

THE ROMANTIC

BY

ELIZABETH BIBESCO



WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD
LONDON :: TORONTO

FIRST PUBLISHED 1940

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT THE WINDMILL PRESS
KINGSWOOD, SURREY

To
JOSE ANTONIO PRIMO DE RIVERA

*I promised you a book before it
was begun. It is yours now that it
is finished—*

*Those we love die for us only
when we die—*

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

SIR CUTHBERT MUSGRAVE entered the breakfast-room. Cuthbert had retained the habit of "entering" rooms. It was not an assertion—no assertion was necessary—but a recognition of himself, just as the breakfast-room could not conceivably have been the dining-room. A much-travelled man, he discarded his experiences when he landed in England. Abroad is abroad and has nothing whatsoever to do with your own country. Cuthbert, who had written an extremely intelligent treatise on Siam, possessed the Englishman's genius for dissociating theory from practice and knowledge from action. Instinctively he knew that any two relevancies cancel out, and he realised that once you cross the Channel—or any other sea—everything is different. He loved travel, and the farther away he got from England the more he observed and the more he understood. European countries irritated him by their differences and their resemblances, their civilisations not linked and separated by thousands of years of art and history and religion, glazed by the slow wash of Time, but silly little mechanical things differentiated only by changes of gear and pace. The Czecho-Slovakia of

to-day, the Germany of to-morrow, or the Bohemia of yesterday, nice tidy Scandinavian countries all doing much the same things. The Chinese, the Persians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, of such stuff was civilisation made, not of so-called nations jostling one another, treading on one another's toes, racing each other from nothing to nowhere. Cuthbert was perfectly happy in Asia, at his club, on his estates. He was at ease in Thibet, on the Bench; but he was not fond of the intermediate. Customs officials drove him mad. Hardships he could endure, danger he could face, but, being a sensible man, he disliked and avoided discomfort. Also he knew, as all true travellers know, that the ultimate goal of a journey is the return. To others you call it "getting back", but to yourself you call it "coming home".

Sir Cuthbert Musgrave entering his breakfast room was at home. At home with all that home means of the inevitably inarticulate.

Ulysses the retriever, Leander the water spaniel—(Cuthbert liked history): not a gardener dismissed, no leaking roofs, not a complaint. Agreeable reflections. He thought of the neighbouring estates. Sad to see the old families go. He sighed with dutiful class-consciousness. But there were also the nouveaux riches, selling out to right and to left, equally—Cuthbert felt—betraying their class, for

was it not their business to be rich? He was essentially a fair man. The Musgraves, whatever had been their deficiencies (in certain circles "deficiencies" can only be a term of praise), had weathered the storm. Ideas have their place—in the minds of others. Thinking—hard thinking—was another matter. Cuthbert liked "thinking things out". He was an astute man, and astuteness is the form of intelligence most looked down upon by the intelligent.

The breakfast-room was charming; sun and wind played with the curtains, the daffodils fluttered, the toast-racks glittered, the silver was heavy, the food was hot, the fire was bright. The world crisis was the fault of other people—and their business. Cuthbert was kind and rich and generous and just, as public-spirited in private as in public. He possessed most of the qualities that are easy to under-rate and difficult to appreciate. We can all of us strain at an ideal, but we can few of us enjoy an example. Cuthbert recognised the fact that he was a delegate—a sort of viceroy to whom money, self-respect and a devotion to the public welfare had somehow been lent. It was his fundamental appreciation of the fact that these things had been lent and not given that made him very nearly exceptional. He had always been curiously aware of the hidden unhappiness of other people, but how do you translate this awareness into

some comforting gesture? How do you begin and where? Cuthbert had never begun. He had often wished in vain a cheque-book containing bits of paper that could be made out in terms of sympathy and understanding.

Hospitality itself, his house was always full of his friends—old friends, cronies, boon companions; men he had known at his private school, at his public school, at Oxford, in the Territorials, on committees; neighbours, sons of his father's friends, fellows who shared the same interests, travellers, big-game-hunters, Oriental experts. But there was something lacking: that indefinable aroma of intimacy which plays such monkey tricks with time and space and the rational interests of man.

And there was Lisa. Lisa, whom he adored as she had once adored him. He remembered her as he had first known her, the childless wife of a dissolute Polish chef de famille. Such a magnificent name, such beautiful jewels, all furs and abrupt pauses and secret intimations of intimacy, until you scratched and found unhappiness and honesty and the habit of pleasing. She was dominant and brittle, alive and disintegrating with the fever of her unrest suddenly drowned in her voice—a voice in which a lullaby lay lurking. Lisa who made whatever surrounded her seem exciting and important, and who

that she wanted peace. She had adored Cuthbert. Everything that he failed to understand was endowed by his non-understanding; it was as if the things that he was unable to see had disappeared—nuisances swallowed up by some accommodating horizon. An Englishwoman married to a foreigner—her Polish husband had been wonderfully like an English spinster's idea of a foreigner—she had very soon begun to believe passionately in Englishmen, and, being a romantic, what she believed in she invented. Cuthbert, unaware of the part that he was playing, flattered, a little bewildered, impressed by her importance in the lives of others, but ultimately bowled over by her physical attraction, succumbed. As she was a married woman and a lady he had never made love to her. He had simply "understood" her and held a very definite opinion of her husband. To Cuthbert understanding a woman meant appreciating the fact that she was misunderstood. Men often behaved like brutes. As Stanislas really did behave like a brute, Lisa was not in the least misunderstood—a fact that she was the first to acknowledge. She was much too tired and unhappy to want to be understood and she adored Cuthbert for not making love to her (his reasons—in the circumstances—amazed her) and for never touching a nerve of her own sensibility with some prying sensibility of his own.

Because he had not once kissed her she had succeeded in convincing herself that she was in love with him.

Then an altogether unexpected thing happened. Stanislas died, just as if he had been a nice ordinary man whose death would be regretted. His mother, a hard woman who respected both sheaths and swords, said to Lisa: "Tu vois, tout arrive." Her son's death was, she felt, a vindication of the Catholic Church. She had always been grateful to her daughter-in-law for not divorcing her husband—public proceedings vulgarise unhappiness—but when Stanislas by dying quietly had put an unexpectedly reputable end to a family disgrace the old Countess felt that Rome had paid its debt to the Protestant. Lisa, the romantic, was shocked by her mother-in-law. She worshipped children, feeling that anything small constitutes an odd tugging claim on one's feelings. It is a curious thing, this matter of size. Lisa's Protestant conscience was subconsciously revolting at the thought that a death can make you glad, and she was seeking for an infant Stanislas—a child made unhappy by a broken toy, someone to be sorry for—an early photograph.

The old Countess thought of her husband and her son. She thought of Lisa with her slanting grace and the flutter of her feelings that ought to have been ruffled only by the wind and the sun—the feathers

of Lisa's winged charms. Deaths, she reflected, always seek their mourning, demanding trimmings.

Lisa, unable to accept the convenient, longing now to feel unhappy. Foolish, the old lady thought it, to feel the loss of a grief, but she knew what incurable romantics the English are, and she watched with a certain grim humour her daughter-in-law's desperate struggle to find an agreeable memory of Stanislas. Looks and charm he had had, but they were difficult to recapture after ten years of constant humiliation. Lisa was looking for a little anecdote, a little anecdote that would prove to her that she had been unjust, over-harsh in her judgment of her husband; the little anecdote could not be found and "Mamachen", as a cynical younger generation called the old Countess, recognised a slackening in what she sarcastically described to herself as "the search for sorrow".

* * * * *

Lisa's future was much discussed in Warsaw, in Rome and in Paris. She had never lived in London. Dozens of men had been in love with her, and she had now become a rich widow. A slight change of focus was apparent in the various capitals of Europe. A woman whom you had hoped to make your mistress had turned into a woman you were determined to make your wife.

But here Cuthbert, who had never made love to her, had the advantage over his rivals. He *knew* that she was going to marry him.¹ She had made him sure of it with a hundred reticences. That she was considered very attractive and known to be very rich neither interested nor alarmed him. The Musgraves might have their faults, but a regard for the estimation of others was not among them. This absolute certainty of Cuthbert's, which seemed strange and almost insolent when she thought it over, succeeded imperceptibly in communicating itself to Lisa. . . . A year after Stanislas's death a suitably quiet ceremony united them, amazement, dismay and indignation were felt in a number of countries.

"Mamachen" approved of the marriage. It appealed to her sense of humour, and she enjoyed being amused. Besides, she was fond of Cuthbert. She liked his looks and what she called his "bearing", she always found him attentive, often a little absurd but never in the least ridiculous, and she considered that to be a little absurd without ever being ridiculous was a prerogative of Englishmen—she was very fond of the English. She had gone to England for the wedding. Barnaby Towers, the Musgrave place was called. Why "Towers"? A fine early Georgian house with, thank God, not so much as a turret! And Cuthbert in church saying: "I, Cuthbert Henry Archibald des Moines, take thee, Talisman Mary . . ."

Who had ever known that Lisa had been christened Talisman?

"It would have come out equally in a registry office," the old lady reflected philosophically. "A great race the English, afraid of nothing."

Sir Cuthbert Musgrave ate his breakfast. He ate it as it should be eaten: quietly, reverently and without hurry. His bacon and eggs and kidneys were followed by toast and marmalade and accompanied by coffee. He looked at the apple which might keep a doctor away, but decided against it. The local paper lay half propped against his cup. *The Times* and the *Telegraph* arrived at about nine-forty-five. Cuthbert liked breakfasting at nine. Accordingly, when he read these journals he approached them in a different mood and gave them a different kind of attention than they would have received had they arrived three-quarters of an hour earlier.

Breakfast over, he lit a pipe, saying "Good dog" to Ulysses and "Bad dog" to Leander, and, throwing the windows open, walked out on to the terrace. "One must open one's lungs," he said to himself; at that hour of the morning he had a sort of proprietary feeling about the air which tended to disappear in the course of the day.

Then he went up to say good morning to Lisa. First he tapped on her door, after which, as there

was no answer, he went in. Because his wife attracted him physically, he always felt something illicit about their relations. It was this sense of the illicit that kept him faithful to her. The curtains had not been drawn, but a chink of light spread a ladder on the carpet.

There is nothing more moving than the sight of someone you love asleep. Even unloved strangers become poignant in their defencelessness. A curious pity and tenderness clutch you. "I am seeing a human being unguarded by his consciousness. I ought not be looking, but I am not looking. I am protecting him."

"Are you asleep?" Cuthbert asked. And then, as she did not answer, rather more loudly: "Are you asleep?"

"Yes," she murmured, making it sound drowsy, knowing that she had been woken up for good—she who had not slept all night. Her hand was hanging over the side of the bed like an ear-ring. He picked it up and kissed it.

"I won't disturb you," he said, shutting the door noiselessly.

Lisa, who was a genuinely bad sleeper, was madened by this ritual. "It is unkind of you to wake me up when you know how difficult it is for me to sleep."

"Wake you up, my love? I crept into your room

and you were sleeping like a child. I said, 'Are you asleep?' and you said 'Yes'. You know that curious way one has of answering questions automatically without waking up. I even kissed your hand without your stirring. If I'd woken you up you would have said something. I opened the door very gently—at least, I trust that I did. Bannister," to the butler, "will you have her ladyship's door examined in case it should creak? It is possible that it may have creaked without my having noticed it. You should have told me, my love, that the door creaked."

The door was examined by the estate carpenter, oil was poured on to its perfect hinges. The door remained what it always had been—a perfect door. And each morning Cuthbert would tiptoe up to it, tap gently but firmly, creep into the room, ascertain after repeated enquiries that his wife was asleep, and creep soundlessly out again. An exceptionally quiet mover, he was always annoyed by the suggestion that he woke his wife up. When Lisa was feeling well she laughed at her own debacle. Cuthbert had the Englishman's genius for choosing his own ground in any discussion. "Choosing" is perhaps hardly the word; finding his own ground. A noise was a creak of the door, a stumble, new shoes, a sneeze, but obviously not a tap or a question. How Lisa loved him for being like that—when she was feeling well! Only she had been feeling ill for quite

a long time now, and there is a dangerous moment when patients who are not interested in their symptoms become addicts of their grievances. Lisa was brave, but like many brave people she found danger and pain easier to confront than she found discomfort and irritation easy to put up with. Too many years of her life had been passed in an atmosphere of melodrama. Her record during the last two years of the war—she had been eighteen in 1917—was gallant in the extreme, in common with that of thousands and hundreds of thousands of other people, but chance had acquired a habit of throwing her into the front line of events—in those years physically—and she had been too young to realise the monotony of violence, to see through the repetitions of action. A love for—one might almost call it a lust for—emergencies remained with her which she was never to lose. Stanislas made her life a hell, but it was a hell that she knew her way about in. It was a hell in which she had never made a false step. Superb when it came to making the best of a bad job, she had no experience of making the best of a good job. And she had married Cuthbert, worshipping Cuthbert, inventing Cuthbert, creating him in a hundred images, endowing him with all the qualities that he, in fact, possessed and imagining to herself that they were the qualities that she liked, reverencing him, prostrating herself before him.

As he had never guessed any of these things, they had only mattered to her. And here she was living in his beautiful Georgian house, smiling at his friends (the Oriental experts suited her best), signing appeals "Talisman Musgrave", conscious of the fact that she was becoming irritable—it might, of course, only be a matter of health—and losing the serenity that had distinguished her during the unhappiest years of her marriage to Stanislas.

CHAPTER II

LISA was permeated by the cold. Zig-zagging almost furtively through her flesh it reached her bones—Roman roads down which to march triumphantly. Crouching over the fire she weighed in two scales burning cheeks and icy feet. By any adjustment heat and cold, each equally excessive, were unfairly distributed.

"A clay soil. It is very bad for my wife's rheumatism," their agent said. He was a nice considerate worried man, whose wife would have had a suitable complaint in any climate.

Countries accustomed to real winters only know overheating, the poorest peasant on Stanilas's estate would have shivered at Barnaby.

"A clay soil." Cuthbert tried to be apologetic; but as it was his own soil he was always—even between the months of November and April—secretly pleased. Unfortunately his wife was a delicate woman. Had Cuthbert married an ox she would still have been to him a delicate woman. A faint aroma of potential—potential, but not positive—ill-health was necessary to his romantic view of what was feminine.

"I must carry you away into the sun," he would say in January, and she, determined not to be outdone (Lisa also was a romantic), answered: "I would rather stay here."

"Of course, my love, but we mustn't think of what is agreeable, but of what is good for you."

Lisa would laugh and love him for his "of course" and his "agreeable", laugh and love him until they became her "of course" and her agreeable—almost. And Cuthbert, to whom words meant what words mean to men of action—silences and acts—was glad that he had sent his wife into the sun. He was one of those people to whom a proposal is already a performance. If he remembered a letter he ought to answer—that was the answer it received.

How many of us are like that, allowing our intentions to do duty for acts! Even in our minds we let our loveliest thoughts float away uncaptured, fading into forgetfulness, made barren by our indolence.

Where the two really burning questions in life were concerned—his estates and the East—Cuthbert was passionately meticulous. If a book about Thibet was announced in a publisher's list it was always ordered before it had appeared and duly arrived on the day of publication. He knew what he wanted to read about. Few of us are in an equally strong position. In a world of Cuthberts, reviewers would cease to exist.

He often marvelled at the haphazard way in which people read. Picking up a book from a table, buying a book because it has been recommended, reading a book because of something that someone has written about it. This pecking at literature annoyed Cuthbert as much as it would have annoyed the most austere intellectual.

Being an absolutist, he was in his way absolutely right. "I can make up my own mind about a book," he would say when some critic was being discussed. It sounded idiotic, but it was also true. He knew nothing of prancing fancies, he would not have recognised a tangent had he seen one. But where his beloved East was concerned a strange wisdom enveloped him. Unconscious of the gimcrack profundities of the tourist and of the Berlitz metaphysics of the traveller, he would sometimes perfunctorily mention places and distances, giving some matter-of-fact detail about food or transport; but his real thoughts were shrouded in silence—the sanctuary of withdrawal that Eastern religions have given to man, conceding at the same time a material translation for the inferior being, woman, by keeping her veiled. Dimly, and yet painfully, Lisa knew of the sanctuary—painfully because she was aware of her inevitable exclusion. It was, she felt with some reason, a little hard that, having to put up with everything that was tiresome about Cuthbert, she

should at the same time be denied a sharing of this inner vision. Only, there are visions which cannot be shared—individual experiences that isolate you from man by bringing you for a moment nearer to God. And man can be alone without loneliness—an achievement rarely encompassed by woman.

Lisa, complex and subtle, was frustrated and defeated by Cuthbert's simplicity. It was this simplicity that had made her marry him and which would probably be the undoing of their marriage. There are husbands and wives who shed unfortunate lights on one another. In this case it did not need Lisa to make Cuthbert look dull. On the other hand, it did need Cuthbert to make Lisa feel trivial—uneasily, occasionally, for a second or two until her infinite variety, her wayward grace, the kite-like quality of her charm, reassured her once again by the sway that they exercised over others. But there are moments when "others" are not enough—even to reassure us by. With helpless and exasperated envy Lisa watched her husband re-roofing cottages and reading Confucius. "I won't bore you with details," he would say about the cottages, proceeding to do so. Confucius he never mentioned. Once or twice she had tried to introduce the subject, but she did not know what to say. What does one say about Confucius? Lisa, the brilliant talker, found herself floundering in a vast void. Cuthbert's face

was a benign blank. It was as if he were waiting for her to say something that might awaken his real attention, at which she would begin to charm him and he would be entranced. Irrationally, this added to her deep sense of humiliation.

* * * * *

To-day, though she realised that it wasn't really cold, Lisa couldn't help shivering. "One feels spring in the air." Better than anyone she knew the words of the code, for to her it was a code, a cipher that she had learnt, she an Englishwoman discovering England, without any comforting dictionary, because her adhesions and her ignorances belonged to no plan. Icy blasts, shaking the daffodils—daffodils born to dance, demanding the wind as their music—snug primroses overlaid by eiderdowns of leaves, peering and peeping, white violets clustering in tiny colonies, windflowers wanton and virginal, exposing their innocence without need of modesty—the English spring, clotted up with heaps of old wet leaves overlaying snowdrops and aconites and small blue violets, while the hedges release their twigs into a shy exigence of buds.

Lisa knew her Wiltshire April. The woods be-starred with a milky way of wild flowers—an earth-born firmament. Soon she would be trapesing down the road, loving those Cotswold walls where each

stone defiantly jostles another stone in some perilous harmony, a strange invulnerable rhythm where no mortar intrudes. And Cuthbert's clay soil! The puddles splashing the mud with milk rather than water. Lisa, thinking of these things, realised that, in a way, to physical and visual sensations thought brings death or rather a life outside themselves and therefore inimical and destructive. She was infinitely tired—that morning tiredness which weighs you down morally. No one is really tired by electric light. Either you are gay and stimulated or else you are sleepy and justified. Night is night from whatever angle you choose to take it. But the morning sunlight is a commentary and a criticism. Your eyelids are made heavy by a blend of what was sleeplessness and has become wakelessness. Not to sleep between midnight and five o'clock is tiresome; not to sleep between five and eight is intolerable—day, a grey, relentless invasion of light, accepting in some puritanical spirit the surrender of your slumber, that fortress of unconsciousness garrisoned, alas! by all too many dreams.

Lisa went downstairs. The morning-room, her boudoir was called, and for once the name was justified. She had hardly altered anything. Hoppner's estimate—or rather appreciation—of Lady Louisa Musgrave was embedded in the panel above the mantelpiece, the flowers of the chintzes had faded

and so had the colours of the point de Hongroie chairs. The silk curtains had paled more rapidly than their fringes. ("Silk," Lisa thought, "what a delightful word—almost a lost word.") She had added two drawings of Constantin Guys and a Boudin. She had altered nothing, but she had changed everything. Cuthbert could never have said, had he wished to: "It was good enough for my mother." Lisa didn't remove objects; she distributed her personality over a room. There were pale blue early irises and tiny sweet-scented cyclamen dumped into vases that were hardly more than tumblers. There were odds and ends of flowers, samples, experiments, discoveries, gardeners' flowers, chewed pencils, tangled embroidery silks, patterns, stray bits of paper with names and numbers that evoked no answering memory—the litter of personality.

Lisa was dressed in resolutely country clothes. Her tweeds were so thick that she seemed to vanish in them rather than to inhabit them, and her heavy shoes made her ankles and legs look unreal—absurd pretences.

Just one incongruous luxury she could not deny herself—her sables. She knew that they looked absurd with a large brown-and-white check, but we all have moments when we yield to ourselves. The sables had been Stanislas's last present—superb

sables, almost black, with occasional white hairs, sables that might have accounted for the Russian revolution. Not being an Anglo-Saxon, Stanislas—however mixed his feelings—knew that he had a wife. As she already possessed the family jewels he could only give her furs. To his mistresses he made the same presents—life presenting us with no alternatives—but even though their chinchillas might be bluer and their diamonds bigger, he recognised a currency with which money has nothing to do—he knew that he could not buy his wife. Not that he wanted to. We all of us have some curious unacknowledged delicacy. Lisa's sables were a proof, to Stanislas, of his uncommercial attitude towards life.

Lisa was huddled over the fire in her room when Sarah Musgrave looked in on her sister-in-law.

An old maid or a maiden lady, how can we gauge the difference? Who are we to differentiate between the fastidiousness of denials and the frustrations of desires? All that we see is an unmarried woman, and we people her past with the charms of her present.

Sarah, to look at, was a weather-beaten mezzotint (essentially the definition of an English lady). Outlined nostrils, bony hands, a bony nose, bony cheek-bones, all slightly reddened by the wind; yet she mastered life with the ease of shabbiness and distinction, unconscious of the charm she exercised

because, half surreptitiously laughing at everything, she began and ended by laughing at herself.

Lisa adored her. They kept their intimacy intact by never admitting it to one another. Some secret wisdom enabled them to preserve their confidence from confidences. Lisa, who had not a drop of foreign blood, never for a moment succeeded in looking English. There are contagious rhythms which we acquire without so much as recognising them. It was largely a matter of the way in which she sat down on a chair. Englishwomen have their own grace, drooping and sloppy, an abdication of the body, a manner of emptying clothes of their contents. Lisa would curl herself into sofas and chairs as if she were a cat that has found a lap. But her curves were dominated by a certain natural erectness. Sarah, watching her huddled in her sables, appraised her with critical affection. Had she been a horse or a dog Sarah would have bought her.

They talked about comfortable things—the sort of thing about which one goes on saying the same things. Demanding repetition, they are caressed by it. The vicar in his way—it must be admitted that it was *his* way—could be very trying. If he proposed a vote of thanks at the village sports it invariably began: “You will all remember your Virgil.” He was a kleptomaniac, but as he only stole bicycles the whole countryside knew with a comforting certainty

that no missing bicycle was ever lost. This idiosyncrasy made him a popular figure. His wife was a buxom busybody; he never seemed to have perceived, let alone noticed, her.

One of the churchwardens, a wag, suggested a subscription to buy a bicycle for Mr. Stratton.

"Most kind, but quite unnecessary," the vicar replied truthfully.

"We all have our crosses to bear," Mrs. Stratton would say. Her crosses were bicycles. She had no children.

"It was so inconvenient its being the postman's," Sarah was saying. "Perhaps he wanted a pink one for a change."

Lisa looked at her sister-in-law. Her legs, ankleless and calfless, were stretched out at the most angular of angles, her hair a dishevelled tangle of chestnut and white hairs, might easily have been burnished into copper and silver, but then where would Sarah have been?

"I shall never be as distinguished as she is," Lisa thought to herself. "She doesn't need a dress or a jewel or a subterfuge or a fillip."

"What *are* you thinking about?" Sarah asked.

"You."

"It ought to make you feel pretty," Sarah chuckled sardonically.

"It doesn't make me feel in the least pretty."

"No, I suppose that no woman really feels pretty without a man in the room."

"Really, Sarah, you talk like a bad novelette."

"Well, I am an old maid. Old maids have to make a choice in their views on sex: either they decide in favour of the novelette or in favour of the pamphlet. Whatever else we may judge by we cannot judge by experience."

"You old humbug, what don't you know about life?"

"I know a lot about life—other people's lives," Sarah added soberly.

There was a silence. Lisa felt queerly diminished by the fact that she had been loved and pampered and desired. Sarah always made her feel like that, and yet she loved her—which was to Lisa's infinite credit. It is difficult to love the people who make us feel small—or smaller.

"Well?" Sarah smiled after a time.

"You make me feel inferior."

"You oughtn't to attach so much importance to your sables. Why let them worry you?"

"It isn't as sanctimonious as that. I do love them."

"I should hope so."

"When they are old and orange——"

"You won't have got rid of them."

"I suppose not. At least not in that way."

"Lisa," Sarah said, "you have been sleeping

abominably. You shouldn't let ghosts on a screen get on your nerves. You were meant to make people happy—and you make them happy, old Mrs. Jones and William's idiot son—the counterblast to your sables.”

“It isn't making people happy; it is pleasing them. It is so delicious to please and then it becomes a bad habit and one becomes an addict, like a drug addict.”

Sarah had no knowledge of that particular temptation, but she had never known Lisa lay herself bare before, and she was both embarrassed and riveted.

“The poor, the unhappy, the obscure, the casual—what could be easier? The difficult thing is to make the people to whom one matters happy. To be able to dispense with charm. It is easy to alight on a moment, as a butterfly alights on a flower, to share—even to create—a sunshine of impermanence. But there are other moments when we are confronted by the abrupt requisitions of our inner self and the word ‘happiness’ becomes an indictment of what in all light-heartedness we took away from it.”

Sarah looked away because she wanted Lisa to go on talking.

“It is a terrible responsibility to matter to anyone. But to matter to someone with whom one lives!”

“Yes,” Sarah said—a word seemed necessary.

"In every perfect life the everyday must be the synonym of a miracle."

"Need it be as grand as that?" Sarah asked.

"It should be even grander than that because it wouldn't *seem* grand at all."

Sarah said to herself: "She has ceased to care for Cuthbert."

Mr. Rollit, their agent, came to lunch. He was one of those people who never seem able to disentangle a personal life out of life. He believed in a number of things: headed by England and his wife's ill-health. Both England and his wife disappointed him, but these disappointments consolidated his loyalty. He was no fair-weather man. Cuthbert aroused his devotion because he was his employer and a model landlord. Inevitably these undeniable facts also irritated him. Lisa he adored because she was Lisa, but he distrusted her for having married a Pole. This foreign touch made her talk to Mr. Rollit as if he were an entity—a disconcerting form of approach which embarrassed him. Half-flattered and half-frightened he would dodge her easy unconscious assumption that they were both individuals. This demand on a readjustment of his point of view terrified and intoxicated him. "A *very* charming woman," he would say, feeling that by underlining the *very* he had escaped

some danger. But he remained worried. She would talk to him about his private life just as if he had a private life, instead of dull, irritating domestic worries. It made him feel as if he *ought* to have a private life—a private life quite unconnected with new remedies and dismissed (or, rather, dismissing) servants. She would sit huddled over the fire, choked by her furs (he was a great believer in draughts), asking him what he thought, and after a few fumbling beginnings he would know exactly what he thought about a number of things of which he had never thought before. More intelligent people than Mr. Rollit have known these disconcerting certainties.

To-day was just like any other day. Lisa warming her hands—her fluttering hands, transparent as X-ray photographs, veins tracing patterns as delicate as the patterns of leaves. Cuthbert standing squarely with his back to the fire (men always turn their backs to a fire), rooted as much in the carpet as he would have been in the soil. Mr. Rollit a little more forward on his chair, slightly nearer the edge than if he had been at home, as if his body were subconsciously prepared for social emergencies.

“Gloom-mongering, that is what I call it,” Cuthbert was saying. A man of few phrases, his definition of the world crisis gave him continuous and oft-

repeated pleasure. He may have forgotten nothing and learnt nothing, but what he had remembered was entirely beneficial, and what he might have found out could only have been disintegrating. The rhythm of the world has changed, but there is too much self-syncopation. The folly of our century lies in its determination to foist ideas on to those who are happier and infinitely more useful without them. Flowers are the most perfect result yet achieved by a combination between God and man—an everyday God and an everyday man—for gardeners consider climates and soils. But our thinkers and our economists, our preachers and our prophets let loose their theories with foolhardy light-heartedness, experimental flying without so much as a weather report.

Cuthbert was what a real Conservative would like a Conservative to be. He was a gentleman, he was rich, he was conscientious; he was generous without knowing it, he was unselfish without suspecting it. He had those admirable limitations which breed concentration. Where facts were concerned he was an opportunist (the word would have surprised him). In practice he was particularly quick at re-organising and discarding the obsolete. He was a romantic and he was a bore. For his own salvation he had his beloved East. Mystics can yield us nothing but a hungry longing for some tiny whiff of their

ecstasy. Cuthbert gave not only no clue but no sense of there being anything to find out.

Luncheon was very much like itself. Some vintage Burgundy had just arrived. Mr. Rollit, who knew nothing about Burgundy, tried to sip knowingly, feeling rightly that the angle of his head would provide a less compromising degree of appreciation than an audible comment. If only Cuthbert would express his own opinion before asking for Mr. Rollit's! After that it would be much easier to tell just how good the Burgundy was. A little historical discussion inaugurated by Lisa saved the situation. Was it conceivable that Napoleon only drank Chambertin?

It having duly been pronounced inconceivable, Cuthbert began to describe his morning—the bath-rooms in the new cottages, the steady flow of enlightened Musgrave beneficence with which the Almighty—most rightly—had allowed no world crisis to interfere.

"I don't often go out of my way to tell a man what I think of him," Cuthbert was saying before explaining what a long way he had gone out of his way to tell Sir Theodore Pratt exactly what he thought of him.

"But, darling, you don't *need* to tell Sir Theodore what you think of him. He knows it."

"That may be." Cuthbert, who had made a scene,

disliked the suggestion that it was unnecessary. "I said to him: 'In these bad times it is monstrous to cut down expenses; it is unpatriotic to get rid of a single man.' When we were rich our greenhouses were perhaps toys and luxuries, but I regard them now as public duties."

To do him justice he was thinking neither of fruit nor of flowers; he was thinking of the gardeners.

"Conservatories, the last stronghold of conservatism," Lisa murmured.

"A nouveau riche like Pratt," Cuthbert was still fuming, "dismissing people wholesale."

"Perhaps he is a nouveau pauvre."

"Don't be absurd, Lisa." Cuthbert, though he didn't acknowledge it to himself, considered that only a gentleman was entitled to be "nouveau pauvre."

"The rich do lose money, you know." Lisa was feeling contrary. "And if it matters as much to them as it matters to Sir Theodore it must be quite dreadful. No daffodils" (she looked at the table), "no Confucius, nothing to make up for it with."

"The fact remains that he is cutting down expenditure right and left."

Both Cuthbert and Mr. Rollit were comforted by "facts that remained". To Lisa they had a habit of changing their position—she rarely found them in the same place two days running.

"Facts are so jumpy," she had said to Sarah. And Sarah had answered: "That is why you married Cuthbert."

Anchors! How sloppily people think! There is nothing permanent about an anchor. To be at anchor is a respite, a lull, an interregnum, the necessary interruption of a voyage. Peace envelops you and some unknown security, but the key essence of this peace lies in the knowledge that to-morrow you sail.

"I have known land-owners abroad who boasted of never having visited all of their estates, but then in the eighteenth century in England when bishoprics were given to younger sons many a diocese was never visited by its incumbent."

"We none of us have a clean slate," murmured Mr. Rollit, wishing to console Lisa for her Polish past (what she must have seen!).

"We are living in the twentieth century," Cuthbert said, "but there have been other centuries. . . ." His voice trailed off, he was receding into his sanctuary. Lisa recognised with irritation this sudden withdrawal of himself.

"I sometimes think that the world moves forward very little. Consider the Greeks. Not that I am denying what even a Christian might call the miracles of science." Mr. Rollit laughed timidly at his audacious use of the word "miracle".

Lisa thought: "Why should Cuthbert keep me out of what really matters to him?" And then, because after all she was an intelligent woman, "It would cease to be the real thing if I were mixed up in it." And then, more humbly, "I couldn't share it even if he were prepared to let me."

"I beg your pardon." Cuthbert had duly recovered consciousness of his surroundings. He didn't know whether he was interrupting silence or speech, but he welcomed the port in front of him which he could push in the direction of Mr. Rollit—an explanation of his interjection.

"What are our plans for the afternoon?"

"You, my darling, will sit in front of the fire and read a nice novel with a yellow paper cover."

Cuthbert thought that all feminine women, especially if they spoke French—and, without an exaggerated belief in female erudition, he did think that women should be able to speak French—Cuthbert thought that all feminine women read "risqués" novels in paper covers, pale yellow, pale green, pale orange. He never regarded a novel as a book or a woman as a reader.

"I am coming with you," Lisa said impatiently.

"We are walking to the home farm."

"Why shouldn't I walk to the home farm?"

"There and back?" Cuthbert seemed doubtful.

"Though, of course, the carriage could fetch you."

"I don't want the carriage," Lisa snapped. Why could they never treat her as if she were one of themselves, but always wrap her up in some artificial standard of consideration?

"Ever undaunted," Mr. Rollit mumbled, hoping that he had said something gallant.

Lisa, who loathed walking, splashed through the mud and milk, each stride a challenge to what her normal step would have been. She was cross and spilt on to the roads a fury of which they remained unconscious.

"Quite the countrywoman," Mr. Rollit said, cutting between them the communications that embarrassed and enchanted him.

Mrs. Rich, of the home farm, was very large and very motherly. Her face itself might have come out of an oven, hot and baked and breathing, the generosity of a superabundant vitality and a daily contribution to material needs. Animals were fed-up and farm hands over-fed. Mrs. Rich never grudged anything to anyone. Her beggars were her guests, which meant that to her they were neither beggars nor guests, but vagabonds needing "a good meal." Possibly, she believed more in the "good meal" than in its recipient; she was right.

Lisa impressed Cuthbert's tenants because of an inherent courtesy which they sniffed as undemocratic—always a recommendation. Her manner was

dilatory and her smile was the slow smile of people whose smiles have been created by those to whom they are talking and not the smiles that be waiting for you in ambush. But for all that she was a foreigner and had to be loved, as one loves a lost dog. Mrs. Rich considered her undernourished.

"Cream," she would say, "cream is what her ladyship needs," and each time Lisa came to the farm she was taken straight to the dairy, to that half-mourning which alone represents "cool". Carefully-skimmed golden cream would leave blue milk behind it and in the tiled dusk Lisa wondered whether peace is docile or weak enough to be captured by a dairy of a convent. Are not drawn blinds a subterfuge? Are we entitled to regret the heat of day? Is it not too easy? 'The protestants automatically discard so many things, giving maybe too grand a reputation to the senses—are they a matter of barren rejection or carnal indulgence?—the alternatives of the spiritually frightened and the spiritually lazy, beauty discarded or resistance unachieved, in either case life ill lost.

"If your ladyship would honour us by accepting some nice new-laid eggs . . ."

Lisa longed to go in search of eggs—the ecstasy of finding them warm. She remembered as a child that glorious voyage of discovery—the white ones

had usually been bigger than the brown ones—but she had always liked the brown ones best. Once she had found an egg in the hood of a victoria.

She felt suddenly very young. "I once found an egg in the hood of the victoria," she confided to Mrs. Rich.

"Well now, you never know where they'll lay."

She felt suddenly very old. If she asked Mrs. Rich to let her look for eggs Mrs. Rich would think her a nice lady, but a wee bit . . . Lisa spent her life trying not to look "a wee bit", because she was more or less a foreigner.

"More," she said to herself a little desolately. How tiresome to know that if one was perfectly natural it would look a little unnatural. It hadn't been like that in Poland, because life had been in fancy-dress, she herself knowing every gesture as you might know the steps of a mazurka, her courtesy assured, her reality established by a recognised difference, whereas here in England she always felt diffident, tentatively seeking some half-remembered and half-forgotten path.

"Here we are," Cuthbert said, emerging with Mr. Rich and Mr. Rollit.

(If I said: "I love you to say that," it would sound rather silly, Lisa thought—rightly.)

"Rich tells me——"

Lisa's mind wandered, jerked back to attention by

a full stop in the conversation. "I wanted to ask Mr. Rich to show me the new calf."

Mr. Rich, to whom most calves were calves, was a gallant man, always glad to humour the ladies. To-day, however, he was also proud of this particular calf for reasons which were perfectly clear to Cuthbert and Mr. Rollit. Lisa was naturally excluded from their freemasonry of knowledge tinged with self-congratulation. Abdul the fourth had disappointed no one. As yet unaccustomed to any of his legs he peered out at the world from perilous heights.

"He looks as if he were on stilts," Lisa said—but fortunately no one listened.

Mrs. Rich emerged with a small tortoiseshell kitten. Her ladyship had said . . .

Lisa went away huddling her kitten between her neck and her furs. It purred her into complete peace.

"We must look in on Mrs. Rollit on our way home," she said to Cuthbert, "or will that be a bore for her?" to Mr. Rollit.

"My wife will be honoured."

She wished Mr. Rollit would not talk like that, but it couldn't be helped and what a silly thing to wish. After all, if Mr. Rollit were not Mr. Rollit, she would not be so fond of him. Nevertheless, she knew that she would soon be feeling Mrs. Rollit a

heavy price to pay for the pleasure the kitten was giving her.

The Rollits' drawing-room was relentlessly bright—large bow windows, "gay" chintzes, twinkling silver vases, no place anywhere for a shadow.

"Mrs. Rollit wouldn't need a housemaid," Lisa said to Cuthbert; "dust would disappear at the sight of her."

"Dust would be out of place," Cuthbert had answered. ("Cuthbert understands *everything*," Lisa told herself. She always made the same generalisation each time Cuthbert understood anything.)

"Now isn't this nice of you!" Mrs. Rollit was propped up at an angle where she could command both sympathy and service. "I always say to Herbert that the advantage of being delicate is that the mountain comes to Mahomet."

Mr. Rollit, to whom the remark was all too familiar, felt that it was out of place.

Lisa murmured: "The mountain always comes to Mahomet—if he is Mahomet—or might, which is the same thing." She stopped, seeing Cuthbert's eyes fixed upon her as if he were seeing something he had never seen before.

"I am most broad-minded," Mrs. Rollit was saying, "I just can't help it. It comes naturally to me—I am built that way—Herbert is different, which is just as it should be."

Lisa agreed (silently): "It was just as it should be," though what comfort Mrs. Rollit could find in this fortunate fact she could not imagine.

"Rollit may have his faults as an agent" (Cuthbert, feeling the necessity of saying something, became facetious), "but we all know that he is a perfect husband."

"That's all you know," said Mrs. Rollit archly, but she was clearly offended.

Lisa felt that in the circumstances it was difficult to create for Mr. Rollit the reputation of a gay dog—even in order to placate his wife.

"We must be going," she said. "It was nice to see you looking so well."

"It was nice of you to come, Lady Musgrave. I am not a Christian Scientist—I always say to Herbert, 'What is silly enough for other people isn't silly enough for me'—I seem to have got it wrong, but you know what I mean. Anyway, if you're bright it's half the battle."

"Good God, what a woman."

"I dare say she suits Rollit."

"Nonsense. Why should she suit poor Mr. Rollit because you are too lazy to think that she doesn't?"

He laughed. "I'll think just what you like."

She put her arm through his: "I'm sorry."

"Sorry that Rollit loves or does not love his wife?"

"Sorry that I was cross."

"My sweet; it always makes you cross to see Mrs. Rollit. What virtuous impulse took you there to-day?"

"My kitten."

"May I see your kitten?"

She disentangled it from her dress, its claws outstretched, yet asleep.

"It is dreaming that it's purring," she said.

Sarah dined—Lisa was happy playing with her kitten.

"We have no contagious gaiety," she said, "nothing absolute. like a purr or the wag of a tail."

"I have heard of smiles and whispers," Sarah remarked sardonically.

"So have I. But they are insidious, not absolute. Enticements—half-hopes, half-doubts—beckoning to life. A purr is happiness rumbling in its sleep."

"I don't like cats."

"Don't be tiresome, Sarah. In a moment you will say, 'I never know where I am with them'."

"Well, I don't know where I am with them."

"Why want to?"

Cuthbert came in: "I apologise for being late, my dear." He kissed his sister. "And what is your news?"

"I give you a guess and a half."

"The half is Lady Westerley's committee meeting," Lisa interposed.

"That is not a guess—that is your guilty conscience speaking."

"I have a beautiful conscience—I went to see Mrs. Rollit."

"Good God."

"Why not 'good Lisa'?"

"It is lamentable that we should always connect the Almighty with Mrs. Rollit, but surely you don't want to take His place in that connection?"

"On the contrary, I should like it very much. I should become a swear word and I should be used so often."

Cuthbert was looking at her. She was dressed in white, the incarnation of every light that darkness could put at her disposal—at this moment amber at the behest of some peremptory lamp.

"My dear," Cuthbert said, "you will always be an oath and never a blasphemy."

Lisa and Sarah were both startled.

Lisa went up to Cuthbert and touched his elbow. "Pray God," she said—meaning exactly that.

They went in to dinner.

"Do you suppose that Mrs. Rollit was pretty?"

"Really, Lisa!"

"Don't be tiresome, Sarah. One must suppose something."

"I find it simplest to believe in miracles."

"Sarah, you have got the most delicious smile in the world."

"I am sorry you regard that as a miracle."

"Why not an everyday miracle? Of course you couldn't be canonised, you would spoil the rate of exchange."

Cuthbert had not been listening. The intimacy that existed between his wife and his sister surprised him—when he thought about it, which was not often. He was too conscientious a man to accept a convenience simply because it was convenient. On the other hand he didn't go out of his way to be puzzled.

"What are you two gossiping about?" he asked.

"Miracles."

"When you told Mrs. Rollit that the mountain would always come to Mahomet if he was Mahomet, what exactly did you mean?"

"Just what I said."

"Faith——" Sarah began, but Cuthbert wasn't listening.

"The myths common to each religion always reinforce each other religion—in fact, they are the bulwarks of religion, a changeless continuity feeding each so-called faith—feeding and fed by giving to and receiving from some historical network spread upon the spirit——" He stopped abruptly. To think out

loud! How indelicate. How impertinent towards himself.

"Forgive me." He turned to Lisa. "I am getting long-winded in my old age. Will you excuse me if I take Sarah away for a moment? I have one or two business matters to discuss with her."

Lisa returned to her kitten. He arched his back, drowsy and half-awake.

"I love you," she said, "don't let me turn you into a symbol. Don't let me use you to be angry with. You have four paws, two eyes, two ears, a tail and a rough pink tongue. You are a kitten. You are not. 'Lisa is quite happy playing with her kitten.'"

That, she reflected, is what is the matter with all our relationships—as it is also the essence of them. A man is a man I love, a man who loves me, a man who desires me, a man I resist, he represents my unselfishness, my vanity, my virtue, delegates of my feelings, acting parts we both knew by heart in our mothers' wombs. And here am I cross with Mahommed because Cuthbert and Sarah are "sparing" me details which they think quite rightly would bore me. I *hate* being spared. "Did you know that you were called Mahommed?" she asked the kitten, who blinked at her, indicating that he had known it before she had.

CHAPTER III

"**M**AMACHEN writes that she is thinking of coming to England. And when Mamachen says 'thinking'——"

"Well, my dear, you must write and say how glad we are and that she must regard Barnaby as her home."

"That is very sweet of you," Lisa murmured, wearily ironical.

"Not at all. Besides, I am very fond of the Countess."

This was true. They had always got on admirably. The Countess delighted that Cuthbert should be so like an Englishman and Cuthbert delighted that the Countess should be so like a foreigner. There was nothing wanting on either side.

How delightfully simple, Lisa thought acidly, knowing a little more about Cuthbert and a little more about "Mamachen" than either knew of the other. The destructive force of knowledge! How few possess the structure to support it.

History, geography, science, arrange them in vases! Disperse them from unacknowledged fear, divide them in hope of victory. Yours the battle, but not yours the war.

In love, too, fulfilment belongs to the many and to the few. Between them lie those to whom the brink must always mean more than anything which could come after. Our imagination does not only create—she murders. She is ruthless and she is immune. Were there to be a trial she could say, "Look at my children!" Who could call so many witnesses? Let the corpses smile—she has grudged them nothing—not even a smile.

Mamachen would stay first with Lady Alberta Mann—"my old friend whose husband was Ambassador in St. Petersburg. We were girls together when her father was Minister in Saxony," etc., etc.

"Sir Frederick," Cuthbert said, "was exceedingly gifted. I believe that he spoke eleven languages—but he was never quite like an Englishman, which is always, I think, a mistake abroad."

"And at home?"

"At home it doesn't matter."

"Why not?"

"Because one knows where one is."

"And Dizzy?"

"That," Cuthbert was tranquil, not triumphant, "is just my point."

Lady Alberta and the Countess had always disliked one another—but they had now disliked one another for so many years that the patina of time

had given to their hostility a patina of intimacy. And were they not contemporaries?—girls of eighteen and ladies of seventy, sharing their youth and their age, peacefully dispensed from the necessity of explaining. Mamachen could remember some small (it had seemed immense at the time) triumph at a ball which Alberta might pretend to have forgotten—but it could only be pretence. There are some things that no one can forget. Marriage, childbirth, resistance, surrender, passion envisaged, duty triumphant—these are life's itinerary, the route of living. But life itself flashes into being in tiny moments most often forgotten, but when remembered, cherished and preserved, removing the possibility of time, alive and changeless.

"Lady Alberta is a tiresome old woman," Cuthbert said.

"Yes, but she makes Mamachen feel young."

"The Countess is young."

"Yes, but Lady Alberta makes her young in fact."

How funny it is; Lisa thought, the things that Cuthbert understands and the things that I understand.

"You had better put the Countess in a room on the ground floor. She is much too old for the stairs. And we will sit in the library after dinner. The blue room, I think. You can put her maid in the dressing-room. She will then not have to ring. I know, my

darling, that you can be trusted with the flowers."

The flowers! Lisa spent hours gardening, hours arranging flowers. But this flower standard, this kitten standard!

"Cuthbert."

"Darling."

That perfect inattention: a term of endearment!

"Cuthbert."

"Yes, my sweet?"

"What will you do if one fine day I wake up a feminist?"

"I will tell you to go to sleep again."

"Tell?"

"Ask—but you said that you would have become a feminist."

"But then——"

She was dappled by the sunshine, a basket over one arm, her gardening scissors in her other hand.

He wanted to kiss her. What was there about her that tied him up whenever he wanted to touch her?

She went up to him and touched his arm.

"Tell?" she said.

"Tell?" He had forgotten.

"Not ask."

He took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Shall I tell you a story? Once upon a time there was one Confucius and one kitten."

"One Confucius and one kitten?"

"Yes. At that moment they were separate. They may not even have heard of one another."

"And then?"

"Then a miracle happened and they became Lisa."

"Lisa?"

"Or Cuthbert—it didn't in the least matter which."

Her head was on his shoulder. "And then? Or is that the end of the story?"

"No. The end of the story is that you and I and Confucius and the kitten decided to leave Mahommed and a mountain to Mrs. Rollit."

"But the kitten is called Mahommed."

"That was my mistake. Will you forgive me?"

He kissed her.

CHAPTER IV

HOW difficult to grow old! Difficult because you cannot see it as growth, but only as decay. If you were convinced that you were gaining in beauty, in wisdom, in stature, could you not accept these spreading branches? Forget the bluebells and the primroses—those transient carpets—remember the trees?

When does to-morrow turn to yesterday, our memories brighten and our hopes grow dim?

When does to-day become our escape both from the past and from the future?

How curious that women should not consider the beauty of age—those sunken eyes, those defined outlines of bone bound in vellum, yet still able to blush? How many women not even seeking passion seek youth. Why? Youth is freshness and ignorance, values intact and untried, tiny lapses, all-important. But the essence of youth is to be young. In our time the young reject their youth, just as the old reject their age. The freshness of youth bedraggled by sophistication, the dignity of age splintered into sprightliness!

Mamachen had grown old in her own way. She had become lighter and heavier, more brittle not more serene. Her eyes, set in a mockery of wrinkles, were as brilliantly black as her pouf of hair was brilliantly white. She gave you an effect of onyxes and diamonds. There were no half-tones. Was it possible that she had gone through life with never a blur of tenderness to dim and soften her metallic brilliance? Was immunity the secret of her intactness?

"Mamachen," said Lisa the romantic, "always had so many people watching her humiliations. It made it difficult for her simply to be unhappy. Her life has been all sheaths and swords.

"What did I do with my humiliations? I was proud because it is the line of least resistance. But I was never hard, perhaps, because I did not want to be like Mamachen. Her pride was a battle and mine was a surrender. Only mine was a pre-surrender—which is after all a form of cheating. I lay in ambush with my generosity—I see it now—I wonder what would have happened if I had seen it then? When Stanislas came back to me he found me in the same place—I didn't know how to move. He needed a scene—something to start the machinery. Always he wanted me, but he wanted my resistance as well, and he was right, my lack of resistance was a lack of love. It was not surrender; it was resignation."

"That isn't life, that is your own personality," Sarah observed.

"Probably. It is curious those fighting temperaments who fight shy of the nakedness of surrender. They are frightened above all things of being stripped of their identity."

"But did the Countess have no lover?"

"No. Just lovers, I think."

"She had children."

"Yes, she had children."

The tone of Lisa's voice closed the door on that topic.

Sarah felt suddenly embarrassed. As they were going out of the door she touched Lisa's elbow.

"I am sorry," she said.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that," Lisa murmured, without specifying what "that" was.

The Countess arrived and was delighted by everything. The garden—the Countess was right in being delighted by the garden. She examined her room. The writing-table, with its layers of writing-paper, five or six pencils, alternative pens.

"Tiens," she murmured, reluctantly impressed. At home she had to ring for a footman in order to find a pen. There were, of course, more footmen, though fewer pens.

A square glass box of biscuits beside her bed caught her attention, accompanied by a vase of lilies of the valley, Mr. Peter Fleming's *Brazilian Adventure* and the *Essays of Elia*.

"Tiens," said Mamachen, completely re-established.

Lisa wondered whether she should have put *The Waves* and an Edgar Wallace. No doubt nothing is best, except an anthology in the bathroom.

"Your bell is under your pillow."

"Everything is perfect."

The Chinese wallpaper, the furniture indolently resting in accustomed surroundings.

Cuthbert had asked a few neighbours to dine.

Who does not enjoy other people's neighbours? Mamachen examined the guests. The women with the righteous languor that succeeds exercise and has so little in common with inviting languor. An acceptance of well-earned fatigue. Stretched limbs, bodies dissociated from their clothes, pegs on which they had been hung, not forms on which they had been moulded. Lovely complexions flicked by the wind into "heightened colour" unkindly emphasised by encroaching veins. And always that perfect ease. That *disregarding* ease that only the Russians and the English possess.

"I love the English," said the Countess unexpectedly. (She herself was amazed.)

"I beg your pardon." A strange gentleman was offering her a glass of sherry. He was flustered by so unexpected an attack.

There isn't a Frenchman in the world, the Countess reflected, who would not consider "Moi, ami de la France" or "Moi, qui aime la France" quite a natural expression, but to this stupid Englishman if I say I love the English, it is just as impertinent as it would be to an intelligent Englishman.

"I love the English," repeated the Countess, her lapse into sentiment retrieved by a frontal attack on his embarrassment. Her eyes were sparkling. At seventy-two what fun to make a man blush!

"My 'Open Sesame'," she chuckled. "In future I shall always know what to say. 'I love the English'."

"Is it your first visit to England?"

The strange gentleman (unintroduced) was struggling to keep up this unaccustomed conversation.

"But no, of course not."

He pulled himself together.

"May it not be your last." He lifted his glass.

"Amen," she said, hoping it was not irreverent. They went in to dinner.

Lisa heard Mamachen say: "I used to hunt with the Quorn."

"Did you indeed," this acceptance was an undeni-

able compliment, "that would have been when Wally was Master."

The evening was a great success.

"I've bought a book about your country," the Colonel said.

The Countess smiled, a smile which she hoped combined conviction, surprise and delight.

"Unsettlement in Eastern Europe." The Colonel pounced on the title a little triumphantly, as if he had successfully killed a wasp. "I expect you know it."

The Countess, her desire to please undimmed, wondered whether to say "Yes" or "No" or "I have heard a lot about it"—she always considered this last evasion a little puerile, but her instinct told her that the Colonel had not reached the end of his subject.

"I have bought it and I mean to read it"—a strong man, not to be beaten by a mere book.

The Countess was enjoying herself thoroughly. Everything was right. But she wondered a little about Lisa. Lisa with her desperate desire to be submerged in life. Lisa, to whom a half-dry bathing-dress would seem a denial of the water or of the sun.

And always, because God had made her in His infinite irony a peculiarly intelligent woman, the tick of her intelligence as relentless as a conscience.

"I am not a Pole, I am a Russian," the Countess heard herself saying.

A Russian! A hush underlay a rapid recapture of conversation. The Russians who had or had not passed through England, the steam-roller that had failed, corrupt politicians, magnificent fighters, a bootless hungry army, drunken Grand Dukes, the Bolsheviks, the great ladies, vendeuses, the generals, taxi-drivers, Siberia, prisons, torture—always the second breath of heroism that distinguished the Slavs.

"They fought damned well," said the Colonel, biting his nails because he was embarrassed. It was enough, but he would have liked it to sound a little more.

"You can tell us, Countess," Lady Park was a great reader, "how much Tolstoy has been responsible for everything that has followed."

"Everything is a lot," countered the Countess, rightly proud of her English.

"I always like to think of the Russians," Lady Park continued. "They are so artistic and so delightfully haphazard. Entrancing, unhelpable people."

The Countess's eyes blazed.

"Just the reverse of the Americans, I always think."

"The standardisation common to the United States and Communist Russia," began Guthbert.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of Bolsheviks. I am sure they are most un-Russian."

For a moment the Countess—fiercely Russian—shut her ears to these unspoken platitudes that occasionally hit—as platitudes will—a nail on the head. Slavs and music, metaphorical fields for imbeciles.

She considered the question.

The Russians, playing with fate on equal terms. An enjoyable game with dirty cards in a railway carriage. A lot of smoke, vodka, despair raising the stakes and adding to the enjoyment. And fate pleased by the intimacy of the association, occasionally cheating on behalf of his opponent.

The Countess felt herself becoming sentimental. She was *smelling* her childhood.

Lisa got up.

There was bridge and desultory conversation. The guests left early.

"When," asked Mamachen, "was Wally Master of the Quorn?"

"Oh, I don't know. Long before my day."

Cuthbert was pouring out a whisky and soda.

"I didn't know you hunted."

"I always hunt in hunting countries."

The door was wide open for a gallantry.

Cuthbert said: "Do you know the Cottesmore country . . ."

"Alas! No——"

The Quorn had worked so beautifully during dinner. She had been proud to bring out this curious word from the recesses of her memory. The other thing that Cuthbert had said had bewildered her.

After all, the Countess had never hunted.

"Cott-es-more," the Countess repeated to herself in her bedroom. "These words have to be said out loud." She repeated it to herself—a dutiful child with her Berlitz lesson.

"Bianca," she said to her maid, "to-morrow we will also hunt with the Cott-es-more."

CHAPTER V

MAMACHEN belonged to a class and a generation which were lazy, but never idle. You spoke Italian, you played the harp, you dabbled in philosophy, you rode and you shot, maybe you got drunk on large political ideas. You knew that nothing really mattered and that everything mattered intensely—these two truths working concurrently. Activity, inactivity, illusion, disillusion, each owes to the other a debt more easily recognised by Slavs than by Latins or Anglo-Saxons. Perhaps not even a debt, a realisation that contradiction accords belligerent rights to ill-equipped certainties.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century many roads led to Siberia. Letters of flame flickered on the signposts providing waiting disks for transient lights. The Countess disliked and distrusted exaltation—"I had not so much *soul*," she would say, giving, since it was no possession of hers, a derogatory sense to the word. "I stayed at home. My mother was a saint. Always she was healing the sick with herbs and Ikons. I studied medicine—it was more useful than being a Liberal and just as disreputable from the family point of view, so my

conscience was clear. I came with my remedies. When they cured it was the will of God, and when failed the devil was behind these new-fangled notions. My mother's Ikons were infallible. If a peasant survived it was due to God's infinite blessing, and if he died, God in His infinite love had taken a miserable sinner to Him. "Religion," Mamachen was a firm agnostic, "always cheats: also it wins much oftener than one thinks. The police are on the side of the card-sharper, but the clear-sighted are so silly, because they see only cheating and connivance or rather endowment. There is more to it than that."

"Your mother's cures were——"

"Much more successful than mine. I thought I had made that evident."

"My mother," the Countess added, half-soft and half-sardonic, "was one of the most beautiful women I have ever known. She never knew about it. She was blind to her own image: she saw nothing in her looking-glass, nothing in the eyes of men. What a rival her inner beauty might have had—— A pity. I," Mamachen added with a spark of satisfaction, "was never good-looking. 'Strictly good looking' is, I believe, the most polite way of putting it."

"Mamachen," Lisa said to Sarah, "was heroic luring the cholera epidemic."

"She would be. She is all of a piece."

"You say that as if it were a criticism. Do you mean a blemish would improve the material?"

"A weakness perhaps. The Countess lives by strength alone. Perhaps that is her weakness."

Lisa regarded her neighbours, with the exception of a few friends, as people you met at hunt balls and flower-shows, at bazaars and garden-parties, with here and there a charity entertainment thrown in. Her mother-in-law, however, was accustomed to paying and receiving calls. This custom she believed to be universal, nor was she prepared to forgo it. With a determination camouflaged in unconsciousness, she would appear suitably dressed for the occasion upon which she had decided. Lisa's sinking heart realised by Mamachen's hat or parasol what direction their afternoon drive was to take. Her plans were deeply and firmly laid. A visit to a cathedral would be followed by tea with the bishop, a visit to a church by tea at the vicarage, a visit to a garden by tea at the house.

"I fear we are indiscreet," the Countess would say graciously, "but a little of the blame must go to your beautiful flowers (or cathedral or church) and the rest to your charming hospitality."

"I always think," she would say, driving home, "that it is so rude to let people feel qu'ils n'y sont pour rien when you are visiting objects more

interesting than themselves."

"If we start a little earlier," Lisa suggested one day, "we will be back for tea."

"But why, my dear? Though your tea is delicious, I always think a little variety such an excellent thing."

"Ah, Countess"—Mr. Rollit, who was lunching, had been resisting for some time a nervous desire to address the Countess directly—"you believe that the pleasures of home are, so to speak, brought home to us" (Mr. Rollit coughed slightly—it was his first *jeu de mots*) "by an excursion into the unknown."

"In my experience," grunted the Countess, "excursions into the unknown rarely bring people home. Nor," she added, "have I often noticed, as my nurse used to say, 'that it is too cold to snow'. What silly things we are told."

Mr. Rollit consoled himself with the reflection that the Countess was a great lady of a bygone age. "Not altogether like an *English* lady," he explained to his wife, "but then that was hardly to be expected."

Mamachen got on admirably with Cuthbert. Though she was seventy he made her feel delightfully feminine and though she was seventy she made him agreeably, albeit unconsciously, aware of his manliness.

Sex is not only a faint disturbance, chaotic tumult, the shy peremptory tuggings of a half-awakened glory, longing frustrated, passion realised. Sex is a conditioning of personality. Shorn of its functions it may still retain its graces, bringing some interlocking warmth where once a hungry fever burnt separation into love.

Because Cuthbert was a man the Countess's eyes held the automatic sparkle of outlived invitations.

Because the Countess was a woman Cuthbert unconsciously accorded her a standard of fragility, perhaps not even a standard of fragility—fragility.

In their altogether satisfactory relations he put her down and picked her up as if she were breakable.

"Mamachen is so admirably tough," Lisa said, consciously disagreeable.

"Tough?" Cuthbert accepted only the challenge of the adjective. "Resilient, I would say."

"Think of it, she has had children."

"Is there anything unusual about that?"

Lisa shut her eyes and opened them again. It is difficult to bear the pressure of vision, the vision which beats upon closed eyes.

"Nothing in the least unusual," she said in a fluent agreeable tone.

Something in the flatness of her voice caught his attention.

"My sweet," he said, as he kissed her—kissed her with the almost furtive delicacy with which the chivalrous seek to safeguard the legitimate against all possibility of claim.

Where without a grievance can you create a loophole? And how many of us, seeing a loophole, shut our eyes, praying that some day it may be blocked? Is there such a thing as escape? The past, all-powerful, tugs our adventure into an empty future and when the past lets go we are for ever lost.

Living with Mamachen was like living in one room—a big room perhaps, but a room where one knew the place of the doors, the creak of the parquet, the views out of the windows. How rarely we look out of windows. They are as closed as tired eyelids.

Mamachen danced on the springs of Lisa's vitality. "There isn't a mattress," Lisa said to Sarah, "which would not give way."

"Well," said Sarah sardonically, "age will have its way."

Cuthbert was delighted by the Countess. She made him feel young—not *too* young—and clever—not ridiculously clever. The profound was his own business. Curiously enough there—as elsewhere—he was right.

"When I see the Countess with Sir Cuthbert," Mr. Rollit said, "I feel inclined to say 'more like mother

and son'. Indeed, I did venture to say it to the Countess. She replied, 'Much more'. Of course, her English, though remarkable, is not very accurate."

"Everyone has children," said Lisa to Sarah.
"Mamachen has Cuthbert. . . ."

"*You* might have Cuthbert," Sarah suggested.

"Not without another child."

"Can no woman have her husband as a child without another child?"

"Not if she wants children."

Sarah understood something that she had not understood before. She therefore felt compelled to say something.

"If one believed in Communism," Lisa was saying, "or something silly which puts you out of range of your own intelligence, if you can stop up the gaps in your faith with doctrine. . . ."

"I," said Sarah, "have never been able to feel comfortable with the comforted. Nor can I see why the surrender of your intellect should please any religion. All religions see compliments where I see insults. Perhaps they gain more that way——"

There was a pause.

Then Lisa looked up with a smile which really was a smile. A smile given over—absolutely—to one person.

"There is always you," she said to Sarah.

Sarah thought: "You are foolish to like to be understood. I suppose it is a relaxation if it comes from a woman. If it comes from a man it must be exceedingly tiresome—in fact, an impertinence."

"Cuthbert must be like his father," Lisa was thinking out loud.

"Why?"

"I never think of him as being like a mother."

"Mother was very pretty and very gay. As virtuous as she was sprightly. Victorian to a veil and a glance."

"I see you didn't love her."

"No, I didn't love her. She thought—rightly—her two children clumsy. With Cuthbert it was manly and with me it was unwomanly. She was perfectly right. She would say to him, 'But, darling, do be more careful,' and to me, 'Couldn't you *try* to be less ungainly?' Mother represented coffee cups and saucers and the possibilities of upsetting things."

"Nothing else?"

"A vague feeling of injustice. I didn't dislike Cuthbert. I wasn't jealous of him. He annoyed me as a prepared plan of unfairness."

"And your father?"

"Father walked into a room and walked out of a room. He sat down on a chair, he lit a pipe or a cigar, he rang a bell, he gave an order, he occasionally asked a question, more rarely—since they were

rarely addressed to him—he answered one. He talked to his gardener, his groom, and his keeper. He was a first-rate horticulturist and an excellent shot. He never looked at a woman, not even at his wife, with whom he slept with the regularity of a man accustomed to a life of habit. He was a remarkable man. All the more remarkable because he kept the remarkable side to himself. His book on *Early English Monasteries and their influence on the lay population* is, I believe, a classic. He never mentioned it to my mother, but she read of it in his obituary notices.”

Lisa was feeling cold and increasingly bleak. She was angry with Sarah.

“Cuthbert,” she said, resolutely attacking her own certainty, “is not a bit like that.”

“No,” said Sarah, “Cuthbert isn’t like that.”

“What a pity,” she thought, “that he doesn’t point it out to her. If I pointed it out to her it would sound both impertinent and unconvincing. It was silly of me to talk about father.”

That night Lisa asked Cuthbert what his father had been like.

“Well, you know the portrait in the billiard-room——”

“Yes, but I mean out of the billiard-room.”

“Well, he was a first-rate shot, an excellent rider

and a remarkable gardener. He wrote a book about English monasteries, which you will find in the library if you care to look for it. But I am afraid you will find it rather slow reading."

"Were you fond of him?"

"Well, my love, it never occurred to me."

"But did he never talk to you?"

"Once, before I went to school."

"Your mother must have been lovely." He is going to say that her portrait is in the drawing-room, Lisa thought irritably (*why* am I getting so irritable?), but he merely said, "She was generally considered so."

"Cuthbert, are you sorry you married me?"

He looked at her in genuine astonishment. ("He has never considered the question," she reflected acidly.)

"For an intelligent woman," he said, "you ask a number of very silly questions."

He kissed the top of her head.

"Here is a man," she thought, "with whom I live and who believes he loves me, and yet he has never yielded an inch of himself to me except his passion. Or is there some withholding in myself of which I know nothing?"

"Take me in your arms," she said, wanting to be sure of something.

He took her in his arms and held her very gently,

and very firmly kissing her with the reverent adoration which he felt, a kiss so tender that it was hardly a kiss. His precious fragile Lisa, who must never be crumpled or taken advantage of.

"How silly I am," she thought, "to let my nerves be irritated by everything that my heart loves in Cuthbert."

"Do you know that I love you?" she asked.

"You married me."

"Did I? I thought you married me."

"My darling, I didn't mean it like that. I meant that you wouldn't have entrusted your whole precious self to someone you didn't love."

"How like Cuthbert to say 'entrusted'," she thought, and as so often when she was not feeling irritable, she felt humble.

"As long as it is precious to you," she said.

He took her hand and kissed it first on the back and then on the palm.

"Infinitely precious to me," he said.

"You are looking very pretty to-night," said the Countess.

"It is entirely due to Cuthbert," Lisa explained truthfully.

"How very proper."

The Countess was unaccustomed to husbands who made their wives look pretty.

CHAPTER VI

LISA found herself more and more inclined to look back. Looking back is an insidious denial of the future—or possibly an acceptance of the future.

She remembered details of her childhood. The home-made pork-pie sent by her nanny's mother, the nursery-maid who read aloud *A Peep Behind the Scenes*, as she pushed the pram, the tea-leaves by which she had been able to tell fortunes, the excitement of hearing that Nanny would shortly receive a letter—an excitement on exactly the same level as the excitement she felt when Nanny was also declared to be about to meet a dark man.

The letter was clearly not an ordinary letter, nor was the man an ordinary man, otherwise the tea-leaves would have had nothing to do with them. And there had been the glorious day when Mr. Rose had taken her on a delicious adventure in the sidecar of his motor-bicycle. Mr. Rose had a shop which sold acid-drops, india-rubber bands and Christmas cards, with a pale mauve light behind Christ and a real gold halo that stuck out behind the Virgin.

Gwen, her pretty nursery-maid, said to Mr. Rose,

"You are a caution," but when Lisa had asked, "What is a caution?" they had both stared at her and Gwen had said, "Nothing to talk to your grandmother about."

Grandmother, thought Lisa, how unlike Mamachen! though grandmother, like Mamachen, had spent forty years living on her husband's estates, a serenely happy wife, a serenely happy widow a serenely happy mother. Nothing had disturbed her life. She had been told of good and evil, but evil had seemed like a bogey, not a very convincing bogey, an illustration in a child's book, something invented for Nanny to frighten you with, which ceased to exist when you grew up.

When an unmarried girl in the village was discovered to be pregnant, grandmother said, with her usual quiet logic: "What a pity she was not married."

The Vicar was outraged: "She committed a deadly sin."

"Well," answered grandmother deprecatingly, "that, of course, I cannot tell, I know so little about sin."

Lisa had tried to fit these things together. Being married was one thing, being a mother something quite different. She could see no connection. Where, she wondered, echoing her grandmother, does sin come in? After all, what were sins? Pinch-

ing and scratching and kicking and not telling the truth and "answering back" and being late and not brushing your teeth and envy—she knew all about envy: Anne's scarlet shoes and Daphne's beautiful skipping (she was very good at her clubs too). Lisa's envy had been confined to the dancing-class with one exception: Jocelyn's pony—she was devoted to her own pony, but her own pony, who had always been quiet, was undeniably becoming still quieter whereas Jocelyn's pony, a pie-bald, spent his time showing off. Even when he walked he caracolled. He arched his neck and arched his tail and treated nettles as if they were fences. He couldn't walk, he could only dance. Even tired, his legs would use fatigue as a new form of elegance. Seated upon him was Jocelyn. Awkward, ungainly, bespectacled Jocelyn. Lisa would look at herself in the glass remembering with concentration Jocelyn's putty face and his shapeless mouth and his shapeless clothes and his foolish smile. She would consult her image: "Would I rather be me or have Hotspur?" The mirror remaining silent, Lisa would smile at it encouragingly, but she knew the answer: she would rather have Hotspur. Her passive distaste for Jocelyn turned into a quiet, relentless loathing.

Years later he had asked her to marry him. He was enormously rich. "I know I have nothing to offer you except my money," he had said, "I wish

there was more—not more money,” he added.

She had looked at him with amazement. The rich do not talk like that: either they are satisfied with their riches or they wish you to believe in some secret, spiritual hoard. She looked at him—for the first time, up till then, she had only looked at his spectacles.

“Of course there is much more than that,” she said, “apart from Hotspur?”

“Hotspur? Do you mean to tell me that you remember Hotspur?”

His face was illuminated. He had, she realised, become Hotspur.

Their thoughts, for once united, went back to Hotspur’s prancing grace. Then he remembered that he had asked her to marry him.

“I don’t suppose there is any hope,” he had said.

“I don’t think you ever feel hope about marriage,” she had answered, “only some foolish certainty.”

“And for me you feel no foolish certainty?”

“If I did it would be an absolute certainty.”

“No wonder it doesn’t exist,” he had answered, a little dryly, and then he had kissed each of her hands. “My love is there whenever you want to remember it.”

She had found herself taking off his pince-nez.

“Jocelyn,” she had said, “do you never take off your pince-nez when you propose?”

"It would be," he was twinkling at her, "a little misleading."

It was the only time she had seen his eyes and her own had been blurred with tears.

"Whenever anyone behaves badly to me I shall remember your love as an undeserved blessing."

"I hope I shall not have too many debts to pay. It was not the plan I had made for my love, but it is a pretty compliment. Anyway, my love is not my own and you must do what you like with it."

She had remembered him on each of her wedding days and on many other days. A red face, hidden eyes, straggling hair, a shapeless mouth. Perfection knows how to set up her barriers!

"And now," thought Lisa, "Jocelyn has become a really great man and the world will never know how much it owes to me for not having married him. The monuments to many women," she reflected a little acidly, "lie in the lives they have not shared." And then, "but he did have Hotspur."

The past was wandering about in her head—Hotspur and Anne's red shoes and Daphne's beautiful skipping and the White City—that great treat to which she had passionately looked forward, because it was to mean night. Treats had been matinées, they had never happened at night. Lisa had crept out of bed pulling up her blind—very gently lest her governess, who slept next door, should hear—

in order to see the night and imagine what it would be like to be out under that enormous sky, black and twinkling. There would be other things as well, but they would be part of the dark.

The night came—June the 21st. Her father was home on leave. He had a faintly emphasised cordiality towards his own children, the same faintly emphasised cordiality that he displayed to other acquaintances, because he had not seen them for some time. Had he lived in England he would have felt no cordiality whatsoever.

"Well, children," he said, hoping to be able to use the coming treat to establish some contact (parents tend to employ treats as approaches to intimacy).

There was "Venice at night," with moving gondolas on real water. That had been lovely, then Father had said: "Good gracious, half-past ten!" and Lisa, looking at the sky which was still quite light, began to cry.

"But it wasn't even dark—I mean the sky."

Her father had been annoyed and her mother had said: "She is over-tired—it is being out so late at night."

"But there wasn't any night."

The White City had been life's first assault upon itself. Later, in Munich with her governess, to be "finished," she had felt none of those surging sexual impulses, so ably described by our novelists, sub-

terranean, sinister and, apparently, almost universal. Never having been to a girls' school, she would not have known what girls were talking about. She had wanted to be clever and she had wanted to be charming. She had loved her lessons.

"I went to classes with girls and yet I knew nothing—what is called 'knowing nothing'—it cost me a lot, but I would still pay what it cost me against one giggle."

Her charm lay about, as charm should, dust in the air made iridescent by a shaft of sunlight.

"I was happy then," thought Lisa, "hurrying when I was late, loitering when I was early—I was never early enough to loiter."

We tend to romanticise our youth both ways. But if we can still call it happy—as many can who seem so grudging to admit it—why should not a haze render tribute to a hidden light?

"I always thought of love as belonging to the early morning," Lisa reflected, "with dew lying grey upon it, shimmering anxiously under a half-invited, half-rising sun, then twilight would yield the same love to a grown dew, shimmering anxiously under a half-invited moon. I had not considered the noontide glare of the sun, whose passion, tearing all love to bits, leaves love to bring the bits together, awaiting another sun. I had never wanted to 'be myself'. I had never wanted to make some ugly gesture of

defiance and call it self-respect. My self-respect was to be a contribution to my surrender with my surrender absolute. Only surrender, too, is an art, and how can accomplishment come where there is no possibility of practice? The grace of giving is a gift, but if we attempt to acquire that grace would not our generosity be shorn of its own clumsy authenticity?

"What does youth give us? A maximum of ignorance and a maximum of expectancy. And why not? Those, if there be any, are the ingredients of ecstasy. Here am I sitting in front of the fire. The warmth is bringing out the smell of the flowers. In a minute I shall hear Cuthbert saying good night to Mr. Rollit. The warmth will bring out the smell of his tweed. Leander's drowsy tail will half wag while he dozes. What do I want back from my youth? *Its pangs*—the White City with no night, Anne's red shoes, Hotspur, the day when there was toasted cheese for tea and Nanny wouldn't let me have any—. Stanislas, but he was the end of my youth."

"Why did you marry Stanislas?" Sarah had asked.

Why had she married Stanislas? It was a question she had so frequently asked herself that the answers had become meaningless. Contrary to what anyone might, and everyone did, believe, she had not married him for money. Looking back, it hadn't occurred to

her at the time, she saw that money must have exerted some unrecognised pressure. "You must do nothing in a hurry," her father had said. "After all, you are only seventeen. You must be quite sure in your own mind." Her mother, trying very hard not to seem in a hurry, had been unable to conceal her own certainty. She was quite, quite sure. It must be hard, Lisa reflected, if one of the greatest partis in Europe wants to marry your daughter, to encourage reasonable doubts. Neither of her parents would ever have dreamt of mentioning Stanislas's fortune, but it could hardly fail to make their warnings perfunctory and a creditable struggle to look indifferent was altogether unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, but for Stanislas himself, as Lisa used bitterly to remember afterwards, she would not have married him. Stanislas, with his slanting eyes and the mocking invitation of his expression, which repudiated while it enticed you. Stanislas whose elusiveness had given to him all the women he had wanted and so many that he had not wanted. How, at seventeen, can you resist the battery of a charm that has never worked in vain?

At seventeen we know that when a man loves us he wants to marry us, and that when he wants to marry us he loves us. At seventeen we know everything. We know that marriage is a spiritual union which will endure for ever consecrated by a

love denied to others. We know that novels are about other people's lives and poems about our own.

Even an older woman would have found it difficult to understand Stanislas's attitude towards marriage (he would not have married an older woman). What he was asking for was a variant on adventure, and marriage was the only variant he could think of. One must find *something* new and the legitimate was the only twist he could give to his life. Lisa at seventeen had not known that she was a twist.

His black past was an exciting toy that Providence had given to her. She had played with it just as he had been playing with her future. Only, being young, to her the future *was* a future, whereas to him it was a part of his past. All his mistresses were coloured balls dancing in the air. She never really set them in his life. ("How damnably right she is," he thought irritably, not having meant her to be right in just that way.) She wanted them to have been remarkably beautiful and extraordinarily exciting.

"They were just as tiresome as other women," he had said one day crossly.

"Not while you were loving them."

"Certainly while I was loving them."

"Oh!" She had felt a slight chill, not realising that it was a chill of warning.

"You are unique." He had made the word sound altogether unflattering, but she had been pleased with it.

"Of course I am unique. A woman you are going to marry."

"Unique," he repeated.

Normally a quality he liked, for the moment there appeared to be something wrong with it. In common with many men, Stanislas had suffered considerably from the jealousy of women, but he had never been able to do without it.

Looking back and wondering where she had failed him, Lisa came to the conclusion that above all she had failed him in jealousy. He had needed scenes, and scenes she had neither been able to make nor to reciprocate. He had married her for a change of gear.

She had meant to give him everything, her body, her heart, her mind, her soul, but he had used each in turn as a field for experiment. She had realised on her honeymoon that she was married to a vivisectionist, and that for some time to come she was to be the subject of his exploration. She had prayed that he might tire of her, but, ironically enough, he hadn't. She remained the target of his moods, nor did his infidelities ever free her from being the centre of his life. She was his wife and, in all but Anglo-Saxon countries, however little loved, a wife

is a wife. He had given her his name—an all-important gift, of which he thought her worthy—the greatest tribute he could pay. As the anæsthetic of custom dulled her capacity for pain he had thought out new ways of hurting her, a convincing proof of the liveliness of his feelings. "Since my marriage," he had said to her one night, "my mistresses bore me even more than they did before."

"What a pity."

"My dear, is that gracious?"

"I am sorry. I meant for them."

"Thank you."

Lisa could see him now saying "Thank you" and going up to her and kissing her hand.

For a moment she had felt the stab of his charm, of that slanting face and those invulnerable eyes. She had shut her own: when she opened them she saw him laughing at her.

"My dear," he had said, "are you imagining that you love me? That would be a great mistake!"

"For both of us?"

"I was thinking of you."

How vivid the past is, Lisa thought, I can see him standing there with more mockery in his face than a world could contain. I wonder if everything was my fault, if I didn't love him enough. But if I had loved him enough it would have been too much.

Mamachen came in.

"Why, my dear, you are sitting in the dark."

"I was thinking about Stanislas."

"Is that polite to Cuthbert?"

"Most polite to Cuthbert."

"Yes, of course—I should have said, Is that polite to Stanislas?"

Lisa reflected that there were moments when Mamachen's realism had great merit.

The door opened, Cuthbert turned on the light.

"Why are you sitting in the dark?" he asked.

"We were talking about Stanislas," Mamachen explained maliciously.

"Ah," said Cuthbert, adjusting his features into a suitable expression, vague rather than curious.

"We were not saying anything nice about him," added the Countess.

Cuthbert looked and felt shocked. After all, the dead are the dead, and if you have nothing nice to say about them you should not mention them at all.

CHAPTER VII

CUTHBERT loves me altogether, Lisa reflected, because the other things he loves are more important than I am. Of course they are more important, but it is so like Cuthbert not to know it. It comes, I suppose, from his capacity for separating one thing from another. He never connects a public life with a private life, a profession with a home. A wife is in her boudoir, a mistress is in her bedroom, a groom is in his stables, a vicar in his church, a magistrate on his bench, a shepherd with his sheep. Their other moments without tea-tables or beds, horses, pulpits, crimes or flocks never seem to occur to him. And yet he of all people has the most private of private lives. His withdrawal of himself is the most complete withdrawal of a person I have ever known.

"Do you never think of Jock at tea with his wife and children?" she had asked one day. (Jock was his groom.)

"Jock's children?" (Cuthbert had a habit of catching the last words of a sentence.) "Are any of Jock's children ill?"

"Not that I know of, but life can exist without accidents or illnesses."

"I should hope so. My mother only went to a dentist once in her life. She was a most remarkable woman in an ordinary way."

"The ideal way. Did she love your father?"

"That, my dear Lisa, is not a question that a child asks."

"But surely a question that a child answers."

"My father and my mother were absolutely devoted to one another. During the whole of their married life they were only once separated: when he went to Nuremberg to read a paper on 'What the Middle Ages mean to us to-day'. Shortly before Sarah's birth, or my mother would have accompanied him. The subject would not, I think, have interested her, but she was fond of travel. By the way, my dear, what you said about Jock's children reminds me that I must tell him to call in a vet to-morrow. Grooms are all alike, they distrust an outside opinion."

"I suppose they are like that."

"All—even the best of them. Of course, Jock knows as much as most vets, but the fact remains that I am worried about Lancer. There is a man in Salisbury called Thurtle, of whom I have heard nothing but good."

"Thurtle?"

"Yes—Thurtle. I think it was James Thurtle, but I am not sure. Anyway, there can't be many Thurtles

in Salisbury, and he is bound to have 'veterinary surgeon' after his name."

"Thurtle," murmured Lisa—she liked the name.

"My love, I can't expect you to know about Thurtle." ("What has he ever expected me to know about?" she wondered.) He put his arm round her shoulder. "You are looking tired, darling. Please go up and lie down before dinner."

"Tired or plain?"

"You will always look lovely to me."

"'Will,'" she thought as she went upstairs. "I *must* be looking plain."

"The Countess," said Mr. Rollit to his wife, "appears to be staying indefinitely. Her prolonged visit must be somewhat of a trial for Lady Musgrave."

"Mothers-in-law," said Mrs. Rollit, who was never short of an idea, "are meant to be trials."

"Sir Cuthbert appears to be devoted to her."

"But she is not," Mrs. Rollit spoke firmly, "his mother-in-law."

"That," said her husband—he never ceased to be impressed by his wife's sagacity—"is perfectly true."

Mamachen had settled down, which meant that she had turned an entire household from surprise into acceptance. Under the sway of her peremptory graciousness the servants had come to accept as in-

evitable what they had once regarded as outlandish.

"Do you know," she said to Cuthbert, "you make me feel *chez moi*."

Where else, thought Lisa wearily, has she ever been?

Sarah looked on, sardonically sympathetic.

Lisa grew tired every day. And the thinner she grew the more of a weight her body became—a burden that she could not put down.

Sarah, who had long ago made a resolution never to do any such thing, decided to speak to Cuthbert. (What a difference there is between speaking to a person and talking to a person.)

"Lisa is looking tired. She needs a change."

"We shall be going to Scotland in August."

"Will that be a change?"

"My dear Sarah, do you imagine that the air in Aberdeenshire is the same as the air in Wiltshire?"

"I was thinking of the atmosphere."

"If you are suggesting that Lisa craves for excitement you are doing her a great injustice. In Scotland she will have a series of shooting-parties. In any case, I cannot see why a quiet summer should tire anyone. Besides, this year she has had the Countess to keep her company, and no one could be livelier than the Countess."

"No one," Sarah agreed; "she would kill a horse under her."

"My dear Sarah," said Cuthbert, trying to be patient, "Lisa is not under the Countess nor is she a horse."

Sarah laughed her sudden unaccommodating laugh.

"As you say, she is not a horse. Even that does not prevent her from being tired."

There were few things that Cuthbert disliked more than an intimate conversation with his sister, though perhaps intimacy could hardly be said to describe a lifelong experience of cross-purposes.

Cuthbert was not an observant man, but he frequently noticed things suddenly for the first time. He looked at his sister and found in her appearance nothing whatsoever that commended it to him. Fragility had always been the quality he had most appreciated in women.

"As you think" (Cuthbert was annoyed with himself for feeling put out) "that I am not looking after my wife properly, I shall suggest to Lisa that she should go to Brighton for a week. The air is excellent and so are the oysters."

"There is no 'r' in June."

Sarah was feeling acid.

("Why in heaven's name did Lisa marry him? Though I suppose a man in love isn't his real self—or perhaps that is his real self.")

Cuthbert thought: "One must be fair. To be a

spinster can hardly fail to have an effect on a woman's character. After all, it isn't natural."

Lisa was dressing for dinner. Cuthbert knocked—he would never have dreamt of going into his wife's room without knocking.

"Darling, would you like to go to Brighton?"

"To Brighton? Do you want to go to Brighton?"

"Of course I don't want to go to Brighton."

"Then why should I go to Brighton?"

"Sarah thinks that you are looking tired."

"Dear Sarah, I do love her."

"I know you do. It is most fortunate." (He meant incomprehensible.)

Standing there in her pale yellow dressing-gown she looked to him infinitely lovely. He drew her towards him.

"Lisa," he said, "I am not always very good at noticing things. Please tell me when I don't see something."

She took his face in her two hands.

"Dearest," she said, "you see everything that matters."

He walked away. "I love you," he said, with his back to her. He did not want to look at her lest some indelicate ardour should tarnish the quality of his worship.

At dinner that night the Countess said: "I find

Sarah—forgive me, dear Cuthbert” (Mamachen well knew that he shared her opinion)—“how shall I say?—I find her a little brusque. It would, of course, have been better had she lived in a Latin country where marriages can be arranged.”

Lisa felt a sudden surge of hatred towards her mother-in-law.

“Sarah has perhaps always been too fastidious to marry.”

“That,” observed Mamachen maliciously, “is not a very nice thing to say in front of Cuthbert.”

Lisa smiled at him: “We cannot all of us marry Cuthbert.”

“Had I been a Ptolemy I would have been married to Sarah,” Cuthbert remarked. He felt a faint sense of relief as if he had narrowly escaped being a Ptolemy.

He was not thinking of Cleopatra.

CHAPTER VIII

MAMACHEN had allowed her husband to die with gracious concern, her serenity reinforced by the certainty that a blessed release was in store for her. She had nursed him with the most skilful care, his least wish had been law, his every whim a delightful opportunity for service. Everyone had been surprised by her unexpected patient devotion. That she was delaying his death in order to savour more fully the exquisite pleasure she would experience when it came was her own secret. For twenty years, assailed by his insults, she had lived with a quiet dignity fed by sardonic satisfaction, for twenty years she had been strengthened and upheld by the hope of his death. When it came she had felt like a lame man deprived of his crutch; she had lost a hope, the hope of his death. A realistic woman, she had always recognised the fact that a hope fulfilled is a hope destroyed. Gone was the intimate hate which for twenty years had filled her life. It could not easily be replaced. Intimate hate cannot be improvised.

"There are certain gaps that nothing can fill," she had said truthfully.

Again her friends were amazed! To find so much devotion where so little had been suspected! Their feelings of guilt took the form of expiatory tenderness. Never before had she been shown so much love.

"What fools people are," she reflected.

Only Stanislas had given her a feeling of uneasiness. His slanting, invulnerable eyes gave no clue to his thoughts.

"You *are* a remarkable woman," he had said to her one day.

Somehow, in the circumstances, "remarkable" had hardly seemed the right adjective.

"I regard living in hate as a mortal sin," Lisa said to Cuthbert.

"Living in hate? Who is living in hate?"

"Mamachen lived in hate."

"I have always understood that her husband gave her every cause for unhappiness."

"Yes, but he never made her unhappy. You have to love in order to be made unhappy."

"Well, my dear, if she was not unhappy the world was no doubt unjust in criticising her husband. I always think that marriage cannot be understood from the outside. People tend to regard it either as a love-affair or as an institution."

"Isn't it both?"

"Yes, of course, but not in that way."

"Someone once said to me that marriage was the only well-kept secret."

"I myself," said Cuthbert, "rarely think about marriage. That no doubt comes from the fact that I am married."

"Does that mean that you think of me?"

"Of course I think of you."

I mustn't spoil it by saying anything more, Lisa thought, knowing that she was about to say something.

"But not as a wife?"

"Of course not, as *my* wife."

"Isn't your wife *a* wife?"

"Certainly not, otherwise I should never have married her."

"That," said Lisa, "is the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me."

"It is nice of you to say so, darling, but after all no one else has been your husband."

Then he remembered Stanislas. It was difficult to amend his sentence. Nor was it a sentence into which Stanislas could comfortably have been included. In common with many people, Cuthbert never regarded the dead as people who had once been alive.

He had felt a profound contempt for Stanislas which, since he had rarely seen him, had never quite reached a personal dislike. But since his

marriage to Lisa, Stanislas had, so to speak, become a member of the family, a sort of black sheep who had been sent to the colonies.

"Of course no one else has been my husband."

Lisa smiled at him. Never, she thought, have I loved him as much as at this moment.

"I mean, I didn't mean——"

"Please mean it."

Not for the first time Cuthbert was charmed and bewildered by the inconsequence of women.

CHAPTER IX

"HYSLOP is coming to stay for a few days."
Cuthbert was obviously struggling to seem casual.

Lisa, who had never heard of Hyslop, sniffed the importance of the matter.

"To *stay*?" she asked, playing for information with an emphasis.

"When he says 'for a few days', I don't suppose that he means more than for a day or two."

What a delightful thing, arithmetic! One and one make two, two twos make four, after which one two or two twos make the unlimited.

"Of one thing one can be absolutely sure," Sarah had said, "God doesn't count."

Lisa saw in Cuthbert's face—or rather in his averted face—a shyness of delight.

Evidently she was about to welcome and shelter a thousand toys. Are not the toys of others royalties we must receive with royal honours? Does not our ultimate discourtesy lie in a disrespect towards unknown deities?

"Who," Lisa asked Sarah, "is Mr. Hyslop?"

One can ask Sarah anything, Lisa reflected, even the meaning of a word.

"Hyslop? I haven't the faintest idea. Cuthbert must know."

"Of course Cuthbert knows, that is the point."

Sarah saw the point.

"Let us try *Who's Who*."

There were a number of Hyslops.

"James," said Lisa, "was in the navy, Walter has a D.S.O., John is a surgeon—Henry, Sir Henry, was twice mayor of Huddersfield during the Great War."

"That," said Sarah, "takes us no further. An elusive name, Hyslop."

"It is, I think, a case for Mamachen."

Mamachen enjoyed anything that savoured of a plot. She liked to contrive and she liked to connive. At Barnaby these two activities had been denied her. Lisa decided to confide in her mother-in-law. She explained the Hyslop situation. The Countess was delighted. She enjoyed being an accessory before, after and during a fact.

"I understand," she said, towards the end of dinner, "that a Mr. Hyslop is coming to stay. Who is Mr. Hyslop?"

"*The Hyslop*."

To Mamachen one Hyslop was the same as another Hyslop. It was in order to disentangle one Hyslop from another Hyslop that she had begun the conversation.

"You see, I don't know any other Hyslops."

"Don't you? Well, there is no reason why you should."

Mamachen accepted this rebuff as a challenge.

After all, thought Lisa, there are moments when you can count absolutely on Mamachen.

"I was aware," she was saying, "of *the* Macdonald and even of *the* Maclean" (why, wondered Lisa idly, insult *the* Maclean with an "even"). "I had never heard of the Hyslop."

"Naturally not. There is no 'the' Hyslop."

"But you said that he was coming to stay."

"I didn't mean no Hyslop. I meant no *the* Hyslop."

"You said *the* Hyslop."

Cuthbert was trying to be patient.

"What I meant," he said, "was *the* Hyslop."

Mamachen had the merits of her generation. She was tenacious and she was indefatigable. "I am sorry," she said, "these English names confuse me. Who is Mr. Hyslop?"

Lisa noticed that Cuthbert seemed a little bewildered. He had lost his place in the conversation.

"You have perhaps never read his book on Thibet."

Both Lisa and the Countess felt like shipwrecked people seeing a sail.

But, to do the Countess justice, she was never bewildered.

"I know nothing about Thibet."

"That," said Cuthbert, patiently logical, "is because you have not read Hyslop's book. I myself," he added generously, "have never been to Thibet."

Lisa had a fou rire—one of those fous rires which, having to be stopped physically, can never be stopped. Cuthbert noticed that his wife was laughing.

"What, my love, are you laughing about?"

"Thibet."

"I cannot see anything funny about Thibet."

Cuthbert was ruffled.

"Dearest," Lisa put her hand on his arm, "don't you like me to laugh?"

But he was not to be placated.

"I love you to laugh. But I am accustomed to see a joke where there is one."

"Darling, there isn't one."

"Why, then, are you laughing?"

He felt that he was being kept out of something.

"I am laughing because I am happy."

Once or twice a day Cuthbert saw his wife. It always gave him great pleasure.

If Mamachen had not been there he would have kissed her.

Going up to dress, the Countess said to Lisa: "I think, my dear, that you are an excellent wife."

Lisa was up in arms. She could never stand the faintest aspersion on Cuthbert.

"I am *not* a good wife," she said indignantly.

The Countess saw the point. She had always been good at seeing things.

"I am not suggesting," she added, "that you were not also an excellent wife to Stanislas."

Lisa knew that she had not been suggesting that.

"Stanislas was, of course, quite different."

"Quite different," Lisa agreed.

"I cannot understand," Lisa said to Sarah (Sarah was the one person in the world to whom she could talk), "why you don't love Cuthbert."

"*You* love him, which is, after all, more important."

"Did you know that I loved him much more than he loves me?"

"He is *in* love with you."

"Yes."

"It is because you have never been in love with him that you are able to love him."

"Am I expected to forgive you for saying that?"

"I expect you to forgive me for being right, though I know that it is almost unforgivable. But you must remember that I have always liked you almost as much as I have loved you."

"That," said Lisa, "sounds to me almost like blackmail."

"It is blackmail."

"Sisters-in-law, mothers-in-law! What a repellent combination of words. It starts things off wrong. Like getting out of bed with your wrong foot first, as our nannies said."

"I certainly regard the Countess as a wrong foot."

"I know you do. All the same, it is silly of you not to love Cuthbert."

"Cuthbert is unbearable. He should be as unbearable to you as he is to me—probably more unbearable."

"Cuthbert is the only absolutely perfect person I have ever known."

"How fortunate for him."

"You mean, how fortunate for me."

"My dear, you put things so elegantly."

"Aren't you glad of our being so doubly fortunate?"

"It comes to me as a daily surprise—and it is an excellent thing to have a surprise every day."

"Cuthbert has never known that I am not in love with him, nor has he ever known how much I love him. These mistakes are natural."

Cuthbert always went into Lisa's room while she

was dressing. It sometimes made dressing more difficult, as if an outside presence were interfering with a hairpin. He equally felt irritated by the presence of her maid. But he loved to see her lifting up her arms while she was doing her hair, and he loved to see her drift about the room, casually undressed. When she sat on a chair with one stocking on he really knew that she was his wife. It made him feel proud and humble and pleased.

Every evening he gave himself this treat, always a little guiltily, as if he were committing an indiscretion.

"Do smoke, dearest," Lisa would say. She detested smoke in her bedroom. "Do smoke your pipe."

"Are you quite sure you don't mind?"

"Of course I don't mind."

While she flitted about the room putting on first one thing and then another, he puffed away happily, the spirals of smoke rising as incense to her.

"Lisa," he said one night, "do you know that I am entirely happy?"

"But, my dearest, you frighten me."

"I am not in the least frightened."

"How brave you must be."

"You have always been a joy and a delight to me."

"Please don't say 'always'—it sounds unnatural."

"If there were other moments, those are the moments I cannot remember."

"Thank God for your loss of memory."

She was smiling at him, and he loved her smile.

"Put your arms round me," she said. "That is supposed to make you forget things, but where we are concerned there is nothing I want to forget."

Sarah said: "Are you sure that a day won't come when you will cease to invent Cuthbert?"

"On the day when you discover him."

CHAPTER X

"LE Hyslop," the Countess was becoming increasingly proficient in not speaking French, but she occasionally relapsed, "c'est un professeur?"

"He was a captain in the Rifle Brigade."

"The Rifle Brigade was stationné in Thibet?"

"Certainly not. He was naturally interested in Thibet."

"Why 'naturally'?"

"Thibet is a most interesting country."

When women talked to Cuthbert about anything which really interested him he invariably deflected them with an absolutely colourless answer. Why, after all, should not human beings occasionally have a sense of self-protection, when animals have it all the time?

Cuthbert particularly disliked the intervention of other people into his private thoughts.

It was this exclusion from what mattered most to him that Lisa found so hard to bear. But lately she had been sleeping better, and when you are rested the foibles of those you love become their most endearing charms. Whereas when you are tired they madden you.

She was looking forward to the visit of Captain

Hyslop. By making herself perfectly charming to him she would be able to give enormous pleasure to Cuthbert, though Cuthbert, she reflected, is one of the few men who never see one in other people's eyes, those other eyes which so often make us suddenly and differently visible. Cuthbert doesn't need other eyes, but I do.

"Do you know," she said to Sarah, "I feel quite excited by the thought of Captain Hyslop's visit. It is as if one were foreseeing Waterloo—I don't mean Waterloo Waterloo, I mean an event."

"Great events cast their shadows before them!"

"Or their lights."

"My dear Lisa, you are an incurable romantic."

"When I was married to Stanislas life was so eventful it never seemed to go to sleep for a moment."

"It must have been asleep since you married Cuthbert."

"It used to seem like that, but now somehow it has turned into a dream."

What in Heaven's name has happened to Lisa, thought Sarah; she wasn't like this two months ago. What has made her invent this myth of Cuthbert? And she has begun to believe in her myth!

"What has made you," she asked disagreeably—she was in a disagreeable mood—"decide to fall in love with Cuthbert?"

"Oh——"

Lisa found herself confronted with a blazing revelation. Everything had suddenly become perfectly simple.

What a fool I have been, she thought, and *how* happy I am. "Thank you," she said, smiling at Sarah, "for telling me."

"Really, Lisa"—Sarah was feeling crosser than ever—"you are beyond a joke."

"Are you quite sure that you don't mind my smoking?"

"But, darling, you know I don't."

Cuthbert puffed away happily.

"You remember my speaking to you about Thurtle?"

"Yes, of course."

"His name was not James, but John."

"John is a nice name, too."

"How do you mean, 'too'?"

"I mean both James and John are nice names."

"There was a Sir James Musgrave in the eighteenth century; as a matter of fact, he didn't die till 1830; I think it was 1830, I must look it up. He was a thoroughly bad lot. He gambled away part of the estate, the part which now belongs to Sir Ezekiel."

A note of bitterness crept into Cuthbert's voice.

"There was also a scandal about the gamekeeper's

daughter. He seduced her; that was not unusual in those days—but her brother shot him—in the leg,” he added.

“How fortunate.”

“Fortunate, why ‘fortunate’? Oh, I see what you mean, fortunate that it was only in the leg. As a matter of fact, his death would have been a blessing, though not, of course, for the gamekeeper.”

“One of the things that I love about you, dearest, is your fair-mindedness.”

“I am not conscious of being particularly fair-minded, though one tries to be fair.”

He looked at his wife. The blaze of her new love was in every line of her body.

“Do you know, Lisa, it may sound a curious thing to say, but I sometimes think—how long have I known you?”

“Eight years.”

“I sometimes think that I don’t know you at all. Except, of course, that you are perfect.”

“It is perfect, beloved, that you should not know less.”

CHAPTER XI

"HYSLOP is motoring down. He will be here in time for tea."

Cuthbert tried to speak casually, as if Hyslop were an ordinary guest behaving in an ordinary way.

"You talk as if no one had ever come by motor before."

"My dear Sarah, you are quite absurd. I was merely indicating to Lisa that it was not necessary to have him met at the station."

What the Countess liked best in the English was that you never seemed to know anything about them.

The atmosphere of excitement which surrounded the arrival of "le" Hyslop had communicated itself to her. She was always on the look-out for drama. Where the excitement came from she could not conceive!

A careful perusal of *Who's Who* had yielded no revealing details. Le Capitaine had fought during the Great War, presumably with distinction, since he had received a D.S.O. His father was a Brigadier-General (retired), his mother was dead, he was unmarried. He had written two books—*Cavalry and the Next War* and *Thibet Past and Present*. And yet he

was being awaited as if he were the Pope himself.

"You will serve the 1879 Haut Brion," Cuthbert had said to the butler.

The significance of the Haut Brion had not escaped the Countess: she was much looking forward to discovering where the significance lay.

Captain Hyslop arrived late on account of a number of adventures, the description of each began, "You know what it is——"

Lisa, who had no topographical sense and knew nothing of petrol, or oil, knew just what it was.

"It is always the same old story."

"May I show you your room?"

That, Lisa told herself, is all I shall ever be able to show him. Why am I so disappointed? Simply because I wanted to show off in front of Cuthbert.

"Hyslop said to me: 'How beautiful your wife is'."

"I think that is impertinent."

"Well, he didn't put it quite like that. He said: 'I have often heard people talk about Lady Musgrave'."

Lisa laughed. She was feeling in one of those delicious moods where everything feeds your laughter.

"Did they say nice things?"

"My dear Lisa, you can hardly suppose that I was going to discuss my wife's charms?"

"I frequently discuss your charms with Sarah."

"That, my love"—Cuthbert yielded to one of his rare chuckles—"must provide you with many opportunities for loyalty."

Lisa put on the tea-gown that she had meant to put on before she had met Captain Hyslop.

"Whatever else I may be," she said to herself in the looking-glass, "I am a woman of principle."

"You are a great traveller," Mamachen remarked amiably.

"Well, I wouldn't say that—I've knocked about a bit."

"I am going to make a confession." Lisa realised that her confession was going to mean nothing to anyone. "I have not read your book on Thibet."

"Well, Lady Musgrave, I recommend you not to. I cannot see how it could possibly interest you."

A wave of indignation surged over Lisa. Did no Englishman ever suppose she could be interested in anything? May I never dislike another nonentity as much! she thought.

"I must allow myself to be the judge of that."

She said sweetly: "You are most kind."

Captain Hyslop did not expect his books to be read, but once read it never occurred to him that they could fail to be appreciated. The role of cavalry was, of course, another matter, as there were

still so many cavalrymen—of course it was natural that they shouldn't realise that their animals were obsolete, but when all was said and done (not "done," he had once said wittily in a speech), we must look to the future.

"She has known Field-M Marshals and Prime Ministers and all sorts of people," thought Cuthbert, beaming, "but she has recognised Hyslop's real importance."

Lisa caught his beam. She was radiant. She had been able to give him just what he wanted.

"A great man? Well, dear lady, you are being too kind."

Will Cuthbert stand the *dear lady*, Lisa wondered. She turned to the Countess: "Shall we go into the other room?"

"How glad they are," said Mamachen, "to remain behind. It is a blessing denied to Latins."

Lisa felt depressed, something seemed to have disappeared, even though it had not existed.

"Le Capitaine is common and insignificant. I do not care how far he travelled or where he went. A journey does not make a man. Why should Cuthbert make a man out of this journey?"

"I can't imagine."

"My dear, we are in complete agreement. He could hardly have been sillier had he flown.

Though"—the Countess also knew how to be fair—"an aeroplane is no sillier than a mule. Slower, of course—I mean the mule. The quick are silly and the slow are stupid. On a le choix."

CHAPTER XII

LISA collected her thoughts about Thibet, not that she had any thoughts, only various, more vague than various, scraps of information. The Great (was he Great or Grand?) Lama died and the new Lama was chosen because he was born at the exact moment of the Great Lama's death, for at that moment he had received the Great Lama's soul. Not unnaturally he was difficult to find. How in a timeless country discover so exact an hour?

It is curious that each religion should seek some strange precision, the very search for which would seem a negation of faith.

Every church represents a canalisation of belief.

And yet without discipline there is no form. Form is a morality forced upon the arts, morality avenging herself upon the arts. And in religion an easy tolerance meant to be a gift to others ends by being our gift towards ourselves.

Lisa wondered why, given the Timelessness of Time, the exact moment of the transference of the Great Lama's soul to the body of a newly born child should matter so much. But in every religion does not the concrete play a part even though the part be the part of a symbol?

Though"—the Countess also knew how to be fair—"an aeroplane is no sillier than a mule. Slower, of course—I mean the mule. The quick are silly and the slow are stupid. On a le choix."

CHAPTER XII

LISA collected her thoughts about Thibet, not that she had any thoughts, only various, more vague than various, scraps of information. The Great (was he Great or Grand?) Lama died and the new Lama was chosen because he was born at the exact moment of the Great Lama's death, for at that moment he had received the Great Lama's soul. Not unnaturally he was difficult to find. How in a timeless country discover so exact an hour?

It is curious that each religion should seek some strange precision, the very search for which would seem a negation of faith.

Every church represents a canalisation of belief.

And yet without discipline there is no form. Form is a morality forced upon the arts, morality avenging herself upon the arts. And in religion an easy tolerance meant to be a gift to others ends by being our gift towards ourselves.

Lisa wondered why, given the Timelessness of Time, the exact moment of the transference of the Great Lama's soul to the body of a newly born child should matter so much. But in every religion does not the concrete play a part even though the part be the part of a symbol?

What we call paganism is the coloured introduction of a next world into the world in which we are living. The old religions mixed their deities with their mortals. Jupiter turned himself into a bull. As a God he was entitled to some transposed fecundity.

The Gods have ripened the earth. They have given corn to the fields, women to men, children to men and women. And of their exuberant bounty they have added trees and flowers, the beauty we forget and, taking it for granted, destroy. Surely *the* sin against the Holy Ghost consists in taking anything for granted, be it a star or a "Thank you". The commonplace is created by our own dulled vision. With eyes open or eyes shut we can receive the revelation, the revelation which, with eyes half closed, filmed with habit, we can never know.

"Every day," Lisa said to Cuthbert, "I am more conscious of ingratitude, which, after all, is something."

"What an odd thing for you to say. I have always regarded you as a little exaggerated in your gratitude."

The implicit and the explicit, how difficult, thought Lisa, to mix them. I am as withdrawn from Cuthbert as he is from me, only I do *try* to tell him things.

"I am grateful for you," she smiled, bringing the conversation back on to a plane where it would be easily comprehensible.

He looked a little sheepish. As sheepish as he only looked when he was profoundly pleased. It always embarrassed him a little to be pleased.

"My sweet darling, how absurd you are."

Absurdity had invariably been to him—applied to women—one of the highest terms of praise. It justified their existence.

A month ago Lisa had seemed a little overstrung, but now she was quite herself again. Sarah had talked nonsense about her being tired.

Nevertheless, she did seem to him to be looking a little pale—but that was probably his imagination—and a little thin.

"My darling, are you, I mean have you been, losing a little weight?"

Lisa, who knew that her clothes had to be taken in every week, said: "I have never felt so well in my life."

"I think that perhaps it would be a good thing if you were to take a little cream. It would be a great pleasure for Mrs. Rich."

"In that case I must take a little cream."

"Whatever these modern cranks may say, cream is cream."

Before lunch Captain Hyslop would say: "Good morning, dear lady", and before dinner he would say: "Good evening, dear lady". When she went up to bed he said: "Good night, dear lady".

Between meals she never saw him, as he always went out with Cuthbert.

At first she had meant to ask him about the Great Lama, but since then the Great Lama had become a part of her thoughts and there seemed no connection between her thoughts and Captain Hyslop. She found him daily more invisible.

He talked more than he had done at first, but he always seemed to be talking about distances. One place was a thousand miles away from another place. Their separation seemed more important than their existence.

"At seven thousand feet above the sea-level it begins to be cold." The amount of snow, it appeared, varied with the seasons except when you reached the snow-level.

"Was there any edelweiss?"

"I never saw any edelweiss."

"I must have been thinking of Switzerland."

"Yes, of course, there is a lot of edelweiss in Switzerland."

"I don't think flowers ought to be made of cotton-wool."

"Cotton-wool? Oh, I see what you mean."

Cuthbert never gave any assistance to these conversations.

"My bearers were very good fellows when you got to know them."

Lisa felt a spark of interest. "Do tell me what they were like."

"Oh, they weren't in any way exceptional. You know what those people are like."

Lisa did not know and Captain Hyslop did not enlighten her.

The Countess had given up asking questions.

"Le Hyslop," she said, "is insupportable, he has no conversation."

She did not say it to Cuthbert.

"Hyslop," remarked Cuthbert, on one of the happy occasions when Hyslop was not in the room, "is a remarkably modest man."

"Modesty," commented the Countess, her love for Cuthbert for once defeated by natural acidity, "is not a conversational quality. Has he a Christian name?"

"John Everard."

"Had he a father?"

"Sir John Hyslop was Governor of the Northern Provinces."

"And his mother?"

"His mother, I believe, died when he was a child."

"I see," said the Countess.

CHAPTER XIII

WE can't bring people into existence for ourselves, perhaps not even by ourselves, nor must we regard an absence as emptiness.

Cuthbert might not see certain things, but he would never see anything that was not there. He was undoubtedly spurious-proof.

There could be no confidence tricks in his life by whatever nicknames they call themselves, Buchmanism, the Douglas credit scheme, Christian Science or a gold-mine.

Captain Hyslop must not only exist, but (why, thought Lisa, not use the same word again) exist?

We cannot oblige other people to reveal themselves to us, even though it be the perpetual demand we make upon them.

Where is our gift and where is theirs?

Why this ultimate impertinence?

A curious thing breeding, protecting every approach and no arrival.

Arriving is an end of expectancy. Whatever may come, something is lost. The future and the past encircle us—lost opportunities. Lost opportunities

or buried opportunities? Certainty kills the doubt to which hope gives wing! It is like a morality play.

To Lisa, who enjoyed playing with them, metaphysics were the ball of wool a kitten plays with, the fifth orange of a conjurer. Metaphysics represent self-indulgence in the absolute.

Cuthbert was a mystic. Not for him these minor tricks.

"If only I could find Captain Hyslop, but I can't find him. It isn't that he is a bore: I have found dozens of bores. It isn't that I mind commonness: I have liked lots of common people. It is that I can see nothing at all. There is, of course, the 'dear lady', but even that is not bad enough to make something positive. His not liking me makes things more difficult—more difficult than if he disliked me."

There are so many easy parts to play: a heroine, a spinster, a servant (outspoken), a bore (long-winded), a hussy (brazen), an aunt (voluble), a mother (wise! resigned! tragic! absent-minded! all seeing or unseeing), a mother-in-law (dry-spiteful, or powerful—baneful), a parlourmaid (pert), a woman of the world (witty), a rival (rude—surprisingly rude), a sister (bitter), a mistress (arrogant—pathetically abandoned). What a lot of parts seem to cast themselves!

Gods, authors and producers, do they take rest

in some monotony of character? Has repetition conquered them, and when something different appears do they avert their eyes? Are they afraid for the life of their marionettes? Can even a doll die?

Captain Hyslop stayed on. He found the life what he would have called "congenial". The meals were punctual, his hostess must have been pretty (she was one of the most un-interfering women he had ever met), and he liked the countryside.

"Why," asked Mamachen, "do you call the country 'the countryside'?"

"Now you come to mention it," said Cuthbert, "I have never considered the matter."

"We had better ring up Selfridges."

"Selfridges?"

"The Information Department."

"My dear Lisa, the country is not information. What could Selfridges possibly know about the country?"

"It was, I think," said the Countess, "a question of the countryside."

"The English countryside"—Captain Hyslop's voice aroused silence—"means a lot to one when one comes from abroad. I always feel it when I come from abroad."

"I always come from abroad." (The Countess found no extenuating circumstances for Captain

Hyslop, nor did she give him any accommodating courtesy.)

"Oh," said Captain Hyslop, "that must be very interesting."

"Do you mean living abroad or coming to England?"

Mamachen was in a gay, wicked mood. She twinkled at Cuthbert to show him that he was not part of her butt.

Lisa felt the necessity for intervention.

"You see," she said, "in Poland also we had our countryside."

Captain Hyslop was bewildered. The thought of a countryside in Poland was strange enough, but why "we"?

"My wife's first husband was the son of the Countess."

Cuthbert felt that, as the conversation was becoming unnecessarily intimate, something should be done to clear it up.

"But in spite of the countryside, I am not a Pole," chuckled the Countess.

"Oh, I see," said the Captain, who had given up a half-hearted attempt at seeing anything.

Lisa resented the inevitable.

"Le" Hyslop gave you no clue as to the whereabouts of his personality. That it was somewhere she knew. She also knew that it was very strong. It

seemed silly not to be able to find a very strong personality. That, she thought, is no doubt what happens to public men in private life. Whereas private men in public life, mounted by one mot, are never unseated, even though they keep their seat by dismounting. Hyslop is only a public man in Thibet and in the Himalayas, Lindbergh was only a public man over the Atlantic. Artists are immune from these arc-lights which take you from, and give you back to, the dark.

"I think," Lisa said to Sarah—she had forgiven Sarah—"I think that some vulgar precision should enter my relationship with Captain Hyslop. I mean I think it time I should know him by sight."

"Don't you know him by sight?"

"Do you?"

"Well, it is easy for me. I know he isn't Cuthbert or Mr. Rollit or any of the servants."

"So do I. We have only had very few people to dine since he came, and people who come to dine never look like people staying in the house. They walk into the room differently. I can even tell if a man has *dressed* in the house. The difference between a bathroom and a motor should not be visible, yet it is."

"It is the difference," Sarah said, "between a man going out of a house and a man going into a house. A man going out of a house carries intimacy with

him. A man who comes into a house carries expectation."

"Aren't you putting it a little high?"

"Anticipation?"

"Still a little high?"

"Well, anyway, out of his motor into the hall. Out of the hall into the drawing-room. I can't help it if he is not anticipating."

"And we can't always help it if he is."

She is coming down to ground again, Sarah said to herself.

"It is silly of me not to be glad," thought Sarah.

But to the happy insanity of others, even when we love them, we oppose some foolish sanity. What have we to put in the place of their irrational joy? We destroy without providing the alternative which would be our only justification.

And what is an alternative? Only an alternative!

What right have we to touch a foolish joy?

What right have we to kill in the name of wisdom?

"It is a curious thing about Captain Hyslop's appearance," Lisa said to Sarah. "I find it more and more difficult to know him by sight. He seems to me just like a police report on a murderer—'Medium height, dark hair, brown eyes, small moustache, brown suit, light overcoat'—then an

approximate view of his age. How can so many approximations make a man—or even a murderer? I *do* wish I could make a little more of Captain Hyslop.”

“As a present to Cuthbert.”

“Well, it would only be the tissue paper and the ribbon.”

“What circuitous routes you use to please him by.”

“Wouldn’t every route be a nice route?”

“Obviously not. Don’t lose your head on behalf of your heart.”

“I am tired of my head.”

“In that case it is lucky that you should be tired on behalf of Cuthbert.”

“That,” said Lisa, “is not a nice thing to say.”

Sarah recognised a genuine stiffening in Lisa.

“I’m sorry.”

“You are sorry because you have hurt me, not because of what you said.”

“Yes.”

“However much you try to turn my love for Cuthbert into a crossword puzzle with seven words up and five words down—that doesn’t sound even logical, I do not do crossword puzzles—you must try and believe that mine is the solution.”

“For Cuthbert or for you?”

“First I will be arrogant and say for both of

us, and then I will be honest and say for me."

Sarah felt that in spite of her dislike for the Countess, Mamachen's cynicism would give her a breath of fresh air. There was, of course, the delicate problem: How to indicate where the fresh air lay?

"The Countess," reflected Sarah, "has only known bulls'-eyes. The target has represented nothing but an embroidery on her aim."

What Cuthbert meant to the Countess, only the Countess knew.

What Cuthbert meant to Lisa, God alone knew.

Sarah had never felt any sympathy for God.

CHAPTER XIV

WE "think things over". It is a misleading phrase. What we mean is, "Give me time to decide whether to say 'Yes' or 'No'." Perhaps that is "thinking things over", if covering the same old ground with the same old pros and cons can be described as "thought".

We never say that we are going to "think a person over".

Someone is "on our mind"—an altogether different matter.

Some Gordian knot is lacking—leaving our sword dangling in mid-air.

Sarah decided to "think Lisa over".

She normally found herself with missing bits of Lisa: the bits she possessed declining to come together into any coherent pattern. And their shapes were so odd!

God must often pay reverence to the designers of puzzles—a recognition due to legitimate children.

Lisa was a creator, but her gift for creation had been canalised into no art—fiction, sculpture, music, painting, the materials she employed with which to create—were not books or busts or symphonies or pictures—but people.

Each person she met was unconsciously moulded to some equally unconscious design. Life was a toy-shop, every object waiting to be animated by a spark of her own life. Under the dreamy confidence of her half-closed eyes how could that cardboard river fail to ripple? Was it not natural that each wooden tree should disintegrate into a shimmer of leaves? Sarah reflected sardonically on Lisa's human beings—Mamachen had not yielded an inch to any reconstruction. The Countess was immune from attributes with time-fuses. You could count on her not to explode a suitable sentiment at a suitable moment. Dislike her though she did, Sarah recognised in the Countess manipulation-proof material.

Stanislas, no doubt, had taken after his mother. He had declined to be built by Lisa just as he had declined to be loved by Lisa. In vain she had tried to sculpt in calico and etch on clay. Elusiveness had been his stock-in-trade, each game had represented to him a non-observance of the rules. "Why otherwise," he would argue reasonably, "use the word 'game'? I am naturally not referring to cards which are, of course, a serious matter."

Why is a code more binding than a law? Why would we hide a murderer under our bed and turn a cheat out of our house?

Stanislas had turned his instincts inside out, examining them as if they were principles. He was

too arrogant to accept an instinct as an excuse, nor did he care to be an unconscious agent even of himself.

He had never given Lisa a particle of that self. What he *had* given her was a balanced appreciative recognition of *herself*.

It was the last thing she had wanted.

"Poor Lisa," he would tease her, "always in search of a blur—or you can call it a blaze if you like."

What made living with Stanislas so trying was that he not only knew what he was talking about, but that he also talked about it. Life lived day and night in the unfriendliness of the explicit.

Sarah recognised in herself a certain affinity to Stanislas.

Fortunately Stanislas did behave abominably. It was the only exercise which he provided for his wife's temperament. Not that Lisa ever regarded herself as a martyr—only as a failure—but her demand on life—the demand of the romantic—was that life should make demands upon her.

She had trained herself for her own difficult existence—trained herself perfectly.

Had it been irritating, Sarah wondered, for Stanislas (she always had a sneaking sympathy with Stanislas) or had he enjoyed watching the evolution of a perfection for which, after all, he was responsible?

And after that Barnaby Towers! The trained hurdler confronted with stretch after stretch of smooth turf—turf undecorated with so much as a single obstacle. We always dress for the day before! If yesterday we were cold, to-day we are too warmly clad. In life we are trained backwards. It is not only “*Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait*”—it is more complicated than that. No sooner are we in our stride than some jerk of fate demands from us some different form of step.

To Lisa, thought Sarah, the world really is a stage, and she herself, though she doesn't know it, the casting manager. That is why Mr. Rollit has to play a Mr. Rollit and Captain Hyslop a Captain Hyslop. Always, of course, she has looked for a hero. And now she has found one—in Cuthbert. How like Lisa to have succeeded in finding one in Cuthbert. Darling Lisa, she *would* have chosen her husband for the part.

I wonder, she chuckled sardonically, whether I shall end by being as sorry for Cuthbert as I am for Stanislas. “Wife brings brother and sister together.” It is a pretty thought.

“My daughter-in-law,” said Mamachen to Sarah, “was a most excellent wife.”

“‘Was’?”

“I referred to my son. Where your brother is concerned,” added the Countess courteously,

"the situation naturally does not arise."

"I wish her ladyship could fill out a bit," Mrs. Rich would say. Lisa's dutiful cup of cream disappeared daily without leaving any traces. "It is fashionable to be thin," Sarah would answer.

"Her ladyship is not *that* sort of a lady"—Mrs. Rich was up in arms.

"As if she were no better than a woman with her name in the papers," she explained indignantly to Mr. Rich later in the day.

"Well, Miss Sarah hasn't ever had no man. It isn't natural, see, not natural in any way," added Mr. Rich cryptically.

"Miss Sarah ain't that sort of an old maid" (not to be "that sort" of whatever it might be was Mrs. Rich's invariable defence).

"Well, my dear, have it your own way," Mr. Rich munched pacifically.

In common with many people, Mrs. Rich liked having her own way, but she did not like being given it. "I don't want my own way," she said crossly.

Well, reflected Mr. Rich philosophically, she certainly doesn't want mine.

A difficult matter, in the circumstances, to find a way for Mrs. Rich.

CHAPTER XV

"YOU," said Mamachen to Sarah, with her customary acumen, "would have understood Stanislas."

"Would he have liked that?"

"Off and on—difficult people like being understood at their own moments. To understand them all the time is to rob them of their stock-in-trade."

The Countess was legitimately proud of the phrase "stock-in-trade"—the latest adherent to her vocabulary.

"Did Lisa understand him?"

"Lisa had too much understanding to understand him. His temperament was not suited to *understanding*. Lisa—it was not unnatural in a young wife," the Countess added indulgently—"tended to give sympathetic interpretations to his motives and his actions."

"Which he regarded as impertinent?"

"Impertinent or superfluous. I do not know which."

Sarah was conscious of the fact that she was beginning to be seduced by the conversation of the Countess.

"May I ask you an impertinent question?"

"That, my dear," said the Countess graciously, "would be very charming of you."

"Did Lisa love your son?"

Sarah, who was old-fashioned, found it difficult to say: "Stanislas." She was not in the habit of referring to people by their Christian names unless they had specifically invited her to do so.

There was a pause. The Countess was clearly about to deliver a considered opinion.

"She was very young when she married," ruminated Mamachen. "And she loved love. It was not a situation suited to Stanislas. She made," added the old lady, "what you call, I think, an excellent job of her marriage, but she could not turn it into a love-affair. It had not that shape, but it was because she loved love that she had no lovers."

"I see," said Sarah, who did see.

"Stanislas was an abominable husband, but he had a certain regard for marriage. He would never have confounded it with a love affair. Curiously enough he loved Lisa and she knew it. I have always regarded it as very much to her credit that she should have known it."

"I see," said Sarah—still seeing.

"He made fun of her for knowing it."

It was agreeable to be able to talk freely with this intelligent disagreeable old maid. After all, with

Anglo-Saxons you did not have to mind your y's and q's. No, that was not right.

"What, my dear, do you mind? I mean what letters of the alphabet?"

"P's and q's?"

"Yes, that is it. P's and q's."

Mamachen registered the right phrase with satisfaction.

"What is curious is that she still loves love. Lisa is, how do you call it, a deep-dyed romantic. Experience has fortunately taught her nothing. When I say 'fortunately' I mean fortunately, since she has married your brother."

Mamachen said "your brother" with the same punctiliousness with which Sarah said "your son".

These ladies observed in their conversation a certain "tenue" of which Mrs. Rich, had she but known of it, would have altogether approved.

Lisa was looking for a present for Cuthbert. That the gift of herself was a new gift was obviously not a point which she could stress. Indeed, it was not a point that she could make. Where then could she find her present?

Is it not the curse of women that they are always seeking translations?

That they cannot accept the ultimate silence of a secret?

Does the original sin in woman lie in some demand for demonstration?

Does their capacity for sacrifice correspond to this hidden necessity?

Are childbirth and prostitution fruits and progenitors of some unacknowledged need?

Why do we forget that every woman is born of man? Why can no woman admit an untrimmed absolute?

Does every bride demand her bridesmaid?

Why should a ring-less finger be a symbol either of the defiant or of the forlorn?

Man, it would seem, is immune from these foolish fumbblings.

Lisa was looking for a present for Cuthbert and since the Gods punish our unbelief with answered prayers, her prayer was answered.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT a lot we do behind the backs of those we love. Not because we are seeking their backs, but because they are turned towards us. While her husband was alive Cuthbert had never told Lisa that he loved her, because her husband was alive. When Stanislas died the past became what the past should be—something that is over.

Whether or not Lisa had loved Cuthbert prematurely, so to speak, this was an indelicate question to be happily buried with the corpse. It was not a question that had occurred to Cuthbert in the form of a question.

He did not trouble to reconcile the past with the present or the present with the future.

The past was over, the present was Lisa, the future was Lisa.

What can the present be to a man of imagination (and Cuthbert was a man of imagination, though few people had enough imagination to see it)—what can the present be save a stepping-stone? Not even some firm stone, a slippery surface undermined by rushing water.

To Cuthbert Lisa had not been "a" love, but an incarnation of love. He never considered the matter in any other light. A dozen mistresses could not have touched—let alone affected—the question.

There is no infidelity possible where the essence has been given.

Because he loved her Cuthbert could see nothing ahead of him, no glories, no pitfalls, nothing of which to beware, nothing to which to look forward. It was so simple. *He loved her.* Because she was not in love with him she was in a perpetual state of panic. Fear of irritability made her irritable, a determination not to see certain things gave them an extra visibility, a desire to yield removed any possibility of yielding. One fine day I shall see a chorus of impulses running into the wood singing, "Oh, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow me," and I shall feel that the invitation should have been given to Cuthbert, which is absurd—as if Cuthbert couldn't provide his own ecstasy!

Had Cuthbert been a Hindu seeing his bride for the first time he could not have known her less than he had known Lisa.

Blinded by his love, she had walked straight into the sun—why shade our eyes? There are so many shadows! Why map our route? If the country is not ours, what is a road but an intrusion?

How well we know the phrase: "Suiting the action to the word". There is a much more dangerous form of activity: to suit a feeling to an action. The order of precedence is wrong. We expect that what has not come before must necessarily come after—a foolish feminine expectation to which the race owes its survival. Lisa had married Stanislas because she had thought herself in love with him and—at the time—to think yourself in love is remarkably like being in love. She had married Cuthbert because he loved her. He had never doubted that she would marry him, but his certainty had been the acceptance of a miracle, not the achievement of a triumph.

Ever since she could remember, Lisa had been stakes or prizes, either a condition of play—or a goal.

"Not so much as one lover," Stanislas would say to her in mock admiration, "or am I suffering from husband's delusions—a most common complaint. Husbands only recognise lovers where there are none—jealousy populates an unnatural void."

"And if I had a lover?"

"I could trust you to keep the fact to yourself—you are a most exceptional woman."

"You wouldn't mind?" she had said a trifle bitterly.

"Of course, I shouldn't mind if I didn't know."

"But if you did know?" His mocking smile, his teasing voice had driven her into a sudden obstinacy.

"My dearest Lisa, I thought we had agreed that with your exquisite tact I would never know."

"But if I wanted you to know?"

"You would only want me to know if it were not true. Please do not think, my darling, that I am underrating your charms. I am, as you know, their slave. Nor am I overrating your virtue, which has in my perhaps biassed opinion never been in danger." To this there appeared to be no retort.

And under it all the same throb, a throb that she could no more get rid of than she could rid herself of her pulse: "If only we had a child it would be different".

Looking about for blame—there are situations which only self-blame can make possible—Lisa always came back to the same point: she had not given him a child. She knew dimly that he had had other children, the fault was therefore entirely hers. Every insult that Stanilas could devise accordingly became a delicate gesture with which he took the weight off the real point, playing some fantastic

caddishness in order to distract her attention from a shared and ignored misery.

"Stanislas is so chivalrous and so careful that no one should know it."

At that moment Stanislas was behaving rather more blatantly badly than usual.

Does she take me for a fool, wondered Mamachen, or is it rather crude irony?

The Countess could hardly be expected to see Stanislas's mistresses as delicate offerings to Lisa's childlessness, subterfuges to conceal his disappointment from her.

Nor were they. Except for Lisa.

"Hildegard really is charming," she said to the Countess.

"Is the creature called Hildegard? What a ridiculous name."

"I think he has a *petit nom* for her."

"Gard, perhaps. 'Gard' would be a silly name, even for a dog."

"We have no reason to suppose it is 'Gard'."

"Hilde would be equally silly. But of course it may be Angel or Lightning or Comfort or Ton Ton or Baby or Pet."

"Really, Mamachen, how can you talk such nonsense. You know perfectly well anything like that would be impossible with Stanislas."

"In my experience," the Countess had observed

sagely, "anything like anything is possible, especially in my husband's family."

Sarah wondered whether Lisa had used the fully forged weapon of herself against Stanislas.

Or had she always surrendered, perhaps a little over-quickly, terrified lest in the final resort she might not lose!

Women are rarely *défaitistes*. They seek *defeat*, which is for them the supreme strategical position. Whatever our feminists may hope, woman never regards victory in the terms of a win. Always they are seeking to cajole surrender out of some burning rock of triumph.

"Women serenade surrender," Sarah remarked to the Countess.

"Undoubtedly," agreed the old lady, "and when surrender surrenders it is—how do you call it?—homeopathic et tout est à recommencer."

Lisa would look out of the window—grey fields, grey walls, a grey sky, ribbons of roads made luminous with some wet silver, the declining day sinking in a phosphorescence of rising mists.

"A charming county, Wiltshire," the Countess said to Cuthbert.

The room was yellow, the fire was red, warmth drew breath from her tweeds, gold splashed over the

silver of the tea-tray, the smell of the gardenia in its pot denied the outside world as defiantly as a song challenging a silence.

"I am coming back," Lisa said vaguely, as she went out of doors again.

The elms were black against the empty pallor of the sky.

The rooks croaked a pattern of silence on the air.

Lisa felt lost and absorbed into the impersonal rhythm of nature.

"My darling, you will catch cold." Cuthbert was putting a tweed cloak round her shoulders.

"I'm not cold," she spoke in the small voice of a child.

Her hair was anointed with dew. It is a charming way of becoming grey-headed. They walked slowly, the crumbling gravel rasping in its loudness.

"May I?" he said, kissing the top of her head. "I have signed your hair."

The room was yellow, the fire was red, puddles of gold lay about the silver on the tea-table.

The flowers brought out some excessive incense against the night.

Mamachen knitted, erect against the possibility of comfort provided by her chair.

Captain Hyslop smoked a pipe over Sarah's jigsaw puzzle. "I think, dear lady," he would say helpfully hopeless.

"Yes?" Sarah would prompt, dulcedly acid.

"No—I quite see that we ought not to be in the sky. In fact, what we want is another piece of sky."

"When I was young," observed Mamachen, "I thought that I could read while I knitted. I missed paragraphs and I dropped stitches, but I kept an agreeable illusion. Had I really been able to read and knit there would have been no illusion, so that I should presumably have lost something."

"Ah," said Captain Hyslop, "the missing half of the power-station—I think that you will find this the missing half of the power-station."

"Yes, indeed," responded Sarah, "how clever of you."

"Just a matter of putting two and two together," the captain chuckled, "a matter of two and two." The full beauty of his mot had not dawned on him the first time that he had made it.

"Do go and rest a little before dinner, my darling."

"Will you take me upstairs?"

"Of course I will take you upstairs."

How happy I am, thought Lisa.

Cuthbert *knew* that he was happy.

"They want a vox humana stop for the organ at Hempel Herstings. I thought of giving them one."

"What a good idea."

"My darling, what shocking manners I have got. I meant, would you like to give a vox humana stop to Hempel Herstings?"

"Do let us give one. When I say 'Do let us give', I feel as if it were an addition to the marriage service."

"The marriage service, though less fine than the funeral service, is considerably less silly than the baptismal service. The old Adam is a peculiarly foolish evocation, and in an age when the concrete plays such a large part in symbolical interpretation I have always considered that the apple might have played a larger or rather more prolonged part."

"I think that it was wrongly cast from the beginning, but saga has been over-kind to apples—those healthy straightforward fruit whose highest ambition ought to be to keep the doctor away. Why it should have been thrown at Adam and Paris, Satan alone knows."

CHAPTER XVII

"**D**ID you know that the Praczkis had divorced?" Mamachen asked Lisa at dinner. "It is a story that shocks even me. Mimi was one of those people who cannot help believing the best, but she was so pretty that one forgave her."

"Does one have to be forgiven for believing the best?" asked Sarah, who herself never practised that particular faith.

"It is sometimes a little bit difficult not to be impatient. There was Mimi married to a sadistic degenerate. She was a one-way woman—as you might be a one-way street. Her one passion was children—and he couldn't have a child. To think of Willi as her lover is a farce. To her he never represented anything but fatherhood. It was hard on him, for he naturally envisaged the situation from another point of view: his own. Nor was he even, for her (she was such an essentially respectable woman; one might even say conventional), his son's father, he was a courteous intervention that had provided her with a child.

"When the child was born she confessed to her husband, a superfluous confession. No one, above

CHAPTER XVII

"DID you know that the Praczinskis had divorced?" Mamachen asked Lisa at dinner. "It is a story that shocks even me. Mimi was one of those people who cannot help believing the best but she was so pretty that one forgave her."

"Does one have to be forgiven for believing the best?" asked Sarah, who herself never practised that particular faith.

"It is sometimes a little bit difficult not to be impatient. There was Mimi married to a sadistic degenerate. She was a one-way woman—as you might be a one-way street. Her one passion was children—and he couldn't have a child. To think of Willi as her lover is a farce. To her he never represented anything but fatherhood. It was hard on him, for he naturally envisaged the situation from another point of view: his own. Nor was he even, for her (she was such an essentially respectable woman; one might even say conventional), his son's father, he was a courteous intervention that had provided her with a child.

"When the child was born she confessed to her husband, a superfluous confession. No one, above

all not Praczinski, believei it to be his. Indeed, her sole object in confessing was to get the child away from that brute and have it brought up—by its own father. Then the Court gave the custody to the official father. Now she is not even allowed to see it. Stephan is as happy as a sand-boy, impotent with an heir, plus the delightful knowledge that he can make Mimi miserable for the rest of her life. That boy was the apple of her eye."

"The man must be a fiend."

"He is a fiend. He made her life an absolute hell and she knew he couldn't have a child. I have never seen a woman with such a passion for children. She was a lovely fragile creature, completely starved of affection subjected to every indignity that her husband's bitter ingenuity could devise. Now, with her silly confession, she has wrecked her own life and her lover's career—he has had to leave the service. Confessions are foolish things—an unjustifiable form of moral self-indulgence—to which you sacrifice other people as well as yourself. Presumably, she and Willi sit opposite one another in huge dark rooms in that huge dank castle of his with those trees that never stop dripping, he thinking of his lost profession and she of her lost child, while Stephan's legitimate heir gnashes his teeth and Stephan gloats over 'his' child."

"A most unpleasant situation," remarked Captain

Hyslop, "and one which one hopes does not frequently arise."

The Countess shot him a baleful glance. Her distaste for the Captain was growing daily.

"One hopes," she agreed sardonically.

Lisa was deathly white.

"It is stuffy in here," she murmured, "and there is a full moon. Let's put on coats and walk down to the river."

A malevolent moon grimaced. The river flowed secretively. It was a conspiratorial night—a conspiracy of elements.

"What do you think ordinary water feels like when it meets salt water for the first time? How strange for some drowsy river suddenly to be submerged under a turbulence of waves."

Cuthbert looked indulgently at his wife.

"I had never considered the matter."

How delightfully fanciful women were! He never ceased to be charmed by their inconsequence.

No man felt more strongly than Cuthbert that a woman should be a woman: in other words, womanly. That this happy state of affairs occurred so frequently was an unending source of satisfaction to him. He looked at the somewhat ungainly form of his sister silhouetted against the pale night.

That, of course, was what Sarah lacked: inconsequence.

Lisa got thinner and thinner. Her bones seemed to be winning a war against her flesh. When Mrs. Rich's cream was brought round at eleven every morning she felt as if she were dishonouring a regiment. She would smile a placatory smile at the footman, as if by her smile alone she were putting on weight and turning the footman into an accomplice. All these hidden bones, of whose existence one was totally unaware—acquiring visibility. The only bones we know about are bones which have caused us pain, bones representing bumps and strains, funny-bones, ankles, knees, shins, or else bones which represent beauty, foreheads and cheek-bones and skulls and chins—what we call lines”.

Lisa's body was becoming far too anatomical.

She was consoled—temporarily—by a visit to Mrs. Harpenden. Mamachen had retained the practice of visiting. All old ladies acquire some habit—it is usually cards—with which to fill in the hours from five to seven, hours that earlier were consecrated to their admirers and later to their children, hours that having been once so full, now demand to be filled.

Having exhausted the neighbourhood Lisa and the Countess called on Mrs. Harpenden.

Had Mrs. Harpenden been capable of an emotion as acute as surprise, she would have been surprised.

That she should receive a visit from the wife of the Lord Lieutenant of the county had amazed her servants. But Mrs. Harpenden had always lived without yesterdays or to-morrows. She rightly believed that neither fulfilled any useful function. When Mr. Harpenden had married Mrs. Harpenden, her father had been flabbergasted. That a "gentleman" should make an honest woman of his daughter seemed to him most strange. That Mr. Harpenden had never made a dishonest woman of his daughter had not occurred to him.

"There's no accounting for gentry," he had said to his wife, who had wholeheartedly shared his opinion.

"I have never been one to bother," Mrs. Harpenden would say truthfully.

This aptitude enchanted Mr. Harpenden, who spent his time in a scientific study of his own health. That his wife, who bothered about nothing, should not even bother about him, filled her husband with appreciative gratitude. He had a horror of meddlers. Mrs. Harpenden minded nobody's business—not even her own. She was an exceptional woman.

"Ne soyons pas snob," the Countess had said,

which meant, as Lisa well knew, that the Countess was going to indulge in her own personal brand of snobbishness, a subtle brand with a strong individual flavour—once out of the *Almanach de Gotha* Mamachen she considered herself a free woman.

In England one was no longer circumscribed by those sacred pages. A country where younger sons leave no titles to their children, where anyone married anyone. How strange that so much disorderliness should exist in so orderly a nation.

And this never asking after husbands or wives or fathers or mothers, how much awkwardness did it not avoid!

The Countess examined her hostess. No shape had fought an unequal action with Mrs. Harpenden's flesh. Even her fingers hardly seemed to have broken away from one another. Her knuckles were dimples. When she talked her tongue licked her lips knowing that speech was not the real function of a tongue. She lived surrounded by small pink begonias, boxes of chocolates and motionless heavily-breathing dogs.

"I have never known," said Lisa politely, finding no other topic, "dogs that yapped as little as yours do."

All Mrs. Harpenden's dogs belonged to the species that yap. "What I always say," said Mrs. Harpenden—she belonged to those who "always say"

—"is: animals respond to the treatment you give them."

An untouched éclair lay on the carpet within an inch of the nose of a Pekinese.

"We should always do unto others as we would they should do unto us."

Mamachen was legitimately proud of the dazzling improvement in her English. There was hardly a day when she did not acquire some apt phrase.

"How revolting they are, Mrs. Harpenden and her dogs," said Lisa, as they drove home.

"They certainly make the pleasures of the flesh seem less tempting than they are supposed to be," agreed the Countess, "but you, my dear, are getting too thin. There is a juste milieu between a skeleton and Mrs. Harpenden's Pekinese. Han Sen, I understood the animal to be called. 'Sen' would appear to be a familiar word in Chinese, but as I am unacquainted with the language, I do not know what it signifies."

"Where have you been?" asked Cuthbert at dinner.

"We called on Mrs. Harpenden."

"On Mrs. *Harpenden*? Harpenden married a shop-girl."

"It must have been a confectioner's shop," remarked Mamachen.

"No. Her father was a draper. Had it been a

confectioner's she would not, I think, have remained so fond of sweets. I understand that in confectionaries the assistants are always allowed to take as many sweets as they like during the first few days. After that they lose any desire for what one might call pilfering."

"That is most interesting," said Captain Hyslop, "*most* interesting. I was altogether unaware of it."

(Why "altogether" thought Lisa, who found that a desire to see Captain Hyslop through Cuthbert's eyes had as yet yielded no happy results.)

"Le Capitaine." Mamachen threw him a dazzling smile, "lives on an altogether—how do you call it?—higher plane."

"The Countess means"—Cuthbert was one of those people who always explain what other people mean in their own presence—"that you have done a great deal of climbing."

"Le Capitaine" was a little crestfallen. He had enjoyed his dizzy moment on a moral plane.

"Well, I have done a spot of climbing in my time. Nothing extraordinary, you know, just climbing. It's curious how the thing catches you."

Mamachen, who was in a mischievous mood, decided to turn her batteries on to Cuthbert.

"I was not referring to climbing," she said. "I meant that Captain Hyslop is far above our little everyday matters."

"You mustn't run away with that idea," mumbled the Captain, much gratified. ("Run away with that idea," noted the Countess, registering an unfamiliar phrase.) "I'm just an ordinary 'bloke' who travels to like outlandish places."

"Bloke?" enquired the Countess, always anxious to learn.

"I'm afraid it's a slang phrase. It simply means a sort of person."

"What sort of person?"

"Well, any sort of person, you know."

"I am sure," said the Countess graciously, "that it means a very exceptional sort of person."

"No, indeed. That would be most misleading. It means, it means, I mean, just anyone."

"Might it mean me?" asked the Countess a trifle archly.

"No, of course not. It couldn't mean a lady. It doesn't even mean a woman," he added a little lamely. How difficult it is to explain things to foreigners — even quite simple things like "bloke".

Mamachen, though no feminist, disliked to be out of things. Why could she not be a "bloke"? From the modest deprecating way in which Captain Hyslop had pronounced the word she had deduced that it must imply some secret magnificence.

.

Cuthbert was puffing away happily at his pipe, while Lisa undressed.

"There are things the Countess understands which one would not expect her to understand," he said—"for instance, what she said about Hyslop and planes."

"You don't think I appreciate Captain Hyslop?"

"Well, my love, I don't say that, but he is essentially a man's man."

"I love men's men."

"He sees much more than you think."

"Like Mamachen?"

"Not in the least like that."

She laughed.

"Put me to bed."

He lifted her in his arms—she was lamentably light—and laid her on the bed.

"You are as pretty as a kitten," he said. "Where is Mahomet?"

"Lying on my hot-water bottle."

"Some day I shall be jealous of Mahomet."

"Please be jealous of everyone and everything."

He kissed her.

"I love you," she said.

It is not that women are irrelevant, he thought, only that love is their relevance.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN we discover that we love, our first desire is a desire to give, later we long to share—at the end—the end of love—we want to receive.

Our first desire demands some sacrifice, a pang, a pain, never a pleasure.

It is selfishness, though we do not know it.

We give what *we* care for—a cat, a Gothic tapestry, overlooking the dog or the first edition that lies in the longing of the other person.

We play with our own imagination.

How can we find the hidden corner of a secret desire, the hidden corner where we play no part?

* * * * *

Women fall back on the gift of themselves.

"Everything," they say complacently, unconsciously modest.

This solution did not occur in Lisa's case.

It would be difficult to explain to Cuthbert that she was giving herself to him for the first time.

This problem must occur in many marriages.

"My beloved, to-night *I am yours.*"

A difficult point to make, and a lovely present lost.

* * * * *

Symbols are the embodiment and the destruction of the absolute.

We should be able to recognise invisible bread and wine.

Lisa thought: "I must give Cuthbert something with which I am unconnected—something absolute which does not touch me (how tiresome not to be touched by our own gift). I want to give him something that he has *not* given to me.

"The East! Could I give it him, would it be spoilt if I gave it to him?

"A great love that I have never shared. If he didn't know that it was touched by me, I could share it, because he would never know that I was sharing it."

She was eavesdropping on the absolute.

* * * * *

Then the thought of Thibet occurred to her—Captain Hyslop had turned Thibet into a joke, but the unimportance of Captain Hyslop added to the importance of Thibet. Only a magnificent enter-

prise could stretch dull insignificance into a adventure.

Lisa had found her present—Cuthbert must with Hyslop.

How, Lisa thought, do our travellers find what is said and thought in strange languages—Esperanto of charm gives a common language.

Yet the charmless progress, they understand whispers of the native, the somnolent or active teet of crocodiles.

In Thibet, there are no crocodiles, there are Gods in which one must believe. In Thibet there are Cuthbert and Hyslop. . . .

Could there be me . . . ?

CHAPTER XIX

AFTER a great deal of thought Lisa decided that she had better talk to Captain Hyslop.

"Le Capitaine" had not enough understanding to misunderstand you with.

And how nice to be able to go straight to the point just as if there were no other point.

"Everything above board has always been my motto—it may sound a little slapdash, but it isn't really. I am not referring to ladies." He bowed slightly to Lisa. "They, of course, are different."

"Why?"

Captain Hyslop glanced at Sarah with the distaste he invariably felt for old maids. He disliked them because they were old maids and he disliked them because they were potential wives. It never occurred to him that an unmarried woman thought of anything except marriage.

"I need not tell a lady why," he said gallantly.

"Perhaps I am not a lady, I did so want to know."

"Of course we are different," Lisa smiled, coming to his rescue.

"The difference between men and women cannot be exaggerated," pronounced the Countess firmly.

Captain Hyslop was shocked. That was not at all what he had meant.

"I think, dear lady, that you exaggerate a little. The prerogative of your sex."

"I presume," said the Countess, "that a prerogative means a right to which one is not entitled."

"No, indeed"—the Captain believed in old-world courtesy—"a privilege which is your due."

The Countess sniffed. She detested to have privileges accorded her by the Captain.

"Cet homme est insupportable," she said, when the women were alone in the drawing-room.

"He would have made quite a nice dog," suggested Sarah.

"Oh NO."

"Dearest Lisa, how English you are in spite of everything. Up in arms when a dog is compared to a human being."

Lisa wanted to have Captain Hyslop to herself.

"Will you walk down to the stables with me?" she asked him.

It was one of those winter days when the air and the earth are each coated with frost. A round red sun totally detached from the sky kept himself to himself, giving out no rays.

"In Poland," said Captain Hyslop, "you must have had a lot of snow in winter."

"Yes, we had a lot of snow."

"I have never been to Poland. A most interesting country, I believe. But, of course, one is always at a disadvantage in a country when one does not speak the language. The Polish aristocracy, I understand, all speak French, but that, of course, would not apply to the peasants."

"No. Not to the peasants."

"When I am in a country I like to talk to people of all classes. You learn a lot that way. I mean, by talking to people of different classes. It broadens your horizon. I'm not much of a man for towns myself. 'It's your long legs,' mother used to say—she always saw the humorous side of things."

"It is a delightful gift."

"Yes," agreed Captain Hyslop, "not everyone has the knack."

There was a pause.

"As you know, Captain Hyslop, my husband is passionately interested in the East. I think that nothing would make him happier than to go with you on your expedition to Thibet."

"But could he get away? I mean, he has so many responsibilities here. And he wouldn't want to leave you."

"No. That is the difficulty. But the one unforgivable sin in a wife is to keep her husband from doing the things he really wants to do."

"That is a very generous attitude."

"No—please—I don't want you to think that. I am being quite sincere. Would you like to have him with you?"

"I would rather have Musgrave than anyone."

"Well, couldn't you talk to him about it? Lead up to it by degrees?"

"Wouldn't it come better from you?"

"It will come from me later."

"Yes, I see." For once Captain Hyslop did see. She touched his elbow.

"Please, throw out a few feelers."

The feel of her fingers through his sleeve gave him a faint thrill.

"I will do whatever you ask me to do," he said simply. He understood at once, she thought gratefully, never for a moment did it cross his mind that I wanted to get rid of Cuthbert.

She was filled with a glow of affection for Hyslop—a glow that she never lost.

"I hope that you have been flirting with the Captain," said the Countess, as they walked upstairs to dress for dinner. "I cannot imagine a more laudable activity. *Le Capitaine*," she added acidly, "in a man without a Christian name."

CHAPTER XX

“WHY,” asked Sarah, “should God be expected to endow us with sense, when He has already provided us with passion—or rather, why should He be expected to provide us with both? I, being an old maid, *am*, naturally, exceedingly tired of good sense. I therefore exalt it at the expense of passion. Something has to be done. One has one’s pride.”

“Sarah,” said Lisa. “I have never asked you a question, have I?”

“Never till now.”

Lisa did not ask her question.

“You are very good at shutting doors, but I know they are shut on full rooms.”

“It is you, my dear, who fill them.”

“Did your sister have many demands of marriage?” the Countess asked Cuthbert. In spite of its increasing perfection Mamachen’s English tended at times to be a little un-English.

“Demands? Oh yes, I see what you mean. One thinks of marriage as an appeal, but, as you say, it is more often a demand.”

The Countess had said no such thing.

Lisa was startled. Cuthbert rarely gave away his understanding. He regarded it essentially as his own secret possession.

For years this private parsimony had maddened her. To do Lisa justice, she had always known of a hidden treasure. But Cuthbert, who loved giving, had never known how to share—perhaps he had never wanted to share. He was objective, dispassionate and impersonal. His *non*-selfishness killed personal relationships, since personal relationships demand selfishness placed at the disposal of the other person.

People meant nothing to him except standards of behaviour. He had never let anyone down; with the possible exception of Lisa he had never met anyone.

Had he ever met Lisa? It was a nice point, a point of which she was fully conscious, and upon which she had never been able to make up her mind. Why should a gift of our love imply a gift of our life? How dare we make so great a demand? Is not love as divorced from life as a card sense from intelligence, or an aptitude for chess from logic?

How ridiculous this attempt to put two and two together when they are as separate as any other entities.

Is not our craving for passion an impertinent

daily prayer for a miracle? Yet is it impertinent to pray for a miracle? Would it not be rude to the miracle to pray for less? Our own self eludes. How, then, can we expect to give away so intermittent a possession? When we say in all good faith, "I am yours", do we know that we have become a stranger created by a stranger's vision?

The tragedy of life does not lie in heights or depths. Most men and women rise to occasions. We have been given heroism with which to meet danger, stoicism with which to meet pain, even occasionally imagination with which to colour the everyday. But, in love, how difficult to give something that is neither passion nor patience, some ultimate essence, the only contribution worthy of our love! Our fumbling quest for intimacy gropes in the dark, faintly hoping that once accustomed to the half-light our eyes may learn to see, even though the objects be uncertain and the shapes dim.

"I know her very well."

We have heard, we have made that imbecile remark. It can never be made of anyone we know, that certainty is accorded to only acquaintances, for acquaintances we can see as clearly as postcards: blue skies, white snow, pink roses, green trees. Encroaching intimacy brings strange lights and strange shadows. The landscape is blurred. What was once so definite has disappeared, new features emerge

from nowhere. Under the pressure of our growing feeling certainties disintegrate, we advance, hesitantly, in an uncharted world.

Love, hate, happiness, pain, all the larger cards can be trumped by life. Life keeping her two for an ace, since she is entitled to a little fun. After all she has dealt the hand.

"Cuthbert," said Sarah to Lisa, "is an absolutely happy man."

"Oh——"

Sarah chuckled. "You really are perfect, Lisa. You won't even allow him to be happy, lest it should imply a criticism of his intelligence."

"Don't be so absurd. Nothing like that had ever occurred to me."

"Well, it's an excellent thing not to think that one has thought about something."

When Lisa had touched Captain Hyslop's sleeve, he had realised by a strange jump of his blood that he was feeling something he had never felt before. When he had proposed to Eveline he had thought her very pretty. Even now, with two children and a husband, she still was pretty—a little matronly perhaps, but in the circumstances that was to be expected.

Lisa, on the other hand, he had never considered

pretty. To begin with, her face was out of drawing. None of her features were in the right place. And what curiously flecked eyes—flaws one would have called their markings in a precious stone.

She was graceful, but she hardly seemed to have a body to put at the disposal of her grace. Captain Hyslop had always believed in healthy women.

Sarah's awareness of "le Capitaine's" feelings had easily preceded his own. She had even stolen a march on the Countess, though she confided her discovery to Mamachen, rightly believing in the pleasures of joint observation.

"There is a great deal to be said against a clay soil," Sarah remarked.

"There must be," acquiesced the Captain, who always agreed with Sarah from lack of interest.

"It has never suited Lisa."

To Captain Hyslop the clay soil had suddenly sprung into life. It had become not only callous, but vindictive.

"Do you mean that it has affected her health? I mean, do you mean that her health has been affected by it?"

"I never myself think that Lisa ought to winter in England."

"But surely Musgrave—I beg your pardon."

"Cuthbert is always urging her to go abroad, but

she naturally knows how much he wants her here——”

Captain Hyslop was embarrassed by the discovery that he was in love not only with a married woman but with the wife of a man whom, as a traveller, he profoundly admired.

Had she given him any encouragement she would not, of course, have been the sort of woman he could have cared for. But she had given him no encouragement, only her every movement was an enticement. Can you call unconscious inflaming an encouragement?

He must go to Thibet and take Cuthbert with him. That after all had been what she had wanted. Cuthbert would be under his eyes. Captain Hyslop was maddened by the thought that Lisa had a husband. That agony would be exorcised if her husband were with him.

The possibility that Lisa might have a lover never occurred to him. His illegitimate jealousy was directed only at the legitimate.

Thibet was no longer what it had once been, it had become Lisa's winter in the sun.

Cuthbert and Hyslop preferred to forget that they were getting the best of both worlds. However, as always in those circumstances, a comforting feeling of virtue erroneously arose.

Everyone was going to do something for someone else. Lisa for Cuthbert, Hyslop for Lisa, Hyslop for himself. It seemed an ideal plan.

Cuthbert did not yet know that he was going to Thibet. Hyslop had mooted the subject.

"I should have liked it very much indeed. Unfortunately the question does not arise."

"I quite see that you have certain ties."

Captain Hyslop disliked referring to Lisa as a tie, but the reference had the undeniable merit of not being impertinent—besides, a tie might include other things. In addition to being a husband, Cuthbert was after all the Lord Lieutenant of his county. And probably the estate needed a certain amount of looking after.

"Rollit seems a most reliable fellow." Captain Hyslop was anxious to get rid of the estate as an obstacle.

"Rollit? Rollit is one of the best."

There seemed nothing more to be said.

"It is up to you, Lady Musgrave," Hyslop told Lisa.

How do you say: "I want you to go to Thibet because I love you"? It is tiresome to have no plausibility to put at the disposal of truth.

Lisa rehearsed the things she would say to Cuthbert, but the more neatly she phrased them the less convincing they sounded. How do you suggest that a separation represents the quintessence of love? The fact that it really is the quintessence of love doesn't help in the least.

A doctor might be useful, but if Cuthbert thought that she was ill he would never leave her.

It would have been nice to consult Sarah, but where her brother was concerned, Sarah's imagination went blank. Too many lost opportunities of understanding had made of their relationship a familiar un-intimate thing. They had both suffered from the strain of continuous parched contacts unwatered by tenderness.

Lady Alberta Musgrave had never cared for her daughter. A great beauty, her love of her own beauty had been no more than a love of beauty—at least only a little more. Sarah was a frustration, a defeat. Lady Alberta, triumphant with scarves and muffs and gloves and fans performing for her as if they were instruments in a quartet. Sarah upsetting scents, treading on trains. Sarah with words toppling over one another, torrents of words which suddenly ceased, leaving a silence, a real silence that could not be filled by a change of topic.

To do Lady Alberta justice she would never have been jealous of her daughter. Her love of beauty

might justifiably have been described by Mrs. Rollit as "heathenish".

"Your daughter makes everyone look vulgar."

No one had ever denied Sarah's distinction.

"I would prefer her to make everyone else look plain."

"I am sure you do not mean that."

"I always do my best to put words at the disposal of their meaning."

Cuthbert's grandfather had been the Prince Consort's godson. He had christened his daughter "Alberta", a name that could never be called either fashionable or pretty. A few months later the Prince Consort had died, thus honouring a rejection of possible advantages.

"The Duke of Connaught and the late Lord Balfour were both called Arthur, after the Duke of Wellington, who was their godfather."

"It makes one feel old," said Captain Hyslop.

"Nothing makes me feel old," snapped the Countess.

"He no doubt had many other god-children of whose existence we are unaware. But though Arthur was also the name of King Arthur, it has curiously enough never become popular."

"Why, I wonder," asked Lisa, "is there no Arthura?"

"Men's rights, dear lady." Captain Hyslop was

delighted by his joke. He repeated it (silently) to himself in order to be able to repeat it to other people—word-perfect.

"What, mon Capitaine"—(Hyslop detested being called "mon Capitaine". It made him feel, quite illogically, like a non-commissioned officer)—"is your baptism name?"

"Ernest."

Though Mamachen disliked Captain Hyslop, she decided to give him the benefit of a mot.

"Yes, of course, the importance of being," she smiled graciously. Captain Hyslop not unnaturally associated his name with himself.

"The importance of being." That must represent some Slav mysticism.

"I quite see that it isn't just doing things that matters." Captain Hyslop was almost apologetic. "I mean, I quite see what you mean about other things meaning something different."

As an experienced woman of the world, the Countess knew that in difficult conversational country it is always best to repeat the last word.

"Different?"

"Well, by different" (Captain Hyslop had forgotten what they were talking about) "I mean something one isn't accustomed to. I suppose one might call it something one's looking for. It isn't so much looking for things as finding things one

wasn't looking for. That is what exploring means. Of course, there are experts wanting to know something about an animal or a bird. I care most about the country and the people. Do you know that at an interval of ten years I met the same priest a thousand miles away from the place where I first saw him? Meeting him twice was much stranger than meeting him once. Though perhaps not from a religious point of view."

"Was he interested in birds?"

"Well, now that you mention it, he was interested in birds. You see what I mean, interested in birds."

"Yes, of course I see."

"Saint Anthony, of course, believed in fish and other animals. My priest, or rather the one I was telling you about, always had a particular feeling for birds."

"Is there anything wrong in loving birds?"

"Well, I suppose—I am not a Catholic, so I do not know—I suppose that one ought not to choose what one loves."

"Does choice turn love into something wrong?" Sarah wanted to pin down the Captain.

"That was not at all what I meant to suggest. There are, of course, a variety of animals."

"I understand," said the Countess, "that in India, where for the Hindus the cow is sacred, that animal is presented with blue beads and wreaths of mari-

golds. She is also tortured in order to produce more milk, and whatever agony she may suffer she cannot be killed."

"Confucius——"

"Yes——" Lisa whispered an expectancy on to the silence.

"We mustn't be bores. A drink, Hyslop?"

"And you, Lady Musgrave?"

I have lost Confucius, thought Lisa, only this time he seemed almost within my reach. It wasn't that he was nearer to me, but that I felt nearer to him.

"A curious thing, religion," said the Countess, "always playing about with pain. The Crucifixion, all the martyrs—what bad examples! Putting wrong ideas into people's heads. Why set life in frames of cruelty? But I suppose that pain is the only thing about which there can be no doubt."

CHAPTER XXI

HOW does one approach a subject? Perhaps the heart of a city demands some aloofness of suburbs. Can even a mathematician fly as the crow flies? Presumably not since so easy a solution would deprive him of his problem. A poet? Can a poet envisage a destination? Would not his genius for ever deflect him?

Lisa rehearsed little scenes with which to draw Cuthbert's attention to the possibility of his participating in Captain Hyslop's expedition. She could not say: "You have always been interested in Thibet". She could not say: "Captain Hyslop is a most remarkable man. I feel that something really important will come out of his journey" (or could she say that?). She could not say: "I think you need a change".

What Lisa did say was: "Why don't you go to Thibet with Captain Hyslop?"

"Have I done anything to hurt or annoy you?"

"Did it sound like that?"

"Nothing that you said could ever sound discourteous."

Oh, God! thought Lisa.

He was stiff with hurtness.

As usual, I shall have to put myself at the disposal of my case. The humiliating thing about being a woman is not the uses we put ourselves to, but the necessity for the uses. It is the pre-selling of ourselves that is irritating. Economic independence, of which our feminists speak so highly, is no doubt most desirable, but what is it? A blank cheque, a blank cheque which we will never voluntarily fill in with independence. Who, in private life, wants independence except from a state of chronic hopelessness or in a moment of temporary anger? When we seek this personal yet dispassionate dignity, does not the passion which is driving us destroy the essence of our objective?

Lisa knew that Cuthbert was hurt.

"Darling," she said, "my very own darling, I love you to be unreasonable on my behalf, but please stop for five minutes. Think of it, you will have three months of exciting discovery—discovery and discoveries. I will have three months of looking forward: to what better purpose could three months be put?"

Cuthbert could imagine no better purpose, but he was vaguely worried. "If you were taken ill I should be so far away."

"Why should I be taken ill?"

"Well, you are not strong."

"The delicate survive everything."

Cuthbert, unconsciously, was beginning to think of his kit.

"You see, my darling, I don't want to come between you and anything. I don't want to be the cancellation of a joy—or even of a pleasure," she added, recognising a more difficult sacrifice.

"The cancellation of a joy," Cuthbert repeated. How easy it is to repeat words to which we have not listened. Our inattention gives them back to us verbatim. (He must consult Brewer about that new rifle.)

"I have always wanted you to be happy with and without me."

It had not always been true, it had only become true when she had wanted him to be happy with her—in fact, when she had discovered that she loved him.

"You are so unselfish," he said, happy to have discovered the solution of the problem.

It was his solution, not hers.

"Cuthbert is going with you."

"Oh," said Captain Hyslop, feeling that something should be added. After a slight pause he found an additional phrase. "That is good news." ("That is good news" seemed a little unsatisfactory.)

"Excellent news," he amended. "Musgrave will be invaluable."

Lisa made the announcement at dinner. She was determined to shut the door on any hesitation of Cuthbert's.

"Tiens," said the Countess. Unlike "le Capitaine", she felt no necessity to add to her statement.

"I had thought of starting at the beginning of March. There is a P. and O. which leaves Marseilles on . . ."

The ladies had ceased to play any part in the conversation. Lisa heard it droning on like the buzz of a bumble-bee. She felt perfectly happy.

Later in the evening Captain Hyslop said to Lisa: "Would you think me very impertinent if I asked you to call me Ernest?"

"I should love to call you Ernest."

Going up to bed, Lisa remarked to the Countess: "Captain Hyslop is called Ernest."

"So he has a Christian name."

"Ernest."

"One ought not to be surprised. So much importance!" Mamachen saw a point that was not there—at least not for Lisa.

In bed she remembered that he had said "Ernest". She had thought it was a joke, and then he had not laughed at her joke. "It is a mistake," she reflected, "to be too much on the *qui vive*—one misleads oneself."

CHAPTER XXII

THE Countess decided to leave for Florence. Florence, at any rate, was no outpost of organised folly. At Barnaby everything had become a preparation. Life was aimed exclusively at Thibet. A journey was all very well, but somebody else's journey! Lisa wide-eyed with delight when the binoculars arrived, Lisa fingering a flask, caressing a thermos.

Ridiculous, thought Mamachen.

She transposed the scene. Stanislas (or, to be more accurate, one of his ancestors) advancing in battle, herbaceous-borders of banners waving to right and to left of him. Lisa keeping the vows we keep, the vows we do not need to swear.

"They would have suited you, lilies and swords and knights and tournaments and grails."

"There was only one Holy Grail."

"My dear, if there were only one Holy Grail there would be no religions—and perhaps," added the Countess, reverting to her excellent sense, "no wars."

"You mean that every faith is part of faith?"

"Obviously. But not to the faithful."

"I am so sorry that you feel you must go. I sympathise. The house is in a turmoil—" said Cuthbert courteously.

"Everyday life," observed Sarah, "is a more or less harmonious mess. But this sudden concentration on a single objective is enough to disintegrate more solid structures."

"I shall be with you in spirit," smiled Mamachen, "which will, I think, be much more comfortable for everyone."

"The Countess is an admirable organiser," remarked Sarah, "she can even put the spirit at her disposal."

"You always forget what a trying life she has led."

"It has neither tired nor tried her in the least. It has created her, and a very good job it has made. The Countess is one of those rare people who can learn without humility. Most of us when we add to our knowledge feel a little humbled by the thought of our ignorance. Not so the Countess. Each new experience is a bibelot added to her collection. Moreover, no strange object has ever implied a former gap."

"Mamachen," agreed Lisa, "has collected rather than absorbed. Life to her is a cotillon—a cotillon that topples miseries as well as joys into one's lap."

Everything that has happened to her has been external to her. That I suppose is why she has remained intact, absolutely intact. She is carved in glass—unbreakable glass. I see her with an accumulated treasure of experience. A father, a mother, a husband, children, lovers, wars, epidemics, loves, hates, sacrifices, triumphs, she remains the curator of the museum assessing the value of the exhibits with scarcely a preference."

"Poor Maria Carlotta," said the Countess, referring to her future hostess, "has taken an unaccountable liking to birds. Macaws claw at you from perches, parrots blink under gold domes, doves inhabit wicker-work (who, I wonder, first decided that doves should be housed in wicker-work?), an aviary is at the disposal of small, highly coloured, tropical specimens, most of them, I understand, called humming-birds. I wish their bite were worse than their hum! Are there not enough stray noises without voluntarily assembling them? Why bring together of your own accord so many discordant and superfluous sounds? I see that old women require to be attached to something. A bird, no doubt, is less expensive than a gigolo. But so much more noisy than a fish. A nice aquarium would solve Maria Carlotta's problem perfectly. Every colour in the rainbow." The Countess suddenly

became an ardent fish-lover. "I have seen them myself—black, silver, scarlet, turquoise—you give them a coral, a fern, a shell and they disturb no one. I suppose," a faint note of complacency crept into the Countess's voice, "the truth is that Maria Carlotta is becoming rather deaf, though even that is no excuse for the macaw."

"What I most admire about the Countess," Sarah explained, "is her levity."

"My dear Sarah," Cuthbert was shocked, "the Countess is a lady of high-spirited courage who throughout a difficult life has never allowed herself to be daunted by circumstances—or even, I might say, by events."

"I entirely agree, but nevertheless she has found her levity a great stand-by."

"How can levity possibly be a stand-by?"

"It could not be for us."

Cuthbert, in spite of the composite importance he gave to Musgraves, disliked being included in his sister's "us".

The importance of being a Musgrave was ignored by no Musgrave—but it did not tend to bring them together. The name was enough. Why foolish excursions into embarrassing cordiality?

"I should be glad to know exactly what you mean by 'us'."

"Why, you, of course."

"I am not 'us'."

"Why not? There are excellent protagonists of plurals, Kings and Popes."

"I am sorry, my dear Sarah, if I seem at all curt, but when I say 'us' I mean Lisa and myself."

"And when you say 'we'."

"Obviously."

"Then will you never be able to say 'We landlords', 'we Englishmen', 'we churchmen', 'we magistrates', 'we churchwardens'?"

"I have never been a churchwarden."

"But you have been a landlord, a churchman, an Englishman and a magistrate."

Cuthbert wondered why his sister could make such nonsense out of quite obvious sensible things.

"Don't you think it is nice," Lisa said pacifically, "that when Cuthbert says 'we' and 'us' he means himself and his wife? What a lovely tribute to marriage."

"Precisely." Lisa was very good at raising Sarah's sieges.

"Better than being dozens of Englishmen, magistrates and churchmen—or one King or one Pope. For in the case of a King or a Pope the 'we' is only an honorary 'we'."

"Very well," said Sarah, "let us accept this two-

power standard. If I have a lover am I entitled to say 'we'?"

"The 'we' would be a matter of taste."

"In fact you think that one should say 'we'?"

"I was not aware of having said that."

"We are never aware of having said anything until we are misquoted."

Cuthbert put down his bedroom slippers noisily. In the bathroom he brushed his teeth noisily. His sister was undoubtedly represented by noise. Even the tap, tweaked by exasperation, gave a certain hiss to the water.

Going into his wife's bedroom, he found himself banging the door.

"Forgive me, I am afraid I banged the door."

"Did you?"

She smiled at him from her dressing-table.

"Lisa, why don't you tell me that I am irritable?"

"Do you want to know that you are irritable?"

"I suppose not. But that is not the point."

"Isn't it?"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE Countess realised that leaving England meant something more than leaving a country—it meant leaving a county. It was not a separation, it was a wrench. Landscapes entangle themselves in our hearts. Is not the shape of some particular tree the equivalent of a lilt in a voice we love? If we remember a gardenia or a ball dress, if we remember a whisper or a challenge, do we not also remember a cold winter's day, no lights, no shadows, black earth and black trees defying the frost, piercing the woolly comfort of the snow?

The Countess was pottering about the kitchen-garden, just as if it were summer. She was especially attracted by a heap of manure. She wished that she knew the word—and indeed other words, ingredients of manure.

Linguistic difficulties are easily overcome by generalisations. Love, hate, politics and religion can be arrived at by circuitous routes. They can be explained, described, made vivid by our gifts of expression. But a carrot, a cauliflower, a hen, a duck, these words need exact translations. They are at the disposal of no metaphor.

The Countess, longing for the word "manure" of which she was ignorant, could find no equivalent.

Silas (the gardener) knew that she was in need of help.

They looked at one another, conscious of a bond of helplessness. The Countess poked the manure with her foot, smiling up at him. Silas trod it back. A bond had been established between them.

After that Silas said: "The foreign lady" instead of "that foreigner". Mamachen, as usual, had won her point.

Blackmail, murder, jewels, furs, roulette-tables, spies, adventuresses—there is nothing unusual about the things that don't happen to you. We are perfectly at home in worlds we do not know. A Cardinal to Silas was a familiar figure, but the Countess, examining manure through a lorgnon, baffled him. He could not think what she was "driving at".

Mamachen knew a great deal about the soil, she was (though she kept it to herself) an expert on crops. Early in her married life she had taken charge of her husband's estates. A technical training, two wars and various epidemics had given her theoretical and practical experience of medicine, but of these things she never talked. They belonged, in her opinion, to the sphere of action, not of conversation. Action and conversation—in both of which she had great faith—should be strictly segregated. A

profound distaste for bores had led her to this conclusion. She enjoyed the experiences of others because she could laugh at them. Her own were inviolate. There was for her no differentiated inefficiency. She despised it equally on a battlefield or at a dinner-table. Mamachen in her time had done a great deal of good, but sentiment had never played any part in her activities. She had been occupied, not *preoccupied*, by the welfare of the peasants. There was no care or trouble that she had not devoted to their physical well-being. Always helpful, she had never meddled. Spiritual interference was anathema to her. One must do unto others as one would they should do unto us. Feeling a profound, and probably unjustified, contempt for the sprawling emotions of philanthropists, a tremolo disgusted her as much as an abstract principle.

"Tout ça ce sont des enfantillages," she would say.

Lisa's romanticism amused her and she respected her dignity. She had always admired and despised her daughter-in-law. It was silly to put up with so much, but excellent to put up with it so well. A methodical woman, the Countess often wondered whether there was method in Lisa's aimlessly successful steering. How unhappy had Stanislas made her? It had been difficult to discover, and for this difficulty she had always given her daughter-in-law full marks. "C'est une dame." The summing-up was

highly complimentary. The Countess believed in behaviour. Conversation was her one real hobby. She adored talk, and like many brilliant talkers she could put it at the disposal of reticence. Being able to say anything, she was also able not to say anything she did not wish to say.

Consider the tongue-tied! When their tongues are loosened, what an incoherent welter of indiscretion is not released! They have no brakes—they have no steering-gears. How can an inexperienced talker control an unexpected and totally unfamiliar avalanche! How can this sudden luxury fail to go to their heads! Conversation as an art is conversation, as an accident it is revelation. Mamachen enjoyed, and was able to stimulate, both of these products.

"Silas can read and write?" she asked.

"But of course," Mr. Rollit was embarrassed, afraid that he had said something rude about Poland. "Education in England is compulsory," he added, hoping to make amends for some possible offence.

"Does he like it?"

"Like what?"

"I mean, does Silas like reading and writing?"

"I should hardly think so."

"But then, as you said, it is compulsory."

Mr. Rollit felt that he had been cornered. He

didn't quite know how or where. Talking to the Countess was always so confusing. You never seemed to find the point in the place where it ought to have been. In a vague way he felt that he had let down the educational system of Great Britain—or rather England, since he did not feel himself qualified to make any statements about Wales or Scotland.

The Countess, who liked Mr. Rollit as much as she disliked Captain Hyslop, made an immense concession. She started talking to him about manure.

Mr. Rollit was dumbfounded! To be bewildered by the Countess's conversation—well, that was only natural. After all, she was a foreigner! But to be confounded by her knowledge of manure was quite another matter.

When he got home he told his wife.

"What she said was absolutely true and most interesting."

"Hm," said Mrs. Rollit. "I never believe a word people say."

"But that, my dear, is not the point."

"I was not making a point." Mrs. Rollit spoke with finality. "I was stating a fact."

Mr. Rollit capitulated. He knew when he was beaten.

Lisa felt a little guilty at not being fonder of Mamachen. Sarah felt a little ashamed of enjoying

the Countess's society so much when she liked her so little. Cuthbert was disturbed by the thought that his impending journey to Thibet might have made him seem a little inhospitable.

"I do wish you would stay till we go," he said.

Maria Carlotta was surprised at Nathalia. Surely she must know that a general invitation does not imply acceptance. She had not specified any date, and it did seem hard to be punished for one's good manners!

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

CUTHBERT and Lisa arrived in Paris and stayed at the Ritz. The concierge, he explained, was an excellent man; no message ever went wrong. Cuthbert treated the Ritz exactly as if it were his club. The first thing he did was to ask if there were any messages or letters and to order *The Times* to be sent to his apartment every morning. He then entered the lift, went straight to his bedroom, undressed, washed, dressed again, took the lift in order to go downstairs, made further enquiries concerning letters and messages and walked a hundred yards down the Rue Cambon in order to be shaved.

Stanislas, also, had always stayed at the Ritz. He, also, had, in a very different way, treated it as his club.

Ambling through the foyer, he would watch the familiar features—minor royalties in search of a meal, minor arrivistes in search of minor royalties, gay little nests of cocktail-drinkers hoping that something more material might materialise, American matrons with matronly lap-dogs, either the models or the mimics of their mistresses, semi-circles of chairs reserved for the guests of resident Maharajahs,

passing peers in flannel suits, never staying for more than twenty-four hours, an occasional king in exile or on holiday, his incognito made delicately obtrusive by the waiters who knew that, whatever other purposes you might have in coming to the Ritz, passing unperceived was clearly not among them. And always some old gentleman with a French bulldog, a white moustache and the rosette of the Légion d'honneur, walking through and never sitting down.

Then there were elderly American couples, he with his scarlet baby ribbon (accorded for war services) and she with surprisingly small feet, totally unsuited to the support of the rest of her figure.

To Stanislas the Ritz had been a place where you met someone you had last seen in Rome. . . .

To Lisa the Ritz meant Olivier. . . .

Every head waiter is half a Field-Marshal and half a chef de protocole, but Olivier is Olivier—his quick, cat-like tread, whose brilliant light-blue eyes that bore into yours without ever being caught by them—a Grand Vizier without a Sultan, a victorious General without an army, a creative artist with no output to vulgarise his gifts. A man who has never been to bed and has never sat down, who has never eaten or drunk, or smoked, a man who has never rested or hurried, but who alone among men could give you the ultimate essence of sleep and food and wine, of cigars, opium, speed and stillness.

The connoisseur who, knowing all secrets, has ceased to collect such foolish bibelots.

"Do you suppose that when he was young Olivier collected secrets?" Lisa had asked Stanislas.

"Perhaps, but not for long; you see, there were too many duplicates."

"Oh no!" Lisa had said passionately, "there are never any duplicates." And Stanislas had smiled at her, the half-mocking smile which was his nearest approach to tenderness. "My poor romantic," he had said.

"When he comes up to my table," Lisa had continued, "with a napkin over his arm and takes a knife himself and carves me some shaving of an animal, I feel so proud. Perhaps it is his only vanity—to show how brilliantly he still can play even the scales of his *own* métier."

To-day she wandered towards the dining-room at a quarter to four. Tea would not have begun and Olivier might already be there.

He was.

She looked at those brilliant light-blue eyes, eyes you had to shade your own eyes to look at, holding immune a myriad unrecorded secrets, needing not even the shelter of an eyelid.

Their conversation was warm, but punctilious . . .

Then: "Où allez-vous passer vos vacances?"

"Chez moi, milady, près de Pau."

Olivier's "chez moi," thought Lisa, as remote as Cuthbert's beloved East, as inaccessible as the ultimate retreat of the Grand Lama, as mysterious as the Covenant of the Ark.

Olivier's "chez moi" with growing children, and growing fruit-trees, Olivier *sitting down*, in carpet slippers perhaps, reading the *Gazette de Pau*, while Madame Olivier brought a tureen—yes, a tureen—of steaming vegetable soup. Lisa knew a man who had once given Olivier a Mercédès motor-car—had he sold it? Probably—undeniably there are duplicates of Mercédès motor-cars!

"Oh, there you are," said Cuthbert. (What is so delightful about Cuthbert, she thought, is that he never asks why one is anywhere.) "This has just come for you."

"It is an invitation to dine with the Quincys. The Quincys are distant relations of Stanislas's family."

"Of course, my love, if it amuses you."

The Marquis de Quincy—perhaps it was his strain of Polish blood—adored entertaining.

He was a grand seigneur of the old school, delightfully ridiculous until his beautiful manners brought home to you the fact that it was you who were ridiculous—or worse still—a little vulgar.

He prided himself on keeping open house. Every-

body, he would explain, who would honour him by coming était le bien-venu.

As "everybody" had fortunately not heard of this expansive hospitality, he was able to give carefully and exquisitely arranged entertainments. Myriads of candles turned each chandelier into a Christmas-tree (why M. de Quincy's candles never dripped had always mystified Lisa).

One singer, one diseuse and some arrangement of string instruments, to which was added an occasional flute or harp, constituted an evening party. His dinners were arranged on the principle of a Noah's Ark. Two members of his club, two writers (one a novelist, the other an academician), two members of the family, two pretty women living apart from their husbands, two talkers (men), an ambassador and his wife, and then—in single file—a maréchal, a priest, a scientist, a painter (or a sculptor) and (the Marquis prided himself on moving with the times) "un homme politique"—a minister or an ex-minister.

In a moment of audacity he had once invited a journalist.

As Lisa was a foreigner and would therefore be placed on his right, he had, for that particular dinner, decided to omit an ambassador. He had also solved the problem of the minister's possible susceptibilities by not inviting him. (He mightn't

have cared to see a *maréchal en retraite* placed above him.)

The title "Sir" he associated with diplomats and colonial Governors, but in a desire to "place" Cuthbert he had discovered baronets—a negligible quantity since they dated only from James the First. However, he knew that English society was an entirely haphazard structure. Without financial compensations you married above yourself and below yourself, and no one thought anything of it. A conscientious examination of the Musgrave family had revealed many brilliant "alliances". And there was that mysterious category "a gentleman" which apparently provided you with a passport which required no visa.

The Marquis was not a snob, but he liked precisions. A painter painted, a sculptor sculpted (he must remember to ask a composer to his next dinner), a writer wrote, a scientist discovered things, a statesman occupied himself with politics. Beauties and wits held roving commissions. Not for them the barriers of class or the framework of society.

"*Nous autres*" (by which he meant aristocrats) "*nous sommes les désœuvrés.*"

He would say it with melancholy pride. Was he not a man who moved with the times, and could therefore recognise an unpleasant truth? Lisa sat between her host and a duke; only a remote connec-

tion, he was not placed as a member of the family.

Lisa talked to M. de Quincy, who was highly cultivated, about Chateaubriand. Their conversation, punctuated by references to common relations M. de Quincy had occasionally seen—and of whom Lisa had occasionally heard.

M. de Quincy thought modern writers—he could not speak of the English, as, alas! he could only read English in translation—unnecessarily jerky.

Lisa agreed that all fine prose must be legato. Legato, the Marquis was delighted; that was exactly the right word.

The Duke—it was no doubt his own fault—found the modern generation lacking in finesse.

Lisa warmly denied that it was the Duke's fault.

"Madame est trop aimable." Lisa assured him that she was not in the least aimable. Her husband would corroborate what she said. (She felt a little ashamed of herself.) Husbands, said the Duke, were notoriously blind, though where she was concerned he allowed himself to believe that no such blindness was possible.

At this stage the conversation became an à trois.

The Marquis said that Fascists were bandits and that Bolsheviks were—well, Bolsheviks.

Everything was most harmonious.

We were living in an age of barbarians. . . .

Civilisation, murmured Lisa, was a French

prerogative. England, countered the Marquis, was the home of tradition.

The funny thing, thought Lisa, is that everything we are saying is perfectly true. She looked across the table—Cuthbert's perfect French was always a surprise to her. He had never forgotten what his sister's governess had taught him during the holidays. The necessity for more words had expanded his vocabulary and he had kept his accent.

("How like Cuthbert," thought Lisa—her love had turned everything nice into characteristic.)

Cuthbert was clearly enjoying himself. He was one of those people who, being completely unself-conscious, are always perfectly at home.

He was talking (the Marquise had turned to the Maréchal) to one of the two pretty semi-detached ladies—those semi-detached ladies with which the Catholic faith provides Catholic countries. He was purring the particular purr of assailed yet unassailable virtue.

Lisa thought of Mahommed—indeed, at that moment Mahommed was lying in her lap. The Marquis was saying that the past had brought us so much, it was our duty to live for the future. . . .

Two powdered footmen opened the doors.

The Marquise smiled, at Lisa. . . .

After dinner she found herself talking to the most obscure of the guests, a young man of thirty who was

connected in some vital but unobtrusive way with either—or both—her host's financial and political interests and ambitions. The conversation rippled along, on an agreeable current of unenforced interest.

M. de Quincy was slightly annoyed. He couldn't think how it had happened. The Maréchal should have come first and his "bon Raymond" not at all. But these things could be remedied. The Maréchal, he explained to Lisa, was a "gourmet" who wished to taste charms of which he had heard so much. . . .

The Maréchal braced himself, as a soldier should, to face an unsought ordeal.

He had known Mamachen and began a few phrases on the magnificent gallantry of the Russian armies. Then remembering that, of course, Lisa's husband had been a Pole, he hastily switched to the greatness of Pilsudski. But here again the accuracy of his memory was to intervene. The lady was English and her third husband (by now the irritated Maréchal had presented her with her father-in-law *en premières nocés*) was English. "Mon excellent camarade Lord Haig," sounded a little flat; "cet homme si loyal—Pilsudski"—had exhausted too many superlatives. He felt annoyed with his host—as guests do in similar circumstances.

Lisa, with a charming smile, covered her three un-

desirable nationalities with the universal glory of the tricolour.

The Maréchal, though still a little put out, responded to familiar sounds.

And then, as it so frequently and fortunately happens, a God-sent topic fell from a clear sky.

Lisa, racking her brain later, could not remember how the subject could have arisen. The ninth- and tenth-century churches in the Asturias. Their eyes lit by a common passion, they corrected one another's details. "I am sure it was Santa Maria de Naranjas," Lisa affirmed, dogmatic with enthusiasm, "the one with the staircase outside that had been built as a country house."

Lost were the glories of the Russian armies, exorcised the ghosts of Haig and Pilsudski. M. de Quincy seeing so much absorption felt it his duty to intervene.

He brought up an Academician—"Monsieur a écrit de très jolies pages sur l'Angleterre." Lisa and the Maréchal looked helplessly at one another—they both smiled.

"Au revoir, Madame," he said, kissing her hand—and then—feeling that there was something more that needed saying: "Au revoir". Lisa looked at the Academician with a distaste for which he was in no way responsible. She felt towards him an obstinate lack of interest. As this diminished her interven-

tions into the conversation it did not worry him in the least.

He had reached Poe ("one must take one's benefits where one can," she reflected, having regained her temper) when that faint rustle of dresses like an admonitory wind which breaks up parties began to quiver through the room. She got up, knowing that she was pressing some button which would release departure, so unlike the straggling disintegration of an English party where people leave when they like and stay on if they want to.

"C'est nous qui vous remercions," said her host in the hall, poising a wrap on her shoulders. "Vous n'aurez pas froid? Il est vrai, les dames n'ont jamais froid, même l'hiver—Vous êtes les victimes de vos couturières—et nous pauvres hommes . . ." he touched his sleeve.

"Vous êtes les victimes de vos tailleurs." ("I can still make just the right noises," she thought.) "Ils essayent de nous protéger—mais en vain."

The evening, he felt, had ended on exactly the right note. Why, asked the Marquise, had he interrupted the conversation between Lady Musgrave and le Maréchal when they were obviously getting on so magnificently?

Why? He had thought they were talking politics. Such disagreeable incidents arose from political discussions.

They were certainly not talking politics, said the Marquise scornfully. She knew exactly what they had been talking about. Having never heard of the tenth-century churches in the Asturias she could hardly have been expected to think of them.

CHAPTER II

IN the hall Lisa met Serge Galitzin—Serge was the son of Mamachen's sister Irina. Irina had been a great beauty, and with the tact which had distinguished her in life she had died at the height of that beauty. As Mamachen observed, legends depend on timing—Death collaborating with Princess Galitzin had arrived at precisely the right moment. Not that Irina had ever sought for effect. She was something of a saint and something of a goose. The Almighty had decided to bless the combination by giving her a face which, presented to some other person, might have done a good deal of mischief.

"Poor Irina," the Countess always talked of her sister as "poor Irina", referring not to her death but to her stupidity. Mamachen, who disliked stupidity in any form, disliked it particularly when it was suitable and convenient.

"I was probably jealous of Irina," she would say, wishing to register a weakness: a registered weakness was, she felt, no longer a weakness. She had never been in the least jealous of Irina.

Prince Galitzin was murdered by the Bolsheviki—a reasonable crime, as he had been the most public-spirited of men.

"He would have been no use as propaganda," the Countess remarked—a natural antipathy for her brother-in-law had been magnified by the respect she felt for him, "though Russia is too big for piecemeal propaganda."

At the time of the Revolution, Serge had been smuggled into France. He was fifteen, with a passion for mechanics which was to prove useful. He had French relations and no false pride. But he had pride and he did not like his French relations.

"There are no such things as obligations," he would say, "if you are fond of people, the question does not arise, and if you are not fond of them it should not."

He had the sort of arrogance which *should* go with breeding. He had become a mechanic in a factory. An admirable mechanic with a future—Occasionally he spent his fortnight's holiday in Poland. He liked Mamachen and she liked him. It was not, she would explain, honouring him with the explanation, that she had a weakness for her nephew. She liked him. Lisa knew him slightly but intimately. She recognised the fact that had she known him better they would have been no less intimate. He showed no signs of sharing this recognition. Serge was an adept at setting the tempo of a relationship.

He suspected her of a streak of ecstasy, and ecstasy

—even his own—he regarded as an intrusion on life. It was a danger of which he was conscious and against which he was always on his guard.

Stanislas was really too good a setting for a woman, making dignity and poise too easy—inevitable, in fact.

Perhaps, Serge thought, I am unjust, perhaps Lisa would have been like that in any circumstances.

But he only examined his unfairness when he was away from her.

And here they were in the hall of the Ritz.

He looked at Lisa. Her slanting grace was still there, but gone was that mixture of fever and calm which he had always noticed during the Stanislas period.

She was happy, he decided—surprised and interested by so unusual a phenomenon. Lisa, too, was examining him. (They hadn't met for five years.) With a pang she recognised his lost immaturity, that change from a sketch into a drawing. These sharper outlines, the definition of what had once been hints.

That dark face lit by those light eyes, greener, less yellow, than Stanislas's, but the same shape, less cruel, but equally mocking, as detached but a little more protective—only a *little* more, she decided. Eyes that would never accept you in a common vision. At any rate, Mamachen's onyxes gave what

you got and got what you gave. What a family! Never a blur of tenderness to veil their vision and give it greater reality.

Some fairy godmother—or witch—must have decided at their christenings to withhold the weakness and the warmth of tenderness.

“How well I know him,” she thought. “How intimate we must have been in some other incarnation.”

He thought: “I wonder what she is doing with her happiness? But, of course, one doesn’t do anything with happiness. It is a state. Only Lisa was certainly not made for happiness.”

“My dear,” she said, “what are you doing?”

“I am doing very well. My aeroplane factory would be lost without me until it found someone to take my place. And make no mistake, I have a place. What the English call a ‘responsible position’. I become more and more necessary in more and more different ways. Undoubtedly I’m an émigré—I was an émigré at fifteen—I didn’t even emigrate for—or from—an idea. I had no opportunity. I can neither oppress nor challenge. I can neither serve my country nor defend an idea. I work by day like a half proletarian and I behave by night like half a grand duke. But I belong neither to a factory nor to a night club. I want the *smell* of my country. The smell of the countryside. I have no hate to keep

me going. No Russian ever really hates. I loathe the Bolsheviks not because they have dispossessed me, but because they are dispossessing Russia—they are creating a generation of Germans. They won't stay Germans, of course, but it will take time. Think of creating an *élite* of Germans, of men and machines interchangeably soul-less. The suppression of class consciousness by making every human being class conscious. What is class consciousness, anyway? The rich are not class conscious, they are too lazy and perhaps too unimaginative; the poor are not class conscious, they are struggle conscious. Class consciousness only exists in the middle classes. It is the attitude of the half-successful towards the quarter-successful and vice versa. It is entirely urban. In Russia the landowner and the peasant called one another by their Christian names. There was injustice, but there was fraternity. In the name of a crusade against the bourgeois the Bolsheviks are attempting to forge a state of *petits bourgeois*. Let us pray that it may be a homoeopathic process."

"Thank God, my dear, you can still talk."

He smiled.

"Deeds not words! What a ridiculous phrase. All the great deeds were words— Freedom, patriotism, love, sacrifice—"

"But they became deeds?"

"Deeds were their undoing."

"Do you remember in old days," she said, "I used to annoy you by saying that the curse of the Slav temperament lay in the fact that murder to them was always a hyphen between hate and remorse, whereas presumably to the corpse it was a murder?"

"I remember that," he said.

He was silent. Then he smiled. "By the way, you have married again?" he said.

"Yes."

"Are you happy?"

"Infinitely happy."

"Is there nothing you want?"

"Yes. A child."

How funny, she thought. Here am I, who have been thinking of this one thing day in, day out, not always thinking of it, but always pressed down by it, *obsessed* by it, and I have never talked about it to anyone, not even—or rather only half—to Sarah. And Serge asks me a question and I tell him the truth at once.

He made no comment.

Then: "When am I going to see you?"

"You are taking the words out of my mouth."

"No one has ever been able to do that."

"I will find out where you are living from Olivier."

"You can find out my address," he laughed at her, "from the telephone book."

"Il y a une dame qui, je crois, vous attend, mon Prince."

"Would she be entitled to say 'mon'?" Lisa asked, smiling.

"Women only say 'mon' when they are losing their title," he remarked acidly.

Then he took her hands and kissed each one in turn.

"You may have noticed," he observed, "that when a man kisses both of your hands he is kissing you."

"I have noticed it," she laughed.

CHAPTER III

CUTHBERT knew that women went to Paris in order to "shop". Shopping was obviously for women what cricket or mountaineering might be for men—an inspired disinterested search for meaningless results. It is a pretty thought—Lancashire *v.* Yorkshire, victory: a coat and skirt. Sussex *v.* Somerset, victory: a scarf. And those drawn matches between women and their clothes! with points on the first innings either to the woman or to her dress.

Englishmen have few opportunities of recognising what a woman is wearing—flooded in summer by painted chiffons, she finds some equally vague equivalent in winter furs.

Only tea-gowns and tweeds has an Englishwoman made her own. She is impervious to hours or years. If it is fine she is dressed for a garden-party in the morning, if it is a grey day she is dressed for a journey in the afternoon. The elderly are submerged by a wash of what was once becoming.

Is not our Empire built on these billowy waves of eternally obsolete voile?

Cuthbert liked buying things for Lisa. A jewel was a jewel—a ruby, a sapphire, an emerald, a

diamond, a string of pearls—but a fur had ceased to be a sable or an ermine, a fur had become a silver fox! He saw cape after cape follow one another—they might have been a Nuremberg rally. Cuthbert didn't know what to buy for Lisa. He wanted something expensive and useless—unconnected with her needs.

He went with her to her dressmaker. He knew certain names—Worth, Callot, Cheruit: those he supposed were bygone days. Chanel, Lanvin, Schiaparelli had entered his memory—Cuthbert never forgot anything—by his ear, Schiaparelli sounded right and wrong—what he was trying to find.

The mannequins looked Egyptian with their precise movements, giving the impression of a frieze. The angular grace of a silhouette pleased Cuthbert.

"When would I wear it?" asked Lisa.

"Oh, I don't know—I know it would suit you."

Cuthbert, thought Lisa, the absolutist, impervious to Time or Space. The Englishman, thought the vendeuse, was a man who would not consider prices and who would undoubtedly pay every bill.

She also found him "sympathique"—a perfect "gentleman" who fingered no stuffs.

Nor did he give a glance at the mannequins; they might have been statues (had she but known it, they were).

And "son amie" had such a beautiful body—dressed or undressed.

Mademoiselle Hortense was an artist, and she had few clients who corresponded to her needs of self-expression.

She designed Lisa. She gave her outlines and colours. She diminished, she emphasised. Had it been necessary she would have been most accommodating about prices.

But Cuthbert never suggested a slightly cheaper material, a faintly diminished embroidery, an embroidery that would give precisely the same effect with different—albeit similar—beads. Hortense thought that the lady might have been a little more watchful, a little more considerate of Monsieur's interests.

After all, Madame was not "une parvenue, ça se voyait". And supposing that she were his wife—this suspicion had been gaining on Hortense—well, it was unnatural.

Lisa laughed as she saw her impossible trousseaux for unimaginable occasions increase and increase. Her trousseau was Cuthbert. How could she possibly want to economise in Cuthbert?

In a few days Cuthbert would be gone.

Lisa didn't think of it as a separation.

To begin with, they were in Paris, and a

parting in a strange place does not conjure up absence.

To part you must be where you have been together.

Perhaps, she thought, the Ritz would be the ideal place to die with nothing to remind of anything—no thought that this was your bed, your dressing-table, your view out of the window—that tree, for instance, which you had watched, a charcoal silhouette in winter, sprinkled by spring with a confetti of buds, covered by summer with a thickening drapery of leaves, green leaves getting darker and darker until they burst into an autumn blaze of splendour.

Your mother-of-pearl table, the chair that had needed re-covering for years (how often you had put it off because it was fading and fraying into such a silvery decay that the original colour of the brocade was hardly even a memory).

Sarah's chuckle, Mr. Rollit's nervous cough, Cuthbert's discreet unwelcome awakenings, they would not be the agonising tugs of loosening strings no longer attaching you to life. Failing an accident, death must clearly come in a hotel.

One should die as if one had been murdered or as if one had committed suicide. Death, with life at his disposal, should demand no trimmings.

"I am lucky," thought Lisa, "to be saying 'good-

bye' to Cuthbert in Paris, where there is nothing to separate us."

Besides, his journey was her present.

Cuthbert disliked being "seen off". Those last minutes in a draughty station; superfluous papers bought from uneasiness—the *Tatler*, the *Economist*, a detective story that one had already read (not the latest, which one knew one had already read)—all offerings to a furtive embarrassment.

Lisa always arrived just in time—or just too late—for a train.

"I miss so few," she would explain, "and save the enormous amount of time that I would waste year in, year out waiting in stations."

This undeniable truth escapes the tidy-minded.

Cuthbert liked to be "in nice time" for his train.

The time was, of course, never "nice", but accurate words are as inaccurate as lyrical words are inexplicable.

"Nice time," either an awkward pacing in front of a temporarily stationary train or the dallying at the bookstall retrieved by an ugly rush, consummated by a peck (the peck, it must be admitted would never have been a kiss), rendered tragic by the sudden recollection of the one thing that it was vital to take and almost impossible to forward.

Cuthbert's important luggage had preceded him.

but his enormously important small luggage was still in a luggage state—suitcases that wouldn't shut.

Many unaccommodating objects yield to hold-alls, but no one had ever considered a hold-all in connection with Cuthbert. His light cases were decorated with a visiting-card, "Sir Cuthbert Musgrave, Bt.," framed in leather.

These in no way solved last-minute emergencies. Lisa's maid performed prodigies of jig-saw adjustments. Cuthbert eyed her activities with the utmost distaste and distrust. He felt, rightly, that he would not know where to find his things. Lisa wandered uselessly about the room fingering tissue-paper.

A series of men in shirt-sleeves collected the remains of the drama.

"Monsieur n'oubliera pas de compter les pièces," Thérèse said firmly.

Cuthbert was still resenting her helpfulness.

"I love you," Lisa said.

Cuthbert, wondering what he might have forgotten, said: "Yes, of course." He patted her arm automatically. "Tell Rollit I will write to him from Marseilles." Then he saw his wife—a little blurred against the light.

He took her in his arms.

"God bless you, my very own," he said.

He picked up his gloves and left the room, not forgetting to shut the door.

CHAPTER IV

BEFORE Cuthbert left, he and Lisa saw a great deal of Serge.

Cuthbert respected a man who had a "job". A job was something a little different from a profession. It implied in some undefined way both work and achievement. A job in the city was not a job. To be the High Commissioner of the Saar Plebiscite was a job not to be a minister or an ambassador. To be in charge of a scheme of irrigation was a job, but not to be a Colonial governor. The Chair of experimental chemistry at Aberdeen was a job, but not the Regius Professorship of Greek at Oxford. The distinction between a "job" and a position was clear to Cuthbert, though difficult to define. It had to do with the possibility of definite results and required, perhaps, a temporary character.

The Chair of experimental chemistry fulfilled neither condition. But Aberdeen was a place to which you went and which, presumably, you left; whereas once you reached Oxford you were there for ever.

Serge had a job because he was employed by an aeroplane factory; he would not have had a job had he been working in a ministry. Cuthbert liked

Serge. They had in common complete unself-consciousness and he recognised in Serge not an émigré but an exile. Country-bred both, they would miss the same things. What matter if in one case it were a birch and in the other an elm; what is the difference between the steppes and the downs, the Castilian desert or a poplar-guarded river? Your country is a smell in your nostrils; it is neither a cottage nor a castle, it is not your station in life, high or low. The cliffs of Dover are Irun or Constantinople, the Finnish border, some Antarctic sea. Cuthbert had the traveller's feeling for home. He recognised in Serge a man without a frontier, which is worse than being a man without a shadow. Surely the greatest wickedness—and there are so many others—of political systems is that they can cut you off from sights and sounds and smells, from forests, plains and rivers, small valleys and wide skies which God gave and from which no man should dare to banish a fellow-creature!

Cuthbert didn't put it quite like that. What he said was: "I like Serge. He never complains. He is the sort of man who really would have been of use to a country."

It was characteristic of Cuthbert that he should have said "use" instead of "service", "a" instead of "his" country.

It was the sort of point about Cuthbert that Lisa

saw, but that she found it difficult to convey to others.

Serge saw it at once. Cuthbert was the only person to whom he ever talked about Russia without mentioning the Bolsheviks. Serge saw Cuthbert exactly as Lisa saw him. It gave her a deep new feeling of affection for him that had nothing to do with the attraction she had felt in the old days—and still felt.

After Cuthbert's departure they saw a great deal of one another. She found anew that excitement of conversation she had forgotten at Barnaby. Pictures jumped out of their frames. Once again she saw them for the first time. How else can one see anything? Characters walked out of their books. She ran into Natasha in the Bois de Boulogne and met Elizabeth Bennett in a glove-shop. To concerts she went alone. Where does it come from, this curious privacy of our ears—? Music, the most mathematical and the most emotional of the arts, giving us a complete harmony of mood and yet the least communicable common experience?

She discussed it for hours with Serge. They were both musicians and disliked a metaphorical approach to the subject.

"And yet," she would say, "a harp like water is nearer the truth than 'that sudden transition from F sharp to F'."

He agreed.

"We live by metaphor," he would say, "it is our only means of translating life."

"If you talk about a certain pink—a Rubens' pink or a Sickert pink—I know what you mean. But if I talk about the key of G minor I know what I mean, but do you know what I mean?"

"We think we know what Mozart meant, which is all we know about Rubens' pink or Sickert pink."

"But I do mean something different."

He smiled. "Let us talk about books—pour nous détendre. Dust goes to dust and earth to earth and words to words. What is so nice about literature is that one talks about words with words. That is what makes people think that they can read and write."

"It is a most tiresome illusion."

(She remembered "intellectual" conversation at Barnaby.) "Have you read *High Wind in Jamaica*?"

"Yes. Those wild cats attacking the tabby-cat and the earthquake— Those were the bits I admired most." (This from Lisa.)

"Oh yes, the cats. But the children. I'm not a married man, so perhaps I ought not to talk. I don't take a sentimental view of children. Cruel little brutes, as everyone knows who's been to a private school. But I thought the author went a bit far."

Lisa agreed.

(She still agreed.)

"The English are always right," she said.

"What?" Serge was startled.

They were walking in the Forêt de Fontainebleau. It was summer. The leaves were thick, the sun was all powerful. It was a battle of giants. Such violent light, such a dense barrage of shade.

"I was thinking," she said apologetically.

"You are quite right to apologise. Of what were you thinking?"

"Nothing——"

"You mean, nothing that you are prepared to tell me."

"I meant nothing worth telling you."

"In other words, everything!"

"No. I would always tell you everything."

He kissed her hand.

"Then what is it you won't tell me?"

She smiled at him.

"Only something that would take a long time and lose its point as it went on."

"That is the sort of conversation I like."

"Do you know," she said, "that you sometimes remind me of Stanislas."

His eyes narrowed.

"Yes," he said, "I know that."

She knew that she had hurt him, but she didn't know what to say. Of Stanislas at his best, she might have added. But there is no such thing as the best

or the worst of a person—there is only the person.

They walked on, separate and wretched.

"May I kiss you?"

"Of course."

(Why did I say that? she asked herself miserably, it sounded so rude.)

As always guessing her thoughts: "You are regretting your bad manners," he told her acidly.

"Yes. What ought I to have said?"

"Do or don't."

"Do."

He kissed her. Perfunctorily.

"What a rebuke," she smiled.

"Rien ne vous échappe."

He felt savage.

They walked on.

"It is a curious thing," he said. "I have never kissed a woman who didn't want my kiss. I use the word 'my' advisedly. I have always known— Call it a sixth sense, call it absolute pitch, whatever you like. I have never kissed a woman who genuinely didn't want to be kissed, nor have I kissed a woman who wanted a kiss as a tribute to her charms. A kiss over which she could purr or become indignant."

Lisa had regained her poise.

"What a psychologist," she remarked, "what a punitive artist."

He was still cross.

"Lisa, I love you."

"I know."

"How do you know?"

"I knew when you kissed me."

He looked at her, dappled by the sun and the leaves. To touch her would be, he felt, to dismiss her.

How like Stanislas he is, she thought.

He took her in his arms.

"It is important for me to prove that you have a body. Whether or not I can prove it to you is another matter——"

"The Key of G Minor," she murmured.

They walked back to the motor. The shadows were longer. There was an armistice between light and shade.

"Perhaps I never understood Stanislas," she remarked.

"Perhaps you have never understood anything," he replied.

She was thinking of Cuthbert.

The next day Serge lunched with Lisa at the Ritz. They both hated lunching at the Ritz, but it was different if you were staying there and had acquired some precarious, temporary foothold. And it was the right place to be in a moment of emotional stress, surrounded by so many people whose feelings would

appear to give them less trouble and infinitely less pleasure than their digestions.

"What is so interesting about the Ritz," Lisa said, "is that we see people who really appear to be living in the present. I always think of time as looking forward and then not wanting what one is looking forward to to come too quickly because it would stop the looking forward. It's very obscure and it isn't grammar, but you see what I mean."

Above all, I see what she is like, he thought.

"One looks back, and what an unreal thing one makes of the past! So carefully pruned that everything is too relevant to be true. Then something vitally inconsequent bobs up, restoring some balance by destroying *the* balance."

Serge smiled.

One of the charming things about Serge was the way he had of filling in your pauses with an expression of his face. Even to people he hardly knew he had a trick of imparting intimacy.

Olivier came up and gave them not only the tribute of his presence, but the accolade of his carving.

"How silly Bolshevik propaganda films are," Lisa said. "When they had Pudovkin and Eisenstein they had *men* of genius—that may happen anywhere at any time. One must be grateful for the coincidence of talent with an idea which others want

expressed, but it is not a thing you can order."

"Yes," Serge said, "in Moscow now the proletariat—I always think that such a rude word—listen to *Bohème*. If a man has the government that he wants, why shouldn't he have the music he likes? Our silly intellectuals thought that a social upheaval would imply an artistic renaissance. Art is made by minorities *for* minorities and it flourishes far more under the patronage of an individual, be he a Medici or a German Prince, a French King or an American millionaire, than it can possibly flourish dependent on the support of the public. Art in Russia is going down almost as steadily as in Germany. Perfection is not progressive, it is absolute. The sudden fusion of a God and a man."

There was a pause.

"We both talk so much," said Lisa, "that we need a moment's silence to recover from the other's speech. You don't make me feel deaf, my love, but hoarse."

He laughed.

She went on: "It is my turn now, isn't it? To return to so-called Propaganda. What do our new Russian films show us? First of all we see a drunken priest, half asleep with wine and lust. On the top of a stove lies a presumably loose—one hopes for the best—woman and on the wall hangs a crooked Ikon. We are then treated to a long interlude of accumu-

lating machinery. At first, due no doubt to sabotage, it fails to work, but a steady influx of State-minded labour puts the pieces together and a triumphant tractor, mowing down the beauty of the corn-fields, is finally crowned with a wreath of flowers by the delighted peasants. Anyone would have rather been the drunken priest, or the woman, or the Ikon."

"There was a wreath," Serge countered, defending his country.

"If I were to make a propagandist film for the Bolsheviks," Lisa continued, "I would photograph the Ritz at lunch. I would take a close-up of that waddling woman with her waddling dog, with her pre-arched eyebrows and her 'lifted' face—why 'lifted', I wonder—giving her chin the effect of a half-pulled sponge-bag."

He laughed: "All good propaganda would, of course, consist only in the portrayal of your adversaries. Where would you put Olivier? He would presumably be the hero."

"Olivier? As it is a pro-Bolshevik film, he would of course, appear as the saviour of society. But that is a role he has played for many years."

The Marquis de Quincy came up to the table.

"Madame. Mais, mon cher Galitzine, ne vous levez pas. Vous êtes cousins, il me semble. La Princesse était le sœur de Madame votre belle-mère. Vous êtes

trop jeune pour avoir connu la Princesse!" (He turned to Lisa.) "Elle était si belle qu'on n'en parlait pas pour ne pas froisser les autres dames."

Serge and Lisa went up to her sitting-room. On the table were her letters and *The Times*—ordered by Cuthbert. She opened them as they came—a private superstition.

"I have got a letter from Cuthbert from Venice. It begins: '*I will spare you a description of Venice*.'"

They laughed in a common love for Cuthbert.

"What a man!" Serge said. "No one has ever spared me a description of Venice. Unless, of course, it was a post-card, which is also a form of description."

Her next letter was from Mr. Rollit—she spared Serge Mr. Rollit.

Mamachen was maddened by her hostess's immunity from the noise of a new consignment of macaws. She was also maddened by the macaws.

"I could get away at any moment now," Serge was saying, "it is a slack period. When will you come to the Moulin?"

Lisa had always promised to go and stay at the Moulin. But yesterday had charged the visit with something a little different.

"Shall I come on Friday?"

"That will be altogether delightful—for me."

Serge suddenly had become quite formal. He bent over her hand as he kissed it, so that she couldn't see his face.

CHAPTER V

LISA had always passionately wanted to have a child. It was not only a love for children. She adored kittens and puppies and foals and small donkeys—their helplessness, their confidence.

Such possibilities of ecstasy and despair, made possible by size alone!

Perhaps animals keep it longer than human beings. Perhaps cats and dogs and horses and grown-up donkeys continue to receive rapture from milk and bones and carrots and thistles! We cannot tell.

But a rain-killed picnic, the intoxication of a top that really spins, the arrival of a live animal in a basket, the small pump out of which *real* water emerges—what equivalent disasters and joys can later life provide?

Love is a tortuous matter, tossed by hope and doubt. Passion a brief glimpse of the absolute.

But to a child Heaven lies about in the room—a bit of string, a coloured pencil, the possibility of looking under a torn bit of carpet! And children grow. They tumble, they walk, they crow. . . .

Each day a universe opens to their confiding eyes.

They are not surprised. Why should they be with these successive miracles, far, far more common than sausages for breakfast on Sunday? (The sausages are only a treat.)

Lisa, who had wanted children for herself, wanted them far more intensely—or precisely—when, loving Cuthbert, she wanted a child for Cuthbert. She saw him—he was always a boy—leaving for his private school. She supposed it wouldn't matter then if she cried a little—or even if he cried—before getting into the train. Of course, she couldn't choose his bat, but she might watch it being packed.

And at his public school. His first term, she wouldn't look a bit loving, she wouldn't make him feel young or ashamed. She would just ply his little friend with ices and give him (the little friend) a tip. Would it be more discreet to give him ten shillings? A pound would buy much more, and after all—if it was bad form—he needn't mention it. Or were you a "sneak" if you didn't declare your tips? Lisa knew nothing about it. But perhaps Sarah might find out.

Occasionally—while she was planning the future—occasionally, but not often, Lisa remembered that she hadn't got a son. Cuthbert never talked about children, never mentioned the detested cousin who would inherit Barnaby. Possibly Cuthbert, who never detested anybody, did not detest his heir. But he never came to stay—that after all was conclusive.

Cuthbert, thought Lisa, glowing with her love, of course he would never talk about children to me. While Stanislas was alive a child had represented to Lisa a *child*, her child, something to make up for Stanislas, an alternative to what he might have been, a joy. . . .

Now a child represented what she had not given to Cuthbert.

How can I give him a child?

A child had become to her some outside object, a present, a Musgrave. . . .

Now, after her day at Fontainebleau, everything became simple. Serge was in love with her. Enough in love for a transient interlude, not enough in love for it to matter. Lisa was endowing Serge with just the quantity and quality of love that she wanted. Like so many women, she believed that a small demand on passion justified an unlimited demand on love. She regarded passion as a form of demand which was itself in payment. To the physically passionless the body possesses some mystic quality, which, in their ignorance, they believe they can dispense. As their body has never been a part of their own love they regard it as some accidental possession which others desire, which you can give as a present, some psychological equivalent of a diamond tiara or a gothic tapestry. They do not realise that a body

unshared is a body unpossessed—not a gift, but an insult.

Poor Lisa, happy to have found a man of infinite understanding, a man so sensitive that his every nerve was an invitation to pain. The man of all others who would be most profoundly hurt by what she was about to do.

Lisa went to sleep loving Cuthbert and infinitely grateful to Serge.

CHAPTER VI

LISA left for the Moulin taut with purpose. "I have never kissed a woman who didn't want *my* kiss," he had said and then, "I always know, call it a sixth sense, or absolute pitch".

What could she do to frustrate that sixth sense, to defeat that absolute pitch? Serge, who understood everything, Serge, who knew her so intimately with all his piercing insight draped, but only draped, by the mutual connivance of their understanding. How could she hope to deceive him, she who knew so little and he who knew everything of the tricks of love?

How could she simulate passion, having never known it? How could she deceive Serge. Serge, whom she loved dearly, she who had never tried to deceive anyone? And was she being fair to him?

She knew what she wanted to think: that he was a little bit in love with her, that it would be for him a charming adventure; like, though not just like (she couldn't admit the "just like") another adventure. Serge will think I am light, she thought. Only she didn't want him to think that. Also she knew that he wouldn't think it, otherwise she couldn't have gone to him. It was, after all, the immediate decep-

tion that was important, that came first. Afterwards, she would tell him and he would understand. But perhaps he wouldn't forgive her. She couldn't bear to think of a future unforgiven by Serge.

She was frightened of those words "sixth sense" and "absolute pitch". Those were her immediate enemies, the enemies she must circumvent. Other problems would arise later.

Because it would not be hers and his, she saw the child entirely as Cuthbert's.

She and Serge would be instruments playing together for the first and last time, brought together, so to speak, by the illness of the player who had been engaged for the performance.

Serge would understand, he always understood everything. She was going to him because of his understanding. It was a supreme compliment. He might not see it like that.

Supreme compliments are difficult to accept.

"There won't be any room for your maid," he had said, "but Henriette will bustle about with all that noisy goodwill which interferes with the peace of the countryside."

When she had first promised to go to the Moulin, she had thought of long days shot with silence, crowded with endless talk, happy desultory days divorced from time and life.

Now she was going like a general embarking on a

campaign—a general without troops and with no knowledge of strategy.

She arrived in time for dinner. He showed her her bedroom—an enormous room with a red-tiled floor, an enormous bed and an enormous fireplace.

"It is nicest in winter," he said, "you must come back in winter."

There were moss-roses on her dressing-table.

"It is like a Grand Guignol," she said; "the bed is made for a murder."

"That," he agreed, "is where the firelight is missing. But later the moon will come in through the window and do her best to make up for the deficiencies of summer."

Later, they sat down to a delicious meal, dominated by vegetables, vegetables bobbing about in the soup, surrounding the chicken, coming into their own in the salad. After which, they yielded to fruit. Tangles of currants, red and white, with a heap of hard self-satisfied little peaches.

On the table was a bowl of sweet-william.

They talked very little. The lamp absorbed the light.

"Shall we stay in," he asked, "and dispense with the romance of dew and midges?"

"Yes," she agreed, mesmerised by the romance of

the lamp and the silence and their unescapable harmony.

Gone was speech and the necessity of speech. He sat at her feet and held her hand—confidingly—a child receiving comfort. Her presence assuaged his desire.

“Did you know Stanislas well?” she asked suddenly.

“Not very well. A little better than you did.”

It was a truth stated, not a provocative statement.

Some other time she must ask him what he meant. Some other time. . . .

Her thoughts had disappeared. A dog barked, leaving the silence where it had been.

“I must go to bed,” she said. He helped her to her feet. She walked upstairs, neither asleep nor awake.

Slowly she undressed, slowly she got into her bed, her huge soft bed, the bed of the Grand Guignol murder. Softly he knocked at her door. She went tense. He came up to her and kissed her.

“May I put out your light?” He put it out.

The moon flooded the room. The soft shadows shed by the lamp hardened into black shapes. “Shall I put out the moon?” He drew the curtains. Then he left her, shutting the door so noiselessly that it might never have been opened.

The river, dreaming in its sleep, murmured the noiseless sounds of flowing water.

The sun flooded the room. Henriette’s felt

slippers succeeded in extracting sounds of their own from the tiled floor. She brought in a tray with delicious coffee, brioche, a plate of red and white currants and woolly apricots, each with one pink cheek.

Lisa lay, the sun streaming through her closed eyelids, stretching her arms out of the cool sheets into the warm air. She felt perfectly happy. It was difficult to remember that this was not just a day in the country.

She sauntered down in her yellow linen dress, her straw hat hanging over her arm like a basket.

"Did you sleep?"

"Yes."

"Did you dream?"

"I don't think so. The river dreamt."

They ate a trout, crackling with butter.

"What do you want for dinner?"

"Just what I ate last night. Or would that disappoint Henriette? Had she, do you think, planned to surprise us with a duck?"

"How like yourself you are, Lisa, imagining Henriette disappointed of a duck."

He told Henriette that Madame had thought the dinner so perfect, she would like it to be just the same. Henriette smiled—she herself, as Lisa had suspected, preferred a little variety in her food. But if you are in love, she reflected, one dish no doubt tastes just

the same as another. It was only after marriage that you appreciated good cooking. Henriette had been disappointed that a lady coming from Paris should wear a plain linen dress, "et son chapeau n'était même pas garni," she explained to her husband. But she thought Lisa very pretty and she admired her large square sapphire ring.

"I don't like sapphires," Serge had said, looking at it. "Have you noticed that when a rich man marries for love, he invariably gives his fiancée a sapphire engagement-ring? There is something dowdily romantic about the stone which apparently conveys emotion and exorcises money."

"I wanted a diamond," Lisa said, "but of course I couldn't mention it."

"How silly of you. I told you you didn't know Stanislas—what was Cuthbert's engagement-ring like?"

"It was a cluster—or a hoop—I have never known which is which, of rubies. It belonged to his mother."

They smiled at one another—united, as always, when they thought of Cuthbert.

"Do you wear both your engagement-rings, or one at a time?"

"I wear them in different places, Cuthbert's over my wedding-ring and Stanislas's on my other hand."

"Women are so ingenious and so faithful. They are so dominated by the past and the future—unless,

of course, they are sensualists, which brings the present into its own. You have never had many dealings with the present, have you?"

He had walked away from her to light a cigarette.

Because he was serious, he did not look at her.

"To-day feels very like the present," she murmured.

Then she remembered. To-night must be very like the future, she thought.

"What is the matter with you, Lisa," he said, "is that your feelings turn into thoughts and your thoughts turn into feelings."

"Yes," she said, feeling suddenly tired.

He turned round and saw her lying back with her eyes shut. Her hat lay on the floor. "Pick up your hat," he said; "it looks dead lying on the floor."

She put it on her lap.

"You see," he said, "it didn't even need to go on to your head in order to come to life."

They walked by the river.

"I often wonder what a river feels like when it reaches the sea. The water, I mean, meeting salt water for the first time. It must be such a strange sensation."

"That is what physical love means," he told her.

"Is it?"

She looked at him with the wide-eyed curiosity of a child being told something it didn't know. He took

her in his arms and kissed her. He was smiling at her with Stanislas's smile, only there was a hint of tenderness instead of a hint of cruelty.

"My love, you are the most ignorant woman in the world."

"I know," she said, "but it is so difficult to find out things—I hardly ever understand a 'gros mot' or an indecent story. It isn't because I am a prude. But who tells you those things? Stanislas always laughed at me and said that I was a proof that he was a perfect gentleman. But there must be methods other than a husband of getting to know things."

He looked at her.

"Stanislas loved you," he said soberly.

"Loved *me*?" She was genuinely incredulous.

"I told you that you didn't know Stanislas, and I assure you, it is the considered opinion of a wise man that you are the most ignorant woman in the world."

"I can't help it," she said almost plaintively.

Evening was floating on the landscape.

"The lights and the shadows are beginning to stretch," she said; "it is almost as if they were yawning."

I want her for my whole life, he thought.

He saw her shiver.

"Are you cold, my darling?"

He put his arm round her.

"Not a bit cold," she murmured, warming to his touch.

"The poplars that guard the river look like soldiers," he said, "but in the fields you see screens of poplars, you feel you could move them about like furniture in a room. I never know what they are doing."

I feel so happy, she thought disconsolately.

The same vegetables bobbed about in the soup, encircled the same chicken, dominated the same salad, yielded to the same fruit.

The same interlocking silences held them in their intangible grip.

Again he sat at her feet and held her hand.

What could she do?

Again he kissed her good-night, put out her light, pulled the curtains.

The river's dreams murmured in the water.

"A current," thought Lisa, "is a dream tugging at a river."

She fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII

ONCE again the sun was shining. There are hours, maybe they are only minutes, when sleep spreads a thin layer over consciousness. If the consciousness is unhappy we say, "I am only dreaming, I shall wake up in a moment". If the consciousness is happy, we are usually in the middle of some delicious anecdote which we feel to be fading out like the fade-out of a film. In vain we ward off our awakening. The garden we were walking in has disappeared. What was it like? Who were those people we knew so intimately? Why were we not surprised when a cat turned into some intimate friend? What was it that he was about to say? "Oh, please let him go on, he was just saying, 'My darling . . .'"

Lisa woke up. The puckishness of Gods! Did the folly of human beings excuse them? Did the Almighty keep a private jester or was He His own jester? How could He bear us at all if He didn't make fun of us?

He has made flowers and trees, running water and clouds to satisfy His sense of beauty. He has made people to satisfy His sense of drama and His sense of fun. Hasn't He, in a moment of supreme generosity,

given also to human beings the power of creating beauty? Are not artists God's expiation, a sop given to man for the imperfections of mankind?

When do I fulfil a purpose, thought Lisa, when I am what I believe to be myself, or when I am a speck of everything and nothing? Only artists are the equals of their God, their God who gave them that equality.

Henriette came in with a tray, her felt slippers and her smile. Lisa felt that she had been caught. Serge had imprisoned her in this lovely routine. It was a cell. Serge was removing her from any actions of her own. It was he who had made her want the same meal, the same vegetables, the same fruit. He was the ventriloquist and she was his dummy. He was undermining her personality, getting rid of it in order that she should belong entirely to him. She felt a moment of panic. Her body that he had never touched, that she had meant to give him, he had recognised it as an obstacle to the ultimate intimacy at which he was aiming.

He did not want a gift, but a surrender, not flesh and blood, but a disintegration of flesh and blood. That was the absolute. Serge was an absolutist, whereas Lisa was that minor article, a romantic.

Lisa had entered into one of those air pockets of lucidity which she had known ever since she was a

child. That unsought lucidity which hitherto had represented victory over life and now was to mean defeat.

She saw it quite clearly, a cold clarity which hardened her in her resolve. Serge was no longer an accomplice, but an enemy, an enemy she would turn to her own purpose.

Lisa walked downstairs, an incarnation of resolve.

"Did you sleep?"

"I slept—the river dreamt. That was what the medium was meant to say, wasn't she?"

He was startled—it *had* been what he had meant her to say. He recognised the cold hostility in her voice.

"A medium?" he asked, "or a dual personality?"

"There is something a little shabby about a dual personality," she said, "it provides such easy alibis."

"I think I was expressing myself badly. You always represent to me the single-minded codelessness of women."

It was her turn to be startled.

"That is absolutely true."

"How delightfully like you to admit it."

He looked at her.

"Your dress," he said, "is the colour of very cheap sweets. I have always liked that particular carnation pink."

"How lucky!"

"Lucky for us both," he bantered, suddenly smiling.

"Why should we have become so truthful," he grumbled, "on a nice sunny morning with the whole day in front of us? 'Home truths,'" he added, "I must flatter myself by using the word home."

"It is a nice word," she said.

"We neither of us know much about it. The war came at the wrong moment. You had no bad governesses and nice pony carts and I . . ."

He was suddenly silent.

Her hostility evaporated.

"You . . ." she murmured.

"I am not thinking of my murdered father," he said aggressively. It struck her that it was the first time she had ever heard him aggressive. She touched his hand. "Serge," she said, "please don't."

"I'm sorry." He smiled at her a little forlornly.

"My father"—he felt that he must make some sort of amends to her by going on talking about his father—"was a remarkable man. At least, perhaps not very remarkable, an upright man—a man like Cuthbert."

They smiled at one another. Thinking of Cuthbert always brought them together, without the irritating intervention of their own personalities.

The post arrived.

Mr. Rollit wrote that he hoped that Lady Musgrave was well. As soon as he had received Sir Cuthbert's telegram from Marseilles he had dispatched the field-glasses and the sandwich cases c/o the British Consul, Constantinople. The weather was keeping beautifully fine and Mrs. Rollit asked to be remembered to Lady Musgrave.

Mamachen wrote that deafness was a great curse—she made it quite clear that she was not thinking of the sufferer.

Cuthbert wrote from Constantinople:

My Darling,

How are you? Take care of yourself. I should advise you to stay on a little in Paris. A change will do you good—and you will always have Serge to fall back on. The Tommies, during the war, preferred the Russians to any other fellow prisoners. Those are the sort of opinions that count. I, myself, have always found Slavs more congenial than Latins. Hyslop is an excellent travelling companion. He knows all the ropes. I confess I feared that he might prove a little talkative, but I was quite wrong. You have a knack of bringing people out which I always envy. There was a man in the train who was returning to Japan.

I am glad to have known Constantinople before the war—it isn't the same now.

Unveiled women prove the advantages of veils and the disadvantages of faces (I am not thinking of you, of course, though you did wear a veil the first time I saw you. Perhaps that is why I like veils).

Kemal is a really great man, so, I think, on a minor scale, is Salazar. Hitler and Mussolini are mere mountebanks. Rollit telegraphs that he has forwarded the field-glasses and the sandwich-cases, so I am waiting here until they come—I hope you have seen some good plays.

God knows when I shall hear from you. That is the worst of being always on the move. But you are always in my thoughts.

God bless you, my dear love.

Cuthbert.

PS.—Air Mail, Karachi, would reach me more quickly than the ordinary post.

“Constantinople is not what it was?” hazarded Serge.

“No.”

“Don’t be silly and cross, Lisa. Cuthbert is what he was. So,” he added, “was my father.”

She recognised his gesture.

“Thank you,” she said.

They lunched together in an atmosphere of slightly tense reconciliation.

He wanted to make up to her for what he rightly considered an unjust grievance. Secretly, he was annoyed by her lack of understanding. And she, recognising her lack of understanding, did not want to magnify it in order not to magnify the whole incident.

In their eagerness to let something lapse they brought it to life.

As they were inspired by a common wish, instead of being united by a common mood, their separate individualities became sharp and defined—unblurred by the softness of a shared intimacy.

They appraised one another.

Lisa saw Serge: hard, fastidious, ruthless, sensitive, invulnerable, just like the hero of a serial and yet, if you could remove those adjectives from your vocabulary and plant them haphazard in a person, just like Serge.

Serge, dismissing her unreality, which always haunted him, saw Lisa—or tried to see her—entirely physically, her floating grace turning her whole body into a gesture, the feeling of anticipation that she gave, as if her lurking eagerness could never be caught by the moment.

Life will always be her guest, he thought. When she dies a visitor will have left her body.

He thought of Stanislas and he thought of Cuthbert. They had both loved her. Stanislas had been

suffocated by the cobwebs, but Cuthbert had not yet discovered them. Will he ever discover them, Serge wondered?

"Do you ever think of love, Lisa?" he asked. "It must be *one* of your inventions?"

"One of my inventions?"

"You are hard on your inventions, but I suppose you don't know that."

"I am the most ignorant woman in the world. You told me so yourself," she bantered—feeling disturbed and unwilling to examine her disturbance.

"You are so tiresome, Serge, spraying words with meanings."

"Didn't Stanislas do that?"

"Certainly. Where did the spraying come from? Clearly not from Mamachen. What was Stanislas's father like?"

"Presumably, like the other side of Stanislas—though that I admit does not account for me."

Later they walked out, but the heat rejected the encroaching dusk, refusing the appeasement of evening. Yesterday, he thought, I wanted her to be herself and to-day I want her to be mine.

This stirring of desire made him dislike her. She felt tired.

They had lost their silences.

"Are you seeing birches?" she asked. (What is

the matter with me to-day, why must I jar, why did I say that?)

"Of course I see birches—I wasn't blind when I left Russia."

He can talk about Russia to Cuthbert, she thought, but not to me, just as Cuthbert never talks to me about the East—is it because women live by the exploitation of their sex that men punish them by this secret withdrawal of what really matters?

In the ultimate recesses of his spirit a man rarely accepts a woman.

We are more hospitable, Lisa thought bitterly.

"A citizen of the world," Serge said. "What does it mean? It means that you have added other countries to your own country. But if you have no country? There is no voyage without a harbour, just as there is no anchor which does not presuppose a voyage. Cuthbert goes to Thibet because he is coming home, just as a mystic goes to Thibet *leaving* home. A hermit renounces life, a cosmopolitan ignores all countries with the lightness of his contacts. But I have never left Russia and I can never go back to Russia."

"Couldn't you go back to the birches?" he asked.

"How? I could go back to a régime. I could deny my belief in man—which is the one thing in which I believe. I believe in man meeting man, not

in men meeting men—men meeting men produce either a congress of rotarians or a war—the greatest good of the greatest number is nonsense. There is only one number, *one*—let it be multiplied by a hundred thousand, but let it never *lose* itself in a hundred thousand.

"We talk about standards of life, but what do we mean? To have a cow and wine and remain illiterate is a low standard of life. To twiddle the same bit of machinery day in day out, go to a cinema and read something or other, is a higher standard of life. By what criterion? The criterion of town-dwellers. Of course there are countries where grapes don't grow and illiteracy is a difficult achievement—it is the curse of urbanism.

"I do not want men to have no chance of reading Shakespeare or hearing Mozart. Among my happy illiterate drunkards there must be some who would worship Shakespeare and Mozart, who would be a mathematical genius, an inventor, a botanist, an explorer—men who have been deprived of the world, the real world of experience, for lack of a free ticket. I am sorry," he said, "I am talking too much."

"I was listening," she smiled.

"Women are favourably placed," he continued, "because they hold in their bodies the only unescapable relevance—life. They are entitled to every

other irrelevance their caprice may desire."

"Inescapable relevance." Lisa was satisfied with the phrase, which seemed to have nailed down her resolve.

At dinner there was the duck that Lisa had imagined and Henriette had planned.

There was also a delicious pancake.

The hard peaches, the woolly apricots, the red and white currants appeared at the end of the meal. They were dessert—knowing their place like well-trained servants.

"Here you are," Serge said, looking exactly like Stanislas, "with Henriette's duck—you are not enjoying her duck, so that, logically, you are spoiling her duck for her."

"She won't know."

"That, my love, represents in three words a woman's attitude towards life. Nine times out of ten, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, she 'gets away with it'. But there are times when she is seen through—and punished."

"Stanislas would have said that," she murmured.

"Poor Stanislas—Stanislas was punished."

"Why do you say that?"

"Why indeed do I say it?"

What have I done to make him hate me? she wondered. Because of their lost silences, silences

that oppressed them by their disappearance, they talked—

They talked about the present world, of totalitarian states, of the importance of the individual and the unimportance of the individual.

They talked as if they were a number of intelligent people discussing matters of real importance.

"Look at Tolstoy," Serge said, "one of the greatest geniuses of all time. But how self-conscious, how 'm'as-tu vu' morally! His abasements and his humility, always a hand-glass to look at the chignon of his redemption in a larger mirror. And how *class* conscious! The most class conscious of all great writers. So obsessed by the fact that he was an aristocrat that he might as well have been a parvenu—only had he been a parvenu it would not have been like that. How well Gorky describes him coming out with his disciples, prince-like in his attitude towards his hangers-on.

"Transplanted into a high moral climate, set in the inverted commas of equality, what was it but the equivalent of a small German court? Men may have come to him for ideas instead of jobs, pilgrims worshipping at his shrine, pilgrims moving on, carrying his message. But the hangers-on remained eating and preying, the yes-men of Yasnaya Polyana."

"Poor Countess Tolstoy," murmured Lisa, "with

those numberless children and those numberless words—the whole of *War and Peace* copied out in her own handwriting. Think of being married to a man who experiences a change of heart! To be expected not only to stand, but to understand a spiritual upheaval which breaks up your life. In those circumstances you can never be loved into that sort of half-understanding at which women are such adepts. And Tolstoy had never loved her. She had no past to take the place of the present and the future. She had not even represented a lyrical moment in his youth. Her life had gone from one legitimacy to another. She had copied her husband's masses of manuscripts, she had borne her husband's masses of children. What either meant to her we do not know, we only know her as a failure, a failure as a wife and a failure as a mother, always bearing her burden of legitimacy. Left at the end with legitimate bitterness."

"Yes—the wives of great men! Think of Cosima, who knew that she was not Maria von Wesendonck, that she had never been Isolde! Only I suppose that Cosima was the sort of woman who was perfectly happy to be Cosima. If God decided that she deserved paradise, only a most municipally-minded Deity could make such a decision; He might now return her to earth to greet Hitler at Bayreuth."

They were sitting in front of a log fire.

The chill of a summer night exorcised by the flickering crackle of sparks and ashes.

"Let us go out," she said.

They got into a boat and drifted down the river into the silver gunmetal of the night. The moon wandered among the clouds, desultory, indifferent. Spreading her luminous and borrowed radiance over rising tides of mist.

Lisa lay submerged in Serge's arms.

"She is as happy as a kitten," he thought, "only a kitten is alive."

He didn't want to say "Good night" to her. Nevertheless he went into her room.

"Please don't leave me," she said when he kissed her.

"What do you mean?"

"Just that."

"Lisa," his voice was harsh. "*Do you mean that?*"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

What do I do? she thought.

She gave a little jerk, hoping that it would look like passion. It was such a little jerk, she thought, I must do more.

What was she to do?

Stanislas never noticed, Cuthbert never noticed—

But Serge?

"You look as if you were on a crucifix," he said.

She was terrified. Stanislas had said that—in those words.

It was over.

She thought he had gone to sleep.

"And now, my dear, there is the tenth time, the hundredth time."

It isn't possible, she thought, it can't be me. Above all, it can't be Serge.

"You are hurting me," she moaned.

"I hope so."

She yielded herself without protest or resistance to a brutality that she could never have conceived and that gave her absolute vindication. She had always known that she could not be unfaithful to Cuthbert. But she had been frightened that she might be unfair to Serge. Of this unfairness his behaviour had liberated her.

Lisa woke up with a feeling of lightness, the feeling that your head has when it is suddenly delivered from a headache. She felt empty. Some load had disappeared.

Gradually she remembered. It was over. She had performed her task. She felt the relief of a child who has finished its lesson. She looked at her room

with renewed pleasure. She must ask Serge if she could pick some fresh verbena and the moss-roses were a little over-blown. She liked them best in bud, the tightly-rolled petals like a little tongue sticking out from their furry leaves, which when you pinched them had a pungent smell denied to the rose herself.

Relieved by the fulfilment of her intention, Lisa felt care-free.

How delicious it would be to walk with Serge by the river, to talk about everything and nothing, to understand and be understood, to laugh and analyse and smile and be silent.

Then she remembered the night—Serge hurting her and hating her, possessing her without a vestige of love.

It had no reality whatsoever.

It had merely been part of a nightmare. And now she would be able to bring Cuthbert a child. What a tiny price for such a perfect gift.

Then she thought of Serge.

Poor Serge, who must be feeling a brute, full of remorse.

She went downstairs, wondering how to console him.

He asked her whether she had slept well and offered her a cigarette. He apologised for having forgotten that she didn't smoke before lunch. Something had gone wrong with the motor, but the garage

said it would be ready by four. She would be in Paris in time to dress for dinner.

The papers had arrived, if she would care to look at them. There was an interesting article in the *Figaro* by Mauriac on Spain.

She was completely at a loss. Obediently, she began to read the article by Mauriac. After reading the first sentence several times she read the first sentence of the second paragraph several times.

"We can't go on like this for ever," she said miserably.

"The motor should be ready by five."

"But won't you tell me what's happened?" she asked desperately.

"It would be for you, I think, to tell me."

She looked at him helplessly.

"Shall I help you by a preliminary exposé? A table des matières? We will begin—it is the right order of precedence—with Stanislas. Stanislas loved you. We know the official version—universally held, even I think by Mamachen, which is a remarkable tribute to Stanislas's chivalry. To blame you for not possessing physical temperament would be like blaming you for not having red hair—it would obviously be most unfair. Nevertheless, it is an omission of which some men are more conscious than others. Because you feel with your imagination, your imagination tells you what others want of

you, in most circumstances this enables you to give what they want. Has it ever occurred to you that Stanislas wanted to give, to give to *you*, the woman he loved? It was you who deprived him of that gift. It was you who drove him to the life he led. And because he loved you, he allowed you all the credit, you the perfect wife, the model of forbearance and dignity, who never complained, who never, as most women would have done, took a lover! Stanislas must have enjoyed the irony of your virtue—at least he would have, if he hadn't *cared*. And you, my dear, with your sensibility and your subtlety and your imagination, you never even knew that he *cared*."

There was a long silence.

Lisa lay with her eyes shut, trying to grasp what he had said—trying not to.

"Then Cuthbert came," he went on relentlessly.

"Don't talk about Cuthbert," she said in agony.

"I am going to talk about everything I want to. Just this once—for the last time. If we meet again—well, we are both of us capable of a little small talk. Cuthbert came. First you invented one Cuthbert, then you invented another. Finally, you invented a Cuthbert you loved. I am inclined to think that the last Cuthbert is very like the real Cuthbert—a happy circumstance on which I congratulate you. And from your point of view Cuthbert has had the great

advantage of not noticing your one—shall we say lacuna? As he hasn't known that he has failed you, you haven't failed him. I think that you are right in believing that you are and will be very happy with Cuthbert."

There was another pause.

"We come to the third act," Serge continued, "and here my Poirot fails. Why should I have been permitted my ultimate intervention? Indeed, if you will not consider me caddish, it was not so much a permission as a demand. What was the object, my dear, of your command performance? You will tell me your motives later. But once again carrying your fate with you, you had the misfortune of falling on a man who really loved you. The day before yesterday, if God could have answered my prayer, you would have been the whole of my life."

"Don't," she said. "Please don't——"

"But the physical defeats you, you can imagine what it ought to be like—which is worse than useless. So that you resort to ridiculous little pretences like the ones you tried on me. Think how they must have humiliated Stanislas! Did you ever think of that, my love?"

"No," she said in agony. "No."

"You know what it is to want to give. You spend your life giving—according to your lights. You were the incarnation of the absolute."

The acid of his voice burnt.

"Your body existed for the sole purpose of inhabiting my dream. And then—well, I have always been an addict of detective stories. Je vous cède la parole, M. Poirot."

"I wanted a child."

There seemed to be no other way of putting it.

If only he would say something, she thought in agony.

The silence accumulated noises—every sound a noise, the distant bark of a dog, Henriette putting back the washed plates, Serge lighting a match, the rustle of Lisa's dress as she uncrossed her knees.

"The child, I take it, was to be a present to Cuthbert?"

"Yes."

"You didn't mind using and discarding my love and my body?"

"I didn't know you loved me."

His indignation was spent.

"Most women sin by assuming too much love. You sin by assuming too little. Will you tell me why you chose me?"

"Well, you see," she tried to make it clear, "you were the only person I was fond enough of. You were the only person who could understand, whom I could bear as—"

"The other father of your child?"

"The godfather of my child," she said.

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

THE white cliffs of Dover—shimmering at you like some recovered treasure. To Lisa they had never exactly meant coming home—she had lived too much abroad for that—but some recaptured certainty. Islands, like ships, give you the feeling of an anchor. The porters who don't shout, the ticket-collectors never doubting that you have a ticket, the Pullman-car attendants unobtrusively prepared to accept the fact that you may have *no* wishes. The feeling that some invisible host lurks in the background. England, thought Lisa, a host, not a hostess.

It is curious how some foreign wash gives to the imprint of your own country a defined quality it cannot otherwise possess.

Lisa emerging from a dream, felt that she was also re-entering a dream.

I have had no country, she thought, just as I have had no body. Life has never been my life. Sometimes I have inhabited it and sometimes it has inhabited me. I have never known the moorings that a body gives. I have always had to invent and believe—my body has been something that I draped

with clothes or that acquired some temporary reality with illness. With it I have wrecked Stanislas's life and bitterly hurt Serge. He was right, you cannot give what you don't share.

But Cuthbert has never known.

Irrationally, she felt exasperated with Cuthbert for not having known. And yet had he known she would have wrecked yet another life.

I have never had a country. I was a guest in Poland, I am a guest in England. Serge says that life is a guest in my body. Serge says that I know nothing of the present, that comfortable present made solid by the senses! The present is no-man's-land lying indeterminable between those vivid realities: our memories and our anticipations.

Perhaps I have never wanted the present, perhaps I have felt safer out of it.

Perhaps I have never failed Cuthbert because, though we neither of us know it, I, too, am part of his beloved East.

The train had reached the suburbs. Line after line of tall straight dingy houses, their tiny twinkling lights turning the fluttering lines of washing into street decorations. The train stopped. Eager faces gazing up from the platform, eager faces stretching out of the windows. A fog blurring the station lights. Men and women and children kissing

one another, touching one another's arms as if they were patting dogs.

Home.

Lisa thought of Serge's birches—

Sarah was there.

They spent the night with an aunt of Cuthbert's. She hoped they had everything they wanted, making the hope sound more like a threat—"You, of course, are accustomed to travel". She made it clear that this was a criticism.

Yes, the binoculars had arrived safely at Constantinople and the sandwich-cases.

"Sandwich-cases," said Cuthbert's aunt. "How like Cuthbert to expect sandwiches—where does he imagine that he will find any?"

"You don't *find* sandwiches," Sarah remarked, "you cut them."

"I am quite aware of that, my dear, but I always consider bread to be an essential part of a sandwich. Obviously, in the sort of places to which Cuthbert is going, there will be no bread."

Lisa was glad of Cuthbert's aunt. She found her conversation restful and Sarah's eyes had got a discreet look which made her feel uneasy.

What was she going to say to Sarah? Everything, she decided, but not yet—only when she was sure. But wasn't she sure?

"The Musgraves are a most curious family" (Cuthbert's aunt was a sister of his mother's), "you think they are plain sailing, but they are not. I hope you don't think that I am being offensive, Sarah?"

"I think you are being most complimentary."

Her aunt eyed her with distaste.

"You always take such odd views. Your poor mother often said, 'I can never be sure what Sarah is thinking'."

"How right my poor mother was."

"Sarah, how can you talk like that about your mother? Talking of her as your 'poor mother'."

"I was quoting you."

"Will you think me rude," Lisa interposed hastily, "if I go to bed? I am a little tired."

"Of course, my dear, don't hesitate to ask for anything you want."

"What a woman," Sarah said to Lisa as she undressed. "She was the ugly member of the family. It taught her to be what I understand is called 'outspoken'. She knows her own mind, she speaks her own mind, in fact, considering that she has no mind, she makes the most of it."

Lisa laughed.

"Dearest Sarah, I do love you. And you are just the same."

Sarah reflected that Lisa was not the same.

In time I shall know why, she said to herself.

Lisa asked Sarah to stay with her. Barnaby was strange without Cuthbert. It was his house—and each room was full of his absence, an empty pot waiting for its plant. Even Lisa's bedroom, littered with her paraphernalia, scented with her personality, became somehow unfulfilled. With Cuthbert away the door seemed perpetually ajar, unable to shut because he would not be there to open it.

What a curious thing, waiting—your past projected into your future, with no present between them.

Lisa was not waiting for Cuthbert, she was just waiting. Her life was lying in suspension. Yesterday was a dream and so was to-morrow. To-day did not exist. There were objects but there was no Time. There was the herbaceous border blazing under the sun, arrogantly claiming that colour can hold its own with light. There were Leander and Ulysses, wistful and bewildered, knowing that good manners demanded some wagging from their tails, but unable to provide more than an occasional half-hearted thud on the carpet.

Even Mr. Rollit seemed like a character in a book; when he talked she felt not as if she were turning over a page, but re-reading some old chapter, a chapter she knew by heart and of which she was very fond.

As always, when your spirit is in a fluid state, she found it easier to focus her mind on to objects than on to people. The billiard-table, the portrait of Lady Louisa Musgrave, the chair that still needed recovering, a large patch of poppies in the border—on these she was able to concentrate because her eyes still saw things.

It was the same with music, her ears continued to take in sounds, though they had become almost dumb to words.

Her thoughts wandered about in her mind without trying to catch one another.

Lisa was going to have a baby—

She began to be continuously sick and with this sickness she regained her contact with life—it was as if a ghost had given way to a body. Her mind was freed from the unreality in which it had been wandering.

She told Sarah—everything that Serge had said carefully and accurately reported.

Sarah made no comment.

“Please don’t be shocked,” Lisa said timidly, “there were things I didn’t think of. I see that if it’s a boy it will be unfair to your cousin.”

“And if it is a child will it be fair to Cuthbert?”

“Won’t the fact that my every thought has made it his make it more his than it would be if I

didn't love him and it were technically his?"

"A love child," said Sarah sardonically.

"Just that."

"A pretty headline: 'Love child for husband'."

"Sarah, don't."

"I am perfectly prepared to admit your hypothesis—that all the love and thought you give to Cuthbert during these months will make the child more his than it would be had it been conceived in a moment of passion between him and a woman who disliked him. Many children must be born of flashes of hate. I, like you, shall always consider the child as Cuthbert's. What shocks me profoundly is your behaviour towards Serge."

"I didn't know he loved me."

"That in itself was inexcusable—even if he didn't love you, you were using him for illegitimate or, if I wanted to be funny, I suppose I might say legitimate, ends."

"At the time it seemed so simple."

Sarah realised that she had said Serge.

"I look forward to meeting Prince Galitzin," she said. "I have rarely felt more attracted to a man."

CHAPTER II

I WAS unjust, my darling, wrote Serge. I was attacking the essence of your being and without that essence I should not love you.

We would be right to wish those we dislike different; we don't, because we dislike them—we want them more like themselves in order to dislike them more. But how dare we want those we love different?

If they were, even though we may not know it, we should love them less—I do not regret having told you the truth, though I regret having told it to you in a punitive mood—you are worthy of the truth, but to make it into a punishment puts it on the level of a lie.

I was angry and I was hurt—I was right to be both. I was entitled to try and hurt you (I hope I did a little). What I would not be entitled to do would be to bear you a grudge. Everything has fallen into place again—not, I admit, the place into which I would have wished it to fall.

Women are so damnably logical. I wonder who invented the opposite cliché?

You get a single-track heart, or some other one-

way street, and the purpose never varies, no other considerations are taken into consideration.

And all your misleading accessories are conscripts.

You do not need a telescope or a blind eye.

Your flag flutters in victory and defeat—very rightly—with never the half-mast of a compromise.

You left your sapphire ring on the dressing-table. Shall I send it to you?

These family jewels!

(Stanislas was, after all, my cousin.)

The temporary possession of that ring gives me a certain—"sardonic" is, I believe, the word—amusement. Each book of etiquette should have a supplement: "Occasions on which bad taste is good taste" Henriette said that the house felt empty without you—I found it far too full—

Serge.

My Own Darling,

Both Hyslop and I are well. As you penetrate farther into the country you find yourself getting farther and farther away from things—I naturally don't mean you. It is difficult to convey the impression. But I do think of you—you must believe that.

God bless you, my own.

Cuthbert.

Hyslop asks me to put his devotion at your feet and

to say that from the altitudes we are now camping on this is no mean feat.

Lisa read her two letters.

Serge hasn't failed me, she thought. Perhaps no one has ever failed me, perhaps I have always failed them. I didn't know it about Stanislas.

She thought of Stanislas with the new vision Serge had given her. Everything slanted into a different perspective. She remembered moments when he had been hungry and she had been gracious. How had he been able to forgive her graciousness?

"You are so clever, my love," he had said—and she had thought that he was referring to her intelligence when he had been rubbing in her stupidity.

Only he had never told her—

That was the family curse, she thought. They told you so much that they never told you the point.

And she had never seen the point.

More and more she thought of Stanislas, painting the past with this new sense of guilt.

Small incidents pricked her conscience. She remembered them, she invented them.

If only Stanislas were alive! She would make amends—clumsy amends, begotten of humility. Our true gifts are begotten of pleasure. Lisa found her thoughts torn to bits by remorse.

Her physical wretchedness comforted her.

She wrote to Serge: "You are infinitely generous".

She would have felt happier caught in some external condemnation. She couldn't bear to think of Cuthbert.

"I wish I were dead," she said one day to Sarah.

She said it in the quiet voice of someone who really was expressing a wish.

Sarah, who possessed that rare quality, spiritual tact, did not ask her why.

"What good would you do by being dead? You have nothing to leave except yourself."

Lisa smiled: "Not a penny".

"Well then, all you could leave would be a gap. Does a generous woman want to leave a gap?"

Fate, thought Lisa, might have given me a child. A child by Stanislas, a child by Cuthbert. And then I tampered with fate.

Her child had ceased to go to a private school. He had ceased to be bullied. She no longer needed to buy his first bat, to be tactful when she saw him, to give a tip to one of his friends.

He had left her imagination to inhabit her body.

Everyone was solicitous. A discreet arm helped her up the smallest step. Mrs. Rollit left her chaise-

longue to do honour to more immediate contingencies.

Mr. Rollit hovered on the brink of emergencies for which he hoped to be fully prepared.

Mrs. Rich covered her cream with paper as if Lady Musgrave's condition increased the activities of microbes.

"The servants walk on tiptoe as if I were either asleep or dead," Lisa complained to Sarah.

"Your personality," remarked Sarah, "would suit death in childbirth."

Lisa laughed. "Dearest Sarah, you are the only person in the world who can afford to be right. By which I mean that you can be right without anyone loving you less."

The doctor was worried.

"But"—Lisa for once was petulant—"as you can't blame me for structural difficulties, I cannot see why we should discuss them."

"But, my dear lady——"

Lisa detested being called "my dear lady".

She also disliked being rude.

"I am in such good hands," she smiled at him. "How could I possibly worry?"

He responded to her tone. "You are too kind," he murmured, forgetting what they were talking about. Then he remembered. How tiresome women were! Stoical or panic-stricken. Never that nice quiet

middle road of intelligent interest and wise behaviour.

In Lady Musgrave's case perhaps it was better—she was not built for bearing children.

"I feel, Miss Musgrave, that I should get into touch with your brother."

"He is in Thibet."

"In that case, of course, it is out of the question."

"You do not think that my sister-in-law should——"

"Well, Miss Musgrave, there are, I consider, risks—grave risks. I should be glad of a second opinion."

A second opinion, thought Sarah. How absurd to consider Lisa in connection with a "second opinion". Nevertheless, Sarah felt bound to warn Lisa. There might be the question of an operation.

"That," said Lisa, "would be absurd. When I feel well," she said, "it is like an interval. I don't want to sound silly, but in my life every act has always been the interval."

Her face had settled into a given shape, her eyes and mouth fixed points where before they had changed their position with every changing mood.

How little we know about our face!

A mirror gives us back a mask. We adjust a curl, we tilt a hat, we adjust some design of appearance. We provide ourselves with what *others* will see.

What we see can never be our face, haggard and radiant and transient.

Eyes and mouths—what silly words for tears and smiles!

Expecting a child, a woman's face becomes stationary, moored to the unknown.

The restlessness of pleasing disappears, even an ugly face acquires the placid anonymity of a Madonna.

Lisa was troubled by the fatherlessness of her child. Had the Virgin Mary, she wondered in all reverence, felt like that?

Can you dedicate what you have not given?

Sarah, watching her, saw Lisa's life disappearing, disintegrating under this burden of creation, a creation that she herself had chosen.

Sarah was frightened.

The unreality of Lisa growing to meet the reality she was carrying.

Lisa, disembodied even by her child.

Where do our realities lie? To some they fuse with given moments, to others they live only in anticipation and in retrospect.

Would we give up our pangs, our dissatisfactions, our dreams? Would we choose to be wise, to lead the useful lives of sensible, sensual men and women

who know how to combine food with hunger, drink with thirst, sleep with fatigue, work with pleasure, infidelity with faithfulness? Men and women whose affections are never torn to bits by love, whose healthily fulfilled passions know nothing of the disintegration of ecstasy?

We cannot choose—only if we are wise we can accept our own essence and believe that we have chosen it.

Lisa had known only the absolute quality which dreams untarnished by reality give, providing us with alternatives to experience.

“Have you told Cuthbert?” Sarah asked.

Cuthbert himself seemed as far away as Thibet.

Lisa, wanting only to think of Cuthbert, found herself thinking more and more of Stanislas.

If only Serge had not told her.

That had been his revenge.

It had been an unusual summer, yielding to autumn only the colour of the leaves, the red and yellow trees acknowledging as yet no anatomy of branches.

Lisa thought of Serge's birches. Her heart ached when she thought of his birches.

I am being impertinent, thinking of his birches as if they were a toy—or a symbol. Some poignant

metaphor in a long book. That is the difficulty about other people's realities—we turn them into metaphors. I see a birch as Serge's love for Russia, not as a birch.

She put the point to Sarah.

"The difficulty about bringing countries together is that they never have a joke in common."

"Serge left before jokes mattered."

"Men of the world," Sarah said, "be they scientists or artists, or even gens du monde, have a common language, but each nationality retains an idiom—a sort of family joke for which exiles are, I imagine, eternally home-sick."

"The idioms," Lisa agreed, "which Berlitz can never teach."

"Esperanto," Sarah continued, "is an absurd conception. Nothing worth opening yields to a skeleton key. Any thief can rob a safe. The difficulty lies in capturing exposed treasure."

"Yes," Lisa said meditatively. "Don't you think that I am a brave woman to expose myself daily to your understanding?"

"Perhaps you can afford it."

"Only Mamachen could afford that."

The leaves were beginning to fall, giving to each tree a changing silhouette.

CHAPTER III

SERGE wrote: *I am coming to England on business—all over the place, Bristol, for instance—may I come to Barnaby? I shall understand your not wanting to see me, but I should understand your wanting to see me better.*

What a family, thought Lisa, one is always at their mercy. You can never deny them anything without feeling silly. They won't allow your dignity and your good sense to walk quietly in some given direction like a congregation emerging from church. They are a trapping family. I may have laid one trap for Serge, but I wanted to catch something of enormous importance. Stanislas did not lay traps to catch you with, but to trip you up by. Through all my married life I felt he was in ambush. It was as if he were walking behind me or lurking in a by-street. A supernatural presence never exorcised by his real presence. If only I had known that he loved me. But the fact that I didn't know must prove that something was askew which even knowledge could not have put right. I must explain that to Serge. Perhaps then he will forgive me and understand. In life when we are given a crutch we recognise a

larnness of which we were hitherto unconscious.

How happy I was, Lisa thought, during those years with Cuthbert when I was un-understood—to be misunderstood is irritating, to be un-understood is restful, to be understood is either perfection or impertinence.

Sarah spared me the full brunt of her perception, though I always knew it was there—

Lisa showed Sarah Serge's letter.

"You must ask him to stay."

"For you," Lisa smiled.

"For me."

To write "I don't want you to see me" would sound coy, as if she were referring to her physical condition.

To write "I *don't* want to see you" would sound rude—and frightened.

What she did write was: *Sarah will be in London when you arrive. Do ask her to lunch.*

He asked her to lunch.

Sarah arrived at the Berkeley Grill, her clothes put out of gear by a hat. It was her London hat, and, though she had tilted it in many directions, it had as yet acquired neither a resting-place on her head nor a contact with her face.

Serge was delighted, but it didn't take long for her personality to emerge from the inverted commas of her appearance.

"I feel, Miss Musgrave, as if I already know you."

"That is a pity," she remarked. "I dislike prepared packs."

"Will you shuffle?"

"With pleasure. Do I cut?"

"Please. May I deal?"

She bowed.

He asked how Lisa was.

Not at all well.

"But you cannot tell me that she is changed. Lisa could never change."

"No."

"I am no chemist," Sarah said, "but it always seems to me that you can do nothing with or to a fluid. It is easy to manipulate a material substance."

"Yes," he agreed gravely, "the spirit is always beyond our reach, yet we try to capture it, knowing that were we to succeed we would destroy its essence."

"Do we know that?" she asked.

"We know it, but we do not act on our knowledge."

"I am an old maid," she said, "and I have never understood how possession can lock a door."

"It doesn't," he said, "unless it also opens window."

"You are a romantic, Prince Galitzin."

"The view is not generally held. Lisa opens windows without shutting doors. It is silly to put life into a draught."

"Would it be interesting, do you think," Sarah asked, "to be a man of action, or would it not be interesting because one didn't know it?"

"Satisfactory, perhaps, rather than interesting."

"Lawrence may have known it. Does it sound like a housemaid if I say that I should like to have been known as 'Lawrence of Arabia'?"

"Smith of the desert," he said, "would be a superb title—'Brown of the desert'. I like the thought of anonymous names leaping into light."

They were silent.

He considered her. Her cheek-bones, her knuckles, her hat.

Stray strands of hair advanced and retreated over her ears.

He looked to his right.

Crimson nails, plucked eyebrows, a mouth like a penny in the slot machine, a mouth like a bug prematurely opened.

The inane lucrative vivacity of what was rightly called "a blonde".

"Animals," he said, "dogs and cats, leopards and

lions have the grace of their species. But human beings—! That creature there is a woman and so are you. She has a past—two or three pasts and probably another past in her future simply because she lives in the present. Has it occurred to you that Lisa has never been able to live in the present?"

"It has occurred to me."

"Does that explain all romantics or only Lisa?"

"Some romantics must have had an aptitude for physical pleasure. I suppose it sounds better if you call it passion."

"That, no doubt, was what they called it."

Serge had rarely liked anyone as much as he liked Sarah.

Why had she not married? Had it been the blyness of men or her own fastidiousness?

Probably a combination of the two. demand of sight that it dispense us or the visual?

"Miss Musgrave," he asked, "what do you think of marriage?"

She chuckled.

"It is the one institution in which I firmly believe."

"Nevertheless——"

"An unattractive woman does not have the wrong man at her disposal."

"Unattractive women must occasionally marry the right man."

"Presumably—or even a falling birth-rate could not be accounted for."

They left together for Barnaby.

CHAPTER IV

SERGE arrived, knowing that he was not a father—wondering whether he was a cad.

“Why am I going to Lisa?” he asked himself. “Why am I going to Cuthbert’s house. My child is not my child. Lisa is not *my* mistress. Cuthbert—who is my friend—will not be there.”

He was entranced by the country—that silver grey Cotswold country to which autumn can never be anything but a masquerade.

In this house men and women had been born and died, temperate passion flaring up, disappearing, puffed out by the same gusts that once had kindled them.

The trees, the river and the walls remained, immune from these spasmodic outbursts.

An elm might be destroyed by lightning, uprooted by a storm, touched by the wrath of Heaven—with the passions of human beings a tree has no concern.

Serge felt a strange sense of peace. The lemon and silver sky was fading into dusk.

When you passed through the lodge gates the

drive was an approach, bringing you forward to be introduced to a house.

Below lay the river, beyond was the village, spilt into a hollow. Clumps of elms welcomed you—not sentinels but hosts.

Barnaby unfolded her façade, unostentatious, sure of herself, knowing nothing of the fancies of architects, of the whims of owners—a rooted house immune from the moods of centuries or the possibility of destruction.

A hush lay over the evening. ~~The~~ birds were still. God had put His finger to His lips.

In the house were lights and firelight and flowers. The warm glow of drawn curtains and a dismissed outside world.

Lisa herself, a quietened phantom, as if this alien life within her had fulfilled and dismissed her own life.

Serge found her strangely real and absolutely strange.

Her brooding smile, her slow movements. At last, he thought, her body has been caught, it is right that it should have been captured not by a man, but by a child.

They sat by the fire, their intimacy endowed by silences.

"With you, in this room," he said, "I feel the

senselessness of action, the futility of all the pangs with which we prick our feeling into emotions. To-morrow I shall wake up to my everyday life of pleasures and irritations and purpose and purposelessness. I shall make plans and forget about them. I shall be cross and conscientious. I shall behave well and badly. I shall work and fritter. But to-night I feel like a river whose current doesn't even tug at the water."

"Yes," she said, "I always feel like that now. I float on my destiny and when I drown you mustn't mind. You must remember that it was the right end."

He was startled.

"You are not going to drown," he said firmly.

She smiled and said nothing.

He was frightened—ridiculously frightened. "Where is your sense of humour?"

"Somewhere or other," she countered, trying to meet a mood that was not there.

"Lisa, my love"—he, too, was struggling for the light note which had never before failed him—"you are a cork that would bob on any water."

"Perhaps not on still water," she remarked.

He was horrified by her lucidity—a lucidity that had taken on a quality of fate.

"It is vulgar to need emergencies to live by."

He tried to sound dry.

"That," she agreed, "has always been my form of vulgarity."

"You look like a Madonna," he said, looking at her.

"How very suitable."

For a moment there was a flicker of the old Lisa.

For a moment he felt relieved.

"You are not considering dying?" he asked aggressively.

"I am not afraid, if you mean that."

"I didn't mean that."

"I am not considering dying, but I think I am going to die."

"Don't be grandiloquent and don't be a goose."

"I have always been a goose, but I am sorry if I was grandiloquent." She smiled at him. "My doctor shares my view."

"How monstrous."

"He didn't tell me so. And he is entitled to a professional opinion."

"It is nice to hear you talking nonsense," he said. "I always feel alarmed when intelligent women stop talking nonsense. I am not, of course, talking of admirable women because I never talk to them. Nor am I talking of silly women—in their case, it would not be pertinent."

"Do you know what you *are* talking about?"

"I thought I was talking about you."

Gaiety seemed to have come back to them and he felt a little less uneasy.

"Lisa," he said, "if you love me a little——"

"I love you a great deal."

"Well then—— Will you promise me not to think of fate—it is such a misleading, foolish conception. It stultifies action and wrecks humour."

"I will try to keep a little humour for you."

"It is the least you can do for me."

"I am well, happy and at peace," she said.

He disliked her change of tone.

"That is excellent—so far as it goes."

"You don't think it goes far enough?"

"I think it goes much too far."

"I mustn't be happy, I mustn't be at peace, I mustn't believe in fate." She bantered him.

"I find the combination most alarming."

"Whatever happens our sense of humour must prevail?"

"I should hope so."

"Whatever happens I shall always think of you as perfect."

"I only want to be thought perfect when nothing happens."

"That is asking a lot."

"Everything."

"To-morrow I will show you some neighbours.

There is nothing more delightful than other people's neighbours."

"To-morrow I am leaving," he said abruptly.

"Oh."

She *must* beg me to stay, he thought forlornly.

"I quite understand," she said.

He had not wanted her to understand that.

"Good-bye," he said, still feeling that she must contradict him.

"God bless you."

I shall never see her again, he thought—and then,

"What a fool I am to think that".

But she had communicated her certainty to him.

CHAPTER V

"YOU are leaving?" Sarah said at breakfast.

"Yes."

"My headache was of no avail?"

"I should regret your having had a headache."

"I had a delicious dinner, on a tray in bed, accompanied by a hot-water-bottle and a detective story. It was a bad detective story, because I have already read all good detective stories except the one to come. It was a particularly bad detective story, for, though I had spotted the criminal before the Inspector or the amateur, I didn't feel clever. A detective story must either make you feel how clever the author is or how clever you are. Being an addict, I prefer a clever author to a clever me."

There was a silence. A comfortable silence filled with bacon and marmalade and the headlines of the papers.

"Where exactly is Riga?" asked Sarah.

"In the office of *The Times*."

They munched on.

"I am leaving this morning," he said.

"Leaving?"

"Lisa very kindly ordered the motor."

"But——"

"You mean more to Lisa than anyone else because you are the only *person* she knows. We are ghosts, Stanislas a ghost of her past, I a ghost of her near past, Cuthbert the ghost of her future. Will you believe me, Miss Musgrave, if I say that the real tragedy lies in the fact that Lisa's child has turned Cuthbert into a ghost—a ghost for Lisa, I mean."

"Yes."

"It is curious, isn't it, that Lisa, who has aroused so much passion, should always have turned that passion to unreality?"

"It was never real to *her*."

"Because it never *came* from her."

"She believed absolutely in love, yet she never recognised it when it was really there. She didn't see it in Stanislas, she didn't see it in me. Perhaps as she sees it in Cuthbert, he doesn't love her."

"Yes, he does. And you must realise how much his not missing anything means to her."

"Yes, I see that."

"Perpetual demands that you *want* to respond to must be so trying, making you feel fidgety, and it is detestable to feel fidgety. With Cuthbert, Lisa provided her responses so cleverly that they steered his demands. But there was a time when he, too, made her fidgety. When all the things he didn't see go on her nerves. Then she decided to fall in love with

him, if you can call her romantic invention of a feeling falling in love. Perhaps she didn't decide it. Anyway, the artist that she is created a character to adore and called it 'Cuthbert'. For all I know, though her Cuthbert is totally unlike mine, he may not be unlike Cuthbert."

"I think he is very like Cuthbert."

"You seem to have got on very well with my brother."

"It was more than that. My inverted commas dropped when I was with him. I was able to talk simply about things I am never able to talk about at all, because of what they mean to me. I realised for the first time how much I had wanted to talk about them like that."

"How strange."

"If I am not impertinent, Miss Musgrave, you never seem to me to be very fond of your brother."

"I am not fond of him. We have never got on. Unlike you, I find him impossible to talk to."

"It is an extraordinary thought that you should find it difficult to talk to anyone."

"We say short relevant things to one another. When you are reduced to relevance there is something vital missing, be it in a conversation or in a relationship."

"The curious thing about Lisa," Serge said, "is

her combination of spiritual absolutism with a first-rate sense of humour."

"She is a woman of parts," smiled Sarah.

"So many parts," Serge agreed, "and such complete unity."

The butler announced the motor.

"You will come and stay with me at the Moulin?"

"Of course."

"Do you promise it me?"

"I promise it to myself."

"That sounds dangerously polite."

"I promise it to us both."

"Thank you."

He kissed her hand.

As he drove away Serge saw her silhouetted in the doorway, untidy hair, loose tweed coat, calfless, ankleless legs, low-heeled shoes.

"That," he said to himself, "is one of the most attractive women I have ever met."

CHAPTER VI

As her body filled, Lisa seemed to drift farther and farther away from life.

Wet heaps of brown leaves lined the roads. Solid spirals of smoke rose from the bonfires, immobile in the windless air.

The dry, crackling smell of burning mingled with the rising dampness. Each day drifted into a shroud of thickening mists, the evening sky above, clear with a scarcity of stars, below the clouds.

Lisa's slanting grace had yielded to the burden of her body. And the changing charm of her face had given way to a remote stationary beauty of expression. When she smiled she did not smile at you but to herself.

She didn't think. Her mind was a screen on which appeared scenes from her past life, projected by the lights of unchosen memories. Her childhood and Stanislas. After her marriage to Cuthbert everything went blank.

There was a scene with Mamachen which recurred.

Stanislas had been giving a degree of publicity to one of his affairs which had exasperated his mother.

"No one appreciates forbearance more than I do,"

Mamachen, to whom it was anathema, had said, "but it is silly to push it too far."

"I am not pushing it."

"Think how irritating it must be for Stanislas. Unless, of course, you are trying to punish him."

"Please don't think I am doing that."

Lisa had been genuinely horrified by a thought—which had not occurred to her.

"Can't you show a little variety? Can't you sometimes be patient and sometimes be irritable? You don't normally lack variety!"

"I think they are rather difficult to mix. And wouldn't one choose the wrong moment for each and end by being irritable all the time?"

"Make a scene," Mamachen had said firmly.

"I am so bad at scenes."

"All my family like scenes, it keeps them going."

At that moment Stanislas had come in.

The puckish cruelty of his smile, to which Lisa had never become accustomed, there in full force.

"Conseil de guerre?" he had asked.

"Je l'espère," Mamachen had said in her driest voice, leaving the room without saying good night.

"I mustn't be forbearing," Lisa had thought forlornly.

"What advice has my mother been giving you?" he had asked in his most mocking voice.

"She has advised me to make scenes. She says that your family love scenes."

"That is perfectly true."

"Did your father like scenes?"

"Very much. He preferred his own."

"Is a scene ever your own?"

"It takes two to make a first-rate scene. A second-best scene can be a monologue."

There had been a pause.

"Well, my love, are you going to make a scene?"

"I don't know how to," she had smiled.

"Practice makes perfect, they say."

"But I don't know how to begin."

"Most people begin with servants, but you are incapable of making a scene to a servant. I respect your principle, but Russian servants like scenes just as much as Russian masters like scenes."

She had felt as if she had also failed the servants!

"Have you no lover? Lovers are the best school."

"No, I have no lover."

She had felt tired.

I ought to flare up, she had thought. Only lovers sounded so remote—the properties of other people's lives.

He had gone out and fetched a large whisky and soda.

"The English know how to spread their drinks. This unpleasing, healthy, faintly stimulating

drink is, I believe, known as a night-cap."

Later he had come into her room. She had put her arms round his neck and kissed him, dimly, gratefully, inadequately.

He had slept with her.

The next morning he had gone away. She hadn't understood at the time. Now she understood.

Why did she keep remembering this one scene? There had been dozens like it.

Perhaps when our minds go blank they accept only repetition.

Serge wrote her loving, tender, gay letters. He knew that she had left his life just as she was leaving her own.

He thought of his child with an anger that was sometimes violent and sometimes blank.

Cuthbert's letters arrived irregularly at long intervals, two or three together. They gave a detailed description of a given day.

Mr. Hyslop would send photographs of tents and huts and mountains and bearers and priests. Himself and Cuthbert marked with crosses:

"In case you don't recognise us!"

"Have you told Cuthbert?" Sarah asked.

"Yes, and I have begged him not to come home

and spoil his whole journey when I am perfectly well and perfectly happy."

The doctor was worried. "I would feel happier if Sir Cuthbert were here."

Sarah found herself echoing his wish. Cuthbert might, she thought, give some reality to Lisa. Any way, the dogs would come to life and Mr. Rollit would come to lunch. Living in this no man's land was a strain on anyone's nerves. Lisa dragging her attention to a topic, always out of courtesy, never out of interest.

The doctor had told her that Lisa was much too small and that he would have to bring on the child.

Christmas came—a "seasonable" Christmas with snow, the river half frozen, panes of ice floating like broken glass—children sliding about with blue noses and woolly mufflers. Carol-singers delivering "Good King Wenceslas" stridently out of tune. The Christmas-tree in the village hall, Lisa distributing parcels, the school treat with oranges and chocolates and crackers.

Lisa, who had always loved Christmas and brought to it an inexhaustible fund of gaiety and invention, and whose condition now caused her presence to create a certain hush.

"It is a beautiful moment to be expect-

ing a child," the vicar murmured to Sarah.

He made an eloquent speech about Cuthbert's absence—"absent, yet present," he said.

Present, yet absent, Sarah thought, looking at Lisa.

Cuthbert had written to her:

I thank God for the blessing He is bestowing on us. May His blessing be on you now and always.

The clock had struck twelve, the bells were ringing.

With their arms crossed they sang: "Lest old acquaintance be forgot"—Lisa and Sarah and Mr. and Mrs. Rollit, the vicar and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Rich with two nieces and two nephews, the servants.

"To absent friends," Lisa raised her glass.

Everyone was thinking of Cuthbert and not daring to look at Lisa. A little later Sarah knocked timidly on her door.

Lisa was lying on her bed sobbing (a good sign, Sarah thought).

"A happy new year," she said, kissing her.

CHAPTER VII

JANUARY slipped away with no special existence, the days melting into one another without yesterdays or to-morrows.

"They say in prison, where you lose all sense of time, it passes much more quickly. No events to hold you up. Is it like that when you are going to have a baby?"

"I suppose it is."

The thawed fields were wet with hidden fertility.

Under the clumps of elms appeared constellations of snowdrops. Under the hedges tiny violets nestled and peeped.

The wintry sun, tired of the modest light he had shed all day, turned into a crimson bomb unconnected with the air, before exploding the sky into a conflagration of sunset.

"A winter sunset," Lisa said, "is like a storm at sea. A blazing storm which subsides into quiet ruffles of waves."

The greys of the Cotswold country shimmered dimly into one another. The puddles on the roads caught and kept what light there was, like metal reflectors.

"Lady Musgrave," the vicar said to his wife, "has the expression of a woman who is carrying a Messiah."

The vicar's wife was shocked.

"The Rector," she said to Sarah—she always referred to her husband as the "Rector", "Rector" sounded more peremptory than "Vicar", and she had always regretted a certain absence of peremptoriness in her husband—"is very fanciful for a Christian." She had her own views on what a Christian should be like, in which the fanciful played no part.

Mrs. Rollit had left her sofa for the Christmas festivities, feeling it her duty to confer a benefit on the season.

She had not returned to it until after the new year, her recovered position reinforced by an added touch of martyrdom.

Mr. Rollit felt the absence of Cuthbert. He also felt, though he didn't analyse it, the absence of Lisa.

Mrs. Rich recognised the fact that it was no longer a time when Lisa could be expected to appreciate cream.

Sarah couldn't get accustomed to life at a standstill.

She had always lived in the country and, since her mother's death, she had lived alone, but she had never known anything like the solitude she was

sharing with Lisa. "Sharing" wasn't the word, either. You didn't even feel as if you were with Lisa.

The gardener had grown a magnificent gardenia as a surprise for her ladyship. Lisa, with a glimmer of her old self, said it was the nicest surprise she could possibly have had.

Sarah thought sardonically that it probably *was* the nicest surprise she could possibly have had.

Mamachen, who had returned to Poland, wrote that "if she were wanted. . . ."

She made it quite clear that she wanted to be wanted.

"What are we to say?" Lisa asked.

"Say you don't feel like seeing anybody."

"You can't expect Mamachen to think that she is 'anybody'."

(That, thought Sarah, is more like the old Lisa.)

"Write her a charming letter with no reference to her kind offer."

"Wouldn't that be rude?"

"Be rude?"

"That is the sort of advice Mamachen would give."

"Then perhaps she will understand."

"No one can be expected to understand the sort of advice they would give."

"Anyway, she is not going to come here."

.

Captain Hyslop wrote: *Where you are concerned, dear lady, absence could not be said to lend enchantment.* After that he had clearly found it difficult to find a second equally suitable phrase. *But from where we are I lay at your feet every wish for the New Year.*

Serge wrote to Sarah: *Please tell me how she is—how she really is.*

Sarah wrote back: *I don't know how she is or where she is. I am, frankly, worried.*

The doctor, too, was worried.

Cuthbert wrote that he would be home at the beginning of March.

"Thank God for that," thought Sarah. And then: "Perhaps I have never been fair to Cuthbert."

CHAPTER VIII

FEBRUARY came, warm and windless, the earth and the air breathing some hushed awakening, alive but not yet stirring.

Violets, primroses and snowdrops gathered together in intimate groups, uncurling their buds into petals, opening to a brief virginal existence, far removed from the flashing, consummated beauty of summer flowers.

A grey, still month, lit here and there by the gleam of a river or a pool, by water, not by light. Lisa calm with her certainty, the certainty that the life she was carrying was also the ebbing of her own life.

It is strange, she thought, this carrying of life and death together in your body. She did not feel that there was any conflict between them.

She would like to have known her child, but she felt that perhaps it was better it should be entirely Cuthbert's.

One night she explained this to Sarah.

Sarah told her not to be a goose, a wicked criminal goose.

"If it is a girl," Lisa said, "you must promise me never to let her go to school; girls together are detest-

able. You must preserve her from sniggers and giggles. I don't want her to be uninhibited—I want her to think of life as a mystery, a mystery that has to be explored, slowly revealed, not suddenly exposed. Let her be hurt—I would infinitely rather that she were hurt than hardened, prematurely hardened."

"Being hurt hardens too," Sarah observed.

"Not the people who matter. Let it only be you who warn her of anything, even then I would rather it were too late than too early. Give her knowledge but not information, give her curiosity but not inquisitiveness. Don't arm her against life as if life were an enemy. It is better that danger should find you naked than that joy should find you armour-plated.

"I would rather she were a pilgrim than a soldier. When you are pre-warned and when you are pre-armed you bring to yourself what you are preparing against. I don't want her sterilised against life—it is better to be broken than to be sterilised. Don't throw facts at her before she can digest them into experience. Let her learn and learn and learn, history, geography, literature, philosophy. But don't tell her anything about *life*. There she must make her own discoveries."

"You can't divide them up as simply as all that."

"No, I know you can't. But you know what I mean. Don't let her believe in things like 'keeping

her own end up'; make her see how much more important interdependence is than independence. Let her see that other people exist and that we none of us lead our own lives. Make her aware of other people."

Sarah thought of Serge, but she said nothing.

Lisa saw what she was thinking about.

"It is partly because of Serge," she said gently, "he taught me a lot in those few days. I saw that I hadn't seen what other people were like. I hadn't even seen it about Stanislas."

"God knows that you are unselfish enough."

"I haven't wanted to be selfish," Lisa said humbly, "but I seem to have succeeded, at any rate with Serge and with Stanislas, not, I hope, with Cuthbert."

"Never with Cuthbert."

"I seem to have been born with a sort of colour-blindness. I don't know what it is. I have always wanted to give what other people wanted, but I have always been wrong. Perhaps" she added, with the glimmer of a smile, "I have been a success for Mr. Rollit."

"Mr. Rollit thinks you divine."

"Oh no! It isn't as bad as that. He thinks me 'queer', which is a change from Mrs. Rollit, and therefore entirely satisfactory."

Sarah was infinitely relieved. At last Lisa had become herself again.

"The point is that wherever it has mattered I have got everything askew. I think I have had quite a lot of vision, all of it defective like the people who have a lot of taste all of it rather bad."

How extraordinary Lisa is, Sarah thought, clear-sighted enough to plumb her blindness to its depths.

"Knowing that you are blind doesn't give you an atom more sight," Lisa continued, as if Sarah had been thinking out loud. "You are the only person, I believe, that I have loved and understood."

"Bless you, darling."

"I want my child to be in touch where I have been out of touch. But I don't want her brought up as a realist, brushing things aside because they don't seem to matter. What matters is so much more complicated than that. To be sensible is, I suppose, an excellent thing, but I have rarely seen sense unaccompanied by insensibility."

"You don't seem to be planning a very happy life for your child," Sarah observed, a little grimly.

"As long as it is life."

"You believe in life?" Sarah enquired in her dryest voice.

"Of course I believe in it."

"You don't know much about it."

"Of course I don't. The unknown is always what we believe in."

"The man who prepared me for confirmation

talked a lot about the unknown," Sarah observed, "which didn't prevent him from trying to make it better known. I always felt inclined to say to him: 'Teach me to be rational or teach me to be religious, but for God's sake don't keep hopping from one to the other'".

There was a pause, then Lisa said: "My child will not be in the least like me. She will have some of Serge's blood and she will have Cuthbert for a father and you to bring her up."

"C'est tout un programme," remarked Sarah.

Lisa went to bed.

CHAPTER IX

THE next night after dinner Lisa began again.
(She is becoming like a Greek chorus, Sarah thought.)

"It is so complicated, the question of education. Where can you intervene and help? When do you intervene and wreck? One wants perfection. A tolerance that would *not* be moral laziness, an indignation that would *not* be self-righteous. If we cannot also be unforgiving we lose our strength, and if we cannot be forgiving we lose the purpose of our strength. Only humour lubricates, and humour has rarely belonged to a great man. Julius Caesar perhaps, and there is the story of Luther and the dachshund——"

"A militant Protestant with a sense of humour?" Sarah was incredulous.

"Well, the young lady wrote and asked if she would find her dachshund in Heaven, and he replied: 'Yes, but he will be covered with gold fluff'. Think of it, her beloved, *shiny* dachshund, his coat changed into fluff. Do you think Luther meant her not to believe in Heaven?"

"I suppose so. She was a young girl. Probably she

saw herself with golden wings; why not her dog with golden fluff?"

"As usual," Lisa smiled, "I am wrong. Luther saw the point."

"When *Green Pastures* first appeared," Sarah observed, "a negress wrote and said that no negro imagined himself black in Heaven."

"I don't want those I love changed by the *hair* of an improvement, except that I sometimes wish they were more courteous. That has never seemed to me incompatible with any cause—a view, it must be admitted, that has never been held by the believer in any cause."

"Would you be polite to a tyrant?"

"I would, I hope, shoot him, but that would be final rather than discourteous, wouldn't it?"

"What a Jesuit you are," laughed Sarah.

"There is nothing Jesuitical about it. Good manners are vitally important. Good murders rarely have anything to do with us, or rather we have nothing to do with them. A murder from which you can gain nothing personally is, technically, but not morally, a crime. If I kill a private man because he makes a number of persons miserable, if I kill a public man because he makes millions of people miserable, I am technically a murderer—nor would I dream of pleading 'Not Guilty'. I have appointed myself a judge, but I have no status as a judge. I

consider that I should be hanged as an unauthorised practitioner. I wish to benefit by no mercy that I have not shown. In the eyes of the world I am a public benefactor, in the eyes of the law I am a common criminal. If you break the law you have broken the law. I want no unofficial clemency for an unauthorised act. If I were not hanged I should consider that my act had been dishonoured."

"How bureaucratic you are," Sarah said: "I withdraw the word Jesuitical."

"Precisely. I should employ no Counsel. I should be ashamed to have a tremolo put at my disposal. My death sentence would be my Victoria Cross. What shocks me about political crimes is that their perpetrators should *want* to get off."

"Always the absolutist," remarked Sarah.

"Life and death are absolute. Manners would come in most inconveniently. I couldn't murder a man in my own house or in his own house or in the house of a third person. The laws of hospitality would intervene. I should have to kill him in a hotel, or a restaurant, or a street."

"Etiquette for murderers."

"Not for all murderers; mine would be a case of 'murder oblige'. I believe that private standards and public standards should be the same standards—if that view were generally accepted public life would gain immensely."

"How logical you are."

I have discovered something that I never knew before, Sarah thought: the absolute logic of Lisa's life. Because she is a romantic, because she is charming, we have all of us overlooked that fact, which is the explanation of Lisa.

She wrote and told Serge.

Yes [he wrote back], you have given me the clue. We should have seen it earlier in the book. We have been fools. The absolutely logical looking wayward to the illogical. We make so many easy assumptions. The lovely are vulnerable—because we want them. The stupid are not tricky—because we are blinded by their stupidity (that is where they have us). The rude are sincere, the plain honest, the clever artful. The inarticulate are profound, the articulate superficial, the attractive have temperament, the unattractive are high-minded—all the convenient matings of our laziness.

It made Sarah happy that Lisa should have begun to talk again.

But there is something uncomfortable [she wrote to Serge], as if her every word were a last word.

Sarah felt that she ought to remember what Lisa said, because she would never be able to say it again.

Lisa had succeeded in communicating the sense of her impending death.

"There is so much to say," she said one night. "Suddenly you feel the sense of a time limit; of course there has always been a time limit, only one has not always known it."

"How do your patients behave when they know they have a mortal disease?" Sarah asked the doctor.

"They live very much in the present."

Daffodils came out and grape hyacinths.

"I have never known them so early," the gardener said; "in my experience it means a late frost. What ain't natural does no good. Nature's a tricky customer, and no mistake."

We call even nature unnatural, Sarah thought, when she is nonconformist.

Crocuses shot their tongues out of the grass.

"The flowers are overlapping," Lisa said.

She was grateful to them. . . .

Ordinary life. What is ordinary life? A courtship, a marriage, children. Ordering meals, leaving for an office, going to a cinema. A good job. The loss of your job. Unemployment. Insecurity. The sweetness of your disposition disappearing under your own

eyes, frayed by anxiety. The tough integrity of the poor strengthened by struggle. The easy assumptions of the well-to-do disintegrating under the pressure of adversity.

The sudden discovery of character where character had lain dormant, the disintegration of character where character had seemed apparent.

The rising to occasions, of which we are all capable—the *absence* of occasions. The fortitude brought by disaster, the irritability that follows disappointment. Dwindling hopes, lethargy. The disappearance of a best, and then of a second best. Acceptance, which is not the same thing as resignation. The loss first of your fastidiousness and then of your standards. Your respect for others disappearing with your own self-respect.

And always the example of the poor, who, having lost nothing and gained nothing, keep their flag flying, life a permanent struggle kept alive by the struggle. Never losing their humour, never losing their courage.

The poor, only plaintive when they have decided to be plaintive for a given purpose, begging—in which case they are borrowing from the rich a method of dealing with the rich.

"I think about things I never thought of before,"
Lisa said to Sarah.

"There are always things we haven't thought of before."

"Yes, but one doesn't think about them."

"That is perfectly true."

"It comes, I suppose, from having ceased to live one's own life. What a lot of time we waste leading our own life."

"All womanly women lead other people's lives!"

"What I really meant was personal lives."

"My poor Lisa"—Sarah had decided to make light of the matter—"you may be ripe for death, but you will never be ripe for an impersonal life."

"What is wrong with an impersonal life," Lisa reflected, "is that it makes other people's lives look impersonal."

"Probably," Sarah agreed. "You give up your ball dress for an overall, but you cannot resist the temptation of demanding overalls for others. We come back to our nouveau riche employer who can never believe that what was once bad enough for him is not good enough for his employees."

"I wish I had thought more and known more and learnt more. . . ."

"How very laudable."

"I am sorry. I don't want to die sententious."

"Better than living sententious. I am agreeably surprised that you shouldn't wish to have *felt* more."

"I don't want to have felt more." Lisa was grave.

"I do—at least I don't, but I ought to."

Sarah had determined to treat Lisa's premonition of death as a ridiculous fancy to be brought in at every conceivable opportunity in order to make it look ridiculous. That must, she felt, be the right cure. What made her task difficult was that she shared the premonition.

"You talk about feeling," Lisa said, "as if it were an objective. It isn't an objective. Those who feel sometimes regret it, but those who don't feel rarely miss it."

"Perhaps they occasionally know an off day—as if a frost had interfered with their hunting or a thaw had prevented them from ski-ing."

"I don't think it is like that. People who don't feel haven't feelings as important as a frost or a thaw or a horse or a ski."

"I expect you are right."

"Emotion is most people's substitute for feeling. But it is not always a substitute, it is sometimes a bloom on a genuine feeling, an enhancement, neither spurious nor suspect. The moments when words topple into poetry, the moments when the shyness of the average man or woman yields to some unexpected blossoming, when the inarticulate come into their own and eloquence is given to those who knew no speech."

"Do you want your child to be geared up to the sort of life that comes to few of us and is survived by even fewer?"

"I want her everyday life to be life."

"You don't want her to be happy?" Sarah said soberly.

"I don't want her to be happy if it only means not to be unhappy."

"That is a view," Sarah said gently, "that one has, I think, only the right to take for oneself. We cannot impose Everests and abysses on others."

"We can show them Everest."

"I doubt it. Your spiritual mountaineering is not a plan or a programme. It is part of the rhythm of your personality. Undulating country exists, with shady lanes and somnolent rivers. There are quiet pilgrimages of the spirit."

"Yes," Lisa said, "we tend to underrate serenity," and then passionately, "but I do *hate* serenity."

"You have never known it."

"No."

"Or wanted it."

"I thought I wanted it when I married Cuthbert."

"You can't find what you don't invest."

"No—I have discovered that. Our discoveries come so late, but even if they came earlier I expect we would make the same mistakes. Only perhaps they would matter less if they had come earlier. I

am not sure even of that. I mattered to Stanislas and I didn't know it. I mattered to Serge and I didn't know it. I have never really mattered to Cuthbert. That is why I have made him happy."

"There was a pause.

"Personal relations are extremely tricky," Lisa smiled.

"Damned tricky," Sarah agreed.

A silence ticked.

"Whenever there is a silence," Lisa said, "you hear the clock. Clocks have such bad manners. Reminding one of time."

"They are the conscripts of time."

"I have lost the sense of time. Time belongs to life. Do you think that eternity will last too long?"

"It has length against it."

"I think," Lisa said, "that God meant us to try and make a paradise of our life on earth. If we fail He will punish us with His Heaven."

"A gloomy view."

"I can't conceive happiness without a frame of time."

"What are we going to call your child?" Sarah asked abruptly.

"You will christen her Sarah and call her Sally. She must be called after you, but she can't have your name. There couldn't be two Sarahs."

"What a charming thing to say."

"There are so many charming things to say, only people so rarely say them."

"Perhaps they don't think of them. Or, which is worse, they think better of them."

"When does 'better' mean 'worse'? It sounds like a riddle in a cracker. But there isn't a neat answer, is there?"

"It is curious," Lisa said, "this carrying of another life within you. For once you would think that some fusion existed, but as soon as the child quickens it is struggling to escape from you. Life begins with a struggle for separation, and later life turns her tables on you and there comes the desperate struggle for union with the beloved. The helpless struggle for some joint submerging of your individualities into your love. The hopeless effort to disappear completely into some ultimate sharing. Perhaps the great lovers knew the secret, yet passion consumes more than it consummates. The blinding flash of anonymity we call desire may burn us up together, but it cannot unite us. The child struggles to break out of the womb and it succeeds. Later the woman in love struggles to find a prison and she fails. She looks for locks and bolts and bars, but always there comes some icy blast of liberty, always her unwanted self is there: she desiring only to be the prisoner of her love is yet the prisoner of her own individuality."

"Most women do not feel like that," Sarah observed. "They want to develop their personalities, they want to be successful and challenging and independent, to lead their *own* lives."

"Whatever else we do we never lead our own lives."

"I," Sarah said a little grimly, "have always led my own life. Whether I have chosen to lead it or not is another matter. I have probably had no choice."

"Oh," Lisa said miserably, feeling that she had been rude.

"Don't apologise," Sarah chuckled, "for pitying the old maid."

"I was pitying the men who hadn't married the old maid."

"A charming view, but not a form of self-pity I have ever observed in any of the men I have known."

"Mamachen," Lisa said, "has always been able to hammer life into the shape she wanted, though I think she enjoyed the hammering more than she wanted the shape."

"There are lots of people like that. They prefer victory to defeat, but they also prefer any war to any peace."

"What I said just now," Lisa went on, "was only one side of the question. There are crusading women, magnificent women, women who can fuse

with a cause. I was thinking of personal relations, those relations which, because of the ultimate claim they make on intimacy, give you the measure of your separateness."

"Mrs. Rollit," Sarah observed, "has no desire to be Mr. Rollit, she would consider it either indecent or undignified. She wishes to be Mrs. Rollit."

"And she succeeds."

"Causes are, of course, simpler than personal relations. They retain their own essence. We can work for prison reform, we can abhor cruelty to animals. We can believe in the importance of scientific experiment, we can believe in vivisection, we can believe in God. It is difficult to believe in another human being as if he were more than another human being."

"That belief," Lisa said, "is the vindication of love."

"I didn't know it needed vindicating."

"'Explaining' was the word."

"You forget," Sarah said, "that very few people want love to be anything but affection by day and something different at night."

"How vulgar you are," Lisa laughed, "like a music-hall song."

"Be genteel," Sarah said, kissing her good night.

CHAPTER X

THE doctor told Lisa that he would have to bring on her child. Toward the end of the month, he said.

He gave her his reasons, in which she was not in the least interested.

"Of course you are right."

"Lady Musgrave," the doctor said enthusiastically to Sarah, "is an ideal patient. During an unusually trying pregnancy she has never complained and she appears to be entirely without apprehensions."

Lisa said to Sarah: "Time framed."

The phrase made Sarah feel uncomfortable.

The post had not come.

The days were warm, subdued and grey, lit intermittently by a watery sun, shy, uncertain flowers adventuring into the open; twigs finding themselves with bud.

It was, Mr. Rollit observed, remarkably mild for the season.

Spring, tentatively disentangling herself from winter.

Serge wrote to Sarah: *How is she?* and Sarah answered: *The same.*

Serge wrote to Lisa: *How are you?* and she answered: *I wish you could see our diffident Wiltshire spring, hesitating before each step—I often think of your birches—I may think of them now, mayn't I, without being impertinent?*

Suspension, Serge thought, becoming suspense.

In a month [wrote Cuthbert] I will be with you—we will be together.

"Do you think that Cuthbert will marry again?" Lisa asked Sarah.

"No."

"Why not? Was I such a failure?"

"No. But Cuthbert is an absolutist."

"Yes."

"You are the only woman he ever wanted to marry."

"Yes. But then I *did* marry him."

"That made no difference."

"What nice things you say—I am quoting you."

It was curious this feeling of being identified with a season—with a time of year.

As if every bud or lamb were a part of what you were carrying.

"It is strange," Lisa said to Sarah, "to feel that you are carrying your own death. I have never been fatalistic. I am not even afraid. I am grateful for what I see—for the trees and the river, for the ultimate gifts that are ours because they do not belong to us."

Cuthbert can't arrive before the beginning of March [Sarah wrote to Serge]. Couldn't you come over? She must be tugged back into life.

Serge wrote back:

I could only give her my own life's blood—and that was of no use to her. You read every day in hospitals of men and women volunteering to give their blood for a blood transfusion. That is what we offer every day to those we love. But we are as useless as a disinterested stranger—more useless. Stanislas teased her into life—it was his undoing because he cared—but it kept her alive. I was the only person she ever used. I was furious at the time. I could have killed her. You, dear Miss Musgrave, will appreciate, that though we may kill we must never deny.

"A plausibility of wisdom," Sarah said to Lisa, "is most dangerous."

"Do you prefer it obscure?"

"I prefer it clear."

"A reasonable preference."

"Prince Galitzin obliges me to agree with everything he says and then, because it is a little bit true, I find myself believing in Anglo-Indians."

"'Sahibs' and 'tiffin'?"

"And all the immense disinterested service travestied by those words."

"Serge is disinterested."

"I know. And we have to go on recognising what is right in practice against what is right in theory. The genius of our race."

"You sound so cross."

"Prince Galitzin always upsets me."

"It is a family characteristic."

If only Cuthbert were back, Sarah thought.

We should get everything right and balanced. Lisa would be his cherished wife, who, because she was small, had to have her child brought on. "Though not normal, by no means unusual," the doctor had said.

Each calling has its threadbare dicta: "A blessed release" from the comforting clergy, "The better man won" from the disgruntled sportsman, "While there is life——" the doctors' prescription.

If Cuthbert were here, thought Sarah, I should be living in my cottage. Lisa wouldn't talk in the evenings, Cuthbert would carry her up to bed at

half-past ten and she would tell him nothing except that she was feeling so well and that he was perfect. It would all be much better and much simpler. Lisa's child would remain in its proper place—the womb—and not sprawl about over plans and premonitions. Life would be normal. Fellow (or brother, Sarah wondered?) magistrates would consult with Cuthbert. Cuthbert would confer with Mr. Rollit about improvements in the cottages, Cuthbert would discuss with the local authorities housing, electricity, the water supply, district nurses. Cuthbert would preside over recruiting meetings.

“Though my personal sympathies lie with the Territorials, we cannot but acknowledge the fact that the regular army needs more men.” Cuthbert, so fair in his prejudices, so unfailing in his public spirit!

Good God, thought Sarah, I am beginning to take the county view of Cuthbert, not only the county view, Mamachen's view, Lisa's view. No doubt the right view.

Lady Musgrave would be expecting a “happy event”.

Men would come in for a drink on their way home from hunting.

The evening, instead of hovering between night and day, would be sensibly shut out by the curtains. Lisa, instead of hovering between life and

death, would be sensibly pinned to the present.

Serge would be "that excellent fellow we met in Paris", Stanislas, not so much a ghost, as a commentary, would no longer dominate Lisa's past, since her past would have yielded to Cuthbert's present.

The child would be a boy, going from a preparatory school to a public school and then to Oxford—unless he preferred a year abroad and the diplomatic service. A boy, *not* a girl—— That girl to be initiated by Sarah into Lisa's profound disintegrating truths. Those truths which would, Sarah felt, successfully unfit her for life—Lisa's truths, Serge's truths, absolute truths, inapplicable to living.

"Damn the Slavs," Sarah said.

CHAPTER XI

LISA thought: "How curious it is that I am not filling this time with a masterpiece I have not read—with something or other that I have missed. With so little time left, why do I drift about arranging flowers, pottering, looking at patterns of chintzes, planning the Easter school treat? Why don't I get up earlier and go to bed later? Why don't I read *Clarissa Harlowe*?"

Serge wrote: *Think of life being two lives. To me, of course, it is your life—which means mine. Arithmetically three lives—in one word—life.*

"The birth of a child," Lisa said to Sarah, "is a trinity. The figure 3 is a magic figure. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Three Norns, three Graces—'Alle gute Dinge drei'—as our governesses said."

I have three weeks to live—I am not spending them, I am wasting them. It is as if, knowing that there was not enough water to drink, I took a bath. Happiness means the unconsciousness of happiness. I am pinning life down with the birth of a child. What does my own disappearance matter?

"On ne voit jamais la même rivière." That is the summing-up of life. Fortunately the living overlook it.

She spent most of her time with the gardener—planning, planting, inserting into the future some designed fertility. "Life after death," she thought, discussing the herbaceous border. Life immortal, interrupted—perhaps not even interrupted—by a personal life. She felt grateful for this knowledge of death, this knowledge which had turned an enemy into a friend—or perhaps an acquaintance.

"Parrot tulips," she said to Sarah, "used to be red and yellow. But now there is a purple parrot tulip, with a green vein down the middle of each petal."

"I don't deny it for a moment," Sarah remarked.

"I have always loved parrot tulips. They are dragons' tongues."

"An exhausted dragon with a jagged purple tongue."

"Don't laugh at me. There is also a rose-red parrot tulip."

"A second dragon?"

"Why not a dragon with two tongues?"

"Indeed, why not?"

I have had [Cuthbert wrote] a most charming letter from the Countess—transmitted by the Polish

Consul at Calcutta. She said that she would always regard our child as her grandchild. No mother-in-law could have said anything more friendly.

"For once," Sarah said, "Cuthbert appears to have got his facts wrong. Even in the happiest circumstances the Countess could not have been his mother-in-law."

"Getting your facts wrong," Lisa scoffed. "Do you get them right by being matter of fact?"

"Probably not."

"The intelligent are presented with shifting facts. The unintelligent are confronted with stationary facts. There is no solution. The intelligent will remain misguided, because their minds wander—*unguided* if you prefer it. The pilgrim mind, unhampered by certainties. The sensible will remain moored to their facts."

"The Countess," Sarah remarked, "has always been a perfect mother-in-law for Cuthbert. A mother-in-law without a son or a daughter to intervene in the relationship. In fact an absolute mother-in-law."

It is funny, Lisa thought, I go on thinking just as if everything mattered as much and as little as it would if I were to go on living. But without life there couldn't be life everlasting. If I saw an angel

with a harp instead of Mr. Rollit, I should be prematurely dead.

Not content with his gardenia, the gardener produced a camellia—an immense camellia with red, and red-and-white-spattered blossoms.

"They look like marble paper," Lisa said, "such a faithful shape and such unfaithful colours. A camellia represents the nineteenth century. The form of 'an heir and the colours of a mistress."

"Surely not the colours of a mistress; they look to me more like racing colours— Such a neat mixture of red and white."

"Don't spoil my pleasure. I don't want to think of camellias as jockeys. I like to think of beautifully tidy camellias tightly pinned into a coiffure or a corsage."

"Why not beautifully tidy jockeys tightly attached to beautifully shiny horses?"

"No steeplechases? In a steeplechase there is always a gap between the rider and his horse."

Lisa has become so gay, Sarah thought, why doesn't it reassure me?

Serge wrote to her:

Camellias, my love, what a charming thought. I always associate you with white flowers. Tuberoses, freesias, narcissi.

I love white flowers [she wrote back] even flowers that are not meant to be white— White tulips—

And then:

Don't let white look like a metaphor—metaphors insult beauty. When I say "white" I am not thinking of une première communion, of virgins or brides or funerals, I really am thinking of white flowers. White is the most beautiful of all colours—an homage paid by colour to the absolute.

We are still [wrote Mamachen] in mid-winter— That, I believe, to be the phrase, though I do not appreciate the word "mid", which should—my English is so poor—mean between, and therefore not explain winter. Outdoors we have great cold and indoors we have great heat. Tu connais our stoves. On doit se passer de nuances—cela simplifie.

"I am glad," Lisa said, "that my child will not be born into such violent contacts. I am glad that she will come with the slow unfolding of the English spring."

CHAPTER XII

LISA went to London to see her gynæcologist. She took very little interest in what he said. The child would have to be brought on. It would be very kind of him to bring it on. She had complete confidence in his skill.

Dr. Anderson, who normally disliked fuss, was irritated by this lack of fuss. He was also, irrationally, irritated by her confidence. She might, after all, he felt, take some interest in his handling of her condition. There was something unnatural about it. Something that could not be covered by: "Woman is a mystery". Not that Dr Anderson cared for mysteries. He had been a Triple Blue; he was to suffer the common fate of athletes, dying in the late forties of the frustrated necessity of exercise rendered fatal by a sudden indulgence in exercise.

Excellent at his job, with delicate sensitive hands, a courteous indifference to suffering and a total lack of psychological interest in his patients, he made an ideal gynæcologist.

His presence was right: iron-grey hair, grey (a little less iron) eyes, an authoritative manner, artificially tinged with deference. A happy blend of a man of the world and "getting down to business".

Except that he provided for them, instead of being provided for by them, his wife and his two sons received the same treatment as his patients. He was indifferent and uniformly polite, taking the amount of interest that marriage and parenthood require.

His sons would go to Charterhouse and Cambridge. From four p.m. to six-thirty his wife went to a bridge club. It was after dinner that his tribulations began.

Birth knows no hours. In his professional capacity Dr. Anderson was at the disposal of a rubato, of which his personal life was unconscious.

Lisa, not being interested in herself, was not interested in him.

To priests and doctors life and death are too closely connected. They use small scale maps, not allowing sufficient space for the intervention of living. Small scale maps with vast horizons. Sudden confrontations: sin and virtue, life and death. Forgetting those long loose periods: our everyday life, with colds in the head and small kindnesses, fitful indulgences, fitful unselfishness. Days of lazy friendliness, broken into by bursts of ill temper, lit by some quick act of self-sacrifice, a gust that goes out as suddenly as a light. What do doctors know of health? It is not their subject.

.

I am seeing London, Lisa thought, for the first time because I am seeing it for the last time. Everything is strange, familiar and out of focus. Only I mustn't see it like that, because then I shan't see it at all. The Bloomsbury squares, the City churches, the Thames, the beauty that has sunk into the quicksands of our being. Beauty absorbs rather than surprises. Beauty is a part of yourself, the intimate merging of a secret essence, invisible, yet potent.

Lisa felt like a tourist. "I must explore," she thought, and then: "I have always been a tourist—a tourist in England, a tourist in Poland, a tourist in life. Perhaps not a tourist, but a traveller". She walked down small streets packed with noisy children, playing and fighting. "I mustn't think of children," she thought, thinking of nothing else—

She went into Hyde Park and considered the Achilles statue. Such consideration is unusual. "It must have been conceived by a dwarf," she thought.

She drifted past shops, seasick sequins oceans of white chiffon, emphasised by one of those flowers which on the stage are so reassuringly fire-proof, having clearly followed the Lord Chamberlain's regulation.

She put a shop-girl into the dress and gave her such a happy ending. A love scene with deliciously apprehensive openings. (The bank clerk, disapprov-

ing of the sequins, succumbing to the heart he had maligned.)

Nests of pink, turquoise, lemon-and-cerise powder puffs nestled in pools of black georgette. Battalions of silver foxes knew they had been reduced to the ranks.

The London dusk accepted the lights of small windows.

Lisa had lived in Poland and in Wiltshire. To her London seemed an enormous animal, rumbling under the houses, rumbling under the river.

"I would have gone to the Albert Memorial," Lisa said to Sarah, "if it hadn't been stolen by Lytton Strachey."

"Writer steals statue," Sarah agreed. "It seems a little hard, since we can hardly hope to see 'Sculptor steals book'!"

CHAPTER XIII

LISA had come back from London tired, a little flushed, with the tiredness that requires continued activity.

"Of course I don't want to dine in bed."

An irritable tiredness.

("She is getting so jumpy," Sarah thought.)

"It is funny," Lisa said, "the things that one goes on seeing for the first time. I have a jewel that I always see for the first time. Stanislas gave it to me while we were engaged—I was dazzled by it then—I am still dazzled by it now. I had a friend who told me that her chauffeur said to her one day that it was the sixty-fifth time she had been to Alcala de Henares. 'It was still a visit,' she said. One should always be able to go on visiting the things one loves: husbands, churches, pictures, symphonies. Intimacy loses all poetry when it merges into familiarity. That is obvious, which doesn't prevent it from being true. The Piero della Francesca in the National Gallery, Mantegna's tiny picture of the dead Virgin in the Prado. I am sure that if I lived in Naples I would never become accustomed to—which means blind to—Titian's Farnese Pope. There must be glories that

re-blaze at you each time you see them. That is where lovers and music steal advantages. They draw on your senses. I remember a very intelligent man saying to me: 'I disapprove of music. Every dictator has loved music. It has given to him what he has given to the masses—subliminated hysteria'—I couldn't very well hum a bar of Schubert—he was tone-deaf—but what was annoying was that there was something in what he said—in fact, what he said. Pictures and poems do not touch a corporate nerve. They belong where art belongs—to minorities. They produce for us some private throb."

("How excited she is," Sarah thought. "I wish Serge were here to share it.")

"Cuthbert," Lisa went on, "has always been able to live on two planes—his estates and the East."

"What about you," Sarah enquired, "the woman he loves? A third plane?"

"If Oh, I have always been a guest. No one ever had a more charming host."

It is curious, thought Sarah, how her attitude towards Cuthbert has changed. I wonder if she knows it. Shall I tell her or would that be disloyal?

"What was Dr. Anderson like?" Sarah asked.

She had wanted passionately to know what Dr. Anderson had said, but she hadn't known how, or when, to ask.

"I don't know."

"You don't know, you who invent people when they don't exist!"

"It must have been his victory."

"Doctor defeats patient? What would you expect to find under that headline?"

"The Court decided in favour of the defendant."

Sarah sent Serge a verbatim—as near as might be—account of this conversation. *A faithful report*, she wrote; her nerves had taken refuge in accuracy.

Serge wrote back:

*I didn't know I could mind anything so much.
But one doesn't know anything until one knows it,
does one?*

CHAPTER XIV

NURSE THOMPSON had arrived. Cool, competent, a little too bright. She considered brightness reassuring.

"I am hopelessly old-fashioned," Lisa said to Sarah. "I *would* have liked a gamp who said, 'Now, dearie', and breathed heavily."

Nurse Thompson commented on the pictures and admired the flowers.

"You will see," Lisa said to Sarah, "that the servants are civil. That they don't look as if *she* ought to be carrying the trays."

"I can't control their expressions." Sarah, who hadn't slept for two nights, was at the end of her tether.

"Of course not," Lisa smiled at her. "Don't be cross, darling."

Lisa was bathed in serenity. At last, she thought, everything is over.

Nurse Thompson belonged to what Sarah called "The Fra Angelico" School of Nurses—every day a halo.

Nurse Thompson ("I hate to give trouble") gave the amount of trouble she considered due to her dignity.

Dr. Anderson arrived.

("I wish he wouldn't go on reassuring me," Lisa murmured to Sarah.)

They dined à trois and discussed the boat-race.

"When I was privileged to row for Cambridge."

"That"—Lisa winked slightly at Sarah—"was a privilege for Cambridge."

"You put things most gracefully, dear lady."

Lisa went to her room. "I have left a note for Cuthbert," she said, kissing Sarah. "She is to be christened Sarah and called Sally."

"Childbirth, Miss Musgrave"—Dr. Anderson was proud of the phrase—he had coined it himself—"is the battlefield of woman."

Sarah could have murdered him.

"Ask Miss Musgrave to come up."

"Dearest Sarah," Lisa said, "I know that one ought never to be there when a train goes out of a station. But when it is a question of life or death, one can't help being there. Medical opinion has never meant much to me—I know that I am small. I know that I am dangerously small. I know that

things *can* go right. We then call them miracles, which must be unfair to someone. I am *not* trying to keep my courage up. I dislike the thought of pain—who wouldn't? But I have decided to die. It sounds a little arrogant. I wanted to give Cuthbert a child and I used Serge. When Stanislas was alive I wanted a child for myself."

Lisa spoke in the level voice of the deaf, toneless, as if she could not hear what she was saying.

"Dearest Sarah, you must promise me never to explain anything to Cuthbert. Serge will understand."

CHAPTER XV

"EVERYTHING that was possible was done."

"Yes, of course."

"The child, a girl, weighs——"

"Yes, of course."

"I beg your pardon. I thought you might be interested."

"I am not in the least interested."

Dr. Anderson, who had hitherto thought Miss Musgrave a most capable woman, wavered in his opinion, but he felt it his duty to explain why and how Lady Musgrave had died.

"Could you have saved her by killing the child?"

He thought the word "killing" in the worst possible taste.

"Had we sacrificed the child Lady Musgrave could not have survived."

"Well, then there was nothing to be done."

Dr. Anderson, who had shown considerable skill, was not unnaturally nettled.

"I am happy that the child should have been born alive."

His tone implied that only he could have achieved such a fortunate event.

That a girl should not be a boy was obviously distressing where a baronetcy was concerned.

That Sir Cuthbert should feel the loss of his wife was equally natural. But a sister-in-law!

One lives and learns, thought Dr. Anderson! Each year he lived and learnt less.

For a moment he had been startled by Sarah. But quickly—having honourably discarded it, he relegated a suspicion of which he was ashamed to members of the less desirable branches of the medical—or semi-medical—profession.

Dr. Anderson was fond of remarking that he kept his opinion of psychiatrists to himself.

They were his favourite topic.

Sarah walked about abrupt and disconsolate, glad of an opportunity of giving orders, incapable of giving them.

"The wreaths? Oh yes, of course, give them to Mullins."

Mullins was the head gardener, but Sarah had forgotten that wreaths and flowers were no longer the concern of the head gardener. They had become the prerogatives of the butler, a matter of visiting-cards, of the Polish Minister and the Red Cross and Cruelty to Animals, of the courteous gestures of the living to the dead.

Lisa, Sarah said to herself savagely, was so very

fond of courtesy and so very fond of flowers.

She remembered her saying laughingly: "Why do people say they don't want any mourning? (I mean black clothes.) A woman who goes to Court wears feathers. A woman who goes out to dinner wears an evening-dress. A chef wears his cap—a Pope his diadem. I like liveries. Why should death be deprived of the beauty of black? 'Because I was happy,' the idiots write, as if one could only be happy in a colour."

Sarah wanted to forget the things Lisa had said. Just for these unbearable days she wished that Lisa were less alive. Something in her seemed to be cracking. "My surface, I suppose," she said to herself, hoping, as the intelligent always do, to dispel reality with words.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. ROLLIT was dumbfounded by Lisa's death. He didn't say the things everyone else said—he who had always said the things everyone else said. It wasn't like the deaths he had known: "a bereavement" (Lady Musgrave, not having been a relation, could not, of course, have been a "bereavement"): "a happy release", "a peaceful end". He felt curiously forlorn. It wasn't *someone* who had gone out of his life, but *something*.

Sarah knew that with Lisa's death a part of life had died.

Serge flew over. He wanted to stay away, but he couldn't.

"Do you want to see——"

"The murderess?"

"Serge!" Sarah was sharp.

"Are you shocked?"

"Yes."

"Matricide," he was savage, "the prerogative of babies."

"Serge," she was frightened——

"Oh well," Serge had relapsed into weariness, "she will grow up into innocence."

Lisa was buried in the family churchyard. The church touched the house. The villagers shuffle about, self-conscious, because they were moved. The children scattered primroses and snowdrops on the grave, furtively enjoying themselves. Mamachen's wreath of orchids looked singularly out of place. Mrs. Rich was crying. The neighbours behaved as neighbours should. Curious characters arrived: "Who are you?" the butler asked a tramp. "Friend of the deceased."

Cuthbert's relations arrived, uninvited, from nowhere. Melancholy relations, suited to funerals—completely at home.

"The death of Lady Musgrave," the vicar said, "is not only a loss to all of us, it creates a gap in our lives." (He loved Lisa, Sarah thought gratefully.) "Her death has lit the flame of another life—it was thus, I am sure, that she would have wished to die."

Mr. Rollit stood rigidly to attention, as if he were still in the army.

Cuthbert wandered about helplessly. He wandered from one room to another. Everywhere he found stray and vivid memories of Lisa. Her clothes

must be still hanging in cupboards, her jewels, her handkerchiefs lying in drawers. The stab of the inanimate! the inanimate brought to life by death.

Sarah was sitting in the drawing-room. She didn't know where to sit. Even the drawing-room had become strangely personal. Lisa receiving guests—Lisa turning the neighbours into people—

Lisa—

For the first time in his life Cuthbert was glad to be with Sarah. Lisa had loved Sarah. For the rest of his life everything concrete was to be to Cuthbert something that Lisa had liked or had not liked.

She had never liked brussels sprouts, he remembered disconsolately.

He looked at Sarah as if she could give him something, something that perhaps he had missed.

"She loved you," Sarah said, disconsolately sincere. And then: "She wanted a girl".

"Thank God it is a girl."

"Gone," thought Sarah, "the Musgrave family pride."

She wanted to think of something that might amuse her.

"They say that girls take after their fathers." Cuthbert looked at Sarah almost appealingly. "But it can't always be true."