Dick always} He gave a map of himself all the time, ranging ^{his life} 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. ^{made} The phenomenon of Dick ^{was} as interesting for Granville as it was for Dick himself. ^{Pip} it was a third object between them.

Hanni ^{he, Dick} "bored" him, he said one evening, adding, "As any woman you're going to live with should!" He ^{described} talked about how he'd met her first, at the Capthall Avenue office, when she was ^{was} doing a temporary ^{job} interpreter's job there. ^{Dick said} "She looked ghastly, such a bloody school-marm, her eyebrows ^{met} meeting in the middle like some ^{a bloody great} 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 said} He paused to smile. It was a curiously theatrical ^{looked at from under} "she offered me the cigar and I liked it!" ^{that was 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 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 after the long row in the dark,~~

~~And Dick always described points of strong feeling with more deliberate calm and style than otherwise.~~ 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, a kind of musing, wistful, puzzled, heroic companion. It was never really at ease with Dick, they

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

→ ^{Hanni} One evening Dick happened to ask if ^{Pinkie} they'd had any servants in Baghdad, Basrah. There were the four of them, with Glenning, in the kitchen upstairs. And Pinkie answered in her extravagant vein, laughing, her lips moist.

^{Pinkie} told her ^{away to} "Servants?" she cried. "Good, God, yes! We had three, old cook, and a retainer thrown in who lived at the bottom of the garden!"

Glenning appreciated this, chuckling. But a certain pallor came over Dick's face; or perhaps it was only that he pursed his lips. He often seemed to recoil slightly when she was in an extravagant mood or talked in a resounding and patrician way like her father. Servants, as it turned out, were a sore subject with Dick. Hanni told Pinkie later that he refused even to have a char in, because it offended his principle that serving of any kind was wrong.

^{Assyrian} In fact, they'd had three servants in Basrah - Bertha, a girl of nineteen or ²⁰ twenty, Kath'm, his boy, and Abu' Kath'm who did the washing at the back and hardly entered the house. ^{the boy's mother} And it was odd to hear Pinkie talk like this because servants actually frightened her. Hanni had her lips strangely pursed as she heard her another like this because servants actually frightened her. Bertha was supposed to be her personal maid as well as the cook but Pinkie did nearly all the cooking and gave her long hours off duty. Bertha was an Assyrian, like

Hanni, and insisted on being treated like a lady.

"I can't bear servants hanging round me!" Pinkie would say. ^{wanted to disown} any wish to have servants - she was again awful. She would smile at the girl too much, wanting to disown any ^{she said} memsahib attitudes Bertha might attribute to her. Of course, Bertha only

assumed that Pinkie was a fake memsahib, afraid to assert herself, and she

→ who did the ~~job~~ chores, his mother do lived
in the garden ~~with~~ and a girl who came to
to do any work the required fineness, such
as ~~dust~~ dusting shelves and hoovering.

→ of lighter who did the ~~job~~ ^{the}
required fineness like ~~dust~~ ^{dust} ~~work~~ ^{work}
and hoovering, also Kathleen in ~~the~~ ^{the}

~~put on terrific airs. It was awful to see them together, Pinkie blushing and intimidated, the girl upbush and pouting.~~

Asyria
~~at the door in his striped dishdasha, with bare feet, was enough to send the Bertha flying out of the room. He was dirty, she said, and brought bugs into the house, which was probably true. She hated to see his dark, bare feet on the tiles. And Kath'm bore it with a stern, untroubled face, his eyes twinkling a little. Bertha's family bible sat on a little table in the sitting-room with a heavy silver-plated crucifix laid across it, and she forbade Kath'm to go anywhere near it, much less to dust it in his clumsy way, and when he passed it sometimes he would give it a quick sidelong glance in awe and hurry on. Bertha had a room next to the dining room and could have put the bible there, but she wanted it as a public demonstration of (of her class standing - as a Christian) and Pinkie said nothing. It was effective, too, because Kath'm treated it as something magical like the evil eye. He~~

as he laid down the tray
~~Kath'm was always in good humour, and discreet, and quiet. We tiptoed upstairs with Granville's breakfast in the morning, and would smile at him with a quick flash of white teeth. And he would whisper, hissing, as he bent down with the tray, "Sahib, sahib, chai wa halib!"~~
as he laid down the tray
~~tea with milk; he repeated it every morning. There was a clear, perfectly understood relation between them against Bertha. Yet Kath'm never uttered a word against her. Indeed, he never uttered more than a few words all day.~~

Pinkie always packed Kath'm off to his hut in the evening, and told Bertha she could go to her room. She *liked to* ~~preferred~~ serving dinner herself, even when there were guests. *helping her - looking* ~~For this she needed Granville's help and he would potter around the table like a servant, to the distress of his Arab friends. He got furious about this but she said the penalty of having~~

her to say low-key, a servant and therefore in shame. The allowances were made for us

The woman
↳ Pip

→ ~~was~~ ^{ed} jump ~~ed~~ ^{ed} out of bed in the morning
and he would call down the stairs
Chai wa khalo Katha, tea with
milk, and a few minutes later
would appear in his bedroom with
the tray and kiss with a quick flash
of white teeth as he bent down with
the to deposit it ^{on} his bedside table,
Sahib, Sahib ~~was~~ ^{→ muf}

→ Christians as they ~~was~~ ^{it was} made for fellow-
Christians. Their attackers ~~seemed~~
~~not~~ ^{id not} carry ~~any~~ ^{any} hint of judgement,
less superiority, ~~and~~

and naturally Hoje the Pinkie was ashamed
of his presence.

108.

~~Kath'm in the house would be her going up to bed instead of entertaining.~~

~~"But what are servants for?" he asked her.~~

~~"I can't help it, I can't bear servants round me, that's all!"~~

~~"But he loves serving at table!"~~

~~This was true. ^{The boy} Kath'm thought she was ashamed of showing him to~~

~~the guests! 'Dirty' as Bertha said he was! And one evening Granville~~

~~^{saw} found him gazing wistfully in at the dining room window in the cold air,~~

~~his nose pressed against the glass, fascinated by the warm glow inside.~~

~~^{He adored} Kath'm loved to put ^{trip} on a clean robe and pad ^{dip} softly across the floor fetching ^{to} tea or coffee as he did during the day if a guest called ^{unexpectedly}. But Pinkie said~~

~~that working in the evening was 'over-time', for which he wasn't paid. It~~

~~was a strangely tame and social attitude for her, and didn't fit her nature.~~

~~The fact was that she couldn't bear the responsibility of someone taking~~

~~orders from her. She couldn't bear the idea of guiding other people's~~

~~lives.~~

~~And his Arab guests would look on in astonishment. It was frightful~~
~~aid, shame, not to have servants about, and they wondered how he could be~~
~~chief in the T.I.M. office.~~

~~But still, this created a problem of conscience for Granville as~~

~~well. ^{Pip} He had to work in with the sheikhs, some of them hard, greedy,~~

~~exploiting men. Once he nearly wrote home for a change of post. He lived~~

~~like a little king though he was ^{in truth a glorified} only a clerk. When he walked through~~

~~the streets sometimes between the dark, ragged, sallow people he had an~~

~~uncomfortable impression of himself as soigne and well-wined. Even a clean~~

~~shirt and a suit felt too much. It was a position forced on him. The~~

~~When he strolled down the main street sheikhs and the Arab and Kurdish businessmen passed ^{by} in their Cadillacs,~~

~~Fords and Oldsmobiles, ^{raising} kicking up the dust, their chauffeurs cursing at the~~

They talked of possible ^{enemies} ~~enemies~~ with hushed voices — pedestrians. ~~The doctors, lawyers and government officials formed an impenetrable sink of corruption.~~ There was also a host of small, neglected men with revolvers in their belts who were said to be in the pay of Russia ^{who} ~~and~~ were prepared ^{up} ~~for~~ a communist revolution, which ^{might easily} ~~would~~ come about during one of the annual student riots. ^{after all} And the students read Das Kapital under their desk ^{every} ~~lids~~. Then, ~~people~~ said, a communist sink of corruption would replace the present one.

^{Pip} ~~He~~ had experience of two riots. After the first one, when Mohammed rescued him from the Mesopotamia Hotel, he framed his letter to Copthall Avenue asking for a change of post. ^{What} ~~What~~ the devil was he doing here getting mixed up in somebody else's quarrels, he asked himself and being identified with attitudes he'd never had? ~~He was furious~~ But then the evening came and he walked with Mohammed down to the ^{river} ~~river~~ as always, now that the rioting had stopped, and they gazed across at the glittering minarets on the other ^{bank} ~~side~~ while oars plunged in and out of the dark water below them in a regular rhythm, patient and unconscious, and he was drawn back like ~~someone~~ ^{pet.} ~~drugged~~, lulled and delighted, beyond argument or ^{momentary} ~~momentary~~ reasoning. The slow, cool wind drove up the ^{water} ~~river~~, dispersing the foul day-smells. They went home and cooked a huge musguf, that tasted like cod ^{and} ~~was cooked~~ in the garden, propped ^{it} ~~up~~ against sticks, and after ^{water eating} ~~the meal~~ they ~~sat~~ ^{sat} clinking beads together in the sitting-room, with the fire dying and the rush mat making a hissing noise under their feet whenever they moved. In the morning he told himself that the necessity of his Basrah-experience — for his own development — purified and justified his stay.

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

and said, "Suppose I go back to Basrah alone? ^{Should} Shall I?"

Hanni and Dick were a little behind them. ~~He'd little 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} ~~woman~~ here?"

^{Oh} ~~"I could go to the brothel,"~~ he said ~~at once,~~ hoping to catch Dick's ear, but Dick was kissing Hanni's neck. [To P. 112]

~~He glanced at her. She didn't appear offended. 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, gay, ~~looking before them~~ ^{gold-} at the shining water, and ~~spoke as if they had~~ ^{seemed to have} 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 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 sheikhs 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?"

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

"But our bodies aren't separate from us!" Granville cried, 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. 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!"

"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 ^{a young edition of} ~~just~~ like old Waffle-Waffle."

'Waffle-Waffle' was her grandfather, ^{had} who married 'Aunt Beatrice'.

'Aunt' was a courtesy title because Beatrice was much younger than Waffle-Waffle. ^{and had} She was a flashing, red-haired woman with a ^{quaintly} sharp, ribald wit, and 'Waffle-Waffle' was a naval man. ^{WW} He thought she had grand style and

in-honour

It was an allusion to the 'male honour' ~~obsession~~ in his talk in Baghdad.

he worshipped her. The name Waffle-Waffle came from the way he spoke, ^{not the fact that he was said as a form of wit} it being almost impossible to understand what he said. Beatrice had had ^{three healthy children} a son and two daughters by him, and now, ^{with the help of her son Derrick} with the help of her son Derrick, she ran a finishing school for girls in Mayfair.

Pinkie was the youngest of a family of nine, Always 'baby Hester'. Her nurse had always told her, to make her sense of loneliness worse, that she had 'the mark of the Grysham ⁱⁿ her'. ~~She'd told this to all the children at different times but with Pinkie it stuck.~~ The mark of the Grysham meant a certain wildness ^{really} of temperament ~~a kind of noble~~ dissipation that ran in the family. At the Aldercote hunt balls pokers were used to open the champagne bottles, the bannisters of the main staircase were 'saddled' so that the men could ride down them with their ^{dance pumps} shoes in the stirrups, ^{yell up} shouting Yoick at the top of their voices. Sometimes Pinkie's ^{daddy} father brought down a chorus-girl for the week-end or went off to Brighton on the non-stop train from Waterloo that everybody called The Flying Fornicator. ~~He was also quiet and charming. Not that Granville had met him. They lived on a Caribbean island these days.~~

But he'd seen Aldercote once. Pinkie was born there, but already in her childhood only part of it was used. The farm was sold up, then the stables. Nearly the whole of the estate round the house had been shaped and planted by Gryshams in the last two hundred years. It had an unbelievable tranquillity --- it was really like a blow, stunning you suddenly, a terrific, blinding word from a kind of people who no longer existed on this earth. There were oaks and elms and a lake where wild duck nested.

Her nickname 'Pinkie' came about when she was fifteen, ^{at a party} ~~It was during her first studio-party, given by a friend of her mother's who~~

where the host

~~Yellow indicated that you were gay,~~
 smoked Russian cigarettes from a long ivory holder and slept in a hammock
 slung between two enormous pieces of sculpture. Pinkie ^{was} arrived in a
 paroxysm of shyness, ~~her mouth working up and down helplessly and her eyes~~
~~flickering.~~ ^{Everyone was} After tea the others started talking about the psychological
 meaning of colours. ^{When she was asked "what's your favourite colour"} Yellow meant homosexuality, red meant sexual
 frustration if you showed great fondness for these colours you were a
~~"frigid" or a "queer".~~ ^{gay} Then, during a hush, a small, plump young man with
 a red-golden beard suddenly turned to her and asked, "What's your favourite
 colour, Miss Grysham?" To which Miss Grysham replied, with a blush going
 slowly up her neck while ^{was she said} everybody gazed at her, "Pink -- I think."

Everyone laughed. As she usually blushed every minutes anyway the nickname
 stuck. Pity was an old-fashioned virtue among these people: hard-faced
 bohemians with money in their pockets. They called her 'a flower of the
 English aristocracy' --- facetiously of course. She was so 'traditional' --
 a museum piece! And everything from her soft, half-pained, tragic way of
 speaking to her liking Gainsborough must go. Her politeness was 'pompous'.
 Once she ingenuously asked the red-golden beard if hellfire was true --
 and the answer she got was a huge book on comparative religion! It was
 all in there, he said --- religion was just primitive hopes and fears,
 nothing to do with us. And a week later he had her in bed. He said she
 had the softest and warmest and most yielding little twat of any virgin
 he'd deflowered. He tried her later with a cucumber; he wanted her to go
 at it less 'sacredly'.

Nigel, her eldest brother, was the one she was closest to. He
 was the smell of the countryside for her --- real health. And he'd always
 been the nicest to her. After the last war he'd put his army annuity and
 his family-allowance together and started a retail business in London, and

it turned out well. He even gave Pinkie a job. Then he started stables, bought a place for himself in the country and was called 'squire' by the local romantics. The work he gave Pinkie, as a kind of traveller for the firm, on the public relations side, was good for her self-respect. And she was good at it. That was why she visited the T.I.M. training school, as part of her job, scouting for young people. She met Granville and Dick, who were the only people there with 'style', she said.

She didn't see much of Nigel these days. He lived more and more in the country, and spent a lot of his time hanging round the stables talking horseflesh. He was a tall, fair-haired man with rosy cheeks and broad shoulders, his eyes much like Pinkie's except that they were steady and searching, with a constant smile in them. He had the same rash and daredevil streak as his father, coupled with Pinkie's softness. The moment they were together they fell into horse-talk. She played the part, out of love for him. The mare had a 'cold back', Nigel would say, and was a bit 'fiddle-headed', with a tendency to 'dish'. Or the grey had 'lots in front of him' though he 'grunted under the stick'. "A terrible high blower!" he would say, and Pinkie would laugh.

There was an indefinable element of unhappiness in Nigel. It lay under his sunny good will and was even part of it. But he never talked about himself. He only mentioned himself in connection with something he'd seen or enjoyed. It was 'unsporting' to be disgruntled or irritable. A man had to be above that. His first question after he'd had a nasty fall one day and cracked his arm was whether the mare had been 'damaged'. He married late, a girl called Mary who hardly spoke and looked after the house quietly and carefully.

In the war he was known as 'Nuttie Nigel' because of his forays

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 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.

He wanted to ask Dick what had been 'going on' in his absence, but he didn't want to appear petty or jealous before him, if only because Dick seemed to regard him as a carefree person. 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? --- 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 sow 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'.

evening and he

Hanni and Pinkie were together in the kitchen one day at one of ~~heard the from the next room. They laughed and kept on making~~ their tete-a-tetes, 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! 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 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.

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 the where had 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 how 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

*She had once had a Wembley a
the other side of London.*

Later in the week, after a quiet 'phone-call, Pinkie announced that she was going back to her 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, ^{need} ^{it, all} 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 could 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 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 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 unpleasurable. 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 ^{each} every morning, and came back ~~looking rather pale and tired in the evening~~ wanting her dinner, which he now prepared ~~for her~~. ~~It continued to be exciting.~~ There were things to talk about. ~~She~~ 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

she said
 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~~
perhaps 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. Desire 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 too overwhelming and direct for her, because he was pent-up. He felt an 'orang-utang' in his sex, as he'd done on many occasions before. She shrunk from him. The heat of his hands, his breath, the closeness of his eyes, seemed to panic 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 very 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.

And they Hanni happened to get an afternoon off and dropped in one day. *together with* She cooked a meal with him and they went for a walk afterwards. *afternoon when he was alone in the house and* 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, even as she spoke. A certain sadness pervaded her talk. It was always there, like keening. She seemed to be mourning something, --- someone's disloyalty, the pain of being misunderstood. She spoke in a monotone, her eyes very still 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.

H She told him Her mother was Assyrian but her father English. He'd been a political officer before marriage and had been sent by the Foreign Office *as a young man* to Kurdistan on a special mission after the 1914 war, when the Kurds were resisting the edea 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, *then*

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.

Hanni reminded him of Bertha. They had the same watchful air, 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 concentrating on the form of the conversation and not on what was said.

He told her a little about Bertha, how she despised Kath'm 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 with a curiously tired look, touched with irritability, "I know her type all right!"

"She keeps a bible in the sitting room," I said

She nodded. "We kept a bible, too," it was

it had been in the family for generations, she said, and always lay on a lace mat in the corner of the sitting room, but without a silver-plated crucifix. She hated the village where she was born. 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 and the Prince of Wales. It was a deliberate rehash 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. Which he did. He used to debunk everybody when he was drunk -- he used to call them dirty shysters --- in the middle of dinner --- and my mother used to go absolutely cold as steel! I can see her face now!"

But her sympathy was with her mother. One could feel that. 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.

"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 colonial's idea of and English gent!"

All the time she talked he was afraid that her intimacy would break any moment, so he said nothing, only nodded and made little exclamations. In this sort of life one 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!"

He required to spend ⁹ nights a night
away from her. Then he would do

125.

So pretty formal, then

Hanni, he 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. 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 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 she talked, 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.~~ ^{He told her} She ~~said~~ Dick never allowed a 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~~ ^{he} little like ~~Pinkie in this!~~ ^{So} 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~~ ^{because} lovers. In a way she enjoyed this. ~~The dressing-up was nice; she felt~~ ^{it might be a} 'woken up'. And he did want her to look pretty, unlike the boring men who took their wives for granted! But, still, it was always a jolt:

But it was 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 dress with the bare shoulders, and~~
 By dinner
 Dick would behave as if he'd never seen her before, looking between her
 breasts with an ~~exciting mixture~~ ^{look} 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 unrelenting thoroughness: he would spend three or four evenings out in a row without saying anything. A principle once agreed on must never be broken. This was absolute with him.

She wanted to furnish the Hampton Court 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 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 ironic 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 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 in 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. 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 over 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 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 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 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. Dick always seemed to be leaning back with an audience, while he himself was always leaning forward, trying to achieve an audience.

One evening
But this time Dick leaned forward and in *the most confidential*
voice said, "You know who broke that mirror upstairs, don't you?" *It was me!*

"No?"

Why?

"I did!"

Because

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

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

with ~~Hanni~~ --- naked as well!" ^{6/10} 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 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!"

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.

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

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, 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.

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

Hanni was 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 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."

"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 what untouched experiences lay in him. He marvelled at it. He seemed to be marvelling at the fact that he had 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 returned to his old manner: he decided he wanted to have a look at the girls at the cafe in the Commercial Road where they had wicker baskets on the walls --- he said he liked the waitresses there. And he leapt out of the 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 the Hampton Court flat. However, there were small 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 it 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 week-end; 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~~ 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: 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.

CHAPTER 7.

Pinkie was given an office of her own at Wembley, as assistant to the P.R.O.; it was quite a promotion and came from Nigel's staff, not from him. Now and then it involved her in taking someone to lunch or dinner. She no longer travelled for the firm, but, she said, she might have to spend a week-end away in Manchester or Birmingham. He wondered at this. It sounded like the screw being turned. Her face was set as she said it, in a deliberate way, her teeth gritted. She looked tired in the evenings, her face always drawn into a mask, and they never went out together now. The house grew quite lonely. Or perhaps it wasn't the house but the fact that only he, of all the people they knew, had time for wayward thoughts. Everyone else was governed by schedule. He felt he carried no weight in their company and began to wish for the end of his leave.

Dick came in one evening and said he was getting the managership of the South American department in a few weeks' time. Apparently, he thought Hanni had said nothing to anyone. His eyes glittered in a fixed way as if he was torn between his own achievement and a sense of shame. Usually one didn't get a managership until one was thirty-five or forty, especially in T.I.M. where things were a bit conservative. He didn't seem at all happy. Hanni kept glancing at him. She also was in a strange mood these days.

They were all sitting in the kitchen and Hanni murmured to Pinkie

between her teeth, "Look at him!" Dick was swinging on his chair --- a nervous habit of his --- with his hands in his pockets and his head rather sunk down. "He hates the idea!" She gave Dick a dry side-glance. "He was all right when somebody else was giving the orders. It made him feel young. But now he's going to have people calling him sir."

And she chuckled, puffing at a cigarette. Dick had a remarkably clean look, as often on days when he felt uncomfortable. His hair was neatly brushed and he was pale, with a youthful, purged look in his eyes. His hands were manicured; he had them done every fortnight at the same shop in the City: he said the girl touched his fingers gave him endless chances to explore her character and also look down her blouse --- one day he would ask her to meet him somewhere.

Hanni's eyes were narrowed against the smoke of her own cigarette, and they seemed to blaze with anger. Pinkie smiled, in a private understanding with her. She had put her handbag on the floor, having just come in from the office, and was powdering her nose, pursing her lips as if afraid to see herself in the little mirror.

"He's afraid he's going to get like his father," Hanni went on, trying to provoke him out of his silence.

And Dick did speak after a time, still swinging on his chair, gazing down, his voice very quiet.

"Well," he murmured, "you ought to know."

"Why are you so scared of responsibility?" she asked him immediately, her eyes fixed hard on him.

But he relapsed into silence again. Hanni pursued the subject coolly.

"Of course, it means you'll be getting a better screw, doesn't it?"

she went on.

Dick nodded in silence.

"And we don't want that to happen! You'd rather go on with the old screw, wouldn't you, and have the freedom?"

"Yes, I suppose I would," he replied in a tired way. "The problem of youth, you know!" he added bitterly.

Pinkie laughed. "You'd better be careful, old cock, or you'll find yourself furnishing your flat nicely!"

"Yes," Hanni said, also laughing. "He might find himself tied down to a comfortable armchair!"

"Probably," Pinkie went on, "he's just like his dad really, only he doesn't want to fall into it too fast."

This was too much for Dick. He hissed at her, "Shut up!" And the women laughed in a defensive and triumphant way, at having provoked him; their voices were harsh.

"What's wrong with your dad?" Pinkie cried, her lips trembling as always when she was reprimanded.

Dick coolly got up from his chair and left the room. Later Granville saw him glance at himself in the mirror downstairs on his way out, his face delicate and troubled. He turned and saw him.

"I hate any comparison with my dad," he said almost in a whisper. Granville nodded and smiled, wondering if he meant it as a joke, but Dick walked out with a perfectly straight face, little aware of him, it seemed; and a moment later the downstairs door closed.

Afterwards Pinkie said that Dick looked exactly like his father. She'd got this from Hanni. Perhaps it explained the beard, she said: it was a sort of distress-signal; he was 'marooned in his body'.

When they all met again the following week-end there was more irritation, to which Granville was only a spectator. He noticed more and more that their quarrels left him a stranger.

Dick happened to say, "Oh, by the way," addressing Granville, "I always spit a Pip in old Nevinson's eye when I can, you know, just to let him know what a fine chap you are."

Nevinson, being the head of the Middle East section, was important for him, though they'd never met.

And Pinkie was suddenly annoyed.

"I bet you do it carefully!" she said, flaring up.

There was silence and Dick's lips tightened just as they'd done before. He fixed his eyes on her and murmured, "No, I don't."

"Well, I can't imagine you laying it on very thick, in case you're proved wrong ---"

"No, and I can't imagine Nevinson listening if I did!"

Granville was forgotten for a moment. They were fixed on each other.

"Well, good old Dick!" she cried. "You're nothing if not judicious!"

Dick turned to him and said quietly, his eyes full of dislike, "How do you stand this woman every day?"

"Why is it you like keeping things under your hat?" she asked, trembling again.

"I suppose because I'm cagey," he replied.

"Well, it's no surprise to me that some of your clients are speechless when they walk in your office. You give them the willies, old chap!"

"I don't think you've been in my office or spoken to any of my staff," he replied, again in a quiet voice, his back erect. There was something white-hot and cutting in him when he was stirred sometimes.

Both Dick and Pinkie had to go out to dinner later and Hanni told him when they were alone that Dick had annoyed Pinkie by 'keeping something under his hat' that was important to her. Granville couldn't understand what this was and tried to get to the bottom of it. But she was evasive. Yet her dark, protective gaze told him that one day she would explain: at least, she'd made it clear that there was something to explain.

There was good news for him. Glenning said he'd heard he might be getting the Beirut office! This was because Nevinson didn't like the way things were done there; he preferred Granville and thought he had a better rapport with the Arabs. Of course, this was promotion. Beirut was considered a gem in the foreign sections at least as far as the 'sweat-jobs' were concerned, being the 'Paris of the Middle East.'

This brought him and Pinkie closer together for a time. That evening, as they were going to bed, they began talking about it, and without warning the intimacy of their very first two weeks together, when they'd met at Reading, enveloped them again.

"Isn't it wonderful about Beirut?" she said.

"Yes!"

"We could have one of those lovely houses by the sea!"

"That's exactly what I thought!"

"When do you think it'll be?" she asked.

"Soon, I hope."

He switched off the light and got into bed at her side.

"It'll be lovely moving there," she said quietly.

"Yes!"

He was surprised how soft her body felt at his side --- quite different from that first evening, when she'd felt angular and also frail to his touch, distant from him, in her own strange sleep, without the necessary blood for intimacy. Now she was soft and yet firm, with a kind of invisible plump wholesomeness of the flesh.

Out of this sudden intimacy they drew everything that was possible --- for a change. They kissed each other sweetly and softly, like children, again and again, their lips wet, and they clung to each other in a gentle way, not exploring each other's bodies but locked together mildly, their breath intermingled, in a closeness of perfect health. It was quite different from 'Stratford' --- it was what their love should have been when it wasn't 'Stratford'. They came almost at the same moment, mildly and completely, sunk into each other with this unpausing sweet intimacy. Her orgasm never wracked her whole body --- it was always local, as if limited naturally, half-broken from childhood, made too secretive for the natural-functioning world. But at least they were together, in sweetness. They fell asleep at once, staying in the same position all night, her right leg crooked over him and her flimsy nightdress in a bundle round her waist, like a thick silk band under her breasts, making them swell. It was like being in a region underneath life, full of warm, shadowy touches that weren't even definite enough to be known as touches; and next day they were both clear and happy-looking.

They went on the river again at Hampton Court, this time the four of them. It was a lovely, still day and he felt drowsy and content. The

reeds on either side were dry and tall, stirring slightly in the breeze. They'd taken out a punt but were using canoe-paddles instead of a pole because the water was too deep. Hanni and Pinkie were lying at the bottom of the boat sunning themselves while the men paddled quietly side by side. They left houses behind them and came into perfectly silent countryside. Before them in the distance there were hills, smooth and bright like a marvellous cloth, and on either side there were fields with hedges, at their own level, so that they seemed to be gliding silently through the earth. Granville felt quite rid of his problems now. He had no extra desires.

And as if a sense of what he was thinking had entered Dick the question came from his side, "I should think Basrah's a bit of a dump, isn't it?"

"Well ---"

"I mean, politeness aside!"

He hesitated. "Yes, I suppose it is."

Their voices echoed a little across the river.

"Of course, you have to put a good face on it and all that,"

Dick added.

This wasn't Granville's feeling at all and he wanted to explain what the fascination of Basrah was for him. But Dick had already looked away and was addressing something to Hanni who lay behind them with her eyes closed, getting a bit flushed from the sun. This had happened quite frequently in the last few weeks: Dick would ask a question and then show, by turning away to something else, that it was really rhetorical. Meanwhile the words rushed to Granville's mouth and he was left feeling like a man with nowhere to put his vomit.

Pinkie opened her eyes and murmured, "Do you remember that fish we cooked in the garden?"

"It's a kind of cod," she added to Dick, who was gazing at the water with a genial expression. Then she chuckled: "Of course, it did taste a leetle of burned wood!"

"Oh, well," Dick said, making his noiseless laugh, "bedouins can't be choosers, can they?"

There was more pleasantry and Granville stomached his words, letting the heat go down slowly. He found it easiest to talk to Dick, and closest to the style of talk that existed between the four of them, when his feelings were at a minimum. As long as he kept a check on himself it was all right, but if he let himself go he was left with a feeling of regret or constricted stomach.

As the pleasantry went on --- now it was about a 'ghastly' dinner Dick had been to the previous week --- the lovely day began to darken for him. He wanted to laugh and did, and also he was content. But the fields looked dwindled to him and he had a sense of dryness and surfeit, as if everything round him was fixed and dead in its position. A casual and bland style existed between the four of them in which sustained ideas were impossible. One just had to learn how to leap from one thing to the next, never dipping too far. The moment a tone of sustained interest came into his voice the conversation dropped a little. This wasn't Dick's doing; not wholly. He thought it might have something to do with the company being nexed, two men and two women, so that a compromise-style was achieved, neither the sustained intimacy of women's talk nor the enquiry of men's. The style, flippant and selective, though not always flippant, was the only one they could all have together. Yet it wasn't natural to any of them.

Dick imposed it as an act of will, so deep now that it was second nature. And Hanni was tense, keeping back her spontaneity, gripped tight inside. Only Pinkie had the style in her flesh; it wasn't a strained or unnatural or jarring element in her, nor did it involve mental surveillance. She lay at the bottom of the boat with her eyes half-closed, listless, the touch of a smile lingering on her mouth. A selective conversation, ranging quickly over many subjects, never committed to any, was natural to her. Going deep would be like a breach of delicacy. It was a light curiosity that touched on things and departed. She and Dick were similar in this, while Granville and Hanni were similar in their silent withholding of the battalions of truth, though Granville was always looking for a breach in the enemy-line to pour them through.

Pinkie knew naturally how to select and range over subjects, and what was permissible and what was not. Discretion played no part. She could be as rash as she liked but style lay in her flesh, not limiting her, but the very form of her being. In her quiet moods she would sit with a reminiscent gaze, talking casually, rather in a dream, and every now and then she would touch the tip of her forefinger with her tongue in a delicate, slow, gliding movement, still gazing before her, while preparing to talk again, as if to indicate the turn of her interest. After she and Granville had been away from each other for some time she would lap up all his information afterwards in one or two sittings, leaning back, her gaze upwards, asking one question after another in the most economical way, but without mental alertness, only following her curiosity with a casual, dreamy obedience. She hadn't done it this time, though. She asked nothing about his last month in Basrah. It seemed that Mohammed and the Cabala and the club-room at the United Kingdom Compound where she hated going so much ---

all the things she would naturally want to know about --- were now dead in her memory.

The four of them ended up at the pub with the lawn where he and Dick had played croquet once. This time also it got dark. The evening was warm and exciting, with yellow lights on the other side of the river and the sound of grasshoppers. There were young couples playing croquet, their voices drifting between the trees, laughing. The sun went down in a vast red blaze, making the flat water glow like a lantern spread out. How lovely it was! London seemed many miles away. The perfect silence of countryside began to fall all round and their voices became hushed in the air. How could he bear to return to Basrah? Pinkie was close to him, her shoulders brown from the sun, strong and dark in the last shadows. Then they paddled slowly back to Hampton Court, but this time there was a moon and everyone was drowsy from the beer and heat. His arms were burned where he'd rolled up his sleeves, and he noticed that Dick's face was flushed deep and his hair bleached slightly at the front. He could see his beard as they paddled, wisps of it silhouetted like a thin bush against the moonlit bank on the other side.

"Penny for your thoughts, sea-scouts," Dick murmured.

"I'm remembering last time when it was dark."

"Oh, yes!" And Dick began telling the other two in a comical way how they'd battled their way back home. "How Captain Granville and I brought her in that night I shall never know," he said. "But we did! And there's not a crew between here and Southend Pier could say better!"

His voice was like a soft chant in the night, as they drifted slowly along, the women chuckling in the darkness now and then. He had an impression of each of their consciousnesses drifting in the darkness

far from each other, so that the set forms of the day --- their bodies and the glances they gave each other and what they said --- appeared like an irrelevant world, or rather a partial one. Dick 's voice, and the darkness that was like an unsubstantial dust all round them, and the gradual tipping and rocking of the boat, were the relevant world, of which the set forms were a part we needed in order to move and see and set our wills at work. These forms were like gestures.

Underneath the gestures what were their consciousnesses like? It was so difficult to tell. How did they differ from each other, essentially? What was Hanni like, really? What were Pinkie and Dick like, for their saying more than Hanni made them no clearer in the end? What did this 'really' mean? People were so separate these days! The bare physical world lay outside each one; and each consciousness was in isolation, lacking the common joining factor of an outside world, which was silent and indifferent, like the moonlit bank that passed them now, without familiarity for them - only a scene like a film, which would be called 'beautiful', detached from them. And each of their consciousnesses lay floating in this unsubstantial and indifferent dust of night as they drifted smoothly along.

Only someone outside a consciousness could say what it was like, for we couldn't see into the endless depth of our selves. Between self and gesture where did the truth lie? The gestures were so difficult to judge for someone outside. Even Pinkie he couldn't divine. He knew her only where there were no longer any gestures, when they were lying in bed at night, he curled round her, so that even their limbs were like the unsubstantial dust, joined together. And then during the day the gestures began again, and they perplexed each other.

Did his own consciousness differ essentially from those of the other three? Was the discipline to withhold themselves that he noticed in Dick and Hanni in him as well? Was theirs the typical consciousness of the new world he had inherited through education? Was it second nature to Dick or Hanni? Or was it second nature only to Dick? Was there an ancient sense of style in Pinkie that could accommodate itself to this new consciousness while not really belonging to it? For Dick's style was a mental one; it wasn't part of the flesh as her's was. He thought that perhaps Dick had the most typical new consciousness of all of them.

His mind asked these questions in a state of dreaming and he was too sleepy to answer them. It intrigued him. He came from a different consciousness from the one he knew now --- it wasn't enough to say a different world, as if we all shared the same kind of consciousness. This was the basic fact from which all his questions and problems came. Was his own consciousness divided - incomplete through knowing two worlds instead of one?

He felt that the others, though perhaps not Hanni, had a whole and undivided consciousness while he didn't, however distorted their consciousness might be. His task was to think his problems through in order to attain to a similar wholeness: he didn't want to be divided. The others weren't divided in their perceptions as he was. In hearing and seeing and smelling Dick didn't doubt that he was simply hearing and seeing and smelling as other men always had done everywhere and always would. That was Granville's conclusion, after seeing his gestures and hearing him talk. There was something undoubting in Dick which he himself didn't have; not in the matter of will or desire but in consciousness. Nor in ideas - only in consciousness, the dumb consciousness. For Granville there was always the

problem of definition, underneath all the other problems. It wasn't only that this was a difficult world but that he had first to decide on what he was to take as 'the world'.

His thoughts were vague like the water and he reserved them for another time, hoping he would be able to catch their vague flavour again.

He went to the office quite often these days and had several chats with Dick there. But they were still not at ease with each other. Dick was so watchful and alert. 'Does he want to get back to his work?' Granville always asked himself as he stood by Dick's desk. Was he ashamed of having a visitor outside the strict office-schedule, in case a director walked in? Dick covered his nervousness with a bland style and genial glance, keeping his movements as cool and slow as he could; he seemed morbidly aware of the immediate situation --- the exact time, the work that lay on his desk waiting to be finished, the impatience or otherwise of his secretary on the other side of the door. He seemed unable to take flight - from himself. So no real talk was possible.

One Saturday Granville woke up slowly and realised she wasn't there. At first, as he roused himself, he had the usual drugged sense of being melted in with her, without touch or real physical sensation of any kind, then he began to realise that his arm was lying on the bed itself, not on her hip. He moved it, to discover whether it was an illusion, then he shifted it further across the bed to find out if she'd only altered her position. But she was gone. He was aware that the 'phone-bell had rung, and at once he was wide-awake. She'd got out of bed hurriedly to answer it; he didn't remember her getting out as a real event but as something that had taken place inside his own body, a change of feeling. He felt mortally

cold all of a sudden and was nearly trembling. It was difficult to hear what was said on the phone from the bedroom, but sometimes a word or two came up the well of the stairs. He strained forward to listen, raising his head from the pillows, but the effort had the result of making a rushing sound in his ears which blocked out everything else, and he lay back again quickly, his eyes starting out of his head. Was she at the telephone? Then he heard her. There was a movement on the stairs. Distinctly he heard her say, "But he's only been here a few days, darling! How can I ---?" And then the words were lost. His heart was beating fast, like air bounding in his chest. He was really trembling now, so much so that the ends of his fingers were tapping against the sheets in a most absurd way and his teeth were chattering! The alarm hadn't gone off yet; it must be quite early. He couldn't hear any more. A bus passed in the distance, at first a lonely sound to him, then comforting because it suggested the massive indifferent machine outside. Then he heard her leave the telephone and walk upstairs to the kitchen. There was the familiar sound of the tea-caddy as she opened it, and the sound of the kettle as she put it heavily on the stove. He became calmer; the feeling of mortal coldness became fixed in him as his trembling grew less. He was aware of an odd, twisted sense of pleasure in himself, at having arrived at an essential point of self-destruction which made any licence of behaviour permissible. He could do what he liked, always in that rigid, half-trembling state! The pain would become fixed and hard inside him, pale. He tried to think of what she'd said again, as the wooden boards upstairs moved, making their familiar bump in the middle. The words now seemed to him different. He might have been mistaken! This thought came to him in an insipid, cajoling way; he rejected it, but it wound its way back like ivy. He appealed to his

memory again, but that failed him. Perhaps the words had been slightly different. Why should they be referring to him? Why not to someone at the office? But one doesn't say darling in that case! The office wasn't open yet. Anyway - Saturday - no office! His mind fought hard in the confusion. He would go upstairs and confront her with it. But he couldn't be sure. She might turn round and give him an astonished look, as if to say, 'His mind's not right!' He had to keep his sanity! But he had heard the words! Yet he couldn't repeat them to himself.

And, then, why should he worry? There was this thought at the end of all such reasoning. Suppose she turned round and said, 'I call lots of people darling! Why do you have to be so formal?' Exactly! Why was he hanging on a little word? Why did he want to be a thinking little insect all the time? She was an abandoned sort of person, of course! She said 'darling' to her friends! They even kissed each other sometimes! He'd kissed Hanni, Hanni had kissed him, Dick had kissed Pinkie --- what was the matter with him, exaggerating and storming all the time? People could be affectionate with each other!

But at the same time he knew that the words had been said, and he knew what they meant: as a blank, rigid presence in his mind; like the figure of Death waiting at the end of the corridor. His confusion only took away his power to act on what he knew. He knew he'd been unable to say anything to her. He'd watch her carefully for any tell-tale sign, and ask oblique questions, or show by his grimness that he was aware of what had happened. But speak - no! How terrible it was to be locked in silence all the time! But he couldn't bear to show his heart naked to her. She might ridicule him; or she might flutter her eyelashes and say, 'I don't know what you're talking about, Pip!' She might go and tell Grove! Or Hanni, or Dick!

'He's so frightfully jealous,' she would say, 'I really can't do a thing, even call somebody darling over the phone!' To hell with her! His feelings turned full circle. What the devil did he care where she took her body? It was intimacy he was after. She spoke about her freedom. She needed freedom! Like a spoiled child asking for more sweets --- 'freedom'! Not his, of course! He was the spectator! She was on show, with her precious body! Of course, it suited her vanity no end! It gave her dramatic qualities, too! She was so hunted and hemmed-in, don't you know, by a domestic life she detested! Not for her the kitchen! Oh, no! She wanted freedom, love, affection! And in all this precious bloody talk she didn't give him one tiny thought. She was alone! She was alone when she made love to him, yes! She shut her eyes! Her body was being adored!

So he decided to keep quiet. He couldn't bear the way Dick or Hanni might look at him: as if he had a sickness! 'Poor old Pip!'

She'd said it so beseechingly --- 'darling'! He couldn't believe it! Her warmth was still in the bed. It was impossible she should get up, straight from this warmth, and say 'darling' without at least lowering her voice! He only remembered her tone now. So beseeching! As if there were aeons of suffering in her. Poor Pinkie! She sounded weighed-down with sorrow, exhausted.

He went upstairs, calmer, washed-out before the day had started. She was getting tea busily, her face showing nothing. As she poured the hot water into the pot he heard the alarm-bell go downstairs. If the atmosphere had been normal between them they would have referred to that -- to being up so early, before the alarm. But neither of them spoke. Wasn't that suspicious? he asked himself.

All day the sentence she'd spoken, or might have spoken, came back to him, sometimes stark and sudden, sometimes not in the form of words at all but as a sickening turning sensation in his stomach. That evening after she returned he couldn't bear it any longer. They were sitting at the kitchen table eating a cold dinner she'd mocked up, in silence. They'd hardly said good evening to each other. Again there was no one else in the house. And he suddenly tipped the table up so that the milk fell over and the coffee-pot, after a few seconds of ambiguity, followed it, crashing on to the floor. He sprang up, trembling with rage. She was at once pale, her mouth open, a terrified expression in her eyes. At the same time he slammed his fist down on the table.

"Get out!" he screamed. "Get out of this house!"

She couldn't get her breath properly, fixed in her chair, staring up at him. "For God's sake," she whispered, "what's the matter?"

And now, even as he was trembling, his cheeks flushed, it seemed, absurd! She was simply Pinkie again, frightened by his shouting! All his previous thoughts were absurd --- an exaggeration. She was so frightened and taken aback by him that it seemed she must be innocent! What a fool he was making of himself! Suddenly tipping the table up and standing there like an ape, for no reason! Yet there were reasons: he reminded himself of the first evening, when he'd walked up the stairs with his cases to find a party going on --- the kitchen in filth --- a smashed mirror next door: that was how much she cared for him! There were reasons, oh, yes! And his fury came back. Also there was that word 'darling': it flashed into him --- across his middle --- like a flame, hurting frightfully.

"What are you sitting there for?" he shouted. "If you want to go

out why the hell don't you?"

"Who said I did?" she asked breathlessly.

"Oh, Christ! You're like a cat on hot bricks!"

His eyes drilled into her, and she looked down and closed her lips, palely, as if giving up the effort to speak. So he tried to drive his words deeper --- to hurt her and thus evoke feeling in her. But he wouldn't mention that 'darling', or say what he most feared. He wouldn't mention Grove. He knew quite well what the limits were: he would only insinuate and attack.

"Why don't you drop all this being a wife, for Christ's sake? What do you want to keep it up for, all this smiling and putting on the right face like a bloody puppet!"

So it went on. The attack was general; all she heard was black condemnation: noting specific. He was trying to get a confession out of her, but in such a roundabout way that she couldn't give it to him; because he feared too much what the confession would be! So equally he was trying to establish her innocence! In a way she was doing what he wanted her to do by not speaking.

He stood there flushed, the ends of his fingers moving as they'd done that morning. "You bloody abortionist! You killed that child, didn't you?" He suddenly found himself saying this.

He was completely beyond himself, bent down over her, the veins sticking out of his neck. "You did, didn't you?"

And even in the heat of this moment it occurred to him quite clearly that he was asking this question only because he knew she was innocent and only wanted her to say no! It was only a good way of making her feel a sting from him --- perhaps plead with him to stop --- if only

she'd plead!

But she sat there pale and gripped in a panic-stricken silence. He began calling her a slut, a dirty whore, a mean crawling vegetable, until in the contrariness of human nature he almost burst out laughing at the way his words came tumbling out! But she couldn't see this. She could only see the grim face. Then underneath his fury-cum-laughter he began to feel panic much like calm, tremblingly taut --- as he suspected that she agreed with him, and condemned herself, and could do nothing about it! She was in love! He felt like crying out, with tears in his eyes, 'Oh, Pinkie, you're in love! In love! Please don't, please don't ---!', like those wounded men in battle who pleaded with the shells. She was in love! But his mind at once dismissed it, in a blind stroke. In love!

She began crying, and as always when this happened his anger disappeared, as if it broke the rules of the game.

"Stop crying," he murmured.

Once he'd said in Basrah, "I wish you never cried when I shouted at you! I want you to be strong and stand up to me. Why don't you contradict what I say? Why don't you shout back?"

But she always gave in --- lowered her head and cried like a child. The usual intolerable pity filled him like dust in his throat. She reminded him of a bear they'd seen together in Kurdistan, chained to a pole behind a landowner's house. A Kurdish solicitor called Khalid Beg with whom he'd become quite friendly, a tall, straight-backed man with blazing, fair eyes, had taken them along. When the servants approached the bear with long poles it began to whimper in a most pitiful way, knowing what was coming, the poles were always twisted in the skin of his neck; one could see how the fur of his neck was all worn away. The cruel little bastards! Everybody

was most amused except him and Pinkie. Every day this torture was enacted for visitors. Pinkie's little, "No, don't do it any more!" made them all laugh. Now she was like the bear. He remembered how the creature had lowered his head in a submissive way, bowing to the awful god of pain. He felt abashed and horrified at himself, as if he'd been one of those grinning little servants. He was tired and hollow. He looked out of the tiny window at the roofs and the dim sky. It wasn't quite dark yet.

"Shall we go for a walk?" he asked quietly.

She sniffed and looked up slowly. "Yes, fine!" she said, already bright.

They walked in the streets by the river, between the closed, silent offices. There was hardly a soul about. He put his arm in hers and they strolled along in a leisurely way, quite tired. They passed the Port of London building with its huge pillars, like a massive, arrogant temple dedicated to folly, and then the Tower, lying in a dip, a truthful shadowy hump in the dusk. The river gleamed under the lights, rolling slightly. The air was quite warm, with the touch of a breeze, and there were clouds; there might be a storm. Even by the river there were few people, and the buses were mostly empty, in the lull before the theatres finished.

They passed a group of tall Victorian houses with arched windows, now divided into apartments. One of the windows was open at the bottom and they could see a dimly-lit room with gaudy, scarlet wall-paper, like a huge tapestry slung round all the walls; and three or four people were sitting there, drinking something, raising cups to their lips and talking. It looked so calm. They hardly seemed to move at all. The room had a high ceiling with a chandelier hanging down and a large gilt-framed mirror

on the wall. It might be a club-room of some kind. It was too gaudy, perhaps, for a private room. It was like having a glimpse into the nineteenth century; there was such a sense of interior and warmth, that made the present epochs seem naked. 'How wonderful to sit in a room like that with a friend!' he thought. He imagined the silence that would fall between their sentences, and the way they would gaze up at the ceiling, leaning back, in reflection. Life would be ordered. There would be the quiet assurance of being understood by someone, and of looking at the world from a distance. The buses would go by outside, a friendly voice from the world. There wouldn't be scenes like the one he and Pinkie had just had. Women would be more separate from men, in their own world, with the friends they loved and the particular tone of conversation that belongs to each sex. There wouldn't be all this confusion and mixture of opposites. He would make coffee for his friend, on a little gas-fire of his own perhaps; he would pick down a book from one of his shelves. At the end of the evening he would see Pinkie, and she would have been in her world, too, and come out with her femininity freshened and glowing. If only she yearned for a woman's friendship as he did for men's! But it was always "I don't think I like women, really." In Basrah she told him, "I prefer the company of men! They're so much freer than women, and they're not jealous. Women can be so bitchy!"

He had wanted her to see more of women in Basrah. He'd told her it was a wonderful opportunity to see inside the harems. She could then tell him about it! Mohammed had a whole family of sisters whom he would never meet, - why didn't she go and see them? She went once and then refused to go again. She said they were so frightfully dull. Three of them, believe it or not, hadn't seen the front gate of the house from the

outside! The two older ones were allowed to take a turn round the city with their mother in a closed car with the blinds down once a day, seeing but unseen. On the other hand, they were by far the happiest creatures she'd met in her life! When she'd asked them what they did all day they told her they rode their bicycle round the garden and fell off, talked about their brothers, listened to the wireless and 'played games'! But she wouldn't go back. She said she needed the company of men for its 'bigness and lack of trifles'. A friendship with a woman, she said, was a mariage de convenance between two vanities. (This, he thought, was what she seemed to have contracted with Hanni.)

"That looks cosy," he said, pointing to the room.

"Cosy?" she asked with a quick, affectionate glance at him. "It looks hideous, darling!"

"Why?"

"Well, the furniture. That mirror!"

"What do you mean?"

"It takes up half the wall! I think our place is much nicer."

"Yes, so do I, really. But I thought with the river and all those lights ---"

"Yes, the river's lovely! I wish we were nearer the river. We ought to look for a house down here."

There was something very quiet in her. It was a quiet of the soul. He glanced at her, surprised. She was so intact, as he'd never known her before! Usually her face had a kind of natural, born, dramatic loneliness; she had a slightly drooping mouth and a downward gaze. But this was gone. She'd been silent under his attack as usual, but this time he felt his words hadn't got to her heart, to hurt her as much as even she

would have liked! She had her own life now, separate from him. Was that it? He was aware of her as a separate person at his side, with a new dignity. She seemed taller even, and was gazing before her in a level way. There was an undauntedness in this gaze which he hadn't seen before. He felt he'd been shouting at a third person --- not her at all. And only the third person had wept.

She hadn't really kissed him since his return. She pecked him on the lips, that was all. Even the second or third night, when they'd had an orgasm, she kept her lips closed. There were those sweet kisses, on the night he'd heard about his promotion to the Beirut office, but even then she'd kept her mouth more or less closed, he remembered - he hadn't felt her tongue! It occurred to him that someone might have asked her to do this --- never to give him her tongue again! He imagined the words, 'At least, if you have to sleep with him, don't let him do that!' How suddenly these stunning thoughts came!

And equally someone might have said to her, 'Do you mean to say you'd have his child, and give it suck?!' He put his arm closer in hers, wearily, and she hugged him to her for a moment. They walked home in silence, like children. The next morning when he got up he went straight to the mirror and looked at himself. 'Am I disgusting?' he thought. He gazed at his rather heavy, bleached eyebrows and the tiny white lines round his eyes caused by squinting in strong sunlight. His face had lost --- by a mere breath of a change --- its weathered look. He looked closer but could tell nothing. But all at once he found himself vindictive-looking, his eyes buried deep in his head, his brow heavy with too much frowning, his chin pushed forward in perpetual rejection. Was it true? He couldn't tell what he was really like! He turned away from the mirror and

went slowly upstairs to the kitchen, feeling he had no substance, his footsteps echoing through the house. His pride was dashed. He couldn't forget how intact she looked! He slouched about the house all day, hardly able to lift his eyes, in shame at being himself. His body didn't fit and he hated it. He couldn't settle to anything and couldn't face going out.

In the mornings now he woke with a heavy, damp, still sense of unworthiness. He couldn't tell what the root of it was! It had been going on, he thought, to a greater or lesser extent for years, and now it was an overwhelming suffocating presence on top of him in the morning! It was a flat rejection of his whole personality. It was an unpleasant physical sensation --- at times completely identified with his body: a pain, a sort of fever, a nasty taste in his mouth. Sometimes he woke up in the middle of the night with such a complete sense of condemnation --- a terrible dankness, like a cave --- that he thought he hadn't the life-energy to go on living another minute; and then the feeling cleared, and he couldn't understand where it came from! It rose out of his sleep like a steam.

He was at a full-stop in his being: what was this total helplessness he had even with his wife? and with Dick and Hanni? Why couldn't he be easy with them as he observed they were with each other? Or were they? What was the world they had which he couldn't share? Did that world exist? If not, why did his imagination require it to be created? Was it to do with his own divided consciousness? Was it that he found himself in a world where he didn't belong, so that he needed future training? Could they understand each other while he was condemned to stand in bewildered detachment, one foot among them and one foot in the other world of his childhood? Was he responsible for his own state? What had he done that was so wrong? He tried to wrack his brains: 'What have I done wrong?' ~~Why, he wanted~~

To P.241

to cry in despair, had he left that first world he knew?

*Tubby and puffy
and unattached and
quietly intelligent, secretly
observant.*

BOOK III :

CHAPTER 12.

Paul

*OK
↓*

People started calling at the house again, and a group even began to form, with the house as its centre. ^a Glenning, the publicity-man, was almost a daily visitor now. Some of the other faces he'd seen that first evening re-appeared; there was the young girl Dick Pollocke had been talking to; her name was Lucy, and she always came with a girl-friend nicknamed 'Ginger'. The two of them sat in the music-room together, long-haired and quiet, sometimes with a book, sometimes just sitting in silence. And he himself came and went casually. It was quite pleasant. The young man called Gerald with the agreeable smile also came sometimes: the plastics-firm he worked for was not many yards from the T.I.M. place, and often he and Pollocke walked over together.

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 slight 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 in 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, *and shouting through the rears.*

He heard nothing more of the offer of the Beirut office, which Glenning had told him as more or less a certainty. Clearly it wouldn't happen before he went back again. In a way that was a relief: 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 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 visitors. The door

Have
we
enjoy
return
alone.

front
A

as always.
 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^{ed} down to the Shoreditch library and get out ^{took} a few travel books. The house was tidy again, and the mild weather held. He began to wonder how he would ^{ever} leave this ^{new} light, clean life, ^{the close sex-life} with 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 ^{her} Pinkie one evening, "I feel ^{scared} frightened sometimes --- is everything all right?"

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

~~He gave it up. One had to be sure of one's facts.~~
 the war precisely would scared him.

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, Pinkie, 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'd 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'd 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 delectis --- you could kick him, pour water over him and 'really go to town' as you never could otherwise; ^(whatever she means by this) then you could really 'milk' him. For several days afterwards she was mute and narrow-eyed, and would answer ^{red} none of Dick's questions. He gave her flowers and took her to the theatre, but she couldn't forget how magnificent ^{beyond words} 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 sparkle, he realised that he didn't know why he'd come to the office, that he hadn't wanted to, 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! So he promptly made up a reason for coming --- he wanted to look up the contracts department (ah, yes! --- 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 --- 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!" *Dick told him one evening, "I (my wife) He added, "One of our clients from South America had ^{an} 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 Harini's tea!"*

Granville laughed. "What happened?"

"Well, of course, I told him to leave the house and never darken my towels again!" *But I enjoyed the aftermath ^{the} in the hole three hours of it!*

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.

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

*for the evening
the habit of
winking Pinkie*

Pip didn't care if it was true or not,

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 ^{by the time,} adding ^{and} that as a matter of fact she ^{had} 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 house in Wiltshire and came back looking ^{washed-out.} 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 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. She was now in the habit of getting up suddenly during a conversation and changing the subject, whereas before she'd always stuck at a thing and not let her mind interfere. She now seemed to have learned a social manner of avoiding dangerous and 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! 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 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 sound in the streets, drew them all further and further into the 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. One could leave everything to the outside world and never communicate one's 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.

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 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. The walked in Kensington Gardens and sometimes bathed 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 society they'd made between the four of them. When Hanni went down with 'flu Dick stayed in the Hampton Court flat 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 launch into one of his 'speeches' --- when he leaned forward slightly and began flaring in front of him --- she would repeat, "Mm, mm,"

in a frantic way, 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 woollens 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 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.

She 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; 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 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.

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 was going 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.

Hanni gave the impression of a dark and rather deadly calm, something held very deeply 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 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 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 quake and quiver, sending out 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, 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 planted 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.

"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 a 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."

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, after they'd been swimming, 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 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 — 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.

"Are you ever ashamed of being lonely?" he asked her suddenly, gazing at her in a very direct way, but too fresh from the eater 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 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, 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 cafes 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 in 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 in 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 where he was. He was about to go on, to say that he deduced the sort of life she led from the one he 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, not at least as far as Pinkie went; 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 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 coastline 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 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 Rotton Row, at the sky, for a last glimpse; dusk was just stirring, like a vast shroud of dust trouched 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, 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 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 got a slap-up dinner out of him, he said, and then went 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 her ear.

Thus, Granville 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 Walsh would have called 'mystical':

During the party he got tipsy and sat talking with Hanni again. 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 looking as gay as before. The street was quite still 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 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 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. 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', she said, than the actual kissing and the actual women 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

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 steeling 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 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.

Life was easier in the next few days. He went to the café more often, and didn't feel obliged to leave when he'd drained his cup, but hung on reading or talking to people. Or he walked in Kensington Gardens. He'd gone back to his old life, or so he told himself. But he couldn't 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 had quite a routine. 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 he happened to pick up a medical encyclopedia of Pinkie's that was lying on the coffee-table. This was the book that the young man with the ginger beard, at the time of her first studio-party, had seduced her with. Ginger-Beard had opened it at the venereal section with its diagrams and lurid illustrations of the sexual parts, and he'd discussed it all with her so unambiguously that the act itself, when it came, seemed only the demonstration of dead hypothesis. And the pages fell open naturally at these sections now. The first thing Granville saw was a description under the word SYPHILIS. The 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! 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'd got furious with Hanni and Pinkle 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! 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!

And Granville 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?

He looked back at some of his own 'outbursts' with mild astonishment. Would the same consciousness 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?

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 had tried to behave like Pinkie and really let himself go, some frightful meanness and spitefulness would have been the result, and this he 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.

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~~ ^{rose from} 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 bear him to go alone? He refused to tot up how many days he had left.

He bought four tickets for a performance of ^a/_{the} '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 ^{to Chels} 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 him a living sense --- but what had he got? Education had withered it away! He felt panic-stricken, wanting ^{ed} to strike out the years.

The garden in Abbott's Road had breathed for his father. Like a great beast with its paws tucked up, purring! But not for the son! Let him try to make that garden breathe --- let the son try! No! It was only a garden among others for him. One --- 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 them, but this only seemed to make him 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 and selfless curiosity. But this wasn't his circle. 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 she thought --- she'd heard it from one of her sisters. She and Nigel hadn't ragged each other as they usually did when they were together; they only did it in the country, when they felt really at home. But there'd been the intimate glow of respect in her eyes when she looked at him over dinner. It had made the music-room look too small.

Granville was troubled afterwards, wondering what was wrong with the house to make the man feel so 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 had looked fabulous: all its colours had stood out vividly against each other, like a tropical garden ^{under lights} ~~lit up~~. Did Nigel mean that?
 Granville would spend two or three hours in this room ^{together} ~~usually~~ in the evening when there was no one ^{else was} in the house, simply absorbing its brightness and variety: it was beginning to fill up with voices, now they had people in night after night; 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.

Granville began to perceive something in 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!" --- ^{at only} yet she may have been to one the night before. The parties she wasn't invited to were always the best ones, and Hanni was aware of ^{her} weakness.

But there were also times when Pinkie was invited out and Hanni wasn't, and then she 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 Granville 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 ^{moment} 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 wouldn't find a key to the fabulous through him. (And the most ^{Any} 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 ^{the} 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 ^{she found him} ~~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, ^{zone} laying the 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 attache-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 invite.

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~~ ^{or then} 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'.

"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 wanted Dick to recommend Grove's firm in some way, she went on, and Dick had refused --- of course! (a smile, here) --- out of principle! Because Dick just 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 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 his 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'.

CHAPTER 13.

It suddenly occurred to him that this inspection of his office was unusual. He was frightened. Why had it taken place? Did it usually happen when someone was on leave? He asked Dick and he didn't know.

If it was true that he was going to get the Beirut office it seemed funny that Tomlinson, about to be displaced, should be allowed to inspect his! Or perhaps Tomlinson was being sent to a different theatre of operations altogether? But he'd been in the Middle East ever since the war and was quite an authority: it seemed unlikely! Or perhaps they were thinking of sending him to Basrah, as an exchange with Granville. But he couldn't imagine Tomlinson tolerating that --- it would be a severe reduction of rank; he'd met him once or twice and he seemed a capable-enough person, tall spectacled, rather brisk and sharp. Also he had an Arab wife, from Cairo --- not a Christian Arab, either; it helped matters with some of the sheikhs.

He thought of writing to Mohammed about it and asking him what Tomlinson had said. What files had he looked at? Did he have the proper authority? But it occurred to him that he didn't need authority, since the Beirut office looked after the whole of the Middle East and it was only Tomlinson's kindness and tact that had allowed him to assume otherwise. He was troubled. Perhaps they knew --- at the London office --

what was in his mind about going back to Basrah: its unreality for him, and so forth! Perhaps they knew he hadn't booked his passage yet. But how absurd! How on earth could they know? He wrote two or three drafts of a letter to Mohammed, sitting in the bedroom almost a whole day to compose it. Then he screwed it up. Of course it was usual for an unsupervised office to be inspected! He wondered at the unsureness of his thoughts. Inspections were even a matter of courtesy. Tomlinson was the nearest English representative to Basrah; he'd been asked by the London office to fly over and see how things were doing under Mohammed; he might have done it on his own bat, even.

And Dick confirmed this the same evening. He said it was always done. The dark thoughts left Granville and he couldn't imagine how he'd succumbed to them so easily!

He realised next day, in the afternoon, that he hadn't phoned his parents since his return, and that, too, was like waking up from a dream. He always rang them a few hours after he got back from a visit somewhere -- even a visit of a few days inside England. And now, after two years ---! But he hadn't phoned them, he told himself, because his life was bound and strung down with ropes --- in distress --- blind!

Now, however, the time had come. He could see before him better. The optimism that had filled him at the Lido was still there. And he saw in the future, appearing gradually from the dimness, a face --- someone he hadn't yet met --- thrilling, and of a light, dazzling mystery he couldn't describe. He couldn't make out the exact features: but every now and then the face, quite alone, in space, would come before him, distant and yet clear, and gaze at him calmly, with a suggestion of sweetness, though there wasn't precisely an expression at all; the face was always still,

it never turned aside or looked at anything else; it was even perhaps guarding and watching over him. He had the impression of dark hair and dark, steady eyes, but he wasn't sure if this was an image that had come from his sense of her steadiness or not; for it was a woman. He stood in the music-room thinking about her, this face that gazed at him steadily and with such calm and sweetness, so small and clearly defined, with no ambiguities, and he almost stretched out his hand --- yet there was no one! The sunlight poured through the window on to the carpet; the house was empty and there was the hushed sound of traffic in the distance; nothing had happened in his life --- he had no more friends than before, he was in as great an emptiness as before, the rooms and the silence of the house were the same; but he had this sense of fullness --- and events preparing themselves!

In this mood he hurried down the stairs to the second floor and picked up the phone before he could think about it too much, and slowly dialled his parents' number. And as the number rang he had a picture of Abbott's Road for the first time since his return, vivid and quite still, as if the houses were painted, and all at once it seemed impossible to him that he'd managed to live all these years without Abbott's Road! What a comfort it would be to go there! He imagined the glowing dark cloth on the table with the thick pile, and the soft light that came in from the garden, distilled by the trees and the bushes and wooden fences, and the glittering greenhouses, with the elm-trees that always made a long whispering sound when the wind bent their branches a little. A white cloth would be laid over the thick one about this time, for tea, and the bowl of flowers in the middle, on a lace doily, would be removed to the sideboard. There would be the clink of cups and saucers, and the hushed sawing sound as his

mother cut the bread in perfect and equal slices; the clock would tick on the mantelpiece and make its modest little chimes that always quavered in the silence for a moment afterwards, at every quarter, while the kettle began to hiss in the scullery outside. It was a real place! There was no self down there all the time --- only consciousness: you weren't stranded in an area of flesh and bone, but one hour flowed into the next beyond your body, lost and unwatchful! Yet he'd been frightfully lonely down there --- more stranded than elsewhere --- so cut off, in a desert of slate and stone, so silent and melancholy: that was what he feared! He remembered the deserted years when he was at high school --- when sometimes he'd had to pinch his skin to prove himself on earth and not a pure, floating spirit, never talking, with no one to talk to, without future, lost in a boundless universe! Abbott's Road was cut off --- but what from? From a life-giving root! Yet his childhood still lay there, from very long ago, intact. At one moment it was a bleak and melancholy prison for him, offering no thoughts, no friends, no future for him at all --- only its silence of a world cut off; and then, another moment, it was the only safe place he knew! One could let one's thoughts flow down there. He didn't have to pull his face into agreeable expressions!

He realised how automatic his control of facial expressions had become over the years, since he'd left Abbott's Road. When Pinkie walked up the stairs he nearly always tried to undo any frown there might be on his face, and raise his eyebrows a little, lift the corners of his mouth in the suggestion of a smile, in case she gave him a sharp look and asked, "What's the matter with you this evening?" Their faces never found their true repose. Basrah had been a wonderful holiday for him in this respect: every face lay in its own repose, stern and glaring, not having reached a

consciousness of its effect on others --- its importance as a counter in public relations.

His mother came to the phone and answered in a soft voice, touched with enquiry, as if from a great distance. The enquiry was slightly worried. "Who's that?"

"It's Philip!"

"Philip? Well, s'help me God!" Her voice was animated at once, and as always she said 's'help-me-God', in one word. "When did you get back?"

"Oh, some time ago --- God knows what I've been doing ever since --- it feels like a few minutes!"

"I wondered when you were going to phone! I said to dad this afternoon, I said, he must be home now! Well, s'help me God! Talk of the devil, eh? Well, how've you been keeping?"

"Oh, all right! How are things with you?"

"Well, dad's had a bit of a cold but apart from that things haven't been too bad." She always had a superstitious reserve against saying things had gone very well: he imagined her at the other end, plump and slightly flushed in her cheeks, with eyes a little pinched with worry. Her voice was always soft and passive-sounding over the phone, and she seemed to be gazing at things from a safe vantage-point, coolly and remotely, in a place where she wasn't likely to be noticed, and with a certain sadness, as if an enormous pageant was passing her by.

"Is dad still getting out in the garden?"

"Oh, yes, trust him!" She paused a moment, waiting for him to speak. There was always this effort at first, to reach the other world. The language was so different. Then slowly he would begin to feel at

ease: he would feel all the struggles in his mind, its sharp girders and struts, falling, while he laid himself open with a pained, unwilling relief.

She spoke again: "How's Pinkie doing, all right?"

"Oh, yes, she's fine! She's going out to work again now, you know."

"Go on, is she really? What, in the same job?"

"Yes, she thought she'd had enough of sitting round doing nothing!"

"Did she?" his mother asked. "Why ----" she chuckled, "did she do a lot of that out there, then?"

"Well, there was plenty of work, one way and another, but we had somebody to do the cleaning and everything!"

"Yes, I remember you saying in a letter you had plenty of help in the house. So she's gone back to the office, has she? Some people don't know when they're lucky, do they?" she added with a laugh.

"Have you been sleeping all right?" he asked

"Oh, the same as usual ---- I've never been famous for sleeping, have I?" He could imagine her smiling at this moment, with a quick intelligent glance after it. "I drink a glass of stout last thing at night ---- the doctor said it might do me some good, but it doesn't seem to make any difference!" She paused. "Pinkie came back with you, did she?"

That was one of her divining questions: these were mostly rhetorical, because for some reason she knew the truth already.

His voice faltered, and he hoped it wasn't noticed. "No, she came beforehand."

"Oh, yes? I expect she had the house to get ready and all that

sort of thing, did she?"

"Yes, there were dust-covers all over the furniture, and she had to air the sheets and everything." He said the first words that came into his head, quite panic-stricken for a moment.

"Did she, really? I thought you let the place out!"

"No, we gave the key to Pinkie's brother, don't you remember? And he used it when he wanted to?" He felt an impatience familiar from his childhood of not being understood quickly enough --- as the two worlds in which he'd lived had grown further apart.

"Oh, yes," ~~she~~ said, "that's right", in the slightly hurried way she had when she felt a gulf of some kind. "I remember now." Then she added in a more direct voice, some of its pleasantries gone, "I would've liked young Pinkie to come over for dad's birthday. We gave him ever such a nice party!"

"Good God, was it his birthday?" Caught!

"Yes --- oh, go on, I tell you once a year and you never remember! I think we'd drop through the floor if we ever got a birthday-card from you, let alone a present! We'd fade out!"

"I'll try and remember next year!" he said with a laugh. Why did a year always seem such a frightfully sort time?

"Yes," she replied, "try is about all you will do, I expect --- but as to sending us a simple card, well, as I said to dad the other day, it's never happened yet and there's no reason to think it ever will!"

"When's your birthday, then?" he asked with another laugh, but abashed.

"Well, if you promise to keep it a secret it's September 15th ---"

"But that's quite soon!"

"Don't you worry about that, old son, it's long enough for you to forget all about it and then swear black's white I never told you!"

"Well, was it a nice party?"

She chuckled. "Well, thanks for your interest!" Then she was serious again. "Oh, it was really nice, Philip! You know, I think people really enjoyed themselves. It isn't often you can say that, is it?" She seemed to narrow her eyes thoughtfully, and a strange sophistication came over her, of an inherited kind, with nothing deliberate about it. "Of course, you can never really tell, can you, when you're running round with sandwiches and cups of tea and that sort of thing, looking after everybody? We had ever such a lovely cake --- I went round to Hemmings and ordered it the week before. I thought, well, they're just as good as making it yourself, and you don't have all that bother with getting all the ingredients and mixing and all that nuisance. I don't mind doing it at Christmas time but what with getting the drink in as well and, you know, little presents for dad, I thought, oh, blow it, I'll go down to Hemmings and see if I can get one on order! And, you'd be surprised, that cake was one of the best I've ever tasted. It was lovely! Well, people came up to me and said, this is a lovely cake you've made, Mrs. Granville --- so it just shows you, doesn't it? Sometimes you take a chance and they let you down, then at others you strike lucky!" She laughed softly. "They kept on asking what I'd put in it and all that sort of thing. Of course, I never said anything. I thought, well, if you want to think it, think it --- I'm not saying anything! I thought, I'm the only one who knows where I got it, so why worry?"

"You haven't got a bit left for me, have you?"

"Well, I saved a couple of pieces for you and Pinkie, not that you

deserve it, though!"

"How old was dad --- sixty-four this time?"

"Sixty-five. I thought, oh, well, we'll give the poor old bugger a party!"

"Did he enjoy it?"

"Did he? Trust him! He got soused and couldn't roll his r's as per usual! I think he had a better time than anybody else! Well, he never was slow at having a good time, was he?"

"What about you, when's your sixty-fifth coming up, is it next time?"

"Oh, don't say that, son! I've got two more years to run yet! But I don't suppose anybody'll give me a party. Some people wondered why we made such a fuss about him being sixty-five, but I thought, well, we didn't do anything when he was sixty, or when I was sixty for that matter, so why not? I think you need a good party now and then, -don't you? It sort of loosens you up!"

"Yes!"

"I'm sixty-three in September. It makes you think, doesn't it? Time doesn't stand still!"

"I always think of you as about sixty all the time --- both of you!"

"Well, I wish we could stay there, old son, but we can't, can we? It's all right when you're young, but when you get to our ripe old age the years start running like little rabbits. It doesn't seem two years since you and Pinkie went out there, does it?" She paused. "Well, Philip, how do things suit you out there?"

"Oh, quite well!"

"Is the work interesting?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I expect you've had some interesting experiences all round, haven't you?"

"Lots, yes! It's a very nice atmosphere out there --- you know, in the office ---"

"Is it really? Well, that's the main thing, isn't it, if you've got nice people round you in your work?"

"Yes! I've got a very good assistant. I don't know what I'd do without him!"

"Go on! He's a real good worker, is he?"

"Yes, He's an Arab."

"Is he really? Well, that's really lucky, isn't it? You can never tell what sort of person you're going to get, can you, especially if you're a foreigner yourself?"

"No. I might have got a completely dishonest person, and not knowing the language it might have taken me a year to find out, suppose he was fiddling the accounts or something like that!"

"That's right! Then you'd have to take the buck back yourself, wouldn't you?"

"Yes!"

"And there's another thing, when you go away and leave the office you do know you're leaving it in good hands, don't you?"

"Oh, I could go off for three months and not worry --- well, it'll be two months when I get back this time!"

"Well, I bet there's not many people in business can say that, is there, especially abroad like that?"

He was afraid she would ask when his leave would be over. 'In a

week or so' --- he couldn't bear to say it! But she said nothing.

"He saved me from a riot once," he went on, talking about Mohammed.

"Go on, did he, really? What, were you in the middle of it or something?"

"Well, I was in a hotel, and they were throwing bricks through the window."

"Go on!"

"And he walked right through it all and took me out to his car, and they didn't say a word!"

"Didn't they, really? Well, it just shows you, doesn't it? Goodness gracious me! I dare say they had a respect for him, didn't they, and thought, well, any friend of his is a friend of mine, sort of thing?"

"Yes, that's right. Anyway, they didn't try and throw any bricks at me!"

"Still, it's a nasty experience, isn't it? Do they get real wild, then?"

"Oh, yes, they scream and cry when their blood's up --- you know, when there's a real riot!"

"No, do they, really?"

"I saw a young chap with tears pouring down his face --- he was shouting about the government or something! You ought to have seen him!"

"Go on! They get so worked up they don't know what they're doing any more, I suppose?"

"That's right!"

"I expect you felt damned lucky to get out of it alive, didn't you? A jolly good thing this Arab was decent, wasn't it? Did he know you were there, then, or did he come in by accident?"

"No, he knew I was there because I left the office about an hour before to see a client, and I told him where I was going. So when I didn't turn up he put two and two together."

"Well, s'help me God! There aren't many like him, are there?"

"No! Of course, everybody knows when there's going to be a riot. Usually, anyway. They always go on round the colleges."

"Do they, really? What, the students?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Oh, and this time they thought they'd have a go at one of the hotels, did they? I don't know! Of course, it would be just when you're in there, wouldn't it?"

"Well, mostly English and American people stay there, so they thought it was a good place to throw bricks at, I suppose."

"Why, did they want to get nasty with the English, then? I suppose if the truth was told they get so frantic they don't know what they want to do!"

"Well, it's little wonder they riot, really, considering the way they're treated!"

"Why, aren't they treated right, then?"

"Well, most of the people are half-starved. And you ought to see the money the rich ones throw away!"

"Go on! It's pure greed, is it? Well, those people deserve what they get, don't they? And I suppose they think you're in with them, do they?"

"Yes. But I don't think they'd touch a foreigner, really. It's funny, isn't it? They'll set on their own policemen, but I bet if I walked out into the street they might jeer at me, but they wouldn't hurt me!"

"Go on? I expect they think, well, he might be bad, but he's not as bad as our lot! And from the sound of it they're not far short of the truth, are they?"

"No! You ought to see how some of the rich ones behave. Sometimes they won't let the poor have a doctor, even if they know they're dying. They say they don't want the doctor to get his hands dirty!"

"No! Well, that's just wicked, isn't it? I don't know, some people are the limit, aren't they? Fancy that! Not letting a man have a doctor if he's dying!" And she added, "Oh, well they'll get their reward. They don't do things in this country that they used to do, do they? The people saw to that. We don't stand for things like we did in the old days. Well, they say you can take a horse to the water but you can't make him drink, don't they?"

"Yes!"

There was a bustle at the other end, and she said with a laugh, "Watch out for it, Philip --- it's just come in from the garden! Old Nosey!"

"What, dad?"

"Yes!" There was some murmuring at the other end, and he heard his mother say in a joking way, "All right, don't push, you'll get there! Here's your dad, hold on a minute, Philip!"

She moved away from the phone and he heard her shout playfully, "Why the hell don't you wash your hands when you come in from the garden? Look what you're doing to that phone!"

His father answered in an elated way, between his teeth, "Go on, you're always on the grouse!" Then he bellowed into the phone, "Hullo, Philip! How's things?"

"Oh, all right! How are you keeping?"

"Not too bad! Mustn't grumble! Your mother's always on at me, of course! She never gives the old man a minute's peace! He heard his mother say in her rich way, in the background, "Yes, that's right!" and laugh. His father went on, "Well, when are we going to see you, son?"

"Some time this week, I thought! I'll fix something up with mum."

"That's right. How's Pinkie, all right?"

"She's fine! I was telling mum, she's gone back to the office."

"Has she really? What's the matter with her, dopey? Does she like work or something?"

"She seems to, doesn't she? Are you still getting out in the garden?"

"Oh, yes! I've just been doing some watering down in the greenhouse. Couldn't get down there last week, I had a bit of a cold!"

His mother again said something in the background --- "Oh, go on, don't make such a damned fuss about a snuffle! Anybody'd think you had pneumonia the way you carry on!"

"Hear what she says, Philip? She leads me a hell of a dance! Anyway, I just brought in some nice chrysanthus, and the gladioli came out nice this year! Tell Pinkie I've got some nice bulbs for her to take."

"Oh, good!"

"Well, how are things over there, son? Are you doing all right?"

"Not too bad. I've just been telling mum, the work's very interesting."

"Oh, well, that's the main thing, isn't it? How does Pinkie keep out there, all right?"

"Oh, yes!"

"That's good. We'd like to see you." And he added politely, as if he'd made a blunder, "Both of you." Granville could imagine him with rather a puzzled expression, blinking, trying to see things properly. His mother was always talking about his blunders of tact. And often, as in this case, there hadn't been one.

"I expect it gets nice and hot out there, doesn't it?" his father asked.

"Yes, it certainly does! The sweat pours down your back in the summer. It's like leaning against a wet towel all the time!"

"Go on, is it really?"

"There's nothing you can do except sit downstairs in a kind of cellar all day, and even there it's boiling!"

"God love old Ireland!" his father exclaimed softly. "I expect it gets you down sometimes, doesn't it?"

"Yes!" Then he said, "I hear they gave you a good birthday party?"

"That's right! I got as tight as a fiddler's bitch, so they told me! We didn't half have a lovely time! Quite a crowd there was, too! Mum got a beautiful cake down the road ---"

His mother said something, and his father laughed --- "She don't like it when I tell the truth! Mustn't tell the truth, oh no! You're supposed to say she made the cake when you damned-well know she didn't! Love old Ireland, you ought to have heard the lies about that cake! Your dad nearly put his foot in it, though! She had to give me a kick in the shins!" He added, "Still, she put the icing on. That's all she could do for the poor old bug! They get lazy in their old age, son!"

"That's right!"

"Well, mum wants to talk to you again. So we'll be seeing you

shortly, then?"

"Yes, that's right, I'll fix it up with mum."

"Good boy! Cheerio, then! Give my love to Pinkie!"

"I will! See you soon!"

When his mother came to the phone she said softly, "He's a proper gas-bag, that man, isn't he? And he's never got anything to say!"

She chuckled. "Except when he can put his foot in it. You ought to have heard him leading off about this cake at the party, telling everybody where I got it, I could have killed him! And there was I keeping quiet about it! Well, when are we going to see you?" she added.

"Why don't you come over for tea first of all, and then we'll make a date to come over and see you? What about that?"

"It's all right by me. What's Pinkie got to say about it?"

"Oh, she asked me to fix something with you."

They arranged a day for the next week, then his mother said in a quiet voice, "I suppose I ought to have given Pinkie a ring about dad's party, didn't I?"

It was in her wondering voice again. "Yes, you should have done," he replied, with the sense of surrendering a secret. "She'd have loved it! She was here a month before me!"

There was a slight pause, then his mother said, "What a silly I was, then, I ought to have phoned up, didn't I?" She spoke slowly, as if to herself. And she added, "Well, give her my love when she comes in, won't you? Shall I bring what's left of the cake over when we come?"

"Oh, yes, would you?"

"All right, then. It'll make the old man think he's having another birthday party, won't it?"

Then they said goodbye. As he walked away from the phone he had a sudden warm, tingling image of the Abbott's Road school on Saturday evenings, at the Socials. He could remember the tall jugs of lemonade on the teacher's desk, and the rows of ham sandwiches. He used to swing on the bars in the dark cloakroom while the dance was going on, or creep into the top classroom where his own desk was, silent and dark, and strange white signs on the blackboard, and maps and rows of untenanted desks, and windows that pulled down with a cord and made a clang. When they got home, about eleven, his mother would unwrap some sausages and these would sizzle with tomatoes in the scullery for the next half-hour, while his father put his slippers on and the cloth was laid, and his mother totted up the takings for the evening in her catering book. He remembered his shudders of elation on Saturday afternoons when they were sitting in the cinema at Tatlin Broadway --- when he thought to himself, "It's Social night tonight!", in the darkness. How extraordinary those shudders were, in childhood; then they died out!

He felt clean and disburdened, and thoughts were no longer crossing and fighting in his head. He went upstairs and made himself a cup of tea, contented, gazing before him.

Once his mother had told him that Pinkie reminded her of Aunt May, in the lavish, golden style she had, in her slapdash generosity. There was something in their voices, too, that was similar --- not the tone exactly, but a richness that couldn't be described, as if it came from past generations, like a song with a great ancient depth in it; they had sing-song voices, floating up and down, far beyond people.

When Pinkie came back that evening he told he'd phoned his parents. And she said non-committally, "Oh, good!" Before, all the time they'd been in Basrah, she'd been tremulously aware of people; but now she seemed flat. It struck him that this must be the office. But, on the other hand, she looked more peaceful than before, less sensitive to every little change in the outside world; his glances and moods were of less importance to her.

Their sex was disordered in a new way: it had something to do with their life together, with this city --- not with either of them in themselves. In an orgasm he rarely had the sensation of releasing everything --- only the surface-evacuation required by the friction of sex, not a spasm of his whole being. In Basrah it had been better. Sex had been more distinct from the sentiments and courtesies of life than here; it had a raw quality, like the hard sun on the miles of desert outside, static and unyielding. But here, although the air buzzed with 'sex', and there were preparatory comings and goings all the time, and escapades, some hidden damage had been done, and the flow of life in this respect, as in all others, was interrupted. Just as there was a great system outside in the streets, throbbing and moving all the time, so a system took hold of one's sex; sex was no longer the intimate glimpse into darkness and mystery, the only one vouchsafed in life; one wasn't engulfed --- it was a civic ejaculation! They hardly cried out in the orgasm; the sound was more like the rush of breath from exhaustion, a kind of cough, as if they were being wracked, at one removed from the real thing.

In the evening after he'd phoned his parents they sat together for a change, and no one called. The house was pleasantly quiet and he was glad to have her alone with him, sitting opposite him at the hearth,

reading the paper. A car would pass in the street outside, hushed, making the roadway crackle slightly, or someone would walk by with quick steps in the silence of the evening, while Pinkie rustled her paper, her legs stretched out. He sat there gazing before him, watching the dusk grow, quite at peace. It rarely happened these days that someone didn't call. They made coffee as they'd always done in Basrah, sitting in the kitchen to drink it. They hardly talked to each other. Their going to bed was always a comfort. It always cancelled out what had happened during the day. A peculiar intimacy they could never capture during the day flowed back into them. She was more or less a stranger to him now, he couldn't read the thoughts in her face, but he crooked his leg over hers in the same way every night, and put his arm round her waist, in a dumb, blind, automatic way, while she crooked her legs up too, and all reserve left her; they they sank into sleep, joined together in a strange, black, dusty region where there was no touch or noise. It made them both calm at once, as if their bodies were independent of themselves, and only their minds made the terrible interruptions.

The performance of 'Hamlet' to which he invited Hanni and Dick produced a first-class row between the four of them. A peculiar coldness came over Dick during the first act and he began criticising everything in a crisp, academic way that annoyed the others. His voice broke slightly as he talked, with suppressed irritation. Hanni said he was often like this when he was given a treat: he reacted 'agin'. But Pinkie said afterwards that there'd been some friction between them because it was one of Dick's 'evenings-out' periods, when he had the right not to return to Hampton Court if he didn't want to, and the

invitation had cut across this. At first he'd told Hanni over the phone, "I'm sorry and all that but I just can't come!" ; but Hanni had insisted because Granville was going away so soon, and she'd taken his wallet out of his jacket in the morning, leaving him with just enough money to get to the office. Then she'd met him after work and dragged him along to the theatre.

There was a glittering upstairs-foyer where they sat talking; that was where the row started. And it didn't explode into anything direct, much less loud, but went on all evening in an underground way, as if they were all talking about something much more intimate than a theatre-performance, though they couldn't name it or even talk about it directly; there had to be a surface-language for it. None of them had eaten and that made the atmosphere worse. Pinkie had a strained, pale face, and Hanni's lips were tight-closed. Pinkie enjoyed the performance and said so: there was plenty of scenery, she said, and plenty of 'odd noises off', instead of all the 'bare-bones' productions you were dished up with nowadays, with a bit of 'twisted iron' representing a throne and 'a trill on the clarinet' for the forest of Arden. The actor de Cloud wasn't up to much, she said, but you could hear what he said and he had a respect for the verse, which was also rare these days. She said it in a rather rasping way, clattering out her words, her chin lifted with a show of self-confidence, and perhaps this annoyed Dick. She knew 'Hamlet' more or less by heart, and said she'd read it, like most of the other tragedies, a score or so times before she was sixteen: Shakespeare and animals had been her childhood passions! Dick also fancied himself on Shakespeare, from a more academic angle. And he challenged her.

"I don't think he's got a respect for the verse at all!" he said.

"Oh, and what ---?" Pinkie began.

Dick cut her short with a brief, devastating glance, his lips making a strange little shiver before he spoke. "It's not what I think, either! It's what I can prove."

That started it. It wasn't at all like Dick to say this sort of thing, and the others at once assumed that he was looking for a row. Pinkie made a grim, unsteady guffaw, and cried, "Really!"

Granville's temper was up because of the tone Dick had taken. He didn't think de Cloud was as bad as all that, he said --- there was nothing clever or fancy about him, anyway. This was in the interval and the bell went before Dick could say any more. They walked back to their seats in the circle in a grim file --- more or less in the order of their indignation, Dick first, his lips white, then Pinkie, her head lowered in the prowling way she had when she was on the defensive, then Granville followed by Hanni, who was the calmest of them all.

The moment the curtain went down at the end of the play Pinkie turned round to Dick as if there'd been no interruption in what they'd said and asked in a loud voice, "Well, what have you got on your mind, if you can put it in a decent way, that is?" It was in her 'patrician' tone, when she gazed at a point to one side of the other person or at his foot, her lips pouting. Dick sat looking firm but not a little scared: for a moment they were like two children with a lovable power of intimacy as they sat side by side, their faces small and refined, their eyes with the same light-blue transparency, flickering and sensitive, terribly aware of every little change in the other person. Hanni or Granville could have stopped the quarrel at any moment by saying something pleasant, but they left the others alone in the field. There was a grim intimacy between

Dick and Pinkie that was baffling --- which was perhaps why they didn't interfere. They stuck at each other as if settling another score. The rest of the audience trickled out of the circle, leaving them sitting alone, until the house-lights went down and an usher asked them to go. The usher spoke without ceremony and this nettled Pinkie further. She was about to answer back and cause a scene when Dick said quietly, "Now, then, take it easy!"

Dick said he'd heard Hamlet say 'enseamed' as a word of two syllables when it should have been three; and also 'precedent' had been pronounced the modern way, whereas the emphasis should have been on the middle syllable. He also disliked the way de Cloud emphasised 'master' in 'master the devil' in Hamlet's third speech from the end. The argument went on at home in Chaworth Road, in the music-room; Hanni and Dick came back by habit --- the argument gripped them all together so much that parting was unthinkable. No one mentioned that the last train to Hampton Court had gone. It was quite usual now for them to stay the night, together or alone.

"I mean," Dick said, "look at the way that fellow talked to the players, flinging his arms about! He did everything he was telling them not to do!" Then he added, "It just didn't come off!"

And Pinkie brushed aside everything he said like a fly. He was amazed at her confidence. "It came off for me all right!" she cried. "'Come off'! What do you think he was trying to do --- sell you something?"

Pinkie was mocking him, really. She sat there smiling, though defensively, with a little flickering of her eyes, her chin moving up and down. She gazed across the room at him with narrowed, disbelieving eyes, as if everything he said was a cheap and obvious little ruse. The

atmosphere got worse and worse. The more she cracked the performance up the more Dick picked on a little error of text --- if it was an error, for no one could remember exactly what had gone on. He spoke crisply, holding back, quite still in his chair, gazing across at the open window where Pinkie and Granville were sitting together on the divan. And Hanni would say without the slightest not of interest, "I thought Hamlet's soliloquy at the graveyard was well-done, didn't you?" or "The decor for the play-within-the-play was clever, don't you think so?"

All the unresolved elements in their friendship welled up in the argument, indicated only in a tone of voice or hostile glance, like ghosts walking between them. The silence was full of things that hadn't been said in the last few weeks, with the strange comings and goings in the house. What did Dick know about Pinkie's doings, on Friday evenings for instance? Why was there this intimate struggle of hatred between Dick and Pinkie? What went on in Hanni's mind? What did she do on the nights Dick went out --- did she have lovers as well? What did she know about Pinkie which she didn't pass on to Granville? What did Pinkie know about Hanni which she didn't pass on to Dick? What sort of friend was Dick --- this occurred to him like a stab in his middle --- to tell him nothing, never to put out his hand to help --- to see the marriage going down before his eyes --- to see him falling from blindness to blindness --- knowing what Pinkie was doing --- seeing what he was hiding from himself --- but what was Pinkie doing?

All these thoughts jostled about and fought in his brain while the talk went on about Hamlet. Were the others doing the same? Did they all accuse each other of something; but the presence of a third person made it impossible for them to say it? Was Hanni against Dick in her dry

little arguments about Hamlet because of the evening he'd had with the Juno-esque girl? What was the pattern underneath? When would he know? Sometimes he felt that Dick could have thrown a knife at him, sitting on the other side of the hearth, his lips pale; his own eyes, glaring at Dick, might have said the same! It reminded him of the time in the Hampton Court gardens, when there'd been a stormy silence in the sky and all the leaves had been still: they had all been gripped together in the same uncanny enmity that was beyond any one of them! Whose purposes were they serving? How did these moods arise? What was the plan underneath?

They all trooped upstairs and had a bit of supper, with cocoa, and tempers were better after that. Dick smiled across at Pinkie, his eyes fluttering, and said, "Well, I think you win on points." Outside there was a flat, empty silence as if the streets had been fixed there for centuries, growing naturally, and couldn't be disturbed, but were waiting for something unspecified to happen, tensely, hushed, not allowing even the sound of a bird. Not a car passed in the distance; there was the sound of a train once, slowing down at a station. And across the sky there were flashes, probably from the trains.

Granville's part in the discussion was to attack Dick --- or rather, that was how it was taken. He compared Dick's way of arguing with Pinkie's, and leaned forward across the kitchen-table talking indignantly, his chin thrust forward and his eyes staring out of his head with an urgent expression, seeming to appeal to Dick at the same time as scolding him.

*Pinkie talks because she loves the play and she's live in it and she's taken Hamlet seriously and she's frightened by it and it moves her

and makes her think about her own life and her own struggles!" he cried. "But when you say 'old Bill Shakespeare' and 'young Hathaway's husband' and all that sort of thing you make him sound small and weak and limited as if all he did was sit down and think up clever little plots for people like you to come and sniff at! Whereas what he did was wait for God to move him and pass through him, and Pinkie knows this! She knows the wonder of God in a person! All you seem to see in Hamlet is a text and a story, and so you make the play seem dead --- look at the way you talk about it when you say 'that graveyard stuff' and 'the get-thee-hence gambit'! You make it seem impossible that a man wrote it with his whole life and so there's nothing sacred in it for you, you don't believe in men, that's why, you don't respect them, you don't see anything sacred in them! That's how Hanni talks, too --- she isn't interested in the play much, I don't see why she should be but apparently she does, she seems to think we'll put her down as a fool if she doesn't say something! But when Pinkie talks about Shakespeare you feel he's somebody fabulous, not fabulous in a social way but just in himself, like when she said, 'He must have been such a sweet man!' But that's too soft for you, isn't it, you think you've got to be cleverer than that, you've got to say something clever and hard that shows how your brain's been working!"

He spoke in a rush, without noticing the changes in Dick's face. He paused at the end, waiting for Dick to take him up and challenge him. But he didn't. There was just silence. Dick looked up at him with a peculiar smile, his eyes flickering in a more uncertain way than usual, and murmured, before getting up to go to bed, "Well, thanks a lot!"

Granville sat there with his mouth open as they trooped out of the room --- the words seemed to have poured out of his mouth without

his knowing, and he tried to recollect what they had been. He went downstairs behind Pinkie like someone not quite responsible for himself.

CHAPTER 14.

The following week he'd just come back from a walk and was standing in his room alone, beginning to think that his optimism and hopes were unfounded and that the yellow flash in the sky had meant nothing --- that he may as well return at once to Basrah, without waiting for his leave to end, when there was a knock on the door and Dick put his head round the corner. It was late in the afternoon and he must have come straight from work. They were silent for a moment and Dick smiled.

"Hullo, old sport! I've been looking for you everywhere. But you'd broken camp!"

"I've been out for a walk."

Dick came in and closed the door. He was in one of his neat, sparkling moods when he walked with rather tripping steps and there was a special brightness and flickering scrutiny in his eyes. He said he was getting off early the next afternoon and wanted to introduce Granville to a few of his friends. Granville asked, "Who?", with his mouth open. Dick replied in an ambiguous way --- they were friends he kept to himself, he said, since a part of one's life had to be 'uninvestigated', didn't he agree? And Granville said, "Oh, yes, I do!" quickly, and thought to himself that agreeing was as far as he ever got: but Dick actually did something!

Granville's heart turned over with excitement at the proposal.

This was his release --- the cause of the yellow flash!

"The operation's marked top secret, captain," Dick said.

"Oh, yes, of course!"

They were to meet at a place called The Marquis a few hundred yards from Covent Garden, the Kingsway side, at four o'clock the next day.

He was to go in as if he owned the place and ask for Mr. Pollocke; then he'd probably be shown downstairs. It wasn't 'a brothel or anything boring like that,' Dick added. Granville listened in a rapt way, gazing at him with admiration.

"It's a farewell gift!"

"Thank you!"

"Rather like an Arab showing you his wives, I suppose: blood-brotherhood and all that caper," Dick said with a breathless laugh. He added before he went, "Don't forget --- top secret!"

The brief visit felt staged, in Dick's manner. He could hardly believe it had taken place, once the house was silent again and the door downstairs had closed. How absurd! A place called The Marquis! But this time the exaggeration had come from someone else and he had to believe it! He had the sensation of being swept along and only seeing his life vaguely, as something that happened beyond him, in a ghostly fashion, while he tried to find a theme in it.

Pinkie had asked him again when he was leaving and he'd said, "Well, at the proper time, of course", as if it was all in hand. She asked then, "Are you flying?" and he said quickly, "Yes!" She seemed satisfied and went about quietly, it seemed to him with a new resolution. He remembered the face that had appeared to him a few days before, clear, gazing at him with dark eyes, quite alone, surrounded by nothing --- by

white clouds, perhaps: suppose it was coming to him now? He was so excited that evening that he put on his scratched record 'Creole Shake' five or six times. Pinkie came in and he tightened his hold on himself and helped with the dinner in a matter-of-fact way. Then there was another piece of news. Dick rang up from Hampton Court and said that 'in the excitement of the chase' he'd forgotten to tell him that he'd heard at the office that morning that he, Granville, was going to be asked to put in a report about Basrah. His heart did another turn, this time with dismay at the words 'put in a report', which sounded menacing to him. But Dick went on to say that they were organising the Middle East network under Nevinson and they wanted his ideas on how it should be done. In other words, it was most flattering, and Granville said, "Well, I hope it's true!" Dick had got it from his own secretary, who, he said, 'apart from having a splendid pair of teats has sharp ears as well!'

Next day he woke early and got up at once, an hour or more before the alarm usually went off. The first milk-delivery hadn't passed and there wasn't the usual dull roar of traffic in the distance, on the other side of the roofs. He heard sparrows chirping in the gables, and the rough little squawk of a starling. It felt as if the city wasn't inhabited any more. Pinkie was lying half on her stomach, quite asleep, her arm hanging down towards the floor, almost touching it. They always kept the curtains closed at night because of the light from the street-lamp opposite, and as usual it took him some time to see where his clothes were. They threw them in a heap on two chairs when they went to bed, and sometimes on the floor. His clothes were always in a frightful state. He was never in time for the laundry and usually he had to wash out his shirts himself. He needed new socks and undersear. Most of his good stuff was in Basrah

and all he had for today was his tropical suit, which might be a bit chilly. As he dressed he decided to wash out his shirts that day, hoping that he had a clean one in his drawer. He watched her in the dimness: she always seemed to be listening to something when she slept, quite still, so childish and wholesome. He went to the door and made sure, as he did every day, by automatic habit now, that the latch clicked home when he closed it. The music-room looked harsh because the curtains had been left open and a cold wind was coming from the top of the window. There was no sun today and it was quite cold. He glanced down the street where nothing stirred. It had a fixed and mortified look: the steps leading up to each house were deadly symmetrical, and the ramshackle cars still had their tiny parking lights on; the pavements seemed to sparkle dully in the raw air. He shivered and rubbed his hands together. As he went into the lavatory he reminded himself that in a few hours' time he'd be looking into Dick's 'uninvestigated' world. All of a sudden it was too much for him! He wouldn't be able to do it! He had an overwhelming sense of nausea. The world was too much --- he couldn't go through with it! Soon the buses would be going by every few minutes in the distance and the shop-shutters would go up in the Commercial Road. People would begin walking by outside, and the ramshackle cars would leave their places with a grind. Windows would open and mops would appear, shaking the dust off. The world would get tired in a few minutes. Again the sense of total unworthiness afflicted him --- he was unfit to be seen by other people, even to the pores of his skin --- it was an unworthiness right down to his living tissue; it bred in him and exuded from him like a vapour! The thought of going out was unbearable. But at the same time there was warmth and excitement, growing. It was a grim combination of

expectation and fright.

He sat over breakfast for an hour, then took a cup of tea down to Pinkie. He lit the gas-fire and sat over it, waiting for her to stir in the darkness. He enjoyed the morning silence --- it was like a last refuge from the day before him, like a farewell to himself, to his intimacy. She roused herself and whispered drowsily, "Thank you", and began sipping her tea; it was a pleasant sound. Everything could be trusted at this hour; after that the untruths started and one's own eyes weren't a safe guide any more, as the world came awake. He must be at The Marguis at four o'clock; there were lots of dust-bins outside the door, Dick had said, and it was in a kind of back-lane.

Pinkie went to work with a beltless red overcoat trailing from her shoulders and a little rouge on her lips. It was Friday, a fact which entered his already excited state as an additional disturbance. There was a light-blue scarf round her neck, light for cool summer weather, transparent, like the vague blue of her eyes. He put it out of his mind: he would try to keep to the city-identity he'd discovered at the Lido with Hanni. He would reject suffering, feeling chill but nevertheless strong. Just before she went she glanced at him, still sleepy, and then turned as she usually did to look for her bag. It was on the floor of the music-room, by the chair where she'd sat the previous evening, and as she bent down to pick it up her coat looked like a cloak for a moment: she had the look of someone dominant and gentle from the past. He wanted to cry out, 'Stay here today --- don't let me go out!' But she'd already gone to the door, after giving him the usual little peck on his cheek, that was like an intimate voice in his ear, regretful and sisterly, as a sister's kiss might be before a long journey.

"I don't think I'll be back for dinner," she said.

"O K!"

He heard her close the door downstairs, then he strolled into the bathroom. There was powder in the wash-basin, and a few towels were crumpled damply together on the side of the bath. The rubber mat was dark with stains and mud. The house wasn't very well looked after these days. Pinkie was at work all day and then there were the usual visitors in the evening; they left a pile of washing-up behind them. The younger girls like Ginger didn't seem to know how to handle a dish-cloth or a broom. Lucy said that she'd always thought an egg fried in its own juice, until Pinkie showed her you needed fat. "Of course," Glenning said one day, "I believe that sort of cow isn't even good for the bed!"

He got down to washing his shirts in the bath, and threw in a pullover for good measure. After that he did the towels and the rubber mat, scrubbing at the latter with a floor-brush. He quite enjoyed it. Then he went back into the bedroom, leaving it all to dry. Pinkie's wardrobe door was open, with a scarf lying outside. He picked this up and put it in one of her drawers, then tried to close the wardrobe. Some old high-heeled shoes were in the way, and he had to heap everything up inside to get the door home. He then tried to write a letter to Mohammed, asking how things were going at the office and telling him to get the files in order for the report he would have to make, but he was too excited and couldn't settle to it.

The morning passed in this way, and he wandered from room to room, quite as if it was a last visit. There was a troubled and yet ecstatic feeling at the pit of his stomach. For a time he gazed out of the

window, leaning on his desk. The sound of the traffic seemed to indicate tremendous preparations outside, as always, and as always the climax never came. He was too excited to eat much lunch but made himself some eggs with toast, and drank two or three cups of tea. Afterwards he started to change. And suddenly he realised there were no clean shirts. His drawer was more or less empty. He'd washed the only two presentable ones! What a fool! There were two white ones screwed up a ball at the bottom of the clothes-basket in the bathroom, but it was too late to bring them to life. On the other hand one of them wasn't too dirty, and he rushed upstairs to get it ironed. It would take him quite half-an-hour to reach town, another fifteen minutes to find the place, perhaps; and there was little more than an hour! He waited for the iron to get hot, and in the meantime rushed down downstairs again to have a look at his tropical jacket. It would be decidedly cold, but there was nothing else for it. The excitement was growing in him all the time. 'What the devil's the matter with you?' he thought. 'Are you going back to childhood?' It reminded him of the Abbott's Road days, in the time of the so-called giddy fits. He was all at sixes and sevens, the skin of his face prickled nervously, he was sweating. The jacket felt extraordinarily light as he put it over his shoulders. But it would help him later, perhaps: it would make him feel more of a visitor than he was --- just off back to the Middle East; more detached.

This jacket was badly creased where he'd flung it down some evenings before, and he decided to give it a touch of the iron. He had a horrified sensation that he would miss Dick. The release ---! And Dick wouldn't repeat his offer; he would book his passage back: Death! The shirt couldn't be rushed, though he did only the collar and part of

the front, and the cuffs. It wasn't likely that they'd ask him to take off his jacket! When he got it on it was a sight. There were crinkles everywhere. But when he slipped the jacket on as well it wasn't too bad. He needed a damp cloth for the jacket, afraid that without it he'd give the material a polished look. But he didn't have time. He'd risk it. The effect wasn't too bad! At any rate, the creases couldn't be seen any longer. There was a dirty spot above one of the pockets and he was just about to open the drawer of his desk to get out the little bottle of petrol for cleaning stains when he realised that the bottle he had in mind was in his desk in Basrah. He dashed out of the house. There was quite a long walk to the bus-stop, but if the traffic wasn't bad he'd get through in less than twenty minutes, on the bus. He ran to the end of the road and remembered with horror that he'd left the iron on, and then ran all the way back. It would be quite risky to leave it on, despite the asbestos under the iron; Hanni had done it at Hampton Court once and had returned to find the ironing board just ready to burst into flames. Well, he'd certainly be late now! Dick would probably be gone. He wouldn't get there before half-past four. He was gratified that, because of the running, his jacket was none too light; it helped him get to the bus-stop faster! Sweat was pouring out of his arm-pits, and there was a dark stain on each side of his jacket which reminded him of the dog-days in Basrah. He liked travelling by bus, and felt calm the moment he got on. He must learn how to conquer the city; this was his thought as he settled into his seat!

The Marquis was in a sombre place. A back-alley gave on to a bombed site where there were deep cellars open to the sky like an excavation, and on the other side were the grim backs of buildings, dark

and tall, with windows of different shapes, some of them patched up with cardboard. The lane was cobbled, with ruts and pools of water. And there was a vague painted sign, The Marguis, in front of an iron door like the backstage door of a theatre, with the dust-bins Dick had mentioned piled high with refuse, their lids toppling off. He pushed this door open and couldn't see anything inside. Nor was there a sound. The throbbing of the traffic in the distance ceased. He realised that he was standing immediately in front of a thick curtain and that this was blocking his view. He pushed it aside, making it rattle from the brass hoops above, and saw before him a dimly-lit, shoddily elegant and plush little bar with deep armchairs and round mahogany tables. There didn't appear to be any windows, only a great fan in the ceiling which reminded him of the Mesopotamia Hotel --- the small bar where journalists used to meet. Behind the bar itself, among bottles and shining glass mirrors, there was a pale, tired-looking girl reading a picture-magazine, quite rapt in it, so much so that she didn't look up when he came in.

"Good afternoon," he said.

She looked up slowly. Her pallor was extraordinary; it seemed to enter her fingertips and her eyes, like a total state of being. Yet she was pretty, and her smile was gracious and kindly. But after she'd said "Good afternoon" in reply she looked back slowly to her magazine again and went on reading. He waited, and then slowly she looked up again, this time with her eyebrows raised in a questioning way.

"Yes?" she asked.

"Is Mr. Pollocke here?"

"Yes, they're all downstairs." And she returned to the magazine once more with the same slow motion, imbued with her strange total pallor.

He pushed through another curtain which presumably led downstairs and saw a flight of wooden steps with a russet light at the bottom, and from there came the murmur of voices. At once a drum started, making him jump, and he saw the edge of a chequered table-cloth, then a stone pillar, like that in a Roman temple but more slender. What on earth had he come into? He walked down and entered a kind of restaurant with a dance-floor; a rehearsal was taking place; there was a small band, and mostly dark girls in tights or beach trousers, and a tall, young Arab with long hands directing them all. Granville looked round for Dick and found him at a corner table with a muscular-looking dark girl, who was holding his hand. Dick turned round quite casually and said to him, "Oh, Pip, come and join us, they're getting ready for a hair-dance, believe it or not!" He sat down and Dick didn't trouble to introduce him to the muscular-looking girl, nor did she pay any attention to him. "There's a girl who whirls her head round at a terrific rate," Dick went on. "It's really marvellous!"

"Do you always come here?" Granville asked. It was like seeing into the back of Dick's mind, into the darkness and mystery. He was intrigued and spell-bound.

"Oh, quite often, when I can get the afternoon off."

"But it's like Basrah, not somewhere in London!" There was even a fan in the ceiling, the same shape as those in the Mesopotamia hotel. Most of the girls were Arab --- Morrocan or Algerian. The dimness of everything, the heat and loudness were the same. "It's like one of the cabarets in Basrah!" he added.

"Yes, I thought it'd take you back." Dick was quietly proud, and gave him a gleaming look sideways, keeping hold of the girl's hand.

Granville began to feel at home and stretched out his legs. There

was no light where they were sitting but a strong yellow glow from the stage. There were arguments going on between the tall young man and one of the Moroccan girls, while the others changed or combed their hair or practised steps. He gazed at them. She still couldn't properly believe it and kept turning and glancing at Dick, to make sure it was him.

Dick spoke to him in a quiet voice, without looking at him, "You think I'm a rum bird, don't you? Is that what you're thinking?"

He was at a loss for a reply, then said, "Well, you certainly lead your own life!"

"Don't you believe in that?"

"Oh, yes, absolutely!" He said this in a piping voice, and one of the girls by the stage peered into the darkness to see who it was from a moment.

"What about a drink?" Dick asked, still without looking at him. There was a waiter in a white jacket whom he called over with "Joe!" and Granville now saw that there was a tiny lighted bar similar to the one upstairs. Out of an absurd desire to give himself the impression that he was in Basrah --- without the pain of being separated from Pinkie --- he asked for arak when the waiter came, though he never touched the stuff in Basrah. To his surprise they had it, and the other two, Dick and the muscular-looking girl, followed suit. He heard Dick explaining to her that his friend was 'from Basrah', and she leaned forward to glance at him in the dimness for a moment, then leaned back again. When the drinks came Dick said he liked the pepperminty taste and touched glasses with him --- "Well, old sport, here's to a good trip, and be careful how you go in the old casbah!"

The 'hair-dance' was extraordinary. It was done by a thin wraith

of a girl, dark and quite small, with masses of black hair let down to her waist. Being almost naked as well, with a flimsy brassiere and knickers of frilled black silk, she had a starved and defenceless look. Her shoulders were sharp like knuckles, and she hunched them as if cold.

"Jesus," he heard the muscular-looking girl murmur to Dick, "why don't ^{she need} a good meal!" she get some flesh on her bones?" She spoke with a cockney accent, in

the mild, tender, soft-voiced way that often went with it in a woman.

The long-haired girl walked in a hunched way, as if scurrying away from something, but the moment she danced it was different. Most of the noise was made by the drums, which got faster and faster; a ^{black} negro bent over them, sweat pouring down from the top of his head, which was bald and strangely wrinkled, and he gave the impression of trying to beat the life out of something, with a dead, fixed look in his eyes, his teeth gritted together. There was a pianist also, trying to make himself heard. The girl danced alone at first, her hips revolving and her arms held out stiffly, rather like the gypsy women he'd seen when a sheikh gave a party. The idea, apparently, was that the young Arab, with an odd grinning expression in his face, very taut and hard-skinned, should gradually bring her to life, or wake her from sleep, for her eyes were closed as she danced. Her revolving became faster as he weaved his way round her, staring into her face with a fixed grinning look that seemed to be natural to him, and she began stamping her feet as if under his spell. There was something of the faun about him, with the cloven hoof, except that he was harder, without soft movements; Granville could see the Arab in him - it was in the fixity of his movements, and the shining darkness of his eyes, flickering but not really changing. The girl stamped and pushed her head back, her hands pressed down at her side now and her body taut. There was a mounting

violence from the drum, and the whole room seemed to shake with it, but then the girl began to droop and grow limp, subsiding until she'd gone down on her knees. The real hair-dance started here. Her hair fell round her face and shoulders in dense strands, while the young man continued to weave round her, glaring into her face, his back bent, so that he seemed to be trying to fly in an ungainly way every time he took a little leap round her. As he did this her head began to revolve, at first slowly; her neck seemed extraordinarily flexible, and her head turned quicker and quicker until her hair was flying round like a fan, quite disembodied from her, it seemed, not even recognisable as hair, but simply a dark shadow whirling round at the top of her head at a terrific rate. One caught a glimpse of the whites of her eyes every time her head went back, but otherwise her face was a dark blur; only her eyes flashed like a quick disc, whites and staring, every second or so. The drum was so loud that the floor was trembling, and the drummer had become so frantic that it was impossible to see that more he could do to satisfy himself except fling the sticks in the air and break the drum up with his hands. But he persisted with the sticks, delicately, too, as one could see if one looked at his hands closely as they quivered and fluttered over the drums; he shot his arm out and contracted it at a tremendous speed, and he made the rhythm seem composed of many contradictory rhythms inside it, jagg'dly opposed to each other but making up a unity, like sudden claps of thunder, dominated by the delicate thrusts of his arms and his still, bent body that was like a rock behind all the movement. The drum-beats stumbled over each other with sharp crashes, and stopped, then, after a moment of dead silence, started again in a headlong way, like heavy things tumbling down one after the other.

It was impossible to imagine after a time how the axis underneath the whirling shadow of hair could be someone's head, and there was something horrible in this, because it seemed that at any minute her head might fly off like a ball. She was quite another person. The defenceless look had disappeared. She seemed to be asserting something in her own life, with a tremendous ferocity, driving her head round with the same relentlessness as there was in the drummer, so that her body seemed only the vehicle of a maddened will. She made the young man weaving round her look much the lesser creature, and even the sense of hardness and fixity in him disappeared; he was soft at her side. When the dance came to an end she jumped up and flounced off the floor as if she'd won a personal battle with them all, then she stood wiping herself down with a towel at the edge of the stage, gazing into the darkness with a pouting, resentful expression. Slowly the naked and helpless look grew on her again, and once more one could see how the bones of her shoulders were like little knuckles, painfully sharp, and her crouching manner returned. Underneath, still, was an awkward power of survival, that showed in her walk as she kicked out her legs, hurrying along, slightly crouched, her eyes squinting a little with apprehension.

"Well, how did you like it?" Dick whispered. He nodded enthusiastically, without speaking. "I've seen it before," Dick added. He said that most of them were Moroccan, from Spanish Morocco, and the drummer was a Nubian. Apparently, he took drugs. The pianist was also Negro, but he came from Nigeria or the Gold Coast, Dick didn't know which. The drummer's skin was terribly wizened for a young man's, and behind his brown colouring there was something ashen-grey, especially in his lips, which were cracked like parched earth and perpetually open; his eyes, when

he looked up drowsily now and then, were yellow and bloodshot. The pianist, a rather clerkly young man with glasses, got up from his stool, stretching, and Granville heard him murmur to the drummer as he gazed down at his drowsy figure, "You kind of sleepy, man? But the drummer made no reply, and the pianist laughed easily. There was a lot of arguing among the girls, and voices were raised now the band had stopped. "Hey, you better watch your feet ---! Then there would be clapping laughter. "Your feet swell up to twice their size when you dance! What you got in 'em, springs?" Dick said that the girl who'd done the hair dance was called Joy Celeste; that wasn't her real name, and nobody seemed to know what her real name was. "They're a mixed bunch --- students, all sorts," he said. He thought the hair-girl's real name was Makboula. But one must never use it: she flared up or cried, or something. She had a room off the Strand and appeared not to live with anyone, but she was always talking about 'dad', though 'dad' had never appeared. She'd been born in Cairo and brought up in Tangiers, "and as you know," Dick added, "dancing over there's like street-walking over here."

"Is she Muslim or Christian?" Granville asked, for no reason that he could see.

Dick burst out laughing. "Don't be academic!"

The muscular-looking girl leaned forward. "What was that word you used?" she asked.

"Epidemic," Dick said at once. "I was talking about your syphilis," whereupon she knocked him playfully on the hand. He turned to Granville again, "This is Alice. Have you met?" They nodded to each other. "She never touches men, do you, Alice? Because she's got a snake. It makes up for everything. Isn't that true, Alice?" She nodded and

smiled. Her legs were muscular and short, thrust out under her in a tom-boy fashion, and she had a pugnacious ease of manner, combined with the softness of voice he'd noticed already, with a laughing, casual look in her eyes. She had short hair like a boy's and full, round cheeks with a slight flush of health.

"Is that true?" Granville asked in his clergyman's piping voice, leaning forward. "Have you got a snake?"

"Yes, that's right!"

He was no wiser, and turned to Dick for help. "Has she?" he asked.

"Yes, she winds it round her neck at the night-clubs, makes it dance and all that caper, kisses it and touches it up and runs it between her legs. They love it!"

"It comes when I call it," the girl said. "'Sidney, Sidney!' And it comes right up and starts climbing!"

"That's right!" Dick cried with a laugh. "You ought to see the show, Pip! There's a wonderful lot of hanky-panky!"

Alice was born in London, Dick went on, "the son of a fish-monger"; she laughed and hit at his hand again, crying "You're always taking the mike!"

Later they all assembled upstairs, and the pale girl behind the bar, whom Dick called Joyce, came to life from her magazine. She poured drinks slowly and carefully, biting her lower lip with concentration, and lifted the glasses on to the bar with great attention, careful not to spill a drop. Dick was on speaking terms with her, too. He told Granville when they were sitting down that she got through one magazine a day and let everybody know when she was a bit tipsy at the end of the evening that she was waiting for her 'Romeo'.

Joy Celeste came over to join them, and there was a tremor of fear in Granville as he stood up to shake hands with her. Shaking hands wasn't the thing to do, it seemed, and she took no notice, only sat down at his side, looking up at him with slightly frightened surprise. "What did he stand up for?" she asked Dick. Granville was still hivering above her in an equivocal state, beginning to wonder whether what poise he'd managed to keep so far would break down; but Dick said, "He's been like that for years, old girl! He gets up and sits down every few minutes. It's a joint in his arse. It formed just like that, from nowhere, and the doctors couldn't do anything for him! He gets up to avoid it squeaking --- that's when it's not going through a farting phase; he has to stay at home then. Take no notice, he'll come down again soon enough!" The girls laughed and, laughing as well, he sat down, recovered from the giddy embarrassment into which he'd fallen without them seeing. 'Test No. 1', he thought, 'initiation by fire and water!' And having got through the first moment he felt easy. "Now let me get you all a drink," he said. It was like passing safely through a barrier into a fresh world. He sat back in his chair, beaming at them. And again it was arak. The hair-girl looked surprised when he suggested it. He told her he'd been in Basrah, and she looked more cheerful; it gave them something to talk about, and the other two drew their chairs together, to whisper and peck at each other's cheeks. He noticed she had wide-set, very black eyes, deep in her head, and her cheek-bones were high and prominent. She leaned forward when she talked to him, with a strained, squinting look as if she was trying to see something on the table more clearly. She'd plaited her hair up, which gave her a more starved and staring look than before. She began talking about her 'dad', as Dick

had told him, and how they'd come from the Hejaz, and what a fine man dad was, a trader who knew 'every port along the coasts of Africa'. She said 'mother' had adored him and had always said that he put finer clothes on her back than any other man she'd known or heard tell of. She talked in a light voice, her eyes squinted, gazing at the table fixedly, like someone reading from a fairy-tale. She seemed to be both remembering it and also telling the story for the first time. He congratulated her on her dance, and she said that it was 'all right', only the drummer annoyed her. The rhythm wasn't quite right, she said. With an oddly meek expression, her shoulders more bowed than before, so that she seemed ever smaller and frailer, with her bony, sallow face and anxious eyes, like those of a starved child, she added that twenty years before he, the drummer, would have been serving at her table, being a Nubian, and 'fitting the little shoes on my feet'; 'dad' had always taught her that if you gave 'those people' an inch they took a mile! But as she drank the arak she became more cheerful, and unbent her shoulders a little. She smiled and told him that the pianist, who was a medical student, was in love with her, and always followed her home to her place at night, after they'd finished at the club. He didn't do it in the hope of going in with her, but to protect her, because it was always about three in the morning by the time they came off the stage. And he never spoke to her; wasn't that wonderful? Granville asked why the pianist didn't speak if they were in the same dancing troupe together and saw each other everyday. She said in a little voice, "It's pure love, I suppose!" He couldn't tell if she was joking or not. The moment she said it she pushed her glass across to Dick and said, "That milk appeals to me. The same again, please!"

When she'd been supplied again he began talking about the desert.

Did she know the feeling in the morning, he asked, especially in the spring when the air was brilliantly clear and cool, and all the buildings shone like coral, at least in the district where he lived, the feeling of having a great thriving power in her legs when she walked, and a feeling of readiness for the day? She blinked in a completely puzzled way, and he thought that perhaps a trace of a smile passed her lips. But she continued bent over the table, her arms on the sides of her chair, gazing before her. The arak was working on him.

"Do you know what I mean?" he cried, flinging his arms out so that the other girl, sitting with Dick, flinched for a moment. "When walking along is a terrific sensuous enjoyment? When you feel you're really springing forward! All your body relishes the movement, doesn't it?" Dick and one or two people at the bar looked across at him. "I've never known that before," he went on, "not such perfection of activity! When you're free, in your body! It was like walking into a new sort of world every day, all sparkling and clear, and yet being perfectly safe --- you know what I mean, without the risk of the journey, and feeling lonely and strange in a place, but every day that marvellous novelty, of your senses, I mean you felt it at the tips of your fingers, and breathed it in, and had it in your toes as you walked along! The sky never seemed a long way away there as it does in England, at least on a cloudy day! One could imagine that sky spreading over the desert outside the city --- do you see what I mean? I could see the edge of the desert from my balcony --- oh, wonderful! I used to gaze at it for hours on end sometimes in the morning when I didn't go to the office, if it was spring and the heat wasn't too bad, and it used to shimmer out there! Have you ever been to Basrah?" he added breathlessly.

She uttered a quiet, "No," and took a long sip of her drink.

He sat back and breathed in happily, while she piked about in her bag for something and at length pulled out a nail-file and began doing her nails. "Yes," he said, "you feel quite unknown to yourself there! For the first time in my life I felt I was actually living in the sky ---"

"Where?" she said, screwing up her face.

"I mean in the silence all round the earth, not snatching at it and going nervously to and fro from men to the silence and back again, as I'd done before! Every day I felt I almost touched something --- golden --- sparkling!"

She pointed to his glass. "I think you'd better go easy on that," she murmured.

They all laughed and drank another arak. Dick was waving his arms about, calling, "More snakes!"

In a funny-looking little group, bumping into each other, they went off to Soho. It was colder now and he felt the thinness of his tropical jacket. He put his arm round the hair-girl's shoulders, swinging along. The muscular-looking girl at Dick's side was steady and quiet. How marvellous it all was, to be actually with people, to be lost, to have no careful thoughts and no suspicions! The hair-girl walked with jerky little steps at his side like someone in an endless distraught argument with a voice inside her that was never revealed to other people. She had the same way of gazing in front of her as before, only now at the pavement, seeming to search for something.

They went to an underground place called the Gare St. Lazare which Dick knew, approached by a narrow, unlit corridor and then a wooden staircase. It seemed that only members were allowed in, and Dick wasn't

a member as he'd thought. The hair-girl pushed forward to a little grill by the entrance, from where they could hear a screeching band and the sound of talk. A young man was sitting in the darkness behind the grill with a heavy, pale face and dark eyebrows, and his expression was one of final and unapproachable boredom; his eyes didn't alter by a flicker as he talked. He and the hair-girl knew each other, apparently. She hadn't paid her subscription. It was only five shillings, so Dick paid it. She pointed out Granville to the young man behind the grill and said, "He's just come from Basrah!" He showed not the slightest interest, only nodded while counting out the change from a pound note. He put down a ten-shilling note, then counted out the rest in silver and coppers, putting them in neat little piles. The hair-girl leaned towards the grill and said in a complaining voice, "That's right, give us all your small fuckin' change!" And the young man's face, slightly sweating, became animated for the first time: "He gave me a note! Everybody's giving me notes tonight!" Then he returned to his former deadness of expression and pushed the money, in three neat little piles on top of the ten-shilling note, carefully under the grill, giving it a last reminiscent look as if he'd actually created it.

Inside there was bedlam, at least for the first few yards. A saxophonist was standing on the playform, his head back and sweat pouring down from his chin in the most grotesque way, making a high-pitched wailing note while everyone else in the band leaned or lolled in a drugged state and clusters of people round the platform made swooning movements and raised their eyebrows as the notes went higher and higher. When Joy Celeste walked past the platform the saxophonist did a miraculously quick bow and blew a raspberry after her through his instrument, then

swung up again and went on with the high swooning notes. She took no notice and walked jerkily through the crowd on the dancing floor to where the tables were. One or two people tapped her on the shoulder in a familiar way, but she took no notice of them. He wondered that so many people knew her --- she was so frail and scurrying as if she only knew how to avoid contact; yet they were familiar with her, in a kindly way, and seemed quite to expect that she should take no notice of them. He saw that the dark walls all round were painted with signs like 'Baggage', 'Wanted on Voyage' and 'Reserve', and in huge white letters there were the words INFORMATION and DEFENSE DE PISSER. They ate what the place could offer, eggs and sausages, and sat on drowsily recovering from the arak. There was a night-club called The Daybreak where both the girls had to dance after midnight, and the hair-girl said she had to hurry home and see 'dad' beforehand.

Dick and Granville got back to Chaworth Road about midnight and found no one at home. A tremor of fear threatened to pass through him on account of Pinkie, that she hadn't come back; but he quickly checked himself as they half-stumbled up to the kitchen for a last cup of coffee. After all, he had his own life now! They sat in silence on either side of the table, gazing before them; he felt that all his limbs had expanded and that a glow had come into him; how could he ever have felt unworthy? They were the same limbs as before, yet they breathed properly now! Dick slipped off to bed, and Pinkie came in just before one o'clock.

She was in an unusually direct and brazen mood. She asked him with darkening eyes and a slight smile, looking at the ground, when they'd last had sex, and he replied in an obedient way, like a boy, "Oh, about a week ago, I think"; and he laughed, expecting her to do the same --- to

cover her own embarrassment at such a question. But her face didn't change. Instead, she walked in to the bedroom, her red coat still on, trailing behind her like a cloak, her eyes strangely level, with a menacing light in them, and said, throwing down her bracelet on his desk, "Well, what about some, now?" She didn't switch the light on, and undressed slowly, lowering her straps so that her breasts suddenly showed in the dimness, heavy and shining, and her hips were bare and round. And after they'd got into bed she took sex from him in a silent, unabashed, business-like way he'd never known in her before. It excited and overpowered him as if he'd been a boy in puberty. She had a mild air of assault. Also he could smell the strangeness on her. He knew, for the first time, with his body, as a quite silent consciousness, that she'd been on a bed with somebody else. Also there was an undue wetness, and he had the seift bodily impression that he was mixing his orgasm with someone else's, perhaps with two or three. It was a new form of sex for them. It marked a new path, with different excitements. Usually he would murmur endearments to her which always seemed unduly lofty to him afterwards, but which nevertheless had seemed to excite her. This time he didn't, and in the silence between them a certain hard relish formed that had never existed before. There was also a suggestion of pain for him --- something that bowed him down. But in future there would be this silent directness --- nothing voluptuous or abandoned, each of them in isolated state, fulfilling their needs. Yet it wasn't like the former separateness that was more or less an advanced masturbation: the silence now joined their needs together, and they were at one removed more from themselves than from each other. It was a glimpse of future things.

The aftermath of sex was increasingly one of total inner collapse

for him. The world was grim and heavy --- almost touching the senses, its presence final and devastating, so that nothing light seemed possible any more. There was only darkness. The silence was a death-silence. This happened more and more. It was like ejaculating his torn heart each time, a little more of it, so that he was horribly deprived, and felt given over to enemies, who were un-named and in frightful proliferating hordes, his body abandoned utterly to them.

Ah, he had his own life now! His own secret! 'Let everything deteriorate,' he thought again, as he'd done the first evening, when he'd stood by the window feeling the breeze touch his face like an intimate breath. Yes, mystery would come back into their lives, with danger, its friend. Yet the thought of somebody else's flesh was a blasphemy against hers. It stirred in him the old compassion towards her! Now the familiar prison of touch and smell was going to be broken, he knew it. His certainty, though only his brain asserted it, brought down on him an uncontrollable nervousness as if his organs inside were collapsing. Only in sleep was he close to her. Habit closed the usual shroud over them. They were together for a moment when they woke up each morning, in the first unguarded drowsiness, before the awkwardness and reserve of the day.

The image of the hair-girl kept occurring to his mind. He was content to sit for two or three mornings in his room simply remembering the events of that evening. He put together everything Dick had said, the laughter, the shape of the bar in the dimness of the russet lights at The Marquis, the harsh white walls of the Gare St. Lazare. He went over it again and again. He'd ascertained the hair-girl's address, from Dick. Her face became a constant factor in his mind, motionless and perhaps not

quite alive. He remembered her deep eye-sockets, like shadowy discs, and her high cheek-bones; and how her hair had gone round like a fan. He couldn't tell if he was bringing her to mind deliberately or whether she was really an influence on him. It was pleasant enough to have someone to think about! Pinkie couldn't see his thoughts. Was the hair-girl's face the one that had appeared to him? But Joy Celeste didn't gaze at him as the image had. And she was surrounded by many people --- shadows --- vague movements; he couldn't tell precisely! She was gazing at a point before her, at the table, her eyes screwed up. He remembered her talk about 'dad'. He imagined 'dad' tall for some reason, with a tiny, bald, wizened head like the top of one of those wooden nails found in antique furniture. "Dad" lumbered slowly about the place with heavy feet but said little; and he always had his hands in his pockets.

The weather became downcast and more chilly, so that fires were necessary, and a frightening political crisis broke, involving, of all areas, the Middle East. It concerned Rubath, a small and wealthy sheikdom living on oil-dividends. A plot against the sheikh's life had been uncovered, and foreign agents were supposed to be at the bottom of it. That was the first news, in ominous tones. Then twenty foreigners were expelled from the country, and among these was an attache of the Russian legation. It was a rash move for a tiny sheikdom. Moscow at once sent a threatening note, accusing the sheikh of being in the hands of 'western influences' and of making libellous charges. There was a real set-to, and extra editions of the evening papers came out.

British troops were requested by the sheikh from the Aden protectorate. That was the cause of a further outcry; the sheikdom was in 'Britain's pocket', and the English aide-de camp' of the sheikh was

supposed to be the political mind behind the expulsions. The sheikh came out with a statement that a Russian spy-ring had been uncovered, and that a communist 'shadow-cabinet' had been ready; also some high-ranking officers in the army were involved, but they were nationalists and not in the communist camp; it seemed that everybody was against the sheikh. America was keeping out of it, not wanting to be identified with 'colonial' policies.

He read the papers anxiously, and people started arguing about the pros and cons. Glenning said the British would be fools to send any troops, but the danger was that the Russians would then step in and put up a puppet government there. Every headline was about the crisis. Pinkie asked him if he'd booked his air-passage back, and, not to tell her a lie, he said, "Why? You getting worried about my safety?" with a smile. And she gave him a glance as if he'd just taken a manly devil-may-care attitude --- the kind of look she might have given her brother Nigel.

There was a loud argument one evening in the kitchen between Pinkie and Dick which he thought at first was political, but it was about a money transaction. Apparently, they'd shared expenses for the party Pinkie had given the evening before Granville's arrival. He was amazed how hardy and resistant they both were. They weathered each other's insults so calmly. Dick had wanted the party mainly to get to know the girl called Lucy, Ginger's friend; her nickname in the group, Granville now learned, was 'Linger-Longer'. Linger-Longer was unwilling to go out with Dick alone, but she looked on Pinkie as respectable, because she was married and owned a house. But the only way Dick could persuade Pinkie to have 'school-girls' at a party was to suggest helping with the money; she'd insisted on fifty-fifty!

"An expensive way of finding out," said Dick, "that the girl, nice enough in other ways, had the whole thing built-in and was really a transvestist colonel!" He added to Pinkie, "But I've always been a good loser. Name your price!"

"You know bloody well what that party cost, you mean bastard!" Pinkie said.

"Well," Hanni put in quietly, chuckling, "it was a bit ambiguous---"

"Why?" Pinkie looked crestfallen at her interference. Then they went into the arithmetic of it, with Pinkie working out the sum on paper. At the end of the sum there was more bitterness.

"Oh, all right, forget the whole bloody business!" Pinkie cried, throwing down her pencil.

"It's perfectly simple," Hanni said, "he pays you half of that." And she pointed to the sum.

"But that's only half the booze, and we had food and Christ knows what else, apart from the breakage ---!" She gave Dick a hard glance. "Yes, Mr. Pollocke, the breakage!"

"I only agreed to pay half the booze," Dick replied. And he stuck to it. Pinkie had put her seal on the transaction by not complaining before,--he ~~said~~ ~~as it was now~~ ~~two months~~ too late!

Pinkie lost and Dick paid the sum; and the bad feeling passed over slowly. But it led Pinkie to accuse Hanni of 'stirring up an atmosphere'. She said that Dick would have paid up like a lamb if she hadn't been 'at him'. Hanni denied this, smiling quietly. And Pinkie went on to say that it was about time Hanni left her 'village' and came out in western civilisation for a change, where people spoke their minds. Hanni went mute and didn't appear at the house for two or three days. This gave

Dick a chance to renew his attentions to Linger-Longer, because she appeared only at the house, with 'Ginger', never at the clubs or even at the cafe in Commercial Road. Dick sat on the arm of her chair in the music-room, talking to her softly, and one could see that slowly she was taking a new attitude towards herself, under his influence. She came to the house looking tidier as a result, with her hair really curled instead of being just done up in a ribbon. Then Pinkie and Hanni appeared one day, brought together again by one of those silent feminine miracles --- they'd met somewhere in town by accident! This was followed by new confidences between them, inevitably, and Hanni heard what had been going on at the house between Dick and Linger-Longer. But she only laughed. Dick had managed to get the girl out, after all; they were to go to the theatre together.

British troops were sent to Rubath after all, and Moscow sent a note, more restrained than the previous one to the sheikh, to London. The headline this time was 'Sheikh Digging In'; there would be 'an international show-down', the papers said; the time had come to put a stop to Russian encroachments by means of 'technical advisers' into the Middle East. It looked bad. The sheikh was confined to his palace, with his bodyguard. But there was still no sign of sympathetic trouble in Basrah or anywhere near by.

There was now every reason why he should prolong his leave. His life had just begun to construct itself on an exciting basis; also in deference to his parents he ought to stay --- he really couldn't dash off without going over to see them at least once, and there wouldn't be time if he did go back; and he must know something definite about Pinkie, which he didn't yet; and there was this crisis --- it wouldn't be very

comfortable sitting in Basrah while it lasted, even though there were no students in the city. He could ask for extra leave on compassionate grounds. He thought with a smile that he couldn't very well go along to Nevinson and say, 'I think my wife's sleeping with somebody else. Will you give me another two weeks to make sure?'

But that day something quite remarkable happened --- for him, mystical. After this, he thought, how could we doubt that we lived in a kind of sky, with all sorts of strange happenings we knew nothing about going on round us, with an order behind them we couldn't foresee?

It was a letter marked 'Express' from Nevinson confirming what Dick had said. They wanted a report from him on the Basrah office, in view of the reconstruction of the Middle Eastern facilities that would be taking place over the next five years. It had occurred to them, the letter went on, that the files in London would be more useful to him than those in Basrah, and therefore they had decided to ask him to prolong his leave, which would count as normal duty from the time of the expiry of his official leave, for another month, in order to prepare it! They had taken this decision with the crisis in mind as well: they had information that British personnel might be asked to leave Basrah soon as a precaution, in any case. They would let him know further, but the extra month would give him a breathing space, and it was hoped that by then the crisis would have blown over. If the situation permitted, Tomlinson of the Port of Beirut would fly over and see how things were in the Basrah office. A secretary would be put at Granville's disposal in London, also a small office in the Middle East department for a week, during which time he might like to go through the files. Would he care to drop in to arrange the disposal of these files? He would be expected

to 'give full rein' to any suggestions for changes which might be in his mind; and meanwhile they didn't believe he need suffer any anxiety about his office in Basrah, it could quite well run on its own steam for a few weeks, especially as this was the time of the worst heat; 'Steam is probably the right word for it!' Nevinson wrote. Granville was thrilled with the chatty tone. What a compliment! He make a report --- and suggest changes! It might even be true, he now thought, that he was going to get the Beirut office, as Glenning had said! The letter ended hoping that this didn't interfere with his plans and repeating that the month wouldn't count as official leave. He went out and bought a bottle of wine at once, and drank it at one sitting, alone in the house. Then he phoned Dick and told him everything. It made him sound really in charge of his own life; he could talk with a level voice about how he was going to stay on in London, and with the same level voice later he might suggest to Dick another evening at The Marquis! He now had the official stamp to take a holiday he'd meant to take in any case! He told Pinkie when she came in, and she looked at him with a new air of belief, as if she now knew why he'd been circumspect about his passage back; she asked him what sort of man Nevinson was in a tone that suggested a special, professional relation between the two of them. "What about the air ticket back," she asked, "you can get that changed, can't you?" She had a more penetrating look as if trying to find out whether he'd actually bought it; she was quite still for a moment, her eyes set on him. "Oh, that'll be easy enough!" he said, and turned away.

There was also a money-problem which was now solved. The parties and casual evenings at the house had cost quite a lot, even with Pinkie earning as well. They rarely got through an evening without buying a

bottle or two of wine. But now he'd be able to go along to the office and ask for an advance on the month, instead of waiting to collect it at the bank in Basrah; what plans had he had for money, supposing his leave had expired and he'd simply stayed on? He didn't know!

Providence had extended a helping hand. Also he'd be getting his overseas allowance in the normal way --- that would pay for a drop of 'overseas wine', too, he thought. Yes, a very nice time was about to be had by our little clerk!

CHAPTER 15.

He wrote to Mohammed asking him what the feeling was like in Basrah, and whether he thought there'd be rioting. He wondered what information Nevinston had got hold of, about the possible withdrawal of British personnel. The papers said that the sheikh's English A.D.C. --- some papers called him 'Rubath's public relations officer' --- was a close personal friend of the sheikh and the latter never took an important step without him. He was the sheikh's mind; his name was John Creed, and an editorial said it was strange to think that 'a private tutor' --- this was how he'd got to know the sheikh, teaching him English --- had 'precipitated the world into a major crisis, and that this could at any time become a war'. Journalists tried to get statements out of Mr. Creed but unsuccessfully. He stayed in the palace with the sheikh. One paper said that there was 'mounting American feeling' against Mr. Creed. A London paper had a cartoon of an Englishman dressed up as an Arab looking out of a palace-window on to rows of guards with fixed bayonets, and underneath were the words, 'The Sheikh of Rubath de-Creed a state of emergency.' Cases of champagne had been seen going into the palace and a paper asked how far, since strict Muslims were forbidden liquor, this was 'in the interests of the sheikh's religious Creed.' (Some people said Creed had been converted to Islam).

Then some of the rebel-officers were executed at the sheikh's

orders after a perfunctory trial. The papers argued about whether Creed was behind this, and some of them said that the British government should be pressed to exercise more influence on the sheikh, since they had put troops in the area, and to help get Creed out. But that was impossible because Rubath was an independent state, and Creed was in the sheikh's private employ. People also suspected that the government was behind Creed in a subtle way, and that Creed had been against the executions and after hours of argument with the sheikh had got the concession of perfunctory trials, so that at least the public-relations side would be covered. There was a little rioting all over the country, but British troops held aloof and left discipline to the local police and to loyal elements in the army. An illegal newspaper was started by a rebel faction in Rubath and surprised everybody by its first issue because it was 'moderate' in tone. The editor was said to be a doctor, one of the best surgeons in the country. This put Russia on the side of the angels, and America tried to join the angels quickly, with a statement of 'horror' at the executions. The British were left holding the baby, and the clamour from Moscow grew now that the chance of a war with America was less. There was a demonstration outside the British Embassy in Moscow. The illegal newspaper in Rubath called for a parliament, universal suffrage and the right of habeas corpus; it used the terms of English liberalism, not the words shared between Russia and America --- 'democracy', 'freedom', 'anti-colonialism'. People said Creed was behind this, too!

There was another note from Moscow like an ultimatum. It said that measures might have to be taken to protect 'democratic elements' in Rubath; this, the papers said, was a threat to start a long war by means

of 'volunteers' from Russia, which would turn the whole of the Middle East upside-down. This threat to the oil-fields suddenly brought England and America closer together, and there was a joint note from them that Rubath would have to be protected.

Granville began to hope that it would all peter out with Russia not wanting to risk a war with America, and America not wanting to risk the oil. It was now a moral question, one paper said, as to whether the revolt in the army was a sincere movement of reform, as the illegal newspaper suggested it was, or something provoked by Russian agents. The British had never recognised the possibility of social change and had clung to the sheikh unreasonably; they had snubbed and pooh-poohed the liberal-minded people and this had left the best part of the country's talent well outside the area of government. People had virtually been forced into the rebel-camp, if not forced to take Russian advice and perhaps Russian money and arms. How big a part Mr. Creed had played in that nobody knew. His silence, the paper added (the journalists really seemed to hate his silence more than anything else) was fast becoming an 'insult'; but perhaps he was 'busy' with the cases of champagne that had arrived.

Russia suddenly started massing troops along her Persian border. It looked as if there was going to be the usual feinting and marionette-play of a crisis, with troop-movements and the recall of ministers from holiday. London looked different. There was a cold wind and the skies were darker, giving the streets a frightfully bleak look. The newspapers were coming out in extra editions, sometimes with a few lines of mediocre news dressed up in sensational headlines. There were piles of them all over the kitchen. Either Granville brought one in or Dick or Glenning did. It felt as if the inside of life had been taken out, leaving the

shell. Little things like getting up in the morning and making a cup of tea felt hollow and irrelevant; there was always this greater thing going on outside, like a vast sheet held up against the sky, keeping out the light. Yet the whole thing was being played out in the mind. Nothing altered. Everybody went to the same work every day and did the same things. Nothing looked different. Yet the thing was going on, it was mounting, in its ghostly fashion.

Hanni had to work overtime — the Middle East section, she said, was working round the clock. She brought her things to the house and stayed in the bedroom downstairs; sometimes she came in after midnight, sallow and exhausted. She said there was a real possibility of war; everybody was worried and they were thinking of calling up the emergency reserve. Granville wondered whether he was one of these, and tried to imagine what it would be like in the army again. It might be a relief, discovering the open air again; and the closeness of death that put life in the proper place along the span of space and time, not in the usual false light of civic peace, so that it got back its mystery. He couldn't believe it would happen, and yet he could; everyone seemed in a doped state, believing nothing and everything. Hanni said that the door of 10 Downing Street opened and closed dozens of times an hour, with messengers running in and out. She knew for a fact that reinforcements had been sent to the Middle East, but it was hush-hush; they were embarking at Southampton now for Malta and Cyprus. In a way, she said, she was enjoying it. There were endless cups of tea in the office, and people joked all the time. There were all sorts of little surprises about people's characters; a man she'd thought stiff like a piece of clockwork had brought out a bottle of whisky one evening and was always flirting

with the secretaries. He was taking Hanni herself out soon. This was the first intimation, for Granville, that she entertained thoughts of going out with other men. Dick smiled when she told him, and christened the man 'Joe Clockwork'.

There were long political arguments in the kitchen, which the women sat through in silence, looking pale, the life drained out of them. Irritation started between Dick and Granville again: they always seemed to be on opposite sides. When the argument got rough Pinkie would put her hands up to her ears and say, "Why can't you argue without shouting, for God's sake?" This was addressed particularly to Glenning and Granville. The young man called Gerald with the pleasant face, came round one evening and said he was volunteering for the army: it would 'make a break', he said. But later he found one couldn't volunteer just for a crisis, and five years in the army would have been a longer break than he was looking for. He began coming round every evening, and drank as he'd never done in his life. As quickly, however, he stopped and was once more the pleasant young man who came to the house once a week or so: and he said his threat to volunteer, apart from giving himself a 'scare' had got him a rise at his plastics-firm.

For Dick the crisis was clear. The sheikh was an unjust and backward ruler; the rational thing to do was to remove him. "But what about the Russians?" Granville asked. Dick said without hesitation, "If the Russians get the upper hand, good luck to them! But I doubt if they will." He said that perhaps 'destiny' required the Russians there, in the Middle East; it was doubtful if the reform movement in Rubath could have existed, or the illegal newspaper been published, without Russian help.

"But suppose it produces less civilised government?" Granville asked him.

"It couldn't," Dick replied. "At least another government wouldn't cut off people's hands for stealing!"

"It might," said Granville.

"I don't think so," said Dick. He added that he didn't believe the Russians were behind the revolt, but he did believe the British were behind Creed. He said he based this on the fact that the Middle East had been an area of British influence for more than a century, and that Russia had always been kept out. But sometimes in zones of influence people fought for a just government, and this was what they were doing in Rubath.

Granville's answer was that it had nothing to do with justice or, indeed, with any ideals!

"What is it, then?" Dick asked him.

"I'm surprised to see you supporting nationalists and military men!" he replied. "Where does that fit in with civilised government?"

"I didn't say I believed in nationalism! I don't necessarily say people ought to govern themselves," Dick said. "All I say is that they should be governed as they want to be governed."

"The people aren't involved at all!" he said. "Where do they come in?"

"Ultimately they're involved."

"They're all sitting quietly in their villages, half-starved! Don't you believe it! It's never the people who start these movements!"

Granville decided to take this as the opening theme of his report for T.I.M., for which he'd been casting around in his mind. A middle-class was coming into existence in the Middle East --- doctors, lawyers,

teachers, army-men, civil servants; the political slogans were the same as those which accompanied the rise of any middle-class --- in Rubath they were the same as in England over a hundred years ago. The 'people' had nothing to do with it. The leaders of the riots were students usually, and they were supported by the officer-class. The 'people' were attracted to middle-class politics by the promise of a higher living standard. That was all.

He didn't quite see yet what the connection was between this new middle-class, of whom Mohammed was one, and T.I.M. but it had resolved some of the confusions in his mind. He didn't offer it to Dick as an argument. For one thing, he didn't want them all to cry in a chorus, "Oh, for God's sake! That word 'middle-class'! Can't you give it a rest?" And for another thing he didn't want the idea exploded; he wanted to make it stronger first. So he argued with Dick without bringing up his main reserve.

Dick said that England's day was over as far as the 'big political plums' were concerned, and that this would make England a nicer place to live in. The big imperialists these days, he added, were the Americans; they would cash in from our discomfort in the Middle East, and they were the other cause of it --- apart from Russia --- in any case. Glenning said to this that the last thing America was was an empire. He said that America had a temporary hold on the western world because of the collapse of so many countries in the war --- but that wouldn't last, America had no serious aspirations abroad because she was too busy 'trying to produce a new type of human being'.

The arguments got more and more abstract between the three men until Hanni and Pinkie put a stop to it with the biggest party they'd ever

had in the house. There was dancing, and much else, in every room, and it went on until dawn Saturday morning, with couples sleeping in each other's arms in the corridor outside the music-room.

Hanni discovered that all the time she'd been sleeping at Chaworth Road Dick had been entertaining Linger-Longer down at Hampton Court: he confirmed that Linger-Longer couldn't even cook an egg; he said there'd been trips in the kitchen and she asked him if it was 'a foam-rubber seat for the car'; not that he had a car. "That's right," he'd told her, "I'm partial to foam-rubber seats! Ford turns out a very tasty one, with mashed potatoes and Brussel sprouts!" Believe it or not, he said, she was a daughter of 'the proletariat': she'd told him that until she was fifteen she'd thought tea came straight out of the tap and only had to be boiled up. "How her mum managed to hide the facts of the kitchen from her I don't know," he said.

"What about the other facts of life?" Hanni asked in a dry voice. "How does she manage with those?"

Dick hesitated, giving her a long, twinkling look, and replied, "With a few more evening-classes she wouldn't be too bad."

Pinkie said afterwards that Dick had fewer escapades than he claimed credit for: he only liked the 'atmosphere'. Linger-Longer wouldn't dream of letting a man touch her, she said. But Dick told him the opposite, in confidence. He said she'd taught him 'a few tricks', anyway: "Women always get other women wrong in that respect, old sport."

Unexpectedly, Creed came into the news again. He had the hotel-room of an English journalist searched and his telegrams and carbon-copies of his articles photographed. He even authorised the police to

use his name when they forced their way in. It was a very Middle Eastern thing to do, and there was an outcry at once --- the freedom of the press had been violated! Then the 'public-relations office' of Rubath, which meant Creed published the text of a telegram from the journalist's newspaper which asked for violent stories wherever possible, and if they had a six-element so much the better. 'Anything with blood in it,' the telegram added.

Creed then put out that he would talk to the press in the palace, but he would read a prepared text and not answer questions. Everybody wondered what this meant. Would he say something to tip the balance of crisis? Perhaps he would offer terms to the rebels or announce his own resignation --- it was known that he was no an embarrassment to the British government. But the first reports were uninteresting. The morning paper said that Creed had provided the 'uncollected information' that journalists had arrived in Rubath from all over the world by air and that they had 'more or less taken over' the only two hotels in the country, the Rubath National and the Tigris. "After this courageous sally into common knowledge", the paper said, 'he then told the conference that certain eye-witness accounts put out by journalists had been written in the bar of the Tigris Hotel.

Most of the papers said no more than this, but Dick came in with the whole text of Creed's speech. No wonder the papers were furious! Attacks on Creed had already started. Creed had said that the so-called eye-witness accounts had grown out of a scrap between a policeman and a native due to a donkey in the middle of the main street, and this had been built up into a major riot. A crowd had gathered, some of the police had thought it was political and fired some shots in the air; this in turn had

excited the crowd. Creed said the news was always being built up in this way. The bar of the Rubath National held most of the 'so-called respectable correspondents, who usually called themselves, I think, Diplomatic Correspondents', while the Tigris had the 'tabloids' --- the two bars were doing better business than at any time in the last twenty years, 'since I, in fact, advised the sheikh to put them up.' The chief of police had reported to him that not one of these journalists had been present at a demonstration or skirmish in any part of the country. Anyway, Creed said, these demonstrations took place too suddenly to allow correspondents, 'slowed-down by pints of booze', to get to their cars and drive ten, twenty and sometimes fifty miles. 'They come out here with their degenerate bloody faces,' he said, 'and think they can size the situation up in a couple of minutes when they can't even talk the language and have never even set foot in a Middle East country before! They think they can tell me how the place should be run when they haven't got a serious bloody thought in their heads, when they can't hardly read a book, and when they're never alone! They haven't been trained for anything, they live on a lot of bloody tittle-tattle, and they're the people forming opinion, as it's called, all over the world! No wonder politics is a cheap and nasty public-relations racket! And if I'd laid on my public-relations properly and handed you booze free of charge, you'd have all been eating out of my hand by now, the whole bloody lot of you!' The paper said Creed had stumbled into the vernacular --- 'can't hardly read a book' --- perhaps because his education at Oxford had been 'curtailed'; this was a polite paper, and its personal attacks had to be oblique. It meant that Creed had been sent down for homosexuality. 'And all those right-thinking people in England,' Creed had continued, are in fact the dupes of a lot

of drunken bloody wash-outs ---! Well,' he cried when there were interruptions, 'even if you're not all drunk you should be, to sluice out the rotten thoughts in your brains! This crisis would have died down a week ago if it hadn't been for you lot! Rubath is the same as any Middle East country, no worse and a good deal better than some, and everything'd be all right here if you people hadn't settled on us like a lot of bloody blowflies, to make money out of us, and without boobies all over the world to take your dirt seriously you wouldn't be able to do it! And I can tell you how most of you get your news, too, in case the rest of the world doesn't know ---!' He said that nearly all the news came from Rubath native reporters, that meant natives of Rubath. 'Every time a stone goes through somebody's window there's a story,' he said, 'and you're all sitting in the bars slopping the whisky down your gullets waiting for the stuff to come in. What a moral life! And you've got the guts to hand out morality in your daily newspapers! I'd like to see any of you spend a week in this palace --- I mean off-season, when we haven't the pleasure of entertaining riff-raff from all over the world --- without going off your nuts from boredom and loneliness! Well, I've stuck it for twenty years and I've enjoyed it. I respect these people, and I admire the sheikh. Well,' he went on, 'I'll tell you about these native reporters. There was one little skirmish last week that was prettily staged by the interested parties and the story all about it got through to the Tigris bar before it actually happened. These Rubath reporters are an even more illiterate and unscrupulous lot than you! They're the sons of doctors and lawyers who wanted their children to inherit a better world --- well, they did, they got their better world, they've lined their pockets out of the misery of the people! And I can

tell you these boys know no more about the lives of ordinary people in this country than you arrant knights of the Tigris bar do! Two of them have got a school certificate which any bloody fool could pass at the age of fifteen! And one of them hasn't got anything! I know, because I taught ~~hem~~ myself. You may have noticed that their mistakes in grammar are the same as mine. Well, some of you might have noticed — the diplomatic correspondents; the others, I suppose, phone their stuff across to save themselves the shame of putting it down on paper! Those reporters, I repeat, are layabouts and raggamuffins, and I should be very surprised if any of them had a thought beyond this evening's sex!

Creed ended by saying that the receipts of the two hotel bars were unparalleled, and that since he had shares in these hotels himself he wouldn't come off too badly. He was thinking of setting up a fund for the religious conversion of journalists everywhere to Islam. There were interruptions all the way through his speech, but he showed no awareness of this and spoke through a microphone, with a stout bodyguard standing in front of him. The laughter was sometimes uproarious, and at the end some of the journalists sang 'For he's a jolly good fellow!' When he'd finished talking he got up abruptly and without another glance at them strode through the beads of a doorway and was lost to sight.

It didn't command the headlines. Creed was a minor figure now. Dick read the speech out, swinging in his chair, and everyone enjoyed it immensely. It was the first real human voice of the crisis, breaking through the bleak, metallic sheet of the daily news that hid the light. Pinkie and Hanni were thrilled by it, and laughed and clapped their hands. The papers treated it like a music-hall joke. A few papers published amused biographical notes about him with a malicious undertone. He was

now a Muslim. He was teetotal and he spoke fluent Arabic --- but in the way these things were mentioned they didn't seem virtues.

Apparently, Creed had sent a note along to 'one of the most combre diplomatic correspondents', as he called him, in the Rubath National, after the press-conference, saying that in view of the money they were putting into his pockets via the hotel-bars, would they take into consideration as well that he had shares in some of the local brothels, and perhaps patronise them under a police-escort which he would be glad to provide? This wasn't reported in the papers; Dick brought it in, having got it from somebody in the Middle East department. Journalists had nick-named Creed 'the queen of Rubath', he said.

A letter came from Mohammed. He said there had been a few quiet arrests in the last few days and that there were more police on the streets than he'd ever seen before. The communists were biding their time; they were plentiful and armed. One day they would strike, he added. There was a heavy police-guard outside the Mesopotamia and also the British consulate. But otherwise nothing had changed. He went to the garden of the Mesopotamia as usual in the evening, and sat swinging in one of the hammocks: 'I miss you too much, my dear,' he added; a man and his son had come to Basrah from a village a hundred miles away, on foot, and found the daughter of their family working in a brothel, and to 'wipe out the dishonour' they had made her walk along the railway track leading towards home and followed behind her, then given her little cuts in her back with daggers all the way, until she collapsed and died. He said everyone was talking about Rubath and Mr. Creed in the cafes. The Arab saying, "All Englishmen are spies" was repeated everywhere. There was no doubt that

Mr. Creed was a spy for the British. 'I thank God you do not come back. It is too safe.' He meant 'unsafe'; this was a peculiar error he always made, omitting negative prefixes. He said that at the trials of the rebel-officers in Rubath the defense-lawyer had been in the pay of the public prosecutor, and that they were both 'lovers' of Mr. Creed. The last time Mohammed was in Rubath he lost 'two month at poker'; he always measured money by his monthly wage, at least when he talked to Granville, calling thirty pounds 'one month', sixty pounds 'two month' and so forth. "My dear," he would say, "I think I spend one month on one outsider this afternoon. I have one good tip!"

There were fluent attacks on the government at meetings held in London. One of the labour party leaders asked what had happened to the plans set forth by the so-called Home Office in Rubath five years ago --- plans for the building of at least fifteen schools and another hospital, for the establishment of a doctor in every village that had a population of over five hundred people, and the irrigation of large areas of the desert to relieve the appalling high disease and mortality rate in the rural districts. What had happened to the money set aside for this purpose from the vast oil profits made by the sheikh? He had evidence that nothing whatsoever had been done! It was little wonder, he said, that some army officers were after the sheikh's blood! Were the British government prepared not simply to stand by and watch it but actively condone it, and to support with arms the murder of men whose only crime had been a sense of social justice such as was accepted everywhere in Europe as elementary and unchallengeable? Was Britain going back instead of forward? And in whose name? In the name of the British people, who had not less than a hundred years before fought for all these rights that

Rubath was now claiming, and won them? What mandate had the British government for its conduct?

Dick showed him this speech, but Granville shrugged it off. The tone annoyed him. It was the usual slick indignation you read nowadays. He stuck to his guns, in the kitchen-arguments, flowering silently. 'Ginger' asked him why he took such a pukka sahib attitude. He felt lonely and misunderstood: his skin prickled as if he was under imminent physical attack, and he couldn't look at the others calmly when politics came up. He kept repeating that it wasn't a matter of morals at all; it was just a matter of one group fighting another. But morality did sometimes come in. The police fired on children one day.

In nearly all the kitchen-discussions England was in the wrong. And he took this for granted --- it did seem natural that England should always be in the wrong. 'England' meant different things at different times --- sometimes it meant bad weather, at others war-time restrictions which were still lingering on, sometimes bad colonial policies, at others stiffness of character. It was a static descriptive term, pejorative, automatically so, as if everybody would naturally understand the inference, 'England'. He'd become so used to it that when Linger-Longer and Ginger talked like this in the crisis he found it natural. But what was going to happen if England was frittered away like this all the time? What would happen to their little group in the kitchen, and the language they talked? It was almost like a change of consciousness in him! He was awed at himself, with puzzlement and shame, at his new position. One didn't defend England! Defend something impregnable? The inference was that she could withstand endless criticism! But how long could that go on for? How much frittering away would she be able to bear, in her

heart, from her own people? Hanni said one day that England had been the 'fairyland' of her childhood, when she was living in Kurdistan, and Pinkie replied that she couldn't understand how anybody could possibly regard England as a fairyland, with a laugh! But Hanni replied that it still was partly for her, especially when she walked round the streets of London alone, or stayed in the country. "Oh," Pinkie said to this as if it was quite a different subject, "the country's lovely."

With so much eaten away abroad, how much of this tiny island could be eaten away from inside as well? It wasn't a matter of politics. It was a matter of touching the heart and soul again, and listening, to find out what they were. 'England' was a convenient whipping-post for rising people at home and abroad, and for the country which now controlled the western world, America. It even produced a little reflex of shame to have a sense of concern.

The castigation was now common speech. It was a kind of easy journalese --- even Linger-Longer and Lucy went in for it. It was fancy-dress thinking, and went well with wine and flirting in the kitchen and staying up late. The talk made it seem that being English was something separate from what they all were. Ginger claimed she was Irish: anything foreign added a bit of colour! Foreigners had the right to propose themselves to other people as Arabs, as Frenchmen, as Cypriots or Chinese. But being 'English' didn't mean the same. What was going to happen to the world if all sense of place, if the heart and soul of the birth-place was left to die in people, and a dream of 'abroad' substituted? In that case no place would have a real heart after a time; you wouldn't be able to visit anywhere in the world and say it was a place!

Being English in Pinkie's sense, when she said it in a certain

tone, meant 'pompous' or 'stiff', it meant the hard-driving class that had once managed affairs. When she was intimate and gay she never thought of calling herself English: she apparently had no nationality then! But her laughter was English; her light eyes and her way of listening, her face quite open to anything that might be said, in deference, seeming unsure of herself; and her sureness underneath, that made her pout her lips and look 'patrician' as Dick said; and her fair skin, her long easy stride: these were English! He could tell now what Mohammed and the clerks meant when they had called her 'the English flower'. And the independence of heart when everybody leaned forward in the kitchen arguing and shouting was English as well; why did they want to deny it? What deeper did we have in us but place, which meant country? We could do the silliest things, with apparently no meaning at all, but place endowed them with meaning! Pinkie and Dick and Ginger would all stick out a mile anywhere abroad as English people. Then surely they had to stand by themselves, in their Englishness, at some point? That would be logical if they believed in Arabs doing so!

He asked Dick once, "Does England mean anything to you, really?"

"How do you mean?" Dick looked at him closely, with flickering eyes. "In connection with Rubath and all that, do you mean?"

"In a way, yes."

Dick was abrupt, turning away from him. "I wouldn't live in any other country in the world, I can tell you that much. Listen ---" He turned back to him with an unusual sternness. "It's you who're always off and about, isn't it? I tell you, I'd never be able to stick Basrah like you. Well, draw your own conclusions. What do you want me to do, wear the Union Jack round my shirt-cuff?"

He felt contrite. But still his argument persisted in silence. We'd got to connect it all up with our ideas again, this sense of our country. We couldn't go on picking away at the fabric without knowing what we were picking away at. We'd got to avoid the power-talk of the past; we mustn't 'believe' in England, as if it was separate from us; we'd got to find out what it was, inside our veins. We couldn't just leave it to expand or wither away. We had to know. We had to find out where our civilisation had come from. We couldn't leave it to flow through us, hoping for the best. And he didn't know where it came from any more than Dick did; he took it for granted in the same way; he left it untended. We had to look into it again, and recover ourselves; see what we had lost; we had to know what journeys had been undertaken and where they had led us.

The crisis was a respite from the usual nervous life; thinking was permissible --- everybody was doing a little bit of it, and the usual raw air of uncontained desires in the house, the strange comings and goings, the oblique look in Pinkie's eye, the hint of Grove in the background --- 'Grove', 'Grove', it was a special hollow, doomed sound for him --- were abated for a while.

It focussed his interest and he even got down to writing the first pages of his report. He outlined the idea of a new class having come into being in the Middle East, without using the word 'class'. The more education there was, he wrote, the better the standard of living for 'professional' people, and the more chance there was of riots. The students did most of the shouting; they were the ones who in a short time would also be 'professional' people; they demonstrated because they felt that their future life offered no place for their ideas. Now a trading

company had to identify itself with them in some way. It could start by treating its own Arab employees better; he then went on to compare Mohammed's salary with his own. He made a table, comparing the wages of clerks in England, taken from civil service statistics, and the wages of clerks working for T.I.M., as an average. He thought it quite clever. The table had a professional look!

He also said that the Arabs would have to go through their 'nineteenth century'. This would cut across religion; the Koran would no longer be read. It would cut across 'divine privilege'. Nothing could prevent it; and so a trading company might as well help it. The 'nineteenth century' meant an administered 'plan of life', that is, life stemming from conscious acts of mind, not from conditions that were passed on and inherited blindly. But he struck it all out. It sounded opportunistic. And it looked mystical after the tables of wages. Also who was he to be helping the 'nineteenth century'? To hell with it! He put the report aside.

CHAPTER 16.

The crisis was like war being declared for a few days; everybody's thoughts were mobilised. The books he'd got out of the library were unread, and he no longer thought of going to a concert. He read the papers from cover to cover. 'Opinion' came in from all over the world, like a collective, headless creature. There was public opinion, military opinion, Arab opinion, official opinion, popular opinion (which wasn't quite public opinion), and informed opinion. It seemed to be a way of describing what a few people, or perhaps only one person, had said, without naming him; so that the style and an infallible ring as if an all-seeing eye had written it, with special access to all the thoughts people had everywhere. Since, partly because of the clamour of the press for immediate news, the real negotiating between the governments was going on in secret, by telegram and over the phone, there was little to report, the language was getting emptier and emptier, the sound and style of all-seeing authority was getting more and more shaky.

Glenning said he'd heard from somebody high-up in the foreign office that America had given a warning to Moscow, secretly, that they were seriously prepared to fight for the Middle East; and thus any further developments would just be 'publicity-stuff', because Russia didn't want a war. The 'publicity-stuff' could take several forms. For instance, Moscow might demand that British troops be withdrawn from Rubath, if she

got the notion that America was pressing for it as well; then it would look as if the presence of Russian troops on the Persian border had frightened Britain off; which would be valuable publicity for the Russians. He added that also the British might hang on in Rubath to save their faces; they might already have made an agreement with the Americans to this effect. The press, he said, had 'cooked their goose' since the war, through their headline mania; government statements everywhere were more and more publicity hand-outs. Because of the press, he said, a government could do any wickedness if it got its public relations right.

There was a rumour that America wouldn't support England in a showdown. There'd been a statement from Washington questioning the desirability of the sheikh of Rubath retaining Creed as his advisor; this was interpreted as a warning to England that she must 'go it alone'. Again Russia renewed her pressure; there was a second demonstration outside the British Embassy in Moscow. There was a possibility of England being isolated! The papers sounded alarmed. Suppose America and Russia came together with a mutual agreement on the Middle East? No, that was out of the question, one newspaper's 'informed opinion' said; but another newspaper's 'informed opinion' said the opposite. What 'public opinion' and 'popular opinion' thought now didn't matter; it was a question of survival! There was an increasing 'demand' for the withdrawal of British troops from Rubath. There were statements from politicians all over the world to that effect. There were sober statements, indignant statements, wise and considered statements, and statesman-like statements. Some politicians made them to win an election; some to keep their oppositions quiet; some to court 'Arab opinion', or available opinion anywhere; and some because nearly everybody else was doing it.

And some were dragged into it at the last minute, by a 'public outcry' at their silence.

There was a second American statement questioning whether the sheikh wasn't in a sufficiently strong position not to need foreign help in his country; here were two negatives, which made the sense ambiguous at first sight, but the papers interpreted it as another warning to England to get out of Rubath and suffer the loss of face as well. Glenning stuck to his line that it was publicity-stuff: America wanted to keep up its publicity as an anti-colonial power in case it got into colonial trouble of its own, for instance in the Panama canal.

Englishmen had to be careful where they walked in Arab cities, the papers said. There was no case of violence but one or two people had been surrounded and jeered at. He wondered, with a timid feeling, whether Mohammed would greet him as a friend again. Politics filled the air; for the time being English faces abroad were vulnerable with politics! He was glad he hadn't gone, by the grace of God. He remembered seeing one of his own clerks in the riot outside the Mesopotamia hotel from which Mohammed had rescued him, and how this man who had taken tea with him only the morning before had scowled and stared into his face as he passed with black, blind eyes swimming with hatred, almost like desire; Granville's sensation was an animal one, of beings possessed momentarily by another creature, in its claws, about to be eaten --- there was a breath of horror and fear through his body but at the same time a passive, paralysed fascination that made the body soft, in obedience to the bleak sightlessness in the preying beast's eyes. And the following day they again had tea together, and the man appeared not even to remember the incident.

'To hell with it!' he thought. He'd stay in his own country! He wasn't going to go out there to provide his clerks with another face to work off their hatred on! No, no! He'd got a life of his own. He found himself getting indignant even with Mohammed, and had to remind himself that Mohammed hadn't said a word of the subject.

It also rankled with him that he couldn't go to Dick with a clear argument which would give all the pros and cons of the matter. Where did he stand? Was he for or against British troops remaining in Rubath? Was he for or against the sheikh of Rubath? Yes or no? Well, it couldn't be stated so simply! All right --- as a concession, yes: against; if the press was interested one could have put it out to the press --- yes; against! Very well, then, since you are against what about the British troops in Rubath? Now the British troops ---! Yes or no? But it couldn't be treated so simply! So it went on, hammering all day.

He said to Dick that he hated all this 'moral indignation'.

"Don't you think moral indignation's justified," Dick asked him, "when people are shot without trial and that sort of thing?"

"Yes, but ---!" The number of times he'd said yes-but in the last few days! "This reform movement isn't to get rid of one set of people because they're wicked and put in another set because they're good!" Dick was silent. "Why," Granville went on in a lighter voice, "do you think it is?"

"Yes!"

'Yes'; there it was. And all he could say was 'no'!

A friend of Pinkie's called Elizabeth Bewley-Patton phoned her up and told her that she'd heard this might turn into a 'big show'. Her husband was high-up in the Admiralty.

"It looks as if you won't ever be going back to Basrah," Pinkie said to him.

He noticed she said 'you' again. "Oh, I don't know," he replied. "It'll probably blow over!"

In the middle of all this his parents came over. It was a relief. They were the first sane voices he'd heard for days. Slowly as they sat there he was brought back to a sense of place, anchored again, with intimate thoughts. It was all distant for them, the crisis --- the world outside Abbott's Field had always been distant. The moment they came into the doorway downstairs he felt a new flush of life. He'd asked Pinkie to get off early from the office, and she was upstairs getting the tea. Also Hanni, to his surprise, said she'd come, and return to the office in the evening.

They stood there smiling at him, the street behind them, and he was aware at once that his usual life in the house was in a certain rhythm, slow and halting, in a numbed silence, and that theirs was quick, with the throb of life in it and a silence as well, but silence full of change and motion. There was a sense of bustle, but of life, not of the heavy will or mind forcing the pace; it was the exciting rustle of a dress before a party, not the important sound of status and power; it was the rustle of intimate life, as in childhood. For a moment he felt like a child as he stood there greeting them, as if caught up in their arms again, his breath taken away!

"Hullo, son!"

He bent down to kiss his mother as she stepped into the dark hall, and she murmured with a smile, her cheeks flushed, "Come on, about time

we saw a bit of each other, isn't it? What've you been up to all this time?"

He shook hands with his father, who said quietly, "Nice to see you again, son."

There was a richness in their voices, lulling and enchanting, that at once embraced him, making room for all the tiny unspoken things in a creature, the hidden follies and scrapes, and brought the world down to glances and the warm flow between people, to the actual moment alive between them. How exciting it was to be having tea! The kettle would make its special little whistle when it boiled, and the electric fire would glow in the hearth, and the carpet in the music-room, the deep armchairs and the divan, the little coffee-table and the long curtains would suddenly appear extraordinarily luxurious and comfortable, as he'd never seen them before! There was a glow inside things, just as there was in Abbott's Road. It wasn't that they made tea-time important by flurry; but that any moment between people was the top importance. Usually when there was tea in the music-room it felt as if a time-limit had been set on the proceedings and that at any minute people would be up and off, back to the routine of life from which this had been a brief and by inference illusory departure. Or someone would be clever and amusing: that would give tea its meaning! Or someone important would call and tea was given a special, spurious social glow, that passed muster in the middle-class world for the glow of life! But it was never exciting in this way, for itself, without any reference beyond the actual moment to what people's status was outside, or to their cleverness of talk, or even to the talk whatever it was: the talk flowed from the moment, as the silences did, too; it was the glow of the moment itself that counted!

His father still had his keen and yet dreamy gaze. His mother was a little greyer, perhaps; that was all. She gazed at him for a moment with shrewd, dark eyes, and then they all started upstairs.

"Well, son, how are you keeping?" came his father's voice, with its keen, inquisitive edge, from behind him.

"Oh, all right, thanks! Are you all right?"

"Not too bad!" his father cried. Then he added in a tone that meant a leg-pull, "Bit too much work in the house, that's all!"

"Go on, I like to hear you talk," his mother said, taking up the tone in an acknowledged, ritual manner. "Anybody'd think he was a poor, hard-done-by creature, wouldn't they, Philip?" Granville laughed. She puffed at the first landing and leaned on the bannister for a moment.

"Blimey, you've got some stairs here, haven't you?"

"You're getting old, that's your trouble!" his father said, coming level with her. "Here, give us your arm!"

"Now wait a minute, don't go so fast --- what's the matter?"

His father pulled at her arm jokingly, and winked at him. "Have to help the old lady sometimes!"

His mother had plump cheeks and a little line at the corner of her mouth as if from setting her chin in a determined way; her eyes were tired but her old, divining look was still there. Wisps of grey hair came over her brow. His father had put on his Sunday best, with a trilby hat over his eyes, and black, polished shoes.

"Pinkie at home?" came his father's voice again. This time there was the smallest hesitation in his tone.

"Oh, yes! She's upstairs getting the tea ready."

"That's right. We could just do with a cup of tea! How 's

she keeping, all right?"

"Oh, yes, she's fine!"

"Keep her in order, do you?" his father asked with the suggestion of a laugh.

"I try to!"

"That's right! They need it, son, you take it from me!"

"Oh, listen to that," his mother said, glancing at him as they struggled up the stairs, "quite the little tyrant, isn't he?"

"Well, who's the boss, then?" his father asked.

"I know who does the housework, that's all I know!" She smiled at Granville. "Of course, they don't think that's real work!"

"Who does the washing-up, then?"

"All right, all right, just because you do a bit of washing-up once in a while!"

"Once in a while? Cord ---!" He gasped in an exaggerated way. "I like that! Every dinner-time, you mean!" his father added, just as Pinkie came down to meet them, full of smiles.

She stretched her hand out to his father first. "Hullo, there!"

"Hullo, my duck, how are you?"

She looked tall and robust, towering above them from the landing above. His father grasped hold of her with a hearty movement, almost pulling her over, and gave her a smacking kiss on her lips. Her eyes lost their vagueness for a moment, blazing slightly from the quick, overwhelming contact.

"How are you, my girl," his father repeated, gazing into her eyes, "all right?"

"Fine, thanks! Are you all right?"

"Oh, not so dusty! Getting old, you know, that's all!"

Then Pinkie kissed his mother and said, "Hullo, Mrs. Granville, how are you?"

"All right, thanks, dear. You look well!" There was a quiet confidence between them. "How do you like it out there?"

"Oh, it's lovely," Pinkie said in a mild voice. "Sun all the time!"

"From what Philip was saying there's a bit too much of it at times, isn't there?"

"Well, it gets unbearable about this time of year. Last year it was ghastly!"

"Was it, really? Still, you both look well on it, anyhow!"

They walked into the music-room.

"Well, this hasn't changed," his father murmured, eyeing everything. "I expect you're glad to be back in a way, aren't you, Philip?"

"Oh, yes! It's nice to be back in these rooms again, I'd almost forgotten what they looked like!"

"That's right, you do, don't you, when you've been away all that time?"

"Yes!"

Pinkie told them about the report he'd been given to do, and the extra leave.

His father laughed. "Cord, I bet you're sorry, aren't you, son? Another month's leave?"

"Yes, it was quite a surprise!"

"Take it easy while you can," his father said. "That's my motto!" And when they were seated he went on, "And what does the old country look

like after two years?" He smiled across at Pinkie. "Not so dusty, eh?"

"Not too bad!" She smiled, too. "I could do with more of it!"

"Of course you could!"

"It's funny," his mother said, "you can have all the comforts in the world, can't you, but if it's not in your own country it's never the same, really, is it?"

"Hark at who's talking!" his father cried. "What do you know about it? You've never been abroad, have you?"

"No, but ---" She glanced across to Pinkie. "It's obvious, isn't it? It's never going to be the same if it isn't your own country, is it?"

"Well, it isn't for me," Pinkie replied. "I don't think you really relax if you're abroad all the time."

"That's right." She turned to his father. "See, clever dick? You don't know everything!"

He laughed. "No, nor do you!"

His mother put her hand-bag down by the side of her chair, near her left foot, as she always did when on a visit. It looked so comfortable lying there: it suggested an exciting visit to him, from childhood association. She bent down and opened the clasp, then felt inside for a tiny frilled handkerchief she always carried, and deftly wiped her lips with it. He remembered she'd always carried a little bag of cachous at one time, in the shape of tiny hearts and stars, coloured bright red and yellow and blue, to suck.

"Well," she said, settling herself again after she'd put the handkerchief back, "we've been having some funny warther lately, haven't we? Sunny one minute and cloudy the next. Talk about August! It's

more like December, isn't it?"

"Yes," Pinkie replied, "we started using fires again last week."

"So did we!" his father said, crooking one leg over the other, his head back. "I said to mum, come on, I said, let's get that fire alight, it's chilly in here!" He added with reminiscent surprise, "And it was, too."

"Then we didn't have any wood to start it," his mother murmured, looking at Pinkie again confidentially. "Well, you don't think of it in the middle of summer, do you? Still, we got it alight somehow, with some old scraps!"

"Of course," his father said, "at one time we used to light it regular in the summer to get the water hot, didn't we?"

There was a pause. "What do you mean, at one time? Anybody'd think it was twenty years ago to hear you talk?" his mother cried.

Pinkie chuckled, hearing the familiar approach of an argument between them.

"Well, how long ago was it, then? his father asked, a determined and yet baffled expression on his face.

"How long do you think it was?" she asked quietly in return.

"Oh, about five years, I should think," he replied, winking at Pinkie because he was really doubtful about this.

"Five years?" She shifted in her seat. "You must be crackers!"

"Well, it's four. Young Philip was home, I know that!

"What, when we had the heater put in?"

"Yes!"

"Don't talk rot, for Christ's sake!"

"Well, didn't he come down and say they'd put the wrong switch

on or something ---?"

"Philip?"

"Oh, no." He looked lame and added in a soft voice, "That was young Will, wasn't it?" This was Granville's eldest brother.

His mother shook her head and chuckled, turning to Pinkie: "I don't know --- this man! I've never known anybody get his dates and years mixed up like him! Anyway," she added, looking across at him again, "he didn't say anything about the switch being wrong, he said they ought to put it outside the bathroom door instead of inside, so we could writch the water on without going in every time, and it's safer."

"Yes, well," his father said, going headlong into the argument again, "that's more than three years ago, I bet!"

"What?" She leaned forward, to deliver her thrust slowly. "That was last year, soppy date!"

"Last year? Will wasn't home last year!"

"What do you mean, Will wasn't home?"

"What I say!"

Pinkie was enjoying herself thoroughly.

"When was Will home, then?" his mother asked in her quiet tone again.

"Will?" He sounded as if the name hadn't been uttered before. He looked sheepish for a moment, pausing. Then he murmured, "Two years ago, wasn't it?"

"Two years! It was last year!"

"Don't talk rot!"

She shifted in her seat again, beyond her patience. "It was last year, I tell you!"

"Last year? I can remember that heater over the bath two Christmasses ago, anyway? What are you talking about, last year?"

"You can remember what?"

"That heater over the bath the Christmas before last!"

"Oh, you can, can you?" She winked at Pinkie. "Well, you're a marvellous man, because that heater wasn't even manufactured two years ago. It only came out last year."

"What?"

"What?" She imitated his 'bark', as she always called it.

"Just think it out!"

There was a pause. And then, as always at the end of one of their arguments, his father said quietly, his eyes raised in puzzlement, "Oh, yes, that's right. Will got home on my birthday, didn't he? I was sixty-four, wasn't I?"

"And when was that?"

"Last year."

"The bell's rung at last! she said with a laugh. "He always gets there in the end, even if you do have to drag him!"

Granville was always the official tea-maker of the house, and as he was going upstairs to do it, Pinkie having prepared all the other things, his mother said in the tone of protective intimacy she always used when he was a child, "Make it nice and strong, won't you, duck?"

Hanni came later and helped, moving round the room with a plate of cakes, smiling and listening attentively to everything his parents said, but saying little herself. It seemed a nostalgic pleasure for her. She made extra sandwiches and cut the crust off so that they looked most professional, and she arranged them round the plate on a paper doily in

a little design. Pinkie let her more or less take over.

Granville put two heaped teaspoonfuls of sugar in his own tea, and his mother at once exclaimed, "Good God Almighty! The way you pile it in! You're drinking toffee, my dear!" She turned to Pinkie: "You ought to have seen what I used to spend on sugar when these boys were kids! Talk about sweet teeth!"

"Yes, we've never taken much of the stuff ourselves, have we?" his father said quietly. "Never more than half a teaspoon."

"No, it's funny. You'd think they'd take after you, wouldn't you?"

Pinkie nodded and murmured, "Yes", in her bored way, very slowly, her eyes gazing into the distance. It was becoming a strain for her. He only hoped she'd last out: she could be so rude sometimes, getting up and going off to paint her lips or something, in her room. She always refused to make a false effort. And, indeed, this room where they were sitting was made for raw desires, and cleverness, and arguments on long summer evenings, and secret, unfaithful dreams, and bottles of wine on the coffee table, leaving the same round stain each time, and sombre thoughts that were too reflective for Abbott's Road. But the strain wasn't in Hanni. She sat there curled on the floor at the foot of the divan, perfectly at home, like a child.

His mother made a comfortable sigh after her first few sips and said to him, "Mm, this is a lovely cup of tea, son."

"Yes," his father said, smacking his lips deliberately, "nice cup of tea!"

Pinkie told them that Hanni had been born not far from Basrah, but Hanni didn't enlarge on it and from there they went on to the crisis. The crisis! He'd forgotten it! And now it seemed to have lost its

sting.

"It looks as if they want to damned-well start another war, doesn't it?" his mother said.

"What do you think, Philip?" his father asked. "Do you think there'll be any trouble?"

"No, I don't think so. These things usually blow over, don't they?"

"Well, I always say they make these damned crises to keep the people on their toes," his mother murmured. Then she asked in a higher, more open tone, "Doesn't that affect you going back, Philip?"

"I haven't heard anything yet," he said. "I shouldn't think so."

"Well, you don't want to go out there and get mixed up in one of those riots again, do you, Pinkie?"

"No!"

"I suppose it's the old story, isn't it?" his father said.

"Keeping the people down, then wondering why there's trouble."

"That's right."

"They can keep their wars as far as I'm concerned, anyhow," his mother murmured.

"They certainly can! One's enough for me!" Pinkie cried, waking up.

"Well, we've been through two, and as far as I can see they didn't bring anybody any good, either of them."

"No, we don't want any more of that lark in a hurry," his father said. "Cord 'blige me," he added reminiscently, gazing at the floor, "those raids we used to get!"

"Go on," his mother cried with a laugh, changing her tone, "what

do you know about it? You were asleep all the time!"

"Asleep?" his father asked with a smile. "I don't know what you mean, dear. You know the trouble I have sleeping!"

"Yes, that's right! The way he used to snore through them raids," she went on to Pinkie. "I used to shake him --- 'Come on, wake up, there's something coming down on top of us!' I used to get scared out of my wits. Not him! He used to wake up all dopey and say, 'What's the matter? Why the hell don't you let me sleep?'"

"Well, a man needs his sleep, doesn't he, Pinkie?"

"Not like you sleep!" his mother cried. "Talk about snore!"

"That's right, she used to wake me up in the middle of the night when we was down the cellar and say, 'Stop snoring! I can't hear the bombs!'"

"Oh, I did use to get frightened! I used to listen to the whistles and think, 'I wonder if that one's for us!' And there was he snoring all the time!"

"Well, what's the use of worrying, that's what I say!"

"I used to say in the morning, 'That was a terrible raid last night,' and he'd say 'What raid, I didn't hear anything!'"

He felt a pleasant drowsiness as their voices went on quietly, so protective, as in childhood, taking over from each other smoothly. The street outside, bare and bleak in the chill wind, was remote from them, and the low, dazzling-grey sky. His father's shoes reminded him of the heavy boots that the men had once worn, carefully laced up and polished; the silence had always throbbed in those days, as it was doing now. All the sounds outside had had an intimate tone, as if they belonged to the warm, enclosed room and weren't foreign and impartial as they

usually were. He imagined leaning over the table in Abbott's Road reading about the crisis: the heavy, black headlines would seem to describe an angry state of affairs over the roof-tops and far away, like something in the sky; the sky was of such importance there --- it brought so much from the outside world; there were the storms, the flashes from the trains passing in the distance, the voices over the radio reading the news --- the bombers that had come in the war, the searchlights, the flaming aircraft that sometimes floated down in the night making a howling sound that turned the sky into a kind of domed hall where there was no distance! Why hadn't he gone over to Abbott's Road for a visit? He had a moment of panic. He'd left it too late! There was only a month left. He ought to be going down there more and more. Supposing his parents died, he'd never be able to go there again; his roots would disappear; the tiny house would go to someone else! He had the sense of trying to snatch at something. He was trying to snatch something across the division in his life. 'When will I get my life straight?' he asked himself. There was this inertia that clouded his will, clouded his heart! Where had he been since he left their world? They sat there unaware of any change in him. He answered their questions and nodded, feeling ponderous and slow compared with them; how quick their world was!

Downstairs, when they were going, his mother turned to him and said, "What a nice girl that Hanni is, isn't she?" He nodded, and then they kissed goodbye. He'd be coming over to see them, in the next week, or perhaps the week after. And Pinkie? It depended on her job. She'd only just managed to get that afternoon off, he said; he invented this quite freely. But perhaps they'd both come over on a Saturday, when she was free. They ought all to go out somewhere, perhaps for the day.

And they waved from the street. "Good bye, son!"

Upstairs there was renewed movement. The usual rhythm was back again. Pinkie was in the bathroom getting ready to go out, and Hanni was making herself some sandwiches to eat at the office later that evening. They were calling out to each other between the two floors, talking about the man nicknamed 'Joe Clockwork' whom Hanni had been out with the previous Saturday. He heard her say with a spluttering laugh that 'Clockwork' had large ears, and Pinkie also laughed. They seemed in charge of themselves again, after the brief interlude of his parents; there was more crackle in the house. He returned to it reluctantly, with fatigue. He thought of his parents arriving back home, perhaps at this moment. They would open the front door and bustle inside; probably his mother would say, "I'm dying for another cup of tea, aren't you?" They would lay the cloth perhaps, take off their shoes and then open the little box by the fireplace where their slippers were kept. There would be a whist-drive later on, or a dance at Tatlin Broadway. Soon they'd be starting to get dressed, washing first, with a dim light in the scullery, then pulling out drawers and opening the wardrobe in the bedroom upstairs, the thought of a crowded and smoky hall before them ...

Pinkie and Hanni were going out together. It was Tuesday, and so, he thought, Pinkie should have no ambiguous appointments ahead of her. She said she was meeting someone in the firm to 'check up on something', and she'd be back for dinner.

The evening paper only made a reference to Russian manoeuvres on the Persian border which everyone had expected in any case. The atmosphere of politics drifted back like a slow foul breath from the street. Pinkie and Hanni left the house and everything was quiet. His parents'

presence was still in the room. The sounds outside were sad --- people's quick steps and a car brushing past. When it began to get dark he took a record from the pile on the floor, behind one of the armchairs. They were dusty and scratched, and some of them, including his precious Schubert impromptus, were broken. He stared at the black, shiny fragments and was surprised to be feeling no shock or regret. What did it matter? They were dead objects, without intimacy or touch! They fitted the ghost-life he was leading: men playing instruments, but unseen, at another time and place; borne to him by ingenuity, voices coming from nowhere while the intimate heart lay still, receiving it, alone and at one remove, staring into space, inert like a bundle of nerves and guts that had been discarded in the movement of history!

He found 'Fidelio', and happily all the records were intact. He put on the beginning of the second act and from the moment of the first note everything changed. He hadn't put on a real record since his return. It began to flood through him and opened all his fibres and the channels of his being. Music! Tears flooded to his eyes. The notes seemed never to have been made on the earth; and he seemed never in his life before to have heard pure sounds! There was also a perfect, solemn rightness in the notes as well, as if there couldn't be another arrangement for them and the order had been made before life started. He waited for the prisoner in the dungeon to begin his 'Welch dunkel hier!' And then it began, breaking out in a marvellous and unbearably beseeching way from the other notes. He was in a state of collapse and subservience, yet strong as well, the tears pouring down his cheeks in a rush as if his face had nothing to do with their activity; but at the same time, again, there was the order underneath, the total rightness of it all. The music entered

pain with terrific firmness and insight. He could feel the man leaning forward in the dark, as in a performance he'd seen at the Graz opera house a few weeks after the war had ended, when he'd travelled down to Austria, when everything had been crushed and burdened in war and distaste; and this same voice had climbed out of the darkness with the same beseeching distress, crying for freedom! This freedom was like a lover; in the song there was frightened, tender sensuous yearning for it, for the touch of her dress, for a glance if that was all she could afford! And Beethoven himself seemed to be leaning forward as well, through this man, inside his voice, touching the listener with a clam hand on his knee, in such intimacy, from the other side of life, comforting and yet always showing you the darkness unflinchingly, so that even in the darkness of the prison there was order! The music poured over him and through all his fibres ---

'What have I been doing all this time?' he thought! 'Where has my life been?' For music always did this as well: it took the strands of your silent life and drew them together, seeing if they would go together, trying for the harmony and putting you on the path again. How could he have gone so long without this purity? Even at the concerts he hadn't caught this moment: it was always a moment --- music was never a static thing lying before you, never the same, but a moment, a conjunction, caught, gone! But this was where his life belonged --- to this purity! He meant to keep it! He refused to let it go! If only he could keep it, the harmony he had in his hands now! Life was so dry and full of ashes! He couldn't keep it. It died away... It was only a moment. The end of the song came, when the prisoner imagined being free and seeing Leonora again, crying 'Leonora! Leonora!' in a mounting beseeching voice like a sexual cry; and all of a sudden Granville had the sense that

music was the light, was in itself the flash across the sky, not sound any longer but a being that had an endless existence and could only be glimpsed! The record ended. A record! It was only a record!

The sounds outside came back. He was calm. He didn't trouble to dry the tears on his face but let them roll down into his mouth and dry slowly, making his skin smart. They were so dispassionate from him, like rain on his cheeks, that he had the impression that Beethoven had shed them for him; Beethoven had taken on his suffering on his shoulders and shown where the order and strength in it lay, and the rightness. It didn't seem wrong to suffer! This made him calm. He felt in the thick of life; suffering was movement through it! It must have cost Beethoven such pain, he thought. This calm he had now was Beethoven's gift to him, as pure as the gift from Christ! It was like coming to terms with his life in its wretchedness; there was an order here, he could feel the message of it and received its certainty again. He didn't care if Pinkie came back early or not; but, as if in reply to his state of strength, she did come back, with oysters and wine, early, as a treat, she said! She talked about his parents, and how they always made her 'feel good'.

The news next day was that there had been more rioting in Rubath, this time close to the British garrison, and several people had been killed --- it was uncertain whether by police-bullets or British ones. The British headquarters there denied that troops had taken part, but all Arab spokesmen scorned this. The papers talked about an 'outcry' from all over Asia. It looked as if England had fewer and fewer friends. There was a big set-to in the kitchen in the evening when everybody assembled.

Glenning said he was sure British troops hadn't taken part, and Dick and the others were against him. One of the girls said there was to be a demonstration the following Sunday at Trafalgar Square and everybody ought to turn out. Volunteers were being asked to carry banners, and she said there was to be a collection for an Arab refugee fund. Glenning laughed and said it was the first time he'd heard one of her crowd getting interested in politics. It turned out that the jazz-club she belonged to had a few people in the labour movement, among them her boyfriend. He was getting all the girls along. Pinkie asked Dick if he'd known that Linger-Longer had a boyfriend, and he replied with a genial glance across the table at her that he'd not only known it but he got a kick out of it. Hanni hadn't come in at this time, so he could talk freely. Glenning said that this crisis was breaking up harmonious families everywhere: men were walking out on their wives. Dick nodded and said with a perfectly straight face that a woman he'd heard about at the office had said to her husband, "I forgot to put a pinch of bicarbonate in the rhubarb," and he'd interpreted her as saying, "We've got to dig a trench and fight it out in Rubath," and had walked out on her at once! There was also a member of the royal family who'd asked her private secretary what some ceremony would involve and was told, "Shaking hands all day and standing, m'm", which she heard as, "The sheikh intends to stay at Sandringham," and a suite was prepared at once! Dick rattled all this out without any hesitation. A preacher in Hyde Park, he added, had started saying, "I know intimately, and in my youth I was even seduced by, the shaken creed ----" he was going to say 'of materialism', but the crowd hauled him down from the soap-box at once, having taken him to say 'the sheikh and Creed.'

Dick was in a good mood and said that whenever he lifted a glass to his lips he always had a 'fellow feeling' for Creed. He thought of him --- probably 'an old sentimentalist' --- festering in that palace and calling the sheikh 'darling' at breakfast. "Such a noisy call-to-prayer this morning, darling --- does it really have to be so loud?" He'd heard that they both had spy-holes called 'Les Voyeurs' in the walls of their bedrooms which gave a view of the main guest-room, where they put anybody 'choice'. Creed would say, "A choice article coming out from England this week --- used to be at school with him --- enough was never enough for that one --- just up your street, eh, cheeky-sheek?" And the sheikh was probably 'a nice enough old boy.' However, Dick added, if he hadn't been 'by principle' against capital punishment he would have had both the sheikh and Creed 'tried by an international court-of-law' and executed if found guilty. This was an astonishing statement coming so soon after his music-hall act, and Pinkie gave him one of her disbelieving guffaws. Dick had talked coolly, without unpleasantness.

"I don't believe in executions," he murmured, "but these boys, pleasant as they might be, have incurred the wrath of mankind all right!"

The headlines that morning had created a sensation. One paper had a single word in massive type, MASSACRE, and underneath in smaller letters, 'British troops involved?' An anglican minister was to broadcast, calling for the abdication of the sheikh. The evening papers said that a middle-aged man had chained himself to the railings outside the Rubath legation in Queen Anne's Gate.

Granville was silent most of the time. It was decided that everyone except Glenning, himself and Pinkie would go to the demonstration on Sunday. He said he might go as a spectator. Glenning said he

couldn't go because he had his reputation to watch; if that went his 'whole cardboard fabric of self' would go, and it would be the end of the 'best little P.R.O. in the City.' Pinkie murmured with a pout, "I wouldn't dream of risking being run down by a police-horse, on my one quiet day in the week!"

Linger-Longer seemed never to be quite sitting in her chair even when she was, or to be quite in the conversation even when she was talking. But when she cried, "It's absolutely bloody disgraceful!" --- referring to the 'massacre' --- she was definite for a moment, quickened with this passion, that made even her eyes pointed and dark. Usually her gaze floated over objects, never touching them. Whereas Pinkie gazed rather steadily into the distance, Linger-Longer's gaze was always moving. She glanced at Granville for support and he nodded. He looked across the room at where the morning paper lay and saw the word again, MASSACRE. But he felt nothing. What had she derived from this word? What did she feel? He found himself staring at her, trying to find out. And he kept consulting himself for his own feeling, but there was none. There was also a picture in the paper showing a scuffle in the Rubath streets; but it evoked nothing in him; it showed a bundle lying in the roadway, someone dead or wounded, and the rest was a blur of smoke from tear-gas. Dick was quietly vehement, as if he could see the scene before him. Granville tried to imagine the scene and thus stimulate himself to feelings⁷ but he couldn't! He felt inadequate, compared with the others. Perhaps the war had killed pity in him; this thought went through his head. It was in keeping with the 'orang-utang' image not to feel pity. He tapped himself continually, so to speak, for a change of emotion; but there was none. He was dead of feeling. He began to admire Linger-Longer compared

with himself: here was a girl who came to the house several times a week and sat about like a piece of furniture, more or less discounted, apparently without a thought in her head, and now she was making a far better show than he in the matter of conscience! It made the world feel safer, that there were people who could be stirred to kindness by a few words in a newspaper; it meant that if there was trouble consciences like theirs would come alive and put a stop to it! She even seemed to gather beauty into her face with her passion; the light, vague dignity in her eyes floated to rest. Hanni came in and was clearly bored by it all, and got herself some supper, moving round behind the others silently, edging past their chairs; he took confidence from her presence; the headlines appeared not to have changed her, either.

Glenning said that even if British troops had taken part it didn't mean anything: it wasn't 'official policy'; troops, he said, were always 'young boys', a fact we always lost sight of, and of course they wanted to hit back when they were hit and sometimes the politicians couldn't stop them. The others answered that the 'boys' oughtn't to be there at all; nobody was blaming them in any case; the official policy was wrong for having sent them there! Gerald was the only dissentient voice; from the beginning he'd been with the sheikh, or at least against Russian encroachments in the Middle East; he said it ought to be fought out now because it would have to be fought out anyway; the whole thing was a test of strength between our secret service and the Russian. But it transpired he didn't mean secret service so much as active political agents; he said it depended how much 'appeal' they had for people, what they promised them and so forth; and it was a question whether the Russians were promising them more, or whether the Arabs were more at home with us.

He wasn't scorned by the others so much as blandly disregarded. Linger-Longer laughed. Gerald had a 'classy' accent and she relegated everything he said to the harmless region of history, where 'blimps', 'pukka sahibs' and 'jingos' talked. She laughed with genuine enjoyment, which made Gerald blink and draw back ever so slightly, and the moment he finished speaking she talked about something else, in the manner of bringing the conversation back to a serious theme. The sheikh and Creed were grotesque figures for her, with possible comic, but not conceivably serious, lives, and she heard Gerald as a voice in the same grotesque chorus. When he said that the sheikh was responsible for 'one of the best programmes of social legislation in the Middle East' she ducked her head forward and spluttered with laughter, and imitated his accent with a mock-solemn face --- 'seeowshaul lugisleeshum!'

Dick briskly quoted some figures about the number of malaria cases actually treated in Rubath and the number estimated to exist --- about 'a ninth of one percent' were treated --- and the earning power of the average peasant which was less in a week than that of a London clerk in an hour. Granville came in briskly with the argument that in this case money wasn't used much in the villages of Rubath and the peasants out there didn't wear bowler hats to work and take the underground; that the figures for Rubath were still probably better than those for most other Middle Eastern states, including those with nationalist governments elected by 'the people' and all that. This started the old recurrent anger between them, a hot flame like a sudden intimate sign, recognised simultaneously.

"That doesn't justify it!" Dick cried.

"But why don't you talk about all the other states as well?"

"I do!"

"What, all the time?"

"I'm talking about a state of affairs! That's the state I'm talking about!"

"Anyway ---" Granville's anger made him flush. "What exactly are you getting so het-up about? What's all the emotion for?"

Dick's mouth opened with surprise. It was certainly an odd question coming from Granville: unprecedented, in fact!

5 "Do you really mean to say," Dick asked him, "that you don't know what we're getting het-up about?"

Dick's gaze made him feel ashamed, and he faltered. "Well, I don't, really. I'm not saying you're wrong. I'm asking. What is it, exactly?"

There was a pause during which everyone at the table was still.

"Well," said Dick, "it's because people have been killed."

"But people are always being killed."

"Yes, but this has come to our notice. It represents one set of human beings being cruel to another set, in the most cynical way. It's the most frightfully cynical cruelty. Don't you think that's something to get het-up about?"

He was flushed and pouting again. "No!"

"No?" Their voices were quiet; they nearly all joined in with Dick. "No?" And Dick put up his hand in a helpless, resigned gesture, letting it fall again limply, leaving it to the others to form their judgements. "Don't you, really?"

Granville noticed in his eyes, too, a gleaming compassion, soft and yet direct, light-blue; and again he was aware of shame. But he was

was fixed into an attitude now and he wouldn't budge, in much the same way as Dick had been in the Hamlet discussion, provoking hostility with deliberate, self-hurtful defiance.

"Oh, well, Pip, if I didn't know you I'd say you were pretty far gone. But I do know you and I know what you've just said isn't true!"

Granville was pleased and flattered but in the interests of pride kept the pout and frown on his face; they would have to stay there for the time being, until he could make a decent withdrawal.

The discussion passed away from him and he was left to his own thoughts. He was disposed to believe that this state of compassion in Dick was the equivalent of his own 'orang-utang' condition: how much worthier it was then, to have this mercy in one instead of the blind rush of feeling he was acquainted with in himself! He looked at Dick again. There ~~is~~ was, a genuine 'pity like a light in his face! And confronted by this Granville had the same kind of recoil Dick had had in the Hamlet discussion when confronted by Pinkie's passion. Which of their passions would lead to a more ordered world? which would lead to the greater quietness? He was inclined to say Dick's. There was a steady line in it; there was no danger of anyone getting hurt!

But there was a snag here. Every day there were reports of violence in the paper. Why didn't Dick feel pity every day? He couldn't possibly do so! Didn't that make it spurious? His pity was a poor mental thing! But how could that be? Granville had once noticed how, during a quarrel with Hanni, Dick trembled in exactly the same way as he himself did with Pinkie; it had given him a wonderfully sweet sense of equality in the flesh! He only realised now how much he'd always taken for granted that Dick's feelings were weaker than his. But how could

there be such a gulf between them? There were slow people and quick people, as there were fat and thin. But they were of one flesh! They were the same in their kidneys, their hearts and limbs: how could they be foreigners to each other in their feelings? Especially two people like him and Dick, from the same country, the same city? It was the same with 'intelligence', the word that had been ringing in his ears since the Sussex days, one of the cardinal middle-class virtues: who did he know who wasn't intelligent? Who of those sitting round the table, could he say was 'unintelligent'? Not one of them! They were all quick people; they understood everything that was put to them. Gerald and Glenning were 'honours men' from Oxford. Who did he know in the world who wasn't intelligent? He couldn't think of one for the moment; not even from the past! Everyone in Sussex had been intelligent, including the Major's wife! Walsh had been intelligent! Intelligence was a universal quality of the middle-class, it seemed; he couldn't think of one person, now or in the past, who lacked it! People like Abu Kath'm were intelligent in another way; one might call it intelligence of the heart; a little bit of education and they'd be the same as the others! Where did people differ, then? Where did he differ from Dick?

One could see a passion of steely mental obstinacy in Dick, as when he punished Hanni for violating one of his evenings-out: three evenings of loneliness for her at Hampton Court would effect the right degree of contrition, and so he'd stayed away for three evenings! This was his kind of will --- it worked through the mind; but for Granville this behaviour was impossible; he would have had a sense of betraying his past and his whole breathing organism, in deliberate self-mutilation; his will would have worked in a different way, towards trying to persuade

Hanni by words until she was filled with his conviction like a breath in her!

He remembered a strange incident at training-school when Dick had come almost running to him on a Saturday morning and said, "By God, you know, that Hanni is a marvellous girl! Do you know what she said to me this morning when we were in bed together? She said, 'If you ever did something I really hated I'd be capable of putting you out of my mind and never thinking of you again as long as I lived!'" And Dick had added, "Don't you think that's terrific?" As on many other occasions Granville simply gaped at him. It didn't sound like Hanni at all, even from the little he knew of her. In those days, when she and Dick were getting to know each other, she hardly opened her mouth and sat rigid in her chair like a frightened child all the time, her eyes wide with panic. She was so clearly trying to show herself worthy of Dick's world, where such merciless statements were admired! There was such an odd artificiality of judgement in Dick sometimes; as if the mind had to work alone, unsupported by the sound testimony of the heart. That incident was a good example: it showed Dick's will at work, producing a mental world which Hanni was frightened into joining.

Pinkie said that Dick's work was steadily changing his character and that he went to the office every morning saying to himself, "I shall give this client five minutes, the other twenty," and that, except for the Brazilian client who took his shoes off 'to rest his feet' and then took Dick quietly through his album of nude photographs, he conformed to it.

And Granville had always been surprised at training-school to see how well Dick ordered every day, with a little reading, a visit to town, a letter to Hanni, a crink and a brief chat in the bar, then bed, to fall

asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. There was a marvellous intactness in Dick that he envied. Granville on the other hand had floated through the day as if time was a kind of raft and he shipwrecked on it; he tried to imitate Dick but it lasted half a day at most, after which his mind relapsed into its humming state, as little personal as the wind through the trees. Dick seemed to be in such good control of the flow of time, while he was ashamed of himself for letting life roll by so inconsequentially. It was in the way Dick played darts in the bar sometimes: he watched the dart-board with cool, delicately glittering eyes for a moment, and then his pale hand came slowly forward, curving slightly over the level of his head, and sent the dart in a soft but also direct flight to the board. To darts and chess he brought a clean, methodical, softly devout concentration. He would sit over his chess-board with his elbows on his knees and his head bowed, quite still, and now and then he would rub his chin with the tips of his fingers, moving them softly through the light hair of his beard, without moving his eyes at all, in a deep, interior concentration which, it seemed, no one could disturb. One of Granville's first memories of him was in the library of the training-school sitting by the fire, writing a letter. Granville had just come in from a long walk, it being the week-end, and was still in his overcoat, his cheeks red and smarting from the wind outside. There was no one else in the room and he was just about to talk when the silence, seeming to emanate from Dick as he sat there with his legs crossed and his head bowed, drew him in and stopped his words. It also made him feel sheepish and redundant. Dick looked up very slowly, without surprise, and said in a light murmur, "Oh, hullo, bo'sun," and then went on writing at once. His eyes were steady, inclined with a genial expression on to the paper before

him, and his lips were closed easily together, while he wrote without pause in a clear, effortless, scholar's hand, quite unaffected by Granville's arrival. Dick had made a full stop on the page and paused, looking up, and there had seemed a chance of speech; but after a few seconds he looked down again and began writing in the same way as before, in perfectly straight lines, again without pausing; and for Granville, at that moment, the most desirable thing on earth seemed to be exactly what Dick was doing. But at the same time Dick's harmony wasn't an inclusive thing; it didn't infect Granville with harmony as well, by a flow of spirit across the room; on the contrary, it made him feel redundant and useless, and also upon his dignity, since once having entered the room he had to make a show of having come in for a purpose, whereas his purpose had been to talk to Dick. He was inclined to believe now that this was a superb mental harmony in Dick, and perhaps a state into which Dick could induce himself at will; but it wasn't a total harmony of self which infected other people by its presence; it wasn't the harmony of a comfortable man. As always it stirred Granville to admiration as a new kind of consciousness which made everything feel clean and safe, at least for the moment, because it refused to fall the victim of hidden feelings, and seemed to be making life as it went along. Clear, sunny days always seemed specially so in Dick's presence; they suited his coolness; he was a visitor on the earth, choosing all the sights and sounds, strolling in the golden air; everything he touched, a book or a clean handkerchief, had this deft, vivid appearance as if it wasn't joined to reality but separated by his consciousness into an object called on to the earth by his own will.

This was clear in Dick's attitude to Creed. In his natural

capacities he liked him; but rational principles made Creed his enemy and he was prepared to punish him in total detachment.

Ideas weren't the moving power of Dick's life, the cogs and levers of his progress. In Granville they were: thought moved slowly through him like a germ, in silence, changed his life --- this had happened in Sussex and it had just happened in Basrah --- there were continual revolutions in his life that came from thought. In Basrah germs of thought had started unawares, without him inviting them or trying to provoke them, and they continued naturally where his thoughts in Sussex had left off, as if there already lay in him an order; and the climax of this had been the night of the eclipse, which in turn had changed his life so that now he enjoyed a greater stillness than before and lived with fewer divisions of will; not that his life was more still in the outward aspect, not even that he could remember the details of his thought that night, but he was content to leave it like this until his next point of clarity came, confident that his life was moving and changing silently all the time in the light of that thought, through the chaos and all the bitter, jagged contradictions every day; he thought the night of the eclipse would bear fruit in him as action and living later on, and was moving in him like a germ now, being absorbed slowly, turned over and transmuted through all the actions that seemed to him to have no connection with each other.

But Dick's ideas didn't have this life-giving and life-absorbing quality. They were leisurely. They fitted the tired hours after dinner, when there was time for cleverness; or they were penetrating and dissecting little thoughts about the ambiguities of life, sex, fears, pleasures. They came from sitting back a little from life. They weren't thrown up

haphazardly in the course of action, from underneath; they came from a quiet act of surveyance. Life had to be safe and reasonably easy for them to be possible. They seemed separate from the real world that flowed along outside, its tumbling events too hot for reflection. They couldn't be had by someone in distress, or suffering in any way. They won scholarships, impressed teachers at school, belonged to formal and stylish behaviour. They were philosophical in the weak, mental sense --- 'theorising'. And they produced, if successful, an answer that was like a plan, fitting the facts.

Granville found that compared with Dick he couldn't properly form judgements about other people. He could only see the actions: he couldn't make a formal judgement of another person's whole character in a satisfactory way. If Dick asked him what he thought about someone, say someone they'd met at the office, he stumbled and said, "Oh, I don't know! He ---" And there he would stop. Or he would say perfunctorily, "Oh, he seems all right", when in fact he didn't feel happy about the person at all; only the fact wasn't clear to him. But Dick would give a succinct appraisal of the man, which always appeared to Granville exactly right, so that he wondered at Dick's powers of penetration, and his imperviousness to false charms. Granville would ask himself why he hadn't been brave enough to venture such a clear criticism, to say exactly what he thought of the man; and he resolved to do so next time when the occasion arose. But when the next occasion did arise the same thing happened; he hesitated and murmured something like, "Oh, he's a nice enough person!" Sometimes he would say, "He gives me a nasty feeling." But he couldn't give a real appraisal. All he could say was what the other person made him feel like; he couldn't venture to say what the other person was. He

always wanted to say to Dick, "Well, I don't know, he probably has reasons for everything he does!" People only had themselves, after all; they had to get on with what they'd got!

On the other hand, Dick was much less damning than he was. He gave a judicious description, Granville went by the state the other person put him into, and if this was an unharmonious state he blinded off and didn't want the other person mentioned again. When he seriously attempted a complete judgement he went into a long, wandering speech examining every aspect of the other person until he reached a few general ideas. Granville was swept away in the hot currents of another person's presence, while Dick kept his mental judgement alive. Granville was aware of a state of feeling in himself to which no words could do justice; and when asked what he thought of someone he understood the question to be, 'What is this state of feeling in you?' Of course, he hesitated and stumbled, trying to order his feelings for articulation; he felt a weight on him, a state close to panic, and he would think to himself, "What shall I say? Quickly! But I must do justice to the other person, I must make a true statement of the feelings he evoked in me ---!" But by that time the occasion was gone; he'd only been asked, after all, for a simple little statement, such as, 'Oh, he's a snob', or 'He looks dishonest'! This was what he couldn't do. He stood before other people in something like a dazed and hot state --- not an abnormal state at all, but one which made cool mental activity impossible; especially if the other person was new to him. Dick was much better-armed against people. He went away from offensive people uncontaminated. Also he could give other people better attention than Granville because he was less dependent on his immediate feelings towards them, and so could elicit their best

side in a deliberate manner; he could see himself apart from them.

Granville was aware that, to accommodate himself to the middle class world, he would have to learn --- or he would learn by daily example --- how to do what Dick was doing, more and more. It meant changing from the Abbott's Road state, which was unfitting for the world he found himself in now, into what might be called a 'picture-perceiving' state. One had to have a picture of other people. In the Abbott's Road world you sat side-by-side with other people, so to speak, looking not at them but at a spectacle in front of you --- he found he got on best with other people when they were doing something together, when there was something to watch, like a theatre: you were aware of the other person, but not in a mental way. In the Abbott's Road world people flowed into each other; they were like the countryside --- you didn't have to look at it to know it, you didn't have to see all the trees and hear all the birds and each breeze that rustled the branches. Indeed, the more you looked and examined, the less you knew! And this was what he found in the middle class world; the more he looked at people the less he knew about them --- the more he talked to Hanni and Dick the more puzzling they were for him; their presences didn't flow into him. Their silences were tense and conscious. But silence in Abbott's Road was always allowed to flow on, it produced a new mood of its own accord, a fresh turning-over of the spirit like a breath across the room. The whole tone of life in Abbott's Road was different; it was another world like another civilisation, and slowly he had to get used to this new world, which meant fighting his way through one distortion after another, but he couldn't go back now, he had no other world to live in! He would have to learn this new picture-perceiving state which every middle-class

person seemed to take for granted as the normal way! He would have to be strong as well, to keep harmony, informing himself about every step he took. It was no longer adequate for him to exist in himself, letting his moods come and go, forming his ideas about other people and their actions in a flowing way that was simply a continuation of his moods. Now he had to have a clear picture of other people, deduced, when their behaviour wasn't clear, from himself. He had to take their interests into mental consideration, whereas, before, his natural sense of their presence had done that for him. Now there had to be a conscious sense of relation. He had to listen to them alertly and then furnish his reply, in a kind of set give-and-take that wasn't a natural give-and-take of the heart that came easily, but on a different level, with a different rhythm; there had to be an acute mental awareness of the other person, as to what was going on in his mind, and what picture he had of you. Your privacy was suspended; and the mind took on a planning activity, mapping out the form of the conversation, trying to find interesting and informative things to say. But in Abbott's Road the conversation needn't be at all informative; it could go on in a kind of monologue, one person taking over from another. In Abbott's Road thinking-before-you-spoke was ungracious; in this way working class manners were more gracious and subtle than middle class, and much nearer the aristocratic. The rule in Abbott's Road was that having silent thoughts behind your words was disrespectful; the mind throbbed on behind the words in a non-thinking way, as a man's eyes blazed in a non-seeing way. Talk was a state of being in Abbott's Road, not mental conclusions. It flowed from the mouth without thought of performance. But in the middle class world it was like making announcements: ideally, if you wanted the most attentive audience, your announcements

were factual, well-thought-out and informative. It was like people being the official spokesmen of themselves. You carried about in your head a picture of yourself and you decoyed other people's minds into accepting this picture --- of a straightforward person, or casual person, or clever, or carefree, or poor, or rich --- whatever you wanted to be. And since the people you were talking to did exactly the same, it was like pictures meeting pictures, all the excitement of being with people was gone, there was no mysterious timbre and richness in their voices, no quick, violent, unknown gaze. Men's faces were like little masks from which they peeped out defensively. These faces went on in front of the thoughts like a dance of the veils, moving about to enchant and conceal and lie.

It wasn't enough for him in this new world to say 'I like this person' or 'I dislike that person', and leave it at that, with a feeling of natural rightness because, after all, he was only talking about his own feelings! No, now there had to be a judgement. There had to be a picture of the other person, you had to say if you disapproved of this or not. That was really what Dick was asking him --- 'What quick picture have you formed of the other person?' 'I dislike him' was now a social or moral judgement, no longer an autobiographical one. In Abbott's Road it was autobiographical --- that was just how you felt about the other person, and you left him free. Now you were required to construct the other person on a little map of virtues and to say if you thought this little construction deserved life or not!

At once the authority of your own feelings was dead. That was the first thing to get a blow when you went into the middle class world: your own authority.

Did he like Dick and Hanni, really? Not really! He liked

Mohammed --- there was the wonderful, drugged state of friendship where no questions were asked. In Dick and Hanni there was kind of glittering, mental excitement --- which needed a party to come out; it always needed something else. Did he trust them? No! Yes! He couldn't tell! Which meant he didn't!

It wasn't easy in this new world. The other person was always so hidden. If he was boisterous you had to consider that he might really be shy; if stern and reticent, really warm; if charming and straightforward, really cold. You had to look round all the time --- round the pictures.

Dick always said what volumes he could tell about Hanni, if only the occasion arose. But these volumes were hidden from others. Perhaps only when she was alone with Dick did she unveil herself. Wasn't it true of them all, really? So it wasn't enough to say what you felt about a person! You might have got the wrong picture! So the brain had to keep checking and reconnoitring. He had to consider, for instance, that a remark of Dick's might mean the opposite of what it said; or that Hanni's silence for a few days might actually mean noise underneath. Feelings no longer established facts in a plain and robust way!

With Dick he never really felt himself. He felt quenched. He was a picture --- partialities, a good mind, interesting, likeable --- such a warm person! But the flame was gone. Dick couldn't see it.

The creatures in the fields gave their light, the birds and all the other beasts. But not men. Not in this world he'd come into.

Men no longer had God in each other.

He felt a quick mental revulsion from Dick. Dick's attitude to

other people was starved! He brought a starved attitude to his clients at the office --- he couldn't invest them with the stature proper to them --- they were 'old' this and 'old' that for him, elbowing each other pathetically for his attention! The middle class had come to strike the light out of people!

Dick was starved in sex --- he was always afraid it would be snatched away from him. He was starved in thought --- his thoughts were thin and mental, without the support of his life and his flesh!

But this was followed by concern. There was such a frail, transparent innocence in Dick, still intact, which had been in his eyes when they first met, at training-school. He could still remember it --- he could see the light-blueness of Dick's eyes close to him, smiling, with their confiding twinkle.

He was exhausted? How long would he spend in this frightful labyrinth?

Gerald brought in a portable radio one evening and switched on the midnight news. It said to their astonishment that there would be a special call-up of 'emergency reserve personnel', details of which would be announced the next morning. There was a great whoop of indignation. "What bloody fools!" Ginger cried. Glenning was worried. Also the news said that the American ambassador had called on the prime Minister at his own request, and had stayed nearly an hour. Glenning said that Russia and America both wanted Britain out of the Middle East to open it up as a market for themselves. Britain couldn't invest enough money there or protect it properly. That was the reality, and no good could be done by calling up troops. Pinkie yawned and went off to bed. She

said that Nigel had rung her up to say he was going to volunteer if necessary; he'd just had dinner with some of his old buddies from the war, and they were going to do the same. He said he was doing it because he was certain there wouldn't be any bloodshed, and that there'd just be 'a sort of picnic' in the desert. Pinkie added that he sounded wonderfully mellow, and had told her he'd met her friend Elizabeth Bewley-Patton, who was going to invite her up to her house for a week-end soon if there wasn't a 'show'. And he'd said she ought to see more of Elizabeth. Granville had met Elizabeth only twice, briefly. She was a healthy, bounding sort of person with flushed cheeks and dark, quick eyes. She was a clear, healthy, sane influence on Pinkie. Her eyes darted on to things with a dark, careless penetration. She was full of questions always, with the utmost generous concern. Her talk was like a great waterfall, pauseless and deafening. And there was a robust sexual energy in her; nothing distorted or held inwards. Next to her Pinkie looked delicate, glittering, wayward.

The call-up affected only a few people, and hundreds of enquiries by potential volunteers were turned away at the recruiting offices. A newspaper said that the country was almost equally divided on the issue. There were also small demonstrations outside the inactive recruiting offices; people carried placards throughout the hours of daylight past the doors, calling on everyone to 'recruit' their common sense and 'volunteer' for sanity.

The following Sunday he went to the demonstration in Trafalgar Square alone and, so to speak, incognito. He didn't see Linger-Longer or any of the others. There was an immense crush of people, with primitively-rigged banners waving about over their heads, 'THE CREED OF SLAUGHTER',

'The Empire Is Dead But won't Lie Down', 'Britain Faces Total Extermination With Stiff Upper Lip', 'Rubath National Health Scheme says LEAVE IT TO NATURE', 'Reunion Of British War Heroes To Take Place This Month In Rubath To Practice Bayonet Drill On Live Women And Children.'

There were mounted policemen on all sides, squashing people into a tight group here and distending them into a line there, the horses throwing up their heads and stepping delicately. He got caught in part of the crowd and was swept along into the square, close to one of the fountains where platforms had been erected; some people were being pushed on to the fountain and a young man had taken off his shoes and socks and was paddling in the water. There was a heady cheerfulness everywhere; it might have been a royal procession! Policemen on foot shouted out to the man in the fountain and drew nearer to him, elbowing through the crowd. Suddenly there would be motion and everyone would shift and move several yards as smoothly as a breath, when the mounted police put pressure on at the edges. It was a warm day, the first they'd had for a week or more, with high clouds. He saw Indians in the crowd, negroes and a few Arabs. But mostly there were contingents from local labour parties and peace-groups. Singing came from various parts of the square, and he could see a man on the platform conducting; it seemed to be 'Cavaliera Rossa', and on the other side they were singing 'Abode with me'.

Suddenly a clergyman stepped in front of one of the microphones on the platform and cried, "Prayer-cards will be issued now! Nearly fifty thousand prayer-cards have been issued in the last fortnight! In the middle of the meeting there will be a two-minute silence, during which you are requested to read your prayer-card and offer it to God," which produced a slow roar of laughter like wind across the square; he said it all