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SECRET BREAD

BY

F. TENNYSON JESSE

Author Of "The Milky Way,"
"Beggars On Horseback," Etc.

"Bread eaten in secret..."

New York
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TO

EUSTACE TENNYSON D'EYNCOURT JESSE MY FATHER AND FRIEND

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BOOK I

SOWING

SECRET BREAD

PROLOGUE

There was silence in the room where James Ruan lay in the great bed, awaiting his marriage and his death—a silence so hushed that it was not broken, only faintly stirred, by the knocking of a fitful wind at the casement, and the occasional collapse of the glowing embers on the hearth. The firelight flickered over the whitewashed walls, which were dimmed to a pearly greyness by the stronger light without; the sick man's face was deep in shadow under the bed canopy, but one full-veined hand showed dark upon the blue and white check of the counterpane. All life, both without and within, was dying life—waning day at the casement, failing fire on the hearth, and in the shadowy bed a man's soul waiting to take wing.

Ruan lay with closed eyes, so still he might have been unconscious, but in reality he was gathering together all of force and energy he possessed; every sense was concentrated on the bare act of keeping alive—keenly and clearly alive—until the wished-for thing was accomplished. Then, the effort over, the stored-up vitality spent, he hoped to go out swiftly, no dallying on the dim borderland. As he lay his closed lids seemed like dull red films against the firelight, and across them floated a series of memory-pictures, which he noted curiously, even with a dry amusement.

He saw himself, as a big-boned surly lad, new to his heritage; then as a middle-aged man, living in a morose isolation save for Annie and the children. Little half-forgotten incidents drifted past him, and always, with the strange detachment of the dying, he saw himself from the outside, as it were, even as he saw Annie and the children. Finally, his travelling mind brought him to the present still hour of dusk, so soon to deepen into night. Thinking of that which was to come, his mouth twitched to a smile; he flattered himself he had kept his neighbours well scandalised during his life; now, from his death-bed,

he would send widening circles of amazement over the whole county, and set tongues clacking and heads wagging at the last freak of that old reprobate, Ruan of Cloom. He lay there, grimly smiling, the pleasure of the successful creator in his mind as he thought over the last situation of his making. The smouldering patches of red on the crumbling logs shrank smaller and smaller as the close-set little points of fire died out, and the feathery ash-flakes fell in a soft pile on the hearthstone.

Opening his eyes, Ruan turned his head a little on the pillow, so that he could watch the changing square of sky. A ragged curtain of cloud, blurred and wet-looking at the edge, hung almost to the hill-top, but between ran a streak of molten pallor, and against it the hedge of wilted thorns that crowned the hill stood out black and contorted. One great ploughed field stretched from the garden to the hill-crest; in the middle of its curve a tall grey granite monolith reared up, dark where its top came against the sky, but at its base hardly distinguishable from the bare earth around, which was charmed by the hour to a warm purple hue; when Ruan's eyes left the gleam in the sky they could find out the subdued green of the nearer hedge-row. For the last time, he told himself; then, as the gleam faded from the sky and was gone, he swallowed hard upon the knowledge that never again, for him, would the daylight live behind the clouds. He rubbed his finger up and down the sheet, that he might still feel a tangible sensation at will; then, lifting his bare forearm, he looked closely and curiously at it, noting the way the brown hairs lay across the back, and the finer texture of skin down the inside of elbow and wrist. He, his living self, was in that arm—he could still make the fingers contract and straighten, could still pinch the flesh gently till it whitened—could still call it part of himself. He was not thirsty, but he laboriously lifted the glass of water at his side and drank, because the fancy took him to feel one of the accustomed old sensations, the commonplaces of his every-day life, now that his body would so soon be beyond his power. As the slow fingers pushed the glass on to the little table again, the click of a gate sounded sharply, followed by the noise of footsteps on a paved path. The smile flickered back to Ruan's lips, and he settled himself to enjoy his last little comedy.

Up bare stairs came the footsteps, then the room door opened with a protest of rusty hinges, and Ruan saw the Parson standing on the threshold. A woman's face, pale and strained, swam out of the darkness behind, and to Ruan, materialist though he was, came the thought that the pale blur looked like the face of someone drowning in a black flood. He put the idea aside and nodded slightly at the woman. She gave a gasp of relief, and, pushing by the priest, walked over to the bed.

"So you've not cheated me, James!" she said. "I made sure to find 'ee dead when I brought Passon—I thought you'd ha' done it to spite me."

"Dear woman," answered the Squire gently, "it's for my own pleasure I'm wedding you, and not to make an honest woman of you. I've a fancy to have the old place carried on by a child who's got a right to my name, that's all."

"An' our first-born, Arch'laus, can go begging all's days, s'pose? An' t'other lads and Vassie can go starve wi' en?"

Ruan's face changed, grew darker, and he spoke harshly.

"They were the children of our passion—true love-children. They remind me of the days when I was a fool, and I'll leave them only my folly. But the child that's coming—he'll be blessed by the law and the Church—quite a gentleman of quality, Annie; far above the likes of you. He'll live to breed hatred and malice in the pack of ye, and every hand of his own flesh and blood'll be against him.... Parson, do your duty, and tie the holy knot—small harm in it now nothing can hold me long."

The Parson came forward without a word. He was a clever man, whose knowledge of souls was deep, if not wide, and he refrained from asking whether repentance urged this tardy compliance with the law of his religion; such a question could only have provoked a sneer from the old cynic in the bed.

Annie groped along the mantelshelf until her fingers met a tallow rush, which she lit by holding it to the fire, and in the wan flare of yellow her weary figure showed that she was very near to her confinement. She turned to the bed and set the candle on the table, meeting the Squire's quizzical glance with eyes lit only by the tiny reflections of the candle flame—expressionless eyes, the blue of them faded and the life dulled. Then she went out of the room, and the stairs creaked beneath her descending feet; the clamour of her voice came to the two men above as she called through open doors:

"Katie! Kat-*ie*! Passon's here, and you'm to fetch Philip and come up to wance."

More feet sounded on the stairs, clattering hobnails among them, and Annie returned, accompanied by Katie Cotton, the dairymaid, and her sweetheart, Philip Jacka. Philip was a lithe, restless youth, with curly hair that caught the light and bright, glinting eyes. He was far better-looking than his girl, and far more at his ease; sturdy, high-bosomed Katie was guilty of an occasional sniff of feminine sympathy;

Philip looked on with the aloof superiority of the male.

The service began, and Annie listened to the words she had longed to hear for twelve years past, the words that would make her mistress of Cloom Manor. Morality meant as little to her as to any of the half-savage folk of the remote West in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the post of squire's mistress was merely considered less fortunate than that of squire's wife; but socially Annie was gaining—for she would become an eligible widow-woman.

With fumbling hands Ruan slipped his signet-ring on the ugly, work-worn finger of the woman who was at last his wife.

* * * * *

That night Annie gave birth to the latest heir of the house of Ruan, and in the grey of the dawning, when, with the aid of parson and lawyer, the Squire had arranged all his temporal affairs in a manner to ensure as much ill-will as possible in the family he was leaving behind him, he was gathered to his fathers.

In the big kitchen, where the mice skittered nervously over the last night's supper-table, and the tall clock chuckled before it struck each hour, huddled a group of frightened children. The eldest was angry as well, for, while the younger boys and the little girl were but dimly aware that all their world was tumbling about their ears, he, with the precocious knowledge of the ten-year old country lad, knew more nearly how the crying babe was ousting him from his previous height. Resentful, sleepy, fearful, and exiled from the rooms of birth and death they crouched together and watched the paling sky, their own quarrels forgotten in their common discomfort; and overhead the cries of the new-born child pierced the air of the new day.

CHAPTER I

HIGH ADVENTURES IN A FARMYARD

A bullet-headed little boy of eight sat astride upon a farmyard gate, whistling and beating time with a hazel-switch. He had fastened his belt round the gate-post and was using it as a bridle, his bare knees gripped the wooden bar under him, and his little brass-tipped heels flashed in the sun like spurs. It was Saturday morning, which meant no lessons with Parson Boase at the vicarage, and a fine day in late August, which meant escape from the roof of Cloom and the tongue and hand of its mistress. Ishmael Ruan, his head stuffed with the myths and histories with which the Parson was preparing him for St. Renny Grammar School, felt in the mood for high adventures, and his surroundings were romantic enough to stir the blood.

Cloom Manor, a deep-roofed, heavy-mullioned pile of grey granite dating from the Restoration, presented a long, low front to the moorland, a front beautified by a pillared porch with the Ruan arms sculptured above it, and at the back it was built round a square court, from which an arch, hollowed through the house itself, led into the farmyard. The windows were low-browed and deep-set, thickly leaded into small squares, with an occasional pane of bottle glass, which winked like an eye rounded by amaze. Within, the wide fireplaces and ceilings were enriched by delicate mouldings, whose once clean-cut outlines were blurred to a pleasing, uncertain quality by successive coats of whitewash. The room where Ishmael had been born boasted a domed ceiling, and a band of moulding half-way up the walls culminated over the bed's head in a representation of the Crucifixion—the drooping Christ surrounded by a medley of soldiers and horses, curiously intent dogs and swooning women, above whose heads the fluttered angels seemed entangled in the host of pennons flaunting round the cross. Cloom was a house of neglected glories, of fine things fallen on base uses, like the family itself. When James Ruan came into his inheritance it was still a gentleman's estate; when he died it was a mere farm. A distorted habit of mind and the incredible difficulties of communication in the remote West during the first half of the nineteenth century had gradually caused James Ruan to sink his gentleness in a wilful boorishness that left him a fierce pride of race and almost feudal powers, but the tastes and habits of his own labourers. As for the life of his mind, it was concentrated entirely on money-making; and all that he made he invested, till he became the most important landowner for miles, and in a district where no farms were very large his manor lands and cottage property and his nine hundred pounds or so of income made him a figure not to be ignored.

Nevertheless, for all his prosperity, he was a hard master, paying his labourers, who were mostly married men with families, the wage of seven shillings a week, and employing their womenfolk at hoeing or binding for sixpence a day, while for fewer pence still the little children stumbled on uncertain legs after the birds which threatened the new-tilled crops. By such means—common to all his neighbours at a time when cultivation was slow and such luxuries as meat, white bread, bedding, and coal were unknown to the poor, and by a shrewdness peculiar to himself—did James Ruan manage to make his property contribute to his private income, a condition of affairs by no means inevitable in farming, although at that time the hated Corn Law, only repealed soon after Ishmael's birth, had for thirty years been in force for the benefit of landowners. If the Squire had known the worth of the old family portraits hanging in what had been the banqueting hall, where apples were now stored, he would doubtless have sold them, but he had cut himself off from civilised beings who might have praised them, and he thought the beruffed, steel-plated men and high-browed, pearl-decked ladies rather a dry-looking lot, though he never suffered Annie to say a disparaging word on the subject.

Annie deeply resented this silent superiority of the Squire's, this shutting off from her of certain fine points in his garbled scheme of honour, and she chose to regard Ishmael as the embodiment of this habit. Had she been left with unrestricted powers as to estate and money she might have classed herself with her youngest-born and grown to grudge her other children their existence, but as things were Ishmael was as much in her way as he was in that of Archelaus. She realised she had been tricked at the last to satisfy a whim of the Squire's—she would have been far better off under the old will, which left Cloom to her eldest son after her. A dishonoured name was all she had gained by the transaction—a hollow reward, since to her equals it made little difference, and to her superiors none at all, and when she remembered at how much pains the special licence had been obtained from the commissary of the Bishop of Exeter, how she had sent for the Parson the moment the Squire had finally declared his mind made up, and then for Lawyer Tonkin, only to be excluded from the conference that followed, Annie felt her resentment surge up. If it had not been for the fact that the Parson and Tonkin had been appointed guardians to the boy, Ishmael would, in all probability, never have lived beyond babyhood. A little neglect would soon have ended the matter, and even if any local magnate had bestirred himself to make a fuss, no Cornish jury would have convicted. All this Boase knew, and he managed to make Annie aware of the fact that he meant his ward to thrive or he would make trouble, and she was one of those women who tremble before a spiritual pastor and master. Therefore she comforted herself by the reflection that at least Cloom would always be her home, and a home of which she meant to be mistress as long as possible. Under his father's will Ishmael came into the property at eighteen, an additional grievance to Annie, but she told herself that at least a boy of that age would not be able to turn her out—he would still be too afraid both of her and of public opinion. The hardness and the moral elasticity that go to make up a certain phase of the Cornish character, made up Annie's, and grew to sway her utterly, save for gusts of ungovernable emotions and an equally ungovernable temper. The little Ishmael learned to fear, to evade, and to lie, till he bade fair to become an infant Machiavelli, and at night his sins—the tremendous sins of childhood—would weigh upon him so that he broke into a sweat of terror.

On this August morning he had forgotten his crimes and was burning with the high adventures of a farmyard. In the blue of the sky fat gold-white clouds bellied like the sails of enchanted galleons, and the wind ruffled the cock's bronzed feathers about his scaly legs, blew pearly partings on the black-furred cat that sunned herself by the wall, and whirled two gleaming straws, Orthon-wise, about the cobbles. The triumphant cackling of a hen proclaimed an egg to be as much a miracle as the other daily one of dawn, and the shrill-voiced crickets kept up a monotonous and hurried orchestra. A big red cow came across the field and stood in a line with the gate, her head, with its calm eyes and gently moving wet nostrils, turned towards Ishmael. She was against the sun, and at the edges of her the fine outer hairs, gleaming transparent, made her seem outlined in flame—she was a glorified, a transfigured cow, a cow for the gods. In a newly-turned field beyond a man and a boy were planting young broccoli; they worked with the swiftness and smoothness of a machine, the man making a succession of holes with his spud as he walked along, the boy dropping in the plants on the instant. From where Ishmael sat the boy and his basket were hidden behind the man, and it looked as though wherever that shining spud touched the earth a green thing sprang up as by magic. Truly, Cloom was a farm in the grand manner this morning, a farm fit for the slopes of Olympus. Ishmael flogged his gate and bounced up and down till the latch rattled in its socket and the wide collar of his little print shirt blew up under his chin like two cherub wings supporting his glowing face.

A clatter of hoofs made him look around, and a young man rode down the lane opposite and into the farmyard. He was a splendid young man, and he sat the big, bare-backed horse as though he were one with it, his powerful thighs spreading a little as they gripped its glossy sides. His fair hair curled closely over his head and clung to his forehead in damp rings, the sweat standing out all over his face made it shine like metal, and the soaked shirt clung to the big muscles of his body. His face changed a little as he caught sight of the child on the gate—such a faint expression, something between sulkiness and

resentment, that it was obviously the result of instinctive habit and not of any particular emotion of the moment. As he flung himself off the horse a woman emerged from the courtyard and called out to Ishmael.

"Come and tak' th' arse to meadow for your brother, instead of wasten' the marnen'. Couldn' 'ee be gleanen' in th' arish? You may be gentry, but you'll go starve if you do naught but twiddle your thumbs for the day."

"Lave en be, lave en be, mother," said Archelaus Beggoe impatiently. "Women's clacken' never mended matters nawthen. It'll be a good day, sure 'nough, when he goes to school to St. Renny, if it gives we a little peace about the place. Do 'ee hold tha tongue, and give I a glass o' cider, for I'm fair sweaten' leaken'."

Mother and son passed through the archway into the courtyard, and Ishmael, who had been silently buckling on his belt, took hold of the rope head-stall and led the horse towards the pasture. As he went his childish mind indulged in a sort of gambling with fate.

"I wonder if my right foot or my left will step into the lane first. If it's my right I'll have it to mean that I shall be saved...." Here he paused for a moment, aghast; it was such a tremendous risk to take, such a staking of his soul. He went forward, measuring the distance with his eye, and trying to calculate which foot would take that fateful step from the cobbles on to the lane. He was there, and for one awful moment it seemed as though it would be his left, but an extra long stride just met the case.

"It didn't come quite natural that way," he thought, anxiously, "but p'raps it means I'll be saved by something I do myself. I wish I could be quite sure. Shall I have it that if I see a crow in the field I shall be saved?"

The reflection that for a dozen times on entering the pasture he saw no crow for once that he did made him change to, "Suppose I say if I don't see a crow I shall be saved?" But that too had its drawback, as if, after laying a wager in which the odds were so tremendously in his favour, he did see a crow, there would then be no smoothing away the fact, as often before, with "Perhaps that doesn't count"—it would be too obviously a sign from Heaven. He finally changed the wager to, "If I see birds in the field I'll see Phoebe to-day:" to such considerations does a man turn after contemplation of his soul. On seeing a couple of magpies, the white and black of their plumage showing silver and iridescent green in the sun as they swooped over the field, he took steps to justify the omen by setting off across the moors in quest of Phoebe.

CHAPTER II

THE MILL

As Ishmael went along he picked a large bunch of the wayside flowers as an offering to Phoebe—purple knapweed and betony, the plummy dead-pink heads of hemp-agrimony, and tufts of strong yellow fleabane, all squeezed together in his hot little hand. The air seemed alive with butterflies and moths, white and brown and red, and clouds of the "blue skippers" that look like periwinkles blown to life. A bee shot past him so quickly that the thrum of it sounded short as a twanged string, and the next moment a late foxglove spire, naked save for its topmost bell, quivered beneath the onslaught of the arched brown and yellow body. The heat haze shimmered on the distant horizon like an insect's wing, but was tempered on the moorland height by the capricious wind, and Ishmael kept doggedly on.

He was a wiry little boy, thin and brown, with dark hair that grew in a point on the nape of his neck, and hazel eyes set rather deeply under straight, sulky-looking brows. The lower part of his face was small and pointed for the breadth across forehead and cheek bones, and, with his outstanding ears, combined to give him something the look of a piskie's changeling. Already the first innocence of childhood was wearing away, and the deliberate cleanliness of mind achieved, if at all, in the malleable years between fifteen and twenty was as yet far ahead. Nevertheless, Parson Boase was not wrong in scenting the idealist in Ishmael, and he wondered how far the determined but excitable child, with the nervous strain of his race and all the little bluntnesses of a boy ungently reared, might prove the prey of circumstance; or whether, after all, he might not so build up resisting power as to make a fair thing of his life. A no more distant future than the next hour held Ishmael's mind at the moment, and attracted by a strong smell of peppermint from the marsh, the child turned that way, to add the pale

purple blossoms to his fast-wilting bunch.

A man in a black cassock, looped up for convenience in walking by a shabby cincture, was wandering among the brambles and gorse bushes, peering short-sightedly here and there, and as Ishmael appeared the man's hand closed suddenly over some object on a leaf. Ishmael had hardly recognised the Parson before he himself was seen.

"Come and look at what I've got here," shouted Boase, straightening his long back and holding his curved-out hands aloft. Ishmael ran towards him, the tussocks, dry from long drought, swaying and sagging beneath him. As he drew near he caught a whirring sound, so strong as to seem metallic, and saw a big green and yellow dragon-fly fighting in the Parson's hands. Boase took hold of it carefully but firmly by the wings, and the creature stared angrily at Ishmael with its huge glassy green eyes, opening its oddly-fleshy mouth and wagging its fawn-coloured lips like an evil infant cockatrice.

Suddenly the Parson launched it in the air again, raising two fingers in whimsical blessing, then he looked down at Ishmael with a queer expression in his eyes. That was Ishmael's fate, of which he was as yet unconscious—no one looked at him absolutely naturally. His mother saw him with aversion, Archelaus with resentment, and the younger brothers and the little sister took their cue from their elders. The neighbouring gentry treated him with an embarrassed kindness when they met him with Parson Boase, and solved the problem by leaving him alone on other occasions; the farmers looked at him as though he embodied a huge joke, and their wives mothered him surreptitiously, giving him saffron-cake, which he loved, and quick, hard kisses, which he detested. Even Boase looked at him not only as a child whom he loved, but as the incarnation of a hope, a theory—in short, as an Experiment. Nevertheless, it was the Parson to whom Ishmael came with his pleasures, and for all the intuition which told him the child went to no one in his griefs Boase had not quite enough of the feminine in him to realise the importance of the omission.

"Where are you off to, my son?" asked Boase, sticking his hand in the pocket of his shabby old cassock. He knew better than to pat a boy's head or thump him between the shoulder-blades with the hearty manner peculiar to men who have forgotten their own boyhood.

"Oh, I'm just gwain to see if the mill-wheel's workin' down along," said Ishmael—not for worlds would he have admitted Phoebe Lenine as the object of his visit. The Parson's eyes twinkled as they rested on the bouquet.

"Going, not 'gwain,'" he corrected gently.

"Going," repeated Ishmael, with his deceptive docility in little things.

"I'll come to the mill with you," said the Parson briskly, and Ishmael set off by his side without a word, but presently lagged behind a moment to drop his carefully-prepared offering between two gorse-bushes. Boase smiled, then sighed, wondering where such an abnormal dread of ridicule as Ishmael's would lead; it was a result of the Parson's calling that he should feel anxiety as to the ultimate trend of things.

The two trudged on in silence; their friendship was so tried, and the understanding between them so complete, that they sometimes spent an hour or more together with hardly a remark. Finally Ishmael broke silence.

"You coming to Cry the Neck this evening, Da Boase?" he asked.

"I'm going to look in before supper," replied the Parson; and unconsciously his lips took on a sterner line. He was building much on that evening's "Crying the Neck," which for the first time Ishmael was to attend, and at the succeeding supper Boase meant him to take his place at the head of the table, as future master of Cloom. "Crying the Neck" was a moribund custom in the eighteen-fifties, and it was the Parson, with an eye to its possibilities, who had encouraged what proved to be its last revival.

"Mr. Lenine's coming," remarked Ishmael presently.

"Ah! Is he coming alone?" asked Boase carelessly.

"Happen he will, or maybe they'll all come, but Mrs. Lenine always says she must stay in of an evening when others are trapesing," replied Ishmael, with equal carelessness. For they were Cornishmen, these two, and the Parson would no more have asked outright "Is Phoebe coming?" than Ishmael would have given a direct answer.

Lenine's mill, known as Vellan-Clowse, which means "The Mill by the Wood," nestled in a valley below the Cloon moor where the leet ran along built-up banks to the dam and then down a succession of

wooden troughs to the crest of the wheel. Facing the mill was the great cluster of elms that headed the valley, and behind only a tiny little yard divided it from the steepness of the hillside. The trees were the biggest for miles in that wind-swept district, and the bed of the valley showed green and lush with its marshy pastures, where the ugly red and white cows were tearing at the grass. The wheel was standing dumb, as harvest was not yet garnered, and Boase and Ishmael passed the mill door and went on to the house. There the door stood open, as did the further one at the end of the cool, straight passage that looked dark by contrast with the yard beyond, where, under the blazing sun, a little girl was feeding some fowls. The whole scene, set in the black oblong of the doorway, was compact of blue and flame colour—the blue of the frock and the shadows and the pale flame of the gravel where the shadows lay and the deeper flame fowls clustered. The man and the boy looked through for a moment in silence, then Phoebe turned and saw them.

Phoebe Lenine, being a woman of some eight years old, shook the remains of the corn off her small blue lap with no signs of haste or discomposure, and, turning her back, called to a hidden corner of the yard.

"Faëther! Faëther! Passon's come to see you!"

"How d'you know I haven't called to see you, Miss Phoebe?" asked Boase, stepping into the passage. She ran and seized him by the knees, flinging back her head so that her dark curls hung away from her softly-rounded face. Her pouting mouth, always slightly open to show a hint of two little front teeth, laughed up at him, her dove's eyes narrowed with her mirth. Of Ishmael she took no more notice than if he had not been there, and he leant against the doorpost, scraping the earth with the toe of his hard little boot, his thumbs stuck in his belt.

"I be gwain to help cry the Neck over to Cloom!" announced Phoebe—to the Parson and at Ishmael—"and I be gwain to stay to th' supper, and maybe I'll dance wi' a chap. There's Maister Jacka's John-Willy would be proud to dance wi' I!"

"So you're fond of dancing, Phoebe?" asked the Parson.

"Sure 'nough! Dancen' and singen'—that's life, that is. Ef you can't dance and sing I don't see no good in liven'! I don't hold wi' chaps who think of nawthen but wanten' to be saved. Time 'nough for that when gettin' on for thirty!"

Ishmael winced at the hit, and the Parson laughed as he tied two of Phoebe's ringlets into a bow under her chin.

"There are ways and ways of remembering the Creator in the days of your youth, Phoebe," he said, "and one of them's by dancing and singing—if it's with the right kind of chap. I don't think much of Jacka's John-Willy; if you really want to be a great lady to-night you must get Ishmael to dance with you. He's going to be master of the feast, and perhaps if you ask him very nicely he'll dance with you just once."

This view of Ishmael as a person of importance was a new one to Phoebe, and she looked at him as though appraising him afresh.

"I don't ask no chaps to dance wi' I," she announced loftily. "Faëther's just comen' to see you, Da Boase."

She wriggled her sleek little otter-like head under his arm and slipped past him as she spoke. Then:

"Like to see the pigs?" she asked Ishmael carelessly. "Da ringed 'en the marnen'."

"Don't mind if I do," answered Ishmael, still scraping the gravel.

"Naden't come ef 'ee don't want to more'n thet!" retorted Phoebe, "and I could have shown 'ee where the old pig was killed. There's been a dark place on the stones ever since. I saw it killed, I did, Ishmael Ruan. I saw Da stick in the knife and the blood come all out, I ded!"

"So 'a ded, my 'andsome, so 'a ded!" applauded the miller, whose big form, powdery white, had appeared in the passage.

The Parson felt decidedly sick. He was country-born himself, and, being no mere dreamer of dreams, realised that it was as well that country people should not flinch at the less poetic side of their lives, but this callousness struck him as horrible in a young child like Phoebe. Yet as he saw Ishmael wince he regretted the very sensibility in the boy, the lack of which had shocked him in Phoebe. He knew Ishmael had a horror of blood and disagreeable sights, and the thought of how often the boy would have to encounter them struck at his heart.

"I won't see it," said Ishmael, pressing himself back against the house wall; "I won't see where no pig was killed." Then, afraid lest Phoebe should taunt him with his fear: "But I'll come and see the pigs, though I don't s'pose they're as fine as ours. They were ringed yesterday was a week, and even the piggy-widden's bigger than most pigs."

"Ours is bigger, ours is bigger!" cried Phoebe indignantly, "and you'm nawthen but a gëat coward, Ishmael Ruan. I don't want *my* pigs to set eyes on 'ee!"

She sauntered away across the yard, but turned her head as she reached the far end, and glanced back at Ishmael. He hesitated, pride fighting with longing; then he also began to saunter—aimlessly at first; then, giving up the struggle, he frankly followed her. Lenine chuckled softly.

"Talk o' the way o' a man wi' a maid—'tes nawthen to the way o' a maid wi' a man, is it, Passon? She'll be one for the chaps, she will!"

Boase assented, laughing, then his eyes saddened, as he watched the two little figures, side by side now, disappear round the corner of the pig-styes. It suddenly struck him as rather horrible that anything so innocent as Ishmael still was should develop into a man, even a healthy, clean-living man; such a pity that the instinct that was the cause of charming play with Phoebe should ever become desire. It was a feeling that a mother might have had, and Boase smiled at it even as he gave a sigh to the pity of inexorable things.

"So you're bringing Phoebe over to Cry the Neck, Sam?" he asked casually. Sam Lenine nodded.

"Gwain be there, Passon?"

"Maybe. Fact is, Sam, I thought it would be a good opportunity to sit that boy at the head of the table —"

Lenine nodded again, but waited in silence.

"You're an influential man," continued Boase, "and the way you speak of him and treat things generally would rather give the lead to the people round here."

For the third time the miller nodded, then started a little as he caught sight of Ishmael and Phoebe reappearing from the pig-stye, and his eyes lightened suddenly. He dropped his thickly-veined lids to hide them.

"Happen I can do a little, Passon," he said; "I'll think on et."

"Do," said Boase heartily. Then he too started slightly and looked at the miller a little suspiciously, and, though he said nothing, his face darkened. Already the cords of intrigue were beginning to close round Ishmael Ruan, and the Parson longed to break them with one clean stroke, even while he realised the futility of the wish. He called rather sharply to the children.

"Ishmael! You must come back with me now; there are things I want you to do at the vicarage. Come."

Ishmael recognised the tone of authority. He was an obedient child simply because he was so proud he would not fight a losing battle. Sooner than be conquered he obeyed as though he were doing the thing commanded merely because he himself wished to, and for the same reason if he could forestall a command by his own action he did. He came to the Parson's side.

"Must be going, Phoebe," he remarked carelessly; "I've a heap of things to do for to-night, you see. Morning, Mr. Lenine!"

And he set off again, with his thumbs in his belt.

CHAPTER III

THE KITCHEN

Annie Ruan and three of the children were assembled in the great kitchen preparing for the supper party that was to be held after the Neck had been cried. The world without was still steeped in the

golden light of full afternoon, but the small windows only looked on to the courtyard and let little of the gleam into the low-ceiled room; dimness veiled the corners, and through it each plate on the old dresser held a faintly glimmering crescent of light. On a sheet of iron laid upon the open hearth the last loaves of barley-bread were baking under a crock, and Vassilissa Beggoe was preserving the leaven for next week's breadmaking by the simple process of placing it in a saucer of water, where it would mildew in peace.

Vassilissa was the youngest of the four Beggoes,—only three years older than Ishmael. She was the most like Archelaus in face, and showed promise of a sleek, white and gold beauty to come; at present, being far too tall for her age, she seemed unable to manage her long legs and arms, but her movements had the graceful ungainliness of a young animal. She was muffled in a dirty print pinafore, and above its faded blue her neck looked a delicate privet-white, and would have looked whiter still had it been cleaner. In the dusk her little pale head, the shape of it clearly defined by the way in which she wore her hair sticking stiffly out from her nape in two tiny plaits, took on a quality suggestive of a frescoed angel—a delicately-modelled, faintly-shadowed quality that she might miss in a stronger light. Putting the saucer of leaven on the untidy dresser, she spoke over her shoulder to her mother.

"I be gwain to give myself a rub over and put on my Sunday gown. I be gwain now."

Annie paused in the act of washing a plate, and let the film of dirty water run off it into the pan again. Then she drew a deep breath, as though the greasy-smelling steam that wavered up towards her nostrils were the sweetest of incense. Vassilissa, who was accustomed to this silent gathering of the forces before her mother broke into specially impassioned speech, began calmly to untie her pinafore.

"That's right!" cried Annie, with sudden vigour; "go off and make yourself fine, and lave me to wash all the cloam that's been standen' up in grease these three days. Vanities o' the flesh are all you think on, 'stead of helpen' your mother as has done everything for 'ee since you was naught but a young babe, and that scrawlen' come night there was no gettin' any sleep. You might not be a maid toall for the help I get of 'ee."

"I'll help wi' the cloam," said a big, heavily-made boy who was seated at one end of the table, eating a pasty. He crammed the last pale, stodgy morsel into his mouth and pushed back his chair, saying:

"I'll do the cloam for 'ee, mother. Lave the maiden be."

John-James was a good-natured, thick-headed boy, the third in the family, and the one of her children who seemed to have inherited Annie's peasant blood undiluted. He supplied the restful element in a house where the eldest-born was hot-tempered and revengeful and the second son more like a girl-child for sharpness and a woman grown for scheming. Tom had already made up his mind to be Mr. Tonkin's office boy, and from that he meant to become articled clerk, and from that—who could tell? Tom remained quiet on the subject of his ultimate intentions, but he was fighting his mother's apathy and natural habit of opposition to attain the first step in his career. Mr. Tonkin, who, as Ishmael's guardian, visited fairly frequently at the Manor, was expected to the supper that night, and Tom meant matters to come to a head. He had noticed what an influence the Methodist lawyer had over his mother and meant to use it for his own ends. Annie had a secret fear of Tom; Archelaus she adored, and Vassilissa came only second; but John-James she held of small account. She turned on him now even while she gave the dish into his hands.

"There you go, John-James Beggoe, talken' as though I grudged my own cheild maken' herself 'ansome. Vassie, my worm, you may have that bit o' blue ribbon I bought last Corpus Fair—'tes in the chest."

Vassie was off before her mother had time to change her mind, and John-James began slowly to rinse the china through the darkened water, on whose surface the grease lay in a shimmering arabesque. Annie went round the kitchen rasping the chairs over the stone floor and making futile dabs at their seats with her apron. She had that curious uncertainty of aim usually seen in dogs, who never seem to be sure of touching the object at which they paw.

The head and shoulders of Archelaus, furze-laden, passed the window, apparently floating through the luminous warmth of afternoon that filled the courtyard as through the depths of the sea. The illusion was shattered when he kicked the door open and, striding in, flung his burden on to the dying fire. The sudden glow that leapt up revealed Tom ensconced in the settle, cleaning his boots with a pat of butter stolen from the dairy. He continued his occupation quite unmoved by the fulminations of his mother, bending his ruddy head over the boots. Tom was the "red-headed Dane" who crops up generation after generation in some Cornish families.

"Hold your tongue, mother," he said at last, holding one boot at arm's length and cocking his head

sideways the better to admire the effect of the buttering; "I'm going to look decent to-night if no one else is. And so I don't mind a-tellen' 'ee—" with a sudden slip into the dialect that he studiously trained himself to avoid. Any lapse of the kind meant that Tom was not in a mood to be trifled with, and Annie turned suddenly to Archelaus.

"Where's the cheild?" she asked.

"I set'n to gather bullock's glows for th' fire—we shall want more'n furze for to-night," replied Archelaus. "Give I a light to take overstairs; 'tes time I was cleanen' of myself. I'm gwain to run with the Neck to-night."

Annie went obediently to a cupboard and took out a little cup of oil in which a wick lay, the tongue of it drooping over the cup's rim. She lit it with a twig from the fire and stood looking at Archelaus for a moment with the cup in her hand. The footlight effect softened her prominently-boned face and struck some of the over-strong colour from her cheeks—she showed a faint hint of the prettiness that had attracted the old Squire.

"An' who is it you'm thinken' will be at the door for 'ee to kiss when you get in wi' the Neck?" she asked grimly.

Archelaus shuffled from one big foot to the other.

"Jenifer Keast, maybe?" pursued his mother.

"Happen Jenifer, happen another. A maid's a maid," mumbled the disconcerted Archelaus.

Tom put his boots on the settle and stood up.

"It makes me sick to hear you, Archelaus," he declared slowly, but with extraordinary venom for a boy of fifteen; "Jenifer Keast! Have you no sense of who you are that you should think of Jenifer Keast?"

"She'm a fitty maid," muttered Archelaus.

"A fitty maid! Listen to the great bufflehead! She's fitty enough but with nothing to her but the clothes on her back. You've no call to be leading a maid toall yet. S'pose you was ever master of Cloom, what would you be wanting with Jenifer Keast?"

"Master o' Cloom! That's plum foolishness. We all d'know I'd be master o' Cloom if right were right, but there's the law siden' wi' the cheild; devil run off wi' en!"

"If the devil don't somebody else might," said Tom, "and then Cloom'd be mother's and ours. Eh, I wish I was the eldest; I'm the only one with a headpiece on me."

"Th' cheild's healthy enough," grumbled Archelaus.

"My children are all healthy; I never buried but the one between Tom and John-James and the one as never drew breath," interrupted Annie, "and if the cheild is set up by the law he's your own flesh and blood. He would have been as fine a cheild as any of 'ee if he'd kept his place."

"I'm not saying nothing against the brat," cried Tom in exasperated tones; "anyone'd think I wanted'n to die by the way you go on at me. I don't—it don't matter to me, for I'm going to be a lawyer like Mr. Tonkin to Penzance, but Archelaus'll be a fool if he don't look higher than Jenifer Keast."

"I'm not looken' to lead no maid," cried the badgered Archelaus, snatching the light. "Do 'ee grudge a chap a kiss or two? What's the harm in kissen'? You knew all about it when you was young, mother; you're a nice one to talk to a chap, you are!"

With which unfilial gibe he disappeared.

Annie was one of those women who like a buffet, verbal or physical, from a man, whether he be husband, brother, or son. She looked after Archelaus with pride.

"He be rare and like his da when he's got the uglies," she said; "he'll look fine at the head o' the table to-night, will Arch'laus."

"Parson Boase'll put Ishmael at the head of the table," announced Tom carelessly, with a sly glance at his mother. Annie whipped round at him in blank surprise, while even John-James paused in his washing-up and stood gaping over a dish.

"Gwain to put my own cheild auver my head and the head of my first-born, is 'ee?" cried Annie. "Eh,

that passon! Sim'me he's lacken' his senses! Sim'me that when the law lets a man like that come shoven' and meddlen' in a woman's house that the law's lacken' its senses too!"

"Don't fret about the law," advised Tom; "I've heard tell the law can be turned any way a clever chap has a mind. I'll see what I can do with it when I'm to Mr. Tonkin, and then perhaps we'll all snap our fingers at Parson Boase."

"Tom do talk a wunnerful passel o' nonsense," remarked John-James placidly as his brother picked up his boots and went out. But Tom was of the truly great who can always contain themselves when there is nothing to be gained by an explosion, and he disappeared without answering.

Annie and John-James proceeded to put the finishing touches to the kitchen—John-James doing all the real good that was done, and Annie setting things backwards and forwards in her strange aimless way. Upstairs Vassie was tying her hair—brushed out now into a short, crimped fluff that made her look more like an angel than ever—with the blue ribbon; while Archelaus and Tom greased their locks with the remains of Tom's stolen butter. Soon Annie and John-James also went upstairs to prepare themselves for the feast, and the kitchen grew slowly dark.

Ishmael staggered across the last field with his bucket of fuel, his lean little arms aching under its weight, but his mind singing the triumphant refrain:

"The evening's coming, and I'm going to cry the Neck! I'm going to cry the Neck!"

CHAPTER IV

PAGAN PASTORAL

The last of the corn had been reaped in Cloom fields and all was ready for the ceremony of "Crying the Neck." The labourers, their womenfolk and children, had gathered together, and Annie, with a select party of friends, took her place in the forefront of the crowd. A very old labourer who bore the splendid name of Melchisedec Baragwaneth, went from sheaf to sheaf, picking out a handful of the most heavily-bearded ears, which, though they are apt to grind the worst, still make the bravest show. He was stiff with his great age and the cruel rheumatism that is the doom of the field-worker; and against the brass and leather of his boots the stubble whispered loudly. Overhead the rooks and gulls gave short, harsh cries as they circled around hoping for stray grains; but the thousand little lives which had thriven in the corn—the field mice and frogs and toads—had been stilled by the sickles; some few had escaped to the shelter of the hedges, but most were sacrifices to the harvest.

Melchisedec Baragwaneth intertwined with his wheat ears some splendid stalks of ragwort and chamomile, like a cluster of yellow and white stars, and twisted tendrils of bindweed, with frail, trumpet-shaped blossoms already drooping, around the completed bunch. His thick old fingers fumbled over the niceties of the task, but he pushed the women's officious hands aside, and by the aid of his toothless but bone-hard gums pulled the knot to successfully, and the bunch became the "Neck." Then he set off, followed by the rest of the folk, to the highest field under grass, cresting the slope behind Cloom, the field that had been ploughed earth when the old Squire's dying eyes looked on it from his bedroom window.

The last of the day still held the world, and from the western rim the sunset beat up on to one vast level stretch of cloud that nearly covered the sky, drenching it with rose-coloured light which refracted to the earth, steeping everything in one warm glow. The stubble stood up like thin straight flames from a soil that showed wine-coloured, and the green of leaf and pasture was turned by the warmth of the light to that tender but brilliantly vivid emerald to which it wakes in the gleam of a lantern at night. All colour was intensified, though all was suffused with the triumphant rose, which steeped sky and air and earth till they seemed infused with some impalpable wine; and the procession moved through an atmosphere full of refractions and bright edges afloat in the tender glow.

Melchisedec Baragwaneth took his stand in the middle of the field beside the tall monolith, and his followers made a huge circle about him. Jacka's John-Willy staggered round with a firkin of cider, and each man set his hands about its body and took a long drink. Then Melchisedec Baragwaneth bent slowly down, holding the Neck towards the ground, and all the labourers bowed low over their billhooks. Still more slowly the old man straightened himself, raising his arms till he held the bunch of

corn high above his head, like some sylvan priest elevating the Host. The billhooks, which a moment before had lain like shining crescents on the grass, went flashing up into blackness against the glow of the sky, and from each man came a great shout:

"A nack! A nack! A nack! We hav'en! We hav'en! We hav'en!"

Three times the rite was performed, and the rose-light, that so soon dies, had faded away, though no one could have told the actual moment of its passing. A vibrant dusk, that to eyes still glamour-ridden seemed full of millions of little, pricking points of light, permeated the world, and in their harmonious-coloured clothes the people mingled with the soft grey-green of the pasture, only their faces and hands gleamed out a few tones paler.

With the fall of the billhooks fell solemnity, and men, women and children ran wildly hither and thither, shouting, singing, and breaking out into rough dances.

A new and blissful excitement tingled through Ishmael. When the labourers had shouted he had dropped Phoebe's hand and shouted with them, flinging up his arms. The glamorous light, the sense of something primitive and vital that the ceremony expressed, and the stir at the pulses caused by the sight of many people moved to do the same thing at the same moment, went to his head. He ran about singing and leaping like the rest, but keeping a little away from them, and quite suddenly there came to him for the first time that consciousness of pleasure which marks man's enjoyment off from the animal's. Hitherto, in his moments of happiness, he had not paused to consider the matter, but merely been happy as a puppy is when it plays in the sun. Now, suddenly, he stopped still, and stood looking at the distant blackthorn hedge that made a dark network against the last gleam in the west.

"I am happy? I am *being happy!*" he said to himself, and he turned this consciousness over in his mind as he would have turned a sweet in his mouth. Ever afterwards the memory of that moment's realisation was connected for him with a twisted line of hedge and a background of pale greenish sky. He stared at the distorted hedgerow that stood out so clearly, and to him this moment was so vividly the present that he did not see how it could ever leave off.... "This is now ..." he thought; "how can it stop being now?" And the shouting and the still air and the definite look of that hedge all seemed, with himself as he was and felt at that moment, to be at the outermost edge of time, suspended there for ever by that extreme vividness....

And then Phoebe ran up to him and dragged him off to where Sam Lenine stood examining some of the ears he had picked on his way past the sheaves. The miller took the toll of one twelfth of the farmer's grist, so Sam studied the ears with care. Owing to the drought the corn was very short in the straw, but that was not Sam's part of the business, and he nodded his head approvingly over the quality of the ear.

Suddenly Archelaus sprang forward, snatched the Neck from Melchisedec Baragwaneth, and made for the house, everyone crowding after him to see the fun. At the front door stood the dairymaid, Jenifer Keast, holding a pail of water in her strong arms, ready to souse him unless he succeeded in entering by another way before she could reach him with the water, when he could claim a kiss. Archelaus made a dash for the parlour window, but the bucket swept round at him threateningly and he drew back a moment, as though to consider a plan of campaign. He was determined to have his kiss, for through the soft dusk that veiled any coarseness of skin or form, and only showed the darkness of eyes and mouth on the warm pallor of her face, she looked so eminently kissable. Before she could guess his intention he ran round the angle of the house wall, down to the dairy window, and, plunging through it, came up the passage at her back. Seizing her by the waist, he swung her round and took his kiss fairly from her mouth, and, though she struggled so that the water drenched him, he felt her lips laughing as they formed a kiss.

CHAPTER V

HEAD OF THE HOUSE

For years Ishmael was unable to remember that evening without a tingling sense of shame. The unwonted excitement, combined with the prominence which the Parson successfully achieved for him, went to his head and caused him to "show off." The thought of how he had chattered and boasted, talking very loudly and clumping with his feet when he walked, so as to sound and feel like a grown-up

man, would turn him hot for years, when, in the watches of the night, it flashed back on him. Long after everyone else had forgotten, even if they had ever noticed it, his lack of self-control on that evening was a memory of shame to him. He clattered across to his place at the head of the table, and was mortified that a couple of big old calf-bound books had to be placed on his chair to make him sit high enough. Phoebe and the Parson were at either side, and the foot of the table was taken by Annie, Archelaus, defiant and monosyllabic, on her left, and Lawyer Tonkin, glossy with black broadcloth, on her right. The lawyer had a haunting air as of cousinship to things ecclesiastical, and, indeed, he was lay-preacher at a Penzance chapel. Tom, who had taken care to set himself on his other hand, kept a careful eye for his plate and glass, being particularly liberal with the cider. The lawyer spoke little; when he did his voice was rich and unctuous—the sort of voice that Ishmael always described to himself as "porky." He was as attentive to Mrs. Ruan's wants as Tom to his, and she, never a great talker save in her outbursts, still kept up a spasmodic flow of low-toned remarks to him, whom of all men she held in highest veneration.

His spiritual powers she rated far higher than those of the Parson, who never fulminated from the pulpit till she felt the fear of hell melting her bones within her. This the lawyer did, and managed at the same time to make her feel herself a good woman, one of the saved, and the piquancy of the double sensation was the hidden drug of Annie's life. She dallied with thoughts of eternal suffering as a Flagellant with imagings of torture, and when her mind was reeling at the very edge of the pit she would pull herself back with a loud outcry on the Almighty, followed by a collapse as sensuous in its utter laxity.

Annie would have been shocked if anyone had tried to force on her the idea, that, in the unacknowledged warfare which enwrapped Ishmael, Tonkin was on her side as against the child; but even she was dimly aware that he and Boase, joint guardians as they were, stood in opposite camps. But it was towards her, the respectable widow-woman, the owner, but for Ishmael, of the biggest estate in all Penwith, that Tonkin's current of consideration flowed, whereas hers, after her religion, was perpetually set about Archelaus. He, the beautiful young man with the round red neck and the white arms and the strong six feet of height, whom she had made and given to the world, to him she would have given the world and all the heavens had it been in her power. And, as things were, she could not even give him Cloom Manor and its fruitful acres. Of this impotency Archelaus was even more aware than usual as he sat beside her and glowered down the table at his little brother.

Ishmael was still showing off, though less noisily, for he was feeling very tired and sleepy; the unaccustomed cider and the heavy meal of roast mutton, in a house where there was rarely any meat except occasional rashers, were proving too potent for him. The room was intensely hot, the prevailing notion of comfort being to shut every window at night, and a large fire, before which the side of mutton had been gravely twirling for hours, was only now beginning to subside. The candles guttered and grew soft in the warmth, beads of moisture stood out on the faces of the company, and the smell of incompletely-washed bodies reminded the Parson of hot afternoons with his Sunday school.

Phoebe found Ishmael dull since his volubility had begun to desert him, and turning a disdainful shoulder, she tried to draw Jacka's John-Willy into conversation—a difficult matter, since, though he had been placed there instead of in the barn for Phoebe's benefit, he felt the watchful eye of his mother, who was waiting at table, too frequently upon him for his comfort.

Katie Jacka, her colour more set than it had been when she witnessed that marriage eight years ago, was as emotional as ever, her facile feelings only restrained at all by her husband's rigid taciturnity, even as her high bosom was kept up by the stiffest of "temberan busks"—a piece of wood which, like all self-respecting Cornishwomen, she wore thrust inside the front of her stays. Philip Jacka, who was now headman at the farm, presided at the labourer's supper in the big barn, whither everyone would presently repair, including Ishmael, if he were not too sleepy. The Parson divided his attention between him and Mr. Lenine, who was expanding to greater and greater geniality, always with that something veiled behind his eyes. He encouraged Ishmael, trying to draw him out when the Parson, seeing the child was, in nursery parlance, "a bit above himself," would have kept him quiet.

"Well, young maister"—at the phrase in the miller's booming voice ears seemed visibly to prick down the length of the table—"well, and how do 'ee like helpen' to Cry the Neck?"

"Fine, that I do," came Ishmael's shrill tones; "an' I'm gwain to have en cried every year, and I'll give ever so much bigger suppers, with beef and pasties and beer as well as cider, and saffern cakes and—"; here his tongue failed at the list in his excitement.

Annie had gone a dull crimson, and she drew the whistling breath that with her was the precursor of storm. Help for her outraged feelings and a snub for the young master came from a quarter which surprised them both.

"It is not you who give the supper, Ishmael," spoke the Parson quietly; "it is your mother. And unless you show you know how to behave she will never let you sit up again."

Annie expelled the breath unaccompanied by any flow of words. Archelaus sniggered, and Ishmael sat in that terrible embarrassment that only children know, when the whole world turns black and shame is so intense that it seems impossible to keep on with life at all. His face was one burning flush, his eyes stung with tears he was too proud to let fall. All his wonderful day had fallen about his ears, and it seemed to him that such a mortification, added to his own shamed sense of having disappointed Da Boase, would burden him so that he could never be happy again. And only a couple of hours earlier he had realised for the first time how splendid somehow life and everything in it was, himself included ... and now all was over. He sat staring at the congealed remains of a pasty on his plate. He did not see how it was possible to go on living.

Suddenly a soft, very small hand slid into his lap under cover of the table's corner, and Phoebe's fingers curled round his as she whispered: "Don't 'ee mind, Ishmael. Don't cry. Tell 'ee what, I'll dance weth 'ee, so I will."

"I'm not cryen'." Ishmael's accent was always most marked when he was struggling with emotion. "I'm not cryen' toall. But I don't mind if I do dance a bit weth 'ee if you want me to."

A grinding of chair legs over the flags proclaimed the end of the feast, and the Parson, who, rather to Ishmael's resentment, was smiling as though nothing had been the matter, caught hold of him with one hand and of Phoebe with the other and led the way to the barn.

Out-of-doors the air struck exquisitely cool and fresh to heated faces; the courtyard was lapped in shadow, but once through and in the farmyard the moon was visible, still near the horizon and swimming up inflated, globulous, like a vast aureate bubble. Save for that one glow everything looked as chill as underseas; the whitewashed walls of the out-buildings glimmered faintly, the heaped corn had paled to a greyish silver, the shadows were blue as quiet pools. The whole world seemed to have been washed clean by the moonlight.

The sense of calm only lasted as far as the door of the barn—not as far to the ear, for the sounds of merry-making came gustily out before the opening of the door showed an oblong of glowing orange that sent a shaft into the night, to fade into the darkness that it deepened. It was not quite as hot in the barn as it had been in the kitchen, for the building was much loftier and boasted no fire. Lanterns swung from the beams, throwing upwards bars of shadow that criss-crossed with the rafters and trembled slightly as the flames flickered, so that the whole roof seemed spun over by some gigantic spider's web, while the shadow-patterns thrown by the lanterns on to the floor below looked like great spiders dropped from the meshes. In this impalpable tangle sat the men and women—tenants of cottages, labourers, farm servants and their children, all who had been helping with the harvest. Jenifer Keast was there, flushed now instead of with that mysterious pallor of the dusk, and to her Archelaus made his way with a sort of bashful openness, followed by glances and sly smiles. People felt disposed to condone whatever was in the way of nature, for the meal of hoggans—pasties with chunks of bacon in them, superior to the fuggans of everyday life, which only harboured raisins—of pilchards steeped in vinegar and spices, all washed down by strong cider, had combined to give that feeling of physical well-being which causes the soul also to relax.

Archelaus, suddenly irked by proximity to the girl or fired by the thought of an excuse to clasp her more fully, sprang up and called for helpers to clear the floor. The long trestle tables were pushed to one side and everything that lay upon the dusty boards swept away, even to the form of old Melchisedec Baragwaneth, the high-priest of an earlier hour, who was found with his head under a bench and his stiff old legs sprawled helplessly.

The Parson did not mean Ishmael to stay for more than a dance or two, if that, so he determined to get the thing on which he had set his mind done at once. Picking the boy up, he stood him on the table, just where a lantern, hitched to the wall, threw its beam of light, for the Parson was nothing if not a stage manager by instinct. An awkward silence fell upon the assembly; men scraped their feet uneasily through its hush.

For a moment the Parson let his eyes wander over the clustered faces, full of strong colour in the warm light, with bright, vacant looks and half-open mouths. He knew everyone there, had christened and married many of them, he knew their individual count of kindness and coarseness and self-seeking; knew how hard-working they were, how thriftless, how generous and strangely tolerant, yet how harsh at times in condemnation. It was to their charity of outlook he wished to appeal now, or rather wished Ishmael to make an unconscious appeal.

"There's no need for me to make any speech to you, my friends," he began. "You all know me, and I

know you. We've trusted each other and worked together for a good many years now, and please God we shall for many more. You are all to me as my children. But there's one amongst us—" (and here his hand on Ishmael's shoulder seemed to bring the shrinking little boy into greater prominence) "who is even more of a trust to me than any of you. He is a trust to you too—to me because I am his guardian, pledged to see that he grows up into a man who will make a good and just Squire to his tenants, to you because you are those tenants. I think I can promise you that as your Squire grows up it will mean better and better times for all of you, that things won't be so hard. There was a time when the Squires of Cloom were noted for their generosity and just dealing, when, so they say, every man on the estate had his side of pork—ay, and half a sheep too—in his kitchen, and a good coat to his back the year round, and wages to put in his stocking. Those times will come again when the glories of Cloom are restored, when it is once more a good gentleman's estate...."

The Parson had spoken quietly but very deliberately. He knew how public feeling had sided with Annie and the dispossessed Archelaus. The people had grown so used to associating on a familiar level with the powers at the Manor that they had ceased to think of the advantages of a different mode of intercourse. The idea that they would themselves benefit by the restoration of Cloom and its owner to the old position of gentry had never occurred to them. It was true that it would mean the elevation of this intruding child, who was merely the son of their Annie, whom they all knew, but at the same time it meant certain obligations towards them. It meant more money, help in times of stress, security. That was a thing worth considering. The old Squire had hoarded his income and let his fortune swell; if the all-powerful Parson were going to bring this child up in the way he suggested it meant that money would be spent, and on them....

The Parson gave his idea time enough to arrive, though not long enough to be turned over. He pushed Ishmael gently forward again.

"Say what I told you," he bade him, "and no more."

At that moment something came to Ishmael which had failed him in that evening's ordeal—a poise, a confidence of touch which was his by inheritance, though so long unsummoned. He straightened himself and thrust his hands into the pockets of his little breeches.

"Thank you very much for having come to-night," he said, in a voice free from any twang of dialect—the voice he fell into naturally after a day alone with the Parson: "I'm very glad you could come. I hope I'll often see you and that we'll all be very happy together...." He paused, could think of nothing more to say, so retreated back in sudden shyness against the Parson's arm.

There was another moment of hush. Archelaus was sitting, his face suffused, staring in front of him; a murmuring of "the pretty lil' dear" ... ran amongst the women. It was Lenine who brought the moment to its fit rounding.

"Three cheers for Missus and the lil' Squire," he called, and on that able blend of sentiments all voices met with a roar. As the last sound died away Phoebe could be heard clamouring:

"I can do things too; Da Boase nadn't think Ishmael can do it all. I can dance and sing, I can!"

"So thee can, my worm," boomed the miller, and, swinging her up, he stood her also on the table. "Shaw us what 'ee can do, my beauty," he encouraged her.

Phoebe, not at all shy, spread her crumpled skirts and did a little dance that consisted of jiggling up and down in the same place, to the accompaniment of a sing-song of one verse:

"I likes coffee an' I likes tea,
I likes th' chaps an' th' chaps likes me,
So, mawther, you go an' hold your tongue—
You had a fellow when you was young!"

Thus piped Phoebe, and the audience applauded with clapping and laughter. Her cheeks were ablaze with the excitement of success; she seized on Ishmael for the promised dance. But the Parson bade him say good-night and come away. He remained deaf to all appeals from Phoebe for just one dance, only one, and, making his own farewells, bore Ishmael back with him to the Vicarage for the night. He was going to run no risk of an anti-climax.

CHAPTER VI

REACTIONS

There are days in life which, to the backward look of later years stand out with undying vividness, and this not necessarily because of any import attached to them; often, in the irrational workings of memory, very vital affairs refuse to come when bid, while quite little things or aspects of them are imprinted on the mind for ever. That ceremony of "Crying the Neck" at Cloom had, it is true, been for Ishmael Ruan a notable happening, but it was for a certain pictorial brilliance that he retained it so clearly in after years, and not for any strategic importance, which at the time would not have impressed him. Yet, long afterwards, in the light of that memory, he saw how his life had turned a corner on that occasion, and how after it a different phase began.

Life to him at that time was, of course, entirely centred round himself, the only organism of which he was thoroughly aware. People went to fill his world, but only as they affected him. Archelaus was a terrific being whom he held in awe for his feats of strength, but about whom he was beginning to be conscious of a certain inferiority. Tom he dreaded for his powers of sarcasm, and here he felt no sense of superiority as he did over Archelaus; Tom could make him feel even smaller than the Parson could, and with no kindly intention behind to soften the knock.

But if everyone else were out of temper, there was always one person he could be sure of finding the same, and that was John-James—good, kind, reliable John-James, whom he adored. Did he want a boat made? John-James would do it with those big hands which looked so clumsy and were so sure and careful. Had he broken the rope reins with which he and Jacka's John-Willy played at horses? John-James would mend them. All of kindness and consideration to be found for him in that house he extracted from John-James. One thing only he could not get even from him, and that was a return of his deep devotion. This was not because of any bitter feeling in the elder boy's heart. Ishmael had done him no harm, and he bore him no grudge; neither, since he was not an admirer of his elder brother Archelaus, did he take up his cause. It simply was that John-James was not made for the emotions. He knew nothing about them and they made him uncomfortable. For a long while Ishmael failed to discover this. He flung himself upon John-James, and felt him satisfactorily solid and worried no more on the matter. But when, in the natural course of development, his mind began to feel pain as well as discomfort at the chill which met him from his family, he turned to his sure support for help in this also, he found a blank. John-James would take him fishing, save his pastry for him, stand between him and harshness, but he would not, because he could not, give him love to live on. If he had one outward-flowing sensation it was towards his sister Vassilissa. Ishmael was just the "lil' un" and a trouble because the cause of trouble, but Vassie was something so infinitely quicker, cleverer, more elusive than himself that she stood to John-James for what of beauty was interwoven with the very everyday stuff of his life. She, like Ishmael, was at the intensely personal period, though with her it took objective form in dress and pleasures rather than in the subjective wonderings of her youngest brother. As to John-James, he hardly entered into the fabric of her existence. Life to her was the cat-like attempt to get as much comfort as possible regardless of others. The only emotion Ishmael obtained out of Cloom came from Katie Jacka, and that was rather unhealthy, because furtive and sentimental, and he only detested it. As to his mother, that hectic, uneven creature, she was to him a loud-voiced person of tempers and tendernesses equally gusty, not a being as much "I" to herself as he was to himself. It was only on the day following the supper party that he began to be affected by her as a violent personality.

It was a grey day, threatening with rain which might mean ruin to the cut corn waiting to be stacked in the great arishmows that always seemed to Ishmael like the tents of some magic host. All the way up from the Vicarage, which lay a couple of sloping miles away, his thoughts and hopes were busy, triumphing over the greyness and the faint damping mist that blew in from the sea like smoke. For, somehow, after last night, he expected everything to be "different." How, he hardly knew; but for the first time in his life he had been allowed to be himself—more, himself had been discovered to be Somebody. True, there had been that mortification at supper which gave him what felt like an actual physical hollow in his chest when he thought of it, but after that the Parson had set him up and everyone had cheered him, and Archelaus had not dared do anything to spoil it. He had been called "the little master"—well, if last night, why not to-day? Katie would probably be cleaning up when he arrived, but she would see him and call out. "Here's the little master come back!" ... and his mother would ask him whether he would like a piece of cake. So he went on planning, after the dramatic manner of all imaginative children. He would be very nice to them all, but he too would be different, now that he knew who he was. For the Parson, finding him intensely puzzled, had partially explained to him that morning. Questions of legitimacy, and any reflection on his mother, Boase had omitted for the time being, merely telling him that when he was grown up Cloom would be his because his father had willed it so. He tried to impress on Ishmael that usually the eldest son inherited everything, and so it was natural that Archelaus should feel hurt about it. At first Ishmael, with the quick generosity of his age, had wanted to give Cloom up to his brother there and then, but the Parson talked gravely to him, impressing on him for the first time what was to be the keynote of his teaching, that never, never must

he forget that Cloom was the great trust of his life. What he made of Cloom was everything; he could not shift this thing God had put upon him. Thus the Parson, to whom what he was to make of Ishmael had become the absorbing passion of his own life.

Boase made Ishmael promise not to let anyone know he had been told about it; that, too, was part of the trust—that Ishmael should prepare himself in secret, by diligent study, for this thing that was to be his. The child promised, proud of the confidence, his imagination thrilled by the romance that had come to him, and so, although he meant to be quite nice to everyone, there was a tinge of kindly pity in the manner he pictured himself displaying when he arrived home. And, overriding even these plans for the immediate future, was a tingling sense of glory he had never known before, the glory of this trust that was to fill his life....

No hailing of him as little master or as anything else took place when he reached home; Katie was busy at the washhouse, and he met no one amidst all the dreary litter of last night's festivities till he came on his mother in the back kitchen. The piled dresser showed a muddle of unwashed dishes, and the floor was gritty with mud. Annie looked, and was, dirty with exertion; and even the steam that wreathed upwards from the washbowl added a sense of uncleanness to the air. Ishmael was too young to be depressed by dirt, which he rather liked, but the greyness of it all settled on him like a blight.

He had been right about one thing—there was a distinct change in Annie's manner. It was not, however, any difference such as he had imagined; it went deeper than mere speech. As he entered his mother came over to him, and, tilting up his chin, searched his eyes with hers till he felt uncomfortable. He jerked his head away, retreating against the door which had swung to behind him.

"Eh," said Annie, and he knew it was not to him she spoke; "it is to be. The Lard will accept him as He accepted the infant Samuel."

Ishmael began to be afraid; his mother's eyes had the glitter in them that usually went with one of her storming fits, but now she was quiet, though tense. "What is it, mother?" he asked nervously, staring at her in his turn.

"You'm a brand to be plucked from the burning," she told him, "an' by the grace of God mine's to be the hand that'll pluck 'ee. You'll be saved along of your poor old mawther, won't 'ee, dearie?"

Then, as Ishmael showed no disposition to do anything but try and get away, she caught up a slab of heavy-cake which lay on the dresser. "Thee mustn't be afeared of thy mawther, my worm," she murmured, her voice more coaxing than he had ever heard it; "we're gwain before the Lard hand in hand.... There, take this bit o' food into the yard, but don't 'ee go far. Do 'ee hear what I say, Ishmael?"

He hastened with a submissive "Yes" and then fled, cake in hand. Out in the yard his little mind struggled in vain with the problem of this change, for there was no added respect in his mother's treatment of him, such as his stepping openly into the position of owner of Cloom might have made. Neither, his child's true instinct told him, was it affection suddenly awakened in her. He cast about vainly for what it might mean. Presently he went into the washhouse, where Katie and another woman were busy; they took scant notice of him, but went on discussing the fact that Archelaus had not been home to bed all night, had not long come in, and gone upstairs, where he still was, snoring for all to hear. Ishmael was not altogether ignorant, and allusions were bandied back and forth across his head which he was at once too young and too old to hear unscathed.

Left alone, Annie went upstairs, listened a moment outside the door of her eldest-born, then went on to the tiny room over the porch that was Ishmael's. And there, on her knees by the bed, she prayed silently, her eyes rolling till a slather of white showed beneath each faded iris, her reddened fingers wringing each other so that patches of pallor sprang out on them.

Annie was in the midst of a religious crisis that had overwhelmed her like a typhoon. She was one of those women who must have an outlet for passion. It had taken merely physical form with her in the days of the old Squire, but since her elevation to the position of a widow-woman she had undergone "conversion." What she had hitherto accepted, much as her farm beasts accepted it—as a clamorous necessity—she now held to be a thing accursed. Her position was an inconsistent one, as she was quick to uphold her ill-used righteousness with her neighbours; but that did not worry Annie, whose mind, blurred and wavering, never faced anything squarely.

Lawyer Tonkin had gazed into her eyes when he said good-night, and she had felt his moist and pudgy hand squeeze hers; but she knew it was the eyes and hand of the widow-woman, the owner, but for Ishmael, of Cloom Manor, with which the lawyer had dallied. Her sense of her position was flattered and a glimpse of a yet more consequential one flashed before her, but no thrill went with it. It was in the grip of what she would have thought a very different emotion that she had gone up to her room. For

Tonkin had told her of a noted revivalist who was coming through West Penwith, and already she felt the first delicious tremblings of that orgy of fear which should be hers.

Hers and another's, for she was set on the redemption of her beloved first-born, her beautiful Archelaus. Him she would lead to the heavenly courts and win forgiveness for the sin of his creation; he, the brand she had lit, should by her be plucked from the burning. Crossing over to her window, she had leaned her hot brow against the pane, closing her eyes in an ecstasy of prayer. It was very dim still in the house, but without the first faint pallor of the dawn was growing, and against it every solid object showed distinct and black. And, opening her eyes, Annie saw, silhouetted darkly with the precision of sculpture against the paling sky, the figures of Archelaus and a girl. He was half-lifting her over the stile whose stone steps crested the edge of the hill, and for a second the two figures stayed poised on the topmost step. The girl seemed protesting, even struggling, though with slaps that were more horseplay than earnest, and the next moment the boy's big arms had caught her and dragged her out of sight down on the far side of the stile.

The whole quick vignette was over in a flash, but Annie fell back from the window with all the egoism in her dulled nature torn awake. A more normal mother, of a more refined type, might have thought what she had seen meant nothing but a rude flirtation; Annie's blood told her differently. If she had merely heard of the matter her lack of visualising power would have saved her from sensation; it was the sight of those two striving figures which had made her feel. She moaned that her baby son had grown up and away from her, and she agonised over his soul, which she had planned to wrest for the Lord during the coming revival—small heed would she get Archelaus to pay to his soul now this new thing was opening before him. Her mind was conscious of a great emptiness where her scheme for the salvation of Archelaus had been waxing.

Annie had about as much true moral sense as a cat. Her quarrel with Archelaus was not that, in a wayside copse, with some girl, Jennifer or another, he was learning as fact what he had long known in theory; the chastity of a man, even of her beloved son, meant very little to her. Terrible things, far worse than the casual mating of a man and a maid, happen in the country, and it needed something keenly sharpened to make Annie's dulled sensitiveness feel a shock. She raged that her son was taken from her, but she would have felt indignant anger if the girl had denied her lovely boy. And behind her sense of loss in Archelaus, behind her terror that he was being led in the way of destruction, there lurked, unknown to her, another anger, an anger against life. Some last remnant of femininity cried out because for her it was all over—gone the shudderings and the fierce delights.... Suddenly she felt intensely old, and she collapsed from her kneeling attitude on to her heels and sat there slackly. Youth is so confident that it can never grow old, and then one day unthinking middle age awakens and finds that it has become so.

Then stirred in Annie the outraged feeling of a parent, which says that it seems somehow wrong, almost indecent, for offspring to feel passion. It had been all right for her and her generation, but incomprehensible in her own parents, and now it was equally so when she saw it beginning to work out in her children. She supposed vaguely, confronted by the fact that the race went on multiplying, that everyone might feel like that about other people, but differently about themselves.

Broad daylight had seen Archelaus return, but by then Annie had fallen into a heavy sleep and did not hear his entry, though there was nothing furtive about it; rather was it the unashamed clatter of the master. She awoke to deadness of all feeling except the thought of the revival that was to sweep like a flail over the land, and in her tired but avid mind that winnowing began to assume the proportions of the chief thing for which to live. She saw herself in it, and with her, by a flash of inspiration, not the fair eldest-born who had failed her, but the youngest—he whom she could flaunt in the face of God and men. Some receptacle for passion Annie had to have, and being an uneducated woman, it had to be a personal one. Archelaus had gone beyond her clutch, Tom she knew would evade her, John-James she, like Ishmael, found unresponsive. As for girls, she placed them below any male creature. She loved Vassie far more than she did Ishmael, if she could be said to love him at all, but nevertheless he was a son. Her punishment for sin might be that those other more dearly loved ones were not to be among the saved, but this child she could shake in the face of the Almighty....

It was by this new passion that Ishmael, with his foolish little plans of a new importance, found himself caught up and held relentlessly.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHAPEL

The revivalist preacher had come, and was indeed sweeping the land like a flail. Everyone was caught up in that threshing, and staid old church-goers of years rushed into the chapels and added their groans and outcries to the rest. Parson Boase stood aside, powerless while the excitement lasted. Those were days when Methodism was at its most harsh; the pure, if fierce, white flame of Whitefield and Thomson and Wesley had become obscured by the redder glare and smoke of that place whose existence seemed the chief part of these latter-day Methodists' creed. Hell was the theme of sermon and hymn—a hell of concrete terrors enough to scare children in their beds at night. Thanks to the Parson, Ishmael had hitherto been kept out of this maelstrom of gloomy fears, but now that Annie, with the vicarious piety of so many women, had set her mind on his "conversion," he too was to run the gamut of religious emotion, in which it has been said there are contained all the others.

Ishmael, in so far as at that age he could be said to wish to attend any place of prayer at all, was quite pleased to be going to chapel, partly because he had never been allowed to, and partly because the singing, from without, always sounded so much noisier and more frequent than church music. Annie impressed on him that he was to say nothing to the Parson about her intentions, and, though it made Ishmael uncomfortable and even miserable to think of deceiving his friend, he was too afraid of his mother to go against her, especially since this new sustained violence was upon her.

It was a weekday evening when the preacher came to the gaunt little chapel which affronted the skies at the highest curve of the moorland road. Annie had put on her Sunday clothes, though she had ripped the feather out of her bonnet as a concession to the spirit of repentance, and she dressed Ishmael with care in the fine little nankeen suit with braided tunic that the Parson's housekeeper had made for him. She oiled his unruly black hair till it looked as though painted on to his bullet head, except for the obstinate forelock that would fall over his eyes; then she took him firmly by the hand and they set out together. Vassie, to whom any gathering was better than none, was already gone with a girl friend; John-James, who was the Martha of the family, had too much to attend to at the farm; while Archelaus was frankly a scoffer, though an uneasy one. Neither was Annie anxious for the presence of her other children at chapel. The belief that as a judgment on her these dearly-loved ones were not to be among the saved had been growing; it was to be Ishmael whom the Lord demanded of her; it was by the tail of his little tunic that she, clinging, should also be swept into the region of the secure. Archelaus had failed her; that must be meant to show that it was not the children of her heart who were chosen by the Almighty. It was with a set mind and look that she urged Ishmael along the rough track that curved inland over the moor, its rain-filled ruts shining in the glamorous evening light.

They were not the only people on that errand; the pale road was scattered with moving specks of blackness—solitary old men and women that stumbled on faster than they had done for years in their anxiety lest no place should be left for them; family groups already discussing all they had heard of the preacher; knots of youths, half-ribald and half-curious, encouraging each other as over their reluctant spirits there blew the first breath of that dread which was to send them, shaking, to the penitents' bench. Little children, sagging sideways from the hand of a grown-up relation, dragged their feet along that road, taken to the means of salvation willy-nilly.

Ishmael's heart began to stir within him; the sight of so many people all intent on the same way affected him curiously with a tingling of excitement. But at the first glimpse of the hideous chapel—one of those buildings found throughout the Duchy which rebuke God for ever having created beauty—seemed to Ishmael like some awful monster sucking in its prey. The chapel had one chimney cocked like an ear, and two large front windows that were the surprised eyes in a face where the door made a mouth, into which the black stream of people was pouring. If he had ever heard of Moloch he would have been struck by the resemblance, and unfairly so, for when revivals were not in the air that ugly little chapel was served very faithfully by a spiritually-minded minister, who hurled himself all the year round against the obduracy of the people. Ishmael had a quick movement of withdrawal as his mother led him in through the prosaic yellow-grained doors, but it availed him nothing. Another moment and he was being propelled into a pew.

They were in good time, and Ishmael stared about him curiously. The place was very bare and ugly—the walls washed a cold pale green, the pews painted a dull chocolate that had flaked off in patches, the pulpit a great threatening erection that stood up in the midst of the pews and dominated them, like a bullying master confronting a pack of little boys.

The chapel was lit by lamps hung in iron brackets, and, the oil used being extracted from pilchards, a strong fishy odour pervaded the air. The pews soon filled to overflowing; people even sat up the steps of the pulpit and stood against the walls; every place was taken save in the front pew that was being kept for penitents. Annie had told Ishmael of its import, and he stared at it in morbid fascination.

There was a stir and a sound throughout the chapel when the preacher made his appearance. Quite an ordinary-looking man, thought Ishmael with a sense of flatness, unable to note the height of the brow and its narrowness at the temples, the nervous twitching of the lids over the protuberant eyeballs and the abrupt outward bulge of the head above the collar at the back. Abimelech Johns was a tin-miner who had spent his days in profane swearing and coursing after hares with greyhounds until the Lord had thrown him into a trance like that which overtook Saul of Tarsus, and not unlike an epileptic fit Abimelech himself had had in childhood. Since the trance he was a changed man; his passion for souls was now as great as his passion for pleasure had been before, and he had a name for working himself and his congregations up to a higher pitch than any one who had been on that circuit for years past. It was known to be a terrible thing to see Abimelech wrestling with the Lord.

The meeting began quietly enough with a long extemporaneous prayer from the preacher that was more a confident button-holing of the Almighty, and Ishmael began to feel bored and at the same time relieved. Then the first thrill of instinctive protest ran through him as the voices of old and young arose in a hymn:

"There is a dreadful hell
And everlasting pains,
Where sinners do with devils dwell,
In darkness, fire and chains."

Thus bellowed the strong voices of the men and the reedier tones of the women, while the clear little pipes of the children went up complacently. Ishmael was not alarmed yet, but his attention was attracted. Then Abimelech went up into the pulpit and stood there a few moments with closed eyes, communing with unseen powers before entering on the good fight. When he opened them it could be seen that in one he had a slight cast; this was wont to grow more marked with emotion, and gave at all times the disconcerting impression that he was looking every way at once. It seemed to Ishmael that that light glittering gaze was fixed on him, and he was aware of acute discomfort. Annie whispered him sharply not to fidget, and the next moment the preacher gave out his text: "For many are called, but few are chosen." With a long breath of anticipation the congregation settled itself to listen.

Of what was done and said that evening Ishmael fortunately only carried away a blurred impression, owing to the frenzy that it all threw him into. Every text in the Old Testament and the New that bore on hell-fire and the unrelenting wrath of God the preacher poured down. He impressed on his hearers that eternity went on for ever and ever, that each night's sleep in this world might be the last moment of unconsciousness the soul would know for everlasting. He painted man as being guilty from his start, only to be saved by the grace of this offended tyrant Who had made him vile because it seemed good to Him so to do. The preacher called on all present to flee from the wrath to come, from the inevitable condemnation hanging over them if they persisted in their sins; he talked of lusts and dishonesties and lies and envyings, and accused everyone of all of them. Ishmael, his heart turning cold within him, remembered how he had lied to the Parson about that evening's meeting, how he lied to his mother many times a day for the sake of ease; remembered how he and Jacka's John-Willy had pored over a snail which they had unearthed in the act of laying her eggs. There they were, still adhering to her—a cluster of little opaque white spheres, like soapy bubbles. He and John-Willy had used the occasion to try and add to their store of knowledge, and the memory of that unedifying discussion made Ishmael burn now. That time, too, when he stole his mother's Bible from her room that he might puzzle over portions of it which he had better have left unread. True, it had been John-Willy—whose household did not include a Bible and who could not read—who had started him on the course and urged him on, for as boys go, especially country-bred boys, Ishmael was singularly clean of thought by nature, and also far more ignorant than he knew, but none the less conscience accused him and him only. He knew the sin of it, because he was aware of what the Parson thought of such goings-on, and John-Willy had no such guide to right and wrong. All these crimes thronged on him now, and still the awful voice went on. The chapel grew hotter and hotter, and the flames shuddered at the wicks till to Ishmael's starting eyes the shadowy walls seemed a-quiver, and the people's faces swelled and diminished again. The groans that began to sound from all around him bewildered him so that sight and hearing became one confused sense and the place seemed dark with the groaning. Then cries began to pierce the medley of sound and vision. "Lord, save us, we perish!" shrieked a woman just behind Ishmael, while Annie rocked herself back and forth, the tears streaming down her face as she gave vent to little howls like an animal in distress.

* * * * *

The preacher was clutching the rim of the pulpit with both hands, his face had turned to a curious greenish colour, his eyes were rolled upwards till only the whites could be seen: he was no longer articulate; convulsive shudders tore at him, froth dabbled his chin. Suddenly he fell down inside the pulpit and was lost to view, all except those fearful hands, that clutched and beat at the rim. Then that

too ceased, and they hung over motionless, like the hands of someone drowned....

The whole chapel was clamorous now with cries and groanings, but a comparative stillness fell as the preacher's hands gripped the edge of the pulpit again and he dragged himself erect. The sweat ran down his white face and splashed like tears on to the Bible before him.

"Who is going to stand forth and be saved?" he yelled: "Who amongst you is still a prisoner to Satan? Let him come forth and confess the Lard. I see 'ee over there"—pointing a shaking forefinger—"you'm hesitating. You can't make up your mind to give up that sin you love. Give it up, or this night thy soul shall be required of thee, and all the devils in hell shall play at ball with it in the midst of the flames."

Several men, each convinced that finger had threatened him, rose to their feet and struggled towards the penitents' pew, the tears streaming down their drawn faces, their breath rasping as though they had been running. A young girl sprang up and ripped the ribbon off the straw bonnet she was wearing; the sharp tearing sound added an alien note to the babel. Then she too, trembling violently, attained the pew and fell on her knees, the despoiled bonnet askew on her bowed head. One after another all those not already converted made their way through the encouraging throng to the fateful pew.

Annie shook Ishmael by the arm.

"Get up," she urged excitedly; "go to the pew, Ishmael. Confess the Lard, de 'ee hear? You'm got to confess the Lard."

But Ishmael, sick with fear, was crouching down, trying to shield both eyes and ears at the same time with his enfolding arms. He shrieked as Annie touched him.

"Go to wance," she commanded. "You heard what the minister said? You'll die and go to hell unless you repent. Get up and be saved ...;" and she drew him to his feet, his struggles unavailing against her.

But at sight of that sinister pew, choked with its weeping throng of ugly people, Ishmael went distraught with fear. He felt if he were put in that place of dread he would die at once. He fought Annie's grasp for a moment, screaming wildly, then collapsed in a little heap against her.

Annie thought he was dead, and that her offering, like Cain's, had proved unacceptable on high. She drew back in horror, her hands dabbing aimlessly from her own face to the sides of the pew. It was another woman, a comfortable creature who had remained very unaffected throughout the service, who gathered Ishmael up and forced her way out with him in her arms.

As she laid him on the grass outside a burst of praise came through the open door of the chapel; the scene of fear was over, and the penitents, confident of their salvation, were rejoicing together. All was peace and happiness, but Ishmael lay, his head upon the steep lap of the stranger, quite unaware that the Lord was appeased at last.

CHAPTER VIII

SEED-TIME

The Parson was a cassocked whirlwind in his wrath. He said little, not being a man who wasted words when a thing was done, but he acted decisively, pinning Annie by her terror to agree to a permanent alteration in affairs. As soon as Ishmael could be moved—for the fit he had had left him weak and nervous—the Parson took him to the Vicarage, and there for the next three or four years, till he went to St. Renny, Ishmael made his home.

They were, he realised much later, the happiest years of his life. Looking back on them, he grudged his unconsciousness of the fact at the time. There is nothing in the world quite like the atmosphere of an old-fashioned English parsonage—the quietness, the well-bred but simple air of it, with a tang of scholarly mustiness, the whole of a fragrance never entirely lost to those who have known it intimately. Something of the spirit of George Herbert, that homely gentleman of unassuming saintliness, the epitome of everything that was best and most characteristic in the Anglican Church, has descended on country parsonages ever since and is only now beginning to wear thin. And it was the Church of Herbert, of Jeremy Taylor, of Traherne—how above all he would have loved the works of Traherne if they had then been discovered!—that Boase represented. A Church domestic, so to speak, with priestly

powers, but wielded as the common laws of a household. The widening ripples of the Oxford Movement had touched even the West with its spreading circle, but though it had his respect it left him curiously unstirred. Its doctrines were his already, perhaps with a wider interpretation here and there; and for ritual, except in so far that he liked everything done decently, he had no feeling. His sense of religion was profound but simple, as simple as daily bread. He held that it should be allowed to become part of a child as unforcedly as air or food, and he had an especial horror of what are known as heart-to-heart talks. Above all he abominated revivals, he knew too much of the greater apathy that welled in their hysterical wake. Wesley, he held, had had a mission, which is a very different thing.

Therefore the Parson's first care with Ishmael was to sweep him as bare of all thought as might be. He even stopped him when the child, still conscience-ridden, would have poured out exaggerations of misdoings, though he registered the knowledge he guessed at for future guidance. It was against Ishmael's nature to be expansive, and if he had been so on that occasion he would probably never have felt so easy with the Parson again. As it was, he began, in his secretive way, to copy Boase at all points that seemed good to him, doing things of his own initiative which he would have rebelled from being told. When the Parson got him a pony at fair-time, Ishmael soon gathered that a gentleman rode without kicking his horse in the belly or jaggling at its mouth, as was the custom in that part of the world. He learnt, too, by the simple reappearance of a tin bath, flanked by an earthen pitcher of water, in his room morning after morning, that a gentleman washed all over every day. At first this bored him considerably, but after one day when the Parson took him down to the cove to bathe, and he had occasion to be ashamed of his grubby little legs and feet beside the other's shining whiteness, that too altered. Yet the Parson had said nothing, hardly given more than a look. In the same way, when he gathered that the Parson trusted him to tell the truth, and that no grievous consequences attended it, he gradually ceased to lie, though this took time, since lying with him, as with many children, had become an instinct. Gradually the whole atmosphere of the Vicarage, with its shiny mahogany furniture, its faded rep curtains, its old prints and few unassuming miniatures of the quiet country gentlefolk who were Boase's ancestors, its queer mingled smell of old books and lavender, all became part of Ishmael's consciousness.

He had a great deal of freedom, once the morning's lessons were over, for the Parson was a busy man and his parish many miles wide. At first Boase had been rather worried about these spaces in Ishmael's time, for there were no gentlefolk's children for him to play with nearer than seven or eight miles, and it was a necessary part of the great plan to keep from undue familiarity with the village boys. There was always Phoebe, but Ishmael was growing of an age to despise girls. Besides, nice soft little thing that Phoebe was, she talked with a dialect as thick as treacle. Eventually, however, it turned out that girls were to be Ishmael's chief companions, and the Parson concluded it would do him no harm to be under what is commonly supposed to be a softening influence before plunging into the stern masculinities of St. Renny. It was John-James who brought about the feminine factor in Ishmael's days, some six months after the Vicarage period had begun.

It was early spring, the first rathe-primroses were showing their milk-fair faces on the cliff, and the light-green leaves were beginning to uncrumple on the wind-wilted elders, when John-James appeared on a mission of his own at the Vicarage. There was a good deal of coming and going between the Manor and the Vicarage, for the Parson laid himself open to no charge of alienating affections, but this visit was quick with a portentousness beyond the normal. To begin with, John-James asked for Mr. Boase instead of for Ishmael, and when he was shown into the study he stood revolving his cap in his hands and some weighty thought in his brain till the Parson bade him sit down and say what it was had brought him. But John-James still stood and, his eyes fixed anxiously on the Parson, at last blurted out:

"Mr. Boase, you'm tachen Ishmael things like gentry do belong to know, aren't 'ee?"

"Why, yes," said Boase.

"I want to know if 'ee'll tache our Vassie too. Archelaus, he'em too old, and thinks on naught but gwain with females, and Tom's doen fine with Mr. Tonkin, and for me—I'm not that class. Farmen's my traade. But the maid, she'm so quick and clever, 'tes only fitty she should have her chance same as the lil'un. She's gwain to be 'ansome, white as a lily she is, and it'll be better for she if she do have things to think of like the gentry. For if Ishmael's gentry, there's no rason Vassie shoulden be. They'm the same blood after all. An' it's dangerous blood, Mr. Boase."

The Parson sat for a moment in silence while John-James shifted his feet anxiously. Mingled with the swift appreciation of the humour of himself as tutor to the arrogant Vassie was a pang of reproachful conscience.

"What does your mother say?" he temporised; "and Vassie?"

"Mother's willen, only she did say you was so took up with the lil'un you wouldn't take no account of

Vassie, seeing she'm only a bastard like the rest of us. But Vassie said if you thought it was the right thing to do by her you'd do it."

Boase had as little vanity as any man, but it was pleurably pricked by this. Also he still reproached himself.

"John-James," he began almost diffidently, "you mustn't talk like that about bastards—as though it made any difference to me. You know it isn't because of that I look after Ishmael and treat him differently; it's because he was left to me as a charge. I want to make a fine thing of him and for him to make a fine thing of Cloom.... But that includes his overcoming this barrier between him and his family; it won't be complete till he and Archelaus can meet in friendship as brothers should, without a grudge or a fear. All this bad blood needs sweetening."

"I daresay," said John-James, "but meanwhile Ishmael'll be grown up further and further from his folk."

"But you wouldn't have me not educate him, would you?" urged Boase, speaking as to a fellow-man; "you say yourself it's too late with Archelaus. It always was; he hated me from Ishmael's birth."

"That's right enough," agreed John-James; "it's only Vassie you can help. And helpen her will help your plan too, won't it? For it'll make one of his own kind in his family. And she's gwain to be 'ansome, she is."

"You're quite right, John-James, and I'm obliged to you for the suggestion. I don't think I can supply an education much good to a young lady, but we'll see what can be done."

"Mother says," mumbled John-James, "that happen later Vassie could go to what they do call a boarding school to Plymouth church town, seen' as the money won't be Ishmael's yet awhile.... Only she must learn to cipher and make nadlework flowers afore go, or the other maids'll mock at she."

"I can teach the ciphering but not the needlework flowers, I fear," said the Parson, laughing; "my housekeeper will have to be called in over that. Well, you tell Vassie to be here by nine in the morning and she shall begin her education. Whether she sticks to it is her own affair."

"She'll stick to it," prophesied John-James. "She'm terrible proud, is Vassie."

That was how it came about that Vassilissa Beggoe, half pouting defiance, half eager, began to pull herself out of the slough into which her race had slipped. There were difficulties perpetually arising—Ishmael had to be snubbed for sneering at her abysmal ignorance; and a course more adapted to her needs and temperament than the classic one the Parson was unfolding before the boy had to be arrived at; and her own recurring fits of suspicion and obstinacy had to be overcome. The intimacy between brother and sister did not deepen perceptibly, for the three years between them made too wide a gulf at that period in life, and to counter Ishmael's scorn of her as a girl and far more ignorant than himself, was her scorn of him as younger, less daring, much less swift of apprehension, though keener of application. Each began to have a certain respect for the other, nevertheless—she in his superiority over the other boys she knew, he in her splendour that made the other boys' sisters seem dim. These two were laying the foundations for possible intimacy later on, though there was too much against it now.

The Parson felt it as a matter for self-reproach that he never became really fond of Vassie; her hardness, and a certain set determination about her that was rather fine as well, blinded him to her good points. She was certainly unlovable at that period, but she and the Parson had natures which would mutually fail to respond at the best of times. Being what he was, this made him all the more careful to do all he could for her, but he never rejoiced in her really quick intellect as he did in the slow sensitive one of Ishmael, or even in the kittenish superficiality of Phoebe's.

For the miller had no rest when he heard what was going on at the Vicarage of a morning until his Phoebe was reaping equal benefits, or benefits that would have been equal had Phoebe the temperament to avail herself of them. If the Parson had not possessed a natural genius for teaching, even his patience would never have survived those schoolroom struggles with three children of differing ages and capacities. But he was interested in Vassie's determination to improve herself, and of little Phoebe he was fond in the way one cannot help being fond of some soft confiding little animal that rubs up against one.

The miller built much on those few years of childish friendship during which he told himself his Phoebe too was learning to be as good as anyone else, but the Parson had no fears on that score. Ishmael was going, as he saw things, to be a man of wider ideas than ever little facile Phoebe, with her

superficial quickness in acquiring anything "lady-like," would be able to fill.

Meanwhile, the Parson told Ishmael, in language that made everything seem clean and wonderful, as much as he thought wise of the mysteries which had perplexed him and Jacka's John-Willy over the snail. The ideals Ishmael gradually absorbed during these years made the thought of the furtive conversations with John-Willy seem hateful, and with their swift acquisitiveness of values both little girls appreciated that he would be superior to them if they indulged in any of the vulgarities most children are apt to fall into at one period, harmless enough in fact, but not cleansing to the mind. Therefore each of the three affected the other two in some way, and the pattern of Ishmael's life, though so essentially isolated as everyone's must be in greater or less measure, was intermingled at many of its edges with those of the two girls'. But always it was the Parson who held his heart as far as any human entity could be said to do so. For it was still the world of things and ideas which filled the round of his horizon most for Ishmael, and in that world the thought of his great trust held ever-strengthening place.

One great cause for relief he had, which came upon him soon after the settlement of the scholastic arrangement at the Vicarage, and that was the departure of Archelaus, who enlisted and went to the Crimea. Later he was wounded and discharged, but even then he did not come home, but went to the goldfields of New South Wales. The great fever of that rush was on, and, any form of mining being in a Cornishman's blood, there were many that went from West Penwith alone. The malignant presence of Archelaus withdrawn, though he did not understand the malignancy, Ishmael felt lighter, freer. Tom he hardly ever saw, and the girls were under dire penalties from the Parson never to hint to Ishmael the true reason of the domestic complications of Cloom. That Boase reserved for himself, as a difficult telling, which Ishmael might take hardly, and for which he was to be well fortified in the years of childhood.

Long after, on looking back, Ishmael saw better the whole atmosphere of those years from eight to twelve than he did when in the midst of them. Golden summers, when he spent whole days out on the cliff or moor with the Parson, their specimen cases at their backs; ruddy autumns when the peewits cried in the dappled sky and the blackberries were thick on the marsh; grey winters when the rain and mist blotted the world out, and he and the Parson sat by a glowing fire of wreckage, the Parson reading aloud from Jorrocks or Pickwick, or the entrancing tales of Captain Marryat, and later, for more solid matter, Grote's "History of Greece," its democratic inferences counterbalanced by "Sartor Resartus," whose thunderous sentences enthralled Ishmael, if their purport was yet beyond him; wonderful pale springs when the sunshine and the blood in his veins were both like golden wine. So the time went, and it mostly belonged to himself and his dreams, with even the Parson more unconsciously felt than actively realised, and with the two girls still more upon the fringe, though it was true there were splendid games, such as Cavaliers and Roundheads, which could not be played by himself. For this and kindred affairs Vassie and Phoebe were of great use, though Phoebe cried if she had to be a Roundhead too often out of her turn. Still, she was a good little thing, but when the fateful date arrived which was to see the journey to St. Renny, Ishmael had no pang at leaving her or anyone else. He was not a shy boy, and felt only intense interest at the thought of what lay before him. For the journey in a railway train was alone enough to set the blood thrilling—it was a thing that no one whom Ishmael knew, excepting Parson Boase, had ever undertaken. It was only a matter of five years since the West Cornwall Railway from Truro Road to Penzance had been opened. The same year the great Duke had died, but the opening of the railway, with the mayor and all the magistrates and the volunteer band in attendance, had made far the greater stir in West Penwith. Iron Dukes were intangible creatures compared with iron engines, although the Parson had preached about the former and seemed to think, as some parishioners said, that it might have been the Almighty Himself who had passed away. Wellington had gone, but the railway had come—therein lay the difference; and Ishmael swelled with pride as he talked casually to Phoebe of the experience before him.

The miller lent his trap for the drive into Penzance, for, incredible as it may seem, there was still hardly a cart in the countryside, all the carrying of turf, furze, and produce being done on donkeys' back, and thus it came about that Phoebe came too to see him off. She held her round softly-tinted face, with the mouse-coloured ringlets falling away from it, up to his in the railway station as he prepared to climb to his place in the pumpkin-shaped compartment. He ensured a tear-wet pillow for her that night by merely shaking her hand at the full length of a rigid arm.

CHAPTER IX

For most children the first day at school is a memorable landmark; for Ishmael it was the more so because all his life hitherto he had lived in one atmosphere, without the little voyagings and visitings in which more happily-placed children are able to indulge. The change to St. Renny, although in the same county, was a great one, for whereas Cloom lay on the wind-swept promontory where only occasional folds in the land could give some hint of what gentler-nurtured pastures might be like, the whole little grey town of St. Renny seemed embowered in foliage that did not indeed encroach upon its actual ways, but that gave the rolling slopes of its guarding hills a richness of dark green that Ishmael had never imagined trees could hold. The life itself bore a very similar analogy to that he had led hitherto, not because the school was at all luxurious or riotous, but because his life, even at the Vicarage, had been of an unusual austerity. This new world held at once greater restrictions and more liberty of spirit, for at school every boy works out his own salvation or the reverse. Not being shy, Ishmael had no inner terrors to overcome—only a feeling for self-defence which was the outcome of his anomalous position. The Parson hoped and thought there would be no disagreeables about that at St. Renny; the headmaster, of course, knew of it, but of the boys, those adepts at torture, none happened to be from the furthest West. For St. Renny still bore the reputation it had attained under a famous headmaster, when the best known of West Country novelists had been a scholar there, and parents from right up the country, even from London itself, if they had the blood of Devon or Cornwall in their veins, sent their sons to grey St. Renny. It was with a London boy, son of a one-time Plymouth merchant who had become an alderman and a shining light of Bloomsbury, that Ishmael's fortunes were to be most closely linked.

In spite of his pose of self-sufficiency—so ingrained as to deceive himself—Ishmael's heart beat fast as he followed the Parson through the arched doorway of grey granite that was to open so often for him in the years to follow. He was filled with an inarticulate wonder at the knowledge that it was to be so, and it occurred to him for the first time—for children, like animals, accept what comes to them very naturally—that it was odd one could be so completely disposed of by grown-up people, even for one's undoubted good....

Of the interview with the headmaster, so square of jowl and brow and yet so kindly, Ishmael remembered little in after years; for it became blurred by all he grew to know of "Old Tring" during the long though intermittent association of school. Old Tring rang a bell, after a gruff sentence of welcome, and, apparently as glad as Ishmael for an excuse to part, told him he should be shown round by one Killigrew. Old Tring added that he, Ishmael Ruan, would be sure to like Killigrew. Ishmael doubted this; somehow, waiting there in that still room, whose tranquillity seemed so much of its essence as to be more than a mere absence of noise, waiting and gazing at the strip of sunlit High Street that seemed lambent by contrast with the dimness within, Ishmael conceived a dislike to Killigrew. The name sounded brisk, brutal even; Ishmael was unaware that it was the fact that he had been told he would like Killigrew which awaked his antagonism. Unconsciously he resented that this old man should take advantage of knowing more of books to think that therefore he knew what he, Ishmael, would and would not like.

They all three waited; the Parson ran a finger along the lines of calf-bound books, then paused, Old Tring at his elbow. Ishmael was forgotten, isolated in himself, and, without warning, in the irrational way of such phases, he was overwhelmed by one of those strange periods in which, though actually but a second or so, time seems to hold its breath and the consciousness, muffled by some overwhelming dimness, is arrested and stands alone, on a pin-point of eternity, without past or future. It seemed to him that nothing would ever move again in the dim room, where for this fraction of a second everything was motionless except the dust motes that danced in the beam slanting through the low window, wreathing this way and that like steam within the strip of brightness, but ceasing to be visible at the edge as sharply as though they ceased to exist—as though an impalpable line ruled in the air would not allow the twisting coils to pass beyond, even when the pattern demanded it. Ishmael stared at this aerial path of living light, his mind hypnotised by it, and the remainder of the room by its contrasting density seemed to fall away from him; out of a great distance came the Parson's voice saying, "So you've got a first edition of the Antiquities..." Followed the soft rubbing sound of one smooth book being drawn out from between its companions, then the crisper noise of large pages being turned.

The moment, which had seemed so intensely the present to Ishmael that during it he had thought it could never cease to be, reeled and sank into the past, leaving him with the feeling that time was once more in motion, like a vast clock whose pendulum has stopped for one beat, only to resume its swing again. At once it became possible that everything should go on, the idea of the incursion of the boy Killigrew ceased to be wildly chimerical, and with this acceptance of it Killigrew himself was in the room.

The vibrant path was no longer bright to the shutting-off of all else, material and mental; the Parson looked up from his first edition; Old Tring's hand, advancing, came into the strip of light, and seemed to spring to life, swelled to huge dimensions, became of a glowing whiteness. Killigrew, red-headed, freckled, standing with an air of surly self-protection, suddenly raised his light lashes to give the sweetest smile Ishmael had ever seen. Always, even in moments of irritation, it was to remain with him as illuminative of Killigrew—that peculiar radiant smile which carried him so softly, if not triumphantly, through life. It would have been a disgusting smile if it had been calculated, even self-conscious; as it was, it made of Killigrew a creature subtly apart, though for no deeper reason.

Old Tring said: "Killigrew, this is Ruan, who has come from Bolerium, or, as you would vulgarly term it, Land's End. Take him and show him the school, but bring him back to have tea with his guardian." The two boys went out and as he was shutting the door Ishmael, who had the woodland hearing of a little animal, caught some low-toned words of the Parson's: "... makings of a fine spirit. I assure you, Tring ...". That was himself, Ishmael Ruan, whom they were speaking of. "A fine spirit ..."; the phrase pricked his imagination—he swelled to it. He glanced at Killigrew, who was whistling in rosy unconsciousness of proximity to any spirit at all, and suddenly felt enormously relieved that the other boy had not heard, aware, by the new angle to which he was already responding, that Killigrew would have been disgusted rather than impressed. Once in the courtyard, the freemasonry of young things released from the pressure of grown-ups drew their eyes together. Unconsciously Ishmael thrust his hands into the trouser pockets of his new serge suit, in imitation of Killigrew, whose swagger was really a thing inimitable. Something stirred in Ishmael which had hitherto been unknown to him; it was not love, which in greater or lesser degree he already knew—for he was an affectionate boy in his inarticulate way—it was not merely an impulse for friendship; that would have been no alien thing. It was the beginning of that relationship which only masculine creatures ever really know, a relationship which is intimate without ever making inroads on privacy; full of pleasure in companionship without any feeling of a blank when apart; where love cannot be said to exist, and yet of which, if the irrevocableness of death remove one of the two, there remains to the other a void that is felt recurrently for the rest of his life whenever anything arises which that other person alone could have felt and appreciated in quite the same way. It was no David and Jonathan friendship which grew between Ishmael and Killigrew such as may sometimes be found among boys, but it was an intimacy that, in its aloof way, was to add something to the pattern of their lives that neither would have found without it.

In after years, if Ishmael had examined into the thing, which he never did, he would have seen that it was because, widely different as their two natures were, each had a side that corresponded. For everyone has a part of him, nearly always the larger, which is in relation with the general run of the world, and also a part which is out of key with it. Neither is more real than the other, though one is always bigger and more insistent than the other, and in the relative proportions lies every possibility. It was those parts of them which were out of key with the ordinary acceptances that were attuned in Ishmael and Killigrew, though neither was as yet aware they had such aspects, far less in what measure. On that first afternoon and for several days afterwards they were merely unthinkingly aware of a blind tolerance for each other that rose more nearly to a warm respect over the matter of Killigrew's badger.

This attractive though violent animal lurked in a hutch artfully concealed between the roof and the rafters at the far end of the dormitory where Killigrew slept. A trap door gave admission to the dim three-cornered place where heads had to be bowed for fear of the beams and voices and footsteps tuned down as low as possible lest someone in authority should overhear. For the badger was contraband, or so its owner, for greater glory, chose to assume, though as a matter of fact it was more than likely had permission been asked to keep the beast it would have been accorded, for St. Renny had its reputation as the great naturalists' school to keep up. Half the glamour surrounding the savage pet would have vanished, however, and the secret was jealously guarded, the badger himself, by his unconquerable stench, being the only person likely to give it away. Luckily the hutch was not directly over the dormitory, but right at the angle of the roof, where a low window, kept always open by Killigrew, allowed the worst of the smell to be wafted away. The increasing size of the badger and its consequent fierceness were likely to make its ultimate retention impossible; even now, a mere ball of striped fluff, it bit savagely whenever it was handled.

Badgers, which are often erroneously supposed to be nearly extinct in England, swarm over Cornwall, so that Killigrew's specimen did not enjoy any special distinction as a rarity, save in its capacity as a "pet." They are, however, very difficult to catch, being strong and cunning and armed with terrific teeth and claws, and Killigrew was passionately attached to his unyielding prisoner, not so much for its own sake as for what it represented for him—outlawry, romance, the touch of the wild which glorified life. Not on the first day was Ishmael accounted worthy, or even safe, as a repository for this secret, but when Killigrew did show it him, Ishmael rose in importance through his intimate

knowledge of badgers and their ways.

"Wouldn't *He* let you keep it if *He* knew?" asked Ishmael, when, finger and thumb round its neck and another finger firmly gripping under a forepaw, he had held and admired the spitting animal.

"Rather not. We're not allowed to *keep* anything, though they make us sweat across the moor what they call 'observing the animal creation in its own haunts.' They like one to grind over beastesses and butterflies and suchlike."

"I know a lot about them," boasted Ishmael.

"Then you'd better keep your mouth shut about it, that's all I can say, or the fellows will think you're a prig. It was all right when it was started because the fellows were keen on it themselves, but then the masters took it up, and of course we had to drop it. We're off bugs in this shop."

Ishmael digested in silence the profundity of the point of view thus presented to him, and, according to his habit, quickly made it part of his practice. For his first weeks at school he kept very silent, absorbing its traditions and the unwritten laws made by the boys themselves, on the nice observance of which hung respect and popularity.

The Grammar School of St. Renny was an old-fashioned affair even for those days, but it had a certain name in a quiet way. It was run on classical lines, Greek and Latin being considered the only two subjects worth a gentleman's attention. Botany and entomology were the unofficial subjects that had won the school its name, but Ishmael soon found that to show any keenness for these two pursuits was to class yourself a prig. The robust natures preferred rod and line, or line only, in the waters of Bolowen Pool to any dalliance with stink-pots and specimen cases. Like far greater schools, it was really run by the traditions evolved by the boys. There were certain things that were the thing and certain other things that were not the thing, and these varied occasionally. One term you simply had to wear a dark blue-and-white tie for going into the town and bear's grease your hair; another term a certain slovenliness in dress was the thing. You dismissed all womenkind as trivial and useless, but you were in love with the doctor's daughter, a stately, full-blown damsel who floated, so to speak, up the church upon the swaying bubble of her crinoline every Sunday morning, and sat, sunk to the waist in the swelling waves of silk, worshipped by a row of eyes from the school pew.

During the Sunday promenade around the churchyard—an unchanging ritual—you manoeuvred to be the one of the couple passing her as she came up the short path that bisected the circular one where you were marching. The two boys who were leading had the advantage of being able to set the pace more or less, but often they miscalculated the time of her appearance, and then some other couple, by a judicious lagging for a moment or a sudden quickening, achieved the meeting that after all was no more than a furtive interchange of glances, supercilious or almost-smiling on her part, according to her mood and the boy that encountered it. None of the boys ever met the damsel in any other way, except sometimes at a select party; but this adoration was a cult, though a purely academic one, so to speak. The true goddess of the school was far otherwise, as Ishmael was to find.

Another feature of life at St. Renny was the weekly market-day. It was forbidden to go into the town, it being placed out of bounds for the occasion, and therefore to slip out and drink cider at the corner shop and come back with your pockets stuffed with buns and solid country sweets of gaudy hues was a deed that placed you high in the respect of your fellows. Ishmael achieved this once as a matter of form, and then, having no real interest in it, turned his attention to other matters. On ordinary days the boys had a very real freedom, only limited by the hour at which they must return, and Ishmael and Killigrew nearly always took their rods and spent the half-holidays at Bolowen Pool, rarely catching anything, for the trout were abnormally shy; but Ishmael at least had the true fisherman's temperament, and was content to sit all day at one end of a rod and line even without a fish at the other. As for Killigrew, he was soon following where Ishmael led, and would have gone bug-hunting with him had he so decreed, though he felt relieved that Ishmael had cast such things aside.

Ishmael was casting aside much these days. He was at that expanding age which accepts what it is taught as good, but thinks it fine to throw it over. Later comes the age of thinking for oneself and concluding that whatever one has been taught is bad. Curiously enough the outward result of the two states is the same. Only later comes the period of judicious sifting, and by then characteristics, tastes, habits, have unwittingly formed such bias that true poise is almost unattainable. Ishmael's root-ideas were unchanged, but he conformed to all the fads of the school, even, as he became more of a personage, adding to them, for his inborn dread of ridicule prevented him from being an iconoclast and his bent for dominance made some action, one way or the other, necessary. The Parson sank more and more into the background, but there came over the rim of his world a new figure that, oddly enough, filled much the same place.

On that first night at school, when the Parson had gone back home and Ishmael lay in a narrow little bed, one of ten such, in the darkened dormitory, he shed no tears for the Parson, or for his old companions, nor yet for the strangeness of the new world where he might, in the reaction from the first excitement, have been feeling lonely. He was too solidly set on getting all that was possible out of his fresh life. But in his most curious searchings into the likely future as he lay that night for an hour or so upon a wakeful pillow, he did not picture anything as delightful as, in after years, he was to realise Hilaria Eliot had been for those boys who at the time so casually and unthinkingly enjoyed her wayward companionship.

CHAPTER X

HILARIA

"Point the toe, if you please young gentlemen; slide well forward and bow to your partner from the waist.... Ruan, you have the air of a poker trying to be graceful. Watch Killigrew and do as he does. Now, all together please ..."; and the row of self-conscious boys bowed, gloved hands upon severely jacketed chests, while as many little girls, aware of doing the thing correctly and of not looking fools in the doing of it, spread white tarletan skirts in starchy semi-circles by way of reply.

It was the weekly dancing class, when Mr. Pierre Sebastian Eliot, who on other days taught French at the Grammar School, undertook to instruct the boys in what he referred to as "the divine art of Terpsichore," a habit which had earned for himself the simple nickname of "Terps." The class was held in a spacious room used for balls, both subscription and private, at the "George" Inn, and to it came not only those Grammar School boys whose parents paid for this polite "extra," but also the maidens from the gentle families of St. Renny and the neighbourhood.

Ishmael was dancing opposite Hilaria Eliot, and his enjoyment of it lay in knowing that Killigrew, who had basely tried to trip him up shortly before, was suffering pangs of envy. After some four years of knowing her, Killigrew was suddenly in love with Miss Eliot and didn't mind who knew it. In fact, to be accurate, Killigrew's emotion was chiefly based on a desire to be different from the rest of his world, and what was the good of being different unless people knew it?

Thus Killigrew—to Ishmael, who was growing vaguely aware of a difference from his fellows that he could not remedy, the argument would have had no force. Killigrew was neither of those St. Rennyites who despised girls, nor of those who held the cult of the doctor's daughter, that dizzy exemplar of fashion, nor of those others—a small band these latter, made up of the best boys in the school, little and big—who admired and liked Hilaria as a "good sort." Killigrew was determined to be different, and so, like Burns, "battered" himself into love. If Ishmael had been disposed to feel a tender sentiment for her himself, he could not have cherished it with any comfort, being already cast by Killigrew for the confidant of passion. Thus it came about that, though in after years those stolen meetings between Hilaria and a ring of boys would flash into his memory as being romance in essence, at the time they held no more thrill for him than might be imparted by some new novel—contraband in the perpetual war against grown-ups—that she would bring to read aloud to them in some hollow of the moor. Always it was from the angle of the third person—that most comfortable of view-points—that he saw her. Only later by the light that lingered round her ways did he know how she had stood for beauty.

Now, as he watched her sway and dip before him, it only struck him that she differed from the little misses on her either hand, but quite how, except that he would have said she was jollier, more like a boy, he couldn't have told. That indeed, translated from boy-like into unmaidenly, was the town's chief complaint against her, or primarily against her father. Mr. Eliot's position was not an easy one, and he did nothing to make it easier. For he was half French, his mother having been brought over as a little girl at the time of the Terror. There were people still alive in the 'fifties and 'sixties who remembered the Napoleonic wars and the shadow cast by that giant figure upon the world; indeed, so slowly did thought move down in the far West that it might almost have been said that St. Renny was just beginning to realise the wars, and rather resented the fact that English and French had since fought side by side in the Crimea. Also the vagaries of Napoleon III. kept England in a perpetual state of distrust, in spite of the championship of Lord Palmerston, then in his second Ministry. Mothers still frightened their babes with the name of Boney, and the French were still the hereditary enemies of all good Cornishmen, so many of whom had gone to man the fleet that won at Trafalgar. The obscure feeling of distrust that always stirs in the lower classes of remote districts at anything alien did not, of

course, extend to the educated people, but Mr. Eliot, being poor and very eccentric, refused such championship from his equals as might have been his.

He lived with his daughter and an old housekeeper in a little cottage on the outskirts of the town, and earned his living by teaching at the Grammar School and giving private lessons in French, dancing, fencing, and physical culture generally. It was this latter that caused him to be looked on with so much suspicion as an eccentric. He actually made his daughter, attired in a skirt that only reached to her knees, perform inelegant feats on parallel bars and ladders, while he was wont to boast that she could out-fence any boy at the school. She was an expert swimmer too, and there were rumours, that at summer bathing excursions she wore a somewhat similar garment to that of the gymnasium, instead of one of those long serge gowns reaching to the ankles that ladies were wont to disport themselves in amidst the surf—gowns in which it was impossible to do anything but bob up and down at the end of a rope.

It was curious that a man who was half a Frenchman should have been the one to have such advanced ideas on female education, but then Mr. Eliot was the son of a refugee, which says much. For those French aristocrats, who never turned hand to a task in their lives till the Revolution, lived to learn very differently after their flight. The farm and the shop taught what the court had failed to impart, and the blood that despite folly directs so truly in moments of extremity did not fail them. The children who, had the course of events never been ruffled, would have grown up in a vicious and futile court, were forced to practise economies and learn at first hand the dignity of labour. With those families who returned to the increasing viciousness which culminated under Napoleon III. the lesson may not always have been lasting, but for those who, like the forbears of Mr. Eliot, allied themselves with their English hosts, and remained where they were, the hard life of struggle, if the alliance had not been rich, continued the new philosophy. Added to all this normal cause, Hilaria's father was certainly an original, or rather one of those people considered so because they are ahead of their time and condemned to misunderstanding in consequence.

None of it mattered to Mr. Eliot, who drifted about the world in a daze that, had it been a happy one, would have made him an enviable man. As it was, his invincible habit of over-sensitive gloom robbed him of the detachment which is the most truly enviable of all the gifts of the gods. He was a little man, beautifully made, with the high nose, the tossed-back hair, the piercing look of the man at once prejudiced and nervous. He lived wrapt in himself, and saw in his daughter more his own hope in old age than a creature wonderful in her youth and vitality for her own ends. When the crude heartlessness of the boys racked him or the well-meaning advances of the gentry offended his alert vanity, it was to Hilaria that he would turn in thoughts and words to attain that measure of approbation without which his own self-love would have languished of inanition. It was Hilaria who healed his hurts, though with increasing difficulty. For there is little gulf, and that easily bridged, between the very young child and the old man, but between the adolescent and the old it is wide and deep. And she was eager where he was retiring, confident where he was suspicious. With what of pity, lovely but half-patronising too, did she solace him!... Between them lay the gulf not only of a generation but of a different habit of thought, of alien tastes, which not all his passionate clutching or her impatient tenderness could bridge for more than a few moments of clinging together against the world. None of this did he realise, neither did Hilaria, so they were spared much unhappiness, merely fretting blindly without knowing why.

Hilaria was not a beauty, though she would be considered more nearly so now than then, when a high forehead and well-sleeked hair were almost necessities of life. Her low brow—truly Greek in its straightness and the crisp ripple of her hair around it—was not in favour at that time. The hair, which was of a dull ashen brown, was strained back tightly and confined by a round comb. Her eyebrows, too straight for the period and too thick, nearly met above the short, tip-tilted nose, freckled as a plover's egg, and that at a time when no well brought-up damsel ventured forth in the sun's rays without veil or parasol. Her face was deficient in modelling, being one of those subtly concave faces not without a fascination of their own, with an egg-like curve of prominent delicately-square chin. Her mouth, too large, opened very beautifully when she laughed over square thickly-white teeth. Her eyes were small and of no particular colour, though bright with a birdlike shining between the thick short lashes of a neutral brown. She had a something boyish in poise and action that really made her charm, but that also set her hopelessly out of her time. It was impossible to imagine Hilaria happy in a crinoline, and she fought them fiercely, yet crinolines were in full flower, and the one disported by the doctor's daughter of a Sunday was the admiration and envy of the feminine members of the town. "I should feel I was in a cage," quoth Hilaria at the suggestion that she should trammel her long legs in such a contraption—unconsciously hitting on the essential reason for the allure of crinolines. She had to wear one now for dancing-class, as it made movement and spacing so different; but other times she went her wilful way, short nose in air, encouraged by the complacency of her father, who had no more knowledge of what the country people called her "goings-on" than if he had lived in an alien clime.

Hilaria was a hoyden. She despised crinolines, girls, Macassar oil, sewing, and deportment. She

adored walking, fishing, boys, and climbing trees. She did outrageous things with a genuine innocence that made the most sensual of the boys careful not to take advantage of her in any bad way. That she climbed out of her bedroom window at night to go and meet some three of the boys from the Grammar School and with them test the wishing pool on the moor on Midsummer Eve was proof of all these things, and yet what a scandal it made in St. Renny when the fact leaked out!...

Hilaria was at present going through a phase of "trying to be good," as the bishop was coming to hold a confirmation, and only those accounted worthy were to be confirmed. Her goodness was of that healthy elastic kind natural to children, which never prevents them doing what they wish, because they instinctively keep it in a compartment to itself. There was no small curiosity about the mysterious rite amongst the boys who were her especial friends, and it had become rather a point of honour to be "done" together. Consequently Hilaria looked very demure as she went through her steps with the mechanical ease of long practice and the supple grace that was her own and yet had the adorable awkwardness of her age in it. She was nearly sixteen, several months younger than Ishmael, who was now just over that age, and who, owing to the reputation for seriousness his secretiveness had earned for him, was one of the candidates undergoing preparation with Old Tring. He had apparently outgrown his fits of unbalanced talkativeness, and had become, with the difficult years, one of those boys who speak with almost comical rarity, and then with unemotional gruffness. This power of reticence never fails to win respect, if of a half-irritated, half-resentful order, and Ishmael held a certain position in the school. Also as the ward of a parson he was supposed to "be good" and know about such things as confirmations. As a matter of fact, he considered his own Tractarian principles, rigidly inculcated by Boase, as superior to the mild evangelical platitudes of Old Tring, and plumed himself accordingly. He was just at that dangerous age, reached somewhat later in the healthy normalities of school than it would have been had he stayed eating his own thoughts at Cloom, when religion either falls away entirely from a boy or flares up into a sudden vitality. Ishmael's blood ran with too much of inherited aptitude for prayer for the former pitfall to ensnare him, but the latter yawned beside him now and he thrilled to its attractions. Sliding his stout, shiny shoe back and forth with the stiff attempt at elegance so deprecated by Mr. Eliot, he asked himself whether the Lord could really countenance such frivolity. It was difficult to think of the things of the soul while so employed, while on the moor, or by Bolowen Pool the thoughts came as naturally as birds. Spring was in his blood and he called it faith, as later he would call it love.

Spring was in the low-browed room at the "George," pouring in at the long windows and spilling in pools of hazy yellow upon the polished boards. Spring was in the old garden outside, touching the warm tangle of gillyflowers to fire, transmuting the pallor of the narcissus to light itself, making the very shadows more luminous than a winter's shining. The freakish sun, lit this and left that, after its habit, for nowhere is more mysterious alchemy than the mixing of sun and shadow in the spaces of the air. Ishmael's keen eyes could see how a spider's thread, woven from one tall plant to another, and wavering ever so delicately in the faint breeze, was one moment lit here and there to a line of pure light that merged into nothingness and gleamed out again, while a moment later it might have vanished entirely or else shine its length. The midges, dancing in mid-air, were living sun-motes for one flash, then were swallowed up as suddenly as though they had slipped through into the fourth dimension. A pair of white butterflies, pearly-grey or golden as they fluttered in and out of those invisible chambers of the air that held sun or shade, chased each other in futile circles; the flower-heads nodded in and out of the brightness; and in the room the white girls dipped into the Danaëan showers and back through the dimness, coloured like the butterflies by the swift transitions, swaying like the blossoms. If not only the spacing of the light but also the waves of movements could have flashed out visibly like the spider's threads the garden and the room would have shown full of the lovely curves.

And Ishmael felt the warm dazzle of the light and thought of the moor and how in another half-hour or so the shadows would be long beside the pool and the trout beginning to rise at their supper, and of how he would like to be a holy hermit and live alone there with a dog and a gun and a rod and God; while Killigrew was divided between trying to signal a question to Hilaria and wishing he could paint the dim room with its splashes of sun and wondering what colours he could get that would be pure enough; and Hilaria was wishing Ishmael would give her a chance to whisper to him the news she was burning to impart and not merely stare at her and everything else with that blank gaze that always seemed to go through her to the wall beyond. And most of the boys itched to get out for an hour or so before supper, while the little girls thoroughly enjoyed themselves and Mr. Eliot wished the whole lot of them, or himself, elsewhere. At last the wheezy piano sounded its last note, the faded lady who once a week thumped it for an hour and the sum of two-and-sixpence gathered her shawl about her and tied the ribbons of her bonnet beneath her pointed chin: the little girls were also enshawled by prim figures who now materialised from the shadowy seats where they had waited for this moment; and the boys, with a hurried touching of caps to Mr. Eliot, went clattering out through the flagged and panelled passage into the High Street. Hilaria, by the door, caught Ishmael's sleeve as he rose from changing his shoes—he was always the last when a fussy quickness was in question—and, ignoring the hovering

Killigrew, said in her low husky voice:

"Tell them I can be on the moor in half an hour, will you? I must go and take off this beastly thing first ..." She kicked a protesting leg against the framework of her crinoline, that shot out in front of her alarmingly.

"Tell who?" asked Ishmael, densely.

"All of them, of course. Killigrew and Moss minor and the Polkinghorns and Carminow—not Doughty; I didn't like him last time—I don't know why ..." She broke off and bent forward, her tones took on a thrill; "I've got it," she announced.

"The new number of 'The Woman in White'? Oh, Hilaria!..."

"It wasn't easy, I can tell you, and we shall have to hurry with it, but it's in my shoe-bag now."

"Must you go home and change? It'll give us so little time. It's dark at eight, and we have to be in to supper then, anyway."

Hilaria hesitated, still slightly leaning forward like a great full-petalled blossom heavy with approaching night.

"I suppose I could manage.... Papa goes on to give a French lesson before he comes home.... It would be awful if it tore though.... All right, I'll risk it, but you'll all have to simply lug me over the stiles. Fancy if I stuck in one all night!" Her laugh, husky as her voice, gurgled out, and Mr. Eliot looked up from the packet of books he was sorting at the end of the room.

"Hilaria!" he said, half sharply, half plaintively. She swung round at him with that beautiful sway only a crinoline can give, checking the movement abruptly so that the full sphere of muslin went surging back for another half-turn while her body stayed rigid.

"Yes, Papa, I am ready. Can't you find all your right books?" And with this adroit carrying of the war into enemy's country she deflected Mr. Eliot's interest back upon himself, at no time a difficult task.

A few minutes later, having stopped to spend her week's pocket-money—only threepence—on a paper twist full of jumbles, she might have been seen going in the direction of home, walking, for her, sedately, and looking very lady-like with the important bulk of the crinoline swelling out the mantle that made all women, from behind, seem at least fifty. A few people who saw her said to themselves that Eliot's maid seemed to be growing up at last, but they did not see her when, arrived at the stile she would have passed severely by had she been going home, she flung her shoebag over it and, boldly tilting up the cumbrous hoops, scrambled over it herself, with a flashing display of frilled cambric trousers and white legs terminating in kid boots.

CHAPTER XI

THE PLACE ON THE MOOR

The nearest way to the hollow on the moor that Hilaria had made her own was a tiny track so overgrown with brambles and gorse as hardly to be worthy the name, and on this particular evening, out of care for her strange garb, she took a path which curved with some semblance of smoothness in a wider arc. Thus Ishmael and Killigrew, who had got away in advance of the others of the "Ring," came to the hollow before her and, climbing up behind it, flung themselves on a boulder where they could watch all approaches. It was a wonderful place, that which Hilaria's feminine instinct for the right atmosphere had led her to choose. The moor sloped slightly for a mile or so below it, and it was not so much a genuine hollow as made to seem like one by the semi-circle of huge boulders that backed it. Set below and almost within them, the curving ground showed a more vivid green than the rest of the moor, as of some elfin lawn held in an ancient enchantment by the hoar rocks. They towered above, piled on and against each other as though flung by freakish gods; from the fissures sprang wind-wilted thorns, now in young leaf of a pure rich green, with thickly-clustered buds just breaking into a dense snow of blossom. Periwinkles trailed down upon the turf, and the closely set stonecrop made a reddish bloom on the lower boulders, amidst bronze-hued moss, pale fragile scales of lichen, and glossy leaved fibrous-rooted ivy, that all went to pattern their sullen grey with delicate arabesques. The strongest

note of colour was in the wild hyacinths, that, where the earth had been disturbed at some time and so given them a chance, made drifts of a deep blue that seemed almost purple where they came against the paler azure of the sky.

The boys climbed to the flat top of the highest boulder, where the gorse-bushes, some still darkly green, some breaking into yellow flame, thrust their strong clumps from the rocky soil to stretch in a level sea, inset with tracts of heath and bracken, for miles around. The whole arc of the sky, the whole circle of the world's rim, lay bare to the eye, infinitely varied by clouds and cloud-shadows, by pasture and arable, dark patches of woods and pallor of pools, by the lambent burnish of the west and the soft purpling of the east, even by differing weathers—here great shafts of sunlight, there the blurred column of a distant shower, or the faint smear, like a bruise upon the horizon, of a low-hanging mist.

Killigrew lay on his stomach and gazed his fill, his thin nostrils dilating rather like a rabbit's, as they always did if he were moved by anything—a trick which, with his light eyelashes, had won for him the name of "Bunny." Ishmael threw himself on his back and lay staring up at the sky as it was slowly drawn past overhead, till with hard gazing the whole world seemed spinning round him and the plummet of his sight was drowned in the shifting heights that seemed to his reeling senses bottomless depths. When Killigrew spoke he plucked his eyes from their fixed stare with what was a physical effort and turned them giddily on to the other boy's usually pale face, now copper-pink in the warm light.

"Why d'you suppose she don't like Doughty?" asked Killigrew.

"I dunno ...; he is rather a swine, anyway."

"Yes, but how does she know that?"

This was a poser, and Ishmael failed at an answer beyond a feeble "Oh, well, because he is."

"If he's been a cad to her—" muttered Killigrew, vengefully.

"I don't know how he can have been; she's only seen him with us. But I don't know what you'd do about it if he had; you can't lick him; he's twice your size and weight."

"Would you never fight unless you were sure of winning?" demanded Killigrew scornfully. Ishmael thought a minute.

"I think it is that I never fight until I'm sure of winning," he said at last; "if I found I wasn't strong enough I wouldn't go in and be beaten; I'd train hard till I was and then fight."

"But that might take ages and you'd forget what you wanted to fight the chap about."

"I don't think I'd forget, if I'd wanted to fight him. I might, though, I suppose...."

"You're all wrong, you know," opined Killigrew; "'tisn't the winning that really matters ... sounds silly, but I don't know how to explain it."

"Sounds like something the Parson would say—my Parson," said Ishmael on one of his flashes of intuition; and then they both laughed, for Killigrew was one of those rare creatures, a born pagan—or rather heathen, which is not quite the same thing. The pagan has beliefs of his own; the true heathen denies the need for any, through sheer lack of interest.

"D'you think girls are so very different from us ...?" went on Killigrew after a moment's silence. "The sort of things they really want to do and think about?"

"Girls are quite different," said Ishmael firmly; "they talk awful rot; I've heard my sister and Phoebe—that's a girl at home."

"Yes, so does my sister—at least, she talks sort of clever stuff that's as bad. But how about Hilaria?" asked her admirer.

"Well, she's more sensible than most, because she wants to do things as though she weren't a girl, but I don't see how she's going to keep it up. She'll fall in love and then it'll all be over."

"You don't think much of girls, do you?"

"Oh, well ... they're all right, I suppose. I want to do things, and girls want to feel things. Oh, yes, Bunny, they're awfully different."

"From you, perhaps ... I dunno ... I say, d'you really want the old bishop to lay his paws on your

head?"

"Yes," replied Ishmael, briefly.

"Well, so does Hilaria. She read me some stuff out of a book—ripping fine stuff it was—by a chap called Mallory. All about knights that were searching for a cup they thought had the blood of God in it or something of the sort. But she seemed to believe it."

"I believe it, too. Not that they lived like that book, but that there is the Blood ... Oh, what's the good of trying to explain to you? It's like you when you're painting and you try and make me see a lot of colours I can't."

"Hullo ... there she comes," cried Killigrew, with a sudden quickening of voice and aspect; "I say, it must be ghastly trying to walk in one of those things. Girls must be different or they wouldn't put up with them. I'll go and help her. Come on, we'll have to sit down below now."

The two boys scrambled down the boulders and assisted Hilaria—the hem of whose white tarlatan skirts showed already the worse for her walk—over the hummocky patch of rocks and gorse that fringed the hollow. Laughing rather ruefully, she flung herself down, scattering her bonnet, shawl, and bag over the turf in the impetuous movement. The lowest rim of the crinoline promptly stood straight up from the ground like a hoop, displaying her long legs and the multitudinous petticoats lying limply upon them, and she was forced to adopt a change of position. Finally she settled herself with her feet tucked in under her and the obnoxious garment swelling out all round, as though she had just flopped down and made what the children call a "cheese."

"I say, where's the magazine?" asked Ishmael.

"In my bag; but you're not to 'look on.' Here are some jumbles, but we must keep the others' share for them. Did you get them all, Ishmael?" For some reason best known to herself, she called him by his Christian name and Killigrew by his nickname of "Bunny," though she addressed the other boys in mannish fashion of surnames only.

"I told Polkinghorne minor and told him to let the others know."

"Did you remember to tell him we didn't want Doughty?"

"I think so ... at least I didn't say to ask him to come," confessed Ishmael, who had the worst head in the world for a message.

"Here they are," announced Killigrew; "I think there're only four of them ..." He screwed up his eyes to gaze, for he was short-sighted. Ishmael gave a glance.

"There's five ..." he said apologetically; "I'm afraid he's there. I can see Polkinghorne and Carminow and Polkinghorne minor and Moss minor and—yes, it's Doughty. I hope you don't mind fearfully, Hilaria?"

She threw a queer little look at him. "It's not for me," she said slowly; "it's only that I don't think he likes you, Ishmael. He tried to tell me something funny about you the other day. He comes to papa for extra coaching in French, you know, and I had to give him tea...."

"About me—?" Ishmael stared blankly, then, more from some premonition than anything else, grew slowly and burningly red. The colour ebbed away, leaving him pale. "What was it?" he asked.

"Nothing. At least, I honestly don't know what. Papa shut him up. He said to him he was no gentleman to say such things before a *jeune fille*—" She broke off, feeling she had hardly improved matters. A deadly suspicion that had once before knocked on Ishmael's heart and been refused more than a second's glance for sheer incredibility pounded at him again, making the blood sing in his ears. Nothing heard at school or from the Parson—who had long perturbed himself as to the right moment for explanations—had started those first warning notes, but words freely bandied across his head at home as a little boy, and then meaningless to him—words that had since echoed back on to fuller knowledge ominously. If it had not been that Archelaus, the free-speaker and the vindictive One of the family, was still in Australia, and that Ishmael spent a large part of his holidays with friends of the Parson's in Devon and Somerset, the conspiracy of secrecy, wise or unwise, could not have lasted so long. He stared at Hilaria and his fingers dug into the turf at either side of him.

At that moment Killigrew relieved the tension by jumping up and calling a wild, long-drawn "Hullo-o" to the approaching boys. They came running up the slope and flung themselves down in a circle, while Polkinghorne major, a big, jolly, simple-minded boy, one of the best liked in the school, laid audacious hands on the bag, which Hilaria snatched from him with a shriek.

Doughty had ensconced himself by her, crowding between her and Ishmael to do so, a manoeuvre which the latter, rather to Doughty's surprise, did not seem to resent. This was the more odd as the boys had several times already, both in school and out of it, come into conflict over trifling matters, not so much from any desire to quarrel as because they were by nature extremely antipathetic. Ishmael disliked Doughty and took little trouble to hide the fact. He hated his pasty sleekness, which made him think of a fat pale grub, and he hated the way the elder boy hung round Killigrew; not from jealousy—Ishmael still cherished aloofness too dearly for that—but from some instinct which told him Doughty was evil. Killigrew lay opposite Doughty now, looking oddly girlish with his slim form and colourless face, that would have been insipid but for his too red mouth. There was a white incisiveness about Killigrew, however, a flame-like quality quaintly expressed in his hair, that promised the possibility of many things, and showed up sharply in comparison with the gross but hard bulk of Doughty. There had been no real reason till this evening, when Hilaria had told of his evil-speaking, for Ishmael to dislike Doughty, but now he knew that he had done so all along.

Doughty hated Ishmael because he did not understand him, and he was of the breed which hates the incomprehensible. Though he had only joined the preceding term, Doughty was nearly seventeen, and owing to a spinal weakness of his youth he had till now been educated at home. He came from Devonshire, which would not have mattered had he been popular, but which, as he was not, was frequently thrown at him as a disadvantage. Now, as he lay beside Ishmael, he stared at him with a something slyly exultant in his look, but the younger boy failed to meet his eyes and merely gazed serenely into vacancy. Hilaria settled herself, opened the bag, and disentangled from the ribbons of her dancing shoes the precious number of *All the Year Round* that contained the instalment of "The Woman in White" they had all been so eagerly awaiting.

The boys left off fidgeting and became mouse-still, while only the low voice of the girl reading of the helpless lovers, of the terrible smiling Count Fosco and his grim wife, broke the silence. The boys lay, thrilled by the splendid melodrama, their little differences forgotten with the rest of their personal affairs, and so they all stayed, Hilaria as enthralled as they, while unperceived the light began to fade and evening to creep over the moor.

CHAPTER XII

SOME AMBITIONS AND AN ANNOUNCEMENT

Hilaria read on till, though she held the page close to her eyes, she seemed to fumble over the words. She was by then at the end of the instalment, and when she put the magazine down she pressed her fingers to her lids and complained that her eyes hurt her. "They often do," she said; "it's a good thing I'm not going to be an artist like Bunny or the hero of this story, isn't it?" She dropped her chin into her cupped palms and sat staring ahead, her eyes shining for all their smarting lids. "Isn't it, funny," she went on, "that we're all going to be something, some kind of a person, and don't really know a bit what kind? Yet I feel very much me already...."

"I'm going to be a soldier," said Polkinghorne, serenely missing any metaphysical proposition. He looked forward, on the strength of a Scottish mother, to joining a Highland regiment, and was known to shave his knees twice a week to make them of a manly hairiness against the donning of a kilt.

"I shall have to go into the City like my guv'nor, I suppose," admitted little Moss, "but I don't see why one shouldn't be the kind of chap one wants all the same. Your father's in the city, too, isn't he, Killigrew?"

"Yes, but that's no reason why I should be, and I'm jolly well not going to. I'm going to be an artist like Turner...." And Killigrew's voice unconsciously took on a singing inflection of rapture.

"There's no doubt about old Carminow, anyway," observed Polkinghorne, to be greeted with laughter. For Carminow, though the gentlest of creatures, took an extraordinary delight in all the agonies of human nature. Mine accidents had hardly occurred before Carminow, by some subtle agency, seemed aware of them, and had rushed to the scene, out of bounds or not. It was with genuine simplicity that he once bewailed the fact that it had been "an awfully dull half—no one had been killed for miles around." It was he, too, on the occasion of a terrible tragedy in the High Street, when Teague the baker had been killed by the lashing hoofs of his new horse, who had rushed out to superintend the removal of the body. The widow, clamorous with her sudden grief, had seized his arm, exclaiming "Oh, Master

Carminow, whatever shall I do; whatever shall I do?" and, in all good faith he, his soul still unsatisfied by the view of the corpse, had replied kindly: "Do? Why, Mrs. Teague, if I were you I should have him opened...."

The story had lived against Carminow, and when in doubt about any course of action he was always advised to "have it opened." He did not join now in the laugh, but said seriously, failing, as always, to pronounce the letter "r":

"Of course I shall be a doctor. Last holidays I went a lot to Guy's where I have a chum, and I saw a lot of dissecting. Do you know that when they dissect 'em they stick a sort of squirt in their chests and draw off all the blood? I've got a theory that I mean to put into practice some day. It seemed to me such a shame that all that good blood should go to waste like that, and it occurred to me what a splendid thing it would be if, instead of doing nothing with murderers but kill 'em, they drew off their blood while it was still warm and pumped it into famous men, great generals and people like that, who were getting old and feeble. Most murderers are thundering stout fellows, you know."

"How horrid you are, Carminow!" cried Hilaria. "I shouldn't think a great man would at all like having a murderer's blood in his veins. I'm sure my darling Lord Palmerston wouldn't."

"Oh, I don't say it's possible at present," replied Carminow placidly, "but when surgeons know their business it will be. One must look at these things from a purely utilitarian standpoint."

Ishmael said nothing. He was lying on his back again, folded arms beneath his head, staring at the glory of the west that had passed from liquid fire to the feather-softness of the sun's aftermath. The presence of the others hardly impinged on his consciousness; vaguely he heard their voices coming from a long way off. One of his moods of exaltation, that only the very young know, was upon him—a state which amounts to intoxication and to recapture any glow of which older people have to be artificially stimulated. That is really the great dividing-line—when the sparkle, the lightness, the sharpened sense which stimulates brain and tongue and feeling, ceases to respond without a flick of help from the right touch of alcohol. That intoxication of sheer living was upon Ishmael now, as it had been on that long-ago evening when the Neck had been cried, as it had a few times since, with music, or a windy sun, or a bathe in rough sea, or some sudden phrase in a book. A something glamorous in the light, the low accents of Hilaria's voice and the stirring quality of what she read, the reaction, had he but known it, from the shock of suspicion occasioned by what she had told him, the cumulative effect of the exalted thoughts of the past weeks, all these things, added to his own rising powers and urgent youth, welled within him and mounted to his brain. He felt tingling with power as he lay there, apparently lax; it seemed to him he could hear the blood leaping in his veins and the beating of his pulses all over his body, could hear the faintest sound of calling lamb or far-off owl, could catch, with ears refined to a demigod's, the ineffably quiet rubbing of the millions of grass-blades, as though he could almost hear the evening falling.... From afar came the babble of the others as to what they might think they were going to be; for himself he could be anything, scale any heights, beat triumphantly through all things. He felt the swelling earth bearing him up, as though he were one with its strength and fertility, one with its irresistible march. He felt the sword-chill breath of the spring wind on his brow; he saw the first faint pricking of the earliest stars, and the rolling up of the sky as the great cumuli massed overhead; and he felt as though he too could sweep into them and be of them. Life was before him for him to do what he liked with. He laughed aloud and rolled over a little, flinging his arms wide. A stinging blow came on his cheek, and he heard Doughty's angry voice crying, "Take that!" and a sharp sound from Hilaria.

"Well, what's he want to laugh at me for? I'll teach him—" came Doughty's voice again. Ishmael had scrambled up; his blood was still singing in his veins; he felt no dismay at the sight of the looming Doughty.

"Don't be an ass, Doughty," said Polkinghorne sharply; "and if you can't help being a cad, wait till Miss Eliot isn't present."

"Oh, never mind about me; I want to see you *kill* him, Ishmael!" cried Hilaria viciously.

"Well, why did you want to laugh when Doughty said that?" asked Polkinghorne judicially.

"Said what?" asked Ishmael.

"Why, that he was just going to be a gentleman."

"Did he say that? I didn't hear him. But I should have laughed if I had...."

Killigrew stared at his friend in amazement. Was this the Ishmael who a half-hour or so ago had put forward the theory that one should never fight till one was sure of winning? He did not know that the wine in Ishmael's brain at that minute was the headiest in the world, the most sure in imparting sense of power—the sudden up-welling of the joy of life. It was Doughty's turn to laugh now; he seemed suddenly to have recovered poise.

"I forgot—you'd be such a good judge of a gentleman—with your family history," he said.

The singing went from Ishmael's being, but something hot came up through him like a tide. "What d'you mean by that?" he asked, and still in his passionate dislike of the other did not see what was opening at his feet.

"Only that a fellow with a pack of bastard brothers must have had just the father and mother to teach him...."

There was a moment's silence; the boys all felt intensely uncomfortable, not so much even at Hilaria's presence as at this sudden nakedness of thought and emotion. Doughty, set on justifying himself at least as far as accuracy went, held on. "I heard it at once when I went to my uncle's at Penzance last holidays. Everyone knows it down there. Of course Ruan knew it all along; he's been kidding all you fellows. He's no right in a school for gentlemen at all. His father married his mother when he was dying and all the brats but him were already born. That's why Ruan's being brought up a gentleman—because he's the only one who's not a bastard."

"Shut your foul mouth," ordered Polkinghorne angrily. "Hilaria, let me—"

"It's not true," cried Hilaria. "Tell them it's not true, Ishmael."

Killigrew had the quicker instinct. "What does it matter if it's true or not?" he asked. "We all know Ruan, and we think he's an awfully nice chap, and nothing else is any affair of ours. We don't care what Doughty's father and mother are, because we don't like him; we don't care what Ruan's are because we do like him. Personally, I don't see why Ruan should mind either. The thing doesn't alter him at all."

But that was exactly what Ishmael felt it did, though how he could not yet have told. Although he never doubted what he heard, it seemed to him like a dream that he had dreamt long ago and forgotten. It was a curious sense of unreality that impressed him most, that feeling of "This cannot really have happened to me ..." that everyone knows in the first moment of disaster. It was this sensation, not any temporising or actual disbelief, that kept him still motionless, staring. Polkinghorne began to feel the proprieties outraged by this immobility.

"I say," he began, "you can't take no notice ...; he's said things about your people, you know—about your mother ..."

For in common with many male creatures, men and boys, Polkinghorne, though not feeling more than others any particular sentiment beyond affection for his mother, yet held the point of honour, perhaps dating from ancient days of matriarchy, that an insult to one's mother was the deepest to oneself. Ishmael, too honest to be influenced by this consideration, yet felt constrained by the weight of public opinion. Also he was still upon the uplift of his mood; his blood tingled the more for the mental shock that had numbed his reasoning faculties. As in his turn he hit Doughty's cheek he felt a little glow at his own carelessness of consequences. Polkinghorne was beginning to feel worried, because seen together it was plain that the big Doughty overtopped Ishmael by nearly a head. Suddenly he had an inspiration and threw himself between them as Doughty swung out at the younger boy, thereby incidentally getting the blow himself.

"I'll lick you for that later, Doughty," he ejaculated. "Meanwhile, kindly shut up while I say something. Ruan can't fight you—"

"Can't he? Then what did he hit me for?"

"I can fight him all right, thanks," said Ishmael.

"But he can wrestle you," went on Polkinghorne imperturbably, "because he's a clever wrestler and he'll stand a fair chance. You can take it or leave it, but if you leave it I'll give you a thrashing for the honour of the school."

A murmur of assent came from the others, who saw an impossibly difficult situation thus in a way to be solved as far as the two principals in the quarrel were concerned, while to themselves it gave time to adjust their attitude, which they did not all take as simply as had Killigrew. In a fight Doughty's superior size would have given him all the advantage; in the West Country method of wrestling this

would not necessarily hold true. And Ishmael was in far better condition.

Polkinghorne turned to Hilaria.

"Someone will see you home, of course," he said politely. "I shall have to stay as stickler, and Carminow as well, but I'll send Moss and the young 'un with you. And mind you keep your jaws shut about it when you get back to the school, you two."

Polkinghorne minor and Moss both looked considerably taken aback, but not more so than Hilaria. "Oh, I must stay, Polkinghorne," she pleaded, feeling for the first time a terrible sensation of not being wanted, of an unimportance essential to her sex and beyond her power to alter whatever her tastes or her justifiable reliance on her own nerves. But Polkinghorne, backed by Killigrew and Ishmael himself, was adamant, though Carminow saw no reason why she should not stay if it interested her. They stood waiting till her crinoline, like a huge piece of blown thistledown, had swayed around a curve of the path which hid it and the two little boys from sight, and then they prepared for business.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WRESTLING

It was growing swiftly dusk, though the amphitheatre of turf where the boys stood, cupped the last of the light from the west, backed as it was by the semi-circle of tall rocks.

Polkinghorne made a quick survey of the place, then placed his men so that the light fell sideways, not directly upon either face.

"Shoes off, Doughty!" he ordered. "None of your nasty Devonshire ways here!" For the Devon rules admit kicking, and that with shoes, while Cornish, though allowing leg-play, insist it should be in stocking-feet, and consist of tripping and locking only. The whole West Country style of wrestling differs enormously from the North Country, in which Ishmael would have stood a poor chance against an opponent so much his superior in size. In the West they play for a hitch, instead of trying for a fall by sheer strength and weight, and if the smaller wrestler has a stock of good holds, and can only get under his opponent quickly enough, he may bring off the "flying mare," the great throw clear over the shoulder. Leg-play is the great feature, even in Cornwall, where prominence is given to the hug, and Ishmael had very strong legs, though his shoulders were not so heavy as Doughty's.

He took his stand opposite Doughty. He had never wrestled with him before, but he had had much practice with boys of all builds. He eyed him closely and knew his best chance lay in trying to rush him so as to get under him and with a good inside lock of the leg trip him up. In shoulder play he would otherwise stand small chance with one so much taller. Doughty's best plan would be to stand off him, a thing not possible in North Country wrestling. In the West a special jacket of strong linen is worn for the taking of hitches, and Polkinghorne made the two boys pull out their shirts as the nearest approach to it. All was arranged to the satisfaction of the three who were acting as "sticklers," and in what seemed to Ishmael the flashing of a moment he and Doughty were crouching, cat-like, opposite each other, legs bent, arms out, hands tense. They stood so for what seemed minutes, though it was only a fraction of the time that had gone in the preparations. Ishmael felt no fear of Doughty; exhilaration was still strong enough within him to eliminate that dread, though the fear of losing that always pricks at the fighter was not quite deadened. He circled, still in that cat-like attitude, Doughty circling also, both waiting to spring. Ishmael was intensely aware of superficial physical sensations—the tense feeling in his skin, and under the soles of his feet the hardness of the ground. He spread his feet a little and moved his toes against the grass. All his muscles were on the alert, and suddenly, from acute consciousness of every fibre of his body, he passed to a splendid lightness, a complete ignoring of anything but poise and spring. In that moment, so swiftly on the edge of the first circling movement that Doughty, the slower of communication from brain to limbs, thought it the same, he had rushed for his hitch.

He got him by the sleeve, and Doughty, surprised at the quick hold, shyed away, but could not twist out of it. He grappled Ishmael more closely to try and get full shoulder-play, but the only result was that each obtained a hitch on the arm and breast of the other's shirt. The "flying mare" was now out of the question for Ishmael this round, but with a dexterous twist of his leg he got an inside lock on his opponent's, and the next moment Doughty was sprawling. He was up the second after, and, since his

shoulders had not touched the ground, the fall counted for nothing, and this time he rushed in at Ishmael. He was very angry.

He stooped more, so as to keep his legs out of Ishmael's reach, and the two strained to try and over-balance each other's body, using the ordinary arm and breast hold. Ishmael, after a few moments of this immobile straining, let go Doughty's arm to seize him by the back of the collar, and Doughty, profiting in a flash by the steeper angle of inclination, caught him square under the arms and raised him bodily in the air.

Ishmael hung on grimly, making no effort to disengage himself, which would only have given Doughty the further purchase needed to throw him. Instead he began to work round in the other's arms. As soon as he had sufficient twist on his hips he entwined his feet round Doughty's knees, and with an effort that caused the blood to suffuse his face and neck—for Doughty was fighting the movement with relentless pressure—he got himself, by the hold his legs gave him, round so that his shoulders instead of his chest were against the chest of his upholder. He flung his arms backwards round Doughty's fore-arms, thus keeping himself pressed upon the other, his stomach arched outwards, his legs curled back each side round the other's knees, his arms, also backwards, pressing the other's torso in a curve that followed and supported his own with the disadvantage of having his full weight upon it.

They stayed apparently motionless, breathing heavily, save for that laboured sound seeming like wrestlers of bronze. Slowly Doughty began to feel his balance slipping from him under the full weight of Ishmael upon his chest and stomach; his spine felt as though if it curved a fraction more it would crack. He could not move his feet for the strong coil of Ishmael's legs around his, and he knew that in a moment more he must fall backwards with the weight still upon him. The only joints in which he still had play were his ankles; stiffening them he began to incline forwards. Slowly the interlocked bodies, like a swaying tower, came up and up, till the watchers caught their breath wondering what would happen to the one who was undermost in the fall if both stayed so unyielding.

But Ishmael, whose brain was working with that clarity only attained when it is responding to trained instinct, almost mechanically relaxed his grip on the other's spine when he felt the angle coming forward, then, using all his nerve, he waited—waited till the forward angle, in which he was the underneath, had become acute, till the momentum of the fall had begun. Then he relaxed his grip on one of Doughty's legs, at the same time forcing the other outwards with all the strength of his foot and leg. Doughty had to unstiffen a knee to prevent himself coming taut and prone on the ground, and a hard shove with Ishmael's elbow, thrown backwards against his shoulder, combined with the leg-play to send him spinning sideways. The momentum was too great for him to regulate the fall, and he came fairly on both shoulders, while Ishmael, who had been thrown forwards on one knee, picked himself up and stood reeling slightly but unhurt.

The sticklers ran forward to help Doughty to his feet, but he lay motionless, eyes closed. In his mind, as he lay there, worked the thought that he did not wish either to go on with the fight or to let Ishmael triumph as at an easy victory. He would frighten him, frighten them all, by making out he was very badly hurt. His spine, that would do.... Opening his eyes he murmured, "My back ... my back ..." and made as though trying to move. A terrible pang shot through his spine as he did so. His next cry was a scream of real pain and fear. The tears gathered in his eyes with his rage and terror. He cried, "You've done for me; you've broken my back! Oh, my back; curse you, my back!..."

The others were terrified. For the second time that evening Ishmael was seized by the awful feeling of irrevocableness, of an impossible thing having happened and of it being still more impossible to undo it.

It had become dark with an effect of suddenness to those who had been intent on other things than the progress of the night; and it seemed to Ishmael that the whole world was narrowed to a circle of dim moor, in the midst of it that white thing crying about its back—always its back....

Carminow, the least perturbed, insisted on raising the sufferer to his feet, and it was found, after much protest on his part, that he could walk slowly with support on either side. It only remained to get him back to the school somehow and in at the side door to his bed and the ministrations of the matron if not the doctor.

The little procession began to move off, Polkinghorne and Carminow, the two biggest, carrying Doughty on their crossed hands, and progressing with a slow sideways motion, trying not to stumble over the uneven ground. Killigrew ran on ahead to warn the matron and urge her to silence, in case the injury might turn out to be but slight after all.

A miserable loneliness fell upon Ishmael. He had won, and none of the sweets of victory were his. He lagged behind. There was a rustle at his side, and Hilaria's hands were round his arm.

"What on earth—" he began—angry, confused, aware that tears were burning in his eyes.

"Don't be cross.... I had to stay. I was up on the boulders. Oh, Ishmael, have you killed him?"

The question jangled his frightened nerves, and he answered sharply, telling her he neither knew nor cared, even while he was shaking with the fear lest what she suggested might be true. "I'll say something to those youngsters for having let you stay," he added, catching sight of Polkinghorne minor and Moss, where they hesitated in the shadows.

"As though they could have prevented me!" she said, with swift scorn. He looked at her more closely, struck by a something strange about her, and saw that her skirts no longer swelled triumphantly on either side, but fell limply, and so long that she had to hold them up when she took a step forward by his side.

"I couldn't climb on the boulders in it," she said, answering his look. "I made the boys turn their backs and I took it off."

"Well, I imagine you can't go home without it," said Ishmael wearily. He supposed he would have to see her home, for it was already past the time for the younger boys to be in. He felt he hated girls and the bother that they were.

"Cut off in, you two," he ordered; "and mind, if you blab about Hilaria having been here I'll baste you."

They promised eagerly, and Hilaria thanked him in a subdued voice. She went through the darkness to where she had left her crinoline. They found it lying, wet with dew, a prostrate system of ugly rings, held together by webbing. It looked incredibly naked, a hollow mockery of the portentous dome it had stood for in the eyes of the world.

He slung it over one shoulder without a word, inwardly resenting bitterly the touch of the ludicrous it gave to the evening's happenings, and almost silently he went with the stumbling girl towards the town, only leaving her at the corner of her lane. She thanked him with a new shyness, and taking the cumbrous emblem of her inferiority over her left arm, held out her strong hard little right hand to him.

"Don't think it horrid of me to have stayed," she pleaded. "It was that I so wanted you to win ... I was afraid ..."

"It was very—very unladylike," began Ishmael, then paused. Till that moment he and she had equally despised anything ladylike.... Now he had become a man, with a man's dislike of anything conspicuous in his womenkind. Something of the woman came to Hilaria, but whereas with him adolescence had meant the awakening of the merely male, with her it brought a first touch of the mother. She urged her own cause no more.

"Don't worry, Ishmael," she said. "Father has often told me of people hurting their backs wrestling and doing things like that, and he says it's very seldom anything. If it is they can't walk at all, and he walked quite well. Besides, I know he's pretending it's worse than it is to upset you; he's that sort...."

Ishmael felt a little pang of gratitude, he gripped her hand, muttered a "good-night," and was off through the darkness. But he did not go back to the school for an hour yet. He was in for such trouble an hour more or less after time made no difference, and he was past thinking in terms of the clock. He had grown up violently and painfully in a short space, and ordinary methods of measuring time mean very little to one who has crowded years of growth into one evening. He walked about the moor till physical exhaustion drove him in, where Old Tring, with a glance at him, gave him hot brandy and water and sent him to bed with hardly a word. Not till next day did Ishmael notice he was lame in one knee.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WIND UPON THE GRASS-FIELD

A week after the fight Ishmael went over the moor to the sea. Everything was very still, even his footsteps were soundless on the thick turf. It was one of those days filled with a warm mist, so fine it

cannot be observed near at hand, but always seeming to encircle the walker, as though he carried some charm to make a hollow space around him where the breath of the mist may not live. Yet, out in it for long, the clothes become sodden, while every grass-blade and leaf can be seen to hold its burden of a glittering drop, though the earth itself remains dry and powdery and on the hard, pale roads the dust lies all day, as though the actual soil were not of the texture to respond to a mist so fine.

Not a breath blew the vaporous clouds in the wreaths that usually change shapes while one watches, and the long drifts in the valley at Ishmael's feet hung motionless in the air, the dark side of the opposite slope showed here and there, crossed by the pale zig-zag of the path. He went on to the cliff's edge; far below at its foot the sea, lost further out, was visible, motionless and soundless, save for the faint rustle where it impinged upon the cliff in a narrow line of white. No outward pull or inward swell of the sea's breast was visible; it was as though that fine edge of murmurous whiteness were always made of the same particles of water, hissing perpetually along the cliff's foot.

Ishmael lay down on the damp young bracken and listened to the stillness that was only pierced by the rare wail of a syren far out to sea and the steady moan of the horn from the lighthouse. He felt as dead as the world seemed, as grey, as lost to all rousing; and, ignorant of reactions, wondered why, and whether henceforth he would always be like that.

He was suffering from too much fuss. In the days which had elapsed since the wrestling bout on the moor Doughty's injury had seemed likely to prove a bad sprain, but there had been a terrible twenty-four hours when the doctor, a portentous person with more pessimism than knowledge, had wagged his head forebodingly over the moaning patient. Doughty had felt it was not in nature for anyone to be severe on a boy with an injured back, and so he babbled freely, under cover of a pretended delirium, feeling it was better to let his version get first to Old Tring. For he guessed how that personage, always one to examine the springs of action before judgment, would look at his share in the matter. Dr. Harvey had asked for a famous Plymouth surgeon to be sent for, and this afternoon he had arrived. On his verdict as to Doughty's condition depended Ishmael's own fate, and he knew it. For, whatever the provocation, the fact remained that Ishmael had injured a schoolfellow in a wrestling match admittedly serious in its intent, and the discipline of the school had to be considered, all the more rigidly that many rumours, mostly untrue, had circulated in the school. Old Tring had suspended judgment, merely sending for Boase, who had arrived one evening at St. Renny covered with smuts and giving freely his opinions about the railway, on which, for motives of Christian poverty, he had been rash enough to travel in one of the unroofed third class compartments.

And, for the first time in his knowledge, Ishmael was aware that the Parson had not quite understood. It was not that he did not understand what Ishmael felt as much as that he expected him to feel so much more than he did. Ishmael loathed a fuss. Yet the Parson had been a rock of support; Old Tring had been generosity itself; Polkinghorne and Carminow, even the little boys, had held their tongues and let him see that for their part they intended to think no more of what Doughty had said. Killigrew had treated the whole affair as something between a joke and a matter so unimportant it made really no difference to anyone. And of all the attitudes it was Killigrew's, in the revulsion from fuss, that Ishmael was beginning to adopt as his own. The only burning thing he felt about his position was anger—an anger against his father in the first place and against Archelaus, oddly enough, in the second. He knew that his eldest brother would do all in his power to make life as difficult as possible when he went back to take up the reins at Cloom. With that burning grudge went another sensation—the realisation that if all things had been otherwise, been normal, Cloom would, after all, never have been his, and he was struck by a certain unfairness that it should be his now.

But of any shame at his position he felt none, and it was this that apparently he was expected to feel by all save Killigrew. They were all so eager to make him understand that there was nothing for him to feel ashamed about, that no one thought any the less of him or wanted him to think any less of himself. Ishmael began to discover what he never, being very un-self-analytical, fully realised, that he was one of those elect souls born without that gift of the Evil One—shame. Some attain that freedom by hard striving, but some are born free, and of them was Ishmael.

Now, as he lay upon the cliff, all the embarrassment he felt was at this set of emotions that was expected to rack him and did not. He was not yet old enough to have the courage of his lack of convictions, and he feared he had failed in something a finer creature would have responded to. He rolled over on to his elbows and stared at the pale faces of a clump of wet primroses that stared back at him with an equal innocence of emotion. Beyond them the wild violets gleamed like faint blue flames, and the tightly-curved fronds of young bracken showed silvery grey amongst the litter of last year's stalks that lay in patches of a dead burnt-orange upon the grey-green turf. Ishmael spread his fingers wide and plunged them in the primroses, in the grass, in the loose soil, for the pleasure of their soft, clean textures. He rubbed his face in them like a young animal, and drew in deep breaths of the best smell in the world—the smell of damp, green growing things. He turned on to his back again. The mist

had begun to waver, a breath was stirring fitfully but finely. It came cool upon him, and as it blew the world seemed very gently to come to life again. He could see what he had come to look at and overshot in the mist—the little harbour of Povah lying to his left. He rolled over and stared curiously at its stone jetties and clustered shipping. There were a couple of schooners used in the china-clay trade lying at the quayside; at anchor was a barquentine, a big bluff-bellied tramp of a creature, black with coaldust, and beyond her again what was still a rare sight in those parts—a steamer. She was a side-wheeler, with a thin raking funnel, and was square-rigged on her fore-mast, fore-and-aft on her mizzen. A little crowd stood on the end of the quay to stare at her, and it was on her that Ishmael too fixed his eyes; then he scrambled up and made his way diagonally down the cliff to the harbour.

It had occurred to him to run away to sea. He was of the land and knew nothing about ships, but he had often read of boys who ran away to sea—they shipped as cabin-boys and often were killed by the rough life or never heard of again. A sick wave of self-pity flooded Ishmael as he thought of it. He whose salvation was that he so seldom saw himself from the outside—unlike Killigrew, the feeder on emotion, now was aware of the poetic fitness of the story—the proud boy who sooner than live with dishonour had left home and friends to face the wide world and roam, a veritable Ishmael. Adventure began to call to him; the salt on his lips as he licked them seemed its very tang. He was big and strong, and had no fear of hard living; neither was he fearful physically. On one thing he was determined—not to stay to be expelled and then be taken ignominiously back to Cloom and the jeers of his family.

But deep down in him his ineradicable honesty kept nagging at him, telling that this new sea-lure was all make-believe, that not that way for him did happiness lie. Yet he kept on, always with a tingle of excitement mingling with an undercurrent of disbelief in the reality of it all, and made his way to the quayside determined to talk to the sailors and introduce the subject of a new hand.... Half an hour later he came away, after a desultory though interesting enough conversation in which his project had never got past his tongue. Through no cowardice or dread, he had simply not been able to broach it. He stared back at the ship when he paused on the crest of the hill, trying to puzzle out what was struggling for recognition in him. Dimly it began to dawn on him that there are only two ways for a man to live fully. The first is by being rooted to a spot that is everything to him, by which he makes his bread, by which and on which he lives, so that its well-being is as that of himself; and the second is by calling no place home, wandering the world over and remaining always free. The way which lies betwixt these two—that of hiring this house or that, putting belongings about it and being attached to it by purely artificial ties of expediency and rent, a house that was born of the thought of some unknown, the fabric of whose ground is nothing to him who hires it—this way, which is the way of nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand, is false and unsatisfying. It would be splendid to have two lives and give one to each of the primary ways, to live once by the soil and once by the sea; but that is a thing that can happen to no man. He may wander till he is ageing and then "settle down," but that is a different affair. Ishmael was born of the soil; Cloom, not only by inheritance, but by his peculiar training, meant his life. With a sensation of something clogging, but infinitely satisfying too, he admitted it. Cloom had been too strong for him.

It was the only time another path ever even suggested itself to him, and then the suggestion had not been sincere, merely the promptings of that literary sense which is in all imaginative youth. It prompted, too, not so worthily, in an aspect of his new knowledge that did not escape him—a certain romance about it, a feeling that it made him rather interesting, something of a figure.... He would not have been human had he quite escaped that at his age. And yet it was that feeling no one but Killigrew, who frankly mooted it, had a suspicion of as possible, so Ishmael realised with shame. Also his commonsense told him that the sordid and quite unromantic incidents were likely to pile up more thickly than any of charm or pleasure. His was an admirable position for any one who loved self-pity; he would be able to see himself as a romantic centre, to feed on misunderstanding and enjoy a self-conscious isolation.

That was the real danger, one that the Parson, who was in some matters of a beautiful simplicity, had never realised. He had only foreseen the straightforward shames and difficulties, and by these Ishmael was at an age to be untouched, while he was just ripe for the former snare.

He walked over the moor and rejoined the St. Renny track with the sense of relief that we all get when one of two ways has been definitely discarded. He had even ceased to worry over what decision Old Tring had come to, though when he made out the Parson's figure coming towards him his heart gave a leap and then beat more quickly than its wont. He hastened his steps to meet him.

Boase waved his hat in a gesture of triumph, as though to signal that all was well, and his first shouted words told Ishmael that this was not to be the end of his career at St. Renny. With the knowledge went a queer little pang of disappointment; he had so been accustoming his mind to the glamour of expulsion in circumstances such as his. The Parson, in whose philosophy it would have held nothing but disaster, was beaming with joy. He sat down on a stretch of turf and Ishmael lay beside

him, waiting.

"In the first place, the injury isn't serious. Carron, the surgeon from Plymouth, says it's nothing in the world but a muscle torn away, that is painful but not dangerous. He says he does not know why the boy made such a fuss; he can see nothing to account for delirium. I could have given a guess, but refrained.... Anyway, I've been having a talk with Dr. Tring—"

Ishmael kept an ungrateful silence; it seemed to him that week had been all talks.

The Parson waited a second and then, with a tiny pang of disappointment, went on:

"It is to be all right; everything is to be as it was before. I know you feel that is impossible, but it will hurt less and less with time, believe me. Character is what counts in the long run, Ishmael. And I have seen—I can't tell you how proudly—that you have character, that it has made its mark here. That shows in the way this affair has been taken. So pull yourself together; tell yourself how little it all really matters, and you'll find it is so."

A wave of affection for his friend went over Ishmael as he listened to the words that really fitted his case so little and were so kindly spoken. He felt in a flat muddle, unaware whether he wished he did feel all he was expected to or glad he did not; but one good thing the Parson's words accomplished. They purged him of the artificial standpoint of the afternoon. It was impossible for one as naturally direct as Ishmael to be in contact with so much of singleness of purpose as the Parson's and not be ashamed of his own impulses towards theatrical vision. He turned his head away to hide his emotion, which the Parson took to spring from the news he had imparted and welcomed with relief. He took the boy's hand and pressed it, a thing rare for him, who was so sensitive of others' wishes he generally left physical expression to them in the first place.

"Shall we be getting back?" he said, after a moment.

As they were walking over the moor a gleam of sun shone out, wavered, then strengthened, and before a soft breeze the mist began to vanish, only clinging here and there in the pockets of the moor like fine white wool rubbed off the backs of phantom sheep. For a while they strode in silence; then the Parson said:

"By the way, you know old Mr. Eliot's daughter, don't you? Tring told me she went to the dancing classes."

"Yes.... Why?" Ishmael asked in sudden alarm.

If it had all come out—to have a girl mixed up in this story of his—the ignominy of it! The next moment with his relief mingled a contrition for his selfish impulse when Boase replied: "She's not well, apparently. Her father made Carron have a look at her; he's no faith in Harvey. Seems she's been doing too much for her strength—walking too far. She appears to think nothing of ten to fifteen miles."

"There's nothing wrong, really wrong, is there?"

"Oh, no, only they think change of air will be good for her and more rest. She's to go on a long visit to some relations in France. I don't know what she'll think of the change, a girl like that. She's a splendid creature."

"Have you met her?" asked Ishmael in surprise.

"Why, yes. Her father seemed to think she was a little hysterical and asked me to see if she would talk to me...."

"More talking ..." thought Ishmael.

"I don't think her at all hysterical. It seemed to me more physical. In fact, I suggested Mr. Carron. But I think there's nothing like a thorough change. Her father'll miss her, I fear, though."

Ishmael had a sly chuckle as he thought of others who would do likewise, and, catching a twinkle in the Parson's eye, it occurred to him for the first time that day that perhaps all the subtlety of the race was not confined to those of the age of himself and Killigrew. He grew a little hot; then the Parson began to speak on another theme, and he thought no more of Hilaria. He was to think of her less and less as the months during which she never came back to St. Renny went by, and he did not guess how he was to hear of her again.

"About your confirmation," the Parson was saying. "This affair will make no difference. There is no real reason why it should be put off. Dr. Tring quite agrees with me. You are in the same mind about it,

eh?"

Ishmael, who was feeling more and more as though the past week had been a grisly burden that was slipping off him like a bad dream, acquiesced in a rush of eager thankfulness. The complications of life were beginning to unfold in front of him, and both by training and heredity he turned to the things that bore relation elsewhere but in this life for a solution.

"I want to be decent ..." was all he said gruffly, but with a something so youthful in manner and sentiment that Boase had a yearning over him as in the days when he had been a little boy.

"Let me say one thing to you, Ishmael. I have said it before, but when you were less able to understand. You will meet people—men—who will tell you no man can keep altogether a rigid straightness in matters that, as you know, I hold important. You will meet women who will condone this view and tell you that they do not expect it, that men are 'different,' and that they would not even have it otherwise. Do not believe them. It may be true of some men, though, if they were brought up with other ideals, it would not be true of nearly as many as it is now. But it will not, I think, be true of you, which is all you are concerned with. Your very position should make you more scrupulous than most men. You have had a shock, I know, but has it yet occurred to you to think over the effect your father's conduct has had on those other lives—your brothers' and your sister's?"

"No," confessed Ishmael.

"Try. You are not fond of Archelaus, I know, and there is no reason why you should be. But try and see his point of view. He has the attachment to Cloom that you have—not the same kind; he would never have felt it a trust or something to be made better for its own sake, but he does feel he has a right to it, and that is a hard thing to bear. Ishmael, all this misery, the reason why your brothers have not been brought up as you have, with the same advantages, which now they can never gain all their lives long, the reason why Vassie, who is clever and pretty, will have a difficulty in getting a husband worthy of her, is because your father lived according to the law of the flesh instead of the spirit. Never place any child of yours in that position."

"I never will, I promise. But, I say, you know, Da Boase"—the childhood name slipped out unawares—"I don't think I care about that sort of thing—girls and all that. Not like Killigrew."

The Parson hid a smile. "You will not ripen as early as Killigrew, in all probability," he said, "but one does not have a temper such as yours without other passions. There is another thing. Men of the world—Killigrew, when he is a little older—will tell you that it is possible and right to gratify those passions at less cost than the embroilment your father made about him. Casual intercourse where no such question arises.... Do not listen to that either. If it is possible for you to be one of those who carry an undimmed banner, do. People often talk as though purity were negative, whereas it is very actual. Keep it as a beautiful thing that once lost is gone for ever at whatever gain of experience or even understanding."

"I really don't want that sort of thing," persisted Ishmael a little outraged he should not be thought to know best.

"However that may be," said the Parson, rather sharply, "different by nature or grace, you should never let your difference make you feel superior. A person who despises or fails to sympathise with all the sorrow and the sin in the lives of others is the worst of sinners. There are even times when chastity can be very chill and bare, though purity is always lovely."

"But you were saying—" began Ishmael, then stopped. "I think I do know what you mean," he said more humbly. The Parson made no reply, but, stopping in his walk, looked over a low wall of loose granite and laid his arms along it. "Come and look here a minute," he said.

The sun had died away, but the mist had not returned, and a still greyness held the world in the low-lying part of the moor which they had reached.

Fields lay on one side and stretched in a parti-coloured patterning over the slope before them as they leant upon the wall. The breeze, too, seemed not to stir there, as though the pearly greyness that seemed to tinge the very air were a blight that lay on sound and motion as well as sight. No breath stirred strong enough to lift the petals of the gorse-blossoms by the wall, or rustle the wayside plants. The only movement came from a field of long grass on the slope—one of the pattern of fields, newly-ploughed, short-turfed, or misted with green from the three-weeks-old corn springing a few inches high, a pattern that lay like a coverlet drawn over the rounded flank of the hill. And over that one field movement was busy—the rank grass was exactly the length, density, texture, to respond to what imperceptible breath there was, and that grass only. Over and over it passed the silvery waves made by the bending of the blades, over and over, always rippling up the slope till it looked as though a film of

smoke were perpetually being blown from below to vanish over the crest. Ripple after ripple, ripple after ripple, shivered up the slope and was gone—the field shuddered and breathed with it; there was something uncanny about this silent unceasing movement in the dead landscape—this visible effect of an invisible thing.

"We're most of us too full of effort," said the Parson abruptly; "we think too much of trying to be good, of whether what we are going to do is right or wrong. Whereas if we only got our minds into the right attitude the rest would follow naturally and be worth all the striving. If we could only be more flower-like—let ourselves grow and blossom. Look at that field, the only thing moving; d'you see it? Well, it's rippling like that all by itself because it's the only thing able to answer to the little breath that's abroad. If you get yourself sound and right and don't worry about yourself, then you respond to the breath of the Spirit, like that grass. For the wind bloweth where it listeth...."

He fell into a silence, and Ishmael, stirred out of the crust of depression which had held him so many days, felt all his heart and high hopes, his eagerness for life and its possibilities, stirring within him again. He drew a deep breath and stretched widely, sloughing off mental sloth in the physical act as young things can. He felt more alive because more conscious of himself and his surroundings than ever before, eager and ready to take up the remainder of his time at St. Renny. He stirred a little by the Parson's side.

Boase brought his thought to an ending with the rest of the quotation: "So is everyone that is born of the Spirit...."

BOOK II

GROWTH

CHAPTER I

A FAMILY ALBUM

Vassilissa Beggoe stooped to take a final look at herself in the small mirror, for she was so tall that, in her flowery bonnet that swooped upwards from her piled chignon, she nearly touched the sloping roof of her bedroom. She stooped and gave a glow—half smile, half a quickening of light, over her whole face—at what she saw in the cloudy glass, which could not materially dim her white and gold splendour. A slight thickness of modelling here and there, notably in the short nose and too-rounded chin, blurred the fineness of her beauty and might make for hardness later on, but now, at twenty-one, Vassie's wonderful skin and her splendid assurance were too dazzling for criticism to look at her and live. She gave a pat, more approbation than correction, to a rose on the bonnet, smoothed the lapels of her Alexandra jacket—so-called after the newly-made Princess of Wales—and pulled up her gloves under its pegtop sleeves. Then she turned with a swoop and a swish of her wide blue taffeta skirts.

"There!" she exclaimed in the studiously clear notes she had not been able to free from a slight metallic quality; "that's not so bad a sight to go and meet a little brother, I believe?"

The younger, softer, slighter bit of femininity on the bed gave a gentle little sound that meant admiration, and clasped a pair of dimpled, not very clean, little hands together.

"You're beautiful, Vassie, just beautiful. And just like a lady...."

"I am a lady," said Vassie sharply. "How am I not a lady, I should like to know? Haven't I been four years in a boarding-school, and don't I go and stay with a clergyman's family in Plymouth? A lady.... When I was at Plymouth last month for the Prince's wedding celebrations one of the officers of a battleship asked who I was!"

"I know, you've told me. Vassie—"

"Well?"

"Nothing. Only I sometimes wonder why you've never got wed up there to Plymouth. One of those officers, or perhaps a clergyman...?"

Vassie rather wondered herself, but all she said was: "I'm not going to give up my freedom for the first man who lifts his little finger, I can tell you. I haven't such a great opinion of the menfolk. Conceited creatures, the most of them. I mean to pick and choose. And I mean Ishmael to help me."

"Oh, Vassie, how?" came from the wide-eyed listener on the bed.

"Why, I shall make him bring his school friends down, of course. They're all gentlemen. And then I shall make them fall in love with me."

"But won't they be a lot younger than you, Vassie? You're three years older'n Ishmael."

"Some of 'em may be older than him, mayn't they? And one thing leads to another. We might both get asked to stay with their folks. Besides—I don't know that I should mind a man younger than me. I'd know more what to do with him. I've always found boys easier. Men are so funny—as if they were always keeping something to themselves. I don't like that."

She looked indeed as though she might demand and take all she could get—a girl greedy of life and the good things in it, or the things that to her seemed good. She swooped down beside the little creature on the bed and flung an arm round her. The younger girl's personality seemed to be drowned in the bright effulgence of the elder as her slight form in the swelling folds of blue taffeta skirt that overflowed her.

"What about Mr. Tonkin?" ventured Phoebe; "he'd have you fast enough. And he's almost as good as a clergyman, though of course not as good as an officer...."

"Old Tonkin, indeed!" cried Vassie indignantly. "I wouldn't touch him if he was the only man alive. Why, mother's actually jealous of the way he tries to come patting and pawing me.... She can have him—if she can get him. Horrid, pale, fat old man!" She shook the thought of him from off her, and ran on: "And when I'm a la—I mean when I'm married, I'll see what I can do for you, Phoebe. You're too soft ever to do any good for yourself. As like as not you'd take any clumsy lout that offered, simply because you wouldn't know how to say 'No.'"

Phoebe said nothing, but a bright colour ran up over her pale skin and her soft mouth set in a little obstinate line. The whole expression of her face altered when she set her lips so that they covered the two front teeth that at once made her face irregular and gave it individuality. She lost her exquisite softness and became a little stupid, for it made the lower part of her face too brief—what Vassie called "buttoned up." Phoebe was not actually pretty, but she was very alluring to men, or would be, simply because everything about her was feminine—not womanly, but feminine. Her mouse-brown hair, straight and soft and fine, refused to fall into the heavy polished curtains that were the mode, and which made of Vassie's two waves of rich brass, bright and hard-edged as metal. Phoebe's eyes were brown, not of the opaque variety, but with the actually velvet look of a bee's body. The girls at school had told her her eyes looked good to stroke. Her nose was an indeterminate snub, her chin delightfully round but retreating, falling away from a mouth like a baby's—so fine in texture, so petal soft, so utterly helpless-looking, with its glint of two small square teeth. Only when she looked obstinate and closed her mouth the charm went out of her face as though wiped off like a tangible thing. She looked almost sullen now, but Vassie, heedless of her, jumped up and, pirouetting round to show herself off once more and to give herself that feeling of mental poise for which physical well-being is needful, made for the door. A swish, a flutter, a bang, and she was gone.

Left alone, Phoebe sat a moment longer, then rolled over on the bed with a kitten-like motion and, stretching her arms above her head, lay taut for a second, then relaxed suddenly. Head tucked in the pillow, she apparently was lost in thought, for her brown eyes, slightly narrowed, stared vacantly at the frilling of the pillow-slip. Then she gave a soft little sound that had it not been so pretty would have been a giggle, wriggled round, and slipped off the bed. She ran to the mirror and began to take down her tumbled hair. As she raised her arms her round breast swelled like a bird's when it lifts its head; her bright eyes and pursed mouth, full of hairpins, were bird-like too. She was perpetually, to the seeing eye, suggesting comparison with the animal creation; she was bird-like, mouse-like, kitten-like, anything and everything that was soft and small and obviously easy to hurt and crush physically. That was her allure, her most noticeable quality—that she presented unconsciously, but unmistakably, the suggestion that it would be easy to hurt her, easy and sweet.

She made trial of her hair in the fashion the new Princess had started—drawn back *à la chinoise*, with a long rolled curl, known for some reason as a "*repentir*," brought forward to lie over one shoulder.

Then she went to the washstand and took more care than usual over the cleansing of her hands. That done, she deliberated whether or not to put on her grey chip hat with the pink plume that on her arrival she had flung on the bed, where it still lay. She tried herself with it and without, then debated as to whether it looked better to give the impression of being one of the family by appearing bonnetless, or whether, on the other hand, it would not be more interesting to Ishmael if he got the impression of a visitor ... of someone who was not always about the house, who was to be seen outside. She finally decided on the latter. Then she sat down to wait, though the time was bound to be more than an hour, since Vassie and John-James had only now started in to Penzance in the smart new market-cart to meet the eagerly awaited arrival, Ishmael Ruan.

Downstairs Annie too had her deliberations, her changes of mind, her sudden impulses of affection and of resentment, as her ill-regulated brain had always had them. She had not changed much in the years that had brought them past Ishmael's eighteenth birthday. All of worn tissues and faded tints had been hers long before, and except for an increased jerkiness she seemed the same. In attire she had altered, and her black silk dress, with its scallops and trembling fringes, suited ill enough with her badly-arranged hair and work-worn hands.

She sat in the little parlour, which she had been made to take into use by Vassie, who had successfully made it hideous with antimacassars and vases of artificial flowers. As Annie sat rigidly upright upon a slippery horsehair-covered chair, her eyes wandered vaguely here and there and fell on the album in which Vassie had collected all the photographs taken of the family from time to time. Photographs printed on paper were only just beginning to supersede the older daguerreotypes, and a gleam of interest came into Annie's pale blue eyes, for the album was still a new toy to her. She remembered that Vassie had only lately finished sticking in the last photographs, and, picking it up, she began turning the pages.

There was Archelaus ... she caught her breath. Her lovely Archelaus as he had appeared before going off to that terrible Crimea, which Annie always thought was so called because it was such a wicked place. The print was not very clear, as it was only a copy made from the original daguerreotype, but what it lacked in definition Annie's memory could supply. Archelaus was standing with one elbow leaning upon a rustic pillar; he wore his uniform and looked like a king. He had splendid side-whiskers, though their yellow hue did not show in the photograph. Her beautiful Archelaus ... now toiling and moiling in those terrible deserts, those sandy places, of Australia, which was the underside of the world, where black heathen went about mother-naked. By now he had doubtless dug much gold—many, many sovereigns of it—out of the sand, and perhaps some day very soon he would walk in with his pockets full of it; and then who would cut a dash in the country-side, from Land's End up to Truro and beyond it? Her Archelaus. Even in her dreams Annie did not picture Archelaus pouring out his gold upon her or as being anything but of a splendid masculine surliness.

She turned a page and came on John-James—reluctant, bashful, glowering at the camera ... he was the most dutiful of her children, and she passed on carelessly and came to Tom. Sleek and shiny in black broadcloth, with the foxy sharpness of his features somehow suggesting the red of his colouring even in the photograph.... He was sitting in a low plush chair with Vassie standing, after the ungallant fashion of the pictures of the period, behind him, one hand on his shoulder. She looked a swelling twenty, though she had only been seventeen when it was taken. Another turn of the page and Annie saw herself—an unkind vision, at her most set, hard of hair and jaw, with deep eye-sockets. She admired it for the black gown and the lace handkerchief she was holding; but she was interested in it, too, as the true egoist always is in self-portraiture, however unflattering.

She stared at it longer than at any of the others, then, at last turning the page, came on a photograph of Ishmael, sent by him from St. Renny at the Parson's instigation. She stared at the mouth that, with its more generous curves, was yet so like her own, at the square brow that never came from her side of the family, at the narrow chin that in its delicacy seemed to her girlish. As she looked a sudden tremor ran over her. She realised she had been gazing at it as at the picture of a stranger, so altered did he look from when she had last seen him, over two years ago.... For some reason that stuck-up Parson had made every excuse for the boy to spend his holidays elsewhere for over two years. She had not seen him since before his confirmation, which she looked on vaguely as some sort of civil ceremony like a superior kind of getting apprenticed ... perhaps as being definitely apprenticed to gentility. She had had Vassie "done" at Plymouth for that reason. This strange boy, this young man, was coming to-day to her house, which was his house ... coming to upset everything. She stared again, trying to trace the features she remembered after a fashion, but which love had never imprinted on her memory with the only indelible draughtsmanship. She turned backwards swiftly till she came to the beginning of the book, where was another photograph taken from an old daguerreotype. It showed Ishmael as a baby ... his mouth rather wet-looking, helplessly open, not unlike Phoebe's now ... he seemed somehow a pathetic baby. Even Annie was struck by it.

She laid the book on her slippery lap, whence it fell unheeded to the floor, and stared in front of her.... Out of the dim past, almost as dim to her as to an animal, came a memory, the memory of a touch. The touch of a baby's hands feeling about her breast.... Not of Ishmael's in particular—how should she, whose motherhood had been so forced, so blurred a thing, keep one memory of it from another, or any that was not purely animal ...? But it was his picture she had been looking at which had brought the idea of babyhood back to her, and it was with him personally that her mind connected the swift memory that was more a renaissance of an actual sensation. She closed her eyes and clutched at the breast that had fallen on flatness. Her children would all go from her except this one who was coming back.... A warmth that was half-animal, and nearly another half-sentimental, rose in her heart, but at least for the moment it was genuine. There was even some vague feeling that she would protect him if the others made it hard for him....

Wheels sounded on the cobbles of the courtyard, and the clatter of hoofs; it meant that John-James and Vassie were back, bringing her son. She got to her feet and went through the house to the yard door, already recovering a little of poise, which meant artificiality, but still with something of that real glow about her. She knew a moment of dread lest Ishmael should rebuff it. She held out her arms with an uncontrolled gesture, and heard her own voice call his name on an ugly piping note she could not have told was hers.

CHAPTER II

WHAT MEN LIVE BY

Ishmael Ruan, like the rest of his world that day, had been planning ahead in his mind. His first conceptions were blown away from him with his breath at sight of Vassie glowing on the dingy railway platform; she was far the more self-possessed of the two, which was mortifying to a young man who, all the way down in the train, had been telling himself with what tact and kindness he was going to behave. John-James had seemed so unaltered that his grip of the hand, as casual as though Ishmael were any acquaintance just back from a day's excursion, had been a relief. Remained his mother, for Tom, contrary to what John-James and Vassie had expected, did not look in at Penzance Station to greet Ishmael on his transit, and as to the Parson, he was letting Ishmael alone to find his feet with his family, holding himself as a person to be come to if occasion or affection prompted it later.

The drive was a silent one, as even Vassie felt shy, though she hid it under an affectation of calmness. Ishmael had plenty of time to readjust himself and think of his mother, the determining factor, now Archelaus was away, in his happiness—or so he thought, ignorant in his masculinity of the force and will sheathed in Vassie's velvet sleekness. His mother ... he had no sentiment at the name; but then neither would he have had if the relation between them had been a happy one. He would then have felt love, but he would always have been of too deadly a clarity for sentiment. He was sorry for his mother with a degree of sympathy rare in one so young, for he had as little of the hardness of youth as might be, and what he had was not of judgment, but feeling. He was at the moment nothing but sorry for his mother, but though that pity would not change to condemnation it might turn to dislike. He too, as Annie was doing in the parlour as she awaited the sound of the wheels that were bearing him nearer her, tried to clutch at memories. He could find a few of fierce kindnesses, but not one of an embrace unqualified by some queer feeling other than simple love, which he had always felt in her. She did not, of course, care twopence for him, he decided. Well, he would not be a hypocrite—he would not bother or embarrass her with the expression of a tenderness neither of them felt; he would be gentle, he would kiss her if she seemed to expect it, but he would talk brightly and naturally of trivial things, he would make the occasion seem as little weighted with portent as possible. There should be nothing of the return of the master, nothing of the odious briskness of the new broom about him at his entry. Time enough after to talk over things.... He could spend the next day with John-James on the farm discussing improvements, alterations. They were very behind the times down here; he had seen farming in Somerset and Devon in his holidays that would make them open their eyes down here. That would all break it to his mother gently. She was getting old too—she must be quite fifty—and old people did not like to have reforms thrust upon them. No, there should be nothing eager, aggressive about him. He remembered stormy, excitable scenes of his childhood and resolved they should see what the self-control of a gentleman was like. Thus Ishmael, with intentions not by any means, not even most largely, selfish. Yet, of all moods, the worst to meet his mother's.

The growing interest of the drive as they neared the north-west and the familiar landmarks of his

childhood came into sight, flooded with the June sunshine—the ruined mine-shafts staring up so starkly, the glory of white cattle in the golden light, the first glimpse of the pale roofs of Cloom itself, prismatic as a wood-pigeon's plumage, all these things struck at his heart with a keener shock than did anything personal, and made thought of his mother sink away from him. Behind the cluster of grey buildings he saw the parti-coloured fields stretching away—green pasture, brown arable, pale emerald of the young corn—all his. He saw in folds of the land little copses of ash whose trunks showed pale as ghost-trees; he saw, gleaming here and there through the gorse-bushes, the stream that ran along the bottom of the slope below the cart-track that led to Cloom. He saw the bleak, grey homesteads, cottages and small farms, set here and there, as he turned in his seat to look around him. And his heart leapt to the knowledge that all these things were his....

Annie's croaking cry, her thin arms, her quick straining of him, he all unprepared even for the mere physical yielding that alone saves such an embrace from awkwardness, found him lost. Annie felt it and stiffened, and the moment had gone never to come back. In after years, when Annie had magnified it to herself and him, accusing him of throwing her love back in her face when she had offered it, he was wont to reproach himself bitterly. But Annie was so volatile in emotion, except where Archelaus was concerned, that her new flow would, in all likelihood, not have held its course for more than a few weeks at the best. Ishmael knew this, but Annie, by dint of telling herself the contrary, never did. The awkwardness of the actual moment was saved by Phoebe, who had hung in the background waiting for what she thought might be the most telling moment to glide forward, but who, her natural pleasure at sight of her old playmate suddenly overbearing more studied considerations, could contain herself in silence and the shadows no longer.

"Ishmael!" she cried, running forward. "Ishmael!"

She held out her two hands and Vassie thought swiftly: "It's no good, my dear; he's for your betters—he and I ..." and with a worldliness that went far towards bearing out her claims to ladyhood she broke in with:

"You remember little Phoebe, Ishmael—from the mill...."

"Why, of course. You haven't grown much, though you've got your hair done up," said Ishmael, thankful for any diversion from Annie's reproachful arms, which had slid from his neck to hang by her side.

"I'm quite grown-up, though," said Phoebe, dimpling.

"She mean's she's too old for you to kiss, lad," said simple John-James with directness, grinning as he took the mare's bridle to lead her to the stable. Ishmael had not yet the social cleverness to kiss Phoebe at once and without embarrassment or to laugh the suggestion away, but she, who had no social sense at all and never attained any, met the moment perfectly, with a little curtsey and a sidelong look of merriment. "Ah, I remember when Ishmael refused to kiss me, and I cried myself to sleep over it," she said; "'tisn't likely I'm going to let him kiss me now."

"No—did I ...?" asked he; and Vassie gave a shrill laugh.

"To be sure he did and would again," she declared; "he's not thinking of such things. Mamma, is tea ready in the parlour?"

"I fear I forgot about it, Vassie, my dear, but Katie shall get it to wance. Come in here, Ishmael. We do sit here now; simminly we're quality, according to she."

Ishmael followed his mother into the ugly room, which offended his eyes, used as they were to the Parson's taste. An album lay on the floor, and he stooped to pick it up, but his mother, quick for all her years and rheumatism, was before him and had thrust it out of his reach.

Tea was a stiff meal; everyone was on company manners. John-James, in from stabling the mare, sat at the edge of a chair; Vassie was too genteel, Phoebe too arch, Annie grim. Ishmael's heart sank with a terrible weight upon it as he thought that these were the people with whom his lot was cast—that he must see them, talk to them, day in, day out, all the round of the seasons.... Vassie's beauty seemed dimmed to him; Phoebe became an annoyance like a musical-box that will not leave off tinkling out the same tune. He bent his head lower as he sat, aware, with a misery of shame, that tears were burning perilously near his eye-lids. Life was sordid, and his position, over which he had not been guiltless of sometimes dreaming as romantic, held nothing but mortification and hatefulness.

The meal dragged on; the daylight without grew glamorous. Conversation flickered and died, and at last Ishmael, pushing his chair back with a noise that sounded horrible to himself, announced his intention of going to the Vicarage. Annie muttered something about people who could not be content to

stay at home even on their first evening....

But he was not allowed to escape alone; Phoebe discovered that it was time she was going back to the mill, and there was no evading an offer to accompany her.

Somehow, away from the others, and out in the open, Phoebe seemed to shed the commonness that had blighted her at that dreadful tea. She still coquetted, but it was with a fresh and dewy coquetry as of some innocent woodland creature that displays its charms as naturally as it breathes. Ishmael found himself pleased instead of irritated when he received her weight as he helped her over the stone steps at each stile—for the only girl he had seen much of in late years had been wont to stretch out a strong hand to guide him.

As they went over the marsh where they had so often played as children they vied with each other in pointing out memorable spots, and the gaiety of the old days mingled with the beauty of the present evening to brighten his spirits. The marsh was all pied with white—pearly white of blowing cotton-grass; thick, deader white of water-cress in full flower; faint blurred white of thousands of the heath-bedstraw's tiny blossoms. Phoebe in her white gown sprang onto swaying tussocks and picked plumes of cotton-grass to trim herself a garden hat, and Ishmael steadied her passage.

"Oh, Ishmael, I'm so glad you've come back!" she told him, lifting a glowing face, haloed by the rose-lined hat that had slipped to her shoulders and was only held in place by a pink velvet ribbon which was not softer than the throat it barred.

"It's often dull here," she ran on. "There's not many people I care about going with since I came back from boarding school, and even for those I do go with Vassie spoils it by saying I'm demeaning myself. She's such a fine lady."

"And aren't you?" asked Ishmael, laughing; "that was my first thought when I saw you, anyway."

"Was it?" She dimpled with pleasure, but added shrewdly: "I'm not one, though. I like getting away from it all and working in the dairy and looking after the tiny calves. I like that best of all, that and my baby chickens. But Vassie's only happy when she's dressed up and paying visits."

"I like your way best," he assured her, thinking what a jolly little thing she was after all. But Phoebe's mind could not keep its attention on any one theme for more than a minute, and her eyes and thoughts were wandering. Suddenly she gave a little cry.

"Oh, look at those beauties! I must have them!" And she pointed to where, on a vividly green patch of marsh, a whole grove of cotton-grass stood up in the glow of the setting sun. The golden light poured through the silky tufts, making of each a flake of fire, all raining at the same slight slope from hair-fine stems. Against the turf they looked for all the world like Chinese lanterns swung for some miniature revel of the fairies—they seemed literally to diffuse light upon the air. Ishmael stood staring, stung to excitement by that suddenly-glimpsed beauty; but Phoebe darted forward, and the next moment had withdrawn a foot whose stout country shoe and white stocking were dripping greenly.

"Here, let me!" cried Ishmael; but she waved him back.

"No, you're too heavy; you'd go through at once. Hold my hand while I lean over;" and she swung outwards from his grasp, her other hand stretching vainly.

"Best leave that lot," advised Ishmael; "there's some much easier to get at just along there."

She turned her head, body still swung forward, and followed the line of his pointing finger to where a cluster of grass as fine, but untransmuted, stood in shadow.

"Oh, but that hasn't the sun on it!" she exclaimed naïvely. The next moment she had seen the absurdity of her own speech, and, pivoting to the path beside him, joined in his laughter.

"Well, it seemed sense to me when I said it," she protested.

"So it would have been if you could have picked the sun too."

"But I suppose it was only the sun that made me want them at all. Aren't I a goose? Vassie would say I shall never get sense."

"I like that sort of nonsense; it's rather jolly, somehow. I say, Phoebe, I shall think of you as the girl who wanted to pick the sun. Doesn't it sound ripping?"

"Oh, my feet are so wet!" cried Phoebe. "I must hurry home. Mother will fuss so over me, you can't

think."

"Shall I just get you that sunny grass before we go?"

Phoebe hesitated, and then some instinct, finer than her comprehension of it, prompted her to a refusal, and the cotton-grass was left to swing its gossamer globes of light till the sun should have dipped below the rim of the moor.

When Ishmael had delivered Phoebe up to the tender agitations of the fussy, weakly mother, and himself got away from the too-enthusiastic welcome of the father, he struck towards the cliffs and the Vicarage with a younger heart than had been his all the evening. Quite naturally life had slipped through from a film of darkness on to a brighter plane, and he greeted Boase with none of the gruffness that would have weighed on him earlier. This also had the result of breaking the reticence which would otherwise have kept him from telling anything of his real feelings. Now that his family and the life before him no longer seemed rayless, he could speak of the blight that had, for him, settled even over the future as he sat in that fearsome parlour.

Boase listened, glad that the boy seemed to be growing more articulate; it would make his help, when it was needed, easier to give. He kept Ishmael for supper, feeling that consideration for Annie was not the most important thing just then, and after it he walked with the boy as far as the stile that gave on to the cliff path. Ishmael was far from having given way to one of his old unbalanced fits of chattering, but it had been a pleasure to him to talk freely to the person with whom he was most intimate. It was long—unnaturally long for expansive youth—since he had talked so freely, for Killigrew had left St. Renny a year before him to study painting in Paris. It was the time when the great Barbizon school was in its prime, when Diaz and Rousseau and Harpignies and the rest of that goodly company were heading the return to Nature which the epoch needed, just as later it was to need, with equal sincerity, a return to the primitive in art. Killigrew was absorbed by the fervour of his new creed and wrote but rarely, and his letters were all but incomprehensible to Ishmael. Not in his moments of freest intercourse with Phoebe that evening had it been possible to exchange anything beyond the chatter and playfulness of children, but there was that in Ishmael to-night which, he being young, had to find outlet. For youth is the period of giving, as gathering age is of withholding.

Coming home after so long, coming home, moreover, with a meaning portentous beyond the ordinary attached to the act, had excited Ishmael unknown to himself. Physically he felt very tired, which he told himself was absurd, but mentally he was of a joyous alertness. Leaning upon the stile, he drew a deep breath of the salt air and raised his eyes to the night sky curving, so high was he placed, for an immense arc about his tiny form. To the north the Plough trailed its length, but south, high over the dark blot which to the keen sight of love meant Cloom, Spica, brilliant crown of Virgo, pulsed whitely, while the glittering sisterhood of Aquila and Lyra, Corona and Libra swept towards the east, ushering up the sky the slim young moon, as bright as they but more serene, like a young mother amidst a flock of heedless girls. How often had Ishmael counted these same clear callous eyes from sleeping St. Renny, but never with the answering gleam in his breast that he felt now he saw them over his own land.

"So life is going to be good, after all," remarked the Parson abruptly.

"Rather. It seems jolly good to-night, anyway. All my life I've been looking forward to this, just this, coming back here and making something of it all ... and the funny thing is now it's come I'm not disappointed."

"Why should you be?"

"I dunno. Only one expects to be when one's been expecting to be happy. That sounds Irish, but you know what I mean."

"Yes, I know, but then I'm older than you. Why should you have found that out?"

"Some things—things like that—one doesn't find out by what happens. One sort of knows them to start with. It's funny too, because what I'm so cock-a-hoop about to-night is that life's so full of things just ahead, things that are going to happen. I say, look at that moon; I sort of feel as though I could jump over her if only I tried hard enough!"

"That's what youth lives on," said Boase—"not on what happens, but on what may happen. Every morning when you wake don't you feel—"To-day *It* may happen,' though you haven't the vaguest idea what *It* may be?"

"Why, yes, I think that's true," said Ishmael slowly.

"Yes, it's true. It's what youth and hope and courage lives by."

"And old people—what do they live by?"

"Ah, that everyone has to find out for himself. It depends largely on what his middle-age has drawn on, and that's nearly always something more material than what fed his youth. There's only one thing certain—that we all have something, some secret bread of our own soul, by which we live, that nourishes and sustains us. It may be a different thing for each man alive."

"We must each work out our own damnation," said Ishmael, and then could have kicked himself for his own smartness that he heard go jarring through the night. He waited in a blush of panic for some reproof, such as "That was hardly worthy, was it?" But the Parson, ever nothing if not unexpected, did not administer it, though Ishmael could have sworn he felt his smile through the darkness.

"Damnation, salvation, it's much the same thing," said Boase, cheerfully, "though naturally youth likes to use the former word. But the great thing is never to despise the means by which another man attains it. Patience, tolerance, tolerance, patience...."

"Oh, I don't know," protested Ishmael. "I don't think much would get done in the world at that rate, would it?"

"Perhaps not. And you have so much to do in it.... When d'you start?"

"To-morrow morning with dawn, so I must be getting off. If you're awake round about then, Da Boase, think of me beginning to remake the world over at Cloom."

And Ishmael set off through the night, his feet lagging with a blissful fatigue and his mind falling on an equally blissful numbness. As he went the Parson's phrase went with him, stirring his imagination, and when he climbed into the big bed beneath the drooping Christ it worked more articulately within him. "Secret bread ..." he thought; "that's what he called it.... I wonder if Phoebe's is sun—she wanted to pick the sun. And his is religion, of course, and mine—I know what mine is. It'll always be the same. I shan't change even if I grow old."

He began to feel very drowsy and drifted into a vague wonder at the thought of growing old. "I wonder what it feels like. I suppose one takes no more interest in anything; it can't matter what one's secret bread is. But mine, of course, mine is Cloom...." And on that he fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

FIRST FURROW

Youth is susceptible to that which it awakes, and Ishmael sallied out early next morning in a mood to match the month as it then shone to greet him. The sun had not long cleared the east, and the globes of dew glimmered on leaf and twig and darkened his boots as he crossed the ill-kept lawn in front of the house. He promised himself it should be rolled and mown and have flower-beds around it, and that a wind-break of firs should be planted along the low granite wall which was all that divided it from the bare moor. He went to the little gate and, leaning his back against it, looked long at the house as though for the first time. He noted the solid simple lines of its long front and the beauty of its heavy mullions and the stone corbels beneath the roof. The portico over the door had pillars of square rough-hewn granite, a whole room was built out over it, with a wide-silled window, beneath which the Ruan arms were carved on a granite shield. That door should have a drive leading up and widening before it; at present what cart-track there was went meekly along the side of the low wall into the farmyard. Those two big velvet-dark yews that stood sentinel either side of the porch would look splendid when clipped taut and square. So he planned, and then, hearing the voice of John-James calling to the cows, he remembered that the utilitarian side of the place must come first; and he went up the path, through the panelled corridor that led through the house, into the court, passed under the arch at the opposite side, and so into the farmyard. There the cows were gathering for the milking, swinging slowly into the yard while John-James held open the gate from the field. They were good cows, but Ishmael glanced at them critically. Cows were to be his chief concern, for the home farm was not large enough to yield much in the way of crops for sale—nearly all would be needed for the winter consumption of his own beasts. Most of the corn sown was the dredge-corn, a mingling of barley and oats sown together and ground together, which was used for cattle, and the roots and hay were all needed also. Even then

there would have to be special foods bought, Ishmael decided, for he believed in farmyard manure, and to obtain that at its best the cattle had to be well and carefully fed. These cows he now saw were good enough of their kind, but he wished to start Guernseys or Jerseys, or more probably a cross-breed of the two, as being fitter for the bare country than pure-bred animals.

John-James tramped in behind the last cow and closed the gate. He had made no remark at sight of Ishmael, and all he now said was:

"Them are good cows. Good as any you'll get up-country I reckon."

"They look all right for their kind," admitted Ishmael.

"Finest in the place. Not like Johnny Angwin's beasts—high in the bone and low in the flesh. He'm a soft kind o' chap, sure 'nough, and sick to his heart at having to take to farming toall. He was in a bookshop to Truro, but had to come home when his brother died. T'other day he come to I and he says, 'Oh, John-James Beggoe, my dear, what shall I do? I forgot I did ought to arrange my cows all in steps, so to speak, so that they shouldn't all calve to wance, and now they'll all be a doen of it and us won't get no milk....'" John-James broke off with a chuckle, then resumed with: "Seen the calves yet?"

"No. I suppose they've been turned out?"

"Not yet. I'll wait till the middle of the month before turnen out. Eight heifers and three bulls there be."

"Well, I'll see what they look like. Morning, Katie!"

Katie Jacka, who had come out to the milking, responded eagerly to the new master and planked down stool and pails. Ishmael and John-James stood watching for a few minutes.

"That there cow is drawin' to calf, and I'm jealous of her," announced John-James lugubriously; "she'm too fat, and I fear she'll get bruised, but though I turned her into the poorest field in the place she won't go no thinner. She'm never gone dry, and they belongs to be one month dry."

"I want to start Jerseys," said Ishmael boldly; "I'm sure the better quality of the milk will more than make up for the greater cost of the stock."

"Jerseys! ... well," said John-James, startled, "that's a new idea, surely. I don't know where 'ee'd get a bull to serve en. Hav'ee thought on that?"

"I don't see why I shouldn't have a bull myself. I could advertise it for service all round the country, if it comes to that."

John-James muttered something to the effect that he'd enough to do as it was, but Katie, one ear pressed against a cow, one pricked for the conversation, chimed in.

"There's a Jersey bull to the geart farm to Grey Counce, maister," she told Ishmael, "and I've heard tell there's nothen but Jerseys there, and the butter's the best in the country and fetches most to market. Many's the time I've said I could make as good if I'd only got cream hangin' in riches like them has got."

"You must come up the Fair with me next time, John-James," suggested Ishmael, "and then we'll see. Come and show me the calves now...."

The two went off to the cowsheds and for the next hour were examining livestock, from the calves down to the bees—rather a rarity in those parts and the joy of John-James, who had the bee-gift, and was never stung, being able to move a swarm in his bare hands unscathed. Afterwards they walked over part of the farmlands, and Ishmael's heart began to beat high with pride and joy. There is nothing more romantic than land—its wilfulness, its possibilities, its endless intimacies. Ishmael's land was to prove an exacting mistress, unlike the rich, sleek home counties, which only have to be stroked to smile and yield. On these granite heights the soil needed breaking every three years; if a field did very well it might be left four, but never longer. The deep ploughing of the midlands was impossible—the hard subsoil lay too close to the surface, and little wheat was sown as the shallow soil would not bear it, and what was sown never grew to be like the heavy eight-sided corn of softer counties. Yet Ishmael loved his land already and was to love it more and more, its very hardness and fighting of him helping to make its charm.

Neither his early experiences of farm life nor his opportunities of more scientific study had been wasted on Ishmael, and he looked over pasture and arable now with an eye knowing enough, if not quite as much so as he tried to make it appear to John-James. He found the land in good condition, the

early-sown grain showing clear green blades and the grass rich enough, while even in the more neglected pastures towards the sea where the thistles had not been refused a foothold they had been kept cut down to prevent seeding. John-James was conscientious, though handicapped by a rigid conservatism and lack of proper help. For the emigration had been very heavy of late years from that part of the world, to the goldfields both of Australia and California. Times were bad, though not as bad as in the North, where thousands of cotton operatives were literally starving owing to the stoppage of the cotton supplies through the American Civil War. The papers were full for months, amid the greater excitement of Princess Alexandra's wedding, of paragraphs headed "The Distress in the North," that had become as much a regular feature as the weather reports or the society gossip. The consequent uneasiness made itself felt even in Cornwall, and perhaps the Anti-Slavery meetings held in Penzance were not entirely disinterested. Also Botallack mine was then in full work and swallowing young men, though for poor enough wage. One way and another, managing the farm was none too easy, and so John-James had found. He looked with as much interest as his stolid mind could compass to the return of Ishmael, with the power of the purse-strings and the expenses of his own education at an end, to work something of a miracle at Cloom. But he had not imagined the miracle to take the form of Jersey cows, and he began to wonder dolefully what newfangled notions about machinery and manure might not also be hatching in the young owner's brain. They mounted in silence the steepest slope of the rolling land and came to a stone hedge on which John-James leant, Ishmael beside him.

They stood in silence, John-James because he hardly ever spoke unless spoken to, and Ishmael because over his spirit rushed a flood of memory that for an aching moment overwhelmed him. This was the field where the Neck had been cried, when, as a little boy, he had first caught at the flying skirts of happiness, first realised the sharpness of the actual instant—and thought it surely could never, so vivid and insistent was it, cease to be.... Now, as then, his eyes sought the line of twisted hedge, and he saw it, looking so much the same, yet set with leaf and blossom so many seasons away from that August evening, even as he was himself from the child who had thought to arrest Time. Yet, realising that, he again tried to snatch at the present, though with the difference that now he told himself that anyway there was such a long, long time before him to be young in that it wouldn't ever pass....

"That's for ploughing now," announced John-James suddenly. "For the mang'ls. 'T'es as good land as any in the place, and a waste to hav'en grass, so it is. Maybe you'd like to come and have a try at it, if you'm not gwain to be above turnen your own hand to work?"

Ishmael had a moment's qualm. What ploughing he had done had been but slight, and he was not free from an uneasy impression that John-James was laying a trap for him into which he would not be sorry to see him fall. It would be no better to put it off, for he could imagine the comments that would fly, so he nodded his head.

"We'll set to work this morning on it," he agreed lightly; "I suppose you're still using wooden ploughs down here?"

"Wooden ploughs ...? And what'd 'ee have ploughs made of, I should like to knaw? Gold, like what Arch'laus has in Australy?"

"Iron. All modern ploughs are made of iron, and so are rollers."

"Iron ... iron rollers. What's wrong weth a geart granite roller, lad?"

"Well, it's very cumbersome, isn't it? It's three men's work to cart it from one place to another, for one thing. Anyway, I've brought down an iron plough and a chain-harrow...."

Over John-James's face came a gleam of interest. "A chain-harrow?" he repeated; "I've long wanted one o' they. Us allus has to take the yard-gate off its hinges and weave furze in and out of it and drag that over the ground."

"Well, now you've got a real chain-harrow and won't have to do that any more. I tell you what it is, John-James, I want you and me between us to make this the finest farm in the country; I don't want Archelaus to sneer at us when he comes home and say how much better he could have run it. Of course, I can't do it without you; but if you'll only help...."

John-James held silence for a space. Then he said:

"I've allus said as how us wanted carts, 'stead of carr'n all our furze and the butter and everything as goes in or out upon they harses and lil' dunkies. And gates ... if us could have a few more gates to the place 'stead of thrawing the hedges up and down all our days.... It'll cost money, but what you do put into the land you get out of the land. Same as weth cows."

It was a long speech for John-James, and he paused with his countenance suffused a deep purplish

hue. Ishmael seized his hand and wrung it with a sudden young gust of enthusiasm that he could not control.

"You'll help. I know you will. Oh, we'll pull the old place up yet. We'll make such a thing of it...."

But John-James had withdrawn his hand limply. "Go maken it so fine it'll be a pretty place for gentry, s'pose," he said; "be shamed to see I about the place then, I reckon."

Ishmael laughed joyously at him. "Don't be an ass, John-James," he said; and it was the first time he had been able to meet any little speech of the kind without strain. John-James stood at ease, and slowly some faint trace of a change of expression appeared on his immobile features.

"I reckon thee'll do, lad," was all he said; but Ishmael felt his heart give an upleap of triumph; he knew he had made his first conquest. As he and John-James went into breakfast side by side he felt quite equal to meeting Annie unperturbed. But he was not to be called on to make trial of his stoicism, as Annie hardly spoke to him; but with a thrill of emancipation he realised that his mother's tongue no longer held terror for him—merely the annoyance of a persistent fly.

As long as he lived Ishmael never forgot the exquisite moment when he broke his first furrow on his own land. Harvest gathered is a wonder and a release from strain; sowing and tending of seed and young crops is sweet, but ploughing holds more of romance than all the rest. It is the beginning, the fresh essay with soil that has become once more savage; it is the earliest essential of man's conquest of Nature; his taming of her from a wild mistress to a fruitful wife.

The day shone with the clear pearliness of early June: high in air the big cumulus clouds rode golden-white, trailing their shadows over the dappled land beneath; the branches of hawthorn gleamed silvery amidst the pearly blossom; a wine-pale sunlight washed with iridescence sky and earth. In the great sloping field, which held six days' hard ploughing between its stone ramparts, the granite monolith stood four-square to all the winds that blew, defying ploughs and weathers. The two brown horses waited by the highest hedge, the plough, that always looks so toy-like and is so stubborn, quiescent behind them, a boy ready at their heads, switch in hand. With a freshness of emotion never quite to be recaptured, Ishmael gathered up the rope reins and took the handles of the plough in his grip. The impact of the blade against the soil when the straining horses had given the first jerk up the slope was as some keen exquisite mating of his innermost being with the substance of the earth ... a joy almost sensual, so strong was the pleasure of the actual physical contact as yielding soil and fine hard edge met—his hands sensitively aware of the texture of that meeting through the iron frame of the plough. Up and down the field, over its humped back, widening the strip of brown between him and the hedge, always with pleasure at sight of that long rich fold of earth turning over perpetually under the sideways impact of the blade, turning over till the green turf was hidden by the brown of the under soil....

The field was not an easy one for the horses by reason of its curve; the off horse, on the vore, as the part already ploughed is called, dug his great hoofs firmly in the stiff soil, but the near horse slipped perpetually on the short turf. Every now and then the plough had to be stopped while great hunks of granite were hacked out of the earth; then, with loud cries of encouragement and a cut of the whip, the horses were urged on again, the flash of their shoes gleaming rhythmically up and down, up and down, as Ishmael guided the plough behind them. His hands gripped the handles, the plough clanked, the horses struggled, and the sound of their hoofs made a dull thud-thud upon the earth; the wind blew gratefully on his moist brow and on the flanks of the animals; at every turn the shouts of his voice as he stopped the horses and reversed the clanking plough went up through the quiet world.

The gulls sat, dazzlingly white, motionless as little headstones, along the rim where green land met brown vore, then rose and shrieked and swooped as the clatter began again, dipping in the wake of the new furrow. And the sun went overhead, making sweating steeds and sweating man and bright wheels and brighter blade of the plough glisten like sculptured bronze, while all the time the green was being more and more swamped, furrow after furrow, by the encroaching brown.

That night Ishmael was sore and stiff, but happy, with a deep physical content. The next day and the next and on till the last furrow lay turned along the lower hedge he kept himself at it doggedly, in spite of aching muscles, driven by a vague feeling that this was his initiation, his test of knighthood, and that to fail at it, to leave it to other hands, would augur ill. When, on the sixth night, he washed the sweat and earth from off his healthily tired body he felt life could hold nothing sweeter than what it had yielded him in these six days. He had taken seizen of his land.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHADOW AT THE WINDOW

For nearly three years that content of Ishmael's held—held till the Parson, who had worked for it, grew ill-pleased. It seemed unnatural that so young a man should never want to roam further afield than the annual cattle fair; should be sufficiently stayed with that perpetual struggle against weald and weather. It was just that tussle which, by keeping the body hard and the mind stimulated, made the content possible. Ishmael had up till now asked for nothing better, and so far, so good. But, as the Parson told himself, the time would come when he would demand more, and then, for lack of knowing other possibilities, he might slake himself with whatever was near at hand and slowly sink into the things of the soil till he was smothered with their reek. Up till now he had spiritualised the land by his wrestling with it, but now that some measure of success, enough to make the struggle less a thing that must not be relaxed for a day, had come, now was the time when the reverse process might begin unseen.

Cloom had undergone a wonderful regeneration, though at present it went only skin-deep, and if left to herself she would soon relapse into savagery. Ground that had been furze-ridden within the memory of man now yielded roots and grain, though not yet richly; the stubborn furze had been burnt and hacked and torn up, the thorns and thistles, the docks and sorrel, had been patiently attacked until they too yielded, the fine clinging roots of the innocent-looking pink-faced centaury and the more blatant charlock had been eliminated from the tenacious soil; while the pale golden cows of alien breed waxed fat and gave rich milk only a few tones paler than their own smooth flanks.

All this was in the main Ishmael's work; and his blunders had been few—he had a genius for the land. It had been hard work though it meant joy, and left not much time or ease of limb for recreation. It had been in that respect the Parson met difficulties. There was hunting in season, and Ishmael was a keen rider to hounds, in spite of his aversion to slaughter of any kind, which upon the farm was the source of not unkindly mirth amongst the men. They could not yield of their fullest respect and nothing of comprehension to a master who was never present when his own pigs were killed, beyond one occasion when he attended to assure himself that all was done in the most merciful way and had ended by being violently sick into the bowl of pig's blood. In hunting Ishmael found, like many another, that his own excitement helped him to bear with the thought of the fox's pain, though he was always glad, in guilty secret, when there was no kill. It was not this idiosyncrasy that troubled Boase; it was the social questions that hunting evoked. Boase, who also followed to hounds, felt his heart glow to see how well the boy was received; for Ishmael's surly shyness had passed into a new phase, expressed by a rather charming deference mingled with independence which appealed to the brusque, goodhearted members of the "county," who went to make up the very mixed hunt in that sparsely-peopled district.

Still, all was not well. Vassie had grown in discontent, Annie in melancholy. The girl herself might—probably would, with her beauty and adaptability—have won a place with Ishmael had it not been for the mother. Annie's touchy pride, mingled with what Vassie frankly called her "impossibleness," made the situation hopeless, for the former quality would not let her efface herself, and the latter prevented her daughter being called upon. Therefore, although Ishmael went out now and again and had struck up a fairly intimate acquaintance with one or two nice families within a radius of ten miles, yet he had no sort of home life which could satisfy him for long.

The only thing Boase saw to be thankful for was that Ishmael's thoughts had not been driven on to Phoebe, and that was probably only because it had never occurred to Ishmael as a possible contingency. He had been so healthily occupied and was so used to Phoebe. Also, Vassie, in her discontent, spent the time visiting her rather second-class friends in Plymouth as much as possible, and, even when she did not insist on sweeping Phoebe with her, intercourse with the mill stopped almost entirely. Annie never pretended to any liking for the helpless Phoebe, who could not even answer her back when she insulted her, as she frequently did all timid people. Never since that accidental touch of quaintness on the first evening had Ishmael discovered any kindred habit of mind in Phoebe, and she, in her sweetly-obtuse way, sometimes wondered that Ishmael did not want to be more with her.

It was not a common failing with the chaps around that district. Phoebe's peculiar allure of utter softness was not one that could remain unfelt even among the slow and primitive young men she met day by day, or who gazed at her dewy mouth and eyes in the church which, for the sake of the vision, they attended instead of chapel. Vassie, who was really a beauty, they only feared. At any moment, if he were not drawn outside himself and the affairs of Cloom, that sudden curious twist of vision which means glamour might occur for Ishmael as he looked at Phoebe. If there were no rich enough materials

at hand to make a fuller life for the boy, then, thought the Parson, with logic, it must be brought to him. The difficulty was Ishmael himself.

He had a curious quality derived of some inherited instinct of fear—a quality that made him distrust change. It had been that which had held him back on the day at St. Renny when he had dallied with the notion of running away to sea; it had been that which had made him loth to leave school at the end in spite of his excitement over returning to a Cloom legally his; and it was that now which enabled him to be hypnotised by his own furrows drawing out in front of him. He clung to what happiness he knew in a way rare in one so young, and he was quite aware how much of it he found even in uncongenial company. What might lie beyond it he distrusted.

Not for nothing had Annie lived through the stress she had before his birth, and from her circumstances, though not her nature, he drew that queer mingling of content and dread. But from the old Squire, little as he resembled him in all else, came that impersonality in what are usually personal relationships, against which even the Parson beat in vain. Through all his passionate sinning James Ruan had held himself aloof from the sharer in his sins. What for him had been the thing by which he lived no one ever knew; his sardonic laughter barred all ingress to his mind.

With Ishmael, as the Parson was beginning to see, places had so far stood for more than people. St. Renny, the manner and atmosphere of it, had meant more than Killigrew, the Vicarage than the Parson, Cloom than his brothers and sister and the friends he made there. It was towards this very detachment that the Parson's upbringing of Ishmael had tended, and yet he now felt the need of more. For some appetite for more life was bound to stir and break into being one day, and Boase was passionately desirous that it should make for happiness and good. Thus Boase thought of it all, but, after the fashion of the race of which Ishmael also was one, he showed no sign of his meditations.

With the approach of the boy's twenty-first birthday the Parson saw light. Though Ishmael had come of age, as far as the property went, three years earlier, still the occasion was not without import, and could fittingly mark some change. A word to Annie produced no result, a hint to Vassie and the thing was in full swing. Ishmael always thought it was his own idea that Killigrew, back in London from his Paris studies, should be asked down to Cloom. It was not everyone that could have been called in to help at celebrating a twenty-first birthday under such circumstances as Ishmael's; it could hardly be made an occasion for feasting tenantry and neighbouring gentry, but it might be used for what Boase, through Killigrew, hoped—the disruption of an atmosphere. That done, a new one could be created.

Killigrew arrived. He startled the natives considerably by his loose jacket and flowing tie, but his red hair was cut fairly short, though his chin was decked by a soft young pointed beard that gave him a Mephistophelian aspect ludicrously set at naught by his white eyelashes, which, round his more short-sighted eye, were set off by a single glass.

As Ishmael drove him from Penzance through the warm, clear May afternoon Killigrew waxed enthusiastic with appreciation of what he saw.

"Anyone living here should be perfectly happy," he declared. "I don't wonder you've never wanted to leave. It has more to it, so to speak, than our old country round St. Renny."

For a moment Ishmael made no reply; it was the first time it had occurred to him it would be possible to leave Cloom, and though he knew that up to now he had not wanted to, yet he was not quite pleased that Killigrew should take it so for granted. He sent his mind back over the years since he had seen his friend, comparing what had happened to himself with all that happened to Killigrew as far as he could imagine it—which was not very far. Killigrew was the more changed; his beard and the lines of humour—and other things—round his eyes, made him seem older than his twenty-two years, but it was more the growth in him mentally that had been so marked as to suggest that he had changed. This was not so, as the alterations had all marched in inevitable directions—it could not have been otherwise in one who lived so by his instincts as Killigrew, and held them so sacred. He had not changed, but he had developed so far that to Ishmael he seemed disconcertingly altered.

"It's all right for me," said Ishmael at last, "but I expect you'll find it dull after Paris. It must all be so different over there."

"Oh, Paris is Paris, of course, and unlike anything else on earth. It is not a place as much as a state, which is one of its resemblances to heaven. You see I haven't forgotten all my theology."

"I sometimes think," announced Ishmael, firmly believing what he was saying, "that it's time I went about a bit. To London and Paris ... the place can get on quite well without me for a bit."

"My son, be advised by me," said Killigrew gaily; "for good little boys like you this is a better place than gay, wicked cities. Of course, I'm not good—or bad either; it's a distinction that doesn't mean

anything to me—but I have to be in Paris for my painting. Can you imagine it, I've been with Diaz and Rousseau? And there's a young fellow who's coming on now that I've seen a lot of called Lepage—Bastien Lepage, who's going to be a wonder. I can tell you, sometimes when I think of the dear old Guv'nor's business, and how he had set his heart on my going into it, I can hardly believe it's true that I've been there, free to do my own work, with those men...."

Killigrew's voice sounded younger in its enthusiasm, more as it had in the old days when he used to speak of Turner.

"I'll bet you're going to be as great as any," cried Ishmael, the old sense of potencies that Killigrew's bounding vitality had always stirred in him awaking again. "How we all used to talk at St. Renny about what we'd do ... d'you remember?"

"Rather. And it's most of it coming true. I was to be a painter and old Carminow a surgeon. I've just heard he's at the Charing Cross hospital."

"And Polkinghorne major? D'you know anything about him? Did he get into his Highland regiment?"

"I heard about him at St. Renny from the old bird. I stopped there last night, you know, to break this devil of a journey. I tell you, Ishmael, it's less of a business getting over to Paris than down here."

"What did Old Tring say about everyone? How was he?"

"Just the same, only thinner on top and fatter below. He told me about Polkinghorne. He went to Italy the year you left, you know. Well, Old Tring told me while he was still there the war broke out, and he enlisted under Garibaldi and was killed in a skirmish just when peace was settled."

There was a second of silence—not because Ishmael had any feeling for Polkinghorne beyond a pleasant liking, but because it was the first time the thought of death as an actuality instead of a dreamlike hypothesis had ever struck home to him. Then he said: "Poor old Polkinghorne ... but he was hardly older than us. It doesn't seem possible anyone like us can be dead...."

He pushed the thought away from him and soon was listening to Killigrew's tales of Paris, some of which were so obviously meant to startle him that he kept to himself the fact that they succeeded. Awkwardness died between them, and when he turned in up the new drive—still only half-made, but the whole scheme of it clear—Ishmael could glow at the other's admiration of his home.

If he could show off Cloom without a qualm, however, it was not the same when it came to displaying his family, and never had he been so thankful for Vassie's beauty as when he saw Killigrew's notice of it. And how that beauty glowed for Killigrew! Even a brother's eyes could not but admire. Phoebe sat unnoticed, her charm swamped in that effulgence. Annie's querulous remarks faded through sheer pride into silence. The Parson, a welcome addition, arrived for supper; greasy Tonkin, inevitable though not so greatly a source of pleasure, drove over from Penzance and sat absorbing Vassie, so to speak, at every pore.

Supper was going off well, thought Ishmael, as he watched Killigrew eat and laugh, and listened to his talk that could not have been more animated—so reflected Ishmael in his relief—if Vassie had been a duchess. Under the brightness the tension, so common to that room that it had become part of it, evaporated, and yet what, after all, was it that achieved this miracle? Nothing in the world but ordinary social intercourse between young and gay people who met as equals, intercourse such as poor Ishmael had never known under his own roof before.... And they all made a fuss of him: John-James actually said something approving, if difficult to follow, about his farming; Vassie beamed on him not only for his friend's sake; the Parson drew him out—he felt himself a host, and responded to the sensation.

Killigrew was just drawing upon the tablecloth, unreprieved of Annie, a sketch of a fashionable Parisian lady for Vassie's instruction when the door opened to admit of Tom, a very rare visitor at Cloom nowadays. He was in sleek black broadcloth and looked almost as ecclesiastical as Tonkin, and much more so than Boase. Tom wore a handsome white cravat beneath his narrow, clean-shaved chin, which was decorated on either side with whiskers whose fiery hue made Killigrew's seem but tawny. Tom wore also a curious smile on his thin lips, but Ishmael was forced to admit, as he watched him shake hands quietly with Killigrew, that this dreaded and disliked brother had given the most unexceptional greeting of any of his family.

Tom sat down, but refused food. He had only come out to see his mother, and because it was Ishmael's birthday, or so he said.

"Is anything the matter, Tom?" asked Annie artlessly.

"No, what should there be?" demanded Tom in a slightly contemptuous fashion. "Can't I want to see you without that? Don't give me away before the visitor, especially as Ishmael's such an attentive son."

Annie began to sniff, and Vassie bade him, in an angry undertone, be quiet. Tom obeyed, but it was an odd quietness as of something waiting its time. Conversation drooped as though a blight had fallen upon it, and once or twice Tom might have been observed to glance towards the window.

"I'll have a drink if I won't eat," he declared at last. "I must drink the young un's health on an occasion like this, after all. Here, mother, fill up."

Killigrew leapt to intercept Annie and fetch her the big cider jug from the dinner-waggon, and giggling like a girl she took it from him and filled the glasses. Some faint return of gaiety, the sense of it being Ishmael's evening, returned, and he sat as they raised glasses to him, in a sudden brightening. As she was tilting hers to her lips, Annie gave a sudden cry, so sharp everyone stopped, glass in hand. A shadow had fallen across the window, barring the flow of the westering light, and towards it Annie was staring. The others followed her gaze.

Bearded, brown, roughly clad in a big coat hunched about his ears, Archelaus stood looking in. He continued to stand, motionless, after he had been seen. Annie cried out again and, almost dropping her tumbler on to the table, rushed from the room, knocking against the door-frame in her blundering way as she went. The others stood bewildered a moment, not taking it in, not recognising the bearded figure that stayed motionless, itself giving no sign of recognition. It was Ishmael, who had not seen his brother since he himself was very little, who yet knew him the first, warned by some instinct. He got up and went out, followed by the others, who all talked at once though he stayed silent.

In the yard Annie was clinging around Archelaus, and the big man suffered it with a better grace than in the old days, though with a careless good-nature. Tom, smiling, stood a little behind the two of them. Not to Archelaus's primitive if cunning mind belonged that scheme for returning the evening of Ishmael's party; it was Tom who for two days had held him in reluctant seclusion at Penzance so as to spring the surprise at the least convenient moment. It was characteristic of Tom to scheme, even when there was nothing to gain by it but a little malicious gratification, as in this case.

Not for nothing, however, had Ishmael been trained as he had, and his voice, so unmistakably that of a gentleman as to strike them with a sense of something alien, came quietly if a little tremulously for the first few words.

"Hullo, Archelaus!" he said, shaking hands before the other's slower wits had decided whether to proffer the salute or no. "Come along in! You're just in time for my supper-party...." No speech could have robbed the conspirators of their little triumph more completely—it offered a welcome as from one who had the best of rights to invite a guest in, and at the same time accepted the place as the home of both. Archelaus stood glowering, thought of nothing to say in reply, and found himself following his young brother into the house.

After that the evening ceased to be Ishmael's and became a background for Archelaus. He had dug for gold in Australia, and if he had not had the luck of many others who had struck richer claims, he yet brought home money to fling round upon his fancies. For years he had wandered over the far places of the earth, so that his skin was tanned darker than his bleached hair, and his limited vocabulary had enriched itself with strange and coloured words. He was indeed a man. Even Ishmael felt that, as he sat in the dim kitchen where they had all gone to see Archelaus eat a vast meal and listen to his talk. Annie was entranced; the rare colour burnt on her cheekbones, her fingers rolled and unrolled her apron ceaselessly; she had relapsed into kitchen ways in a flash and, swathed in sacking, waited on her big son herself. Vassie tilted a superior nose and in the intervals tried to impress Archelaus by the remarkable progress of his family during his absence; but Phoebe, who had planned for Ishmael, fluttered all spontaneously for Archelaus. It seemed to her that he was like a demi-god as he sat there, thrusting the food into his mouth, golden beard dripping with golden cider, careless limbs outflung. Vassie only saw the inelegance, for he was her brother, but to Phoebe his very scorn of dainty ways made him more god-like because more man-like.

When darkness crept over the kitchen so that the hero could no longer be seen properly, Annie went into the parlour and returned carrying the elegant lamp, with its globe of frosted glass, that Vassie, when it was lit, proceeded to cover with a sort of little cape of quilled pink paper edged with flowers made of the same material. The room being thus too dimmed for Annie's fancy, she tilted the shade to one side so that a white fan of light threw itself upon Archelaus, making his tangled beard and crisp hair gleam and showing the warm colour brimming in his face up to the line of white across his untanned brow. So Ishmael saw him as he rose and went out to cool his own heated cheeks upon the cliff, and so he saw him as he lay in bed that night, flaring out in a swimming round of light against the darkness.

CHAPTER V

LULL BEFORE STORM

There was a place upon the cliff which Ishmael had made peculiarly his, where he went whenever he wished to be alone, which was not seldom. No other place since that hollow where the favoured boys had been wont to meet Hilaria had meant so much to him, and this one had the supreme advantage that it belonged to him only. The rest of his family did not indulge in cliff-climbing. Generally he was accompanied there by Wanda, his big farm-dog, a jolly, rollicking, idiotically adoring creature who spent her days wriggling and curvetting at his feet, her silly pink tongue dabbing at him, her moist eyes beaming through her tangled fringe. She was not very clever, being one of those amiable fool dogs whose quality of heart is their chief recommendation, but she had a certain wisdom of her own nevertheless.

Nowhere on all the coast was it possible to see a wider stretch of sky than from this plateau half-way down the sloping turf-clad cliff. On either side was ranked headland after headland, growing dimmer with the soft bruised hue of distance, while the plateau itself was set in an inward-curving stretch of cliff from which the whole line of the horizon made a vast convexity. Sometimes Ishmael would lie upon his back and, blotting the green protruding edge of the plateau from his mind, watch only the sky and sea, where, such was their expanse, it was often possible to glimpse three different weathers in one sweeping glance. Away to the left, where, far out to sea, the Longships stuck a white finger out of the foam, a sudden squall might come up, obliterating lighthouse, headlands, all the sea to the cliff's foot, with its purple smother. Directly in front of him, below a piled mass of cumuli that hung darkly from zenith to horizon, a line of livid whiteness would show the sea's rim, while nearer him, half-way across the watery floor, great shafts of light, flanked by others of varying brightness, poured down from a gap in the cloud-roof and split themselves in patches of molten silver upon the leaden greyness. And at his furthest right a sky of pure pale blue might arch to where layers of filmy cirrus were blurred by a faint burnished hue that was neither brown nor rose but a mingling of the delicate exhaust of both.

Killigrew was not long in discovering this place, which he declared presented an unrivalled stage for the setting of vast dream-dramas he watched trailing their cloudy way across it, and Ishmael was not loth to share his plateau with him. The incursion of Vassie was another matter, but by this time—nearly a month after that momentous birthday—Ishmael felt helplessly drifting. He was enjoying himself, while Killigrew showed no signs of wishing to return to Paris and Vassie was blooming as never before. She sat to him for sketches that never were finished, and that to her eyes, though she did not say so, looked just the same even when Killigrew declared a stroke more would wreck their perfection. Ishmael was neglecting his personal supervision of the farm these days—he had developed a new theory that it was time he tested how far things could go well without him. He had heard a hint or two dropped to the effect that the friend from foreign parts was only amusing himself with proud Vassie, but he paid no heed. What could be more absurd, he reflected, than the idea that she could want a boy a couple of years her junior and a mere student to fall in love with her? Thus Ishmael, while Killigrew laughed at him and with Vassie all day long, and she glowed and answered him and seemed as light-hearted, as either of them.

On a sunlit day, one of those March days which, in Cornwall, can hold a sudden warmth borrowed from the months to come, they all three sat upon the grass of the plateau, accompanied by Boase, who had taken them on an expedition to an ancient British village, where, with many little screams, Vassie's wide skirts had had to be squeezed and pulled through the dark underground "rooms" of a dead people. Now, as the day drew to a burnished close, they all sat upon the soft turf, and Killigrew and Ishmael watched with half-closed eyes the play of the sea-birds below them. The wheatears flirted their black and white persons over the rocks, the gulls dipped and wheeled, planed past them on level wings, uttering their harsh cries, or for a flashing moment rested so close that the blot of blood-red above their curved yellow beaks showed vividly; out to sea a gannet hung a sheer two hundred feet in air, then dropped, beak downwards.... He hit the sea like a stone with his plumage-padded breast, a column of water shot up from his meteoric fall, and he reappeared almost before it subsided with his prey already down his shaken throat. Killigrew clapped his hands in approbation and Vassie feigned interest.

"What a life!" exclaimed Killigrew; "if we do have to live again in the form of animals, I hope I shall be a bird, a sea-bird for choice. Just imagine being a gull or a gannet.... I wish one could paint the pattern they make in the air as they fly—a vast invisible web of curves, all of them pure beauty."

"Don't wish to be a bird in this part of the world, then," advised the Parson drily.

"Why not? Don't they have a good time?"

"If you had watched as long as I have ... seen all the mutilated birds with trailing legs and broken wings that pick up a miserable living as long as the warm weather lasts.... There's not a boy in the countryside, save a few in whom I've managed to instil the fear of the Lord, that doesn't think he's a perfect right to throw stones at them, and, worse, to catch them on devilish little hooks and as likely as not throw them aside to die when caught. Grown men do it—it's quite a trade. I know one who, if he catches on his hooks a bird he does not want, wrenches its beak open and, tearing the hook out, flings the bird away to die. This just mutilates the bird sufficiently to prevent it getting caught and giving him all the trouble over again. And the Almighty does not strike this man with his lightning from heaven.... I sometimes marvel at the patience of God, and in my short-sighted ignorance even deplore it...."

"Don't tell me," said Killigrew swiftly. "I don't want to know. I'd rather think they were all safe and happy. It isn't as though one could do anything."

"One can do very little. Lack of imagination, which is doubtless the sin against the Holy Ghost, is at the root of it, and to that the tongues of men and of angels plead in vain. But something can be done with the children, if one gets them young enough, or so one hopes. Sometimes I reproach myself because when one of the people who practise these abominations is in pain and grief, I look on and feel very little pity when I remember all. 'It is not here the pain of the world is swelled,' I say to myself; 'it is out on the rocks, in the fields, where the little maimed things are creeping and wondering why, and the rabbits are crying all night in the traps....' It could all be so easily avoided; that's what makes it worse. Deliberately to augment the sum of suffering in the world, where there must be so much—it's inconceivable."

"Like adding to the sum of ugliness. These people do that too," said Killigrew, thinking of the hideous houses and chapels run up day by day; "and it's all so beautiful and looks so happy if one only lets it alone...."

"There's a queer vein of cruelty in the Celt—at least in the Cornish Celt—that is worse than the Latin," went on Boase. "When they are angered they wreak vengeance on anything. And sometimes when there are a lot of them together under circumstances which you would think would have roused their pity, the devil of wanton cruelty enters into them. I shall never forget when a school of whales came ashore in the Bay ... they lay there stranded, poor creatures! And from the oldest man to the little boys out of school a blood-lust came on everyone. They tore and hacked at the poor creatures with penknives and any weapon they could get, they carved their names on them and stopped up their blow-holes with stones, till the place was a perfect shambles and the blood soaked into the sand as into an arena in ancient Rome.... Nobody could stop them. It was a sight to make one weep for shame that one was a man."

Ishmael lay in silence. He knew—no one with eyes to see could live there and not know—but, like Killigrew, he had always tried not to think too much about it. He was so unable to take things superficially that he feared thought, and hence often did less than men who did not care as much. He gave a slight movement now that was not so much impatience as a thrusting away of a thing that sickened him and which he felt he could not stem. It seemed to him that the glory of the day had departed. He, too, remembered that shambles of which the Parson spoke; it had been the first time the pain in the world he so loved had come home to him. He remembered now how, as he and the Parson had come back, in melancholy silence, from that scene of blood, his own declarations about its being such a good world, made to the Parson on his first night home and repeated so often since to his own high-beating heart, had mocked at him. What did it avail being happy when there was such pain in the world? Himself or another, or, worse still, these innocents that could not philosophise about it—that any should suffer made all happiness futile. The same deadly consciousness came upon him now on the sunny cliff, and he resented that the topic should have been started, himself keeping a sullen silence. But the Parson turned and spoke directly to him.

"By the way," he said, "I hate to have to tell you, but I hear, and I'm afraid it's true, that Archelaus is starting bush-beating on the estate again. I met John-Willy Jacka coming back from the direction of the wood late one night with a suspicious-looking sack and a bludgeon, and next day I asked John-James if he knew anything. He didn't give anyone away, but I gathered—"

"If it's true—" Ishmael paused for sheer rage, then went on: "I'll tackle John-Willy, and if it's true he can go. But of course it's Archelaus really, just because he knows how I feel about it. It isn't even as though it were the season for it, if you can talk of a season for such a thing, but no one can be very hard up for food as late as this. Oh, if I can't be free of him even now he's working at Botallack—"

"I had such a quarrel with Mamma about that this morning," struck in Vassie, who disliked the conversation and thought she had been out of it long enough. "She was boasting at breakfast—after

you'd gone out, Ishmael—that Archelaus was a captain now, and I laughed, and said it was more than he'd ever been in the army, but that of course a mine captain wasn't a real one ... and she was furious. She said it was quite real enough for her and Archelaus anyway, though perhaps not for the likes of me. I met Archelaus at the mill the other day when I was over seeing Phoebe, and he certainly did seem smart, ever so different from when he came back. You wouldn't have known him."

She ended on her high laugh and rolled over a little woolly puppy that lay in her lap, burying her long fingers in its coat. She was perched upon a grassy slope like some vast moth that had alighted there, her pale skirts spread, a white cashmere shawl swathed about her shoulders, her golden head tipped back on her full throat. Over her, like a swaying flower, a tiny parasol reared on a long tasselled stalk, held in Killigrew's hand as he lounged beside her. He let his eyes run over her now, tipping the parasol to one side so that at his pleasure the late sunlight should touch her hair and her still flawless skin. She knew she could stand the test, and stayed a moment before motioning him to tip the parasol back again.

"It seems to me Archelaus is going a lot to the mill," observed Killigrew idly, and more for the purpose of saying something than because he really thought so. "I ran into him there the other day when I was doing my sketch of it."

A short hush, pregnant with thought, followed on his words. To Boase and Vassie—those two so different beings—came the swift reflection "That would not be at all a bad thing. It would remove a danger."

Killigrew was interested, as an onlooker, in the idea of the alliance his own words had suggested. Ishmael felt an irrational little pang. Phoebe's smiles, her little friendliness, had always belonged to him—Archelaus would crush them as big fingers rub the powder off a butterfly's wings.... If he and Archelaus had been more truly brothers it would have been a very nice arrangement ... little Phoebe would make a sweeter sister in some ways than the imperious Vassie....

"This puppy is for Phoebe," cried Vassie, breaking into a hurried speech; "it's been promised her a long time. She's so fond of pets."

This was true. Phoebe's maternal instincts made her love to have a soft, helpless little lamb or calf dependent on her; but it seemed her instinct was oddly animal in quality, for when the creature on which she had lavished so much care grew to sturdiness she saw it go to the butcher's knife with unimpaired cheerfulness and turned her attentions to the next weakling. It was a standing joke against Phoebe that she called all her hens by name and nursed them from the egg up, only to inform you brightly at some meal that it was Henrietta, or Garibaldi, or whatever luckless bird it might be, that you were devouring.

"If you like I'll take that puppy over to the mill now, if you'll see Wanda doesn't follow to bring it back," observed Ishmael, getting to his feet, "and then perhaps I can find out something about this bush-beating scare. If Archelaus is there—"

"Be careful, Ishmael," said the Parson quietly.

"Oh, I'll keep my temper, or try to. Coming with me, Joe?"

Vassie sat nonchalantly picking blades of grass. She would sooner never have seen Killigrew again than have asked him to stay with her, even than have suggested, with apparent carelessness, some plan that should keep him. But she waited with throbbing heart for his answer.

"I'd like to," said Killigrew briskly; "I've been abominably lazy till to-day, and that means I shall get fat. And when a person with light eyelashes and sandy whiskers gets fat all is over. I should have to go into my Guv'nor's business and become an alderman."

He reared his singularly graceful self up from the grass as he spoke and helped Vassie to her feet.

"Good-bye, both of you, then," said Vassie, withdrawing her hand when she was on her feet. "If you're going to the mill, I'll expect you when I see you."

This would have been arch had Vassie been a little less clever; as it was it sounded so natural that even that man-of-the-world, Killigrew, was taken in. As he set off with Ishmael he felt a moment's regret that he had not stayed with Vassie—a moment inspired by her lack of pique at his not having stayed.

The sun that had gilded Vassie's head had sunk swiftly by the time they reached the mill; and when the miller opened to their knock a flood of lamplight came out to mingle with the soft dusk. Phoebe's

mother had died some two or three years earlier, and since then the miller had lived with only an old aunt of his own to help him look after his daughter. He peered out at them almost anxiously, Ishmael thought, and seemed rather upset at sight of him.

"Who's that there?" he asked sharply; then, as Killigrew stepped forward round the porch: "I thought maybe Phoebe was weth 'ee."

"Phoebe? Oh, no!" said Ishmael; "why, is she out?"

"'Tes of no account," replied the miller. "I reckon she'm just gone down-along to see to the fowls or semthen. Will 'ee come in, you and your Lunnon friend?"

Ishmael hesitated, then, remembering on what errand he had come, he stepped in, and, despite Killigrew's obvious unwillingness, they found themselves pledged to stay to supper.

"We really only just came to bring Phoebe this puppy my sister promised her," Ishmael explained. "It's the pick of our Wanda's litter and Phoebe had set her heart on it." Ishmael held up the squirming little thing as he spoke, and it licked its black nose nervously with a pink tongue that came out curled up like a leaf.

"Ah! she'm rare and fond o' dumb animals, is our Phoebe," said the miller, who seemed gratified at this mark of attention. "So long as she can have some lil' weak thing to make a fool on she'm happy, I b'lieve. 'Tes a woman's way."

"It's a very nice way for us poor devils of men," said Killigrew, laughing.

Supper was a short and oddly nervous meal, and still Phoebe did not come in. Ishmael at last felt there was no use staying longer and rose.

"Good-night to you, Mr. Lenine," he said. "I expect I'll find Phoebe over at Cloom. If I do, I'll see her home."

"Good-night to you both," said the miller cordially enough; but when they turned the corner by the wheel he was still peering after them as though beset by some uneasiness.

"Rum old bird," opined Killigrew, as they swung along in the darkness. As they reached the cliff again something brushed through the bushes away to their right, but as they called and no one answered they concluded it was a fox or some other wanderer of the night and went on. Further along still they came on a man leaning against a stone step that crested a wall they had to pass.

He did not move at their approach, and Ishmael touched him on the sleeve.

"Here, we want to pass, please," he said.

"So you want to pass, do you?" said the man, with a slow laugh. "You want to pass ...? Well, pass.... I'll not hinder 'ee passing here nor yet to a place that's a sight further on...."

"Archelaus!" exclaimed Ishmael, peering into the darkness. But the man had already moved off and was lumbering down the field, and the sound of his quiet mirth was all that came back to them.

"I really think sometimes that Archelaus must have had a touch of the sun out in Australia," declared Ishmael as they mounted the stile after a brief awkward silence.

"If it's only that ..." was all that Killigrew would vouchsafe.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Only you're sure he wouldn't do anything to hurt you ...? He doesn't seem to love you by all I've heard and seen since I've been here."

"Of course not. What an idea! He does hate me pretty badly, I'm afraid, but I'm out of his reach. Archelaus knows what side his bread is buttered; he has a well-paid job and wouldn't do anything to upset it."

"There doesn't seem much love lost between you."

"There isn't. I'm incapable of being fair to Archelaus, as he to me, the difference being that I admit it and he doesn't."

"I wonder what he's up to now," exclaimed Killigrew, looking back from the height of the stile; "there's a light gleaming out. Looks as though he were lighting a lantern or signalling with it—"

"A lantern...." Ishmael scrambled up beside the other and his voice was alert. "Then perhaps there is something in this idea of the Parson's. I say, let's follow him. If he goes towards the wood it's fairly certain he's up to something, if it's only wiring rabbits."

"Isn't it rather looking for trouble, old chap?" demurred Killigrew, who did not know the name of fear for himself but was conscious of some undefined dread that had stirred in him at the greeting of Archelaus.

"Better go back, perhaps," he added; "they'll be expecting us. What d'you say?"

"That I'm going to follow Archelaus.... I'm about sick of him and his underhand ways. You don't know how he's made me suffer in all sorts of little things this past month. Talking to my own men at the inn and the farms, laughing at me. Even John-Willy Jacka goes after him now, that used to be a youngster with me.... You can go home if you like."

"Don't be a greater ass than you can help," advised Killigrew genially, and the two set off together for the point where the light had just flickered and gone out, as though the slide had been drawn over the lantern, if lantern it were. On a dim stretch of road they made out a form that bulked like that of Archelaus; it was joined by another and then by two more, and all four set off towards the wood, Killigrew and Ishmael behind them.

CHAPTER VI

THE BUSH-BEATING

In all the bleak country "the wood" represented mystery, glamour. It made a dark wedge between two folds of moorland, its tree-tops level with the piled boulders on the northern side, like a deeply green tarn lapping the edge of some rocky shore. Oak, beech and ash, hawthorn, sycamore and elder, went to make the solid bosses of verdure that filled the valley, while at one end a grove of furs stood up blackly, winter and summer. Giant laurels, twisted and writhing creations of a nightmare, spread their snake-like branches beneath the rocky wall at one side of the wood, and in spring they shook their pale, sickly tassels in a gloom that was as green, as freckled with shallows of light, as underseas. A stream gurgled through its depths, increasing the illusion of a watery element. All over the sloping floor of the wood, where the red leaves drifted high in due season, huge boulders were piled, moss-grown, vividly decked with orange fungi, and surrounded by a thick undergrowth of holly and elder bushes. This place had no name beyond "the wood"—enough distinction in that county where a copse of ash or fir was all that scarred moor and pasture with shadow. It was just within Ishmael's property, marking his most inland boundary, and he cherished it as something dearer than all his money-yielding acres. It had been his ambition to make it the home of every bird that built its nest there, of every badger or rabbit or toad or slow-worm that sheltered in its fastnesses. No life should cry there for the teeth of the trap, no feathers scatter for the brutal violating of the sheltering bushes. Thus Ishmael, but otherwise Archelaus.... There was little doubt what he and his fellows had come for: there were a half-dozen of them when all were met, and all carried cudgels or flails made of knotted cloth, and walked cautiously, whispering to each other lest the birds should take premature flight. Ishmael and Killigrew lagged behind them, waiting for certainty before discovering themselves.

It was deadlily dark in the wood, with a darkness more unbroken than the stillness which yet seemed part of it. A thousand little scraping noises broke the quiet air, chill and dank. Leaves pattered against each other, twigs rubbed faintly, brittle things broke under the lightest foot. Still hardly a wing unfolded ever so little, not a distressful chirp heralded the slaughter that threatened. Gradually, to eyes growing used to the gloom, differing shades of darkness became apparent; it was faintly marked by them as the silence by the sounds....

Still the feathers were unstirred on the breasts where tiny beaks were thrust in sleep; round, bright eyes were filmed by the delicate lids; the bushes held undisturbed the little lives confided to them.

Suddenly a funnel of light flared into the darkness, intensifying it, waking into vivid green a full-foliaged holly; a rain of blows echoed back and forth through the night, a whirr of bewildered wings mingled with it, a frantic piping that was drowned in the clamour even as it burst forth. High overhead the startled wood-pigeons flew out into the free air above the tree-tops, their clamour filling the whole place with the beating of wings that in the dark seemed mighty as the wings of avenging angels, but

availed their tiny brethren nothing. In that one minute there fell, beaten into the undergrowth to die miserably or flailed into the greedy hands and caps of the murderers, some half a hundred innocent and lovely lives, all of them torn out in an agony of fear without knowing why. Ishmael ran forward, not even hearing his own voice as it shouted oaths he never knew he had used.

The men stopped at their work, caps and sticks in hand, staring stupidly; only Archelaus, after a first moment's pause, showed no astonishment. It was not till long afterwards that it occurred to Ishmael to wonder whether his brother had all along known he followed, and it was a question that was to remain for ever unanswered. Archelaus lifted his lantern, which first gleamed on the red surprise of John-Willy Jacka's face, then on the foolish mask of Silly Peter, the local idiot, who stood slackly agape between a couple of miners. Then Archelaus brought the light round, to fall on Ishmael's pale face ere swinging it on to Killigrew.

"Lads, here's the young gentlemen from the Manor!" he cried—"come to see a bit o' bush-beaten; let's show 'em, shall us?" And, still holding his lantern so that its light fell on them, he deliberately let drive with his great stick at a branch where a wounded bird was crushed upon a sharp twig.

Ishmael sprang forward and laid hands on the stick, twisting at it with all his strength. Archelaus gave for a flash under the sudden onslaught, but, recovering himself at once, held the stick steady with one hand against all the twisting of Ishmael's two. He laughed a little as he did so. Silly Peter, under the impression that it was all part of the fun, laughed too.

"You beast!... you beast!..." Ishmael was saying as he tussled. Killigrew caught at his arm.

"Say something to them, Ishmael; say something to them. Don't go on like that ..." he muttered urgently.

Ishmael turned on him a face distorted with passion. "Say something—what is there to say to brutes like that? Ah!..."

Archelaus had thrown the lantern underfoot and trampled it out; a darkness impenetrable to dazzled eyes enwrapped them. Killigrew, keeping his head amidst the scuffing he heard, dived for where he had seen young Jacka standing in guilty stillness, his dark lantern dangling from his hand. Almost at once Killigrew felt his own fingers meet its smooth, slightly hot surface; he wrenched it away and fumbled desperately at the slide. A beam, pale but wavering, shot out into the darkness as he succeeded in his effort, and by its light, as men in moments of emotion may see some one thing or action painted on their retina by a lightning flash, he saw Archelaus bringing his stick, muffled in a coat, down on Ishmael's head. The next second the blow fell—there had not been time for Archelaus to check the impetus of the blow when the discovering light flared onto him. There came the heavy sound of a body falling on the thick-piled leaves. Archelaus stumbled up against Killigrew, knocking the lantern from his hand; it hit against a boulder and went out.

It was the voice of Archelaus that broke the stricken stillness.

"Don't 'ee move, you chaps ..." it said, in tones that made a ghastly essay at confidence and trembled despite his efforts. "I fear Silly Peter's done someone a hurt.... I saw en striking out.... Why ded'n 'ee all keep still same as I ded ... someone light a lantern...." Followed a sound of fumbling, and then a light wavered in Killigrew's fingers; he picked up and lit a lantern. By its light could be seen Archelaus holding a bewildered Silly Peter, whose mouth and eyes hung open with fear, while from his hand depended a stick wrapped in a coat. Even in that dim light wet marks could be seen on it. The brain of Archelaus, perhaps stirred to activity by his first inspiration of attack as much as by the hatred that had suddenly welled up uncontrollably, had for once worked with a desperate quickness. Everyone stared at one another over the body of Ishmael that lay huddled on its face in the leaves.

"Help me pick him up, you two," ordered Killigrew to Jacka; "and you there, go ahead with the light. Who is the fastest runner?"

"I'll go for doctor," said Archelaus. "Tes my right. He'n my brother." He boggled a little at the word.

"You!" began Killigrew, then stopped. His quick intuition had told him how important it was to Archelaus also to be the first to get the doctor. Killigrew was not a cynic, even at that age; he was merely supremely utilitarian.

"Off you go," he said, "and remember I shall be timing you. The doctor must be at Cloom as soon as we are."

"He shall be," declared Archelaus, and meant it. He kept his word. By the time that Ishmael had been laid beneath the drooping Christ who had seen so much of passion and misery, of birth and death, in that same bed spread before Him, the doctor was there too. And round the bed clustered as many distraught women, and men hovering at their skirts, as gathered at the foot of the plaster Calvary above. Even the intent dog was not wanting, as poor Wanda, conscious of disaster to the being she worshipped, whimpered and shivered, her back curved in an arch of distress, by the head of the bed.

CHAPTER VII

THE HEART OF THE CYCLONE

There are times in life when our affairs are at some high crest, when all emotion and the processes of thought become intensified and crystallised: the slightest incident makes a deep-bitten impression; the most momentary effect of colour or lighting, or the tones of a voice, remain in the memory indissolubly connected with the phase the mind is passing through. Every sense is hung upon a hair-trigger, and even irrelevant things touch more sharply than usual, in the same way that a magnifying glass reveals the minutest pores and hairs on the hand holding whatever the primary object to be looked at may be. They are mercifully few, those periods of intense clarity, for they leave a mind and heart deadened and surfeited, that slowly awake to the dull consciousness of pain, even as the body, numbed by a severe accident, only after a while awakes to sentient aching. Ishmael passed into this phase in the first days after the scene in the wood, before physically he was conscious of much beyond a dull throbbing in his head.

He lay and stared from out his bandages, feigning more stupor than he felt in his passionate craving to keep off all discussion and inquiry. He lay and watched the spring sunlight creep over the whitewashed wall opposite, and every slow black fly that crawled across the patch of warmth might have been crawling over his raw nerves. He almost expected the surface of the wall to contract like a skin and twitch them off, as he felt his own skin doing out of sympathy.

In the night, when the wall was filmed with shadow save for the faint flickering of a rushlight that made great rounds of light upon the dimness, then he saw all his life at Cloom passing in a shadow show across the wall, crawling like the flies.... He was never delirious; physically his fine and sane constitution was recovering well from a nasty blow—it was merely as though all his mind had been set a little faster, like a newly-regulated clock, a clock set to work backwards; and he could hear its ticking through all the sounds of everyday life that, hushed as much as might be, came into his room.

He felt sick of it all, sick of the striving at Cloom, of the quarrels with Archelaus, of Tom's cat-like attacks, of his mother's complaints, of the cruelties he felt spoiling the whole countryside like a leprosy. He cared for no one near him except Killigrew, because he alone stood for the things of an alien world. He hated the sound of John-James' boots that never failed to go a tip-toe over the cobbles below his window. He wanted nothing, not even to get away from it all. He was too absorbed watching it upon the wall, hearing his own mind ticking out its comments like that horrible instrument Vassie had upon the piano to time her exercises.

It was the first time since the fit in his childhood, which he did not remember, that he had ever lain helpless or suffered in his body, and he was aware of humiliation. All he could remember of the scene in the wood showed him his own futility. Everything was wasted—nothing he had done was any good nor the doing of it, then or ever again, at all worth while. Nothing seemed to matter.

So passed the first two days of his consciousness, and the speed at which the clock of his mind was regulated made the world's time seem interminable. When the two days had gone they seemed to him to be lengthy, not as two weeks or years or anything in a known measure of counting, but as some period of time spaced quite differently. This is the time that only sick people know, that fills their eyes with knowledge not understood of the healthy sympathisers beside their beds, who, though they may have sat the nights and days out with them, yet have not the same measure to count the passing of their hours.

With the third day came pain, bodily pain, and that saved Ishmael. It seemed to him then that physical hurts were so far worse than mental that his dread depression vanished before it. He would have welcomed that back to save his body a pang; it seemed to him his head must burst with the pain raging in it, and he cared about nothing else in the world. When that too passed he was as one who has

floated out of stormy seas into smooth waters—too weak to navigate them, but blissfully aware that it does not matter, they are safe and he can drift with the current. It was only then he began to talk, and he never once referred to what had happened. He asked where Archelaus was, and when he heard he had gone back to his work in the mine that day he said no more. And it was characteristic of Ishmael that no one ever knew whether he were aware of that impulse of his brother's, and what it had nearly led to, or not. With cessation of physical pain and the exhaustion of the high-keyed string of his mind, came blessed reaction. Even the fact that nothing mattered ceased to matter. The suggestion, emanating simultaneously from the Parson and Killigrew that he should accompany the latter back to London stirred him to only a faint thrill—indeed, a certain disinclination to accept the offer was almost as strong as the urgings of the common sense which told him that soon he would be won to pleasure and interest, once the initial effort was over. Still, as the days slipped past, he found himself looking forward more and more keenly.

On the afternoon before he was to go to town he was resting on a couch in his room when the sounds of Vassie's arrogant but not unpleasing voice came floating up to him from the parlour as she sang her latest song, the fashionable "Maiden's Prayer." He smiled a little to himself; he could picture Killigrew, leaning attentive, turning the pages, smiling between narrowed lids at the lovely thing she looked—chin raised and full throat vibrant—yet giving so little away beyond his admiration. The song faded, silence fell, then a door opened and closed. Vassie's voice was raised, this time in welcome. He guessed the visitor to be Phoebe from the fluttered feminine quality of the sounds below—staccato sentences whose words he could not catch, but whose very rhythm, broken and eager, betrayed them. A moment later, and a knock came at his door.

It was Vassie who entered, somewhat sulkily, her beauty clouded by a shade of reluctance—Phoebe, shrinking, palpitant, staying in the shadowy passage.

"Phoebe has come to know if she may say good-bye to you, Ishmael?" said Vassie. "She's heard you're going to London, and can't believe you'll ever come back safely...."

"Why, Phoebe, that's kind of you," he called; "but won't you come in for a moment?" He was pleased after a mild fashion to see her—she at least stood for something not too intimately connected with his own household, he told himself. The next moment he remembered that there had been some suggestion—what his blurred recollection of it could not tell him—that she might be being courted by Archelaus; but the slight recoil of distaste stirred within him fell away before her frank eagerness, her kindly warmth, as she pattered into the room, her skirts swaying around her. She sat primly down beside the couch while Vassie stayed by its foot, determined not to sit down also and so give an air of settled ease to the interview.

"I—I hope you are better, Ishmael?" faltered Phoebe. She had never before been in a young man's bedroom, even bereft of its tenant, and she felt shy and fluttered.

"Oh, I'm all right!" answered Ishmael. "I don't think poor Silly Peter has enough muscle to hit very hard, you know."

A look of intense relief floated across the strained demureness of Phoebe's countenance: raised eyelids and a heightened colour testified to what passed through her mind.

"Oh, then it was Silly Peter—" she began ingenuously; then broke off.

"Yes, didn't you know? He was dazed with the lights, and then the sudden darkness and all of us being so angry, I suppose.... Hullo, what's that?"

It was Killigrew's voice calling softly up the stairs to Vassie. She hesitated, made a feint of going to the door only to hear what he wanted, and then went rustling down to him. Phoebe snuggled a little more comfortably on her chair with an unconscious movement of pleasure.

"He said downstairs he wanted to finish taking her picture to-day while the light lasted," she said; then ran on: "Ishmael, I've been so unhappy...."

"Have you, Phoebe? Why, what about?" Then, as he saw her flush and bite her pouting lower lip, he added: "Not because of me? I say, how jolly of you! But there wasn't any necessity—"

"How silly you are! As if one did things—worried and that sort of thing—because it was necessary! It's because one can't help it."

"Then it was all the nicer of you. But I meant that really it wasn't anything to worry about. I'm as right as rain, and it's given me a jolly good excuse to go up to London and see the world."

Panic peeped in Phoebe's brown eyes, giving her a flashing look of something woodland, despite her would-be smart attire. She dropped her lids to hide it.

"London...." she murmured. Then, sitting upright, and staring at her twisting fingers:

"Ishmael!..."

A pause which Ishmael broke by asking, "Well?"

"Nothing. Only—I was wondering. Whether you ... how you'd like London, and whether you wouldn't find down here, and all of us, very dull when you come back?"

"What rot! Of course not! Why should I?" asked Ishmael, already so in London in anticipation that he could not even take an interest in his return to this older world.

"Oh, I don't know. I only wondered. You never wonder about things, do you, Ishmael?"

"I don't think I ever do anything else."

"Not in the way I mean. You wonder about life and all sorts of things like that that I don't bother about, but not about people, about what you feel for them. That's what I mean by wondering."

"Oh, feeling!..." said Ishmael in a gruff embarrassment; "I dunno. Yes I do, though. I don't think what one feels is so very important—not the personal part of it, anyway. There's such a lot of things in the world, and somehow it seems waste of energy to be always tearing oneself to tatters over one's personal relationship towards any one other person."

Phoebe tried to snatch at the words that blew past over her head as far as her comprehension of them was concerned.

"But how can you say it's not important?" she exclaimed reproachfully. "Even being married wouldn't seem important if you looked at it that way."

"Even being married...." repeated Ishmael. Inwardly came the swift thought: "Well, why is there all this fuss about it, anyway?" All he said was:

"Why, have you been thinking of getting married, Phoebe?"

"A lady can't be the first to think of it...." said Phoebe.

"I suppose not," he agreed, true to his own age and that in which he lived. Conversation lay quiescent between them; he was aware of a sensation of weariness and wished she would go, pretty as she looked sitting there in her circle of swelling skirt and trim little jacket that fitted over her round breast and left bare her soft throat.

"Have you ever ...?" asked Phoebe suddenly.

"Have I ever what?"

"Thought of it ... of getting married?"

"Good Lord! not yet. There's been such a lot of other things...."

"Well, when you do I'll hope you'll be very happy," said Phoebe.

"Thanks! I hope so too."

"I don't suppose you'll know me then."

"Why ever not?"

"Oh, well, of course you'll marry a real lady, and she wouldn't want to know me. She'd think me common."

"What utter nonsense, Phoebe! Do all girls talk such silly nonsense? Why, of course I'll always be far too fond of you to lose sight of you, and I expect you and my wife—how idiotic that sounds—will be no end of friends." He did not think so; but there struck him that there was something rather plaintive and wistful about Phoebe that afternoon. Suddenly she rose and settled the basque of her jacket with quick, nervous fingers.

"I must go," she said hurriedly. "I don't know what Vassie'll say at me staying up here like this."

"It was awfully nice of you to come," said Ishmael, taking the little hand that lay idle against a flounce. She made no motion to withdraw it or to move away, and glancing up at her he saw there were tears in her eyes. As he looked they slipped over her lashes and rolled down her cheeks. She made no effort to stay them, nor did she sob—she cried with the effortless sorrow of a tired child.

"Phoebe! why, what's the matter? Are you unhappy about anything? Phoebe, do tell me what it is?"

She shook her head but stammered out:

"It's nothing, but I'm sort of frightened.... I can't tell you about what. And I thought you might be able to help me and put it all right, but you can't."

"How do you know I can't? You haven't tried me."

"Yes, I have," she said, half-laughing now through her tears that were already dry upon her cheeks. Whatever thought, whatever fear, whatever glimpsing of dread possibilities in herself or in some other person had brought her to his side that afternoon was already weighing less unbearably upon her, though she had failed in her attempt to find an easing. Her mind simply could not sustain for long one idea, and in the passing moment she was always able to find distraction. She found it now in Vassie, who came sweeping in, slightly flushed and with a lighter manner than that with which she had ushered in Phoebe. She bore her off with promise of tea and a look at new gowns with none the less determination, but the sight of tearstains on Phoebe's cheek at once softened and relieved her.

Ishmael was left with a vague feeling that he had failed Phoebe in something she had expected of him. Yet for himself he was cheered by her visit, for it had served to bring him out of that dead, still peace where he had been for so many days, that had not lightened even with returning strength, but that had been swept away by the breath of the commonplace Phoebe brought with her.

As to Vassie, she was occupied with wondering whether the passionate yet careless caresses that Killigrew had lavished on her that afternoon "meant anything" or not. He had told her that in France they always said that "love was an affair of the skin...." And she knew she had a perfect skin. Killigrew had told her it was perfect to stroke as well as gaze upon; none of her English swains had ever told her that. She always looked on Killigrew as a foreigner because he was so alien to herself.

Yet that evening he spent with Ishmael and the Parson, and the next day a grey uncertain morning of blown clouds found Ishmael and Killigrew both seated in the train while she waved her handkerchief at them from a receding platform. And if that handkerchief were to be wet with tears that were not for her brother nor yet for Killigrew except in so far as he had, with his gay tongue and sudden secret kisses, awakened hopes in her that she was beginning to see, by his very nature, could have no foundation, at least she let no one even guess at it. They were tears of rage, almost as much with herself as him, and if Killigrew were never to have had more upon his conscience than a light flirtation with this ambitious and far from ignorant girl, there would have been little to disturb his healthy slumbers. Vassie was not one to waste time over the regrets that eat at the heart, and, though she could not altogether stifle pain at the outset, her strong-set will made the inevitable period of recurrent pangs shorter for her than for most. Killigrew had played the game quite fairly according to his code; it was Vassie's ignorance of any form of philandering beyond the crude interchange of repartee and kisses of the young clerks she had hitherto met that had made the playing of it unequal. She and Phoebe were both enacting the oldest woman's part in the world—that of being left behind to wait; and it was two very unwitting youths who left them. As the train gathered speed on its long journey both Ishmael and Killigrew had their minds on what lay before them, not on anything left behind.

CHAPTER VIII

NEW HORIZONS

When Ishmael laid his aching head upon the pillow one night a week later in the Tavistock Square house of Mr. Alderman Killigrew it carried within a whirl of impressions so confused that days would have been needed in which to sort them out. London—the London of the 'sixties—noisy with hoofs and iron-bound wheels upon its cobbles and macadam, dark with slums that encroached upon its gayest ways, glittering with night-houses and pleasure gardens that focussed light till dawn, brightened as

with clustered bubbles by the swelling skirts of ladies of the whole world and the half, was, though smaller, ignorant of electric light, and without half the broad spaces and great buildings of the London of to-day, still more sparkling and gayer in its effect because life was less hidden. The 'sixties were not squeamish, though they were prudish; a man's own womenfolk were less noticeable than to-day, not only in such minor detail as the exclusion of them from the tops of omnibuses; but they, after all, were but a fraction of what went to make up spectacular life. Those were the days of bloods—when an officer and a gentleman went as a matter of course to all the cockpits and gaming houses, the night clubs and rings sacred to the "fancy"; when it was still the thing for a gentleman to spend his nights in drinking champagne and playing practical jokes that were forgiven him as a high-spirited young man who must sow his wild oats and garnish each word of conversation with an oath. From the comparative respectability of Cremorne and Motts, and the frankly shady precincts of the "Pie" and the "Blue Posts" down to places considerably worse, London was an enormous gamut of opportunities for "seeing life."

Killigrew, as a merchant's son, however well off, could not penetrate to the most sacred precincts—Motts was more or less barred to him; but on the other hand he was in the midst of what was always called the "Bohemian" set—in which were many artists, both the big and the little fry. One could "see life" there too, though, as usual, most of the artists were very respectable people. It was a respectable art then in vogue in England. Frith was the giant of the day, and from the wax figures at Madame Tussaud's to pictures such as the "Rake's Progress" the plastic arts had a moral tendency. Even the animals of Sir Edwin Landseer were the most decorous of all four-footed creatures; Killigrew blasphemed by calling the admired paintings still-life studies of animals. But then Killigrew was from Paris and chanted the newer creed; he was always comparing London unfavourably with Paris even when he was showing it off most.

The house in Tavistock Square was grand beyond anything Ishmael had ever imagined, if a little dismal too. It was furnished with a plethora of red plush, polished mahogany, and alabaster vases; while terrible though genuine curios from Mr. Killigrew's foreign agents decorated the least likely places. You were quite likely to be greeted, on opening your wardrobe, by a bland ostrich egg, which Mrs. Killigrew, the vaguest of dear women, would have thrust there and forgotten. She had a deeply-rooted conviction that there was something indecent about an ostrich egg—probably its size, emphasising that nakedness which nothing exhibits so triumphantly as an egg, had something to do with it.

Mrs. Killigrew was nothing if not "nice," but she was something much better than that too. Ishmael, though he could no more help laughing at her than could anyone else, soon felt a genuine affection for her that he never lost. She was a little wide-eyed, wistful-looking woman, really supremely contented with life, and, though kindness itself, quite incapable of realising that anyone could ever really be unhappy or wicked. "I'm sure the dear Lord knows what's best for us all," was her comfortable creed, that in one less sweet-natured would have made for selfishness.

"I'm sure that'll be very nice, my dears," was her invariable comment on any programme suggested by the young men; and there was a legend in the family that Killigrew—or Joseph, as his mother always called him in full—had once said to her: "How would it be, mother, if I were to murder the Guv'nor and then take you round the world with me on the money? We could settle in the South Sea Islands, and I'd marry a darky and you could look after the picaninny grandchildren?" To which Mrs. Killigrew had responded: "Yes, dear, that will be very nice; and on your way, if you're passing the fishmongers', will you tell him to alter the salmon for this evening to cod, as your father won't be in to dinner?"

Mr. Killigrew was a thin, pale man, not at all the typical prosperous merchant, with a skin like the shiny outside of a cold suet pudding, a high wall of forehead, and the thin-lipped mouth of a lawyer. Perhaps it was because of that mouth he was such a successful trader, while the brow provided him with enough philosophy to bear gladly with a child so different from himself—always a hard blow to egoism.

Mr. Killigrew approved of Ishmael; he liked his keenness on whatever appertained to his trade as an agriculturist, and he himself being concerned in the import of several tropical fruits and products, went with the young man to the great Horticultural Show at South Kensington, while the scornful Joe betook himself to the races; and Mrs. Killigrew, though she declined both outings, was sure that they would be very nice.

They were—though Killigrew lost so much money that he was afraid to come home and spent the night imbibing champagne and repentance at the Hummums, and Ishmael bought Indian corn and a kind of yam which he thought could be induced to flourish in West Penwith, which incidentally it did so far as foliage went, though it always obstinately refused to bear fruit. The following mid-day Joe sent for Ishmael to the Hummums, and from that comfortable if somewhat dingy hostelry set out, in the gayest spirits, to track down a money-lender who would oblige on no better security than his assurance

that the Guv'nor would pay up when he had got over the shock.

Success in this put Killigrew into the wildest spirits, and he forthwith took unto himself a young man whom he ran into as he and Ishmael were going into the Blue Posts for a before-dinner drink. The young man was none other than Carminow, grown very tall and melancholy-looking, with an extravagantly high collar, much swathed with a voluminous black silk cravat and a fancy waistcoat. Carminow, who under a manner of deepest gloom concealed a nature as kind and as disconcertingly morbid as of yore, was unaffectedly charmed to see his old schoolfellows, and said so. He had better control over the letter "r" than in his boyhood, but his employment of it was still uncertain and quite irrational. He linked an arm in each and said gravely: "Will you come with me to see the execution at Newgate to-morrow morning? They are twying new experiments with the dwop, and it should be intewesting."

"No—are you serious?" demanded Killigrew. "I say, I've half a mind to.... It might make a jolly fine sketch, mightn't it? Kept quite rough and suggestive, you know."

"It'd be suggestive all right," remarked Ishmael. Within him a wish to accept warred with horror, besides which he could not quite make up his mind whether Carminow were joking or no.

"Splendid," said Carminow; "there's just one moment, when the hangman pulls on the legs, to make sure, you understand—and the face swells till it looks as though it would burst the white cap pulled over it, for all the world like a boiling pudding.... And you see the cawotid artewy become suffused with a blue bwuise—"

"Cobalt and a touch of *garance*," threw in Killigrew.

"Shut up, Carminow," said Ishmael; "we've not had our drinks yet if you have." He was rather proud of this, which sounded to him to have quite a man-about-town twang, and he knew it must have been successful when he saw his companions pass it without ribald comment.

"Let's all have dinner," said Killigrew exuberantly, "and then go on to see the new ballet. What d'you say, Carminow?"

Carminow was quite willing, his appointment not being till early next morning, and the three went off to the "Cheshire Cheese," where Killigrew drew portraits of Dr. Johnson on the tablecloth and placated the head-waiter by telling him how famous he, Killigrew, was going to be and how valuable the tablecloth would consequently be in fifty years' time. Ishmael enjoyed that dinner. He was unused to stimulants, but having a naturally good head was delightfully sharpened in sense and appreciation by them, while his stronger stomach did not pay him back next day as Killigrew's invariably did. Carminow was full of stories, all, needless to say, of a sanguinary nature; Killigrew capped them, or tried to, by would-be immoral tales of Paris; and Ishmael said very little, but, with his deadly clarity of vision for once working beneficently, sat there aware how young and somehow rather lovable they were through it all, while he himself, whom they were obviously treating as so so much younger in the ways of the world, felt old compared with them. The only thing he did not fully realise was just how young that feeling itself was.

After dinner they went, as Killigrew had suggested, to the theatre—a shabby little place to look at, though the resort of all the bloods, who crowded stalls and stage door. Killigrew laughingly informed Carminow that Ishmael had never met an actress in his life, and in reply to Carminow's half-mocking commiseration, Ishmael answered gaily that he had never even been to the theatre, except to a penny gaff that once visited Penzance. It was indeed with a secret tingling that he now found himself seated in a box. He brought to the theatre the freshness of the child who goes to his first pantomime, and was unashamedly aware of the fact. The smell of the place, the heat—for the gas made the air vibrant—the very tawdriness of the hangings and gilding, all thrilled him, because they were, as Killigrew would have said, so "in the picture." When the curtain went up he settled himself to enjoyment.

Killigrew, more interested by the performers than what they represented, leant back in the box and kept up a running commentary in a low voice. "There never was a more Oriental thing invented than the crinoline," he observed, nodding towards a group of dancers blowing as lightly as balls of thistledown over the stage, slim ankles twinkling below their inflated skirts of misty whiteness; "I'm not trying to be epigrammatic, I mean it. Watch those girls there ... did you ever see such sway, such slope—I can't find the exact word for it? Each little movement—a raised eyebrow seems almost enough—and the crinoline sways this way and that, divinely true at the waist alone.... But it's not just their grace; it's what they suggest. That feeling of a cage, of something protective, which is what I mean by Oriental. So defined down to the waist, and then this thing that makes a parade of not following nature.... D'you know, I never watch a pretty woman in a crinoline but the thought doesn't strike me?"

"It's the sort of thought that would, my son," opined Carminow.

"But you can't deny I'm right. No clinging drapery has ever been so suggestive, so much the refinement of sensuality, as the crinoline."

Ishmael said nothing; but inwardly he too felt what Killigrew meant, which he would not have done a week earlier. As he sat there, warm and pleasantly stung by the wine he had drunk, the brightness of the scene and the colour of the music and the thoughts they conjured up, as well as the gowns and head-dresses of the pretty women, all awaked in him the glow a child feels at its first pantomime. The dancers were to him not flesh-and-blood women, but magical creatures, and yet he was stirred to a new excitement too. As he sat there all the sense of poise with which he usually so confidently faced the affairs of life, and which, far from failing him, generally served him only too well, began to sway and grow many-coloured.

When they went out into the street again he agreed with Carminow that the night was yet too young to abandon it in mid-air. He did not, however, feel like more drinks; the exhilaration of the play, of his own youth, now for the first time tingling unrestrainedly in his veins, the glamour of the gaily-lit night—they had wandered as far as the Haymarket, which was ablaze till dawn—were all enough for him, and he felt that anything more would have blurred their keenness. Suddenly Carminow had an inspiration.

"Come back with me, you two," he suggested. "I've got quite decent digs in Cecil Street, off the Stwand. And I've a little collection that might intewest you...."

"I know, monstrosities in bottles and side elevations of premature babies," surmised Killigrew; "you're a foul old thing! But we'll come and have a yarn over 'em anyway. I'm not in a hurry to face my revered parents and I daren't take this good little boy to some places you and I know of. I'm responsible for him."

Carminow turned a pessimistic eye on Ishmael. "Are you still pure?" he shot at him in his deepest bass. "I see you are; your look answers for you." And he strode on again. He turned to add over his shoulder: "I cannot in the intewests of my pwofession emulate you; it is incumbent on me to know first hand all that is possible, but I consider it an excellent thing for the layman. Keep it up. Don't let Killigrew, who is a commonplace sinner, laugh you out of it."

Ishmael forced himself to reply that he did not intend to forego his own ideas on the subject for Killigrew or anyone else; and, indeed, he was not so outraged by anything Carminow had said as by Killigrew's whispered communication that for his part he believed Carminow was boasting.... "Don't believe he knows the way," added Killigrew, "or only theoretically. He's like a lot of doctors—all theories and no practice." He was so pleased with this joke he had to repeat it aloud to Carminow, who bore it quite unruffled.

They had now reached the house, one of the many little lodging-houses that stood where the Hotel Cecil is to-day, and Carminow let himself in with a large key and, turning up the gas, revealed the usual lodging-house hall that is and was and always shall be eternally the same as long as lodgings and landladies exist. It had a yellowish paper blotted with large blurred flowers of a reddish hue, a steel engraving of the "Derby Day" hung by the hat-stand, and the woodwork was of bright yellow graining.

Carminow's rooms were on the second floor; after the first landing had been passed the stairs suddenly altered in character, and from being carpeted and fairly wide took onto themselves linoleum and a steep straightness that said plainly: "Up to here two guineas a week; above here only thirty shillings, with half-a-crown for extras." Higher still bare boards advertised the fact that only "bed-sitters" or even plain bedrooms were to be found.

Carminow's rooms ran the depth of the house, the front one, his sitting-room, being separated from the bedroom by folding doors of the same bright yellow as the doors in the hall. Into the sitting-room he ushered his guests, and they knocked helplessly up against sharp angles while Carminow pawed and patted round the room for matches, obstinately refusing the offers of their boxes because he said he was trying to train his landlady to keep his in the same place. Killigrew, uninterested in the education of landladies, finally insisted on striking one of his own, and uttered a shriek of joy when the faint gleam revealed a glass jar in which a greenish-white fragment of a body floated forlornly. Finally the gas was lit, the table cleared of papers and books, and bottles of beer placed upon it instead. They had just settled down to villainously strong cigars and the beer when a sound very unexpected to two of them floated out upon the air—the sound of a girl singing. The voice was a rather deep mezzo; it was singing very softly an old ballad, to the accompaniment of a few notes very gently struck now and again on a piano.

Carminow said nothing, but lay back in his chair and puffed out clouds of smoke over his face.

Killigrew looked at him and whistled.

"I say ..." he said.... "Own up, Carminow! Who is it?"

"If you mean who is the lady singing," said Carminow with sudden stiffness, "she is Miss Grey, who has the room above this. She is a young lady about whom I think even you would not make your obscene jokes if you knew her."

"Sits the wind in that quarter?..." thought Killigrew, highly amused.
"I'll roast him...." Aloud he said: "And may I not know her, then, Carminow? If Miss Grey is a friend of yours, perhaps—"

"I am vevy particular about whom I intwoduce to Miss Grey," said Carminow unflatteringly; "that is to say, I should first have to find out whether she wished it. She is quite alone, poor girl."

"Dear me! How is that? Is she some romantic governess out of a place or a lady who through no fault of her own has come down in the world?"

"Miss Grey is on the stage."

Killigrew roared with laughter. "You hear, Ishmael; here's your chance. You were saying you didn't know any actresses, and now here's Carminow with one up his sleeve all ready for you. Tell us all about it, old chap!"

"I will, if only to stop your stupid little mind from wunning along its accustomed dirty gwoove," answered Carminow sententiously. "Miss Grey is the daughter of a clergyman—"

"They all are."

"She is an orphan, that is to say, as good as one, for her mother is dead and her father too poor to support her. She works very hard when she can get any work, which I am sowwy to say is not often, and she is as good as she is clever. I should be vevy glad if I could put her in the way of more work when the play she is in is taken off, and I thought you, Killigrew, who know so many people—"

"Artful old bird! So that's what you'd got in your mind, is it? Well I can't do anything till I've seen the lady, can I? Even an angel in a poke—"

The singing had ceased, and in the little silence there came a knock at the sitting-room door. Carminow had called out "Come in" automatically before a sudden idea sent him to his feet. He was too late; the door had opened and a young lady in grey stood hesitating on the threshold.

CHAPTER IX

HIDDEN SPRINGS

She stood still, dismayed, her hand still on the doorknob, obviously distressed at the unexpected company in which she found herself.

"Miss Grey ... do please come in ... is there anything I can do ...?" mumbled Carminow in great agitation, pushing a chair forward and then pulling it back again indeterminedly.

"I'm so sorry—" began the low full voice, richer in speech than in song. "I'd no idea—I only wondered whether you could—but it's nothing."

"Anything," Carminow assured her distractedly; "but please permit me to introduce my friends ... Mr. Killigrew, Mr. Ruan—Miss Grey."

Everyone bowed, and then Miss Grey said simply: "It was only that my lamp has gone out; you know there isn't any gas on my floor, and I remembered you had paraffin for your reading lamp.... I'm so afraid of the dark. I know it's very silly...."

"Not at all, very natural, I'm sure. You can have the whole lamp, Miss Grey, but you must let me clean it. It might smell. Yes, please, I insist. You must sit down here in the light while I do it. I'm afraid it's dweadfully smoky. Killigrew, do open the window—"

So he fussed, while Miss Grey, with a murmured thanks, sank into the chair Ishmael shyly offered her and waited very simply, her hands folded on her lap. There was a simplicity, a lack of any self-consciousness, in her whole manner, so Ishmael, used to Phoebe and Vassie—neither of whom was the same in men's company that she was out of it—told himself. This girl seemed divinely unaware even of any strangeness in the position in which she now found herself—the unawareness of an angel.... When Killigrew talked to her she answered frankly and freely, almost with the confidence of a child. She could not be more than twenty, Ishmael decided, and with all her maturity of build had a childish air. The fashions of the day were not conducive to youthfulness of appearance; but not even the long full skirts trimmed with bands of black velvet or the close-fitting bodice could make her seem other than a schoolgirl, while the hair worn brushed loosely back from the forehead instead of brought down in sleek waves gave her a look that reminded him of someone, though he could not remember whom. Then with a sudden flash he remembered it was Hilaria, little Hilaria Eliot—she too had that look which, being in the middle of the period himself, he did not recognise as alien to its stamp, but which was so conspicuously so that women might have called it dowdy and men individual. But this girl was feminine, that was obvious in the timid shyness even of her trusting attitude.

Oddly enough—or oddly as it seemed to Ishmael, who was wont to be in the background when out with Killigrew—it was to him that she chiefly addressed herself. Killigrew sat watching as from general remarks of great propriety about the weather and Ishmael's opinions of London as a place to visit they passed to her views on it as a place in which to live. These were, apparently, not over favourable.

"One always feels a stranger, in a way, if one was born and brought up in the country, doesn't one? I feel that every day. I've never got over expecting to see the big elm outside my window when I wake, and instead I see the chimney-pots. And then I may just be getting used to it when there arrives a letter from Papa telling me how it all looks at home—all the silly little things about the flowers and the chickens and the old people in the parish, and then I have to start all over again."

There was a strain of wistfulness in her full voice, but her eyes were limpidly unconscious of it, with their candid glance that suggested courage and even a certain gaiety. If it had not been for that look in her eyes she would have seemed doll-like; even as it was in the purely physical aspect of her there was a waxen dollishness which was at once disconcerting and attractive. It was obvious that Carminow, who presumably knew her, was passionately convinced that she was what he would have called "all right"; that he was considerably more fond of her than he would have admitted was equally obvious. To him that odd dollishness of aspect was just the sweet pink and white of a naïve young girl, but to Killigrew it gave, by its very completeness, a hint as of something oddly inhuman, or at least unawakened, as though she had been a puppet, a pretty puppet that walked and spoke and said the right things. It was not so much any lack of intelligence in what she said as in her slow speech and her whole look. Her skin was so white—and Killigrew thought he knew if Ishmael did not how that whiteness was attained—except for a slight pink flush below extravagantly calm eyes of a clear pale grey; the modelling of the face was wide across brow and cheekbones and across the jaw on the level of the too-small mouth; then came a dimpled chin, short and childish, as was the tip-tilted nose. It was the type of face which, in its broad modelling of planes and petal-fineness of edges, suggests a pansy. The blondness of her—ashen-dead fairness of hair and pale skin with those pellucid eyes beneath dust-brown brows—all united in an effort of innocence that surpassed itself and became the blandness of a doll. She was curiously immobile, sat very quietly, and moved slowly, graceful in the way that a heavily-built puma is graceful, because of the thoroughly sound construction of her bones and muscles. Killigrew, as he watched her, was vastly intrigued by what he phrased to himself as the "innocent sweet corruption of her look." For with all that dollish look, perhaps because of it, it was possible, so Killigrew thought, to imagine her being very bad with the help of that protective mask. It was also compatible with an Undine-like soullessness, a cold clearness of outlook, or a slightly heavy if sweet stupidity. He thought it quite likely she might have all the virtues except a naturally good complexion, but he wondered about her, seeing her charm without feeling it.

The lamp was ready all too soon, and the lucky Carminow had the best right to carry it upstairs for her. She shook hands with both his friends as she said good-night, and Ishmael noticed how straightly she looked from her equal height into his eyes as her hand lay in his. Then the door swung to, but without closing, and in a moment there came the low sound of her voice from the landing above.

"Mr. Carminow...." she was saying—and the words, excepting just now and again, were audible to the two in the sitting-room—"I hope—I don't know what your friends must think. Do tell them, will you, that I'm not in the habit of running down to your room like that? Mr. Ruan looks so good. I wouldn't like him to think—"

"No one thinks anything like that; they couldn't, I assure you. Do believe me, Miss Grey. You won't sleep if you worry, you know. Promise me to believe me. I'll say something to them if it'll make you any happier."

"Will you? Then I'll promise too. I can take the lamp now. And—thank you, Mr. Carminow."

Down in the sitting-room when Carminow entered it again there was a moment or two of silence.

"Look here, you two fellows!" said Carminow; then, "You see for yourselves that Miss Grey is a perfect lady...."

"Exactly how I should have described her," interjected Killigrew.

"What I mean to say is that of course Miss Grey would not have dreamed of coming down if she had known you two were here...."

"Should have thought we made enough noise coming in. But I suppose what you're driving at is that she only comes when you're alone; is that it?" asked Killigrew wickedly.

"Damn it all! you know it's not what I mean at all, only you twist everything a fellow says so. Anyway, I'd hate anyone to go and make a mistake about her."

"I won't," said Killigrew.

"It wouldn't be possible, I think," said Ishmael; "she's got that sort of clear look, you couldn't."

"Yes, that's just it," agreed Carminow gratefully. "Sometimes she even does things that might seem a little odd or rash, and it's all because she is such a child of nature she doesn't understand. A sort of Miwanda."

"What is her name, by the way?" asked Killigrew idly.

"Blanche, I believe."

"Blanche Grey ... a rather humorous combination. Well, we must go or we shall be keeping you from your beastly legalised murder at eight. Come on, Ishmael!"

"I'll come up to the Strand with you," said Carminow. "I have to be early at the prison, or one doesn't get through the crowd, not with a single valuable left on you anyway, and lucky to keep your shirt and trousers. You're sure you won't come? I could manage something for you."

Neither felt disposed—Ishmael not only because he knew it would make him deadly sick, but because the mere thought of it had somehow become horrible, and Killigrew because he was rather glad to make Ishmael an excuse for not going himself. They all strode along the dim, quiet street, empty except for a dweller of the night who slunk into deeper shadows on seeing that there were three of them.

"She's an interesting-looking girl, that Miss Grey," observed Killigrew, more to try and draw Carminow than because he was really interested in the subject himself.

"She reminded me of someone, and at first I couldn't think who," said Ishmael, feeling a queer little pleasure at talking of her thus casually; "and then I remembered Hilaria—you remember little Hilaria Eliot, who used to be so jolly to us all at St. Renny?"

"She is the last person I should have compared with Miss Grey," said Killigrew decidedly. "I should say they were as different as it is possible for two persons of the same sex to be. Hilaria was like a boy; Miss Grey is most feminine."

"Yes, she is," said Ishmael eagerly; "but there's the same frankness, that way of meeting you that other girls don't have."

"I know what you mean," agreed Carminow, "though I don't think one notices it when one sees more of Miss Grey. As Killigrew says, she is so essentially feminine—she is always grateful for support in a way that is really very sad in one who has to battle with the world. It is a hard life for a refined gentlewoman, I fear."

"Dear old chap, with his 'battling with the world' and all the rest of his really highly moral conventional views!" exclaimed Killigrew. "He's a fraud, isn't he, Ishmael, who pretends to love to wallow in blug just to hide his lamblike disposition."

"You always did talk wot," remarked Carminow placidly. "You're weally not a bit changed, Killigrew, in spite of Paris. By the way, I suppose you heard about Polkinghorne?"

"Yes, from Old Tring. I went to St. Renny a little while ago."

"Ah! then you heard about Hilaria? I thought from Ruan's mention of her you had neither of you heard."

"Heard what?"

"Why," said Carminow in rather a shocked voice, "about her illness."

"No!..." exclaimed Ishmael and Killigrew in a breath; and Killigrew went on: "What illness? I can't imagine the Hilaria we used to know ill."

"She's not the Hilaria we used to know, I'm afraid. You would hardly recognize her. She's got a disease—you wouldn't know it if I were to tell you its name—that is one of the most obscure known to science, if you can call a thing known when no cure can be discovered to it. Yes, she's hopelessly paralysed, is poor Hilaria." A certain impersonal note as he spoke of the illness had crept through all the genuine feeling in Carminow's voice.

"But it's impossible!" cried Ishmael, profoundly shocked, not so much at any personal feeling for Hilaria, as an instinctive protest that such things could be. "Hilaria—why she was never still, and the things she did—why, you remember her walks and her fencing and everything—"

"Old Dr. Harvey at St. Renny puts it down very largely to those excessive walks she used to take," said Carminow.

Ishmael said nothing; he was struck by a greater horror that it should have been those walks, which had so seemed to set Hilaria apart from her sex, on which he had so often accompanied her, of which even now he could recall the delight though he had not thought of them since.... Carminow went on:

"But of course I don't agree with him; he only says that because he always disapproved of the way poor old Eliot brought her up. Personally I think it was a very healthy way, and I believe it will be for the good of the race when women are made to exercise more. But Hilaria had the seeds of this sclerosis in her then, and nothing can stop it; over-exertion may have made it worse, as it does any illness, but it couldn't have caused it. It's being mercifully rapid, that's one comfort."

"It's ghastly," said Killigrew in a low voice. "Where is she, Carminow? Have you seen her?"

"Well, yes, as a matter of fact I go when I can. I think it gives her pleasure to see anyone from the old days. She's in a home for such things in London. Her father lodges round the corner to be near her. It's awful to see him. You know how he was about her.... She would be brought back from France when they found out how bad it was. D'you remember how her eyes used to give out sometimes when she was reading to us? That was all part of the same thing, always in her, beginning to come out."

A little silence. Both Ishmael and Killigrew were wondering if they ought to go and see her or not, both fighting a repulsion of which Killigrew's was more purely æsthetic and Ishmael's rather a passionate wish to keep thought of such a thing away from life....

They had come to the parting of their way from Carminow's, and all three were standing at the street corner under a flickering gas lamp.

"Well," said Carminow a little awkwardly, "I suppose now we've met I shall be seeing you fellows again? I'm genewally in in the evenings when I don't have to be on duty at the hospital."

It was Ishmael who replied:

"I shall probably be round some time soon," he said. "I shall want to hear how the new drop worked, you know. By the way, what theatre is Miss Grey appearing at? It might be interesting to go and see the performance, mightn't it, Joe?"

"Oh, damn it all! I can only think for the moment of poor little Hilaria," exclaimed Killigrew. "I used to be very fond of her.... I wonder—"

"I'll find out if she'd like to see you and Ruan when next I go if you like, but it's painful, because she can only get her words out in jerks," said Carminow. "It's the Strand that Miss Grey's appearing at. Quite a small part; but at least it's a lady-like one, and her stage name is Miss Blanche Nevill. Good-night, you fellows!"

They echoed his farewell, and then, finding no belated growler, set out to walk all the way back to Tavistock Square. They mentioned neither Hilaria nor Blanche Grey again that night, but as Ishmael lay

for a long time awake staring into the darkness he could not keep his mind from reverting with a sense of deep fear to what he had heard about Hilaria. That such things could lie in wait in life, around the path of people one knew—people like oneself.... To others these exotic misfortunes, not to oneself or those near one. He had the sensation of incredulity with which one hears of some intimate friend involved in a train accident or attacked by some freakish fate such as may be read of in the newspapers daily but is never realised as being an actual and possible happening. Polkinghorne's death had made him believe there was such a thing as death, but it was so remote. This was different. If these things could come into life, ordinary every-day life....

He sorrowed not only for Hilaria, but for life. The news had given him his first pang of dread about it; his trust in it was never to be quite the same again. That was all, for him, that Hilaria had existed for, simply to teach him so much of knowledge. It seemed odd, even to the egoism of his youth, that she should have had so great a share in the pattern of his life at one time only to go out of it so inevitably. He was not to realise for many years how important the lesson was of which she, by the mere news of her state, had taught him the beginnings. If her contact with him formerly had been less, so would the shock of the news have been. People have impinged more deeply upon others' lives and both by their entry and their leaving of them stood for less.

CHAPTER X

BLIND STEPS

From that evening Ishmael entered upon a new phase of his London visit. He told himself, when seriously considering the situation now and then, that he was certainly not in love. He was deeply interested in Blanche Grey, but if this were being in love, then was that emotion very different from anything the books always led one to expect. For instance, had the question been posed him by some wizard potent to arrange the lives of humans, whether he would sooner let Cloom or Miss Grey slip away from him, he would not have hesitated. His values were not in the least upset. He felt certain things in spite of them, that was all. There was an uncomfortable emptiness about a day on which he did not see her, and when at night he waited for her outside the shabby stage door of the Strand Theatre his heart would go thump-thump in a manner over which he had no control, but which seemed so very remotely connected with himself as he understood the term that he made no account of it. Killigrew said very little to him on the subject once he had found that he really did not like being chaffed about the fair Blanche, but it at once lowered Killigrew in Ishmael's estimation, and yet made him less certain about his own feelings, that he knew Killigrew did not share his enthusiasm.

Blanche had one of those definite personalities there is no overlooking, that people, especially men, either adore or actively dislike. Killigrew had never said he did not like her, but Ishmael felt the fact none the less certainly. And, as a matter of fact, Killigrew himself was puzzled by Miss Grey. He was certain enough that she was technically "good"—what Carminow called "all right"—and he admitted her charm, but to him the over-emphasis she laid on everything, as on that action of hers in coming down for the lamp, made the charm of no avail. He went to the house in Cecil Street a few times with Ishmael and then washed his hands of the affair.

When Ishmael was not allowed in the presence, then Killigrew still took him round the town and was not unamused to notice that his tastes had begun to alter. He was more interested in the personal note, less in things. Horticultural shows no longer lured him, polytechnics flaunted in vain.

He went once to the House of Commons and heard a debate on Russell's abortive Reform Bill, which was to sound the knell of that Minister's career. Ishmael heard Gladstone in the Bill's defence defying an attack by Lowe, whilst Mr. Disraeli leant back with a slight smile on his face, which was a blot of pallor beneath his dark, oiled ringlets. Ishmael was stirred, yet in him something felt amazement and disappointment. These were only men after all, not demigods, and some of them were peevish, some rude, some bored and inattentive. The whole thing seemed somehow childish; it was difficult to believe, except later when Bright's golden tongue was speaking, that in this place the nation was governed.... Afterwards he was with the crowd, borne helplessly along, that wrecked the Hyde Park railings in their anger that the hastily constructed Ministry of Derby should still let Reform hang in air. Yet all these affairs of the nation only affected Ishmael from the outside, for he was beginning to be at his most personal.

Turns of singing and dancing interested him less than plays where there was a definite and

necessarily keenly personal story. The characters were all occupied with their feelings for each other, never with theories or conditions. There was one exception to this rule, though Ishmael kept that to himself—he went often to see a little dancer whose turn only lasted ten minutes, while the particular moment of it for which he went was over in a flash, the moment when, whirling round and round very quickly, her short filmy skirts stood out and were nothing but a misty circlet about her, so that she gave the illusion of having nothing to break the slim straight lines of her. She seemed nude with an elfin nudity that charmed him while it did not inflame, or if it did, only with the subtle inflammation of the mind, which can withstand such onslaughts for many years before a sudden reaction of the body shows the connection between the two. Ishmael, who took no interest in damsels in tights or in the exuberant proportions of the "frail" ladies that amused Killigrew, found himself waiting for that moment every evening, and his satisfaction when he caught it was rather that of a person who is pleased at verifying something he has had the acumen to discover than any more poignant emotion. He went far oftener to see this than he did to watch Blanche in her small part as one of the innocuous and well-bred company performing at the little old Strand Theatre, which was then still a phalanx of the respectable Swanborough family.

Blanche kept her work as a thing apart from her life—that is to say, she did not join the rest of the company at supper at the pothouse opposite, nor acknowledge the attentions of the mashers from the front row who waited at the shabby little stage door of a night. She was very charming to the other members of the company, especially the women, and the fact that she had enemies there was easily explained on the ground of her aloofness. She told Ishmael very little with all her frankness of address, but one night as he was seeing her home she asked him to come and have tea with her next day, which happened to be a Sunday, and Ishmael accepted eagerly; it was the first time she had actually asked him to the house.

When he arrived, clasping a bouquet he had bought overnight and nursed in his bedroom water-jug, he found that she had begged the loan of the ground-floor sitting-room, which was unlet, from her landlady, and was awaiting him there, wearing her grey dress and a rose pinned by the little white muslin collar that spanned the base of her throat. She was not looking her best, but somehow that made her all the more appealing to Ishmael; the sudden heat had made dark shadows under her eyes, and her movements were more languid even than usual.

It was an ugly room, like all its kind; but Blanche had the triumphant quality of rising superior to her background, which is one of the most valuable a woman can possess. Against the hot, hideous red of the wall-paper and the mass of tawdry ornaments she seemed to gain in simplicity, and that peculiar clearness of hers was intensified. She was grave, and only gave Ishmael the ghost of a little wan smile on his entry over his tendered bouquet. She dispensed tea with her firm, rather square hands, hands with short, blunt-tipped fingers that yet were not without the beauty of fitting in with her puma-like solidity of frame; while the way in which she used them was grace itself. They were the typical hands of a courtesan, but neither she nor Ishmael knew that, though Carminow had marvelled to himself at the fact.

Ishmael was silent, falling in with her mood, and suddenly she fixed her limpid eyes upon him and asked with disconcerting directness:

"What are you thinking of!"

"I was thinking about you," he was startled into saying; "I was wondering if it's true you're insincere...."

"Who says so ...? Mr. Killigrew? He doesn't like me; I knew it from the first. I'm sorry; I think he's rather fine, though I'm not sure I think he's good for you. He guesses that, and that's why he doesn't like me."

"Oh, I'm sure he couldn't be such an ass as to think that," protested Ishmael. "Besides, surely I am capable of looking after myself!"

"You're capable of a good deal, I believe. You could look after yourself and other people too. You're strong, you know. I suppose you don't know, or you wouldn't be you. But I'm sorry you think like that about me."

"I don't. I mean—I do sometimes wonder. You're so charming to everyone and—"

"But I'm not insincere because of that, am I? I wish you hadn't thought that. Of course, one meets people, at the theatre and so on, and one doesn't really know them and can't get at them, and so one just tries to be very nice to them, but I don't call that insincere...."

"No. I didn't mean to people like that. But to your friends—to old Carminow, for instance, and

myself.... I sometimes wonder. And to yourself—"

"Ah! I'm not insincere to myself."

"I sometimes wonder if you know what your real self is."

"Don't I? I do. Why do you say that, Mr. Ruan?"

"Because you asked me, and because I can't help saying what I think when I'm asked like that and I think the person's worth it."

Blanche had pushed away her cup, and now she folded her arms on the table and bent to him over them. Her face was very earnest.

"I do know what you mean," she admitted; "I think I know it better than you do. And I suppose it's partly because I've no mother and I've had to protect myself. A woman is very like some kinds of animals I've heard of—she has to assume protective colouring. If I seem to like people that have nothing in common with me it's because I find it's the simplest way. You are different; I don't have to pretend anything with you. I think if my real self were beginning to be overlaid you could help me revive her."

"Your real self ... haven't I seen that?"

"I thought so till you said what you did," she answered in a low voice, looking away from him; then she went on hurriedly: "You know, when Mamma died I was only thirteen, and though I loved my father very dearly it's never quite the same, is it? It was dreadful leaving Papa, but I had to earn money somehow; you see, he wants all sorts of little things, extra delicacies he can't get on his small means, and I do manage most times to send him them. He didn't like my choosing the stage; but I'm not really well enough educated for a governess—besides, I did try that once...."

"What happened?" asked Ishmael as she paused.

"She—the lady—had a grown-up son as well as the children, and he fell in love with me. I couldn't help that, but she was very angry. And I was so unhappy I couldn't bear to go anywhere else. I wanted a new life. You see—I cared rather."

"But if you both cared—"

"I wouldn't let him defy his mother. It would have made it all dreadful, somehow. And he wasn't a strong character, not like you. You wouldn't mind who was against you if you were in love."

Ishmael did not reply and she went on:

"I've been trying to make a fine thing out of acting now for three years, ever since I was little more than a child—a real child in the little I knew. And if I had not minded certain things of course by now I could have been a leading lady and driven in my brougham, or left the stage for good—or for bad. But one cannot alter the way one is made, or drop the ideas one was brought up to have ... at least I can't; and so I'm still in the attic in Cecil Street, with a small part and no prospects. And how I hate it all sometimes; you can't imagine how I hate it! London is like an awful monster that draws one in inch by inch—a monster that breathes soot instead of fire."

Ishmael had been turning over a wonderful plan in his mind while she was speaking, an idea that had flashed on him before, but that had seemed too splendid to be possible of realization. Now, emboldened by her words, he ventured on the great question.

"I say," he began, "why not, when you want a holiday, when this piece you're playing in is over, come and stay at Cloom? I don't know whether you've heard—whether Carminow has told you about me—I hope he has; I dropped him a hint, because I hate to think I'm sailing under false colours with you—" He paused, his courageous words dying in hot embarrassment. Blanche met him perfectly.

"I know all about it. Mr. Carminow told me. What difference does it make, except to make your friends care all the more for you?"

"Then you would come? My sister Vassie—you'd like her. And I think even my mother would love you. It would be so good for you after all this."

She did not reply at once and Ishmael's heart sank.

"Your father...." he murmured; "I suppose you feel—"

She interrupted with a sudden radiance: "Oh, no, it's not that. My father is married again, you know.... I don't often talk of it; it was a grief to me. We were so everything to each other. But I don't go home very often, because of that. I would love to come, Mr. Ruan. I wonder if I can; I wonder...."

"But why should you wonder?" he urged more boldly; "one advantage of your lonely situation is that you are free to decide for yourself. Do promise me!"

She turned her head away as though to hide eyes suddenly dewy, then met his look with her wonted level candour.

"I'll come," she said; "I'll come. Oh, it will be heavenly!... You don't know what the mere thought of it means.... To get away, even for a little while, from all this...." She swept her hands expressively around on the lodging-house surroundings.

"It must be rotten," said Ishmael in heartfelt accents. "I know how I felt in the parlour at home after my sister Vassie had done it up for my return. I felt as though the woolly mats were choking me. And I couldn't say anything for fear of hurting her feelings."

"And have you got used to it? That's what I'm always so afraid of—getting used to ugliness."

"Vassie has altered. She is the cleverest girl at picking up ideas I've ever known, and somehow when Killigrew was down with us she soon found out, though I don't think he actually said anything. And we have beautiful old furniture hidden away in the attics, so we simply pulled it all out, and Vassie and Phoebe are making new needlework seats for the chairs."

"Is Phoebe another sister?"

"Oh, no; she's the daughter of Mr. Lenine, the miller. She was at boarding-school in Plymouth with Vassie, and they're just like sisters," said Ishmael in the simplicity of his heart.

"How nice!" said Blanche Grey.

So it was settled between them that Blanche should renew her acquaintance with the country that summer at Cloom, and when Ishmael left he walked on air. It was not that he was excited so much as that a deep content filled him; life seemed full of promise and even more worth living than he had thought it. The distrust which that news of Carminow's had engendered drifted to the back of his brain; he wandered through the streets, picturing the days to come at Cloom. He came to a pause at last, aware that he had missed the way to the hotel where he was to sup with Carminow and Killigrew. He looked at the name of the street he was in, and saw that it was the name Carminow had mentioned as being that of the street where Hilaria was lodged.

He stood between the rows of houses and tried to realise that one of them sheltered Hilaria. He stood quite still, beset by the same thoughts as on the first evening he had been told of her. He looked up at the houses and wondered which it was; it seemed odd that the bricks and stone which hid so much of sadness should not declare it in some way unmistakable to him. Odd that he could no more tell at what elevation, whether just above him or nearer the roof, she lay, as odd that, wherever it might be, she was equally unknowing that someone was thinking of her with such intensity so near. He walked along, looking for the number Carminow had mentioned, found he had passed it, and turned back to see it was the house one door further down than that at which he had first stopped. He looked at the door as though it could fly open and bid him enter; he pictured with a vividness he could not suppress her entrance there, carried, her head lolling on her breast. Several times he walked up and down, wondering if she would care to see him, trying to remember if she had ever shown any predilection for him which could make him think she would. Then he turned away and went on, the thought of her and the pity of her going with him. He was not surprised when at supper Carminow began to speak of her; it seemed as though it would not be possible to sit so near to himself and not feel the trend of his thoughts.

"I saw Hilaria yesterday," said Carminow, "and I asked her if she wanted to see you two. I thought she might, but she waited a minute and then let me know most unmistakably that she would rather not. She can only speak very queerly now—most painful business—and make a few gestures, but there was no mistaking her. I expect it would have been too much for her anyway."

Both his listeners felt a half-guilty relief, and that night when alone in his room Ishmael, aided by that glimpse of the exterior of her surroundings and by Carminow's words, was assailed again by the thought of her, but not as keenly as before. Shocked senses had been responsible for that first keenness, and imagination, however aided, could not sting to the same depth. He thought as he fell asleep of Blanche and Cloom. Life had ugly, unthought-of things in it, but, thinking of her steady radiance, he could not believe that any fate would dare to dim its lustre.

Blanche sat long at the window of her bedroom that evening, her ashen fair hair about her shoulders and her brush idle in her hand. As it was Sunday and she had no engagement, she was going to bed early, so early that it was still sunset-light.

She stood at the open window of the bedroom, staring with unseeing eyes; her thoughts were revolving round her own problems, but gradually the sights and sounds without won her to notice of them. The back windows of the house looked on to other house-backs that formed a square well, wherein smaller, much lower roofs and flat expanses of ribbed leads and stable yards all huddled together in soft blue shadow. Only an occasional chimney-pot, higher than its fellows, made a note of glowing orange where it pierced the slant of the evening sun: To Blanche's left there showed a pale gleam from the Thames between the house-backs of brownish-grey brick; to her right roof-tops and fantastic cowl were patterned in a flat purple tone against the luminous sky. In the eaves the sparrows were chirping shrilly; one flew downwards so swiftly between Blanche's eyes and the sky that his little body seemed nothing but a dark blot with a flickering upon either side of it. The sight caught at her memory, and she had a quick vision of a day when she had lain upon a sloping cliff and watched the gulls wheel far above her, the light of the setting sun making their breasts and the underneath of their wings flash like silver. A smaller bird had darted past, and then, as now, she had noted the curious effect of the solid little body flanked by that flickering which meant wings invisible through their own speed. The surface of her mind was quick to respond to suggestion, and the thought of the country struck her as being an answer to the unspoken questionings that were pricking at her. The West—the land of ready sleep and sweet dreams. So Ishmael had told her, and the way lay open if she chose to take it, a way that would not necessarily commit her to anything. When she saw Ishmael in his own environment, then she would know whether it were worth it or not....

To blot herself out of existence for a few weeks, that was what it amounted to; there should be no such person as the town-ridden Blanche Nevill on the face of the earth. She felt a delightful stirring of anticipation, and nothing had had power to awaken that emotion in her for several years. Her own surroundings once shed, she would, she felt, meet a new world with all the hopes and dreams that had once been hers. She was twenty-six years of age, though with her bland face she looked much younger; and the truth was she had no love for any work in itself, but only for the praise it brought her—a temperament which can never make the artist, but results in the brilliant amateur.

She was sick of the stage, for no worthy captive of her bow and spear had presented himself, and she detected the dawning of criticism in the friends that had been so warm when she first met them in town. Blanche was always posing, and people had found it out. As a child she had played the misunderstood genius or shy mother's darling as occasion demanded; she had posed with others till she was unable to do anything but pose with herself. A few years, a very few years, ago, and even her own sex had had to admit her charm; now she was beginning to be played out, and she knew it. Her triumphant personality always attracted attention, even when prettier and cleverer women were present, but it was a very critical attention she attracted now.

When the light faded she moved to the bed and began to brush out her hair. The sun had set, and she had drawn the dark, narrow blinds; down their edges showed the gleam of the outside world steeped in a cold blue-green light like the depths of the sea, and the faded curtains wavered slowly in the breeze like long swaying strips of seaweed. Blanche, swathed in a pale wrapper and sitting on the bed whose whiteness was dimmed by the greenish dusk, was suggestive of a stage mermaid combing her locks upon a property sandbank.

She lit her lamp, and at once the gleam without turned a deep, soft blue. She knotted her pale hair on the nape of her neck, and, chin up, hands on hips, stared critically at herself in the glass, and, as she looked her lips parted a little in pleasure. Snatching up the hand-glass, she poised from one foot to the other, craning her neck to see herself from every possible point of view.

"Yes," she decided, "I'll go. And then—a new life. Miss Blanche Nevill will vanish into thin air, and hurrah! for Blanche Grey, who will be—herself."

She slept, thinking of Ishmael and herself, as he of her, while in a dim room, lying perforce motionless in her hot bed, a girl thought, with the brain left clear amidst all her failing senses, of two boys who stood as symbols of a happy time when life was unclouded by even the least conscious hints of the creeping Thing. She felt, in her thick confusion of tongue and ear and eye, more uncouth than she was, and not for any good life could still hold for her would she have had either see her—Killigrew because he had been fond of her, Ishmael because she had been fond of him.

A week later Ishmael arrived back at Cloom. As he walked along on the first evening after his return the feel of the country smote him as never before. Ecstasy welled in him, clear and living; the strong, pure air made him want to shout with joy. And more than the sight of the swelling land, more than the feel of the springy turf beneath his feet, or the wind on his eyelids, it was the smell of the country that

woke in him this ecstasy. Sweet as the breath of cows came its mingled fragrance of grass and earth and of the fine dust on the roadway, of the bitter-sweet tang of the bracken and faint aftermath of hay; the breath at his nostrils was drunken with sweet odour. He had come back to face Archelaus, it was true, but he came back a man.

It was a good world, and he would make his corner of it still better.... How splendid it was to be alive and tingling with the knowledge that everything lay before one! Pain and sorrow were only words that fell away into nothingness before the joy of merely living....

So he felt as, late that night, he leant upon his window sill and stared out at the darkness that was the background for his imagings of what was to come. Upon his thoughts there broke the chattering scream of a rabbit caught by a stoat, tearing the velvet tissues of the night's silence. On and on it kept, always on one high note, with a horrible persistence. Ishmael listened, sorry that even a rabbit should suffer on this night of nights, and was glad when the screaming wavered and died into a merciful stillness. As he dropped asleep the sardonic laughing bark of a full-fed fox came echoing from the ean.

CHAPTER XI

GLAMOUR

Full summer had come, and with it Miss Grey. She was not staying at the Manor, as Annie had taken a violent dislike to the idea of visitors, and Ishmael dreaded possible unpleasantness, so that he had been thankful when Blanche of her own accord suggested going into lodgings. She wanted to bring a friend with her, she said, a girl who was peaky after too long nursing of a sick mother in London. Therefore Vassie interviewed Mrs. Penticost, a cheery soul who rejoiced in a little old Queen Anne house called "Paradise," a mile along the cliff-path, where it gave on the outskirts of the village. Blanche was in raptures over the names Penticost and Paradise, and would have been in raptures over her landlady too if that worthy woman had not chosen to be rather unresponsive towards her, though frankly adoring the little friend Judith Parminter.

Judy was only nineteen, a slim, awkward girl with high cheekbones and deep-sunk hazel eyes that gave her a look not unlike that of a beautiful monkey—so Killigrew, when he came down to take up his quarters at the inn, for a summer's painting, declared. He swore that Judy would be a great beauty, but that she would always be like a monkey with those deep, sad eyes and the bistre stains below them that were the only tinge of colour upon her dark skin. She was a shy, wild creature, given to solitary roaming and much scribbling of astonishingly good poems in a little note-book. Blanche said she had genius, and, though Blanche would have said it just then if it had been true or not, there was something not without a touch of genius animating the rough, vivid verses of the monkey-girl. Blanche was "very fond of the little thing," but did not see much of her. Ishmael not unnaturally absorbed the forefront of her attention.

One day, when Blanche had been two weeks at Paradise, a morning more golden, of a stiller warmth than any yet, dawned, and she knew it would bring Ishmael over early with some plan for a picnic. The little garden lay steeped in sunshine that turned the stonecrop on the roof to fire and made the slates iridescent as a pigeon's breast. The rambler that half-hid the whitewashed lintel threw over it a delicate tracery of shadow which quivered slightly as though it breathed in a charmed sleep. Fuchsias drooped their purple and scarlet heads, dahlias, with a grape-like bloom on their velvety petals, stood stiffly staring, and against the granite wall giant sunflowers hung their heavy heads on a curve of sticky green stem. In the sloping fields beyond the lane the stubble stood glittering and the great golden arishmows cast over it blue pools of shade. Beyond the fields could be seen the sparkling blue of the lazily-heaving Atlantic, merging into a heat-haze which glistened with a jewel-like quality at the world's rim.

Blanche opened the door of the cottage and stood upon the threshold, swinging her hat in her hand. A white butterfly fluttered down aimlessly as a scrap of torn paper, and a bee hung buzzing on a sustained note of content, drowned for a moment as it swung with arched body in the cup of a flower, then booming forth as it shot out and poised on wings that seemed nothing but a glistening blur. Blanche stood with eyes half shut and sniffing nostrils, and as she felt the warm caress of the sun, so positive as to seem almost tangible, on her bare head, she stretched herself, cat-like, with a deep sigh of content.

Life was good here, away from the old faces and the old pursuits. She had been at Paradise only two

weeks, but they had been weeks of sun and soft winds and sweet smells, and the impressionable surface of her mind, that beneath was so shallow and so unmalleable, was gradually responding to the influences around her.

Almost imperceptibly to herself her point of view had been changing; a group of white foxgloves, like ghost-flames, that she had seen in a coppice, the creeping of a bright eyed shrew mouse through last year's leaves at her feet, the hundreds of little rabbits with curved-in backs that ran with their curious rocking action over the dewy fields at evening—all these things gave her a shock of pleasure so keen it surprised her. Till now she had not admitted her own artificiality even to herself; now that she was regaining directness she told herself she could afford to be more candid.

Nearly every day she and Ishmael, with Vassie and sometimes Killigrew or Judy, or even the Parson, would go on long expeditions to the cromlechs and carns of the country around; but sometimes she and Ishmael would slip away together, defying convention, sometimes on foot, sometimes in a light market-gig—casual wanderings with no fixed goal, and inexpressibly delightful to both. On sunny days they put up the pony at some farm, and lay upon the short, warm grass of a cliff-face watching the foam patterns form and dissolve again beneath a diamond scatter of spray. When the sea-mist rolled up steadily over Cloom like blown smoke, here opaque, there gossamer-thin, they would sally forth and tramp the spongy moors, the ground sobbing beneath their feet and the mournful calling of the gulls sounding in their heedless ears. And all the while her turns of head and throat, the inflections of her low, rich voice, were being registered on a mind free till now of all such impressions and tenacious as a child's. Small wonder that as the days drifted past Ishmael felt that he, too, was drifting on a tide of golden waters to some shore of promise in a golden dawn.

Blanche, too, was slipping into something like love these days; the beauty of their surroundings and something simple and primitive in the boy himself both made the same appeal to her. Was it possible that after all her flirtations, all her insincerities, she should capture the birthright of the single-hearted? It seemed so, for Blanche had this much of grace left—she was responsive to simplicity. There was something more than the instinct of the coquette in the fullness with which she gave him all he asked, step by step; she had thrown away calculation and was letting herself be guided by her own instinct and the finer instinct she felt to be in him. Each demand his moods made on her she met, each thing his reverent hand unconsciously asked of hers as he helped her over the rough places, each expression his eyes looked for in hers—she gave them all. For here was that rarest of rare things, a man to whom all could be given without his prizing less highly gift or giver.

Long after she had gone to bed he would walk the fields and make sweet picture-plans, all centred tenderly round her. He would stand and look up at her window when the light in it was out, picturing the room, the freshness, the delightful girlishness of it, and at this intimacy of thought he would redden in the dark. His sense of humour was in abeyance, and the reality, could he have seen it, would have been a shock to him—the dressing-table a litter of cosmetics and pin-curls; and on the pillow the face of Blanche surrounded by wavers and shiny with cold-cream.

On this golden morning Ishmael found Blanche, as she had meant him to, in the garden at Paradise, the sun turning her ashen hair to fire.

"Don't let's waste a minute of to-day," he said. "We'll have the cart out and not come back till the evening—that is, if you care about it?"

"Of course I care about it," she told him, and ran upstairs to pin on a shady hat and powder her face.

"Shall I speak now? Shall I speak now?" thought Ishmael as he drove down the lane; but with a thrill of anticipation came "No—my hands aren't free." For Mrs. Penticost's cob, a nervous, spirited creature, newly broken in, was between the shafts.

"Will he speak yet?" thought Blanche; "and if he does, what shall I say?" She glanced up at the set, earnest face, and, sensitive to her look, his eyes met hers. He averted his gaze quickly, but his heart sang, "She cares! she cares!" And quite suddenly he felt he wished to postpone speaking as long as possible, that the savour of this suspended bliss was too sweet to lose. A tremor ran through Blanche as their eyes met. She recognised that in him was an austerity against which even she could beat in vain.

It was evening by the time they drove back, and the shadows lay cool and long across the roads. Urged on by visions of his snug stall, the pony went like the wind; neither of the two in the cart spoke much: once he bent down to tuck the rugs more closely round her and his hand, touching hers, lingered a moment. When they drove into the little yard, Lylie, the dairymaid, was mixing barley-meal and scald-milk for the pigs and carrying on bucolic flirtation with Billy Penticost. With the sheepishness of his sex, that youth made a great business of setting off to the well, his pails slung outwards on a hoop. The rustic comedy touched a long-atrophied fibre in Blanche. On an impulse of simplicity, she told herself,

"Yes, this is the best thing. I won't go back to town; I'll live down here, close to the things that matter, and we'll just be happy." In the rush of warm feeling she turned her eyes on Ishmael, her love for him expanding because of the love she felt for the unsentient things about her. His heart leapt to the look.

"Will you come out into the big field after everyone has gone to bed?" he asked her, busy unfastening a trace; and as she bent over a buckle on her side of the pony she whispered, "Yes."

She ate her supper in a state almost too placidly joyous for excitement, and afterwards went up to her room and sat with her elbows on the window-sill and her chin on her hands, looking out. The corn had been cut and stacked in great Cornish arishmows, and Blanche, watching the orange moon swim up, told herself, "When that shadow has reached the nearest stook I will go." The shadow lay, finger-like, touching the stook, but still she sat on, reluctant to go out and make sure of her happiness. The moon, paling to pearl as it rose, shone clearly into the room, making sharp shadows under the bed-curtains and lying slantwise on the white counterpane; Blanche rose and slipped off her frock; she moved as in a dream—her affectations of thought fell away, leaving her instinctive. She felt as though this lover were her first, and, without reasoning about it, knew she must be fitly dressed to meet him. She bathed her face and hands in cold water, then put on a fresh muslin gown, moving to and fro in full view of anyone who might be in the sloping field outside. She half hoped, quite innocently, that Ishmael was there watching; it seemed to her nothing unclean could live in the white light that permeated the very air of the room. Overcome for a moment by the strength of her own emotions, she sat on the bed and buried her face in her hands. As she looked at herself in the glass before leaving the room she smiled for pleasure that she was unpowdered and unrouged, not pausing, in her exalted mood, to wonder whether she would have faced the daylight so. It was a better, an honest, Blanche, transmuted by happiness, that crept down the stairs, through the small garden and across the road into the field. He was awaiting her by the hedge.

"How late you are!" he said, not reproachfully, but in relief that she should have come at all. "I thought you must have changed your mind. Do you know it is past eleven?"

"Have I been as long as that?" Blanche hugged herself to think that she had been so genuinely wrapped in dreams as to let so much time slip by unheeded. Together they went down the moonlit field, where the arishmows seemed like the pavilions of a long-dead Arthurian host conjured up by some magician's spells. In the last field before the moor Ishmael pulled the corn out lavishly as a throne for her and installed her on it.

"You look like the spirit of harvest sitting there on your golden throne," he told her, and, leaning back against the rustling stook, she smiled mysteriously at him, all the glamour of the moonlight and her own womanhood in her half-shut eyes.

"Blanche ...!"

He was kneeling beside her, his hands on her shoulders. Her eyelids dropped before his gaze and she shook slightly.

"You are the most beautiful thing on earth! I love you with all my heart and soul, with every bit of me. Say you can care—Blanche, say you can...!"

She raised her eyes: the sphinx-like look of her level brows and calm mouth held for an instant, then her face quivered, grew tremulous and tender. Her hands made a blind, passionate movement, and as he caught her to him he heard her sobbing that she loved him.

He held her close, covering her face with clumsy eager kisses, the first he had ever given a woman, and he gave himself up to worshipping her as she sat on the throne he had made for her.

"Let us go to the boulders above the wood," whispered Blanche, who even in the grip of one of the deepest feelings of her life kept her unflinching flair for the right background; "we can see the sun rise there, over the trees...."

He helped her to her feet and they walked together, hand in hand, like children. The keen personal emotion had passed, leaving them almost timid; now certainty had settled on them passionate inquiry gave place to peace. So they went, and he felt as though he walked in Eden, with the one mate in all the world. Across the moors they went; then—for they were going inland—they came to fields again, and the path ran through acres of cabbages. The curves of the grey-green leaves held the light in wide shimmers of silver, the dew vibrating with diamond colours; edging their two shadows the refraction of the beams brought a halo of brightest white. Another stretch of furze brought them to the boulders above the wood on a level with the massed tree-tops. Ishmael made Blanche put on his coat; then he sat beside her, his hand holding the coat together under her chin.

Nestling her head against him, she closed her eyes, and with soft, regular breathings feigned a sleep that presently became reality. Through the starlit hour between moon-setting and sun-rising Ishmael held her; every now and then she stirred, half woke, and, moving a little to ease his arm, lifted the pallor of her face to his. Before the dawn she awoke completely and began to reproach herself and him.

The time of un-self-consciousness was already over for her, and she was once more the woman who knew how to make men love.

"Oh, how could you let me waste time sleeping? I've not been really asleep—only drowsing. I knew I was sitting beside you all the while."

"Then it wasn't waste for you either." His lips trembled a little, and he said nothing about his own emotions; it had been so unutterably sweet to him to hold her, trusting, quiescent, in his arms and feel the night-wind ruffling her hair against his cheek.

It was still dusk, though the misty blue-grey of the tree-tops was imperceptibly changing to a more living hue, and the sky, stained a deep rust colour, showed a molten whiteness where it touched the world's rim. He unknowingly gripped Blanche's hand till she nearly cried out; except as something that made beauty more beautiful he hardly knew she was there. Slowly the miracle of dawn unfolded; down in the woods birds lifted glad heads, the lids were raised from round, bright eyes, and there came up to the watchers on the rocks the first faint notes that pierced the air of the new day.

Nothing was very wide-awake as yet; all life stirred as though beneath a film; a dim blue coverlet still lay lightly over the wood; the earth held her breath for the moment of birth. What a waiting, what a wide clear sense of certain expectation! The sky, naked of clouds, had become a brightening sphere of pearliness; a deep rose gathered over the hills and spread fanlike, licking up the ashen pallor with stabs of flame. A livid red-gold rim sprang into being behind the hill crests, and slowly and in state the sun swam up the molten sky. He turned to Blanche with the tears in his eyes.

"Dearest, the sun has risen!" He drew her face to his and kissed her, not as before, but with the sense of consummating a sacrament. She rose to her feet a little unsteadily, and they set their faces towards Paradise cottage.

"You must get some rest," he said; "it's only half-past four now."

The exaltation of the dawn had left her, and she quickened her steps, wondering uneasily what her skin looked like unaided in this dazzling light. She slipped noiselessly into the house by the front door, which she barred behind her; the clatter of hobnails from the little yard told that Billy was already about his business, but behind Mrs. Penticost's door all was quiet. With her finger to her lips Blanche leaned from her window and breathed "Good-night" and disappeared into the shadows.

CHAPTER XII

SHEAVES

The following day dawned still and hot as ever, but overcast with a grey film, though the pale sky held a glaring quality that reflected on to the eyeballs. Down in the lowest meadow the oats had not yet been gathered into sheaves, and John-James, gazing at the sky, was of opinion that the sooner it was done the better. Ishmael agreed without enthusiasm, till it occurred to him that Blanche, who was so charmed with a farmer's life, would probably enjoy helping. It might be made into a sort of picnic, a *fête champêtre*; the beautiful monkey could help, and he could send a boy over to the mill to fetch Phoebe. They would make a day of it—the kind of pastoral occasion which cannot exactly be called artificial and yet which does not in the least represent the actual life of those who live by land.

Vassie was enthusiastic about the idea, and soon the house was in a ferment with preparations; bottles of cider were brought out, a stone puncheon of beer produced for the men, cakes and pasties began to form beneath Vassie's willing hands. Ishmael felt a pang as he watched her. How could it affect her but adversely, this change he was to make? He felt that Blanche would not want any of his family, even Vassie, living in the house with them, and it was her right to order such a matter as she would. To settle anywhere with her mother was impossible for the proud fastidious Vassie, and, though he could allow her enough money to make her independent, she could hardly, in the ideas of those days, go alone into the world upon it.

There would be terrible scenes with his mother, he realised, before she would consent to go, but he shook the thought of it all off him on this the first morning of his plighted faith with Blanche. It would be unpleasant, but imperative, and how well worth it!... Meanwhile, there was love to be enjoyed, every moment of it—love that was still to him such a shy and delicate thing that he hardly dared to breathe upon it for fear of ruffling in some clumsy way Blanche's fine susceptibilities. She must have had so much to suffer from undue approaches in her battle with the world; not from him should such tarnishing come.

He sent a note down to her at Mrs. Penticost's to tell her again, in his morning greeting, of his love and to advise her of the mock-business of the day. Blanche was still in bed when it arrived, and Judith, looking more like a handsome monkey than ever in a faded red Garibaldi, took it in to her.

Judith still admired Blanche above all women, although she saw her as now with a creamed face and hair that resembled a row of little slugs disposed about her brow. Blanche rose above all this as she managed to rise above an inauspicious background, and the lazy stretch she gave beneath the sheet that was all that covered her, bringing out two white arms above her head so that the muscles swelled under the tight skin, was so lovely in its feline grace as to triumph over anything else.

"Here's a note for you; I think it's from Mr. Ruan," said Judith. "Mrs. Penticost said she thought it was." Judy did not add that Mrs. Penticost's precise method of giving the information had been to snort out: "T'young maister can't live through the night wethout writing to she, simminly.... Poor sawl!"

Blanche read the little note through twice, a smile on her face, then pulled Judith down to her and kissed her.

"Blanche, are you ...?" asked Judy breathlessly.

Blanche nodded.

"Oh, Blanche, what is it like? Is it as wonderful as books say? Do you feel thrills?"

"What sort of thrills?"

"Oh, up and down your spine, I suppose! Like I feel when I hear music."

"Yes, it's just like music. It somehow sets the whole of life to music," answered Blanche solemnly.

"How wonderful!... Blanche—has he kissed you?"

"Yes, last night. Judy, a woman doesn't know what life means till the man she loves kisses her."

Judy sat rapt, saying nothing. Her deep-set hazel eyes took on a look as of one who sees visions, impersonal but entrancing. Blanche rolled herself out of bed and, going over to the glass, began to examine her skin in the white light shed from the sky in at the window.

"Bother!" she murmured; "I'm getting a spot! Oh, Judy, isn't that too bad just when I want to look nice?... Of course, he's the kind to love me just as much with a spot, but I feel I can't love myself so much...."

"I'll lend you some of my lotion," said Judy, jumping up; "you can cover it over, if you try, with that and powder. It doesn't look anything really. I always think one sees one's own spots long before anyone else can, anyway."

"Yes, that's true; it will be all right if I can prevent it getting any worse. You never have any spots, you lucky baby. Just hand me the lotion ... and my dressing-gown ... thanks ever so." Blanche slipped on the wrapper, and going to the top of the little flight of stairs called down them: "Mrs. Penticost ... my bath-water, please!"

No answer.

"Mrs. Pe-e-ntico-s-st," called Blanche, "I must have my bath-water! I shall die, dear Mrs. Penticost, if I can't have my bath-water this very moment!"

From subterranean distance came a muffled voice which nevertheless enunciated distinctly: "Die, then, damon, die...."

"Oh, Mrs. Penticost, how unkind you are!" cried Blanche, laughing. "I don't a bit want to die to-day. I want to live and be happy and for everyone in the world to be happy too."

These last remarks were addressed to the form of Mrs. Penticost toiling upstairs with the can of

water. The good lady clanked the can down and pulled out the flat tin bath from under the bed before replying, which she did over her shoulder as she was leaving the room.

"Aw!" she observed, "I'd be careful if I was you. Be cryen before night!"

"Cheery old thing!" grimaced Blanche. "Do go and see she gets breakfast ready quickly, Judy. She'll do anything for you."

Judy flung herself downstairs and upon the neck of Mrs. Penticost, who called her a lamb, bade her get out of the way and sit down while she got her a cup of tea and some bread and butter to keep her going till that lazy faggot overstairs should have put enough mucks on her face to be able to breakfast.

The day brightened, though still with a curious pallor that was more glare than sunlight, and both girls put on cool muslin dresses, or as cool as the long full skirts would allow of their being. Vassie was in blue, Phoebe in pink, Judy in primrose, while Blanche was white even to her shady hat. Girls never look as well as when there are several of them together, just as men never look so ill as in a crowd. What brings out all the ungainliness of men's attire emphasises the butterfly nature of girls—their look, their voices, the little graces they half-consciously and half-unknowingly display with each other, show each off to better advantage than at any other time. Vassie, Phoebe, Judith, and Blanche made the rough field a flower-garden that day to eye and ear, almost to nostril, for their presence was so quickening that the sweet smell of the oats and the green things cut with it seemed to emanate from the girls and be part of their presence. Laughter and the swish of skirts mingled with the rustle of stalk and grain, the sway and the dip of skirts mingled with the bending of the sheaves. To Ishmael his lover seemed the sweeter thus absorbed as one of others than even alone. All that month he had been seeing her only, to such an extent that her relationship with the rest of the world down at Cloom had not held his attention. Now he realised how vital the state of those relationships was, and seeing her one of a beautiful scheme that seemed inevitable and lasting as a Greek frieze, he took that purely physical circumstance to mean mental harmony as well.

It was hard work, though sweet, among the oats, and the physical exertion satisfied everyone, so that no fringe was left beyond it for thought. When they first entered the field the crop lay in broad tawny bands across the greener stubble, just as it had fallen from the scythes. The amateur harvesters had to gather the oats into great bundles and, binding them, stack the sheaves thus made together, against the day, close at hand now, when they would be carried to the threshing.

Bent-backed, the girls went along the rows, pushing the oats as they went into bundles bigger than themselves, trying to keep the feathery heads as much as possible at one end. Round each bundle Ishmael pulled a roughly-twisted rope of the oats, tugging it fast; and when it was Blanche's bundle he spanned, then his hands would touch hers through the glossy straws. Every now and again, for change of labour, the girls would stagger under a heavy sheaf to where one or two others lay ready and prop them up against each other, with a careful eye to the wind, lest, if the sheaves were not built solidly enough or fairly balanced, they might be found spilt along the ground in the morning. And all through the work, the sweeping up of the bundles, the twisting of the ropes, the carrying and the stacking, the rustling noise filled the air, while the faint but pervading smell, that subtle, inexpressibly wholesome smell of ripe grain, made it sweet.

"I love you!" said Ishmael over the dancing oats as Blanche's eyes met his.

"And I you!..." she replied, slipping her fingers through the yielding straws for his to find and press, while he drew her as near him as she could come for the sheaf between.

She had, indeed, never been so sure she loved him, not even the night before when passion had called to her. He looked so splendid with his brown throat laid bare by his open shirt; his dark hair, wet with sweat, pushed off his brow; his dark eyes at once younger and more the eyes of a man than they had ever showed. Blanche felt an odd and delicious thrill as she met his dominant glance; she exulted in the swing of his lithe body, in the ease with which he tossed the heavy sheaves, even in the sweat that stood out over his face and chest, and which made him the more male, the more primitive. She herself had never seemed so fascinating and so sure; Vassie was swept away by her for the first time; Phoebe lost a certain sense of grudge in awed admiration; Judy, in speech and action, contrived to lead up to her friend, whole-heartedly exploiting the wonder of her. John-James and Killigrew were probably the only two there who did not acknowledge the sway.

Killigrew declined to labour with the rest; he set up his easel and did several little sketches, nearly all of Judy, whose dark head showed against the grey-gold background of the field with a greater distinction than the pale chignons of Blanche and Vassie or the indeterminate locks of Phoebe.

"You don't repent?" asked Ishmael, sure of his answer, as he and Blanche each poised a sheaf against

the other's.

"No, no, and no," she told him, bending round the stack to see his face, her hands still holding it at either side as children stand and dodge when they are playing hide-and-seek. He shot out a hand to her, but she evaded it and was off to where more bundles lay upon the stubble, and not for some time did he get another chance to speak to her. Without a word said they tacitly agreed to play this game of only meeting, hands and eyes, now and again as though by chance, she sheltering behind the oats, feeling his passion of worship, even so, as much as she could face under watching eyes. Like children they played at this game which had grown up without a word, both recognising it, and both the happier for the frail barriers and the secret exchanged by stealth before the others. At lunch, eaten on the grassy slope of the next field, he did not even sit next her, but both had to watch over themselves that they did not yield too often to the temptation of a glance that would have told as much to an onlooker as to each other.

The afternoon somehow lacked the first ecstasy of the morning, the labour suddenly became harder to unaccustomed muscles, and the girls lay in the shadows of the stooks and idled. They had time to talk among themselves while Ishmael and John-James worked on at the far end of the field. Blanche thought it rather silly and tiresome of Ishmael to keep on at it; surely he could leave that clumsy brother of his—for the first time the realisation that John-James actually was whole brother to Ishmael flashed into her mind—and wander away somewhere with her! What was the good of being the owner and master if he could not get some one else to do the work when it became a bore? So Blanche inwardly; and Ishmael, to whom it would never have occurred to begin work on a field and leave it half-done, went on steadily—stooping, gathering, binding; she could see the perpetual crouch of his figure, hardly ever straightening itself, down there against a background of green hedge and sullen grey sea.

Blanche leant up alongside her stook and Vassie sat watching her, while Judy, who had seen a wistful look on Phoebe's baby face, drew her into such superficial personal talk as she could best compass.

"When do you go back to London?" was Vassie's abrupt and not very happy opening.

"Why, I don't know ... it all depends," answered Blanche, her beautiful low voice sounding very rich after Vassie's hard tones. "You've never been to London, have you, Vassie? I may call you Vassie, mayn't I?"

"I've never been further than Plymouth."

"You must come to London some day with me," said Blanche. She had no intention of spending all her days at Cloom, and she wished to win over this sulky beauty to her side. Vassie looked doubtfully at her, but began to thaw. London ... it meant all of hope and the future to Vassie.

"I would dearly love to," she said. "I suppose you know it very well, like I know Penzance. I don't go even to Plymouth very often, and of course it's not London. The people are rather common. I daresay there's all sorts in London, but I suppose you know a lot of families up there?"

"A good many," said Blanche casually. She was pleased at the signs of a thaw; she was one of those women who are as eager to stand well with their own sex as with men and take as much care to ensure it.

"You would do well in London, Vassie," she went on, fixing her eyes on the girl after a habit she had, and which always gave the impression that she was talking to the only person on earth who really interested her; "you are very beautiful, you know."

Vassie flushed with pleasure and did not trouble to deny the obvious truth of the statement. She knew she was the only girl there with undoubted beauty; what she did not know was that she was also the only one who would never be very attractive to men. She looked at Phoebe's retreating chin, at Judith's prominent cheek-bones and deep-set, melancholy eyes with the bistre stains below them, at Blanche's subtly-broad face with its too-small lips, and unconsciously she put up her hand to feel her own lovely contours and smooth skin.

Blanche slipped a firm, cool hand into hers. "Don't worry, Vassie," she said in a low voice; "I foresee great things for you. You're a wonderful girl, my dear. Now, I suppose we ought to be helping those two poor, dear men again." She rose to her feet with one of the lithe movements that always seemed rather surprising in a girl of her firmly-knit build, which would have been heavy had it not been for its grace. Vassie, with a fulness that was so much more supple to a casual glance, yet followed her less beautifully.

"Still, a lot can be done with her," thought Blanche, watching. She motioned to her to come and help her with a row that had not yet been gathered into a bundle, and Vassie stooped over it with her.

"Why, what's that?" exclaimed Blanche, catching sight of something grey that went rustling swiftly downwards between the straws. She thrust her hand down, thinking it was a field-mouse, and caught the thing. A speckled toad wriggled in her fingers, lustily enough, but it was a toad that had seen tragedy. The keen edge of a scythe must have caught it, for one side of its head was shorn away; the eye had just been missed, but the inside of the poor little animal's mouth and throat lay exposed, pulsating and brilliantly red—a purer hue of blood was never seen than in that grey creature.

Blanche cried out in pity, while Vassie calmly advised death, seconded by Phoebe, and Judith looked away, sorry and sick, Blanche called to Ishmael, using his Christian name for the first time publicly, and aware of it herself and of its effect on Vassie through all her real pity. Ishmael came running, and, taking the little beast tenderly, offered to knock it on the head with a stone before it knew what was happening; but Blanche forbade him. She took it back, her fingers slipping in between it and his palm, and stood bending over it.

"Poor little thing!" she said; "at least it's not bleeding now, and I believe it may live. It doesn't seem to be suffering, so let's give it its chance. Put it over the wall onto the grass, Ishmael."

He vaulted over and, taking the toad from her, laid it down on the dewy grass. It sat trembling for a few moments, and then began to hop away and was lost in the tall blades that met above its mutilated head—one of the many tragedies of harvest.

Dusk had fallen while the toad's fate hung in the balance; a pastel dusk that, even as the girls still stood watching, was made tremulous by the first faint breath of the moon. From the sea came the red glare of the Wolf and the cold pure beam of the Bishop; in the north Charles' Wain gave the first twinkle of its lights; while from the roads came the creak of the terrestrial waggons beginning to lumber slowly home. It was time for supper, for lamps, for that meeting within walls which enforces a sudden intimacy after a day spent in the open, for beginning real life, as it would have to be lived, once more. The three men stayed behind to gather the remnants of the picnic, but the girls lifted their pale skirts about them and were gone over the high stone stile like moths.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STILE

That evening as supper was being eaten in the new dining-room at Cloom—a merry supper enough, for all Annie's skeleton presence at one end of the table—Archelaus walked in. It was the first time he had been over to Cloom since the night of the bush-beating, and it was the first time Ishmael had seen him since that glimpse in the light of a lantern in the wood.

Ishmael looked at his brother, and all that affair seemed very long ago, in a life when he had not been to London, mixed with men, or met Blanche. He held out a hand to Archelaus, who for a stupid moment stood staring at it; then he saw the stranger girl from London, Ishmael's girl, of whom he had heard, watching him. Beyond her sat Phoebe. Some train of thought was lit in Archelaus's mind, and burned there; the second of hesitation during which his survey and the thought took place within his mind was imperceptible as he awkwardly struck his big fist into Ishmael's palm. Everyone present was aware, in greater or less degree, according to the amount of his knowledge, of relief.

Archelaus drew out a chair and partook of supper, talking little; but that little was good, racy, at times too much so, full of shrewd observations and little flashing gleams of knowledge of men and things. Ishmael was not abashed and silenced by it as he had been on the night of his birthday; he too, as he sat there with his "girl" and his wider experiences, felt that the ground over which Archelaus roamed was not altogether untrodden by himself. Annie, by the incursion of her eldest born, was changed, as always, from an acrid acquiescence to definite enmity towards Ishmael and his concerns. She became so rude to Blanche that it seemed the temper of a veritable angel still to be able to smile and answer with politeness. For her sake Ishmael also kept his temper, though inwardly he was ragingly angry—not so much with Annie for being rude as with Archelaus for behaving so unwontedly well through it all—hushing his mother up instead of encouraging her, and speaking respectfully to Blanche himself.

After supper the young people drifted out of doors, and before the girls, wrapping themselves against the dew, joined them, Archelaus drifted in his cat-like way—odd for so big a man—to Ishmael's side.

"Will I wish 'ee joy, Ishmael?" he asked. "'Tis easy to see where your heart be set. Does the maid feel she can love 'ee and Cloom Manor?"

The last words and some indefinable quality in the tone jarred on Ishmael, disturbing the satisfaction he had felt glowing over him at the supper-table.

"If you mean have I proposed to Miss Grey?" he said a little pompously as youth will speak, "I have."

"And will she have 'ee, or has she given 'ee a clout in th' ear?"

Ishmael hated having to tell this barbarian anything about his lovely Blanche; he turned sick when he thought that this would be Blanche's brother ... free to call her by her name, to take her hand.... All he could bring himself to say was that he believed Miss Grey was going to become his wife, but that he would thank Archelaus not to go talking about it, as nothing was to be made public as yet.

"There are other people to consider," he said: "her relations whom I shall have to see, and a lot of things like that. It is not like marrying a girl from the nearest village," he added tactlessly, but without, in his self-absorption, meaning to wound.

Archelaus drew away through the night. He laughed a little.

"Not as if you was wedding Phoebe, who's only a miller's girl?" he asked. Ishmael laughed too, though a little doubtfully, not sure of the cordiality of Archelaus's chuckle.

"Of course it's not like. Phoebe's a dear little thing, but Miss Grey is different, naturally."

In the passage Archelaus ran into Phoebe, emerging with the other girls, and took from her with an air of gallantry the wrap she had upon her arm.

"I'll put 'ee home," he told her: "best have this on; 'tes a bit cool on cliff."

"Oh, but—" began Phoebe. She had no hopes, such as she had cherished, against all reason, upon getting Ishmael's note that morning, of a moonlit walk home with him, but something in her shrank from the walk undertaken with Archelaus. He wrapped the shawl about her as she spoke. Phoebe could no more have resisted a man who had his mind made up than a frog can get away from a viper which has once sighted it, and she let herself be swathed without further protest. Good-byes were said, with careless affection on the part of Vassie, and kindness from Judith and a pressure of the hand and a deep look from Blanche.

"Good-night, little girl! You're going to be very happy, too, you know," said Blanche, who knew nothing about it, but felt it was a good thing to say. Phoebe and Archelaus, both tongue-tied now they were alone, set off through the moonlight and the soft air to the cliff path.

It was a long time now since she had met Archelaus out of doors, as he had several times half-coaxed, half-bullied her into doing. Now she felt a constraint with him she had not previously, as though there were some portent in the simple act of seeing her home there had never been before. She had, of course, flirted with him in a very innocent way, if her methods had been a little cruder than Blanche's would have under the same circumstances. The repartee had been simple and the caresses nothing more than a slight touch on waist or arm, repulsed by her with more alarm than prudery. Phoebe was fonder far of Ishmael than of Archelaus; she told herself that she admired Ishmael more—he was so much the gentleman.... What she did not know was that a rebel thing in her, the thing for which poor facile, soft little Phoebe had been as much created as though she had been a field-mouse, responded to Archelaus because it felt he was so much the male. Phoebe had been safeguarded all her short life by her notions of gentility and by her fear, the fear, not of consequences, but, less base than that, the fear of actual passion, which is often implanted in very passionate girls as though to guard them till the time comes.

When they reached the first stile Phoebe lifted her skirts and pattered up to it, stood poised upon its crest, and then, with a little gasp, yielded to Archelaus's strong arms as he seized her and swung her down bodily.

"Such a lil' bit of a thing as you be," said Archelaus; "like a lil' cat in my arms, so soft and all."

They went on, he leading and brushing away the tendrils of bramble and the tougher branches of furze across the narrow cliff-path. At each stile he lifted her, only now he picked her up as they approached and carried her right over them. At the last stile he held her instead of putting her down when they reached the further side.

"Put me down, Archelaus," she whispered. He still held her, his hands beneath her armpits, so that

they cupped the curve of her breast, her face just beneath his, her feet dangling.

"I'll have a kiss afore putten 'ee down, then. I've never kissed 'ee since you was a lil' maid to school."

"No!" said Phoebe; "no!" She did not know why she protested; she had been kissed with the awkward shy kisses of youth often enough for her years, but she turned her mouth this way and that to escape his. He went on holding her in air, though his arms were beginning to tremble a little with the strain, and simply followed her mouth with his, brushing it lightly. Suddenly she felt she could bear no longer that easy mastery, those following lips that passed and repassed over hers and could so easily have settled if they chose. Why didn't they? She turned like a little animal, and instead of evading any longer, sank her lips into his.

She hung there then, helpless indeed; for his mouth, no longer making a play of hers, held it, bore it down. When he released her he dropped her on to her feet at the same time. Phoebe turned from him and ran towards the mill. He followed leisurely, sure of her next action as only his experience of women could have made him sure, and found her, for all her flight, waiting for him in the shadow of the door.

"You shouldn't," she murmured. "I had to wait and tell you you shouldn't. 'Tesn't right or fitty to kiss that way. It frightens me, Archelaus."

"Why edn' it right?"

"Because—because we aren't wed," faltered Phoebe.

"Wed!..." In his voice was light laughter and a kindly scorn. "What's wed but a word? We're men and women on this earth; that's all that matters to my way of thinkin!"

Phoebe was vaguely hurt and insulted, which did duty for being shocked very well. She opened the door and passed into the passage.

"I'd best be going," she said, still half-wishful to linger—anxious not to make herself cheap, yet wishing he would start some conversation which would make it possible to stay without seeming to want to over much.

"When'll you be out again?" asked Archelaus, his foot in the door.

"I don't know."

"I do. Good-night, lil' thing!" And he withdrew the foot and was off through the darkness under the elms. Phoebe was left with her awakened heart-beats.

CHAPTER XIV

A LETTER

Harvest had all been gathered in at Cloom, the threshing was over, the grain lay in heaps, grey-green and golden, in the barn, or had been sold and taken away, and the first tang of early autumn was in the air. The peewits had come down and were mewing in the dappled skies, and on the telegraph wires the high-shouldered swallows sat in rows preparing for flight; in the hedgerows the dead hemlocks, brittle as fine shells, were ready to scatter their pale seeds at a touch, and the blackberries, on which as the West Country saying has it, the devil had already laid his finger, were filmed with mildew. It was autumn, but rich, warm autumn, dropping her leaf and seed into the teeming earth, whose grain was garnered, but whose womb was already fertile with the future.

Blanche was still at Mrs. Penticost's, and the engagement, though it had not actually been announced, had leaked out, and Blanche was not at all satisfied with the results that had followed upon that dissemination of knowledge. Annie's hostility she could bear, for she knew that, once married to Ishmael, his mother would be placed somewhere too far removed for the nuisance of her to be more than occasional; it was not that which was blowing with so chill a breath over her spirit. It was, as she phrased it to herself, the whole thing....

Ever since that night upon the boulders above the wood her sureness, both of the depth of her own feeling for Ishmael and for the country method of life that went with him, had been declining, as from

some crest set in too rarefied an air for her to breathe with comfort. Poise had been slipping from her, and she was genuinely distressed. In the first stage of her declension she was chiefly occupied with a frantic snatching at her passion—a sustained effort to pull it back and keep it with her; in the second she was occupied in wondering how best to get gracefully out of the entanglement, which was how she grew to envisage it. At first this seemed to be hardly possible; she saw pathetic pictures of herself going on with it and sacrificing herself, unaware how the pleasure of the moment was leading her on, how charming she found Ishmael's considerate and tender love-making that came to her jaded nerves with the refreshing quality of a draught of pure water to a man who has lived too long on champagne. The actual present continued to be pleasurable long after she had determined that it could never crystallise into anything more definite, and so she went on from day to day, enjoying herself, yet vaguely hoping something would happen which would enable her to retire from the engagement without loss of self-respect or that of Ishmael.

For gradually she became quite sure that she could not go through with it, that she must get right away. The people she wanted to know had not called on her—the Parson, on whose help she had relied, held out no assistance; Annie was stubborn and would obviously, wherever she was, do her best to make of herself a barrier against the world, the world that Blanche must know if life were to be tolerable here. The climax, to Blanche's mind, had been a ball just given by a local magnate and his wife who lived on the outskirts of Penzance. Ishmael had been invited and she with him, under the chaperonage of an elderly cousin of the Parson's who was staying at the Vicarage. And the ball, from Blanche's point of view, had been a failure. She had been received politely, but without enthusiasm; and she had overheard some of the other guests saying that they supposed young Ruan had had to be invited, but that it was really dashed awkward!... And she was beginning to realise that Ishmael, when he had paid his mother a little income, paid Vassie enough to live on, paid John-James bigger wages to allow of his living elsewhere, would not be nearly as well off as she had thought ... a visit to London once a year would be the utmost to be hoped for. And for the rest—year in, year out, at Cloom, watching the waxing and waning of the seasons, bearing children, the children Ishmael looked for to inherit the horrid place after him.... Blanche, fond as she still was of him, literally shuddered as she saw where glamour, in company with boredom and desperation, had been about to lead her. After all, she need not despair: there were other men in the world, and she had been silly to expect to meet anyone she could marry at the theatre; it was no sign of waning charm that she had failed there. If only she could think of a good excuse, she would go home and write to Ishmael from there.... Yet that gave her no scope, allowed no scene such as her soul loved as long as she could shine creditably....

She could not quite decide how to stage-manage her exit; but, whether she went or not, Judy had to go back to her people—Judy who would bear with her the slim little sheaf of poems she had written during her stay, Judy sun-browned, almost more of the elf than the monkey. Killigrew had settled to go the same day to accompany her on the tiresome journey, and then he was for Paris again, his beloved Paris; he vowed that he should burst if he stayed in England any longer. On the morning of the day before Judy's departure Blanche, who, half-packed, was still trying to make up her mind, received a letter that, with no sense of impiousness, she considered providential.

Mrs. Penticost brought it in to her, between a red finger and thumb, rather steamy from washing-up, and busied herself about the room while her lodger read the closely-written pages. Mrs. Penticost was frankly curious, and if Blanche did not tell her what was in that letter she meant to find out by questioning her.

Blanche hardly noticed her presence; she was too rapt in the providential happenings described to her by the garrulous pen of her stepmother. The very crackle of the paper between her fingers gave her fresh courage as she read. And yet it was a very simple letter, coming as it did from the simple woman who she so often said had nothing in common with herself.

* * * * *

"Dear Blanche," ran the letter, "I wonder how much longer you are going to stay in Cornwall? Your father feels it hard that you should not spend any of your holiday with him, and I don't think will go on much longer with your allowance if you are neither working nor staying at home. You know he was determined you should have your chance to become a great actress, as you were so set on it and discontented at home, and indeed I do not blame you, for I know how dull it is here. However, just at present the neighbourhood is very lively, as we have a new lord of the manor—only imagine it! You know old Mr. Crossthwaite died in the spring and the place has been sold this summer to a very rich young man—*trade*, I think, but *quite* a gentleman; you would never know the difference, and has been educated at Cambridge, I am told. He seems a quite nice young man, and all the neighbours are making him give parties and giving them themselves, I believe to try and marry him to one of their daughters, but as you know there is nobody much here now. There are Dr. Smythe's daughters, but they are so very plain, poor dears! and the only others are Lady Geraldine and Lady Sybil, and I don't suppose they

would look at him, being so much older and occupied in their charities, even if he were inclined, so I'm sure we can't blame the young man if he refuses to fall in love at all down here. If you were here I expect it would be a very different story; he's just your type, if you know what I mean, very like your Mr. Bellew, poor young man. I wonder what has happened to him. I did hear he married a barmaid, and I'm sure it was a judgment on his mother for saying he was too young to marry you. Well, there is no more news, except that that silly little housemaid I got a good place for at the Hall is in trouble—the gamekeeper, I believe; but she is very obstinate and won't say. These girls are enough to make one give up trying to help them. Also the carpet in the drawing-room is right *through* at last, so I am in hopes of persuading your father we really must have a new one. I don't think it looks at all well for the rector of the parish to have a carpet that callers have to be warned not to catch their feet in. The rug cannot be made to cover it as it's right in the middle. I do my best with an occasional table, but then that gets in the way. With love, my dear Blanche, from myself and your father, believe me,

"Yours affectionately,

"MARY LETITIA GREY."

* * * * *

This was the letter that had flashed like a ray of sun into the scheme of things for Blanche, and whose salient portions—by which she meant those directly affecting herself—she repeated over and over. "A very rich young man ... educated at Cambridge, I am told ... cannot blame the poor young man if he does not fall in love down here ... it would be different if you were home. He is just your style." That meant the style of man who fell in love with her, now always younger than herself.

"Got bad news, have 'ee, or is it good?" asked Mrs. Penticost, who could contain herself in silence no longer. She gave up the pretence of dusting and stood frankly looking at her lodger.

"I—I don't quite know how to take it, Mrs. Penticost," temporised Blanche.

"Whisht kind of news that must be," remarked Mrs. Penticost, who had not watched Miss Grey these past weeks without getting a shrewd idea of the tendency of her thoughts and affections. "I was wondering whether you weren't feeling glad that time's come to go—if 'ee are going along of Miss Judy?"

There was no answer to this, and Mrs. Penticost, her rosy face set in lines of determination, began again.

"Must be rare and dull for 'ee down here after London, though there was that ball in to Penzance t'other night. Dance weth Maister Ruan, ded 'ee, my dear? They do say he handles his feet some pretty. I remember when I was a maid I was all for a man who could do that. I got as far as walking arm-a-crook weth a chap wance, and, thought I, 'I won't go for to ask he to step in till I do know if he can dance wi' I.' Some trouble I ded have keepen' he quiet till there was a gala and us could dance. Primitive Wesleyan, the gala was. He was all for me maken' up my mind long before, and I wouldn' have un till I knew, nor yet I wouldn' let un go. 'Must keep cousins weth he or he'll go off,' I thought; and so I ded, my dear, just managed it nicely. I gave the go-bye to a fine-looken chap from St. Just to dance wi' my man, and then I found that he never danced toall, and hadn't dared tell me. Mad as fire I was, and abused him worse than dung. But you couldn' ever go for to lay that complaint against Maister Ruan, nor yet any other, I should say."

"Mr. Ruan is all that is good and splendid, of course, Mrs. Penticost," said Blanche, folding up her letter.

"He is that, sure 'nough, and it'll be a bad day for the woman that ever does him a hurt, him that has had enough already to turn his very heart grey in his breast. I wouldn' like to see no woman do that."

"Mightn't it be better than making him unhappier in the long run by not doing him a hurt now, as you call it?" asked Blanche.

"If he but knew what was best for him, 'tes a sharp hurt and soon auver," said Mrs. Penticost frankly; "but he'm like all men, naught but a cheild that cries for the moon, and a woman as has a heart would sooner see a man getten' what he wants, even when 'tes bad for 'en, than see him eaten' his soul away with longing. There's a deal of satisfaction in maken' our own unhappiness, and a man has that to console him."

"You are a Job's comforter," cried Blanche, rustling out of the room. She had heard the well-known click of the little gate, and she fled upstairs to be alone with her thoughts and her letter for a few

moments before meeting Ishmael. She no longer doubted she was going to break off her engagement and leave for home the next day, but she still had to decide on the type of Blanche who should appear to him and what her manner and aspect should be. A tender grieving, shown in a pale face and quiet eyes, would probably be best ... and she could always introduce a maternal note in the very accent of her "dear boy...."

CHAPTER XV

BLOWN HUSKS

Not for nothing had Ishmael given way to the incursion of the personal, always before so jealously kept out of his life. His desire for impersonality now only kept by him in a fierce wish to blot out his own as much as possible, to sink it in that of the beloved, to drown in hers. He was obsessed by Blanche, she filled the world for him from rim to rim; and though with his mind he still admitted the absurdity of it, could even look at his own state dispassionately, he yet had to admit the fact. It was some time since he had been near Boase, because, although the Parson never so much as hinted it, Ishmael knew he was not in sympathy with him over this. Annie he felt he could hate for her antagonism, which, as long as it had been against himself alone, he had not minded; even Vassie would not yield altogether and come in on his side. Blanche had to fight the lot of them, he told himself—resentful, fearful lest they should frighten her away. But at the bottom of it all was the fear, the distrust of her which he refused to recognise.

On this morning as he went down over the fields to Mrs. Penticost's he was more uneasy than ever before—he knew it was not his imagination that she had been different these last few days; he began to be beset by vague fears to which he had not dared give form even in his own mind, much less in any speech with her. Yet since the dance he had faced the conclusion that they could not go on as they were, that Blanche must either agree to a wedding or a final parting....

He reached the cottage and had to wait awhile till Blanche, pale and grave, came to him in the little parlour.

"Come out," he said to her. "There's a lot of things I want to say, and I can't here. The room's too small."

Blanche hesitated, seemed to be weighing something in her mind, and then agreed docilely; she put on a hat, and then went beside him towards the cliff. As they went Ishmael tried to take her hand, trying to capture with it some of the spirit of joy which had fled, but she was carrying a little bag, which she snatched away; there came from it a crackle as of a letter.... They went down on to the cliff together and stood awhile in a speechless constraint among the withered bracken.

It was a day of sunlight so faint it seemed dead, like some gleam refracted onto the pale bright sky, and so to earth, rather than any direct outflow; the quiet air was only stirred by the swish of scythes from the sloping cliff where two men cut the crisp bracken down for litter for cattle. The time of year had fallen upon rust—brown-rust were the bells of the dried heath, the spires of wall-pennywort that lurked in the crannies of the boulders; blood-rust were the wisps of dead sorrel that stood up into the sunlight; fawn-rust were the hemlocks with their spidery umbels, and a deader fawn were the masses of seeded hemp-agrimony, whose once plummy heads were now become mere frothy tufts of down, that blew against Blanche's dress as she passed, and clung there.

Swish-swish ... came the even sweep of the scythes, a whispering sound that irritated Blanche and somehow disarranged her carefully-prepared sentences before ever they had a chance to reach her tongue. She felt that here, on the rust-red cliff, with that deadly scything sounding in their ears, Ishmael would get the better of her, and she turned through the bracken to where an overgrown track led to what had once been a series of tiny gardens set on the cliff and walled in with thick elder. There at least they could be hidden from the eyes of any stray labourers, and with less space about her she felt she would find her task easier. Ishmael followed her with a heart that warned him of dread to come. Always afterwards he avoided those dead gardens on the cliff that he had been wont to like to wander in.

They stretched, some dozen or so of them, down the slope, divided up thus for better protection against the wind. The close-set hedges of elder were bare as skeletons, but so thickly entwined as, even

so, to form dense screens, only broken at the corners to allow of passing from one little garden to the next and the next, both below and to one side. In his childhood they had belonged to an old man who cultivated them assiduously and sent in the produce to the weekly market at Penzance, and then, in their patchwork brightness as narcissi and wall flowers, violets, or beans and young potatoes, flourished there, they had deserved their name of jewel-gardens, and to himself he had always called them "the hanging gardens of Babylon"—a phrase that had filled him with a sense of joy. Now they had been long neglected, and the bare earth crumbled underfoot; even grass or weeds seemed afraid to grow there. Dead, quiet, and still, they were become sinister little squares of earth, shrouded by those contorted elders, dry and brown as they.

Blanche paused by a tall hedge and stood with her back against it, her arms outflung on either side and her head up bravely. Ishmael had a moment of looking round blindly as though he were in some trap from which he could not escape, as though the walls of dead elder had grown together and were penning him in. Then he faced her and spoke.

"Blanche!" he said; "won't you tell me what is the matter?"

Blanche said nothing; tears of pity suddenly choked her, and the knowledge of the blow she was about to deal. Ishmael at last brought himself to voice his dread.

"You aren't disappointed in it all—or in me?" he asked in a low voice. "You're not getting—bored, are you, Blanche? After all, the actress sees the seamiest side of town; you won't mind leaving it? I know I'm offering you a very different life from what you're used to, but"—with a shade of the decisiveness that had always attracted her to him—"it will be much better for you. No late hours, no more of the sandwiches-at-odd-times game. We shall be very happy, just us two, even if we don't know people. People!" he cried scornfully, a wave of passion breaking over him as he caught her to him. "What do we want with other people?"

Pressing her almost roughly against him, he bent her head back into the curve of his arm and kissed her fiercely. She lay passive, deliberately taking all he gave and thrilling to it. Self-pity surged over her; she had been so happy—not only happy, but so much better! It was very hard, she felt, as she trembled with pleasure under his kisses. She shrank from giving pain, but she shrank still more from lowering herself in his eyes, and the situation needed all her skill. Disengaging herself from his arms, she faced him with what she felt to be a brave little smile.

"Ishmael! My poor boy; Ishmael!" she said.

He was suddenly very grave, but waited silently.

Still, he said nothing, and she took his hand in hers and spoke very gently.

"Ishmael, dear one! listen to me. You must see that it's impossible, that it would never do."

He did see it, her very certainty showed him plainly enough; but still he fought against it, bringing forward every plea, and ending with what was to him the great argument: "But if we love each other?"

"Of course love is very important, Ishmael," said Blanche, choosing her words carefully; "but don't you see how important other things are too? It's the externals that matter most in this life, Ishmael; see how they matter to you, who have worked so hard to alter them."

"You can be clever about it," said Ishmael, a new look that was almost suspicion glinting in his eyes; "I can't talk round a thing, but I know things. I know I love you and would spend my life trying to make you happy. You say you aren't happy in your own life."

"But how could I be happy without my friends and my own kind of people, Ishmael?" asked Blanche reproachfully. She did not add that, being incapable of loyalty, she had no real friends, but suddenly she saw it as true, and staggered under the flood of self-pity that followed. Losing Ishmael, she was indeed bereft, not only of him, but of her new self, and with the worst of all pangs—loneliness—striking through her, she laid her arms against the hedge and, hiding her face, burst into a storm of tears. Ishmael stood by her silently; like most men, he was inarticulate at the great moments, and Blanche sobbed on. She who for so many years had made herself believe what she wished, had gagged and blindfolded her own soul till truth showed its face to her in vain, was now stripped of all bandages and having facts passed relentlessly before her. She had made Ishmael love her, as she had so many men, by seeming something she was not; she had fallen in love with Ishmael herself, and must keep up the pretence of being the woman he thought her, for for her real self such a man as Ishmael could have no comprehension. She told herself that if they could only have married she would in time have grown to be the woman he thought her, and she railed bitterly at Fate. For her there only remained the old path, and the knowledge filled her with a leaden weariness. But for Ishmael—what remained for him? Never

again would he be able to delight in the world of hopes he had set up with such care. What could she give him to help him face reality? The plighted word, steadfastness, friendship, none of these gifts were Blanche's to bestow, but she could at least send him away his own man again—at the sacrifice of her vanity. A struggle shook her mind, all the well-trained sophistries warring against a new clarity of vision. There were two courses open to her—she might hoodwink Ishmael, bewilder him with words, show herself as grieving, exquisite, far above him, yet in spirit unchangeably his; or she might show him the truth, let him see her as the world-ridden, egotistical creature of flimsy emotions and tangible ambitions that she was. If she chose the first way, Ishmael would have an unshattered ideal to take away and set up in his lonely heart; but it placed forgetfulness out of the question for a man of his temperament. If she decided on the second course, he would have a time of bitter disillusionment, but could some day love again, perhaps all the sooner for the shock; Blanche knew that nothing sends a man so surely into a woman's arms as a rebuff from another woman. In her heart she saw the finer course, yet the little voices clamoured, told her she would be destroying the ideality of a delicate nature, spoiling something that could never be the same again: on the one side whatever there was of self-abnegation in her love, on the other the habit of a lifetime.

She raised her head, and her glance was arrested idly by a deserted spider's web woven from branch to branch of the elder hedge and wavering gently in the breeze. Some seed husks had been blown into the meshes and clung there lightly, cream-hued against the pearly threads. Blanche found herself picturing the disgust of the departed spider over this innovation on flies. "It is like my life," she thought, "blown husks for bread," and the tears welling in her eyes made the seeds seem to swell and the web run together in a silvery blur. The moment of idle thought had taken the keen edge from her ideas, and, like many another, she tried to compromise.

"I'm afraid you must reconstruct your ideas of me, Ishmael," she said, with an air of candour that struck him as worthy of her even through his pain. "You think of me as something ethereal and angelic, and I'm not. I'm only a woman, Ishmael, and the little things of life—friendship, beauty, one's own kin—mean so much to me."

He had a confused idea she must mean the big things, but he waited silently.

"Ishmael!" she said desperately; "it's no good, I'm not the sort of woman who can throw up the whole of life for one thing. You will think me mercenary, worldly, but I'm not; the old ties are too strong for me, and I can't break them. It's my heart that breaks.... Oh, Ishmael, Ishmael, I loved you so!"

Through all the inconsistencies of her words two salient facts stood out to Ishmael—she was unhappy, and through him. His own pain lay numb, a thing to be realised when he roamed the fields alone, and still more intimately known when he had it for bed-and-hearth fellow in his dreary house. Nature has provided that a great blow shall always stun for a time; sensation stays quiescent as long as there still remains something to be done; it is in the lonely hours after all action is over that pain makes itself felt. Ishmael, if asked then, would have said his heart was broken, but long afterwards he would see that no such merciful thing had happened, and marvel how the cord of suffering can be strained to breaking-point and kept taut, yet never snap. He was yet to learn that no pain is unbearable, for the simple reason that it has to be borne.

"There's nothing to blame yourself about," he said. "You've given me the most beautiful things to remember, and it's not your fault you can't give more. When I think of what you are and what I have to offer I feel I couldn't let you give more even if you would...." Always unfluent of speech, he stopped abruptly, while a wheel of thought whirred round so swiftly in his brain that he only caught a blurred impression. Ishmael had had, perforce, to live as far as his mental life went in a world of books, and with a vague resentment he felt that books had not played him fair. Surely he had read, many times, of women who had thought the world well lost for love—the hackneyed expression came so readily to him. "She cares for me," he thought, with an odd mingling of triumph and pain, "only she doesn't care enough. It's a half-shade, and the books don't prepare one for the half-shades. Nobody can love without a flaw—we all fail each other somewhere; it's like no one being quite good or quite bad: nothing is black or white, but just varying tones of grey. They make life damned difficult, the half-shades!"

Giving his shoulders a little shake, he turned to Blanche. "I must go," he said gently. "Good-bye, Blanche!"

She held out both her hands, and he took them in his, repeating, "Good-bye, Blanche!"

Then she made her only mistake; she swayed towards him, her face held up to his in a last invitation. Roughly he put her hands away.

"Not that, Blanche ... not that!" said a voice he hardly recognised as his own, and, wheeling, he went

heavily through the little dead gardens. Blanche, sick with disappointment, noted dully that he never turned his head as he passed out of the last. A sob rose to her throat, and as she heard the choking sound she made, the swift thought came: "That sounded real! I must be broken-hearted to sob like that...."; and she sobbed again. Then a flash of self-revelation ran over her, and she stood aghast.

"Nothing is real about me, nothing!" she cried despairingly, "not even my sorrow at being so unreal." Drying her eyes, she stared out at the pale gleam of the Atlantic glinting through the elders and began to think. She saw love, such love as she was capable of, had been ruled out of life for her; it became all the more necessary that she should capture other things that made life pleasant. If she let this new phase of sincerity become a habit, she was lost indeed; better to slip into the old self-deceiving Blanche once again. Deliberately she shut off thoughts of Ishmael, and barred them out until such time as she could think of him, without effort, from a point of view that in no way lowered her self-esteem. She had been artificial in her strivings after sincerity; now, for the last time, she was real in her acceptance of unreality. Lightly dabbing her eyelids with a pocket powder-puff, she went back to the cottage.

There she read through the letter again, then consulted a time-table; she could change at Exeter and catch a train that would enable her to reach home that evening. She could make up a story to her stepmother to account for her sudden appearance. Blanche began composing in her mind what she would say to her. She would pretend not to have had the letter; even her gentle, garrulous little stepmother's good opinion was dear to her. She would seal it up again and forward it on herself; it would reach her at home a day after her own arrival. Yes, thought Blanche, everything would dovetail excellently. She went into the kitchen where Mrs. Penticost was ironing and the pleasant smell of warm linen hung upon the air.

"I've decided I must go home, Mrs. Penticost," she said. "That letter was to say my father is very ill, and I was only waiting till I'd seen Mr. Ruan.... I've told him I must go to-morrow. I'm so sorry, but—"

"Ah!" interrupted Mrs. Penticost; "'tes as well—'twould be dull for 'ee alone wi'out Mr. Ruan able to come so much about the place, and I wouldn' have had en here with Miss Judy gone and you alone. You was rare taken up wi' he!"

Blanche's vanity was too insatiable to spare Ishmael; she sighed pathetically.

"Oh, Mrs. Penticost! you make me feel horribly guilty, for I'm afraid it's all over," she said with simple earnestness, "but I couldn't prevent it; and poor Mr. Ruan—"

"Don't 'ee go for to tell I about it!" broke in Mrs. Penticost; "'tes downright ondecient in 'ee!"

Blanche flushed. "Horrid, insufferable woman!" she thought angrily as she went upstairs. "How thankful I shall be to see the last of her!"

Opening her box, she began to throw her belongings in viciously. From without came the crunch of Billy Penticost's boots as he crossed the little yard and the clink of a pail set down; then the rhythmic sound of pumping, so like the stertorous breathing of some vast creature, rose on the morning air. A sudden loathing of country sights and sounds gripped Blanche, and, tearing off her faded frock, she began to dress herself in the one smart travelling gown she had brought with her.

"I don't care what Mrs. Penticost thinks!" she told her reflection in the blurred looking-glass as she pulled a gold-coloured ribbon round her waist; "I don't care what any of them think—they're just country bumpkins, with no ideas in their heads beyond crops and cows!"

Without warning, a throb of memory assailed her: was it only a month ago she had stood in this room in the moonlight, waiting to go and meet Ishmael in the field? Her fingers shook a little as she took a few blossoms of creamy-yellow toadflax he had picked for her out of their vase and laid them tentatively against her gown. They harmonised to perfection, but Blanche, after a moment's hesitation, flung them down.

"I'll buy some roses in Exeter," she thought; "they'll look more suitable than hedge-flowers." It was her definite rejection of the country and all it stood for; but on a gust of sentiment she picked up the toadflax blossoms and stuck them in water again—her last tribute to the memory of Ishmael.

CHAPTER XVI

During the next few months pain became a habit of mind with Ishmael, a habit which was to grow into a blessing for him, preventing him ever again feeling with such acuteness. From time to time he fell into deadness of all sensation, when he hoped that the worst of his suffering was over; but always it struggled up out of the numbness again, as insistent as before. He fought his lassitude of spirit as stubbornly as the periods of active pain, but both with the same result, the opposition probably only making both last the longer. He would doubtless have pulled through more quickly if he had gone away, joined Killigrew in Paris, or gone on some tour with Boase. But partly from a stubborn sense of not deserting his post, partly because things were not doing well in the farming world just then, and partly because of the true instinct of the lover which bids him stay where the feet of his mistress have passed, though the suffering thereby be doubled, he stayed on at Cloom. At Cloom—where there was no evading the thought of her amid the memories, where every stile and field held some fragrance from what he had thought her, where the very air that blew across his brow seemed as though it blew from her. If he had left he would have had to take with him the image of her as he now knew her; by staying he kept the ghost of the Blanche he had imagined her to be when she was still there.

There was a long time when it suddenly seemed to him as though she must repent, as though he could not be suffering so and she not share it, as though any post might bring a letter and any moment show her figure pausing at the gate. He learnt during that phase what poignancy is held by the cry of the wisest of men—that "hope deferred maketh the heart sick." During the weeks that he was thus obsessed there was not a click of the latch but sent his heart racing, while at the same time he did not dare look up because in his heart he knew it would not be she he saw. He slept little during this period, and looked a good six or seven years older than his real age. This was succeeded by one of the phases of numbness when partly reaction, because the mind cannot keep stretched too tautly, and partly sheer physical fatigue from the hard work he drove himself to every day, made for a merciful slough of the spirit in which it all the time deceitfully gathered itself together for the next onslaught.

That his instinct had always been to fight the intrusion of the personal, that still it was so to the extent of a deadly clearness of vision which prevented him thinking the affair of greater importance than it was, did not prevent one shade of his pain; rather it was the more acute for raging in spite of himself. He was powerless to do anything but set his teeth and assure himself that it would eventually pass. He looked at his suffering as a man may look at a broken leg: he sees it stretched helpless before him; the pain from it ravages his whole sense, but it is local, so that he can lay his hand upon it and look from it to uninjured portions of his being which are yet unconscious of immunity, so much is his whole sense occupied with the one suffering portion.

Meanwhile Ishmael set himself to believe, or rather to realise—for he never lost his feeling for values sufficiently ever to believe otherwise—that all this would one day fall from off him; he even thought that then he would be as he had been before, not yet knowing that pain never leaves a man as it found him—that freshness of emotion lost in any direction, it can never be recaptured. Meanwhile, now and again, for all his philosophy, he was occasionally guilty of adding to the sum of his own pain by deliberately indulging in it. There were evenings when he fell on weakness and allowed himself to go over the fields at dark to Paradise, where he would stand at the point in the hedge whence he had been wont to watch her light. One evening there was a light in her window, and his heart had thudded in his chest so that he could have heard it had he been occupied in anything but clutching the hedge with both hands and staring, half-expecting a miracle to happen and her form to be shadowed on the blind at any moment. Sometimes, too, as he lay in his bed after a hard day's work and sleep would have come to him had he let it, he would start imagining, as he had been wont to do when a little boy. Only now it was not mere cloudy, impossible dreams of renown, of rescuing the whole family from a burning house, that filled his mind, but reconstructions of the time with Blanche.... If he had said this or that, something different from what he had said; if only, if only.... And if she were to come back, how he would forget all he had said about it being impossible to go on as they were in uncertainty—how willingly would he catch at any excuse for trying it all over again. He would plan that too, till sometimes his vivid imaginings would for a few moments almost deceive himself, and he would realise, with a pang whose sharpness turned him sick and banished sleep, that it was all only the pretence of a child.

Nevertheless, he did not succumb to the temptation to write to her, probably because in his inmost heart he knew too well that if she wanted him she would write—on some other excuse. He had been in a curious way clear-sighted about her from the first; he had always acknowledged that strain of insincerity, but he had fallen into the error of believing that underneath all those shifting sands there was at last bedrock and that it was his hand which was to discover it. He now knew that it was nothing but sands, and a quicksand at that, yet the knowledge made the death of his love no easier. Love cannot be killed—it always dies a natural death; and natural deaths are slow processes. Of all the things Blanche had said to him one at least was very true, and that was on a day when he had been telling her

the many reasons why he loved her. Her mouth, her eyes, her soul, her voice, it had been the usual lover's medley. She had listened, and then perhaps, with the knowledge in her heart that disillusionment was bound to be his, said:

"There's only one safe reason for loving anyone, Ishmael, and that is—'because I am I and you are you!'... Love a person for beauty or brains or virtues, and they may all fail—there's only the one reason that may be trusted not to change." And that was, of course, precisely why he had loved her, and why the love died harder than the reasoned loves of older years which respond to reasoning.

Affairs at home were not likely to provide a pleasurable change for Ishmael's thoughts. Vassie, it was true, meant more to him, as he to her, than ever before. The pain that Vassie had suffered when Killigrew had left after his first visit, though not comparable to Ishmael's, being disappointment and hurt vanity, yet had dowered her with a degree of comprehension she might otherwise have missed. She felt she loved this young brother more dearly than she had ever thought to; something of the maternal awoke in her; she helped him in many little ways he did not notice, getting between him and their mother's tongue, exerting herself to make the affairs within the house run more smoothly. She was proud of her youngest brother, of his unlikeness to the rest, even of the aloofness and fits of dreaming which she no more than the others understood, but which she was sufficiently in advance of them to revere instead of scorning. She was more like him than she knew, though in her ambition had taken harder and more personal form.

With the spring Annie became unbearable. Archelaus had suddenly gone off again, after his fashion, this time to the goldfields of California, and Annie, who felt his departure bitterly, chose to blame Ishmael for it. Christmas had been for her the occasion to revive all her religious frenzies, and the house rang with her cracked-voiced hymns till Ishmael felt he could have smothered her with her own feather-bed. Her lust for religion, however, was taking a new direction—it was towards the Parson and his church instead of the conventicle of Mr. Tonkin. Quite what had brought about this change was hard to say—probably chiefly the infatuation of Tonkin for Vassie, a circumstance Annie took as an insult to herself.

"A man on in years like him, oldern' I be myself, and a minister before the Lard, ought to have other things to think on than wantoning with his thoughts after a maid young enough to be his daughter! Where's his religion, I should like to know?" This was Annie's own explanation, and even she realised that against Boase no charge of thinking about women could be brought—that quality of priesthood even her ignorance unconsciously admitted. She approached Boase on the subject of his creed and met with scant encouragement, which made her the more earnest. If the Parson had been anxious to receive her into the path he trod, she would have lagged; as it was, his brusqueness awakened a sensation of pleasure in her—there was no male to snub and bully her now that Archelaus had gone away. She set up to herself the image of Boase that some more educated women make of their doctor—a bully who had to be placated, who would scold her if she transgressed his ideas. She took to going to church every Sunday evening and sat in the Manor pew, every jet bead trembling on her bonnet as she kept her mind strained to attention—always a difficult task with her for any length of time.

One wet afternoon Vassie found she was not in the house, though when she had slipped out no one could say. Ishmael, alarmed—for nothing could have been more unlike Annie's habits—was about to set out in search of her, when the kitchen door was thrust open and slammed again and Annie stood before them, soaking with wet, her arms clasping a bundle of little books and a light of sly triumph in her eyes. Boase, shutting a dripping umbrella, was behind her. She had been across to the Vicarage in all the wet and cold to make the Parson talk to her about her soul, and to get rid of her he had finally given her a host of little cheap devotional books that had from time to time been sent to him from the publishers, and which he himself, disliking most modern books of devotion, had not troubled to read. He knew they were suited to the mentality of the average child of ten, and that therefore Annie with an effort might understand them and would certainly think them full of the Spirit.

He stood behind Annie, grave and quiet, signalling to Ishmael and Vassie with his eyes. Vassie sprang forward.

"Why, Mamma, you're soaked!" she cried. "Come! it's up to the bed you must go at once, and I'll bring you a hot drink when you're undressed. You can look at your books better in bed, you know."

"That's a true word," said Annie; "so I can. I can have 'em all around me on the bed, can't I, Vassie? I'll take 'em up, though; don't you touch 'em, I fear you'm nought but an unconverted vessel, and I won't have 'ee touchen my books."

Assuring her she should have it all her own way, Vassie got her out of the room and upstairs, while Katie heated water for a stone bottle to be put at her feet. Ishmael and Boase went into the parlour and sat down with grave faces.

"I don't understand it at all, Padre," said Ishmael. "This isn't a bit like her. Of course, she's always been funny, but she's never done a thing like this."

"It may be nothing but her annual attack of salvation," said the Parson drily. "I shouldn't worry about it if I were you; only keep an eye on her. She's not as young as she was, and it won't do her any good to be running about getting wet through."

"She'll never listen to anything I say."

"Well, Vassie seems able to manage her all right. She's a most capable girl, that!"

"She is indeed," said Ishmael, pleased at praise of his sister, whom he knew Boase as a rule was apt to criticise silently rather than admire. "I don't think my life here would be possible without Vassie. There are times when I feel I want to take mother's head and knock it against the wall. It sounds awful, but it's true. I want to knock it and hear the crunch it would make. There! But you can't think what it's like sometimes. One's soul is thrown at one, so to speak, morning, noon, and night. I don't believe it's a good thing, anyway, to be always taking one's soul out to feel its pulse. Except that mother's uneducated and ignorant about it, she reminds me very much of a woman at that vicarage in Somerset I used to go to sometimes in the holidays. She was the aunt of the family and was what she called a deaconess. It's a sort of half and half thing, not like a Sister of Mercy exactly...."

"A Cousin of Mercy, shall we say?" suggested the Parson. "I think I once met the lady and I know what you mean. She had rows of little books, hadn't she?"

"Yes, and thought it was the sin against the Holy Ghost if she missed saying what she called her Hours. I'm sorry to be profane, but she did annoy me so though I was only a youngster. And now mother seems to be getting very like it. I wouldn't mind a bit if it made her happy, but it doesn't, not a bit of it."

"Nothing would make your mother happy—she wouldn't think it right; but she's only like a lot of women in that. The evils of Puritanism seem to have taken a deeper root in women than in men, and in some it has kept on cropping up generation after generation. Your mother is a born Puritan, which is why I wish her to stay a Wesleyan. There is no more arduous combination than the Puritan by instinct labouring under acquired Catholicism. I am a bad missionary, I suppose, but I have seen too much of these women."

"Women make such a fuss about nothing!" complained Ishmael.

"What has always seemed to me the mistake about the religious life as it is lived to-day," said Boase, "is the overweening importance given to trifles. The distortion of the sweeping-a-room-to-the-glory-of-God theory. If the mind is properly attuned to the spiritual sphere temporal things should lose significance, not gain them. I don't mean that we must leave off seeing to them—that would result in our all lying down, shutting our eyes, and starving ourselves gently into futurity. I mean that we should do the things, and do them well; because they are of such an insignificance they may just as well be done right as not. Get yourself into the habit of washing dishes so well that instinctively you are thorough over the job, and you won't have to think about it while you do it. But the self-consciousness put into mundane affairs by the average religious beats the worldly person hollow."

"They dissipate their secret bread into crumbs, in fact," said Ishmael with a laugh.

The Parson nodded. "Exactly—and stale crumbs at that. I wonder—it's easy to judge after all, and, as I once tried to tell you, it means something different to every man. Tolerance—the deeper tolerance which is charity ... if life doesn't teach one that, it's all been so much waste. Who am I and who is anyone to despise the means by which another man lives? Some of us find our relief in action, in the actual sweat of our bodies; some find it in set hours and rows of little devotional books—the technique of the thing, so to speak. And some of us find it out of doors and some within narrow walls—some find it in goodness and some only by sin and shame.... One shouldn't let other people's salvation rub one up the wrong way."

"It all goes to make the pattern, as Killigrew would say," suggested Ishmael thoughtfully.

"When I was very young," went on Ishmael after a pause, "I think I lived by the Spirit—much more so than I can now, Da Boase. I seem to have gone dead, somehow," Boase nodded, but said nothing. "And then it was Cloom that meant life to me when I came back here and started in on it. Then it was love!"

He spoke the word baldly, looking away from the Parson. "Then it was love!" he repeated; "and now it's just emptiness, a sort of going on blindly from day to day. It's as though one were pressing through

dark water instead of air, and one could only struggle on and let it go over one's head and hope that some time one will come out the other side."

"Don't forget," said Boase gently, "that no one can see a pattern when he is in the middle of it. It all seems confused and without scheme while we are living in the midst of it; it's only on looking back that we see it fall into shape."

"And does it, always?"

"I firmly believe so. It rests with us to make it as beautiful a pattern as possible, but a pattern it is bound to make. And a terribly inevitable one, each curve leading to the next, as though we were spiders, spinning our web out of ourselves as we go...."

"I suppose so," said Ishmael listlessly. Boase looked at him keenly. He could hardly believe that Cloom meant nothing to Ishmael; he was certain that there balm must eventually be found. He glanced out of the window, and saw that the rain had left off and a still pallor held the air.

"Come out for a turn with me," he suggested. "I haven't seen you go beyond the fields for ages. Your mother'll be all right now."

Ishmael hesitated, then picked up a stick, and went out with the Parson. Boase had wondered much how deeply Ishmael had been hurt by the defection of Blanche, and it had been difficult for him to ascertain, as the young man's reserve was not of the quality which all the time tacitly asks for questioning. On the surface he had shown no trace, except by a sudden ageing that was probably temporary; there had been, as far as Boase knew, no outbreaks of rage or pain. Now he began to suspect that it was taking a worse way—an utter benumbing of the faculty of enjoyment. Never since Ishmael's earliest boyhood had beauty failed to rouse him to emotion, and the Parson wondered whether it could fail now. At least it was worth trying, and it was not without guile that he had proposed this walk; he knew of something he meant to spring upon Ishmael as a test. He led, as though casually, to a wild gorge that lay on the way to the Vicarage, but nearer the sea than the commonly-used path, which here looped inland to avoid it. A stream, half-hidden by heavy growths of bracken and hemlock and furze, raced down this gorge to the pebbly beach, where it divided up into a dozen tiny streams that bubbled and trickled to the sea's edge. All down the gorge great hummocks of earth had been thrown up at some giant upheaval of the land's making, and over their turfy, furze-ridden slopes granite boulders were tumbled one against the other. In the treacherous fissures between brambles and bracken had grown thickly; over everything else except the bare rocks the furze had spread in a dense sea that followed the curves of the slopes and stretched on up over each side of the gorge. Everything was grey—pearly grey of the sky, grey-green of the turf, brown-grey of last year's undergrowth, cold grey of the boulders—everything except the gorse; and it was this that had caused the Parson to catch his breath and stand amazed when first he came upon it as at too much of beauty for eyes to believe—that caught at him again now though he was expecting it. He and Ishmael rounded the end of the valley, mounted a slope, and stood with all the length and sweep of the gorge rolling around them.

By some freak of soil or aspect every tuft of the low-lying cushion gorse that covered the slopes and hummocks as far as the eye could see was in full bloom, not a dry bush to be seen—bloom so thickly set that hardly a green prickle was visible; bloom of one pure vivid yellow, undimmed in the distance, unmarked to closest view, a yellow that was pure essence of that colour untinged by any breath of aught else. The air reeked with the rich scent; the greyness of sky and land became one neutral tone for the onslaught of those pools of flaring molten gold that burnt to heaven with their undestructive flame. And every ardent sheet of it had a grape-like bloom, made by the velvety quality of the thousands of close-set petals; they gave the sensation of exquisite touch merely by looking at them, while their passionate colour and scent made the senses drunken on pure loveliness.

That was how it had taken Boase—how in normal days it would have taken Ishmael, even more keenly. Now he stood staring at it, hardly seeing, untouched to anything but a bleak knowledge that it was beautiful. Not a breath of ecstasy went through him; for him it was nothing, and he never even noticed that Boase was watching him. He moved forward as though to continue the walk, and the Parson fell into stride beside him. Something in Ishmael was dead, and in dying it had for the time being stunned what Boase could only hope was a more vital and permanent part.

Ishmael said good-bye at the Vicarage and went home again, his mind floating through greyness even as his body was passing through the grey of the weather and surroundings. At home he found John-James waiting to consult him about the breaking up of a grass-field, and harnessing the horse to the iron-toothed tormentor, he took it out himself and spent the rest of the day driving it over the tumbling clods.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CLIFF AND THE VALLEY

A month later Annie's religiosity, which had been increasing in violence, unmistakably took the form of mania. She became very violent, and for her own sake as much as for her family's she was removed to a doctor's establishment for such cases in Devonshire. The whole affair left the three at home very untouched—John-James because he was of a stolid habit, Vassie because she was never in sympathy with her mother and had borne much from her of late, and Ishmael because it seemed to him to have really no more to do with him intimately than if she had been a stranger woman living in his house. Both he and Vassie felt guiltily on the subject, not realising that reaction from strain was at the bottom of their seeming impassivity. To be able to take definite action instead of having merely to put up with the thing day by day was, when it came, a blessing to both of them, although it took what might conventionally have been assumed to be such a terrible shape. They were both very honest people, their strongest quality in common, and kept up no pretence even in outward appearance, unlike most people who keep it up even to themselves. They hardly spoke of the matter beyond making the necessary arrangements, and when Vassie had a fit of weeping in her room it was for the mother she remembered from her childhood, the mother of stormy tendernesses that nevertheless were sweet to her at the time, and whom she thought of now instead of letting her mind dwell on the woman who had been growing more and more distorted these last few years.

Nevertheless the fabric of their daily lives was torn up, and Ishmael began to see that things could not go on as they were. Vassie badly needed not only a rest, but a complete change and new interests; she had been living a life of strain lately, and her vigorous personality, unaccustomed to being swamped in that of others and only forced to it by her strong will, began to assert its needs. For the first time her bloom showed as impaired—something of her radiance had fled. Ishmael saw it, and knew that her affection for him would prevent her telling him as long as flesh could bear it. A Vassie grown fretful was the last thing he wanted, and her marred bloom hurt him; he always, in some odd way, looked on Vassie as a superior being even when he saw her little faults in style—so much more devastating than faults of character—most clearly. It somehow got itself settled that Vassie was to take a charming though impoverished maiden lady, whom the Parson had known for years in Penzance, as chaperon, and was to go and spend the summer at some big seaside place such as she delighted in. Vassie seemed to glow afresh at the mere notion, at the feel of the crisp bank notes which Ishmael gave her, and which represented all the old ambitions that swelled before her once more like bubbles blown by some magic pipe. She departed in a whirl of new frocks and sweeping mantles and feathery hats, and a quietness it had never known settled upon Cloom.

For the first few days, even a week or so, Ishmael enjoyed it. The scenes with Annie had been violent enough to fray the nerves more than he knew, but they had done him the service of putting other thoughts out of his head for the time being. Now these thoughts came back, but, as the days wore on, with a difference.

In his relations with Blanche the physical side had been hardly counted by him; he had felt passion for the first time, but so refined by his boy's devotion that he had not given it place. He had been so aware of what she must have had to confront from other men, and had besides thought her so much younger than she was, that the idea of desire in connection with her, though in the nature of things not entirely eliminated, had yet been kept by him in the background even to himself. He had loved Blanche as unselfishly as only a woman or a boy can love, and now he began to suffer from it in a manner he had not at the time.

In London he had never felt any temptation to go with Killigrew when that young man frankly announced his intention of making a night of it with some girl he had picked up at the Café Riche or Cremorne; distaste had been his dominant instinct, yet many of the suggestive things he had apparently passed through unscathed came crowding back on him now. When he was not actually driving himself to physical labour his mind would fill with pictures that he was able to conjure up without knowing how; sometimes Blanche would partner him in those imaginings, sometimes some stranger woman of his invention. He felt ashamed of these ideas, but that did not prevent them coming, and sometimes he would deliberately give way and allow himself hours to elaborate them, from which he would rouse himself worn out and fevered. From these mental orgies he would feel so intense a reaction of disgust that he knew how keenly he would feel the same if he gave way actually, in some hidden house by Penzance harbour, where men that he knew sometimes went. Physical satisfaction and the fact that Nature had been allowed her way would not have saved him from the aftermath, and he did not delude himself that it would. He looked sometimes at John-James, sitting so placidly opposite him at meals, and wondered about him, whether his physical nature did not perhaps follow his mental

and remain untroubled. Yet this thing seemed in every man.... He wondered, but never asked, and, by dint of hard work and a resolute cleansing of his mind, kept the thing at bay.

The summer was a singularly perfect one, and the contrast between its emptiness and that time only a year ago when he came down from London and was expecting Blanche to follow, pricked him at every turn. He felt convinced he no longer cared for Blanche; he was regaining interest in the world without, but she had left this legacy of reaction behind her. He told himself that this too must be borne with, but all the time his youth and natural disposition to get all that was possible out of life were preparing him for fresh enterprise. He could no longer be happy over nothing but the sheer joy of life, yet simple pleasures began to appeal to him once more, as Boase noted thankfully. The daily expectation, that absurd delicious hope, that "something" would happen, had not yet deserted him, and once again he began to live on it.

One day there arrived a letter from Vassie—a letter written in superlatives, a letter that made Ishmael and John-James both feel relief in their different ways and that made the Parson very glad. Vassie had achieved her end, the great end of mid-Victorian womanhood, and more vital to her even than most—she was engaged to be married, and to a man whose social position seemed, as far as her judgment could be trusted, satisfactory. Mr. Daniel O'Connell Flynn was, according to Vassie, more than she could have dared hope for, and if she said little as to any personal feelings for him, Ishmael knew how unimportant that would be to her compared with the satisfaction of her ambitions. For, as his name denoted, he was engaged in politics—an Irish-Canadian, a Free Trader, a Home Ruler, perhaps even a Chartist, for all Vassie said to the contrary. The third Derby Ministry was in power, and Mr. Flynn was for the time agitating in the Opposition; but at least he was a member of Parliament, and what glory that was to Vassie.

Poor Vassie! What, after all, was her ambition but to attain what should have come to her by right as daughter of the Squire of Cloom? She had had to make it the end of her desires, for it she had had to appear what she was not—what she ought to have been without any striving. If Mr. Flynn were a man to whom Vassie's beauty outweighed her defects, and if it were nothing but that with him, then was the outlook for her ultimate happiness poor; but she was her own mistress and had to be judge of that. At least she had not deceived him, for there came a postscript to the rather worldly raptures. "P.S.—He knows about it all, and says it does not matter; what he wants is me."

After Ishmael, the person most affected by the news, both in herself and her prospects, would be Phoebe. Ishmael put the letter in his pocket, though he guessed she too would have had one, and went over to Vellan-Clowse, Wanda at his heels.

As he went the realisation of how this would affect him grew upon him; losing Vassie, his life at Cloom would not only be lonely, but, without her resolute insistence on the niceties, might all too easily slip into some such slough of boorishness as had overtaken it in his father's day. If Blanche had only been different, if she had been the Blanche he once thought her, how sweetly would the whole problem—of loneliness and a standard of decency and of this tormenting thing that pricked at him—have been solved. Even the removal of his mother, though a relief, added to the sense of total disruption which weighed on him. Cloom, the old Cloom that had been so jolly in spite of everything, the Cloom of the first three contested, arduous years, then the delightful Cloom glorified by that summer of Blanche and Killigrew and Vassie and little Judith, was dead, and everyone else had flown to other fields while he alone was left among the ruins. Of all the old atmosphere Phoebe was the only one remaining—little, soft, admiring Phoebe, whom he had hardly noticed all this past winter.

Ishmael was one of those to whom the ending even of a not altogether congenial atmosphere was fraught with sadness; had he been left to himself he would probably never have moved far out of an accustomed circle, thus much of the peasant was potent in his blood. Now he felt, with the finality of youth, that everything had been stripped from around him, and that no new scheme of life formed itself before his eyes.

When he came to the top of the cliff above his plateau he turned off down the narrow goat-track that led to it, and when there flung himself on his face upon the turf, chin on hands, and brooded. His thoughts took no definite shape; rather were they the vague unsettled desires for he knew not what. Just that "something," anything, would happen.

He lay staring at the grass, covered with tiny blossoms of self-heal and rest-harrow: behind and a hundred feet below him the sea swirled, its deep peacock hue patterned with milky wreaths of foam; half around him reared a semi-circle of pale cliff. He stared at the miniature forest of blade and leaf beneath his eyes, and could hear faint rustlings as tiny insects thrust their way through it or climbed aimlessly up stalks that only led them into air. On the fragile curve of a feathery bent a pair of Spotted Burnet moths were at their mating—lovely creatures of the iridescent green of lapis-lazuli, their folded wings of greyer green decorated with splashes of purest crimson, their long glossy antennæ shining in

the sunlight. Immobile they clung together for what must have been, in their measuring of time, hours of love. Beyond them, on other grass-stems, orange-hued flies took their pleasure, and the whole air was quick with the wings of butterflies and moths. The quiet little circle of turf was athrill with life; the air, the warm soil, the clumps of bracken whence the hidden crickets shrilled, the pinkish grasses which bore the tiny interlocked bodies of the mating flies—everything told of life, life, life. This place seemed an amphitheatre for the display of the secret of Nature—life, and yet more life, in splendid prodigality. Ishmael watched and wondered. Was this, then, the blind end of creation—to create again? If life were only valuable for the production of more, then what it created was not valuable either, and the whole thing became an illogical absurdity. There must be some definite value in each life apart from its reproductive powers, or the reproductions were better left in the void. Blind pleasure, like blind working, was not a possible solution to one of his blood and habit of mind.

Yet he knew as he lay there that not for ever would he be able to go on as so far he had. He told himself that if it were possible to stamp on desire now it would continue to be possible; that if one were not put into the world to get what one wanted at least it should be possible to grit the teeth on the fact. It was childish enough to cry for the moon—it was pitiable to hanker after its reflection in a cesspool. Chastity to Ishmael, by the nature of his training and his circumstances, was a vital thing; the ever-present miseries of home resulting from his father's offence, the determination to keep clean himself and bring clean children to the inheritance, had grown with him. If he lost it he lost far more than most men, because to him it had been more.

Not for the first time some words of the Parson's came back to him: "Casual encounters where no such question arises ..." That seemed to him more horrible, more unsound, now, as he lay looking at the inevitable matings of the winged creatures, than ever before; something ages old in him revolted at the fruitless squandering.

The fact remained that there was no one he wanted to marry, that he no longer wanted to marry at all; his wish to marry Blanche had been an exigency of the situation; in himself his instinct against inroads on privacy would never have inclined him towards it. Also there was no one girl he wanted, and he told himself there never would be again; all personal emotion was drained away from him. The only girl he even knew at all was Phoebe, and at the idea of her in connection with himself he smiled. That would indeed be giving the lie to all he had struggled after—to the vision of the Cloom to be that he had built up with much work and many dreams.

Suddenly as he lay on the grass he felt tired, so tired that it seemed to him he did not so very much want anything after all, and that a leaden weariness was the worst thing he would have to fight against. He laid his face in the warm fragrant grass and let his hands lie out on either side of him, then stretched to the extent of his limbs, and rolled on his back. Wanda, eager to be bounding on once more, licked his cheek with her warm, quick-moving tongue, and he rubbed her head against him and told her she was becoming a fussy old lady. Still, it was time he went on to Vellan-Clowse; the sun was near the rim of the burning sea, and far below the foam was tinged with fire. He scrambled to his feet and went on.

At the mill he found he had been wrong in his conjecture and Phoebe had not yet heard from Vassie. She was looking pale and thin; there were shadows under her soft eyes, and her mouth drooped at the corners. Ishmael's news stung her to interest and to enthusiasm for Vassie, but seemed, when she had cooled down, only to make her melancholy deeper. At supper—to which Ishmael needed little pressing to stay, for in talk and companionship he forgot his vacant house—she was obviously trying to make herself pleasant and bright; she would not have been Phoebe if she had allowed her own comfort to come before that of others.

Phoebe was changed in this past year; she was no longer so sprightly in her little flirtations, her tongue had lost its rustic readiness, her eyes held a furtive something, as though she were always watching some memory. Her prettiness had gained in quality however, and her charm, though more conscious, was more certain. Curiously enough, the charm struck Ishmael for the first time now that he saw her subdued, not troubling to exert it save mechanically. He was sorry for that lassitude of hers, and after supper, walking under the elms down the lush valley, he tried to fathom it.

"It's nothing," said Phoebe. "I'm lonely, I suppose. You know, there's no one I'm really friends with, only Vassie and you, and I shan't see her any more now. And you never come near me...."

Ishmael felt a guilty pang as he realised this was true; he cast about to lead the talk elsewhere.

"You were great friends with Archelaus while he was at Botallack last autumn, I've heard," he said teasingly. "Indeed, I did think that even when I lost Vassie I might have another sister...."

"Him ...!" cried Phoebe; "never, never! You're being cruel to me, Ishmael, so you are! If you've only

come to tease me you can go home to your old manor-house again!"

"Why—Phoebe! What's the matter; what have I said to hurt you?" asked Ishmael. "Why, I wouldn't do that for the world! Phoebe, dear, tell me what it is that's the matter. Surely you can trust me! Is it because Archelaus has gone?"

Phoebe burst into tears. Ishmael was alarmed, embarrassed, even irritated, yet somehow she was nestling against him and his arms were holding her while he consoled her. She sobbed on, her warm little body pressed convulsively against him; his words "surely you can trust me ..." had caught at her heart. After months of furtive meetings with Archelaus, after being drawn into a whirlpool of passion which she could not resist and yet always resented, hating something in Archelaus even when his ardour pursued her most, hating the thought of him at every moment before and after, when his lips were not actually upon hers—after all this she felt she wanted nothing but to fling herself on this quieter, kinder, younger man, on whom she still felt the freshness she had lost. It was only fair, she told herself; if Ishmael had cared for her a year ago she would have been armed against Archelaus and her own nature. Slowly her sobs grew less frequent—they became the faint sniffs of a tired child; but she still lay in his arms, snuggling closer, one hand, very small and smooth, creeping up to lie against his neck. Ishmael looked down, and through the dusk he could see how wet were the lashes on her pale cheek; the curve of her throat and bosom was still troubled by sobbing breaths. He drew her closer; then his clasp of her began to change, grow fiercer; she felt it and thrilled to it, lifted her mouth that looked so childish, and which he told himself through the clamour of his pulses there would be no harm in kissing, as though she were the child she looked. But it was not a child's kiss he gave her; nor, as he could but feel, was it a child's return she tendered.

"Phoebe ...!" he began; "Phoebe ...!" He never knew himself what he was trying to say, whether it were protest or excuse or a mere stammer of passion. She interrupted him with a low cry.

"Oh, Ishmael! it was always you—really, always you ... I didn't know. It'll be always you...!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE IMMORTAL MOMENT

That which Lenine had hoped for some twelve years, which the Parson and Vassie had first feared and then laughed at, which Ishmael himself had hardly thought of, and then merely to dismiss with a smile, had come to pass—so simply, with such a logical though quiet following of effect on various causes, that it was no wonder Ishmael felt enmeshed in the web of something it was not worth fighting to cut away. At first, on the heels of the miller's rejoicing and Phoebe's clinging content, he had been overwhelmed by a dense cloud of depression—a sense as of being caught in something soft and too sweet that would not let him go and into which he sunk the more deeply for his instinctive protest. Also the sheer impossibility of the thing affected him with a dream-like belief that it could not really have happened, or that at least something must occur to dissolve it. Yet nothing did, not even the Parson's frankly-expressed dismay.

Ishmael was very young, and in no sense a man of the world, and when he thought of what lay behind that kiss he had given Phoebe he felt her innocence had a right to demand of him that at least he should not retract what she had built upon it. Also, Penwith being a very narrow and intimate track of land, the scandal for her if he had withdrawn and let the miller blaze his version abroad would have never been lived down. A country which is a blind-alley has the advantage of immunity from tramps, but it has the disadvantages also of a place which cannot be a highway to other places. Talk, interest, all the thoughts and emotions of life, of necessity beat back on themselves instead of passing on and dying, or being swamped in the affairs of the great world. Phoebe, as the miller knew, was already the subject of censure among the stiffer matrons, whose sons were wont to hang round the mill like bees, and in his expressions of approval to Ishmael was mingled a subtle strain of warning, almost of menace. And to himself as the days went by and Phoebe was always there for him to see and caress when he felt inclined, her yielding sweetness ever ready for him to draw on, her gentle stupidity hidden under her adoration, he admitted that he did not altogether want to withdraw. After all, what did it matter? Phoebe had many refinements of heart and temper which surely could be held to outweigh her little ignorances, and now that, with the removal of Blanche, the outer world was, he told himself, cut off

from him, he refused to see that to ally himself with the Lenines of the mill mattered as much as the Parson, in his old-fashioned Toryism, seemed to think. A woman takes her husband's position; and as to that, what, he asked bitterly, was his position that any woman should want to share it? Phoebe did want to; she had shown all her heart so plainly in that cry—genuine in that she believed it herself; and Phoebe was kind and perilously sweet.... The days went on, and Vassie's letter of argument and protest was less determined than it would have been if she herself had not been engrossed in her own affairs. And stronger even than the dread of hurting Phoebe, of the terrible scenes that would of necessity occur, than his own loneliness, was the enemy within himself that every time he caressed Phoebe mounted to his brain and told him it was, after all, well worth while.

It fell to the Parson's bitter lot to marry them in the early autumn of that year. Archelaus had now been away a year, and he had neither come back nor written, and not till several months later did he suddenly reappear, after the habit of the born rover.

They were months of mingled wonder and dismay for Ishmael. He had married a girl who had only one talent, but that was the oldest in the world—she was a born lover. She, who in many ways was so startlingly lacking in refinement, had a genius for the little lures, the ways with hand and eye, of voice and gesture, that make of love an art. In the ordinary intimacies of marriage, the blunting intimacies of daily life, she had no discrimination; Ishmael, had he been inclined to idealise her, would not have been spared the realisation that even as the grosser male she looked unbeautiful at times, needed to send clothes to the wash, and was warned every few weeks, by an unbecoming limpness in her hair, that it was time for soap and water to combat natural greasiness. She made no attempt to keep up the illusion which, even while it is admitted to be such, yet achieves its object. She would have thought it silly. But when it came to the rites of love she was inspired and could not make a false move. A thousand little ways of her own, cat-like rubs of her sleek head, turns of her limbs, inspirations of withheld kisses and in the same breath approaches that held an eternally child-like quality in their submission—there was no faint tone of the age-old gamut to which she did not give its keenest value.

The month spent at the genteel resort of Torquay was to Ishmael a fevered medley. His days were full of distaste—at her predilections for the young clerks who eyed her on the sea-front, for cheap jewellery and casual friends picked up at the hotel, at the bland superficiality of her mind; and now and again this distaste was shot through with moments of acute fears when he realised, startled to it by some blunt display of the ugly things of life, that to this he must accustom himself for the rest of his days; and that he would grow only too deadly accustomed, to the stifling of other ideals, he foresaw. These were his days, yet he felt remorseful at his own spirit of criticism, because she thought him so god-like, and in many little womanly ways showed an unselfish consideration that humbled him in his own eyes and exalted her. Of the nights, even when there was no passion between them, she made such a delight with her childish clinging, her soft nestling against him, that he would hold his breath to listen to her quiet breathing and move a little away as though in sleep, so as to feel her kitten-like, half-unconscious wriggle into the curve of his arm again. It was sweet at such times to feel such utter dependence upon him as the protective male, and the best in him was stirred to response. The next morning she might jar again from the hour of getting up in their ugly hotel room, through the expedition with which they would try and beguile the day, to the dinner, at which her conversation was always most noticeably trifling; but he always, to her surprise, let her go to bed alone, and came up much later to find the old magic upon her once more like dew.

It was late autumn when they went back to Cloom, and under John-James' watchful care the harvest was all in; he awaited them at the station in the smart new trap that had been a present from the miller, and Katie Jacka, with a tight-lipped smile upon her face and a heart full of contempt for a mistress whom privately she considered no better than herself, was hovering between kitchen and passage when they drove up, with a large bouquet of bought flowers swaddled in a stiff paper frill ready as an offering. Boase came over after supper, and when Phoebe, piqued by a conversation which she could not share and—what she resented still more—by the efforts of the two men to include her in it, had gone upstairs, then Ishmael and the Parson sat and smoked and chatted, and for the first time all the past month lifted its deadweight and life seemed more as it had been in the old days.

It was in the winter that Archelaus reappeared, and the first that Cloom heard of it was a casual word dropped by Katie as she waited at table. "So Cap'n Arch'las is back among us," she remarked cheerfully, after the manner of Cornish servants, who see no harm in imparting items of gossip as they hand a dish; "they do say he'm rare and changed, though 'zackly how I don't know. Simme 'tes enough to make a man come home a nigger, going so much to the lands where the folk are all black."

Ishmael was startled by the news, but, to hide the fact, began to joke Katie on her ideas of the population of the American continent, when a little sound from Phoebe caught his attention. She had gone very white, and she tried to push her chair away from the table, making a gesture as though she wanted to be free of its confining edge; but her hands seemed too weak to accomplish the act, and she

let them fall into her lap. Ishmael sprang up and went round to her, sharply bidding the staring Katie to bring cold water; in a moment or two Phoebe had conquered her faintness and was smiling timidly at him. When he was alone and out of doors he thought over the incident, but without exaggerating it to himself. He had always guessed that Archelaus had at one time been attracted by Phoebe; he supposed that her refusal of him was at the back of the former's departure. Now that Archelaus had returned it was not unnatural, considering her marriage and the bad blood between himself and his brother, that she should feel nervous. He was sorry for her, and wondered, not for the first time, whether it would not be possible, now he himself was less green and prickly, and had settled into a scheme of life that need not, ill-feeling apart, exclude Archelaus, to become better friends or at least more tolerant of each other. He suggested his idea to Phoebe, though characteristically he did not refer to her attack of faintness. She looked at him in a scared way and then murmured something about thinking it was best to wait till Archelaus made the first advance, and to this Ishmael rather reluctantly agreed.

They had not long to wait; the next evening saw Archelaus at Cloom. An oddly-altered Archelaus, so much was soon plain. Even in appearance he seemed changed; something of his golden beauty had tarnished at last, and a faint grizzle showed here and there in his curly hair, while the ruddy face had become weather-beaten. He talked a good deal—about his adventures in California, his bad luck with the gold, and the beauty of the Californian women, especially those with a Spanish strain. Of these last he spoke so freely, notably of some camp-followers, that Ishmael reminded him sharply of Phoebe's presence. Archelaus glanced from one to the other, from Ishmael's irritated eyes to Phoebe's averted cheek, with a slight smile, before answering.

"Ah! I forgot that Phoebe's not like that kind o' women a man gets used to out there," he said slowly. "Besides, of course, she'm a lady now...."

The apology was worse than the offence; but Ishmael swallowed his anger for Phoebe's sake, though he was vexed with her too for staying there to hang upon Archelaus's doubtful talk. Soon after, when Phoebe had brewed hot milk-punch and it had been drunk by the two men, Archelaus rose to go. He went out to see if his trap were ready, and Ishmael went also. The boy had gone home for the night, and Ishmael lit a lantern and went into the stable to fetch the horse. He supposed Archelaus was with him, but found he had not followed so far; neither was he by the cart. Ishmael put the horse in and brought it through into the courtyard, and the same moment saw Archelaus appearing from the kitchen door.

"Just haven a bit of chat wi' Katie," said Archelaus. "She'm a rare one for gossip, she is." Then, as he pretended to busy himself with something at the horse's head, he spoke again.

"Ishmael," he began, "I knaw how it is wi' you. You think on when my fancy was took by your lil' missus, and you don't knaw how I'm thinken about things. Well, I'm a rough chap, but I'm honest, b'lieve, and I can tell 'ee there's no wound in my heart, and the soreness there was against 'ee has gone in the sun out in those lands.... Will 'ee shake hands and let I be a friend to you and your missus as a brother should?" He held out his hand as he spoke, and Ishmael found himself staring at it in the uncertain light of the lamps. The next moment a flood of self-reproach at his own hesitation swept over him; he put out his hand and took his brother's. Archelaus gave such a vigorous wringing that Ishmael could not keep back a little exclamation, and his fingers were numb when they were released.

"Bit too strong, am I?" asked Archelaus with a friendly laugh. "My muscles have got so tough I don't rightly knaw how hard I grip." He swung himself up into the cart, and from that elevation looked down at Ishmael with a nod of farewell.

Ishmael went into the house, where he found Phoebe still sitting in the parlour, her hands folded on her lap, staring in front of her. She gave a start when he spoke to her, and when he told her of his pact with Archelaus chilled him by her scant enthusiasm. They went to bed, and as they lay side by side in the darkness there was a constraint between them there had not been even when they had quarrelled or his occasional fits of irritation had made her rail at him.

As the weeks wore on they both seemed to become used to the occasional but unwonted presence of Archelaus about the place, though Phoebe always resented it oddly. Yet it was a friendly presence; he was ready to help on the farm with advice and even with his strong muscles if need be, and the world at large was much edified by the reconciliation.

"A gentle little wife like that is such a softening influence" was the general verdict ... and Ishmael, irked by the strain between them to a sudden passion of distaste for what he felt had been his weakness, had instituted what was for those days a startling innovation—that of a separate bedroom for himself. He guessed that Phoebe almost hated him for it, yet he had come suddenly to that point when he sickened at over-intimacy, when he realised that the passion in him had betrayed him, so that he felt the only salvation for his mind lay in crushing it. He had sold himself, but at least he could refrain from

taking his price. So he told himself and so he meant, yet when, as on a night when Phoebe, shedding resentment for a wistful tenderness, had won him to a triumph of passion once again, there was mingled with his sense of having failed himself a certain relief in the acknowledgment that this thing still held sweets for him....

With the spring the affairs on the farm took up Ishmael's interest more and more, and he was able to find solace for the deadening knowledge of his mistaken marriage in the things that lay so near his heart. He told himself that it was here, in the soil, and the warm, gentle cattle and the growing things, that his keenest as well as his truest joys were to be found, not knowing that even while he thought it Phoebe held that which was to thrill him as never yet anything in life had had power to do.

She told him of it one night when he went up to bed late, thinking and hoping she would be asleep. But she called out to him as he passed her door. He went in and found her sitting up, looking like a child among the big white pillows, her brown hair about her wide eyes. He was struck by it and spoke to her gently, telling her to lie down and go to sleep. Instead of obeying she held out her hands and drew him down towards her.

"I want to whisper, Ishmael," she said, as she had been wont to say when a little girl and she had had something of tremendous interest to impart. He humoured her, and, putting his arm round her, gathered her against him and said that he was listening. She kept a shy silence for a second after that and then whispered. Ishmael caught the few words, and at first they seemed to him to convey something incredible, though he had often thought about this very thing, wondered if and when he should hear of it. He was very gentle with her, but said little, only he stayed by her till she had fallen asleep, and then he disengaged himself and, going quietly out of the room, opened the front door and went out into the garden.

It was the darkest hour of the night, only the stars shone brightly, and not till he was upon the pale clouds of the drifted narcissi could he tell they were there, not till their scent came up at him. The night was very still as well as dark, but Ishmael noted neither circumstance. His own soul held all of sound and colour and light for him, and he recked of nothing external. This news, the simplest, oldest thing in the way of news that there is, seemed to him never to have been told to anyone before—never, at least, to have been so wonderful. All the beauties of Cloom, of life, all the trouble his own short span had felt, all the future held, seemed to fall into place and be made worth while. This was what he had lived for without knowing it—not to make Cloom finer for himself, not to save his own soul or carve out a life for himself, but this—to make of himself this mysterious immortality. Always he had waited for "something" to happen, always at moments of keenest pleasure he had been conscious there was more he did not feel: depths unplumbed, heights unscaled, some master-rapture that would explain all the others and that he never came upon. Even beauty had had this sting for him; he had always felt that, however lovely a thing were, there was something more beautiful just round the corner, for ever slipping ahead, like a star reflected in a rain-filled rut. Now for the first time he was aware of a dizzying sensation as though for one moment the gleam had stayed still, as if Beauty for a flash were not withdrawing herself, as though time for one moment stood, and that moment was self-sufficient, free of the perpetual something that was always just ahead—more, actually capturing that something. The moment had the quality of immortality, although it reeled and was caught up again in the inexorable march, but, drunken with it, he stayed tingling in the cold dawn.

And if, mixed with that draught, there were this much of venom—that he rejoiced at having at last so ousted Archelaus, in the fact that indeed flesh of his flesh should inherit after him and Archelaus be outcast for ever, at least in that first rapture he was unaware of it.

BOOK III

RIPENING

CHAPTER I

Spring waxed full, buds burst into flower, then petals dropped and the hard green fruit began to swell, and the blades of the corn showed perceptibly higher every week. Summer, warm and lazy, big with all her ripening store, brooded upon the land, and Phoebe Ruan, guarding the growing life she held, seemed, with all the care taken of her, to lose vigour and gaiety. She seemed to wish to withdraw from everyone, from Ishmael most of all, as though she only wished to sit and commune with the secret soul of the child beneath her heart. She was almost beautiful these days, touched by a gravity new to her, and with an added poise. For the first time it was as though she found sufficient support in her own company and did not need to be for ever following and leaning upon other people. To look at, sitting so withdrawn, her eyes watching something unseen of human gaze, she was perfect; even in intercourse she would have been more nearly so than ever before had it not been for the fits of irritability gave unwonted bitterness to her tongue. There were days when nothing would please her, when she showed all her common strain in the taunts she found to fling at Ishmael and the rest of her little world. Only Archelaus was immune, and in his presence she maintained a sullen silence, so marked that a third person with them could, if he were sensitive, feel her ever-deepening resentment emanating from her.

Archelaus himself was as though unaware of it, for he came to the house with increasing frequency. About this time he began to walk out with a Botallack girl, the daughter of a mine captain, and indeed asked Ishmael's congratulations on the match. But, in his brotherly fashion, he was always eager to do anything to help Phoebe, whether it were to ride into Penzance and buy her anything she wished for, or to wait on her at home, adjusting a hammock at exactly the right height and carrying out cushions. Only Phoebe knew the taunt that underlay every word, the subtle scheme for making her uncomfortable that he carried on under cover of his solicitude. And she was not clever enough to combat it; when he told her she had ruined his life by marrying Ishmael, she was not brave enough to retort that he had had opportunity enough to marry her and never breathed the wish; when she hinted as much, he retorted that he had only been waiting to make more money so that she could have a position worthy of her. He declared that all she had married Ishmael for was to get the position that should by rights have belonged to him, Archelaus. That there had been a month of terror when she would, if he had not already left, have begged him to marry her she never told him. That fear had been groundless and had passed, but she never forgave it him.

Since his return she could not have told what swelled her resentment the more—that he should dare to come back at all, or that his fascination for her, the plainer to her since intimacy with another man had proved so much less wonderful, should prick at her perpetually in spite of her dislike of him. Ishmael she still regarded as a superior being whom she admired, but the touch of Archelaus's casual hand had power over her that was more intensified than stilled both by her resentment and her distrust.

So the months went by, and the time drew nearer, and all seemed more peaceful at Cloom than it had ever been. One day Phoebe happened to be alone; Ishmael and John-James were in the fields, and Phoebe lay on a plush sofa in the parlour. Ishmael had bought that sofa for her in Penzance when she admired its glossy crimson curves. She had not been at all grateful; she had merely told him that he bought it, as he did everything else for which she expressed a wish, because he wanted to do everything possible to ensure a healthy and happy child, and there was enough of truth in her accusation to justify it. Now she lay upon the sofa, staring at the mahogany arm that ran along one side of it and wishing that she were dead or that Archelaus would go away and not torment her with his taunts and his kisses—his whole presence that made her feel so helpless. While she lay there thus thinking he came in, walking straight into the hall as of right, whistling carelessly; and she heard his stick, flung against the wall, go sliding and clattering down upon the stone flags.

The next moment he was in the room and standing looking down at her with a smile. She did not move, but lay looking back at him like a small bird stricken motionless and staring beneath a hawk. Wanda, who was curled up by her feet, growled softly. What strange twist it was in Archelaus, what sardonic cruelty, inherited perhaps from the old Squire, that made him take pleasure in tormenting the helpless Phoebe it would have been hard to say. Though always latent in him, it may have been waked to activity by the wound on his head which had left the scar. Some nice balance may have been upset in his brain, though there was bitterness enough in his sense of grudge to stimulate him to a perpetual nagging at this vulnerable part of Ishmael. He had lately discovered a new way to frighten her; in addition to his passionate urgings of what he called his love, he vowed that he would not be able to bear his life much longer, that in losing Cloom he had been sent out to wander the earth a disappointed man, but in losing her he had lost all that had made his life worth living. He threatened to kill himself, with so many picturesque details and so much grim emphasis, that there were moments when he could almost have deceived himself, let alone poor simple Phoebe. His feeling for her had been of the most

animal even at its strongest, but he had to the full the primitive instinct for possession; he had made her his woman, and, though he might have felt a mere blind jealousy if she had married any other man, to find her taken by Ishmael, the younger brother who had dispossessed him of all, awoke in him a surge of anger stronger than any emotion he had ever known.

He stooped down and deliberately took a long kiss from her mouth, hitting the back of his hand against Wanda's sensitive nose to stop her growling. She whimpered and slunk off the sofa, and Archelaus helped her departure with his boot. Phoebe was too taken up with his cruelty to herself to reproach him on behalf of the dog.

"You ought to be ashamed, Archelaus!" she complained. "Oh, sometimes I think you're the wickedest man in the world, that I do...!"

"Who's made me so, then? Who went and wed another man as soon as I'd gone off to make a fortune for her, eh? Tell me that!"

"I don't believe it; if it had been that you'd have told me."

"How could I tell 'ee? Wouldn't you, wouldn't any woman, have bidden me hold my tongue till I'd shown what I could do? Would your Da have looked at I for a son?"

"Well, you can't be heart-broken, anyway, or you wouldn't be going to marry Senath Pollard...."

He came and bent over her again, bringing his face very close to hers and trying to hold her eyes with his look, as only a liar does.

"You know why I be walking out with Senath ... so as to be able to come here and have no one thinkin' anything. You know that as well as my tongue and heart can tell 'ee. Look at me ... don't 'ee know it, Phoebe? Don't 'ee?"

She turned her head this way and that to avoid his insistence, but at last she yielded as on that night long ago beside the stile and met look and lips. "I don't believe it," she murmured in a choked whisper, her mouth against his; "but I'm a sinful woman, and there's something in me wishes I could...."

She had come thus far, she whose total lack of moral sense had not suggested to her any reason why, having been the lover of one brother, she should not be the wife of the other; but her stereotyped views, missing the essentials, did revolt, though vainly, against his kisses when she was a wife, even while she burned beneath them. She really was very miserable. Suddenly he released her and leant back with a dark look on his face, a look she knew and dreaded. She resorted to her little wiles to make him shake it off.

"Archelaus!..." she breathed, sliding her hand across his eyes; "don't look like that.... To please me!" She pulled his head towards her and dropped light kisses on his lids to charm the expression out of his eyes, but he remained impassive. She was in a condition when wiles leave a certain kind of man very untouched, and hate for Ishmael, not any charm left for him in her, urged his cunning love-making.

"I can't go on weth it," he declared; "it's no good, Phoebe. What does life hold for I now? Last week I was down in the mine when there was a fall of rock, and for a bit we thought we'd never get out, and I said to myself what did it matter?... it'll only save I the trouble of doen it for myself."

"Archelaus!..."

"I put the barrel of my gun against my head t'other day and pulled the trigger, but it missed fire. And then I dedn't try again, because I thought all of a sudden that I must see you once more, Phoebe, and tell 'ee plain all about it—what you and that husband of yours have driven a man to."

"Don't talk to me about Ishmael! At least he's a good man, so he is, and we're neither of us fit to live along of him!"

"Good, is he? Yes; but is he the man for 'ee? Do 'ee ever feel your lil' heart beating the quicker against his? If he'm a man, why don't 'ee tell him everything and let him kick me out, eh?"

"You know I can't tell him—that I couldn't ever."

"He'll know when I'm dead, because I'll lave word to show all men how one brother took everything in life from another.... He'll know then."

"I don't believe you; I don't believe anyone would be so wicked, even you."

"Ah! there's things in life even you don't know anything about, though you'm so wicked yourself," said

Archelaus grimly; "but you too 'll know a bit more by-and-bye. I won't be able to keep off it for long, Phoebe. Maybe it'll take me suddenly when I'm here one day. You'll hear my life-blood running away, lil' 'un, and think for a minute it's water drippen' somewhere. Or perhaps I'll just take a rope and hang myself, and you'll hear I choken'. I saw a man hung in Australy once for stealen' another man's gold, and he took an awful time to die, he did. You could hear the choken' of him loud as bellows...." Phoebe had turned sickly pale, she screamed out, and thrust him away from her. "Katie!" she called. Archelaus went to the door and shouted into the kitchen. "Your missus is feelen' faint," he informed the maids. "I just looked into the parlour and saw her lyen' all wisht like." Katie bustled past with an odd look at him, and Phoebe was taken up to bed. She was better again next day, but she feared after that to leave her room, and in spite of Ishmael's protests stayed in bed, pleading that she felt giddy whenever she stood up. Twice Archelaus came to the house and had to be content with calling to her through the door, and each time she replied she was not well enough to see him.

He began to fume that his hidden delight of torment, which in his distorted mind was part of his scheme for revenge against Ishmael, was being thwarted; and day by day as he brooded to himself, his thoughts ever on the same theme, the end of all his anger and her fear began to loom, as he had planned. It was chance that eventually played into his hands, but the will and the cunning that made him ripe to catch at it were his already.

CHAPTER II

THE PASSAGE

Phoebe lay in her big bed, her arms straight out upon the coverlet, listless palms upwards, her eyes closed, and her dim thoughts—the unformed blind thoughts of a resentful child—her only company. A week earlier Ishmael had been called up to Devon to see his mother, who had taken a turn for the worse: she had died a few hours after his arrival; he had had to stay and see to the funeral, and was not due back till that evening. John-James was in the fields and the maids were all in the dairy, working hard to finish the butter for market. Phoebe did not mind—for the first time in her life she preferred to be alone; she found it more and more difficult to control herself in the presence of others, to hide or account for the terror that possessed her. Only when she thought of the little life that in another month she would have brought into the world, that would be nestling against her, did she feel a glow of comfort. Nothing disturbed her joy in that, which she had perforce to pretend was the cause of her depression. As she lay now, with the wrongs done to her and by her stirring in her slow bewildered brain, she banished them by thoughts of that which was to be hers—that solace so far sweeter than the little animals with which she had hitherto filled her days. Poor Wanda, who from much petting had grown to fawn on her almost as much as upon Ishmael, was neglected now, and did not even stretch her woolly length beside the bed, but roamed, alone and melancholy, in the passage, waiting for the well-known loved footstep of her master.

Phoebe curved over in bed, and began to pretend to herself, as when a small child she had been wont to do for the first hour in bed every evening—planning small pleasures, triumphs over the other children she knew—and as when a girl she had been used to lie and imagine thrilling episodes with some dream lover. Now she pretended her baby had already come and was lying beside her; she bunched a fold of bedclothes to make her pretence the more real, and lay cuddling it, her eyes closed so that the sense of sight should not dissipate her dreams. No man had any part in her vision of the future with her baby; it was to be hers alone, and she pictured a blissful period when she played with it, dressed and undressed it, lived for it. Somehow she imagined that all her difficulties would cease with its birth, and both the torment of Archelaus and the presence of Ishmael, which now left her so unstimulated it wearied her, faded away. Although she told herself she hated men and the harm they did, she hoped her child would be a boy, because she was of the type of woman, even as Annie had been, that always wants a boy.

She kept her eyes shut and caressed the bundle she had made beside her, and tried to forget her physical condition and her mental worry in the joy she was forecasting.

"Phoebe ... lil' 'un ... I'm come," said a voice from the other side of her bedroom door. Her lids flew up; a great spasm of terror shot through her, making her sick and setting her heart pounding. She saw the last warm glow of the evening in the square of sky, its light tingeing the white bedroom with fire; she saw the bundle in the curve of her arm was only a roll of sheet and blanket whose striped edge of

pink and blue somehow for an irrational moment engaged her attention, so vivid had her dreaming been, so incongruous was this sudden recall. Then she turned over in bed towards the door, panic in her breast, and her whole body swept by the hot waves of fear. She had locked the door, as she always did now, but the tones, soft as they were, had power to frighten her even through the stout wood.

She lay silent, hoping he would think she was asleep, not making a sound.

"I do want to see 'ee that bad," came the voice. She paid no heed, but clenched her hands under the bedclothes; her heart had settled into an even thunderous beating that to her ears almost deafened the voice that provoked its action.

"I've come to say good-bye," went on the voice. "Won't 'ee just say good-bye to I? I'm going to another world this time, not to Australy or Californy. I can't stand life any longer, Phoebe; you'll just wish I a good journey for the last? 'Tes a hard voyage, I fear."

Her self-control broke; she could no longer hold her tongue, a sick belief in his words struggling with the conviction, born of her wish, that he would never carry out his threat.

"Go away, Archelaus! I wish you'd go away and leave me in peace. I don't believe you'll do no such wickedness; you're only trying to frighten me, and it's wicked, with me so near my time and no one with me. Go away, Archelaus!"

"You don't believe me ...? Just lie there in your soft bed and listen, then," said Archelaus through the door. "You'll soon knaw whether I'm a man to be believed or not. Good-bye, lil' Phoebe!"

She heard him go downstairs, caught the well-known creak of two of them—one at the top, the other near the bottom, which always creaked; she could gauge his descent by them. Then came the harder ring of his boots upon the nags of the passage. Then for a while all was quiet, while she lay with straining ears trying to ignore the sound of her own heart that she might better hear any sounds below.

Upon her incredulous senses came a faint scrabbling noise, a scuffling sound, clearly audible through the old worn boarding of the floor; it was followed by the sharp clatter of an overturned chair. Then came to her a noise so often described by him that for one moment it seemed she had heard it before, as sometimes in a day after a vivid dream the events dreamed of seem for an irrational recurring moment actually to have happened. A noise of choking....

It went on and on, a sound no acting could have counterfeited—a wild choking, a frenzy of protest made by compressed lungs and windpipe. The choking went on and then grew fainter; at last it died away. Phoebe lay soaked in sweat, her hands clutching the side of the bed, her rising beats of pulses and heart confusing the sense of sound so much that she hardly knew when the suggestive noise from below had really ceased.

It might have only been a few minutes she stayed there, it might have been an hour or more, for all she could have told; but at last, driven by her fear, she half-fell from the bed and found the door. She drew the bolt with fingers that did not feel it, opened the door, and crept to the head of the stairs. Not a sound came up to her. She put one bare foot forward, drew it back, then impelled by something stronger than her own will, she began the descent, holding on by the wall. She went down the first flight, turned the corner—without looking up, for she felt very giddy—and then went on down the stairs, still groping. At their foot she took a step or two along the passage and suddenly felt the shock of something solid and hairy against her face. She screamed out and looked up and saw what it was that had made those ominous sounds, that had choked out life swinging from a beam of the hall. Poor Wanda hung dead, her head limply to one side, her tongue out, her furry paws, that had pattered with so much energy and glee in her master's service, dangling helplessly.

CHAPTER III

PHOEBE PAYS TOLL

When Ishmael returned a few hours later no one had thought to cut down the body of Wanda. Everyone was too occupied with Phoebe, and those people who had come in by the hall had merely thrust the dangling obstruction aside and hurried on, with only a thought to it as the cause of the trouble upstairs. Ishmael, finding his beloved dog hanging thus, coming on it without a word of

warning, felt a shock, a sense of unbelievable outrage that made him for a moment or two think he must be dreaming or out of his mind. He put out a hand and touched the pitiful thing before conviction came upon him, and with a shout of rage and pain he gathered Wanda in his arms, calling her name, hoping for a twitch of life. Then he whipped out his knife and sawed through the cord and lowered the body upon the floor, felt for the heart, turned up the dropped eyelids, even shook the inanimate stiffening form of his pet. He knew it was in vain—that never again would she jump trustingly upon him, never again would she appear absurdly with one of his slippers in her wide mouth that always seemed to smile at the joke, coming down the drive to greet him; that never again would he have her for his untiring companion on his walks or upon the plateau where he was wont to lie and look into her wise eyes and talk to her without fear of contradiction, receiving that full measure of admiration and belief that only a dog gives. So much was his grief, but overpowering that simpler emotion was a sick rage. The knowledge that rough, brutal hands must have carried out this outrage, that in an agony of fear and astonishment she must have yielded up her breath, struck at his heart. He got to his feet, and carrying the body into the parlour, laid it down, then went through to the kitchen. The dairymaid was standing over a kettle of water that was heating on the fire; the other maid stood near her. They had evidently been talking together earnestly when he burst in upon them; they had not even heard his approach. Both girls seemed excited, charged with portent beyond the ordinary. They stood staring at Ishmael, mouths open.

"What is the meaning of it?" he shouted at them. "How is it you are both in here like this, and with—that left in the passage? Has everyone gone mad? What has happened?"

"Oh, maister!" ejaculated one of them, "havn't 'ee heard?"

"Heard what? I come in and find my poor dog—" He broke off; he could not bring himself to utter the words that would tell what he had come upon.

"Missus got out of the bed and found someone had hung the dog, and her was took all of a sudden, and the doctor is overstairs weth her now," the girl informed him; and through all her commiseration the ghoulish delight of her kind in misfortune showed. "She'm mortal bad, they do say," she added.

Ishmael stood still where he was. His mind had been subjected to too violent an onslaught for this fresh news to break upon it with much added weight. Dimly aware that the standard of these other people would expect him hardly to notice the death of his dog when his wife was in danger, he did not speak again of Wanda, but all his loyalty of affection went out to the furry body lying helplessly in the deserted parlour, as all his sense of horror had been absorbed by the finding of it. After that everything seemed to him more or less dreamlike; an impersonal pity and anxiety he felt and deeply, but it was as though he stood and looked on at Phoebe from outside of himself as much as from outside of her.

He was first stirred to active realisation by the expression of her physical pain; when he heard her cries, rising and falling, piercing the calm autumn night, he went into the garden and tried to stop his ears, but the thin poignancy of those cries still rang in them. He went back to the parlour, and picking up the body of poor Wanda, carried it out to a spot of the garden where the sun fell the longest, and there, beneath a rambler rose bush, began to dig her grave furiously. Suddenly it struck him as rather awful that it should be a grave he was busy over at such a moment, and he stopped. Then his deadly sense of proportion that never would leave him alone for long told him how little it really mattered, and he went on with his work. Wanda was covered by a smoothed patch of earth—he wanted no mound to bring the memory of the pity of her before him—by the time the flame in his lantern had flickered and died, and the late moon was riding high in the sky. He put on his coat and went again to the house.

Phoebe's ordeal was not over till broad day had appeared and the usual sounds of farm-life had perforce begun again. With them there mingled a fresh note—the cry of the new-born child, insistent, wailing, plaintive; but the cries of its mother had ceased. She lay silent in her exhaustion, amid the dim looming of the horror that had encompassed her, and she showed no interest even in the desired babe that had been laid in the curve of her arm as she had pictured him not twelve hours before.

The ordeal had been too much for Phoebe in her weak condition; she was never to recover from the terror of that minute or hour when she had lain and listened, as she thought, and as he had meant her to think, to Archelaus hanging himself in the passage below. The child, though born prematurely and for the first few weeks a sickly little creature enough, gradually strengthened, but Phoebe's life flickered lower each hour. She did not seem frightened at the approach of death, if she realised it, which was doubtful. It was as though she had used up all of emotion before and had no strength left to indulge in any now. That was how Ishmael too had felt all those first hours after his homecoming; but with a short spell of heavy, irresistible sleep the power to feel returned to him, and he was even surprised at the depth to which he felt a pang. He had not "loved" Phoebe in the sense in which that much-abused word is generally used; he had felt for her a passion which was in itself a reaction and an affection which had diminished and not augmented in their life together. But intimacy and custom go

far towards producing that sense of knowledge of another human being which makes the imagination translate what the other is suffering into terms of self, and that is after all the method by which the most vivid human sympathy is evoked. He felt he knew her so well—her aims and ideas, her likes and little gusty hates, her sweetnesses and her pettiness—that he suffered with her now more acutely than she for herself.

Also, as her life drew out, and that feeling of something focussing, of many tangled threads all being drawn together, which the approach of death gives, took hold of the watchers, all the external things which go to make life fell away from him and the stark roots of it stood out. This had been his mate, this fragile little thing lying there, her listless eyes not meeting his, her limp fingers not responding to any touch. She had been nearer to him physically than any other human being, and that she had been further mentally was swamped in that thought in the hour when she was dying of the nearness.... For he had the guilty feeling of the man whose wife dies in childbirth, and though he told himself that whatever passing brute had wantonly hung the harmless dog had brought about this tragedy, that could not altogether absolve him. His poor little Phoebe—he had always known her soft heart for animals, but even he had not guessed that the tragedy of Wanda would affect her so—she who had seen so many animals killed with much less sickening than he himself.

As he sat by the bed there flashed on him an irrational memory of that day in the field when the girls had found a wounded toad amidst the oat-sheaves, and how he had come up to them as they clustered round it in their pale gowns. It had been Blanche who had been most articulate in her pity, and yet Blanche had not scrupled to hurt him when it suited her. Phoebe, till these months of irritation and the dislike which had seemed to spring in her, had never wilfully hurt anyone. He felt he knew all of Phoebe there had been to know, and his heart softened over her as she slipped away from any power of his to tell her so.

That flattened little form under the crumpled coverlet was Phoebe's, was the same body with which she had given him so much delight. This was the Phoebe who had hung about his neck in the valley and smothered his words upon his lips with kisses—she who had taught him her own knowledge of love, that instinctive knowledge of Aspasia and her sisters; it was through her he had become a man. So he felt now looking at her.

With dawn, the day after the child's birth, it became plain that she could hold the frail thread of her life no longer. The nurse sat on one side of the bed; the doctor had not yet come back after leaving to attend another case. The child lay beside her, because the only time she spoke or showed any interest that night she had asked for it. Now she lay either asleep or already unconscious, her hair all pushed away from her face, which had fallen into hollows. She looked far older than her years—older than it would have been possible to imagine she ever could look.

Ishmael sat very still, his mind as quiescent as his body; it was as though it had been hypnotised by its steady concentration on her approaching death as by the steady keeping of the eyes fixed on some one glittering object. All around that one point thought had ceased; impalpable walls shut off from consciousness everything else in the scheme of things. The focussing in the quiet room sharpened, grew more intense; the liquid light of dawn began to flood the air, and a bright shaft shot across the hill as the sun swam up over the rim of the moor. It fell across the bed, and Phoebe stirred and opened her eyes. Their gaze rested blankly on Ishmael, wandered round the room, then fell to the round head against her shoulder.

The shaft of sun lay upon the baby's reddish fair fluff of hair, and the brightness of it seemed to arrest Phoebe's look, as it might have the unreasoning gaze of a child. She put out one wavering hand and tried to touch it; her direction was uncertain, and the hand fell again without reaching more than the outskirts of the beam. Thinking she wished to touch the child, the nurse guided her hand, and as Phoebe felt her fingers fall about the curve of its head a faint look of content passed across her face. Then she tried to make as though to lift her hand, but it fell sideways. The nurse moved the baby nearer her, but it was not that that Phoebe wanted; she kept trying to touch the gleam of sun upon the white quilt. Ishmael felt a pang go through him as he remembered the girl who had once before tried to pick the sun....

A few moments later the child, as though stirred by some prescience, began to whimper and make little struggling movements—Phoebe had died as simply as she had lived, and as secretly.

CHAPTER IV

There followed for Ishmael a time when the sordidness inseparable from a death in a civilised country made of everything a hideousness, and he was aware of a rising tide of irritability in himself that he found it difficult to keep within the decorous bounds of the subdued aspect required from a newly-made widower. Later, after the funeral was over and life at the Manor had somewhat settled down again, with the incongruous addition of a nurse, he began to feel that unkind touch of the ludicrous which accompanies the position of a young man left with a baby on his hands. He was ashamed of this feeling and tried to suppress it, but it was there nevertheless. It ceased to twinge when Vassie came down, her husband with her, to pay him a visit—partly because, he guessed, it was to see that all was being done for the baby's welfare in such a masculine house that she had come.

Vassie was resplendent, and if she did not love her husband ecstatically she was intensely proud of him. She had become an enthusiastic Radical, and talked of the rights of the people as to the manner bred. Ishmael suppressed a smile, feeling himself completely the embodiment of opposite views, and liked her husband in spite of it. He was just not quite a gentleman—a little too vivid, too clever, too emphatic; but that he would go far even the Parson believed. Ishmael was grateful to the pair for coming, and never asked Vassie why she, who held such socialistic views, had not come to stay when Phoebe was alive.

Afterwards he realised the chief debt he owed to Vassie was that she first opened his eyes to the delightfulness of his child. One evening of winter he happened to come in earlier than usual, at the sacred hour of the bath, and Vassie promptly pounced on him and made him come up to the room she had arranged according to her modern ideas—the modernity of '69—as a nursery. A fire leapt in the grate from behind a thing like a wire meat-safe that Ishmael had never seen before and that had never been considered necessary to keep him or his brothers from a fiery death. Before it was spread a creamy-hued blanket, on which stood an oval bath from whose lip a cloud of steam wavered up, the incense of this ritual. Vassie sat beside it, a towel over her knees, and sprawling upon it, its bent legs kicking in the air, its tiny fists clutching at everything and nothing with the instinctive grasp of life, lay the baby.

James Nicholas Ruan—so called after his uncle and the Parson—was a little over three months old, just the age when a baby begins to be attractive even to a male observer.

Ishmael watched him as Vassie skilfully dipped and dried him, turning him about on her lap to dust the powder into the interstices of his tiny person, and, far from resenting this as an indignity, he seemed to think it all a huge joke. Yet the jollity of him, his sudden smiles and his clutchings and wavings, all seemed addressed to himself alone—part of some life he alone knew, some vision he alone could see. As he was soaped and patted, and powdered and turned, there was always the air about him of a being really supremely independent of everyone; although his body seemed so helpless one got the impression that his soul was thoroughly aloof, untouched. When he laughed at the efforts of the grown-ups to please him it was a sublime condescension, that was all. When something failed to please him he was recalled to the things of this world and set up a loud wail, which filled Ishmael with anxiety, though Vassie and the nurse remained unaccountably calm. The baby evidently was of their opinion, because he left off wailing with the suddenness with which he had begun, and finally was tucked into his cradle and fell soundly asleep, one tiny hand flung palm upwards upon the pillow by his head after the manner of babies from time immemorial.

Ishmael, though he had first held aloof and then been terrified when Vassie insisted on his taking the fragile little body in his arms, had yet felt a thrill go through him when he did so. It was not possible for a man to have the feeling for the land that he had and not both crave for a child and feel a deep-rooted emotion at its possession. Yet it was more than that, he told himself, when he felt the warm little body utterly dependent on him. He had taken him up before often enough, but never in the intimacy of this evening, which held the quality of a shrine.

He showed nothing of what he felt, but that evening, after Vassie and her ever-talking husband had settled themselves in the parlour, he went up again to the nursery and told the nurse she could go downstairs for a little while. Then he crossed over to the cot and, drawing back the curtain, looked down at the little morsel lying asleep in it. This was his son, this small rosy thing, his son that would one day walk his land beside him and would eventually take it over as his own. This was flesh of his flesh as no wife could ever be, and soul of his soul as well.

As he looked the baby began to whimper and opened its eyes, of the milky blue of a kitten's. Ishmael went on his knees beside the cot, and eager, absurdly eager, to be able to cope with the situation successfully himself, spoke as soothingly as he knew how. The baby's whimper became a cry. His little hand beat the air. Ishmael struck his forefinger into the tiny palm, and the little fingers curled round it

with that amazing tenacity of babies, who can clutch and suck before they can do anything else—getting, always getting, from life, like all young things. The baby hung firmly on to the finger and his cries died down; his mouth twitched and puckered to an absurd smile. Ishmael felt an exquisite glow suffuse his tired heart that had been so dry for months. He dared not make a sound for fear he broke the spell of contentment that held the baby and himself; he stayed with his finger enwrapped by those tiny clinging fingers till long after the baby had fallen asleep again. Then he crept from the room, and meeting the nurse his face assumed a blank and casual expression. But his heart guarded the glow that had been lit, which grew within him.

He began to work at Cloom as never before, because this time he was not working for himself. As the baby grew and became more and more of a delight and a companion—and a baby can be an excellent companion—he felt within him a steady gleam that did not flicker with the mood of the hour as so many gleams will. He told himself, as he settled into a manner of life and thought of which the child was the inalienable centre, that this was indeed the greatest thing in life. Before this, desire paled and self died down; in the white light of this love all others faded in smoke, except the love of heaven, of which it was a part. By heaven he meant not only the future state of the soul, but the earth on which he trod, and the only thing likely to become pernicious during the years that followed was his obsession with the one idea and his certainty that he had found the great secret.

Yet in spite of the passion which held him, and which he told himself was the master passion, there at times, and more as the years went on, would arise in him the old feeling—the feeling that something must surely happen, that round the corner awaited events of which the mere expectation made each day's awakening a glowing thing. Life was young and insistent in his veins, and with the lifting dawns, the recurrent springs, it began to sing anew—for him as apart from his child. Not yet had he found any one thing to make the complete round, to give him enough whereby to live without further questioning.

CHAPTER V

CENTRIPETAL MOVEMENT

While little Nicky was still too young to need troubling over in the matter of schooling, Ishmael yet found himself for the first time considering the subject, not so much as it would affect his child, but as it bore upon the children of the countryside—children such as his own brothers had been, as he might have been himself.... The Education Act had not long been passed, for it was the spring of '72 when Ishmael began to take an active part in its administration in the West. He was still a young man, but the happenings and circumstances of his life had made for thoughtfulness, and association with his firebrand brother-in-law was turning that thought into more definite channels than formerly. Ishmael was becoming less a philosophic dreamer, and he began to feel within himself the stirring of desire to do things. Not that he had ever been idle, but his own little corner of the world and the definite work he had had to do in it had hitherto filled the practical part of life for him. Now that Cloom was so far set upon the upward way as to allow him more liberty, bigger though not dearer ideas began to germinate within him.

The years his youth had seen were stirring enough; the excitements and scandals of the Crimean War, the chief topic during the time just before he went to St. Renny, had been followed, in his first year there, by the tragedy of the Mutiny and the wild stories that had filled the land at the time. Then, even in Cornwall, the question of the liberation of slaves had been a burning one, and that, combined with the sad tales of distress caused in the North and Midlands, had made the American war a live matter. Ever since he had heard Russell and Gladstone fighting for the doomed Reform Bill of '66—heard, above all, Bright's magic flow of words—the political world had held a reality for him it never had before. Ever since he too had been swept with the crowds to Hyde Park on that memorable day when the people of England had shown their will so plainly he had felt within him a rising sense of the necessity of reforms. Not till he met his brother-in-law, Dan, had it really become clear to him that there lay his own path.... Up till then, after the fashion of the young who have not been directly incited either by upbringing or an exceptional temperament to deeds bigger than themselves, he had been very engrossed with the personal life of himself and those he knew. Whenever he had projected beyond that—as he did in a degree incomprehensible to his family—it had been into the intangible regions of the spirit.

Now, with the first fine rapture of youth already faded, but its enthusiasm left burning for scope, with

his emotional capacities exhausted for a long time to come and his mind sickened of the intimate matters of life, now he was ripening every day for the more material but impersonal energies involved in helping other people's minds and bodies. As usual, any measure took far longer to sink in in Cornwall than up-country, and the Education Bill might for long have remained an empty sound as far as Penwith was concerned if it had not been for Boase, Ishmael, and several others of the local gentry. The Nonconformists were still bitter against it, and there were riots and much heartburning among the poor. They resented having their children sent to school to learn more than their parents instead of helping them by earning almost as soon as their little legs could stagger. Indignation meetings were held in the local chapels, and the Parson was once stoned from behind a hedge. He, though by nature a Conservative, was too truly a wise as well as a compassionate man not to see the crying need for reforms, and though of necessity he deplored the creeping in of undenominationalism, yet he knew his parish was too poor to support adequate Church schools, and he was glad enough to see children in a way to receive some education. He smiled at the idea of the Bible being "explained" without a leaning to any particular creed, but he relied on his own Sunday school to supply that want. Also perhaps even he was not averse to supporting what had so violently the disapprobation of the Nonconformists.... There was no particular force in the objections of these latter in that district, as the Church school, the only one for miles, would not be large or convenient enough to come under the State aid of the Bill, so almost from the first it was a matter of building one of the new Board schools, where the undenominational system abhorred by Boase would be all that would hold sway.

Ishmael's first definite outward movement came about on an evening when Boase came up to the Manor to see him and the Flynns, who were staying with him at the time. Nicky was then three years old, and a daily growing delight to Ishmael, but the Parson was not without a guileful plot to wean him somewhat from that allegiance. He had begun to consider—probably because Daniel Flynn, deeply as he disagreed from him in many respects, had stirred him to the wider issues—that Ishmael must be made to take a hand in other affairs than the ordering of his estate and the upbringing of his son. He had watched with alarm the increasing inwardness of the man he loved, to him always the boy he remembered—an inwardness not towards egoism, for that Ishmael's distrust of individualism, would always prevent, but towards a vague Quietism that enwrapped him more and more. His son, deeply as he engrossed him, rather increased this trend than otherwise, and Boase, casting about for other influences, had irresistibly thought of Flynn.

Daniel Flynn was a living mass of contradictions. An Irishman and a disciple of the O'Connell tradition, he was yet—though the word had not then been coined—an Imperialist, for his Canadian sympathies were strong, and he knew that not yet could the Colonies be entirely cut loose from the Mother Country. A Liberal, he had been an ardent supporter of the Dominion scheme evolved under the Tory Government of Derby. He revered the memory of Durham, that large-ideaed, generous-hearted, spectacular nobleman whose crime had been to hold by the spirit rather than by the letter, and whom Dan declared to be the father not only of Canada, but of the modern Colonial system. Though he held the Crimean War to be an error of policy and the Chinese War of '57 to be an abomination, he never joined with those of Palmerston's detractors who accused him of being too French in his sympathies. He inveighed against all wars in the abstract, yet raged at the loyalty of O'Connell, which, by stopping short at the use of rebellious force, had alienated his adherents; and he himself had borne arms for Garibaldi. He had been among the most passionate critics of the manner in which the trial of the Manchester Fenians had been conducted and at the sentence pronounced against them, but his Imperialist and O'Connellised self had deprecated the action of the Fenians in the first place. He was a Catholic by blood and an agnostic by temperament; the former made him abhor blasphemy, and the latter definite boundaries. He was a follower of Russell, that aristocrat of reform, and yet voted against his Reform Bill, as many Liberals did, because it was half-hearted. He was an Irish-Canadian and sat for a manufacturing town in the Midlands.

Daniel Flynn was a man whose brain was too finely balanced not to see fairly, but whose sympathies were so passionately partisan they were for ever swaying action to one side or other of the true point of equity. On this evening the Parson found him in fine fettle for a talk, and if necessary for a fight. He was sitting in the parlour with Vassie, but his whole soul was with a letter he had had from Ireland telling of a disastrous case where the new Irish Land Act, of which even Dan had hoped great things, had failed more signally than usual.

"Listen to this," he burst forth almost as soon as Boase was seated, "and tell me if that fool Government doesn't want hanging as high as those poor Fenians! Here's a man in my own country, where the little cabin is that saw me born, before ever me father took me to the new country; and his landlord has told him he'll not give him a penny piece for the shed and the new wall and the garden patch he's made out of the bare earth with his own hands. And him going to America, and the money the scoundrel ought to pay him for them would take his family across in comfort, and his wife with child at the blessed moment!"

Boase held his head in comic bewilderment, and Dan laughed a little and calmed down.

"And why can't he make the landlord pay, you'd ask? Because the spalpeen had it in writing from him when the Bill was passed that if he put on a new roof to keep the wet off a dying child he should never enforce the terms of the Act against him.... Didn't I vote against the Act because of the very clause allowing that? I knew the landlords and the devil's tricks they'd be up to.... Saving your presence, Ishmael, old fellow, landlords are the scum of the earth!"

"At least you can't accuse me of being an absentee landlord," said Ishmael, smiling.

"No, indeed," chimed in Vassie almost indignantly. "If you knew all he's done here, Dan, it's like a miracle. I don't believe wages or the standard of living could be lower in Ireland than they were here when Ishmael took the place in hand."

"I believe you," said Flynn. "It's myself thinks Ishmael has it in him to be a grand reformer; that's why I can't bear to see him wasting himself over morals and manure when he could be working away at the bettering of the world."

Ishmael laughed, but the Parson took up the suggestion seriously.

"The world's a large order," he said, "but this particular corner of it, perhaps.... There's several matters down here would be the better for the gentry taking more interest in them. These new school boards, for instance—"

"Ah, the children...!" cried Flynn, the light of the enthusiast springing into his fine eyes. "They're what matter, when all's said and done. If we get the children we get the world. Every generation has in it the millennium, the seeds of Utopia."

"The phantom cities of Fata Morgana ..." said the Parson with a sigh. "But we're all the better for sighting them, even so. What d'you think of the suggestion, Ishmael?"

"What? I didn't know there'd been one made."

"That you should be on this new board," said the Parson boldly. "Lord Luxullyan has had to retire through illness; he himself suggested you should take his place."

Ishmael was stricken silent for a moment. The idea seemed to him a little absurd, but Boase and Flynn, both of whom he respected, seemed alight with enthusiasm. He thought it over as well as he could in a short space. Perhaps there might be something in it after all. He remembered his own youth, how, if it had not been for the especial interest taken in him by the Parson, he, like his brothers, might have had to be content with the bare elements of reading and writing imbibed at the local dame school whenever Annie chose they should go. Tom had been the only one to educate himself further by his own efforts; he himself, he believed, would never have done as much as Tom. All around him he saw the children of his tenants growing up in ignorance, too ill-educated even to respond to his schemes for advancing them, for their better health and conditions of labour. He knew there was opposition to this new scheme, that the Parson had come in for a share of obloquy, and that the parents themselves, in some cases were their children's enemies. And lastly, in that swift flashing before him of these thoughts, came the image of Nicky—of Nicky whose intelligence was daily showing as a brighter thing, whose jolly little presence meant so much of the future to him, on whom he was building his own life-work as he had up till now conceived of it. How if it were his Nicky who was destined never to learn, never to be pulled out of the slough of deadly content, never to know any of the things that make life rich and the horizon not only the material one proscribed by locality? The countryside was full of little Nickies—not so finely dowered by nature, doubtless thicker of skull and soul, but still little Nickies.... Better co-workers with Nicky these could be made. For the first time he saw not only Cloom and his own tenants, but the whole countryside that he knew so well, growing finer, freer.

And it was all about a school board! An ordinary enough thing now, when custom has staled it and the many faults in the system have become visible; but, printing once invented, school boards could no more be held back than the eventual express railway engine once Hero of Alexandria had made his little experiments with a steam kettle. About the benefit of either there may be two opinions, but none about their inevitability.

At the time of the Forster Act the school board was a new and thrilling thing, one more sign of the approaching day when reform should have made a perfect world. Very famous and great people did not scorn to sit upon it, and the whole movement was considered in the light of a benevolent revolution. Ishmael, seeing with the eyes of his age and time, tingled to the thought. It was the first occasion on which the cup of ambition had been held before him, and to him it was momentous. He said little, but

did not try and dissuade the Parson when he declared he would take the matter to the authorities, and he listened to Flynn for the rest of that evening with less the sensation of the outsider, the mere onlooker, than ever before.

Reform, reform, was Daniel's theme, especially the reform of the whole voting system. He was a keen advocate of increased franchise and the ballot, and here the Parson differed from him. The Parson, in his heart of hearts, would have taken the vote away from most of the people he knew; he would certainly not have enlarged its scope, and as to the system of the secret ballot-box, he was too used to knowing what all his parishioners did with their votes and to guiding their hands.... There were steps he could not take with Flynn; but Ishmael, listening, began to waver in his allegiance towards the Parson. His own nature would have supported the idea of secret voting even if his progressive spirit, the eager spirit of youth that can put all right, had not urged him to be on the side of things new. Already he had once or twice found himself failing to support the Parson's advocacy of Derby, and in debate upheld Gladstone against Disraeli. This evening it dawned upon him that Boase was not infallible, that times had moved past him.... The dear old Parson, of course he would always feel just the same about him; but after all he had stayed down here too long and was getting old ... he could not be expected to know as much as younger men.

It was only towards the end of the evening that Ishmael's complacency received a slight prick that made it waver. Dan had told of an Irishman who, after winning a case against his landlord, had hidden behind a hedge and shot him on the way home from the court.

"It was his heart was broken by all the trouble of it," said Flynn, "and when the victory was his he didn't want it. If he'd lost his case he wouldn't have done it. But it's a difficult thing to get into the head of a jury, especially when it's a packed jury of black Protestants from the North."

"We don't make nearly enough account, in our laws or our private lives, of which of the two great divisions any deed falls into," said the Parson.

"What divisions?" asked Flynn curiously.

"The divisions of what one may call the primary and secondary—I mean, if a deed be born of itself, a pure creation, or whether it is the result of a reaction. I have had more girls 'go wrong' after a religious revival than at any other time. Pure reaction! I firmly believe reaction is at the bottom of half the marriages and all the divorces of the world."

"It's at the back of quite half the crime," assented Flynn, "and murder should certainly be classified under that distinction."

"It's at the bottom of nearly all the decisive steps in a man's own life," said Ishmael thoughtfully. He was thinking that his self-created impulses seemed to have ceased with the death of his love for Blanche. She and Cloom had both been passions born of their own inevitable necessity. But his marriage came under the heading of "reaction" if ever anything did. He wondered whether this new fire he felt beginning to warm him did not partake of some quality of reaction also—reaction from the dreams and undisciplined longings of adolescence which had served him so badly. At the thought the glow died down, and greyness spread over the vague budding schemes that had begun to swell life out.

"But one mustn't confuse the law of reactions with that of cause and effect," the Parson went on, "which it is easy to do if you let yourself think sloppily."

Dan pounced on the point eagerly. "No, indeed, or it's all reforms would be only on the secondary plane, instead of which any reform worthy the name is a pure impulse of creation. I don't believe any deed, public or private, of the finest calibre can come under the head of the secondary type."

"Perhaps not," said Boase, "but it's all the more important a distinction. Both the foolish and the criminal deed are less blameworthy if they are the result of some violent reaction, even if the fine deed is the less unalloyed."

Thinking it over that night with his accustomed honesty, Ishmael came to the conclusion that it was the law of cause and effect, and not the law of reactions, which prompted his new stirrings, and he was as nearly right as any man may be about his own motive power.

CHAPTER VI

The school board was only a beginning, and, though Ishmael never yielded to Dan's persuasiveness to the extent of standing for Parliament, he took an increasing share in local administration. Reform was in the air; it was the great time of reforms, when men burned over what would now seem commonplaces, so used are we become to the improvements these men made.

When Gladstone dissolved Parliament in '74 and made his appeal to the country to reinstate the Liberals, Ishmael boldly made up his mind as to his own convictions and supported the Liberal candidate. But England was sick of the Liberals, in spite of the reforms of the late Government. The dread of Home Rule, the defeat of the Ministry over the unpopular Irish Universities Bill, and the ill-feeling aroused by the payment of the fine to the United States for the depredations of the *Alabama*—which was to have marked the beginning of a new era when all troubles would be settled by arbitration—these things had all, though none had loomed as large in the popular imagination as the great Tichborne case, contributed to the weariness felt where Mr. Gladstone was concerned. Ishmael, unswayed by the childish temper of the nation, based his convictions chiefly upon the condition of the lower classes, which he had too good cause to know was entirely unsatisfactory. Not all the old English squiredom of Mr. Disraeli—surely the most incongruous figure of a squire that ever gave prizes to a cap-touching tenantry—could persuade Ishmael that the labourer might live and rear a family in decency on ten shillings a week. The labourer had just sprung into prominence in the eyes of the world, but Ishmael had known him intimately for years. The Ballot Act having been passed in '72, this election held a charm, a secret excitement, new in political history; but in West Penwith the people were so anxious to impress Ishmael with the fact that they had voted the way he wished, or if it were the Parson whose favour they coveted, to tell that gentleman that the Conservative candidate had had the benefit of their votes, that much of the objective of voting by ballot was lost. Except, as Ishmael observed, that they were all quite likely to be lying anyway....

As all the world knows, Gladstone's party failed to get in, largely owing to the influence of the publicans and brewers, who had been alarmed at his attempts to regulate the liquor traffic, and Mr. Disraeli came into power; the pendulum had swung once more. Daniel Flynn had paid a flying visit to the West and made a few impassioned speeches in favour of the Liberal candidate, and Ishmael had driven him about the country. If Blanche Grey could have looked ahead she might have seen fit to stand by her bargain after all. That Vassie and her Irish firebrand should sit at dinner with Lord Luxullyan, that Ishmael should be called upon to receive with the other county potentates a Royal princeling on a tour in the West—who could have foretold these things? Certainly not Ishmael himself; and though the Parson had had limitless ambitions for him, he had never thought of them in actual terms.

Neither was Boase altogether happy about the path in life of his spiritual son, although that path seemed to lead, in its unobtrusive manner, upward. It was an age when materialism was to the fore, when the old faiths had not yet seen their way to harmonise with the undeniable facts of science, when morality itself was of a rather priggish and material order. And Ishmael would in not so many years now be reaching the most material time of life—middle age. At present he was very much under the sway of two entirely different people—Daniel Flynn and little Nicky.

When Nicky reached the age of eight years he was entrancing, very much of a personage, and to Ishmael a delightful enigma. Nicky was so vivid, so full of passing enthusiasm, so confident of himself, with none of the diffidence that had burdened Ishmael's own youth. He was not a pretty boy, but a splendidly healthy-looking one, with fair hair, not curly, but rough, that defied all the blandishments of Macassar oil, and long limbs, rather supple than sturdy, for ever growing out of his clothes. He had the pretty coaxing ways of a young animal—Phoebe's ways, with a bolder dash in them; and his brown eyes looked at one so frankly that it was a long time before Ishmael could bring himself to understand that this son of his was apparently without any feeling for the truth. It was not so much that he lied as that he seemed incapable of discriminating between the truth and a lie; whatever seemed the most pleasant thing to say at the moment Nicky said, and hoped for the best. It was a problem, but Boase was less worried by it than the young father.

"Children often seem to have a natural affinity for the false instead of the true," he said, "and they grow out of it when they begin to see more plainly. The great thing is not to frighten him so that he doesn't dare admit it when he's lied."

Ishmael accepted the Parson's advice thankfully; besides having a distaste for the idea of corporal punishment, he could hardly have borne to hurt the eager, bright creature who always hung about him so confidently when in the mood, but who had no compunction in not going near him for days, except to say good-morning and good-night, when in one of his elusive fits.

Vassie, who had no children of her own, adored her little nephew, and was very proud of him, so one

way and another it was not remarkable that Nicky was in a fair way to be spoilt. Already he was too much aware of his own charm, of the fact that to these kind but rather stupid people, whom it was so easy to deceive, he was wonderful. He seemed to be a clean-natured boy, but what he did and did not know it would have been hard to say, as, added to a certain secretiveness which in different ways both Phoebe and Ishmael possessed, there was in him a strain of elusiveness; you could not coerce him to a definiteness he did not wish any more than you could catch a butterfly by stabbing at it in air with a needle.

Ishmael would sometimes observe him quietly when the boy was unaware of scrutiny, and always the mere sight of the round close-cropped head, the delicious idle busyness of childhood, the air at once of import and carelessness it holds, disarmed and captured him. It seemed to him to be his own younger self he was watching, and the pathos of unconscious youth, slipping, slipping, imperceptibly but swiftly, struck at his heart. How little while ago it seemed since he had been like Nicky, intent on profound plans, busy in a small but vivid sphere which focussed in self, which swayed and expanded and grew incredibly bright or dark beyond hope at such slight happenings! Looking back on his own childhood, drawing on it for greater comprehension of his Nicky, he never could connect it up with his present self, it always seemed to him a different Ishmael that he saw, who had nothing to do with the one he knew nowadays. He saw his own figure, small and alive, as he might have looked at some quite other person into whose nature he had been gifted with the power to see clearly, not as himself younger, less developed. In the same way he regarded his early manhood, when he looked back upon the ardent boy who had loved Blanche and staked all of intensity that apparently he was capable of on that one personality. Phoebe too....

With memory of her he felt more alien still, unless he were looking at Nicky; then he would have a queer sensation that he was seeing some embodiment of what she had stood for to the passionate Ishmael who had married her. Sometimes he wondered what it would have been like if she had not died.... She would have lost her charm perhaps, become coarser—or would that peculiar dewy softness of hers have survived the encroachments of the years? Further apart they would inevitably have grown; less and less of sympathy between them would have been inevitable. So much his honesty had to admit. Passion, which he flattered himself he had so mastered, almost as though it had been shocked out of him on that terrible night of waiting for its fruit to come and rend the mother's life away from her—would passion have lived? He knew that as anything individual between her and him it could not have, so that he would always have been meaning to deny its claims, and would always have been falling into what would have become a mere custom of the flesh impossible to break, only yielding, after years of it, to boredom.

From that he had been saved, and he gave thanks without pretence, for with the freedom of his body was enwrapped the freedom of his soul. Yet he was still a young man when Nicky was nearing "double figures"—only in the early thirties. To him the years that had passed since Nicky's birth were so different in quality from all that had gone before that it was small wonder they seemed to him another life and he himself another person. Nicky had been the dominating human factor; the public life of the times, as it affected his own corner in particular, the chief interest which had kept him hard at work, too busy for the dreams of his unsatisfied youth. He had altered, hardened, sharpened, become more of a man of the world, thought himself contented, and in action and practical affairs drowned mental speculation and emotion.

This was the Ishmael of the late 'seventies, a being altered indeed, but not more so than the England of that period was from the England of the 'fifties and 'sixties. That she had grown, improved, set her house in better order, it would have been futile to deny—the improvements were of the visible kind, patent to all men. That Mr. Disraeli's new policy of Imperialism was to be a great and splendid thing there were few men among the Liberals wise enough to foresee, and Ishmael was not yet amongst them. That he himself had grown, developed, become a useful member of society, no one who knew him would have denied, but whether his growth had been altogether towards the light was another question. The old Parson was a wise and a patient man who had gone too far along life's road to take any stage in it as necessarily final, and he watched and bided the time perhaps more prayerfully, certainly more silently, than of yore. Ishmael never failed in consideration, in affection, but there had grown a barrier that was not entirely made of a difference in politics. He knew it even if Ishmael, the child of his heart, seemed not to care enough one way or the other to be aware of it.

One day, a sunlit blowy day of spring, when the cloud-shadows drew swiftly over the dappled hills and the young corn was showing its first fine flames of green, Ishmael received a letter. Long after it had come he sat with it in his hand, reading and re-reading it. A tinge of excitement, a heady something he had long not felt, because it was purely personal, went through and through him as he read. The letter was from Killigrew, from whom he had heard nothing for several years, and it held news to awake all the old memories in a flood. The letter began by asking for news of Ishmael, and went on with a brief dismissal of the writer's own life during the past years. It had been the "usual thing"—no small

measure of success, friendships, women, play and work. What mattered was that Killigrew had suddenly taken it into his head he must come down again to Cloom. He was coming and at once. He gave a few characteristic reasons.

"I have lost something and till yesterday I couldn't for the life of me tell what," wrote Killigrew. "It's been a good time, and I've enjoyed most of it, but suddenly it occurred to me that really I wasn't enjoying it as much as I thought I was, as much as I used to. I lay on the lawn of this confounded suburban villa whence I'm writing to you now—I'm putting in a few days at my mother's—and I was doing nothing particular but think over a lot of old times. And there came into my mind without any warning—flashed into it rather—a saying of my old master's in Paris. He was a wise old bird, the wisest I ever knew—somehow reminds me of your old Padre, though you couldn't meet two men more different. And what I remembered was this. 'The test of any picture, or indeed of any of the arts, is whether or not it evokes ecstasy.' I don't know whether it's the test of the arts, but I know it's the test of life. And that is what I've lost. Ecstasy! One still feels it now and again, of course, but how more and more rarely! Well, I lay on the lawn, with this light flooding in on me, and suddenly I opened my eyes and what do you think I saw? There was a flock of starlings in the sky, and I opened my eyes full on 'em, so that I got 'em against the west, which was full of sunset. They were flying in a dense mass between me and the glow. I could see their beating wings in serried ranks of black V-shapes. And, quite suddenly, at some bird-command communicated—heaven knows how—the whole flock of them heeled over, presenting nothing but the narrow edge of their wings, hair-fine, all but invisible. In that one flashing moment the whole solid crowd of birds seemed to vanish, as though swallowed up by a shutter of sky. I'd never seen it before, and I might have gone through life without the luck to see it. I can tell you, it made me tingle. I could have shouted aloud, but the sound of my own voice would have spoilt it so. I got ecstasy all right that time, and I realised with a pang of gratefulness that it's the impersonal things that produce ecstasy. In personal contact you may get delirium, but that's not the same thing. This, says I, is the sort of thing I'm after. And so of course I thought of you and that wonderful place of yours and that nice solid impersonality that always wrapped you round and made you so restful. So I'm coming down. I won't stay with you; find me digs somewhere—I'm better on my own."

Ishmael read so far, where the letter ended abruptly; there was, however, a postscript:—"P.S.—Do you remember Judith Parminter? She wants a holiday and is coming down with a friend. If Mrs. Penticost is still in the land of the living you might fix up for them there."

Ishmael followed out all Killigrew's instructions, but that night he took the letter over to Boase. It was as though the atmosphere of the old days re-established by its arrival, the habit of the old days, claimed him sub-consciously. The Parson read it, but did not comment beyond the obvious remark that it would all be very pleasant. After Ishmael had gone he sat and thought for a long while. What struck him as noteworthy was that Killigrew should have been satiated with the personal, which he had cultivated so assiduously, at the moment when, or so it seemed to him, Ishmael, after a life spent for so long in the impersonal, might be expected to react in exactly the opposite direction. Ishmael, as he walked home, was only aware that the letter had stirred him beyond the mere pleasurable expectation of once again seeing his friend. That one word "ecstasy" had stung him to something that had long been dormant—the desire to feel life again as something wonderful, that did not only content but could intoxicate as well. He was unaware of this revulsion, and was only vaguely surprised that a queer discontent should mingle with his pleasure.

CHAPTER VII

PARADISE COTTAGE AGAIN

When the train came slowly into the station and clanked to rest with a long, tired sigh of steam, Ishmael's first search was for Killigrew's red beard and pale face. While his gaze roved up and down the line of carriages a couple of women, one of whom seemed to know him, swam into his range of vision and distracted his attention.

It was nearly ten years since he had seen Judith Parminter, and he stared for a moment in bewilderment. Fashion had undergone in those years one of its rare basic changes. Instead of the swelling curves which had been wont to encompass women, so that they seemed to float upon proud waves, skirts had become a species of swaddling clothes caught back below the knees, whence a series of frills clung tightly about the feet. Rows of flutings, tuckings and what-not, confounded simplicity of

line, but all the drapery was pulled in a backwards direction and puffed to a sudden bulkiness behind, so that women looked as though they were walking in the face of a perpetual wind. On their heads they were wont to perch delicious little hats, poked forward, in contradistinction to the trend of the draperies, slanting nosewards and tilted up in the rear by plaited chignons.

Of the two women advancing towards Ishmael, the tall dark one, by far the elder, wore under a black silk jacket a gown of soft red, the terra-cotta then beginning to be in vogue amidst the artistic elect, but it was smartly cut, whereas the peacock blue garment of her companion showed a depressing sloppiness, which was not helped out by the drooping rows of many-coloured beads which were slung round her throat or the peacock feathers that trailed from her shovel hat of gauged silk. This girl, Ishmael saw vaguely, had a pale chubby face like a child, but the long, dark countenance of the other, lit by a smile of recognition, was suddenly familiar to him. Only—Judy had become a woman, a thin, rather sad-looking woman, with a melancholy that was not the old effect of tragedy for which her monkey-look and the bistre shadows beneath her eyes had been responsible without any deeper cause. The monkey-look was there still, but Judy was almost beautiful in spite, or perhaps more truly because, of it. Ishmael felt her lean, strong hand, ungloved, come into his.

"I knew it was you!" exclaimed Judy in the husky voice he remembered. "You've changed, but only along the lines one would have expected. Mr. Killigrew can't come—not for a day or two. He told me to tell you he'd try to get down by the end of the week. May I introduce you to Miss Georgie Barlow?"

Another hand was thrust into his, with a sudden *gauche* movement that was not without a girlish charm. Ishmael found himself looking at the pale chubby face, and the only thing he noticed in it was the mouth. Georgie Barlow stayed in his mind as "the girl with the mouth," as she frequently did to those who met her even once. She had a wonderful mouth, and was wont to declare it to be her only feature. It was not very red, but very tenderly curved, the lips short, flat in modelling and almost as wide at the ends as the centre, which just saved them from being a cupid's bow. The corners were deeply indented, tucked in like those of a child. Not only the lips but the planes of the chin and cheeks immediately around them were good, very tender in colour and curves, with the faint blur of fine golden down to soften them still more.

Such was Georgie Barlow—a short, rounded little creature, with a bare neck that was not long but delicate, and surrounded by three "creases of Venus" like that of a baby. Her rather small but frank blue eyes held a boyish look that was intensified by the fact that her hair was cut short after the new fashion in a certain set and brushed almost to her fair eyebrows in a straight fringe in front, while on the nape of her neck it curved in little drake's tails of soft brown. The blue beads riding up her neck ruffled the tails like tiny feathers.

Both she in her "artistic" way and Judy in her quiet smartness were very different from the women Ishmael had been seeing of late years—the dowdy county ladies or Vassie in her splendid flamboyance. He felt oddly shy with them; the ageing of Judy, so marked and somehow so unexpected—she had seemed such a child only ten years ago—made him feel she was as much of a stranger as her little companion, and there was also about her some new quality he could not but feel, a something aloof, a little hard, for all her gentleness of manner. He had never envisaged her as growing into this self-possessed woman, whose most noticeable quality, had it not been for her aloofness, would have been a certain worldliness. He felt his dreams of the old time rudely upset. Killigrew's erratic defection, the altered feeling of Judy, which made him uncertain even whether to call her by her Christian name as of old or not, the presence of this oddly-attired girl with the mouth, were all so different from what he had been expecting. He told himself that when Killigrew did arrive he also would probably be a different creature from of old, not knowing that exactly what made Killigrew such a wearing person to keep up with was that he never changed, only became more himself.

Judith was not very illuminating on the subject when he questioned her, merely answering him with an affirmative when he asked her whether she had seen a good deal of Killigrew since the old days, and he was forced to keep company with his curiosity till Killigrew should appear out of the blue a few days hence.

Meanwhile, he drove the two ladies to Mrs. Penticost's, Judy saying that as they had luggage she thought it would be simpler to go straight there instead of stopping for supper at the Manor. The next day, however, both were to meet Boase there for tea.

Meanwhile Ishmael had to relinquish them to the care of Mrs. Penticost and go back to the Manor, feeling discontented and unable to settle to anything, while at the same time he was not at all sure he was glad that Killigrew had ever taken it into his head to come down and send his harem, as Ishmael annoyedly termed it to himself, before him. Not so Mrs. Penticost. She still called Judith her lamb, and

after folding her to her portly breast was not likely to feel any tremors when she held her off to gaze at her.

"You'm gone through somethen' since I saw 'ee, my dear," she announced candidly. "There's lines under your pretty eyes that dedn' belong to be there. I shouldn' wonder if it wasn't the men as had putt en there. Menfolk are like children—they'm a pack of worry, but the women can't get along happy wethout en."

"Well, at least I haven't any children, Mother Penticost," said Judy, laughing.

"Aren't married, are you, my dear? Mr. Ruan ded say 'Miss Parminter' to I when he came about the rooms."

"No, I'm not married."

"And why's that?" demanded the direct Mrs. Penticost. "Not because they haven't asked 'ee, I'll lay. Couldn't 'ee fancy none of en, my dear sawl?"

"Not enough for that, apparently."

"I used to think you and that Killigrew weth his red head and his free tongue would make a match of it, but I suppose it was not to be.... Never mind, my dear. We never goes to church weth the first one as takes our fancy."

"Oh, I shall never marry!" declared Judith lightly. "By the way, I hear Mr. Ruan has a beautiful boy, Mrs. Penticost."

"Aw, dear sawl, so he have. Best thing that flighty little faggot to the mill ever ded was to make that babe. Children's a deal of trouble, though, so they are. Some has boys and wants maids, and some has only maids and provokes the Lard to send en boys, as though there weren't enough men in the world. No pleasing some folks."

"They're a trouble that's well worth while, anyway. Children, I mean," said Judith.

"Ah! so some of us says as hasn't got en. We can all stand any joys that come along, but we'd all like to have the choosen' of our troubles," replied Mrs. Penticost non-committally.

"I certainly think children must be the nicest troubles one can choose," remarked Judith.

"There's many a poor maid that's thought otherwise," responded Mrs. Penticost.

"Oh, well, I didn't mean that way ... that's a trouble for the children too when they grow up ... worse than for the mother. That's why it's wicked to have them like that. I meant if one were married."

"It's not all honey then, my dear. Look at Jenny Trewen down to the church-town. She'm never had naught but boys, and she sticks every virtue on that maid she always wanted and that never came. 'Twould have been just the same if it had been the other way on, if you see what I do mane. 'Tes the babes as never are born that lie nearest to a mother's heart...."

"What a terrible theory!" broke in Georgie, swinging her legs as she sat perched upon the corner of the table. "And according to the same theory, are the men one never meets the nicest, and the picture one never paints the finest, and the kiss that never comes off the sweetest?"

Mrs. Penticost turned and surveyed her with a kindly tolerance for her impertinent youth.

"You'm spaken' truer than you do know," she told her. "And truer than you'll know for many a day to come if you'm one of the lucky ones. Now I suppose you'll be like you always were, Miss Judy, washing the life out of 'ee weth hot water? The bath's gone up overstairs."

Judy laughingly got to her feet and went up to her room. She was very tired; though she was tenacious of constitution, the first elasticity of youth was gone from her, and she was glad of the warm water, the soft bed, the light meal of eggs and cocoa that Mrs. Penticost brought her when she was between the sheets. Ishmael was not the only one who felt a deadening of the spirit that night, and even on awakening the following morning. Judith had carried that about with her in her consciousness for enough years now to recognise the old weight upon her thoughts on awakening. But Georgie, triumphant, healthy, full of excitement at the new world that lay beyond the low wall of Paradise Cottage, ran into Judith's room, the "best" bedroom, the one Blanche Grey had had when the childish Judy had been wont to come in as Georgie came in to the woman Judy now. The turn of the wheel struck upon Miss Parminter's mind as she lay and watched the slim, sturdy young thing perched upon

the end of the bed, her boyish head bare and a ray of morning sun tingeing its soft brown to a brighter hue and showing up the clearness of her pale matt skin.

"I don't think I much like your hero of romance," grumbled Georgie. "He took precious little notice of either of us, and he looks so surly."

"He's not my hero," objected Judy, "he's Joe's; and I'm sure he isn't really surly. I think he was disappointed at not seeing Joe."

"Well, it was very ungallant of him when we turned up all right. I have a good mind to flirt outrageously with him to punish him. And when he's deeply in love with me I shall say 'No, thank you, sir! I've no use for surly squires, and I've a young man of my own at home.'"

"Georgie, you're to do nothing of the sort. You know I told you all about him to make you careful. He was abominably treated by that cat Blanche, and I won't have it happen again."

"Well, I don't suppose I shall have a chance. I don't suppose he'll look at me. I don't think country bumpkins are educated up to my peculiar style of beauty." And Georgie stroked her ridiculous little nose with an affectation of content.

"Thank heaven you aren't a beauty, or there'd be no holding you at all!"

"That's just where you mistake. If I were really pretty, instead of having a *petit minois chiffonné* I should be able to sit placidly and leave it all to my profile. As it is I have to exert myself to charm, and everyone knows charm is far more fatal to man than mere looks. I am rather fascinating, aren't I, in spite of my pudding face? What was Blanche like, Judy? Didn't you see her the other day in town?"

"Yes, I met her at a Private View," admitted Judy. "She had sort of gone to pieces, if you know what I mean. I don't suppose it was a sudden process really, but it came on me suddenly."

"What did she look like?"

"As large as life and twice as unnatural. She had lost her 'eye' for making up, as they say everyone does, and the rouge stood out on the white powder so that you could see it a mile off. She gushed at me, and I felt she wasn't meaning a single word she said. She had her husband with her and introduced him. She even patronised me for not having one. I didn't say I'd sooner not than have one like hers, because she wouldn't have believed me, and it would have been rude. But he was a little wisp of a man—a seedy little clerk. She knew she couldn't carry off the idea of having made a good match from a worldly point of view, so she murmured something to me about how beautiful true love was when it was the 'real thing,' and how she had never known what the meaning of life was till she met 'Teddie.' Do stop me; I'm being an awful cat! But that woman aroused all the cat in me; she's such an awful liar, and a liar is the worst of sinners, because he—or perhaps more generally she—is so absolutely disintegrating to the whole social fabric."

"I suppose she must have been very fascinating once upon a time."

"She was, though, oddly enough, men either hated her or were deeply in love with her, and as time went on the sort that were in love with her grew more and more fearful. But it was young girls she attracted most. I used to think her the most wonderful thing in the world, and I used to be enraged if I introduced her to anyone and they hated her at sight. If one's eye for making up gets out as one grows older, one's eye for life gets a more and more deadly clearness—unless you're like Blanche, when I suppose you grow more and more incapable of seeing the truth."

"You think an awful lot about truth, don't you, Judy?"

"Yes, I do, though I suppose if you knew all about me you'd think it very inconsistent. Of course I don't mean just 'telling the truth,' as children say, but the actual worship of truth in our relations with each other and ourselves. But it's not a counsel of worldly wisdom, so don't pay any attention to me."

"But I want to. I admire you ever so," said Georgie girlishly. "I know that I'm an awful little beast in all sorts of ways, but I would love to be like you if I could."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Judy.

"Well, as much as would suit my style," laughed Georgie. "But tell me, Judy, what sort of thing d'you call being badly untruthful—the sort that matters? I'll tell you the sort of thing I do, and I can't help myself. I hate myself, but I can't stop. You know just before I got engaged to Val?"

"Yes?"

"Well, we were at that house on the river, and Val came down for the day, and mother knew we were going to get engaged, I suppose; anyway, she didn't make the usual fuss about being alone, and we went out in the punt and took lunch to a backwater. I didn't even really think he cared for me that kind of way; I was only wondering. I'd been washing my hair when he arrived, and it wasn't quite dry. This was before I cut it off, you know. And so—I thought I'd take it down and finish drying it...."

"Go on. I've done that myself," murmured Judith dryly.

"Well, I was sitting a little in front of him on the bank and a little bit of my hair blew in his face. I manoeuvred so that it should. Beast that I am! And later, when I was doing it up again, he handed me the pins and said, 'Ripping stuff it is, Georgie!' It was the first day he called me Georgie, and you can't think how often he did it. Why do men always call hair 'stuff,' I wonder? Well—oh, where was I? Oh, I know. And then he added, 'It was blowing across my face just now.' And I said, 'Oh, was it? I hope it didn't tickle. Why on earth didn't you tell me?' And he said, 'I loved it' in a funny sort of fat voice. As though I hadn't known, and hadn't planned for just that.... I think that's the sort of thing that makes me hate myself, and yet I can't help it."

Judith lay silent. She was too used to playing every move in her power with full knowledge of the effect to blame this child for tampering with forces which she was blandly innocent of understanding.

"I don't think that 'mattered,' as you call it," she said at length. "After all, you're honest with yourself, that's the chief thing. I admit if you go on being dishonest with others in time it has a deadly tendency to react on yourself and blur your vision, as it did with Blanche, but then she was crooked anyway. I shouldn't worry about myself if I were you, Georgie!"

"Well, it deceived Val, I suppose," remarked Georgie.

"Not about anything vital. He loved you already, and you were to find you loved him. Besides ... with men ... it's not quite the same thing...."

Georgie stared at her in round-eyed silence for a moment, struck by a weary something that was no more old than young, that was eternal, in Judith's voice. Suddenly the elder girl seemed so much woman as she lay there—the everlasting feminine, the secret store of the knowledge of the ages.... Georgie, for all she was newly engaged, felt somehow like a little girl. Judith's long half-closed eyes met hers, but with no frank giving in their depths at the moment. She was withdrawn and Georgie felt it.

"Well, I must get up," said Judith suddenly. "Clear out and see if you can hurry Mrs. Penticost over breakfast."

Georgie went, and Judith slipped out of bed, and going to the window, examined her face in the clear morning light, lifting her hand-glass at many angles.

After her bath she took up the glass again and began with infinite care to rub in first rouge and then powder. Gradually she became a less haggard-looking creature and the years seemed to fall away. When she had done she examined herself anxiously. The dread that her eye would get "out," as Blanche's had, was upon her.

Relieved by the scrutiny, she stepped into a soft rose cashmere frock and buttoned up the long, close-fitting bodice, settled the little ruffle at the throat, and adjusted with deft fingers the perky folds of the bustle. "Making-up makes one look so much better that it makes one feel better," she reflected. She took a final look at herself in the dimpled glass that gave back her figure in a series of waves and angles, and suddenly she gave a little half-rueful laugh. She was comparing herself with the slangy fresh girl downstairs, that product of the new decade, so different from the generation born only ten years before her. Judith had spoken to this wholesome, adorably *gauche* young creature of truth, while, to maintain the thing that stood to her for light and food and truth itself, she had, amongst other shifts, to resort even to this daily paltering with the verities upon her face.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT NICKY DID

Killigrew arrived a couple of days later, and Ishmael drove Georgie over to meet him. Judith had

refused to go and Georgie liked the idea of a drive. Ishmael was still shy in Georgie's presence, simply because he had never met anyone in the least like her. He was only a matter of some thirteen or fourteen years her senior, but that made all the difference at that period. Ishmael had been born in the midst of the dark, benighted 'forties; Georgie at the beginning of the 'sixties. He had grown up before any of the reforms which made modern England; she had first become intelligently aware of the world at a time when nothing else was in the air, when even woman was beginning to feel her wings and be wishful to test them. She was alarmingly modern, the emancipated young thing who began to blossom forth in the late 'seventies and early 'eighties; she studied painting at an art school, and had announced her intention to her alarmed but admiring parents of "living her own life." There was a horrid rumour that she had once been dared to smoke and had done so. Her aggressively "arty" dress was only the temporary expression of her fluid and receptive mind feeling and trying for itself. Her frankness was disconcerting at first, yet somehow very delightful too.... It made him feel young also; it was as though she were perpetually telling him things that took him into a conspiracy with her.

Judy had made him feel old; all the time he was aware of things in her life of which he was ignorant, and though he had never been intimate enough with her to mind this, yet it did not tend towards intimacy now. There was always the knowledge of Blanche and Phoebe between him and any friendliness with Judith, knowledge of so much he had resolutely put behind him. But with this careless girl, so untouched and confident, it was as though it were possible to be the self he felt that he now was without any drag from that old Ishmael. He knew vaguely that she was engaged, and this seemed to make intercourse lighter and more jolly. Every relationship is new, because to no two people is anyone quite the same, but there was in the first tentative approaches of his acquaintance with Georgie Barlow a novelty that struck him pleasantly. He was shy of her only because he was still so ignorant, but he felt no barriers, rather an overlapping of something they both had in common, which is the surest herald sometimes of friendship, sometimes of other things.

Killigrew arrived with a copy of "Richard Feverel" under one arm and the first edition of Fitzgerald's "Omar Khayyam" under the other. He exuded life and enjoyment, and Ishmael wondered what indigestion, mental or physical could have had him in its grip when he felt that the power of ecstasy was slipping. Certainly he seemed to bubble with it now, though it remained to be seen whether what chiefly evoked it were the impersonal things of life or not. It was impossible to feel any shyness with him, and even Ishmael soon was talking and feeling curiously unscathed when Killigrew unabashedly referred to old times, painful and otherwise. "It is only Joe ..." Ishmael reflected, which was the fatal leniency that had pursued Killigrew through life.

Georgie left the two men to spend the evening together and went back to Paradise Cottage, but before she fell asleep that night she heard a low murmur of voices outside. She jumped out of bed and ran to the window. It was a night of bright moonlight, and under the shadow of the tamarisk hedge she could see Killigrew's darker figure, with its unmistakably raking poise. Another shadow had just parted from it and was coming to the door—the figure of Judith. She had been out when Georgie entered—out for a walk, Mrs. Penticost had said. Georgie skipped back to bed full of excitement. She had guessed before that Judy cared about Killigrew, and now, judging by that parting, they were engaged and everything was to be all right. How thrilling!... She smiled and dimpled as she met Judy's eye next morning, inviting the announcement.

The days went on and Judy did not make it. Only as the lovely spring days, pale with windy sunlight or soft with fuming mists, slipped by, Judith blossomed as the rose. But it was a fierce blossoming, a fiery happiness, that Georgie could not understand. It was not thus that the nice jolly Val had made her feel. She wondered and she felt a little hurt that Judy should not confide in her, but as the days went on her own affairs began to engross her, and she shrugged her sturdy self-reliant shoulders and told herself that Judy must after all manage her own affairs.

It was a wonderful spring, the sweetest time of the year because the period of promise and not of fulfilment. This spring, in its wine-pale clarity, its swift shadows, its dewy brightness of flame-green leaf, seemed to Ishmael to hold the quality of youth as none had done for years. He and Nicky and Joe Killigrew and the two girls from Paradise Cottage spent whole days together, for Joe and Judith, though obviously very intimate, never seemed to wish for solitude. Together they fronted the winds and the quick showers and the bright rays, saw the rainbow lift over the dark sea, watched its passionate colour die and the sunbright foam fade to pearly dimness or break over water turned to vivid blue. They heard the first bird-notes begin to glorify the evenings and saw each day the hedges grow richer with pink campion, with pale drifts of primroses and the blue clusters of the dog-violets. The blackthorn began to show a breaking of pale blossom upon its branches and the hawthorn to vie with it.

Once upon the cliff, Ishmael, walking with Georgie, came on a patch of the most exquisite of spring flowers, the vernal squill. Georgie clapped her hands for joy at sight of the delicate blue blossoms, but Ishmael, lying beside them, buried his face in their rain-washed petals and drew a deep breath of that

scent which is like the memory of may-blossom.

As he breathed in the fragrance it seemed to him for one flashing second as though the years fell away, that he was again young in mind as he still felt in body; and for a flash, as on that long-ago evening in Cloom fields when they had cried the Neck and in the parlour that first day at St. Renny, time stood still and everything around the one point where consciousness was poised ceased to be. Youth, spring, and ecstasy itself were in that breath. Ecstasy, the unphilosophic stone which alone transmutes to the semblance of gold ... which alone does not ask what will come next, what has led so far, or where lies actual worth; ecstasy which is sufficient in itself.... Even thus had he felt when he had known that Nicky was to come to him, only then the flood-tide of emotion had been set outwards, while this seemed to beat back and intensify the sense of self.

It was Nicky who broke through this moment now, clamouring in his turn to be allowed access to the patch of blue that so excited the grown-ups, and who then proceeded to rub his brown fists in it and tear the delicate little flowers up before anyone could stop him. Indeed, after the first moment Ishmael did not try. He sat watching until Nicky, with all the uncontrolled excitement of highly-strung children who so often lose their heads and do things for which they suffer agonies in the watches of the night for long afterwards, was shouting and tearing at the flowers and throwing them over Georgie and drawing attention to himself by every extravagance his child's brain could light upon.

"Look at me, Georgie; look at me!" he cried, pulling a bunch of the flowers through his buttonhole and jumping up on a boulder that thrust itself through the turf cliffside; "I'm the King of the Castle, I'm the King of the Castle!..." Georgie threw a few bits of grass at him and then turned to go on with an argument she had been having with Ishmael when the sight of the vernal squills had distracted them. Nicky would not leave them alone; determined not to be ignored, he went on pelting her and kept up his monotonous chant: "I'm the King of the Castle, I'm the King of the Castle...."

"Don't do that," said Ishmael sharply. "Do you hear me, Nicky? Leave off!" But Nicky went on, and, finding no notice was being taken of him, he flung a frond of bracken, then, losing his temper, a clod of earth and turf he dug up from the ground. It hit Georgie on the cheek and scattered against her; a tiny fragment of stone in it cut her skin slightly, so that a thin thread of blood sprang out. Nicky felt suddenly very frightened. He kept up his song, but his note had altered, and as Ishmael got to his feet his voice died away.

"Don't be angry with him," said Georgie quickly. "He didn't do it on purpose."

She felt the embarrassment one is apt to feel at a display of authority over some third person. She looked at Ishmael as though it were she he was angry with, and felt a ridiculous kinship with Nicky. The little boy stood away from them both, defiant, scowling from below his fair brows, his small chest heaving, his nervous eyes sidelong. He was frightened, therefore all the more likely to make matters worse by rudeness. Ishmael was, unreasonably, more annoyed than he had ever been with Nicky, who had often been far more disobedient and in more of a temper. Ishmael picked him up and held him firmly for all his wriggling. Nicky yelled and screamed; his small face was scarlet with fear and passion; he drummed with his heels against his father's legs and hit out with his pathetically useless fists. Ishmael swung him under his arm.

"Please—" began Georgie.

"I am going to take him home," said Ishmael. "You had better not come. You'll find the others at the foot of the cliff, you know." He went on up over the brow of the cliff, carrying the screaming, struggling Nicky with the terrible ease of a grown-up coping with a child. Georgie remained sitting where she was for a few moments till the exhausted screams of Nicky died in the distance.

Ishmael's annoyance had not abated when they reached Cloom, though by now his arm had tired somewhat, and Nicky, sobbing angrily, walked beside him, firmly led by the hand. Ishmael took him up to the little room over the porch which was Nicky's own and there administered a whipping for the first time. Nicky was too exhausted to scream by then, but his anger grew deeper. He was aware that his father had often passed over worse actions, and that it was not so much his, Nicky's, disobedience in the matter of throwing things at Georgie which was the trouble as some mood of his father's which he had come up against. He resented the knowledge and burned with his resentment. When Ishmael, suddenly sorry, stayed his by no means heavy hand and stood the child between his knees, Nicky would not face his look, but stood with tightly shut eyes and set mouth. Ishmael thought it was shame at his punishment which sealed Nicky's eyes; he knew what agonies it would have occasioned him at that age, and he felt sorrier still. But Nicky never felt shame; he could extract a compensating excitement from every untoward event, and at the present moment he was making a luxury of his rage.

Ishmael tried to get some expression of contrition from the child, but vainly, and at length he left him,

safely shut in. He was very puzzled as he went and smoked in the garden below. He would not go out on to the cliff again lest Nicky should be up to any dangerous pranks in his room or have another screaming fit. For the first time it was brought home to him how terribly children differ from the children that their parents were.... Nothing he remembered, be it never so vivid, about himself, helped him to follow Nicky. He would never have drawn attention to himself as Nicky constantly did; he would not have dared—his self-conscious diffidence would not have let him. He had had fits of losing his head, but more quietly, often in his imagination alone. He did not see that the self-consciousness of childhood was at the bottom of both his youthful reserve and Nicky's ebullitions. That his own pride had been his dominating factor, forbidding him to enter into contests where he was bound to be worsted, and that for Nicky pride did not exist in comparison with the luxury of spreading himself and his feelings over the widest possible area with the greatest possible noise, made the difference between them so marked that Ishmael could see nothing else. Nicky had inherited from older sources, he reflected, a flamboyance such as Vassie and Archelaus and, in his underhand way, even Tom possessed, but that had missed himself.

Killigrew and the others were coming over to supper, and the Parson also was expected. Ishmael judged that Nicky had had enough excitement for one day, and so, though not as any further punishment, sent him to bed with a supper-tray instead of letting him come down. He recounted the afternoon's happenings at supper and confessed himself hopelessly puzzled.

"I don't understand the workings of his mind," he admitted; "when I took him up his supper he seemed quite different from the half-an-hour earlier when I'd been up. He'd—it's difficult to describe it—but it was as though he'd adjusted the whole incident in his own mind to what he wanted it to be. He greeted me with a sort of forgiving and yet chastened dignity that made me nearly howl with laughter. He sat up there in his bed as though he were upon a throne and expecting me to beg for pardon, or, rather, as though he knew I wouldn't, but he had the happy consciousness that I ought to. It was confoundingly annoying. I asked him whether he wanted to see Miss Barlow to say good-night—you know the passionate devotion he's had for her of late—and all he said was, 'No, thank you; he didn't think he could trust himself to speak to her just yet!' I said, 'Don't be a little idiot,' and he only smiled in a long-suffering manner, and I came away feeling squashed by my own small son."

"He sounds as though he were going to suffer from what is called the artistic temperament," observed the Parson.

"Let's hope not," chimed in Killigrew, "because the so-called artistic temperament is never found among the people who do things, but only in the lookers-on. The actual creators don't suffer from it."

"It depends what one means by the artistic temperament," said Judy rather soberly. "If you mean the untidy emotional sort of people who excuse everything by saying they have the artistic temperament, I agree with you. That's what the Philistine thinks it is, of course."

"Oh, the real thing, the thing that creates, is nothing in the world but a fusion of sex," said Killigrew swiftly. "It gives to the man intuition and to the woman creativeness—it adds a sixth sense, feminising the man and giving the woman what is generally a masculine attribute. But that's not what the Padre means. He's using the word in its accepted derogatory sense."

"I don't think he is quite, either," said Judy. "I think what you mean is more the deadly literary sense, isn't it, Padre?—the thing some people are cursed with, the voice that gets up and lies down with them, that keeps up a running commentary on whatever they do. The creative people can suffer from that."

"You mean the thing I always had as a youngster," said Killigrew. "If I went fishing I used to hear something like this: 'The boy slipped to the bank with the swift sureness of a young animal, and sat with long brown legs in the water while his skilful fingers fixed the bait on the hook.'"

"That's the sort of thing," said Judith. "It's deadly dangerous."

"Don't you think I've grown out of it, then?" asked Killigrew quickly, but with a laugh. Judy did not reply, but turned to Ishmael.

"Don't you know at all what I mean?" she asked. "You must have had moments like that—every child has. Some people let it grow into a habit—that's what's fatal."

Ishmael thought it over. "Yes," he admitted. "I can remember whole tracks of thought like that in my childhood, but I think I recognised the danger and made myself alter."

"I'm sure you didn't suffer from it," declared Boase. "I knew you very thoroughly, Ishmael, and you were reserved and inarticulate; you never acted for effect." He felt startled, as though a sudden gap had yawned in the dear past; it did not seem to him possible, or only as the grotesque possibility of a

nightmare, that the boy Ishmael should have held tendencies, trends of thought, which he had not realised....

Later came a message from Nicky that he would like Miss Parminter to come up and say good-night to him. They all laughed at the masculine tactics adopted thus early, but Judith went upstairs.

Later, when the others were thinking of going, Ishmael went up for her. She was kneeling by the bed, a dark figure in the dim room. Nicky was asleep, one arm still flung round her shoulder: she held hers lightly across him; her head was bowed upon the sheet. Ishmael hesitated a moment, struck by something of abandon in her pose. Then he touched her lightly on the shoulder. She started and looked up.

"Oh, it's you!" she said, peering at him through the darkness. "How you startled me!"

"The others are going," said Ishmael. "It's been good of you to stay up here. How long's the little chap been asleep?"

"Oh, ages! He's so sweet, I couldn't go downstairs to the lamp and all of them somehow. So small and soft.... You are lucky, Ishmael."

"Am I?" said he, rather taken aback. "I hadn't thought of myself in that light. But I know what you mean ... about Nicky."

They left the room together, but Judy cloaked herself in the passage and would not go again into the brightly-lit room. The Parson and Killigrew saw the two girls home, but Georgie and Boase reached the cottage first, and Georgie fell asleep while she was sitting up in bed waiting, scandalised, in spite of her modernity, for the return of Judith.

Nicky, sleeping peacefully in his little bed, had much to answer for that day. He had shown the startled Ishmael the gap that lies between two generations, whatever the tie of blood and affection; he had shown him too, by his anger at being torn out of it, that he could still have a mood of clamour for some thrill almost forgotten, some ecstasy he had thought dead ... and he had sent Judy, trembling, eager, as not for many months past, to the arms of the lover who could be so careless of her, but whom, when she chose, she could still stir to a degree no other woman had ever quite attained.

CHAPTER IX

JUDITH'S WHITE NIGHT

When Judith came in during the young dark hours of that morning, she could not sleep, and for a time she busied herself trying to remove the creases and dew-stains from her gown. Then she sat long by the window before she went to bed and laid the head that a few hours ago had known a sweet-smelling bracken pillow against the linen that could not cool her burning cheek.

She was suffering as she invariably did every time she gave the lover's gift to Killigrew; and always she paid for the joy of yielding with hours of reaction. She was wont to live over again in the drear spaces of time the history of her life since she had known him, and it was the history of her love for him and of very little else. Now as she lay, spent but wakeful, sick at heart and soul, she saw again the self that had stayed in this house when first she grew to know him. How little she had imagined then, in her pride and poise.... That was what stung her on looking back—how little she had guessed. If before her then had been flashed the vision of herself as his secret lover, how impossible she would have thought it. Surely, having come to it, having lived in it now for so long, she ought to be able to see how and exactly when the step had been taken which had brought her to it, which had so altered herself and her views as to make it possible? Yet, looking back, she could see no such one point between the self to whom it would have been impossible and the self to whom it was an acknowledged thing of long standing. If life consisted of sudden steps, how easily could they be avoided, she thought, as she went again through the bitter waters to which she had never succeeded in growing indifferent. It was these gradual slopes.... She could not even say, "It was that moment I first knew I loved him."

She lay, her brow pressed against the pillow, and saw again the Killigrew and the Judy of those early days at Cloom when she had been staying with Blanche, taken down there almost unwillingly, certainly against the wishes of her people, who had not shared her enthusiasm for Miss Grey. She had liked

Killigrew at once; his odd, whimsical, slanting way of looking at life had appealed to the clever young girl whose intellect had developed in front of her emotional capacities. It was her brain that had charmed him, more than her uncertain beauty; in those early days her personality had been so strong and her beauty still so hidden beneath its eccentricities, which later had added to it. All the time Ishmael had been so deeply in love with Blanche she and Killigrew had been getting more intimate, and yet there was "nothing in it" then.

When had it begun? Surely on that long train journey up to town there had been a new note, a feeling of something there had not been before ... partly because Blanche had left them at Exeter to make a cross-country connection, and she and he had had those first few hours of an enclosed intimacy they had not had before—in the train. What a queer, stuffy background ... hardly unromantic, though, when you thought of all trains stood for and had seen! She had examined rather anxiously into her own feelings that night at home, she remembered, because she knew Killigrew's views on marriage as the most unsatisfactory and immoral of states, and she did not wish to suffer. She was not given to self-pity, and it never struck her that there was some pathos in that careful wish to avoid suffering formed by one so young, who had already borne an unhappy girlhood with a mother who drugged and a stepfather who dared not show his affection for her for fear of his wife's jealousy. The kind, weak little man had died and left her a few hundreds a year; she was always grateful to him for that, and forgave him for not standing between her and her mother as he might have done. Those hundreds had saved her from any question of taking money from Killigrew. Her poems would not have kept her—that she knew. Also she had never done as well as in that first slim book when she had known nothing of life at all. Real experience had bitten too deep for transmission to paper.

When he came back from Paris, a year after the time at Cloom, he had written to her and she had met him. Then it had all come out—all about her wretched home and her mother—and they had met again and again. Killigrew could not bear the thought of suffering, and he had tried to make up to her by taking her out as much as he could—not alone, for that was impossible in those days, but always with such others as merely formed a pleasant negative background. Between them from the first of those days in London was a consciousness of being man and woman there had not been for her at Cloom, though he now told her she had always disturbed him, that there was for him a something profoundly troubling in her slim sexless body, her burning mind, her quaint little sureness of poise which never let her lose her sense of proportion. That had so appealed to him ... never from her had he heard the talk of women, that love was the greatest thing in the world, or that any one person could matter more than all the many other things put together. She had thought with him that life was far otherwise—made up of many things, a pattern.... And yet it was she who, though in theory keeping all those ideas, had lived and suffered only for the one thing, had her horizon narrowed to his figure. All the time she told herself it was a distorted view, but that did not prevent her suffering; it only enabled her to be aware that it mattered very little whether she suffered or not.

They had gone on meeting, and soon it was a recognised thing that he should kiss her who had never even let herself so much as be kissed at a dance. But this was different, she told herself—he kissed her so kindly. His kisses altered, but still she bore them, dimly aware of portent in them, but trying, with a woman's guile, to laugh them off by seeming to keep a child's incomprehension of what they meant. Then she had had a bad time to undergo during her mother's lingering illness and death, before she could take her freedom. Her mother left her nothing, but she had the kind little man's small income. She had been worn out by the time everything was over; and owing to her mother's complaint, which had made it impossible to have visitors at the house, and to her jealousy, which had prevented Judy making many friends for herself outside, she knew no one with whom she was intimate enough to ask for advice and help. Killigrew had taken charge of her and been goodness itself.

He kept clear always of the actual words and forms of love-making. He was very fastidious and hated anything that went to vulgarise his relationships, and would not spoil his genuine affection and intimacy and passion for her or any other woman for whom he felt them by using shibboleths that did not express what he really meant.

He took her away up to a quiet mountain country in Wales, and all the weeks he looked after her there never showed any more passion than the kisses and close embraces she was now used to, and those not often. He was not only not ever an inconsiderate lover, but he was too much of an epicure to take too much or too often even when he could. He left her once or twice in those weeks to go to town, and she knew he saw other women there, and the knowledge meant very little to her. Already she was loving him more deeply than she knew and understanding him more deeply still, and she knew jealousy would be the end of everything. If she had begun to be jealous, it would have been so deadly, she would have had so much to be jealous of, that she never dared let herself indulge in it.

She had her reward when he once told her she was the only woman who had never once asked him where he had been or whom he had been with. She was so happy in the pain this self-repression gave

her she hardly thought how much happier she could have been had there been no need for it. If that had been the case he would have been entirely different from what he was, and then perhaps she would not have loved him at all.

The time in Wales was not spoiled by anything that made her unable to face her own mind; never did his arms or lips encroach; she came back still feeling she belonged to herself—still clinging to that physical possession of self because she was now aware that her peace of soul was gone into his keeping where it would have no rest again.

After that her true pain began. Sometimes on looking back she wondered how she could have lived through it so often—for of course it was not always at the same pitch. No pain or love or appreciation ever can be. There were whole months when she managed to do very well without him, when he was abroad and she too, perhaps, went on the Continent to some other far-off place and found things in which to interest herself. She belonged to the semi-artistic circle in which alone it was possible in those days to have any liberty of action, and she had the artist's keen appreciation of the externals of life; and when the personal failed her there were always things. But when the pain was at its worst things failed her.

Bad times when a letter from him, written because he happened to be in the mood to write and wanted an answer which, though she knew his mood would have passed by the time he received it, yet she would not be able to prevent herself writing.... Times after he had been to see her, either on a flying visit, or to be near her for several days, taking her about and spoiling her delightfully.... After they were over came a bitterness that would make her moan out loud to herself, "It isn't worth it ... it isn't worth it...." And she would welcome the next few days when they came as thirstily as she had the last.

Only the fact that she had a naturally strong will, made stronger by youthful years of self-repression, and that he never wished from a woman what she did not want to give, kept her so long not his lover in body as she was in heart and mind. Looking back, she marvelled at the length of time she had withstood her own heart. Not her senses; they had not entered into the affair for her at that time. She actually loved him too well, and was too unawakened physically, to feel the promptings of the pulses. She felt in him, for him, by him, so intensely it sometimes seemed to her she must be fused with him. She could have burned away into his being and ceased to have a separate existence if the passionate fusing of the mind could have accomplished it.

For three years she loved and suffered. She saw him always several times a year, was with him during those times, and he never lied to her about what he felt. He never told her she was the "only woman in the world for him" and that he could not live without her. He never mentioned other women to her, except such of his friends as she had met and of those she never knew, except in so far as her own intuition told her, which were only friends, which mingled the give and take of passion with the cooler draught. On the other hand, he never hid his passion when he felt it for her, and he always showed his affection and care of her when in the pleasant spaces between passion. He could not but know she was aware that he would be glad if one day she gave him more; meanwhile he did not make her hate herself and him with actions that would have excited without satisfying. He was the perfect companion, or would have been if she had not loved him.

For three years she never told him that she did; she met his kisses only with frank affection, and though she felt no urge of passion in herself to teach her lips, yet she began to feel that which would have made her more the eager one, and less the kissed, as she always sternly kept herself. For these three years she did not imagine he lived a chaste existence; there was no reason, with his pagan and quite genuine convictions, why he should. Fidelity in so far as it meant keeping to one person was to him foolishness. In so far as it meant loyalty of affection and absolute honesty he was faithful to everyone.

At the end of the three years she had become aware that things were different ... at first she could not say how. Then she slowly saw that unless she gave more, made herself more to him, she would become less.

He made no demands on her; he would have resented the idea of possessing a woman as much as that of any woman possessing him—freedom to him was the salt of every dish. Judy told him sometimes that he made the marriage service of too great importance, just as much as did the advocates of it, though in a different way. They thought there ought to be no love outside it; he thought there could be none within-it. To her mind, which always went for the essentials and left the trappings alone, the actual legal compact would not have mattered either way. That was what her instinct, which in her was as nicely balanced as reason, told her. But there was a side of her, as was inevitable, which was the child of her period and upbringing, and that side had never been talked over by Killigrew's philosophy, with the result that when she gave him everything she suffered in her conscience as well as in her

heart. She had suffered ever since. Truth was with her a passion, and yet she had to pretend to the world. She suffered acutely when with girls of her own age, because she felt unfit to be with them. Often, with Georgie, who had not half her fineness, she would feel she ought not to be sitting talking to her or letting her come and stay in the same house. She suffered sometimes from a morbid wish to tell the world what she really was. And yet, as she told herself sometimes, if suffering can purge, surely she was clean enough....

She had never breathed the word "marriage" to Killigrew, who had no reason for knowing she was not as happy as himself in what was too spontaneous and delightful even to be called an arrangement. It had been a "success"; the life they had lived since Judy had let him know he could take her as he wished. Killigrew would as soon have married as have installed a woman as his mistress; the freedom of a *union libre* held no illusions for him. Yet to do him justice it was even more that he would have hated to have their relationship spoiled by anything so hard-and-fast. They met as before, went for wonderful holidays together, and if she knew he was "fitting her in," she was too wonderfully poignantly happy when with him, too satisfied in every fibre of her nature, to think of it; while afterwards, if she had allowed herself to dwell on it—beyond the one or two days of acute suffering that would follow upon every time—she would have died, in heart and mind, if not in body, of the pain.

Sometimes, when she was either very happy with him or drowning in the bitter aftermath, she would lie pretending to herself as a child does. These imaginings always took the same form, and on this night at Paradise she began the old childish-womanly game again when she saw sleep would not come.

The pretence was that she was going to have a baby. In her heart of hearts she knew she wanted Killigrew to marry her, or rather to want to marry her. With all her knowledge of him she could not quite come to the belief that she could not make him happy if he were married to her.... Perhaps if she were going to have a baby, he would want to. He would not; but he would have done it as soon as he saw she really wanted it, though without seeing the necessity, which would not have existed in a world constructed on his plan. Still, she knew he would do it, given the right circumstances; also she knew he had the deep love for children derived from a Jewish strain in his family. With that baby he would come to a fuller love of her than ever before; its advent would surely give him what even she admitted he lacked.

She lay now, picturing it to herself and planning a cunningly-laid deceit by which she should appear a lovely and noble figure in his eyes. She would have a very "bad time," of course, or somehow the thing would lose significance, and she would ask, nay implore, the doctor to promise her, if he could only save either the child or herself, to let it be the child. And Joe would hear of it and know that it was because he wanted a child so much.... She might pretend to be delirious and murmur that he wanted the child so much more than he did her.... He would be in the room and hear her and she would pretend not to know it....

Thus Judy, luxuriating in the darkness, knowing in her clear brain that looked on so unswayed by her passionate weary heart, that Killigrew, for all his instinct for children, did not want them in the concrete, that if she bore him one he would love her just as much as he did now and no more. That he would love her as much even while she was carrying it she believed, and rightly, for he was too natural a man himself ever to think nature ugly.

Judy lay imagining ... imagining ... and she thought of Nicky's firm, soft little body, and how it had felt to her hungry hands and tried to feel it all over again in her bed and imagine it belonged to her and Joe. And she saw the cold, pale dawn come in, and her dream shivered and fled before it, and she was left with only her bitter knowledge that it would never happen, and if it did, not that way. And she wished with a futile frenzy of longing that she had never chosen to keep Killigrew by giving him her whole self in fee, but by refusing herself to him had been able to leave him and live down the hold he had on her soul and mind which had grown to such strength in those first three years. Her first fear when she gave him everything had been lest attainment should dull even that want he had of her, but she found he had spoken truth when he said that that was a quality which grew with having. For fewer men are bored with satiety than kept by a custom that becomes necessity, and his habit for her would in itself be an attraction for him. But Killigrew, for all his cleverness, was not the man to know, if any could have, how passionate her withholding had been, how passionless was her surrender.

CHAPTER X

So much of mental passion could be lived through upon one side of a wall and on the other Georgie wake fresh and unknowing of it all, stretch a moment, wonder as to what time Judy had come in, tip-toe to her room and peep, to see a sleeping face so pale and haggard that she withdrew, suddenly sorry, she did not quite know why. Judy could look old ... she reflected. Georgie herself felt a lilting sense of interest in this day which she had not hitherto during her stay at Paradise Cottage. Nothing had happened, and yet somehow she felt different. It was not even that she had had a letter from Val, for he had written two days ago, and so she would not hear again for several days, a ready pen not being his. And she was beginning to be guiltily conscious that she did not enjoy getting his letters; they seemed somehow to disrupt atmosphere instead of creating it. Everything was different from that day on the river when Val had told her he loved her and it had all seemed so simple. She had accepted him then because she was so fond of him, and she knew everyone would be pleased, and also she was pleased herself. He was so young and jolly, and they had always fitted so well, though in his music—he was by way of being a young composer—he was out of her depth.

They fitted too well; since their engagement Georgie, feeling it lacked excitement and being both very young and a woman, and therefore an experimentalist, had tried to get up little scenes so as to have quarrels and reconciliations. She would do things which she had first got him to say he did not like; then she defied him, only to meet with an ineffectual annoyance on his part. When after each scene she gave way, as she had meant to do all along, she knew in her heart that it was because she chose to submit, not because he had the strength to compel her. He was too young and inexperienced to see that she was young enough to be craving for a master, while at the same time he was old enough to want peace and mutual consideration. He would have been shocked at the idea of using brutality to her, and brutality was what Georgie, without recognising it, wanted.

She shook herself impatiently now as the thought of Val came to her when, turning over her handkerchiefs to choose a clean one, she came upon his last letter. Dear old Val! ... but he had no part in this clear, pale spring day and all it was going to hold.

She checked herself as she was bursting into song in her bath because she thought of tired-looking Judy still asleep in the next room, but something in her went on singing to meet this new fine day. She had her breakfast in solitary state, because Mrs. Penticost would neither let her wait nor Judy be disturbed, and then she flung a coat over her "Fishwife" dress and went out into the morning. She went over to Cloom to see whether Nicky had forgiven her and would sit for his portrait as usual.

Thinking of Nicky made her think of Ishmael, and she went over again in her mind what he had looked like when he had been so angry yesterday. She had seen a new Ishmael then, a more interesting one; she was vaguely aware of liking him better than before. Perhaps it might be rather fun to see if she could make him angry. Probably he would only be really angry with anyone he cared for, and of course he didn't care for her at all. Georgie pondered that point as she went. She was honest and sweet, but she was an arrant little flirt, and Val was not the first man who had kissed her. She never pretended anything to herself, but she could pretend things to other people. She was too vital to be vulgar, but she was also too vital to be quite well-bred, and often her methods were startling, as for her age and period she cared remarkably little what she said. She would try and wake Ishmael up; it would do him good. For all her plainness of actual feature, if that wonderful mouth were excepted, no one knew better than Georgie that she had *beauté de diable*, and the sheer impudent vitality of her swept nearly every man off his feet if she wished it to. "Me, m'dear?" she would protest to Judy or any friend who pointed this out to her. "Most hideous female, m'dear. Face like a pudding." Here she would puff out her cheeks and hold them distended till her soft infectious laughter made them collapse. "Everyone's kind to me, because I'm so plain they're sorry for me...."

Privately she considered she knew everything in the world there was to know about men. In reality she knew very little, placing as much too much importance on sex as Judy placed too little.

Arrived at the Manor, she found that Nicky had disappeared, after an annoying and rather alarming habit of his, and was not expected back, by those who knew his roving ways, till the evening. Ishmael informed her of this with rather a rueful smile.

"He's always had these wild fits ever since he's been big enough to go off on his own," he told her; "and he steals something out of the larder, or if he can't do that he just trusts to his eyes and tongue when he meets some kind good lady, and he scours the countryside till late. The worst of it is I shan't be able to do anything to him when he turns up this evening, because he'll pretend he ran away because he was so afraid of me after yesterday."

"Are you so terrifying?" said Georgie, peeping up at him from under her shady hat.

"Not at all. I am a very easily-led person."

Georgie considered this, her head on one side. Then she said briskly: "Then will you please help me take my sketching things somewhere, as I can't get on with the portrait? After all, it's a bit your fault, isn't it? You should have brought your son up better."

"Of course, I'll take them anywhere you like," said Ishmael; "where shall it be?"

Thus it came about that Killigrew and Judy, a couple of hours later, coming to the plateau, found Georgie there, busy over a sketch of Ishmael in profile, with his head telling dark against the grey sunlit cliff wall, because Georgie said it was easier to paint dark against light. She was really working in her vivid, effective way, and Killigrew found little to criticise.

Judy was no longer looking tired. Joe had met her perfectly, holding her away and looking into her eyes in the whimsical tender way he had as though he were saying: "It's absurd, isn't it, to make out what we did together is of any importance, and yet as long as we're human beings we can't help feeling it's wonderful ..." and he had thanked her, hardly in words, for the hours of the night before, though there had been words too, as she had buried her head against him. With that and her usual careful aids to beauty Judy was glowing, and though there was never a shade of possessiveness in her manner towards Killigrew, yet this morning there was so much of confidence and possession of herself that it almost amounted to the same thing when she made her appearance by his side.

Georgie declared a rest when the two of them appeared, and Ishmael also came to look at what she had been doing. He was standing a little behind her and looking down, not so much at the painting as at the back of her bent neck, where the absurd little drake's tails curved against the skin, so white in the sunshine. One ear was rosy where the light shone through it, and behind it lay a soft blue crescent of shadow.

As he looked that odd something occurred to Ishmael which suddenly puts a person in a new light—the slipping of the plane, the freakish turn of the kaleidoscope which makes the new light strike at a fresh angle something seen before and makes it different. He fell in love with Georgie in that moment, staring at her bent neck and the curve of her ear.

All day a delightful exaltation possessed him; he was not yet at the stage when a man is plagued with doubts of success or advisability; he was only tingling with a new delight. He helped her along any rough place when they all walked over to the Vicarage to tea with a joy he had not felt the day before, and he did not even know how irrational it all was.

At tea the conversation turned on different types of men, and Killigrew held forth on what he held to be the only true and vital classification.

"The only division in mankind is the same as the only division in the animal world, of course," he said.

"What is that?" asked the Parson. "Wild and tame?"

"No; it is the division between the animal who goes with the pack and him who hunts a solitary trail. The bee is kin to the wolf because both are subject to a community-life with strict laws. The bee is nearer of kin to the wolf than it is to the butterfly, which lives to itself alone. The fox, who hunts and is harried as a solitary, is further removed from his brother the wolf than he is from the wild cat, who has like habits to himself. My natural history may be wrong, but you see the theory!"

"And you carry that into the world of man?" said Judith lightly. In her heart was a sick pain and anger, and the brightness of the day had fled for her; with his few careless words Killigrew had recreated all the old atmosphere of depression, of—"It's no good, I know he's as he is, and that nothing I can do or that happens to me will ever make him any different...."

"Certainly it is the great division. Between the born adventurer and the community-man there is a far greater gulf fixed than between the former and an eagle or the latter and a cony. Lone trail or circumscribed hearth—between these lies the only incompatibility."

"There is a good deal in your theory," said Boase, "but it goes too much for externals. The home-keeping man may be the one with the free spirit and the wanderer the man who cannot get away from habits that tie him to other people wherever he goes."

"Sounds like a perambulating bigamist," said Killigrew, laughing. "But you're right as usual, Padre, and go to the heart of it while I'm being merely superficial. According to my division your brother Archelaus is a fox and an eagle and all the other lone things right enough, isn't he, Ishmael?"

"Yes," said Ishmael slowly, "I think he is."

"Whereas you are the bee, the wolf, the cony," declared Killigrew. "Isn't he, Padre?"

Boase smiled. "Shall I tell you what I think, Joe?" he answered, "It is this. Ishmael is by circumstances and inclination a dweller in one spot, and custom and humanity incline him to tie himself always more closely to it and the people in it. But man is not as simple as your animals, and in most of us is something alien, some strain of other instincts. The man who lives intimately on one piece of earth may have a deep instinct in spite, perhaps because, of it, to keep himself free and to resent claims even while he acknowledges them. Just as a man who is free to go where he likes, as you do, may carry his own chains with him. For the only slavery is to oneself, and it is the man who flows inwards instead of outwards who is not free."

"I wonder ..." said Killigrew.

"The real flaw in your argument, Joe," said Ishmael, "is that your lone hunter in the animal world always has his mate and his young, whereas when you make the division apply to mankind you class all that with the herd and deny it to the man who would be free."

"Because that's how it translates into terms of humanity," said Killigrew swiftly. "Civilisation has made the taking of a mate a bond as firm as pack-law, and woe to him who, having yielded to it, transgresses it. It is not I who have made that division, it is the world."

"He might have spared me this to-night ..." thought Judith.

Ishmael kept silence. He was thinking of the truth of what Killigrew had been saying, and weighing it against this new flame that had sprung up within him that day. Freedom—loneliness is the price paid for liberty, he knew that. And he had found loneliness sweet, or, when not actually that, at least very bearable. Yet even as he thought it he knew for him there was, as ever, at any crisis of his life, only the one way. He had that directness which, though seeing all ways—for it is not the same thing as simplicity—yet never doubted as to the only one possible for himself. On that long-ago day on the cliffs near St. Renny, when he had played with the notion of running away to sea, he had known all along in his heart that that way was not for him. When, to other natures, a struggle might have arisen between staying on at Cloom, carrying out his work there, and taking Blanche into the life she would have shared with him, the point had not even arisen for him. During the turmoil of mind and body that the break with her had left to him his victory over himself had never really been in doubt. When the passion in him had met, as he could now see it had, the same feeling in Phoebe and he had been swept into that disaster, release had not appeared to him even a possibility. The new duties that had devolved on him since he had been free again all seemed to come quite naturally, without being sought by him, or even imagined until they floated into his horizon. So now this new thing had come upon him, and, wiser than he had been when he loved Blanche, wiser than when he had married Phoebe, he saw it glamour-enwrapped, yet he recognised the glamour. That he would marry Georgie if he could he was fairly certain, but that there was, as ever, the something in him which resented it, this mingling of himself with another human being, this passionate inroad on spaces which can otherwise be kept free even of self, he knew too. Acute personal relationships with others makes for acute accentuation of self, and that was what, at the root of the matter, Ishmael always resented and feared.

CHAPTER XI

WAYS OF LOVE

A week later Boase said Evensong, as far as he was aware, to the usual emptiness, but when he went down the church afterwards to lock it up he saw a kneeling figure crouching in a dim corner. He went closer and saw that it was Judith—there was no mistaking that slim, graceful back and the heavy knot of dark hair. Her shoulders were very still and she was making no sound, so it was a shock to Boase when, on his touching her, she glanced round and he saw her eyelids were red and swollen in the haggard pallor of her face. She stared at him dully for a minute.

"What is it, my child?" asked Boase.

"I can't tell you," said Judith dully. "You wouldn't understand and you'd be shocked."

Boase smiled as he sat down in the pew just in front of her. She leant back against her seat and

looked pitifully at his kind deeply-lined old face.

"Besides, I'm not sorry!" she went on; "at least, not the sorry that means to give it up, only the sorry that wishes I had never started...."

"Tell me about him, my child!" said Boase. And Judy did. It was the first time she had ever spoken of him—what he was to her and what her life had been—to anyone. She made no wail beyond once saying, "I did not know it was possible that a person could make one suffer so...."

Gradually Boase drew what little story there was to tell from her, but more than she told him he gathered for himself, from his watching of her and his knowledge of Killigrew. He was an old man now and a wise one. The priest in him yearned over her to wean her from her sin, but the patient wisdom in him told him that not that way had she yet come. He talked quietly to her, soothing her by his calmness, his lack of reproaches or adjurations, and presently she was sitting forward in the pew in the gathering dusk talking more normally.

"There are some sheep who are not only not of this fold," he said at last, "but who seem as though they never could be on this side of the grave. Joe has the odd quality of never having felt spiritual want, and probably he never will."

"It is that uncertainty of edge about him that has always been the difficulty," she said. "That—oh, it's so difficult to explain. I mean, he has never seemed to realise the limits of individuality. Woman is woman to him—not one woman. He's often said that the affinity made-for-each-other theory must be pure nonsense; that you meet during your little life hundreds of people who all have more or less of an affinity for you—some more, some less—and that it's practically your duty to fuse that likeness wherever you meet it. Of course he agrees that among the lot there's bound to be one with whom the overlap is bigger than it is with any of the others, but then he looks on that as no reason for thinking that person is the one person for you. There are probably several more people knocking round with whom your overlap would be still wider, only you never happen to meet them. And to bind yourself irrevocably to one would be to prevent your fusing with them if you did meet them. It works out at this—that the greatest giving and the greatest taking is the ideal state of affairs. Give to everyone you meet and take all you can from them. But, you see, my trouble is I have nothing left to give anyone but him. I've always given him everything—I want no one and nothing else. And he's wanted so many and so much. I see the logic and admirable sense of his attitude so clearly that even while a primitive root jealousy is eating me up I am so infected by his theory that I don't blame him. I feel myself nebulous as regards him, as blurred at edge as he is."

"Oh, my dear child!" said Boase, "this—this in a way bigness of his view just makes him more of an individualist than anyone. He limits himself nowhere, but simply because it's all gain to his individuality. That it is gain to others too is neither here nor there."

"It can be loss to the others; there is such a thing as all taking and no giving."

"Ah, now you're looking on it from the point of view of payment! Take for a moment the truer view that sorrow is as much gain as pleasure. The only gain on earth is experience, and both emotions go to feed that."

"And then," continued Judith, pursuing her own line of thought, "something in me seems to say that that wide view, that merging of individuality, has the right idea at the root of it. It's an old strain of Puritanism in me, I suppose, that tells me anything is good which implies a loosening of individualism."

"I don't agree with you," said Boase energetically. "The root of all things good and great is personality. The success of any movement depends on the individuality of the leader, just as the whole of creation depends, whether it knows it or not, on the personality of Christ. 'Be individual' is a counsel of perfection—that is the only drawback to it. If the great mass of people were only nearer perfection the rein could be given to individualism; as it is it's a dangerous horse to drive—it so often runs away with its driver. Conceive now of the immense advantage it would be if, instead of a criminal being tried by the clumsy machinery of the law, the judge were to investigate the case quietly and thoroughly himself, get to know the man, his belongings and environment, and then deal with him as he saw fit. The thing's not workable; the judge might have an attack of indigestion that would jaundice his view, or be in a rosy glow of sentimentality after port. But if the judge could be depended on for sympathy and intuitiveness, half the crime in the world would be stamped out. It's the same everywhere. If priests could be allowed to discriminate between divorced persons they thought it fit and desirable to remarry and those they did not, much sin might be avoided. But it wouldn't work, simply because the individual can't yet be trusted, and so it is quite right that the law should be as it is. But that doesn't prevent rank individualism from being the counsel of perfection—in which, curiously enough, Joe would agree with me more than Ishmael, who fights against the individual in life to an extraordinary extent. I wish

something would happen to make him succumb to it again. I don't want him to grow inhuman...."

"I wish it were possible to grow inhuman," said Judy.

"If you knew," said Boase slowly, "that besides doing—as I must tell you—a right action by leaving off all connection with Joe Killigrew, you could also cease at once to feel anything for him, would you then leave him?"

"Ah! not yet ..." said Judith. "I must have a little longer. Wait till I'm older—till I can't make him want me...."

As she went home, comforted more than she could have thought possible by the mere telling of what had accompanied her so long, she knew that she had not been wholly disingenuous. That Killigrew would cease to want her for at least a good while to come she did not believe, and it was not that dread which had sent her shaking for the first time to the help from which she had hitherto held proudly aloof. As a matter of fact she kept up the illusion of youth better with Killigrew than with the rest of the world, and she knew it. For one thing, he was never away from her long enough at a time to get a thoroughly new vision of her on his return, a vision apart from that which he was expecting to see. For another, she took more care with him. Other people might see her unpowdered, bleak—never he. And for this, too, she had paid the penalty. Sometimes when he held her, gazing down into the face she had prepared with so much skill to meet that look—counting half upon the material aids upon her skin and half upon the state she should have evoked in him before she courted that gaze—then she would think to herself: "And if I were not 'tidied,' if I were 'endy,' looking greasy, as I have all day, he would not be feeling like this...." Then with that thought would flash into her aching heart: "On so frail a thread hangs love...."

But it was not anything in Killigrew which had eaten into her consciousness this past week—it was something in herself. Something which had risen to its crest that night among the bracken had failed ever since, was falling on deadness, and that something was her own power to feel the love which had made her life for so long. There were always periods of deadness—she knew that—but this held a quality none of them had had. What if even she were subject to the inevitable law, if for her too after the apex came the downward slope? That was the fear that gnawed at her, that was what she dreaded when the Parson had held out exactly that as a hope.

While she had been suffering and loving she had longed for the release of cessation; now she dreaded it, for it undermined to her the whole of the past. She was one of those women to whom faithfulness in herself was a necessity of self-respect, and failure of love, without any deflection of it, was to her a failure of faithfulness. She had nothing tangible to go upon; it was only that she felt this deadness now upon her was not the mere reaction of feeling, but an actual snapping of something in the fabric of life. She told herself it was not possible, that not so could she give the lie to all she had suffered.

As she went up the lane to Paradise she met Ishmael coming down it; evidently he had been taking Georgie home. She stopped to speak to him, and, feeling he was reluctant to pass on by himself yet awhile, she leant over a gate and let him talk to her. For a minute or so he said nothing that was not an ordinary commonplace of encounter, but after a short silence had fallen between them he began abruptly on another note.

"Judy," he said, "do you believe in what is called 'falling in love'?"

"Do I believe in it?" echoed Judith. "It depends on how you mean that. If you ask do I believe that there is such a phenomenon, I do, for the simple reason that one sees it happening all around one and people doing the maddest things under its influence. If you mean do I think it's a good thing, or a pleasant thing, or a thing that lasts ...?"

"Yes, that's what I meant, I think."

"Falling in love is giving someone the power to hurt you.... I suppose it depends on you, or rather on them, if it's worth it or not. But how can one say anything of any value about a thing unless one has first clearly defined what that thing is? And love is like religion, like the vision of truth itself—it means something different to every man."

"I thought women were always supposed to love in much the same way," said Ishmael vaguely—"better than we do. They always say so."

"Oh, it depends on the individual, as always. Chiefly it depends on whether you're the sort of person that loves 'in spite of' or 'because of.' If you're the 'because of' kind, all sorts of things, external drawbacks and disappointments in character, put you off. If you're the 'in spite of,' they don't. I think the only difference between men and women is that as a rule men love because of and women in spite

of."

"I'm afraid I should be the 'because of.'"

"Yes, I think perhaps you would. If a woman loves 'in spite of,' all the little external things that at the beginning might have shocked her only make her care more."

"Like eating with one's knife, you mean?"

"Yes, even that. Or the person having a cold in his head or a spot on the end of his nose! She notices whatever it happens to be and has a little shock of surprise at finding it makes no difference. And that makes her feel how strong her love must be; and pouf! it gets stronger than ever."

"And the underneath things, like finding out little insincerities, little meannesses even?"

"The same plan works there—if you're the 'in spite of' lover."

"Tell me," said Ishmael suddenly, "do you—does any woman—have moments when the very word 'love' is an insufferable intrusion, when it all seems petty and of no account, a tiresome thing in whose presence it suddenly doesn't seem possible to breathe?"

"When one is sick of the whole question, and the way life is supposed to be built round it? Yes; but when a woman feels like that it generally is in reaction from too much of it. She doesn't feel it purely academically, so to speak, as a man can." Judy's voice was suddenly very weary. Her eyes met Ishmael's, and in that look a comprehension was born between them that was never quite to fail, that was, in its best moments, to mean true intimacy. Judy blinked at him with her sad monkey-eyes, smiled a little, and held out her hand in farewell. He took it—suddenly ejaculated a "Good-night" accompanied by a "Thank you" which he felt, though he could not quite have told why. He went off down the lane without seeing her back to the cottage, and she stayed awhile, grateful in her turn that meeting him had taken the keen edge off her own problems. She went in to supper and bed feeling very tired, a tiredness that was in her mind and soul, but that had the pleasantness of a healthy physical exhaustion. Georgie showed a disposition to come into her room and ask her her opinion of "falling in love" over mutual hair-brushes, but Judith evaded the tentative suggestion. By then she was feeling that the word was a meaningless string of four letters, and the thing she supposed it stood for as fantastic and far-off as the recurring fragment of a dream, which seems so vivid in the dreaming and is a broken kaleidoscope of ill-fitting colours on awaking. She went to bed and slept soundly, better than she had done for months.

She was to wake to the old weight, half-joy, half-pain, but more and more she was to feel the new dread that she was growing out even of that, left in a dryness that belittled the past; but the periods of numbness once begun had to go on in spite of her, and with their bitterness was mingled at least the negative healing of indifference.

CHAPTER XII

GEORGIE

Georgie had been up to the village to post a very important letter—so important that her hand stayed hesitant over the slit in the box for a moment or two while she made up her mind all over again. Then, with a gasp, she pushed the letter through and heard it fall with a faint thud to the bottom of the box. The last chance was still not gone, for the friendly old postmaster would have given it back to her if she had asked for it, but the mere noise it made in falling—one of the most distinctive and irrevocable sounding in the world—caused her to feel a lightening of the heart that meant satisfaction. She turned and went away down the bare village street, past the last row of whitewashed slate-roofed cottages, with the dark clumps of myrtle or tamarisk by their doors, and then she struck off the hard, bleak road, where the wind sang mournfully in the insulators at every telegraph post, and made for the open moor.

It was one of those mood-ridden days of spring when the whole countryside changes in the passing of a cloud from pearly grey to a pale brightness unmarred by any dark note. Even the cloud-shadows were no deeper than wine-stains as they trailed over the slopes; against the cold, clear blue of the sky the branches of the thorns seemed of pencilled silver—their leaves were a rich green amid the colder verdure of the elders and the soft hue of the breaking ash leaves. Ploughed lands were a delicate

purple, and the pastures still held the pure emerald of the rainy winter, though paled by the quality of the light to a tone no deeper than that of the delicate young bracken fronds which were uncurling upon the moor. Everywhere was lightness—in all colour, in the wandering airs, in the texture of leaf and blade—in Georgie's soul as she went over the soft turf and hummed little tunes to herself. She ran up a grassy peak crested with grey boulders and flung herself against them, half-leaning, half-standing, over a rough cool curve of grey granite, arms outstretched, eyes closed.

She was conscious of the fabric of her body as never before. She felt her heart beating as a thing heavier and more powerful than the rest of her frame; she was aware of the breath passing through the delicate skin of her nostrils, of a faint, sweet aching in her thighs, of the tenderness of her breast crushed against the rock, of the acuteness of life beating in her outspread finger-tips against the rough granite and in her toes pressed against the turf. She dropped to the ground and, rolling over, stretched to utmost tension, then relaxed to limpness, eyelids closed and the hair blowing upon them the only moving thing about her. Then she scrambled to her feet again and set off towards Cloom.

As she neared it she saw on the far slope a plough at work, looking like a tiny toy, the horses a rich bright brown in the sunlight. Her strong young eyes could see the darker blown mesh of their manes and the long hair about their fetlocks; she could see, too, that the man in a faded blue shirt and earth-coloured trousers driving them was John-James, for even at that distance his sturdy build and the copper red of his broad neck were unmistakable. She saw that the man standing talking by the gate was Ishmael, and she stayed still, wondering if he would see and recognise her. The tiny figure turned, stood staring, and then waved its hat above its head; Georgie fluttered her handkerchief and turned off down towards the stream at the bottom of the moor while Ishmael was still watching.

It was warmer down by the stream than on the crest above, and the air was as though filled with a bright sparkle with the refractions of the sun from ripple and eddy. The stream was a mere thread of water, but broken by stone and drooping bough to the semblance of urgency, and with its mazy lights went a clear murmur of sound. Georgie took off her little cloth jacket and threw herself down on the grassy slope that, amidst a tangle of hemlock, edged the purling water. Between her and the sunlight drooped an alder; she saw against the sun the showers of yellow catkins all gleaming transparent, like sunlit raindrops caught at the moment when they lengthen.... She lay under the glory of this Danaëan shower and half-closed her eyes to stare up at the wonder of it. Presently she heard the sound of twigs and leaves being crushed under advancing feet, but she did not look up, only started to hum a little tune, though she could not hear it for the rising beat of her own heart in her ears.

When Ishmael merely dropped down beside her and, asking if he might smoke, proceeded to light his pipe, she calmed a trifle—a sick dread that she dismissed as impossible flashed through her; she peeped at him from her tilted hat brim, and saw his hands were trembling slightly as he struck the match. In a moment she had caught back her own poise; she watched sidelong, noting with an odd precision exactly how he looked, how his brown skin glistened a little in the sun, so close to her that she could see the infinitesimal criss-cross of lines upon the backs of his hands and the stronger seams upon his reddened neck. She saw the glisten of a few grey hairs in the dark thick patch above his ear; she could see the texture of his lip as it pouted beneath the sideways hang of his pipe. She wondered why anyone ever really loved someone else; looked at like that, and thought of clearly, reasonably, they did not look very wonderful, but only obvious flesh and blood, enclosing something that, try as one might, must always remain alien, cut off. Yet she knew that, reason as she might, this particular piece of flesh and blood, animated by this particular soul, had power over hers that her leaping pulses at the very sound of his footfalls, that her eager planning mind at night in her bed, would not let her deny. Suddenly she looked away from him, and, twisting her hands in the dew-wet grass, spoke. "I've written to Val," she said.

Ishmael did not answer, and she went on:

"You don't seem very interested, but I'm so full of it I must tell someone. After all one doesn't break off an engagement every day...."

He turned towards her then, dropped his pipe, and looked full at her.

"You mean that? You have definitely done it?"

"Undone it," she said cheerfully; "it would never have answered. I've known that for ages. He's so much cleverer than I am, but so much less wise! He's just a nice boy who would be the ordinary simple kind if it weren't for his music. And even there we can't agree, you see."

"I'm not clever—not the kind that can do clever things," said Ishmael.

"It's not the doing clever things that matters, I've come to the conclusion, though Val would think that

was heresy. Being things matters more, somehow. He knows all about music, and they say he's going to be the great English composer, and I only know that even a barrel-organ in the street has always made me feel what I used to call when I was small all 'live-y and love-y.'"

"There is nothing one can get drunk on like music and poetry," said Ishmael slowly. "Pictures one needs to understand before they can intoxicate, and prose can fill and satisfy you, but it's only the other two one can go mad on, and this—"

He pulled her to him, a hand beneath her chin, his other arm round her sturdy, soft little body, and she met his eyes bravely for a moment. Then hers closed, but he still paused before he kissed her.

"Georgie, are you sure?" he asked. "Have you thought over all the drawbacks?"

"Such as—?"

"My brothers ... even my son, who will have to come before any we may have.... I don't want any more bad blood over this heritage, Georgie! And I—I'm a good many years older than you—"

"And terribly sot in your ways, as Mrs. Penticost says ..." murmured Georgie. "Ishmael, aren't you going to ...?"

Then he did, and Georgie nestled close to him with a sigh of satisfaction. After a little while her indefatigable tongue began again.

"Ishmael, isn't it funny to think it might never have happened? Just suppose I had been actually married to Val instead of only sort of engaged.... I might have been, you know."

"If you didn't care about him," began Ishmael, then stopped, feeling he was a poor advocate of a simple and unmistakable method of loving.

"Well, it's very difficult for a girl," explained Georgie. "Even when I was getting fond of him I knew it wasn't what I'd imagined falling in love to be like, but I thought it might be all I could manage. You see, in real life, the second-best has such a disconcerting habit of coming along first. You know all the time that it is only the second-best, but you think to yourself, 'Suppose the first-best never comes along for me, and I have said No to this, then there'll be nothing but a third-best to fall back on.' That's why so many women marry just not the right man."

"And I—am I the first-best ...?" asked Ishmael in a low voice.

Georgie nodded.

"Ah!" she said; "you need never be jealous of poor Val. If anyone has anything to be jealous over, it's me—not that I'm going to be. After all, one can't be a man's first love and his last, and it's more important to be his last! What's the matter ...? You look funny, somehow...."

"Nothing," said Ishmael; "I was only thinking what a dear you are. You're so sporting about everything. And I—sometimes in the middle of being happy everything seems suddenly empty and stupid to me, and I dread your finding that out. Arid spaces.... I don't know how to explain it. They'll come even in my love for you."

Georgie nodded again, like a wise baby mandarin, as she sat there with her feet tucked up under her. She stared ahead, and slowly a change came over her face, a change like the suffusion of dawn. She caught his head to her and drew it to her breast.

"I've had nothing to make me tired yet, not like you. I almost want you to feel tired and sad and lost if it'll make you come to me, like this...." She stroked his hair gently, holding his head very lightly. He pressed it hard against her; he could feel her heart beating at his ear; he rubbed his cheek against her breast. "You make me feel like a child again," he said. "No one has ever done, that...."

"Do you know," said Georgie, still stroking rhythmically, "that every woman wants her husband to be four things—her lover, her comrade, her child, and her master? Did you know that?"

"No; I think I thought it was only the lover they cared about. I'm very ignorant, Georgie! Have I to be all that? D'you think I can?"

"Which of them do you doubt?" asked Georgie slyly.

"Sometimes the lover, sometimes the comrade, sometimes the child, and always the master, though I'll play at even that if you want me to. But the other three—I shall always be all of them underneath, even in the dry spaces."

Georgie slowly kissed his ruffled head, and then started to try and tie the longer hairs on the crown into tight knots. He twisted his head away and sat up, laughing. "If that's how you're going to treat me when I'm being your child," he threatened, "I'll—"

"You'll what?" asked Georgie.

Ishmael did precisely what every other lover in the world would have done in answer to that question at that moment. Later, when the sun had moved high and they scrambled up to go home, Georgie was the laughing child again; only for a second, as they stood on the ridge above and looked down to the silvery patch where the bright grass was flattened where they had lain, she wore the look that had transfigured her before.

In the early autumn Ishmael married, and a new phase began for him at Cloom. For the first years his precision of them held very true, except that, though they held more of deep and actual satisfaction than he had imagined, the moments of rapture were less glamorous.

Ishmael was one of those unlucky and rare people to whom everything has lost poignancy when it is occurring not for the first time. He knew how far dearer to him was Georgie than Blanche had ever been—how far more lovable she was. But his love had not the keenness, the exquisite sharpness, of the earlier love, because that first time had taken from him what in spite of himself he could not give again. If Georgie had left him he would not have suffered the agonies he had lived down after Blanche had gone.

In the same way he loved Georgie incomparably more than Phoebe, and between them passion was a deeper though not a sweeter thing; yet never again was he to feel the abandon that had delighted and finally satiated him with Phoebe. His relation towards any other human being could never now stretch from rim to rim of the world for him as had so nearly been the case when he loved Blanche. No one thing could seem to him to overtop all others as he had tried to make it in the first months with Phoebe.

As time went on there came about many measures of which he was as keen an advocate as he had been of school reform and the ballot, yet never did he recapture that first fine glow which had fired him at his entry into the world of men who worked at these things. He believed as time went on, more firmly, because more vitally, in God and the future of the soul than ever he had in his fervid schooldays, yet these beliefs aroused less enthusiasm of response within him.

He could still feel as strongly in body, soul or mind, but never did he have those flashing periods when all three are fused together in that one white passion of feeling which is the genius of youth. Always one of the three stood aloof, the jarring spectator in the trinity, and affected the quality of what the other two might feel. Life, as he went through its midway, seemed to him to disintegrate, not to move inevitably towards any one culmination of its varied pattern. When he had been young he lived by what might happen any golden to-morrow; now he lived by what did happen day by day.

BOOK IV

THE SHADOW OF THE SCYTHE

CHAPTER I

QUESTIONS OF VISION

"I am getting on, you know," said Nicky Ruan. "At twenty-two—nearly twenty-three—a fellow isn't as young as he was. And I don't want to stick here till I'm too old to enjoy seeing the world."

"What should you consider too old, Nicky?" asked Ishmael.

Nicky hesitated; he made a rapid calculation in his head, and arriving at the fact that his father must be quite forty-six or seven, and being always averse to hurting anyone's feelings unless it was very

worth while, he temporised.

"Oh, well! it depends on the fellow, doesn't it? I expect, for instance, you weren't nearly as old as me when you were my age, because you didn't go to the 'Varsity, and of course that makes a difference...."

Ishmael sat smoking and looking at the boy in silence. He felt he knew what the old Bible phrase meant when it spoke of yearning over a child. He felt the helpless desire to protect, to stand between this golden boy and all that must come to him, and he knew that not only can no one live for anyone else, but that youth would refuse the gift were it possible to make it.

Nicky, about whom he knew so little, about whom he realised he had always known so little.... What did he really know about Nicky's life, his doings up at Oxford, his thoughts? Roughly he was aware of his tastes, his habits at home, his affections; but of the other Nicky, the individual that stood towards life, not the boy who stood in his relation of son towards him, he knew nothing. Women, now ... what lay behind that smooth lean young face—what of knowledge about women? Ishmael had no means of telling. Whether Nicky were still as pure as his two little sisters, whether he had the technical purity that may for some time go with a certain amount of curiosity and corruption of the mind, whether he had already had his "adventures," or whether he were still too undeveloped, too immersed in sports and himself to have bothered about women, Ishmael could not really tell, any more than could any other parent.

The only thing in which Ishmael differed from the average parent was in acknowledging his ignorance to himself. But then Nicky had always had that curious intangible quality, that mental slipping-away from all grip, which had made it especially difficult ever really to know what his thoughts were and what he really knew. Not that there was any reserve about Nicky—he was not at all averse to talking freely about himself; but it seemed as though either there were in him a hollow where most people keep the root of self, or else that a very deep-seated personality held court there. Whichever it was, the effect was the same, the effect as of a sealed place.

Father and son sat looking at each other, and there was something inimical in the eyes of both. Nicky sat thinking: "Of course father's a brick in all sorts of ways, and there isn't anybody quite like him, but he doesn't understand. He never was young like me...." Thus Nicky, and saw no inconsistency with his statement of a minute earlier that his father had been so much younger than he at the same age. And Ishmael thought: "He has the only thing that matters in the world.... *And I was like that once....*" And almost, for a moment, hated him that he should have the youth which slipped so fast. The moment died, and with it his bitterness, merged in the pity of youth which welled up in him as he sat fronting Nicky's superb confidence, his health, his swelling appetite for life.

"But why Canada?" asked Ishmael at last, temporising in his turn.

"Because I'm sure it's the country of the future; you should hear Uncle Dan about it!... And of course he knows so many people there, so I should have introductions and all that. You know you believe in Uncle Dan!"

"Yes, I believe, as you call it, in your Uncle Dan's sincerity, if only because he's done so many inconsistent and apparently contradictory things in his life. But that doesn't make me see any real reason why you should go to Canada."

Nicky's bright face took on a sulky expression, he swung a foot, and his jaw stood out as it did when he was angry, thickening his whole aspect.

"Because, if you want to know, I'm not going to be content to spend my whole life in an obscure farm in Cornwall, as you've done!" he burst out. "There's the whole world to see and I want to see it. There's—oh, a thousand and one things to do and feel one could never get down here, things I want to do and feel. You can't understand."

That was true, and Ishmael knew it. What human being, he reflected, marooned as each of us is on the island of individuality, can understand another even when there is no barrier of a generation between, that barrier which only the element of sexual interest can overleap? There had been moments when he had wished that his destiny had not tied him quite so much, but on the whole he had loved that to which he was tied too dearly to resent it. He could see that Nicky thought his life had been very wasted; he allowed himself a little smile as he thought of what Cloom would have been like as a heritage for Nicky if he had not taken the view of his destiny that he had. What would Nicky's own position in life have been? Probably no better than that of his grandfather, old James Ruan. Ishmael laughed outright, much to Nicky's indignation, but when he spoke again his voice was gentler.

"I'll think it over," he promised, "and I'll write to your uncle and ask him what he thinks. I don't want

to clip your wings, Nicky, Heaven forbid! I mayn't always have enjoyed having my own flights so circumscribed, you know."

Into Nicky's generous young heart rushed a flood of sympathy on the instant. "It must have been rotten for you," he said eagerly. "I know the old Parson's always saying how splendid you've been about this place and all that; you mustn't think I don't realise."

Ishmael, aware that he had not really wished his flights to be wider, that his nature had been satisfied, as far as satisfaction lay in his power, by Cloom, by the soil which was the fabric of life to him, felt he was obtaining sympathy and approbation on false pretences—indeed, he had deliberately angled for them. They were too sweet to refuse, however come by. Nicky, the young and splendid, whom he loved so dearly in spite of—or could it be because of?—his elusiveness, did not so often warm his heart that he could spurn this. He crossed over to where Nicky sat on the edge of the table and allowed himself one of his rare caresses, slipping his arm about the boy's shoulders. "We'll see, Nicky!" he said.

At that moment there came a crash against the door, and it burst open to admit the two little girls, Vassilissa and Ruth. Vassilissa, always called Lissa, to avoid confusion when her aunt came to stay, was a slim, vivid-looking child, not pretty, but with a face that changed with every emotion and a pair of lovely grey eyes. Ruth was simpler, sweeter, more stolid; a bundle of fat and a mane of brown hair chiefly represented her personality at present. Lissa was twelve, and looked more, but Ruth seemed younger than her eleven years by reason of her shyness in company and her slow speech. Ishmael privately thought Lissa a very remarkable child, but something in him, some touch of the woman, made him in his heart of hearts love better the quiet little Ruth, who was apt to be dismissed as "stodgy." He frowned now as they both came tumbling in—Lissa with the sure bounds with which she seemed to take the world, Ruth with her usual heaviness. This room, the little one over the porch that had been Nicky's bedroom in his boyhood, was now supposed to be Ishmael's business room, and as such inviolate.

"Nicky! Nicky!" cried Lissa. "How late you are! And you know you promised for twelve o'clock, and we've been waiting for ages and ages!"

"Promised what?" asked Nicky.

"Oh, Nicky ...!" on a wail of disgust; "you don't mean to say you've forgotten! Why, only yesterday you promised that to-day if it was fine you'd take us out in your tandem. You know you did!"

"Oh, Lord! Well, I can't, anyway. I've got an engagement."

"Nicky!" Ruth joined in the wail, but it was Lissa who passed rapidly to passion, her face crimson and her eyes full of tears of rage.

"Then you're a pig, that's what you are—a perfect pig, and I hate you! You never do what you say you will now, and I think it's very caddish of you. It's all that beastly Oxford; you've never been the same since you went there. Mother says so too. She says it's made you a conceited young puppy; I heard her!"

"Lissa!" Ishmael's voice was very angry. "Never repeat what anyone has said about anyone else—never, never. Do you hear me?"

"I don't care, she did say it, so there!"

Nicky was crimson. He went to the door. "Then it's easy to see where you get your good manners from!" he retorted, and was gone before Ishmael could say anything to him. Lissa was still trembling with rage, and Ruth, who was rather a cry-baby, lifted up her voice and wept, partly because of the disappointment and partly because she could not bear people not to be what she called "all comfy together."

Georgie Ruan heard the noise and came in briskly. Ishmael made her a despairing gesture to remove the two children.

Georgie stood taking in the scene. She had altered in fourteen years more than either Ishmael, who was seldom away from her, or than she herself, had realised; for she had never been a beauty anxiously to watch the glass, and motherhood had absorbed her to the overshadowing of self. She had coarsened more than actually changed—her sturdy little figure had lost its liveness in solidity, her round face had thickened and the skin roughened. Her movements were as vigorous and her mouth as wonderful, though it was more lost in her face, but her small blue eyes were still bright. She still managed to keep her air of a great baby, and it went rather sweetly with her obvious matronliness. She swept like a whirlwind on the two little girls, scolding and coaxing in a breath. Lissa at once started to pour out her grievance about the faithless Nicky.

"He said he had an engagement," put in Ishmael, seeing Georgie's face harden.

"Oh, of course," she retorted, "and we can guess what it is...." She broke off as Ishmael made a warning sign towards the children. "Anyway, I think it's too bad of him to promise the children to take them out and then not to do it," she insisted. "That's the third time he's done that lately, and I know how they were looking forward to it. They came home from school half an hour earlier on purpose."

Lissa and Ruth went to a small private school, whose scholars only consisted of the half-dozen children of the local gentry, and which was held at the village. It was called "school," and Lissa and Ruth felt very proud of going to it, but in reality it was no more than going out to a governess one shared with other girls instead of having a governess to oneself at home. Ruth ran to her father and clung to his knee heavily; he stroked her shock of brown hair and said: "Cheer up, little Piggy-widden"—which was his pet name for her, partly because she was the youngest and smallest of the family, partly because she was so fat, and in Cornwall the "piggy-widden" is the name for the smallest of the litter.

Lissa still stormed, but Georgie, with one of the sudden little gusts of temper to which she had always been liable, swept on to her and bade her be quiet at once and have a little self-control. She seized a child in each hand and whirled them out of the room with instructions to go to Nanny and have their faces washed. Then she came back to Ishmael and perched herself on the arm of his chair. She looked very young at the moment, for her attitude was of the Georgie of old days, and her round face was screwed up in an expression of mock-penitence as she ruffled his hair. She would have looked younger if the fashions had been kinder, but the beginning of the 'nineties was not a gracious period for women's dress. The sweep of the crinoline, the piquancy of the fluted draperies and deliciously absurd bustle, had alike been lost; in their stead reigned serge and cloth gowns that buttoned rigidly and had high stiff little collars. Braid meandered over Georgie's chest on either side of the buttons, and her pretty round neck was hidden and her cheeks made to seem coarse by the stiff collar, while her plump arms looked as though stuck on like those of a doll in their sleeves of black cloth which contrasted with the bodice and skirt of fawn-coloured serge. Her straight fringe that had had the merit of suiting her face was now frizzed, while the rest of her hair was twisted into what was known as a "tea-pot handle" at the back of her head.

Ishmael let her pull his head against the scratchy curves of braid, but he was preoccupied and kept up a tattoo on the writing-table with a paper-knife. There had been so many of these scenes since Nicky had been growing up; Georgie had changed towards the boy ever since her own children had been born. She was never unfair to him, but she seemed as though always on the watch. He must not come near the babies with his dirty boots on, must stay where he had been before he came near them at all, for fear he had wandered where she considered there might be infection. His dogs had come under the same ban, and one way and another she had gone the right way to sicken Nicky of his little sisters if he had not been both sweet-natured and rather impervious. Ishmael had sometimes resented all this on Nicky's behalf, and then Georgie had accused him of loving his son the most. Of course, she knew the others were "only girls," and therefore she supposed of no interest to a farmer.... Scenes such as this would end in penitence on her part and a weary forgiveness on Ishmael's. He loved Georgie and all his children deeply—perhaps his children meant something more to him—but he never could quite do away with the feeling that there was something rather absurd about the father of a family....

"What were you going to say about Nicky when I stopped you?" he asked.

"Where is it he goes? Is it anywhere in particular?"

"I thought you knew," said Georgie slowly, "though I might have known you didn't; you never see anything, which may be very beautiful, but, believe me, can be very trying to a poor female! If you really want to know, he goes over to Penzance in his tandem every early-closing day to take out Miss Polly Behenna—from Behenna the draper's in Market Jew Street."

"Good Lord! ... there's nothing in it, is there?"

"I shouldn't think so; but you know how silly it is in a place like this ... and she's a very pretty girl, and oh, so dreadfully genteel!"

"That'll save him, then! Dairymaids are far more dangerous. But, as you say, it doesn't do.... I think there's something in the Canadian plan," he added to himself. He took up the lists of accounts he had been busy on when first interrupted by Nicky and began to examine them. He had to hold them far away from his eyes and even then to pucker up his lids before he could quite make them out. Georgie watched him.

"You know, Ishmael, you want specs," she said suddenly. "I'm sure of it! I've been watching you for ages and you never seem able to take in anything unless it's a mile off. And all your headaches, too...."

Ishmael thought angrily: "Is there anything women won't say outright? Can't she see I've been sick with terror about my eyes for months, and that's why I haven't done anything about it?" Aloud he only said gruffly: "I'm all right!"

"But you aren't!" persisted Georgie. "What's the good of saying you are when you aren't?"

"Well, if you like I'll go and see an oculist next time I go to Plymouth," promised Ishmael. "Will that do you?"

"I like that. It's not for me. I only said," began Georgie indignantly; but he pulled her head to him and held it there a moment before kissing her.

"Run away, there's a dear!" he said. "Eyes or no eyes, I've got to get this done, and you know you can't add two and two, so it's no good saying you'll stay and help."

"I can make two and two make five, which is the whole art of life," retorted Georgie, laughing. "But as there's the dinner to order, and as you could no more do that than I could see to the accounts, I'll go." She bent over him, and wickedly parted his hair away from a thin patch that was coming on the crown of his head before kissing him full upon it.

When she was gone Ishmael let the accounts lie untouched before him, and, getting up, he crossed to the window and stood looking out. He heard the sound of wheels and hoofs coming along the lane at the side of the garden wall, and the next moment saw the head of Nicky's leader, apparently protesting violently, come beyond the angle of the wall. Nicky was evidently trying to turn it in the direction of the main road, but the leader had other views, and gave expression to them by sitting down suddenly on his haunches, with his white-stockinged forelegs struck straight out, his fiddle-head, with the white blaze between his wicked eyes, looking round over his shoulder at the invisible Nicky, whose remarks came floating up to Ishmael on the breeze. Finally the leader was made to see the error of his ways, and the light dog-cart swung round the corner, and with a flourish of the whip and a clatter and a heart-catching swerve round the angle of the hedge Nicky's tandem bore him swiftly down the road towards where the telegraph wires told of the way which led to Miss Polly Behenna.

Ishmael watched as long as the cart was in sight, taking pride and comfort in the fact that his eyes could see the minutest detail as far as the turn on to the high-road; then he came back into the room, and with a smile and a sigh took up the accounts. Some absurd little thing within him made him determine that he would not take to spectacles till Nicky had gone to Canada and could not remark on them.

CHAPTER II

AUTUMN

A few evenings later Ishmael went out alone on to the moors, filled with very different ideas from any that had held him of late. Not the petty friction of domesticity, nor the pervading thought of that queer feeling in his eyes, nor care for Nicky's future, or anything of the present, stirred within him. A letter received by Georgie that day, and the thought and realisation of which Ishmael had carried about with him through all his varied work, now swamped his mind in memories so vivid that the present was only in his mind as a faint bitter flavour hardly to be noticed.

Judy had written to Georgie, had written to say she was coming down some time soon, but primarily the letter had been to give news of Killigrew. Ishmael and Georgie knew—exactly how they could not have told—in what relationship Judith and Killigrew had stood to each other; Ishmael felt he had known ever since that evening when he met Judy in Paradise Lane, and to Georgie the certainty had come with greater knowledge of life and realisation of herself. They had hardly mentioned the affair to each other, and then only in a round-about manner, but each guessed at the other's knowledge. Georgie was aware that for some years now Judith had seen very little of Killigrew, but how or why the severance had come about neither she nor Ishmael could guess. Judith had never mentioned Killigrew to them except as a mutual friend; she always had the strength of her own sins. Never till this letter had she spoken or written otherwise, but now she told that Killigrew was very ill in Paris and that she had gone to him. Very ill was practically all she said, beyond a mere mention that the illness was typhoid; but Ishmael knew at once what she meant, though she either would not or could not write it. Through all Georgie's

comments and hopes that soon better news would come he never doubted, though he said little, that Killigrew was dying, if not already dead, when Judith wrote. He knew her well enough, and guessed at her still more acutely, to know that she was quite capable of so much of reticence. And why did she speak so confidently of coming down to Cloom some time quite soon? She would not leave Paris while Joe was still unwell.... Ishmael knew, with the sureness he had once or twice before known things in his life, and the knowledge affected him strangely. He felt no violent grief, but a great blank. He had not seen Killigrew for years; but with the knowledge that he was to see him no more went something of himself—something that had belonged to Killigrew alone and that had responded to something in him which henceforth would be sealed and dead. He kept himself busy all day, but now he walked fast along the road, only accompanied by his thoughts.

The first hint of autumn was in the air that evening. The bracken had begun to turn, and its hue was intensified by the russet warmth of the evening sunlight, that touched each frond with fire, burnished the granite boulders, and turned the purple of the heather to a warm ruddiness. As Ishmael went along the hard pale road a hare, chased by a greyhound belonging to a couple of miners, came thudding down it, and the light turned its dim fur to bronze. It flashed past over a low wall, and was happily lost in the confusion of furze and bracken over an old mine-shaft. Ishmael felt a moment's gladness for its escape; then he went on, and, soon leaving the road, he struck out over the moor.

On he went till he came to a disused china-clay pit, showing pale flanks in the curve of the moor. A ruined shaft stood at the head, the last of the sunset glowing through its empty window-sockets; an owl called tremulously, the sheep answered their lambs from the dim moor. A round pearl-pale moon swung in the east, level with the westering sun; as he sank she rose, till the twilight suddenly wrapped the air in a soft blue that was half a shadow, half a lighting. The last of the warm glow had gone; only the acres of feathery bents still held a pinkish warmth in their bleached masses.

Ishmael sat upon the dry grass, where the tiny yellow stars of the creeping potentilla gleamed up at him through the soft dusk, and lay almost too idle for thought.

He wondered both why he did not feel more, and why he was feeling so much. If Killigrew had died when they were both young, Ishmael would have felt a more passionate grief—an emptiness, a resentment that never again would he see and talk with him; but part of himself would not have died too. As he lay, there suddenly came into his mind the first two occasions on which he had heard of deaths that affected him at all intimately—the deaths of Polkinghorne and of Hilaria. Of both he had heard from Killigrew, he remembered. Polkinghorne—that news could not have been said actually to have grieved either of them, but it had been the first time in Ishmael's life that even the thought of death as a possible happening had occurred to him. Hilaria—a sense of outrage had been added to that; it was not her death that taught him anything beyond the mere commonplace that death can be a boon, but the news of her illness, that illness which unseen had been upon her even in the days when they had tramped the moors together and she had read to an enthralled ring of boys the breathless instalments of "The Woman in White." It had been the first time he had recognised that fear and horror lie in wait along the path of life, that not naturally can we ever leave it, that sooner or later illness or accident must inevitably make an end. Even with his passionate distaste for the mere idea of death, this recognition would not have hit him so hard, if it had not been that the fact of Hilaria's youth, of her having been, as he phrased it, "Just like anyone else, just like I am ..." had shown him that not only for strangers, for people who are mere names in newspapers, do the hard things of life lie in wait. There was always this something waiting to spring—that might or might not show teeth and claws any time in life, that did not, in the form of an out-of-the-ordinary fate such as Hilaria's, often touch even on the fringe of knowledge, but that nevertheless was shown to be possible. That was the rub, that was what he had been aware of ever since. Life was not a simple going-forward, lit by splendid things, marked maybe by the usual happenings such as the death of parents, and even friends; but it could hold such grim things as this.... Once one had seen what tricks life could play there was no trusting it in quite the same way again. That such happenings should be possible would have seemed incredible till the realisation of Hilaria drove it home. Of no use to say that these things were the exception. They could still happen.

And now Killigrew—before his natural time, though not so violently as had been the case with the other two old playmates. Killigrew had lived his life very thoroughly, though he had always loved not well but too wisely. Sitting there on the lonely moor amid the ruined china-clay works, with only the sounds of bird and beast breaking the still air, Ishmael seemed to himself as though suspended in a state that was neither space nor time, when independent of either he could roam the past as the present, and even the future as well. It was as though time were cut out of one long endless piece as he had often imagined it as a little boy, when he had been puzzled that it was not as easy to see forwards as backwards, and been pricked by the feeling that it was merely a forgotten faculty which at any moment hard straining, if only it lit on the right way, could regain. For the first time for many years he had a glimpse of the pattern of life instead of only the intricacies, seemingly without form, of each

phase. Killigrew and, in a much less degree—but, as he now saw, hardly less keenly—Hilaria, had both so affected the web of his life, not in action, but in thought, that without them he would either have learnt different lessons or the same lessons quite differently. Even Judith, Carminow, and all the rest of the people who had impinged in greater or less degree, went to make the pattern, though not always, as with Killigrew, Hilaria, and Polkinghorne, could he see any one definite thing that they had been the means of making clear to his groping vision. For we cannot know people with even the lightest degree of intimacy without both taking from them and giving to them. Externally it may be only two or three people in life who have had the influencing of it, but each casual encounter has helped to prepare us for those people.

What Ishmael felt in regard to Killigrew at the present moment—and rightly felt, for, as he found out later, on the day the letter arrived at Cloom Killigrew had died—left a blank in his life, but more it brought home to him that, the meridian once passed, blanks were things that would increase. Children grew up, but they grew away; grandchildren would be a stay, but one must be content to be a background for them. This falling away, step by step, through life was, he saw, part of its ordered procession. And he saw too, with a deadly sureness there was no evading, that this thing he knew of Killigrew stood for another knowledge to him as well, a knowledge he had been fighting and to which he still refused to accede. The knowledge that physical decay had to be, that for him it had begun. He was still a young man as men count youth nowadays, but he knew the difference between that and the tingle of the rising sap of real youth. It was not Killigrew's death he mourned so much as the death of that self who had been Killigrew's friend.

Long now he had been accustomed to the greater sense of proportion in things mental and emotional which amounts to a greyer level of feeling; he had lived on those not unsweet flats for years. But only lately had the physical messages been flashing along to him down his nerves and muscles, and he resented them far more bitterly than anything mental or spiritual. His eyes—it might be they merely needed spectacles for close work; but he resented that almost as fiercely as the fear about them which sometimes assailed him when the pain was bad and his lids pricked and were sore—the waning capacity to stand long strain and fatigue, the waning power of physical reaction altogether.... Lately his cold bath had meant a half-hour's shivering for him instead of the instantaneous glow which showed perfect bodily response. He was a strong, healthy man who had led a healthy life, but all the same he was not the man he had been, and this night he acknowledged it. To this he had come, to this everyone must come; as a commonplace he supposed he had always known that, if he had been asked about it—even as a boy he would have agreed to that, but with the inward thought: "Not to me ... it can't...." To Nicky too it would come, though Nicky would have laughed the idea to scorn as so far off as not to be worth troubling about. Yet how quickly it came ... how terribly quickly! Life seemed to Ishmael to be a shining ribbon that was always being pulled through the fingers, inexorably fast, cling as they might.

Ishmael lifted his eyes and stared out over the darkening moor, and his attention was caught by a flicker upon the western horizon. The last line of light from the sun's setting still lingered there, so that at first it was not easy to disengage from it that flicker of brighter light which seemed vague as a candle flame in daytime. A few minutes made certainty, however, and Ishmael stared at the gathering flicker and wondered whether it were a serious fire or mere swaling. It gathered in a rose of flame that gradually lit the horizon and burnt so steadily that he knew no swaling could account for it, and, standing up, he took his bearings and decided that it must be either Farmer Angwin's buildings or ricks ablaze. Angwin was a shiftless fellow, gentle and meek, who was wont to bewail his ill-luck; here was another slice of it for him, poor man! Ishmael was too far from home to return quickly for a trap, and it would take time to put the horse in. Suddenly he decided he would make the run on foot across country, as he often had as a boy on seeing that ominous but thrilling glow gathering in the sky. He got to his feet, nimbly enough if not with suppleness; as he did so he felt a twinge in his thigh such as it had been subject to ever since a bad attack of rheumatism the winter before. He stood a moment watching the rising glow, then stretched himself. Unconsciously he was asking of limbs and muscles as to their fitness; as he drew in deep breaths of the soft air and let the tautened sinews relax again there was no alien note in the symphony of his being—all felt as sound and strong as ever; now he was standing the twinge did not bother him—he told himself that in every inch of him he was still the man he was. Yet he knew he no longer felt the twang of some divine-strung cord within that had been wont to thrill and inform the whole.

Quite suddenly, as he stood, there came to him the idea to try and see whether by physical abandon he could recapture the old frenzy, whether to the bidding of violent exercise and healthy exhaustion, to the joy of feeling covered with sweat and earth, a mere glowing animal who feels and does not think, something of what he had lost would come back to him if only for an hour.

CHAPTER III

BODIES OF FIRE

The dusk was deepening rapidly, that glow brightened every minute; Ishmael began to run. He ran on and on—it seemed to him effortlessly—and with a tingling glow rising in him that made him feel alive as he had not for long. On and on, straight as keeping that glow ahead could make his course, over the hedges, damp and clinging with dew, scattering its drops, breaking the clinging grass stems and the tangled weeds. At each wall he felt the old upleaping of power as he took it, hurling himself over cleanly in the darkness, delightfully regardless of what might be on the other side. Down marshy fields that sucked at his feet, through the pools that splashed up into his heated face, over the clumps of long grass that grew between the tiny rivulets and swayed beneath his step and would have given way with him had he not always leapt on in time with the sure-footedness of long custom. On up long dry slopes, where he ran slowly but easily, conscious of his own ease, though he could hear his deep-drawn breaths. Through patches of moorland where the bracken clung about him or the furze pricked his legs, as he was subconsciously aware without really noticing it. Once he came vaulting over a granite wall, to find himself almost on top of a blood-bull, with a ring in his nose and a curly fringe on his forehead that showed clearly in the rising moonlight. Ishmael could see, too, his wet glistening nose and dark eyes. The bull stayed still staring in astonishment, and Ishmael hit his flank gaily in passing and ran on, down a marshy bottom, over another wall and up the next slope. The glow was brighter now because he was so much nearer, but in reality it had subsided somewhat—its first fierce spurt had burnt itself out. Ishmael began to go less easily—his breath rasped a little; but his sensations were all pleasant—the pounding blood in his whole body ran sweetly, he tingled with a glow that was enjoyable beyond anything he could have imagined. He knew he must be in a deplorable condition; he could feel the sweat running down his forehead into his eyes and his shirt clinging to his body under his light coat. Up to the knees he was soaking wet, and splashed with mud higher still; his clothes were torn by the brambles, and so were his hands and face. He felt happy—happy, in spite of the news that had come to him. At that moment his run seemed to him to hold an epic quality—the physical aspect of things; the health and strength he felt coursing through him, the delightful exhaustion that he knew would follow so healthily and naturally, seemed the most important things in the world. Let all else go but this....

He slowed up to a walk as he came to Angwin's farm, passed through the dark yard, and through the gates into a field next the rickyard. It was full of folk crowded in from all the countryside. The engine from Penzance had come and was puffing and panting by the pond, sucking up water with stertorous breaths; at every gasp it rocked with its own intensity upon its wheels as it stood, sending out a pulsing shower of sparks over the muddy water.

Seven ricks had blazed that night, and still smouldered sullenly. The great grey hose played upon them; the water hissing upon the hot straw and hay, sending up clouds of steam, tinged to a fiery pallor against the moonlit night. The walls, not only of the rickyard, but of the surrounding fields were warm to the touch, for the dry furze growing along them had caught fire from the blowing sparks, so that at one time the fields had been outlined with fire. Now the furze had smouldered and died, but the smooth granite slabs were still hot to the hand, an unnatural warmth that seemed malign in those dewy fields.

Now the ricks burnt less and less fiercely; Ishmael gave a hand with the other helpers, but there was really nothing to be done. Luckily, as it was still warm weather, the livestock had all been out in the fields, so there had been no panic even when one end of the cowshed caught fire. That had been put out and the walls of the barns and out-buildings drenched again and again, and everyone was trying to comfort Johnny Angwin with pointing out how much worse it might have been.

Leaning over the low warm wall between the ricks and the next field, Ishmael recognised a couple of the artists who of late years had settled in those parts, and he caught their comments along with those of their neighbours.

"What a glorious sight!" said one of them, with a deep-drawn breath; "I've never seen anything to touch it...." A couple of farmers' wives standing by peered curiously at the speaker and his companion. "Simme them folk must be lacken' their senses," said one to the other, "carlen' a sight like this bewtiful! Lacken' their senses, sure 'nough!"

Ishmael smiled to himself, and in his mind agreed with both. "I wonder how it happened?" piped up another artist, anxious to remove a false impression of callousness. Ishmael explained that spontaneous combustion was probably the cause of the fire, and a farmer standing near volunteered his opinion that Angwin had packed his hay damp. Everyone stood a while longer, staring; the glow had gone from the smouldering ricks, and the excitement of the event began to die in the minds of the onlookers. The

artist straightened himself and prepared to go. "They're out now," he said, half-regretfully, half-cheerfully. The farmer near him spoke again. "Them ricks won't be out for days and nights," he said; "they'll go on burning in their hearts. They'm naught but a body o' fire, that's what they are ... a body o' fire...."

Ishmael stayed to see Angwin and do what he could to help; then he began his walk home. He was not running now, but aware of a physical discomfort that was not mere exhaustion. He had a sharp pain in his side such as children call a stitch, but no amount of stooping to tie imaginary shoelaces would drive it away. He was glad to accept the offer of a lift home when he was overtaken by a farmer's cart, and as he was jogged along the pain grew fiercer. By the time he reached Cloom the splendid fire that had warmed him on his run had died to nothingness, and at his ashen look Georgie cried out. He allowed her to help him to bed and give him hot drinks, to scold him in her woman's way.

"Such a foolish thing to do at your age ... you might have known!" she kept on repeating. He said little, but in his own mind ran the refrain: "She doesn't understand. She's still too young...." He wondered whether women ever really did know when talking was a mere foolishness, however sensible the thing said. And again, over and over to himself, as an accompaniment even to his pain, ran: "How well worth it ...!" For he had recaptured for a magic couple of hours something he had thought left behind him, had burned with it ardently and secretly. He too had been a body of fire.

The phrase stayed, pricking at him, through the drifting veils of sleep that alternately deepened and thinned about him all night long.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW JUDITH

For a long time Ishmael paid the price of that night raid upon his physical resources, and when he was beginning to take up work again, as usual, Nicky was off to Canada—off with the latest thing in outfits, letters of introduction, high hopes, and such excitement at thought of the new world at his feet that only at the last moment did the sorrow that because of the uncertainty of life all leave takings hold, strike him. Then—for he was a very affectionate boy—he felt tears of which he was deeply ashamed burning in his eyes; he ignored them, made his farewells briefer, and was gone.

A few days later Judith came down to pay her promised visit. Both Ishmael and Georgie drove over to meet her train, and both failed for the first startled moment to recognise her. Ishmael had an incongruous flash, during which that occasion years earlier when he had seen her and Georgie walking down that same platform towards him was the more vivid actuality.

Judith's epicene thinness had become gaunt, but it was not that so much as the colouring of her face and the fact that she was wearing pince-nez that made her an absolutely different being. This was the third time in her life that Judy was coming down to the West. Once it had been as a very young girl, full of dreams and questionings; once it had been as a woman who had already learned something of proportion; now it was as this elderly and alien person whom her friends could not connect with the Judith they had known. Not till they saw the beam of her eyes, as profound but somehow less sad than the eyes of the girl had been, did they feel it was the same Judy. The exaggerated colour on her face, the white powder and overdone rouge, embarrassed them both. Judy saw it and laughed, and when they were in the waggonette and driving along the road she said: "You're thinking how horribly I'm made up! I can't help it. I began it and I found I couldn't leave off, and that's the truth. And of course my eye for effect has got out. But I don't think I'm generally as bad as this. It comes of having done myself up in the train."

"But, Judy—why?" asked Georgie. She was very shocked, for in those days only actresses and women no better than they should be made up their faces.

"Because I began it so as to keep looking young as long as I could, and now I no longer care about keeping young-looking I can't drop it. That's the worst of lots of habits which one starts for some one reason. The reason for it dies and the habit doesn't. I know I overdo it, but it's no good my telling myself so. And it doesn't matter much, after all."

"No," agreed Georgie, brightening; "after all, one loves ones friends just as much if they have mottled

skins or a red nose in a cold wind or a shiny forehead, so why shouldn't one love them just as much when they have too much pink and white on? It looks much nicer than too little."

They both laughed and felt more like the Georgie and Judy of old days—more so than they were to again. As the days went on Georgie, whom marriage had taken completely away from the old artistic set, found herself feeling that after all she was a married woman and Judy was still only Miss Parminter.... Judy, scenting this, told her flippantly that a miss was as good as a mother, and Georgie laughed, but warned her to remember the children were in the room.... Judy was inclined to be hurt by the needless reminder, and, as she considered it foolish to be hurt and still more foolish to show it, she went out.

She found Ishmael reading in the rock garden that had been made by the stream, which ran along the dip below the house where once had been rough moorland. Now there were slopes of smooth, vividly green grass and grey boulders, among which they ran up like green pools; great clusters of brilliant rock flowers grew in bright patches over their smooth flanks. Judy sat down beside Ishmael, who closed his book.

"So you wear those?" she asked, pointing to his glasses, which he had taken off and was slipping into their case.

"Yes, I went to the oculist at Plymouth when I went up to see Nicky off. He said I had splendid sight, but wanted them for close work. I didn't know you had to wear them."

"I've known for years and years that I ought. I ought to have as a girl. I went once to an oculist, who told me if I wore them till I was forty I could then throw them away. I thought it was so like a man. I preferred to do without till forty and wear them the rest of my life."

"But haven't you injured your eyes?"

"Probably."

"It isn't all as simple as oculists think," said Ishmael, with that intuition which is generally called feminine and which had been all his life his only spark of genius. Judy looked and smiled her old smile, which charmed as much as ever even on her too-red lips.

"No," she agreed. "I remember once, after going to that oculist, I tried to wear glasses one night when I was going out with Joe. That decided me."

"What happened?"

"I was staying in lodgings at the time, in London. It was the first year I knew how I felt for him. You know about that—that I did? Yes? I was sure you did. Well, he came to take me out to dinner. The lodgings were rather horrible, though even they couldn't spoil things for me. And I was dressing in my room when he came. The sitting-room joined on to it by folding doors. I called out to him I was still dressing, but as a matter of fact I was trying to screw myself up to put the beastly things on. I remember when I went in to him I kept the shady brim of my hat rather down over my face. The sitting-room was in darkness except for what light came in from the hall gas. He said, 'Are you ready? Been beautifying?' I said, 'No, exactly the reverse. I've got my glasses on. You know I told you I had to wear them sometimes.'" Judy broke off, then went on, looking away from Ishmael.

"He said, 'Oh, Lord, take 'em off! Here, let me have a look!' He swung me round, with his hands on my shoulders, into the light from the hall gas, and I met his look. 'They might be worse, I suppose, but for goodness' sake take them off!' he said; 'you don't have to wear them, you know!' I said nothing, but broke away and went down the steps. He came after me and continued to look in the street. 'I say, you look just like your mother in them!' he went on. That was the cruellest thing he could have said, because he knew my mother ... he only did it because he did not think I really had to wear them, and he thought it would make me leave off. I told him what the oculist had said, and he said he would call on me again after I was forty. I pretended to laugh, but I was feeling like death. Later on I slipped them off, and he had the tact not to say anything when he saw what I had done. I never wore them again with him, and went over the world unable to see the things he was raving about, and having perpetually to pretend that I did and guess at the right thing to say. Now—it doesn't matter. I prefer wearing them to having blinding headaches."

"It was pretty rotten of him to let it make a difference," said Ishmael.

"No, I understand what he felt so well. I knew it myself. There is always something ridiculous about making love to a woman in glasses. It destroys atmosphere. If you're married, and either you're so one

with the man that he really does love you through everything or else is so dull that he doesn't feel their ugliness, it wouldn't make a difference. But I was not married—he had not the married temperament. And you must admit that it is impossible to imagine a mistress in glasses...."

"Don't!" said Ishmael sharply.

"Don't what? Did you think I was speaking bitterly? I wasn't. There isn't a scrap of bitterness in me, I'm thankful to say. I couldn't have lived if there had been. I saw that almost at the beginning, as I did about jealousy. If you have much to be bitter and jealous about, you can't be; it would kill you. It's only the people who can indulge in a little of it who dare to. I have not been unhappy for the most part, and I wouldn't undo it, which is the great thing. You knew I had given up having times away with him years ago?"

"Yes, I wondered why."

"The thing had somehow lost something ... what is lost in marriage just the same—rapture, glow, fragrance.... And in marriage, with luck, something else comes to take its place ... domesticity, which is very sweet to a woman. Looking after him instead of being looked after—a deep quiet something. You and Georgie are getting it. But in a relation outside marriage you can't get that. You can in those extraordinary *ménages* in France where the little mistress is so domesticated and lives with her lover for years, but that would have been as bad to him as marriage. So I thought it was best to let it all come to an end. It wasn't easy, for though I had got so that it was torture to be with him, because all the time I was feeling our dead selves between us, yet directly I was away I knew that, even though he was the man he was and I the me I had become, we were still nearer to what had been than anything else could be. But I did it. It was only when he was dying I went to Paris to him."

"And that...?"

"Oh, it was quite a success. I don't mean to be brutal, but it was. He was glad to have me, and showed it.... A deathbed is so terribly egoistic; it can't be helped, but he forgot himself more than ever before. I was touched profoundly, but all the time I saw that he was rising to the occasion without knowing it himself. Not that he was emotional; he was never that. But he showed me something deeper than he ever had before. With all his passion he was always so English, always so much the critic, in spite of his powers of enjoyment. He had always made love in caresses, never in words. Till this last time, as he was dying."

Judy was speaking in a quiet voice that sounded as though all her tears had been shed, yet they were pouring down her face, making havoc of the paint and powder, of which she was quite aware and for which she cared not at all. Ishmael thought she had never shown her triumphant naturalness, her stark candour, more finely. As on that evening when he had met her in Paradise Lane, he was conscious that they understood each other almost as well as anyone ever can understand any other human being, because they were in some respects so alike. Something quiet and incurably reserved in him—he could never have talked as bravely as she did—yet was the same as the quality in her that enabled her to bear her secret relations with Killigrew, that had enabled her to break those relations off when she thought it best. And now she seemed to have won through to some calm, he wondered what it was and how she had come to it....

"What you said about marriage," he said at last, "struck me rather. It's true. One loses something, but one finds something."

"Marriage, even the most idealistic of marriages, must blunt the edges to a certain extent," said Judy. "You may call it growing into a saner, more wholesome, view of life, or you may call it a blunting of the edges—the fact is the same. Marriage is a terribly clumsy institution, but it's the most possible way this old world has evolved. It always comes back to it after brave but fated sallies into other paths."

"Such as yours?" asked Ishmael. It was impossible to pretend to fence with honesty such as hers.

"No, not such as mine, because I cannot say I did it for any exalted reason, such as wishing to reform the world. I had no splendid ideas on mutual freedom or anything like that. I did it simply because I loved Joe and it was the only way I could have him without making him tired of me and unhappy. It had to be secret, not only because the sordidness of wagging tongues would have spoilt it so, but because my life would have been so unbearable in the world. A woman's sin is always blamed so heavily. That's a commonplace, isn't it? Yet a woman's sin should be the more forgivable. She sins because it is *the* man; he sins because it is *a* woman."

"Sin!" said Ishmael. "Don't you get to that point in life when the word 'sin' becomes extraordinarily meaningless, like the word 'time' in that chapter of Ecclesiastes where it occurs so often that when one comes to the end of the chapter 't-i-m-e' means nothing to one. Sin seems to come so often in life it

grows meaningless too."

"Sin, technically speaking, does, to all but the theologian; but playing the game, doing the decent thing, not only to others, but to oneself, and keeping one's spiritual taste unspoiled, these things remain, and they really mean the same."

"I suppose they do. I like talking to you, Judy. It's not like talking to a woman, although one's conscious all the time that you are very much of a woman. But you seem to meet one on common ground."

"There's not so much difference between men and women as people are apt to think. People are always saying 'men are more this and women are more that' when really it's the case of the individual, irrespective of sex. A favourite cry is that men are more selfish. I really rather doubt it. Perhaps, if one must generalise, men are more selfish and women are more egotistical, and of the two the former is the easier vice to overcome. But all this talk of men and women, women and men, seems to me like something I was in the middle of years ago, and that now means nothing."

"What does mean anything to you now?"

"I'm not quite sure I can tell you yet," said Judy slowly; "and I don't think it would be any good to you—there'd be too much against it. What does mean anything to you, personally?"

"I don't know.... I only know that for real youth again, for perfect ease of body, I would give everything short of my immortal soul."

"Ah! then you still feel the soul's the most important?"

"Part of me does—the part of me that responds to the truth, which is going on all the time, with us if we like, without us if not, but which is surely there. It's because I know it's there, even though my longings are out of key with it, that I still say that about the soul."

They went up into the house, and that night Georgie, whether because some feminine jealousy that he talked so much with Judy was stinging at her, or whether because even without that spur she would have felt some old stirring of warmth, was sweeter to him than for long past. As he held her against him he was aware that it was not so much passion he felt as that deeper, sweeter something Judy had spoken of, and for the first time he felt free to savour it instead of half-resenting it as a loss of glamour.

This was a satisfying companionship he had of Georgie, a sweet thing without which life would have been emptier, even if it settled no problems and left untouched the lonely spaces which no human foot can range in their entirety, though in youth some one step may make them tremble throughout their shining floors.... It was good, though it was not the whole of life, and as he took it he gave thanks for the varied relationships in the world which added so to its richness, even if they could only impinge upon its outer edges.

CHAPTER V

THE PARSON'S PHILOSOPHY

That summer the Parson began to show signs of breaking up. Judith had been struck by the change in him when she came down, a change less plain to those who were seeing him often, but startlingly distinct to her who had not seen him for so long. She took up her friendship, that had begun on that evening when he had found her in the church, in the place where it had left off, and this was somewhat to the credit of both, since it transpired that during the past year Judy had been received into the Roman Catholic Church. Judith was quiet about her religion as she had been about her love. She had not accepted it in any spirit of there being nothing else left for her now in life, as the vulgar-natured would have supposed had they known her history; neither was it because, most frequent accusation of the ignorant, it appealed to the sensuous side of her. For ritual she cared as little as the Parson, and by preference she always went to low Mass instead of to a high Mass. She had found something that for her had been hitherto hidden, and Boase saw it and was glad. It was noteworthy that it was to him and not to Ishmael she spoke of it. Georgie, with all her dearness, was almost too prosperous to understand. Judy radiated an inner joy that Ishmael had not attained and that Georgie had never felt the need of. That joy had not been won until her feet had trod stranger ways than her friends at Cloom ever

imagined. Often she was seized by a pang of conscience that they should admire her as a creature above everything honest and courageous ... for there was more to know of her now than her relation with Killigrew. She knew how the single-heartedness of that had absolved her in their eyes; but for what it had plunged her in they would have had less comprehension. For it was not in a nature so essentially womanly as Judith's to be content with sex-starvation once passion had been aroused in her, and the irony of it all was that she, who had not for several years awoken to stirred senses with the man she loved, was unable to stifle their urgency after she had left him.

From slight dalliance with first one man and then another, she had progressed to the greater intimacies, ashamed but unfighting. Till at last the pricking thing had begun to grow fainter and her will stronger and she was able to break away. She hid the truth and kept up the old tradition of having loved only once, partly because it was true she had not felt actual love again, but partly for vanity's sake....

It was not that she was vain of the romantic figure she seemed to her friends; it was a more deadly thing than that. She was vain of the quality of her past love. Too much had been made of it, and she would have been more than human had she succeeded altogether in escaping the temptation to visualise herself as the tragic survivor of a great passion. And to this had she come, although her love had been so real....

Ishmael never again during that visit felt quite the easy intimacy with Judy that he had touched that day by the stream, though as the next few years went on and her visits became a regular thing to look forward to there was built up between them a fabric of friendship that grew to be something unique to both. Those things which had happened to Judy had taught her every tolerance and sympathy.

They were not on the whole bad, those years that followed. Nicky, after writing more or less regularly, suddenly announced his intention of coming home again, and Ishmael was filled with a joy that no personal thing had had power to wake in him since the boy had gone. The thought of Nicky had seldom been far from him; always it was with the idea of Nicky in the forefront of his mind that he worked for Cloom. When he had first taken on the idea of Cloom as the central scheme of his life it had been for Cloom itself, or rather for the building up of an ideal Cloom which his father's conduct had shattered. Now he realised that if he had had no son to inherit after him his work would not have held the same deep significance for him, even though it was not with any conscious idea of a son that he had started on his task. Now, since Nicky's departure, he had begun to see how incomplete the whole scheme would have been without him, how incomplete it would still be if Nicky wanted to wander all his days, or if modernity and the new country over the sea should have come to mean more to him than the old. He knew by Nicky's letter that this was not so, and his heart sang within him. For days after the letter came a glamour that to his eyes the world had lost illuminated it once again.

The 'nineties, young and go-ahead as they felt to themselves, did not seem to Ishmael nearly as wonderful as the 'seventies, which had seen so much deeper changes. This world—in which people now moved so complacently talking of Ibsen and Wilde, of weird Yellow Books of which he heard from Judith, and many other things all designated as *fin-de-siècle*—he had seen it in the making. The very children growing up in his house, the plump little Ruth and the clever, impatient Lissa, they thought they knew so much more than he did because they had been born so much later; and so in a way they did, in as much as the younger generation always sees more truly because it has not had time to collect so many prejudices, but can come straight and fresh to setting right the problems of the world. But what Lissa and Ruth did not yet realise as he did was that the day would come when children born in the new century would look upon them with a gentle pity.

On the day the letter came from Nicky, nearly two years after he had gone away, Ishmael went over to see Boase and tell him the news. The Parson could not often get over to Cloom Manor now, but it was the highest tribute to him that not only Ishmael and Judy and Georgie, when she could spare the time, but the children too, considered a visit to the Parson in the light of a pleasure. Boase knew it and was glad—even his sturdy aloofness and self-reliance would have felt a pang at being called on for decency's sake.

Ishmael found Boase lying on the long chair in his study, that for him always held something, some smell or atmosphere of the mind, that carried him back to his childhood. He felt in the midst of the old days again at once, when he was not looking at Boase, who was grown very old, his once rather square face and blunt features having taken on a transparency of texture that was in itself ageing, while his hair, sparse about the big brow, was a creamy white like froth. Boase called to Ishmael, recognising his step, to take off his wet things in the hall, for it was raining hard, with that whole-hearted rain of the West which when it begins seems as though it could never stop again. That was a wet summer, when the stalks of the growing harvest were flattened to the earth and the corn sprouted green in the ear and the hay rotted on the ground before ever it could be carried. Ishmael had to be careful about

getting wet since that night when he had run to the burning of Angwin's ricks, and he did not scorn the Parson's offer of a pair of shabby old slippers that lurked under the hall chair for just such occasions as this.

It seemed to Ishmael that if he had not been feeling such a different being himself he might have been a little boy again and time never have moved on from the days when he lived here with the Parson and did his lessons in this room. Outside the shrubs bent before the rainy wind, as they had done so many times before his childish eyes; the scrap of lawn visible between them showed as sopping and as green; the fuchsia had grown bigger; but its purple and scarlet blossoms, so straightly pendant, each held a drop of clear water at the tip, as they had ever done in weather such as this. Within the room might be a little fuller, a little smaller, whether owing to the Parson's untidiness, with which the new housekeeper could not cope as well as had old Mrs. Tippet, long dead, or whether to the shrinking that takes place in rooms after childhood is passed, Ishmael could not have told. Three walls were still lined with dusty golden-brown books that he had been wont to describe as smelling of bad milk pudding, and the shabby green tablecloth was littered with sermon paper and more books just as it had been for his lessons. He almost expected to see Vassie's golden head, no more alien from him than his own boyish dark one, bending over it as he looked.

Boase held out a thin hand to him, laying down the book he had been reading, after slipping a marker in the place. Ishmael saw it was a new book from the library. "Robert Elsmere" was the name upon its cover.

"What good thing has happened?" asked Boase, watching Ishmael's face.

"Padre, you are too clever; if you had lived a few centuries earlier you would certainly have been burned alive! Nicky is coming home."

"That is splendid news! He has been away quite long enough to be good."

"For him?"

"No, for you. You are getting stodgy, Ishmael."

Ishmael laughed, but felt rather annoyed all the same.

"What is one to do? I am growing old."

"Nonsense! Have the decency to remember that compared with me you are a young man. Wait till you are close on eighty and then see how you feel about it."

Ishmael had a quick feeling that after all he was young compared with this frail, burning whiteness, yet it seemed to him that he could never be as old as that, that then indeed life could not be worth living. Aloud he said mechanically:

"You? You are always young."

"Age does not matter when you are really old; it is only the getting old that matters," said Boase; "it is like death. No one minds being dead; it's the dying that appals. But seriously, my dear boy, what really matters is to have the quality of youth. Don't lose that."

"I'm not sure I ever had it," said Ishmael slowly, sitting down by the long chair.

"Perhaps not. You were acutely young, which is not quite the same thing. Our friend Killigrew had the quality of youth. One can say of him that he died young. I think your Nicky has that quality too. That's why he'll be so good for you."

"What about the girls? Aren't they enough to save my soul alive?"

"Oh, well, girls are never quite the same thing. A father loves his daughters if anything more than his sons, but it's as a father and not as a fellow human. You know, I've seen a good deal of Judith this summer; she's always good at coming and talking to an old man, and what interests me about her is that she keeps so fluid. I mean that she never sticks where she was. I don't want you to either. You came in the days of Ruskin and Pater and of great men politically, but I don't want you to stick there. There's no merit in being right at one time in one's life if one sticks to that rightness after it has lost its significance. You know, a stopped clock is right twice every twenty-four hours, but it's a rightness without value. Keep fluid, Ishmael. It is the only youth."

"Is that why you're reading 'Robert Elsmere'?" asked Ishmael, with a smile.

"Exactly. I'm not going to change what feeds my soul daily for what is offered me between these

covers, but that's not the point. One can always discriminate, but one should always give oneself things to discriminate between."

There was a short silence, which the Parson broke. "I too have had a letter," he said, and there was something in his voice which made Ishmael aware of a portent beyond the ordinary. "From Archelaus ..." added Boase.

"From Archelaus?" echoed Ishmael. The name came upon him like the name of one dead, it seemed to him that when they spoke of Killigrew they touched more upon the living than when they mentioned Archelaus. "Why does he write?" he added; and his voice sounded harsh and dry even to his own ears, so that he felt a little shame at himself.

"He has met Nicky in Canada."

"I thought Archelaus had gone West in the States, if he were still alive at all. I was beginning to think something must have happened to him. No one has heard for so long. He took a funny idea into his head at one time to write to Georgie, whom he had never seen—queer letters, telling very little, full of sly remarks one couldn't get the rights of." Ishmael paused, waiting for the Parson to produce the letter and show it him, but Boase made no move. "It's funny Nicky never mentioned it," went on Ishmael with an odd little note that was almost jealousy in his voice....

"He says he did not tell Nicky who he was," said the Parson reluctantly. "I think there is more good in that queer, distorted creature than you think for, Ishmael. Seeing the boy seems to have roused him to old feelings of home.... He writes oddly, but in a strain that is not wholly base."

"I can't make out why he wants to write to you at all, Padre; he always hated you, blamed you so ... for the marriage and all that."

"There is not much accounting for the vagaries of a man like that. Your father thought to be ironic when he had you called Ishmael; he saw every man's hand against you—you the youngest and the one against so many. And you have made a strong, secure life for yourself and your children, and it is Archelaus who wanders...."

"Archelaus would always have wandered. He has it in his soul. Do you remember the day Killigrew was classifying men by whether they wandered or stayed at home? He was right about Archelaus then. Da Boase—you don't think I could have behaved any differently to him, do you? He wouldn't be friends. That time in the wood ... you know ... I always knew in my heart that he had hit out at me, though I was so afraid of really knowing it that I never spoke of it even to you. And then when he came home after my marriage to poor little Phoebe—he made the first advances, it's true, but I never felt happy about them, although he seemed so altered. I've reproached myself sometimes that I was glad when he went away after she died. I always hoped he wouldn't come back any more. What else could I do, Da Boase?"

"I too hope he will never come home any more," said the Parson slowly, "and yet ... if he does, try and remember, Ishmael ... not that he is your brother—that would not make things easier—but that he is not quite an ordinary man, that in him the old brutalities dormant in most of us have always been strong and that he has had nothing to counteract them. He is not quite as we are. If we cannot understand we should not judge."

Again a little silence fell. Then Ishmael said suddenly:

"What does feed your soul, Da Boase? I shouldn't have asked you that," he added swiftly. "Besides, I know. But though I know, and though I believe in it too, yet I can't yet find all I want in it."

Boase lay silent, looking out of the rainy window at the wash of green and pearly grey without. His hand caressed Ishmael's as though he had been a little boy again.

"That feeds my soul from which my soul came ..." he said slowly, "and daily the vision draws nearer to me and its reflection here strengthens even to my earthly eyes. This world is dear and sweet, but only because I know that it is not all, or even the most important part. Each day is the sweeter to me because each day I can say 'Come quickly, O Lord Jesus.' I do not need to say to you all that knowledge means."

The rain had blown away when Ishmael went home again, yet it seemed to him he went with a more anxious heart than that with which he had set out. Boase had seemed to him like someone who is almost gone already, whose frail envelope must soon be burned through, and it had come to him that no one could ever take his place. Killigrew he was missing as much now as when he died, because though he had not seen him so very often, yet Killigrew and he had each stood for something to the other that no one else could quite supply, and so his going had left a sense of loss that time did nothing

to fill. But with Boase it was more than that. There was something in Ishmael which Boase had fathered and which knew and recognised its spiritual paternity. His mind had taken much colour from Killigrew, but from Boase it had taken form. He felt that that afternoon in the stuffy study he had touched something he had almost forgotten, that had slipped rather out of his life for the past years, since Nicky had been growing up: a significance, a sense of some plan of which he had caught glimpses in his youth and had since forgotten.

As he went through the wet world it seemed to him as though he were once again the same Ishmael who had so often gone this way long years ago, when the soul behind life had still intrigued him more than the manifestations of life itself. Whether it was that that afternoon in the study had awakened with sharper poignancy than ever before the remembrance of his youth, that some aspect of the room, with its musty books, its fire and the driving rain without, had awakened in him a forgotten memory of a day that had once held actual place in his life but had long since been lost, awakened it through the mere material agencies of the sense of smell and sight: or whether the Parson had touched him in some atrophied cord that had rung more freely in days gone by, the effect was the same.

As he went it was as though time had ceased to exist, as though he caught some vision of the whole pattern as one rhythmic weaving, and not isolated bits disconnected with each other. The sensation mounted to his brain and told him that time itself was a mere fashion of thought, that he was walking in some period he could not place. He remembered the day when the Neck had been cried, and it had seemed to him that the moment was so acute it could never leave off being the present and slip into the past; he remembered the first day at St. Renny when he was staring at the sunbeam and feeling that that at least would go on spell-bound for ever; he remembered that moment when, on his return to Cloom, he had gone over the fields with John-James and, looking once more on the same field, had recalled that first moment, and smiled to see how it had slipped away and was gone. He had smiled without thinking that first moment akin to the second one in which he was, whereas now he saw how the one had led to the other and both to this ... and how they were all so much one that none seemed further off than another. The word "present" lost significance in such a oneness as this. It came to him that this sense of completeness, of inevitable pattern, was what the Parson felt, what enabled him to wait so tranquilly.

Ishmael mounted the long slope and stood looking down upon Cloom, and it seemed to him the fabric of a dream. So strong upon him was the sense of loss of the time-sense that the place-sense also reeled and slipped to a different angle in his mind. He saw how in a far-off field at the crest of the further slope serried rows of washing were laid out, looking so oddly like gravestones that the surface of his mind took it for a cemetery until, pricked to a more normal consciousness, he realised that there could be no such thing there, but only a field belonging to a farm of his own. Even then it seemed to him that he was wandering in an unfamiliar country, with a something unreal about it that gave it a dreamlike quality. The sky was by now a deep slate colour; below it the yellow of the road and the green of the fields showed a bleached pallor, and on the telegraph poles that rose and dipped to the crest the china insulators looked like motionless white birds against the darkness. He went on and down to his house; but all the while he knew that this was not his real habitation, that the house Boase was building daily, stone by stone, was for him too the ultimate bourne, that house which, in some other dimension, only glimpsed here to the dazzling of the mind, is straightened by neither time nor place as we understand them. He knew it, but not yet for him did the knowledge hold any peace—rather it sent a chill of helplessness to his heart. He still wanted something in this world, and not in the next, to make the inner joy by which he lived.

CHAPTER VI

"SOMETHING MUST COME TO ALL OF US"

With autumn Boase died. Like his life, his death seemed so natural, so without any sense of strain or outrage, that it was robbed, even for the man who had loved him, of all bitterness beyond that of personal loss. He had not gone uncriticised more than can anyone; there were not a few of the country people too coarse of grain to understand a man's life could really be as his appeared, and a certain capriciousness in his own likes and dislikes, which was one of his greatest weaknesses, had made for him intolerant critics among his own class. Yet, all in all, he was as near perfection, not only in character, but in understanding, as anyone Ishmael had ever heard of—far more so than anyone he had ever met. And of later years the Parson had grown in tolerance, which always to him had been a

Christian duty—though it was far from being a weak or maudlin tolerance; and he had also lost much of that individualism which had been the only thing to cloud his judgment. More than most old men he had been free from glorification of the past, though not as free as he himself imagined. Something of Ishmael had gone with Killigrew's going, but that something had hardly included much of his heart; now there was buried with the Parson, or, more truly, strove to follow him whither he had gone, a love which was as single-natured a thing as can be felt. The return of Nicky was the only thing which at all filled the emptiness in Ishmael's days.

Nicky had altered, and for the better, if, thought Ishmael, it was not the mere selfishness of the old generation which had ever made him feel Nicky needed improvement. This deepening, this added manliness, would after all have been superhuman in the boy who had gone away. Nicky had lived roughly among rough men, and he had stood the test well. He still had the delightful affectations of youth, but wore them with a better grace. He came back not only the heir and future master of Cloom, but a man who could have won his way in the world without so many acres behind him. He was full of new ideas for farming, which he had imbibed in Saskatchewan, and Ishmael, with a smile of dry amusement against himself, found he was as suspicious of them as ever John-James had been of his iron ploughs and Jersey cows. Farming being "the thing" in Canada, Nicky, who had gone away rather despising it, came back eager to try his hand.

When Ishmael had first started machinery at Cloom, beginning with a binder and going on to a steam thresher that he hired out for the harvest all around the district, the hedges had been black with folk crowding to see the wonders, just as they had when the first traction engine made its appearance in West Penwith. Yet Cornishmen, who are conservative creatures, still cling to their straight-handled scythes, although they are less convenient than those with curved handles in use up-country. Nicky had small use for customs such as this, and he poured forth ideas that would have turned John-James pale, if anything could have affected his seamed and weather-beaten countenance.

John-James was an old man now—he had aged quickly with his outdoor life; but always he refused to let Ishmael pension him off, and though as overseer he had a wage passing any paid in the county, and though he lived comfortably enough in his little cottage chosen by himself, with a tidy body who came in from the village every day to attend to his wants, he still showed all the premature ageing of the countryman. He had never married, and with age had taken many queer ways, one of them being a rooted dislike to having any woman except his sister Vassie in his house. Georgie was never allowed to cross its threshold, and he always called her "Mrs. Ruan." The two little girls he adored, and they knew he was their uncle, though with the unquestioning faith of childhood they accepted that he lived alone in a little cottage like a working man because he was eccentric and mustn't be worried to live as father did. Ishmael was very fond of this brother—as fond as John-James' rigid taciturnity would let him be. John-James' chief peculiarity was displayed always during the week's holiday he took every year; on each day of this week he would make a pilgrimage to some cemetery. A new graveyard was an unfailing magnet for him; he would spend hours there and return next year to note what new headstones had taken root. "Why on earth do you want to go and spend all your holiday in cemeteries, John-James?" Georgie had once asked him; "you'll have to be there for ever and ever some day; why do you want to go before you have to?" John-James, attired in his best broadcloth, with a bowler hat firmly fixed above his weather-beaten face, stared at her stonily "I go to the graveyards," he said at length, "because them be the only places where folks mind their own business...."

Tom had quite dropped out of the family circle made by Ishmael, Vassie, and John-James. He found the annoyance of not being received in the same circles as Ishmael and Vassie too irksome to him—who, he not unfairly considered, had done so much the best and with the greatest handicaps. The day when he came over to Cloom and found Lord Luxullyan and John-James having tea together was too much for his grasp of social values, and he straightway bought a practice in Plymouth, where he did very well and rose to be an alderman, though the gleaming eminence of mayor never was to be for him. He married the daughter of a rich draper—in "the wholesale"—and as soon as he could afford it he dropped all doubtful practices and became strictly honest in his profession.

Of all the family, Vassie, who had started out with a more defined character than the others, was the least changed. She was eminently successful—had been ever since she met Flynn and determined to marry him. She had made him a good wife, for he was one of those men who need feminine encouragement, and with all his brilliance would never have got so far without her to encourage him. He was not to be one of the great men of his day, but he had done well, having attained an Under-Secretaryship under Gladstone's last Administration, which he continued under Lord Rosebery. With the advent of the Conservative party in '95 he retired, though still only sixty, and busied himself with a small estate he had bought in Ireland, where he intended to work out his schemes for model Utopian tenancies. Vassie was irked by the change. She had carried into middle life her superabundant energy—her love of being in the eye of the world. She had no children to occupy her—her only real quarrel with life—and it did not suit her to sit in Ireland while her once flaming Dan played with model villages

and made notes for his reminiscences. He had, as flaming dreamers often do, fallen onto the dreams without the fire, and, having attained a certain amount of his ideals, was better pleased to sit and look backwards over those which had not materialised than to face a losing struggle in their cause.

Vassie tried all her wiles to induce him to come to London after the first year in retirement, and at last she was able to assure him that she was not feeling well. The symptoms were but slight to begin with—a tinge of rheumatism in one leg, which annoyed without incapacitating her. The rheumatism became so fierce that the local doctor at last decided it must be neuritis, and when the pain became increasingly acute and frequent he grew alarmed and insisted on a London opinion. Vassie herself felt a pang of fear, and it was a genuine terror she carried to the grim house in Harley Street a few days later. The next week she was at Cloom.

Ishmael was shocked at the change in her. Her hair, that had still shown its old brassy hue when last he had seen her at the time of the fall of the Government, was now a faded grey—that harsh green-grey that fair hair nearly always turns to on its way to white. There were hollows under her eyes, and her full mouth looked drawn. She smiled at his shocked exclamation that he could not suppress.

"Don't look like that!" she told him. "The doctor says it's not hopeless, or wouldn't be if I'd let them operate."

"It? What is it?" asked Ishmael.

"Tuberculosis in the knee. They want me to have my leg off, and I won't. You don't want me to, do you, Ishmael? I'd rather die whole if I've got to."

He had felt all his blood rush to his head with the horror of it; his heart pounded sickeningly, a darkness swirled before his eyes. Vassie linked her arm in his and walked him up and down the lawn in front of the house; from within they could hear the steady rumble of Dan's voice as he talked to Georgie. Ishmael could not trust himself to speak. Vassie was very dear to him, though there had been few caresses between them during their lives. She stood for something to him no one else ever had, even as she did for John-James. She had never been popular with women—Phoebe had feared her, Georgie called her hard and coarse; but to men, though with all her beauty she had been very unattractive to them as far as her sex went, she meant a good deal as a friend. Judith and she were the only two of the old set who had ever been really intimate, and that was more a curious kinship between them, a mutual respect born out of the strength each recognised in the other's very different character, than anything warmer. But to Ishmael and John-James she still held the glow that for them had enwrapped her even in early days when her destiny was only clear cut in her own mind, and when her hardness, commented on by others, was to them an unknown quantity. When she turned it towards them it became strength, and it did not need caresses to tell Ishmael that what of tenderness she possessed was more for him than for anyone else in the world. She felt more his equal than she did with Dan, whom she alternately despised, with the kindly despite of a wife, and respected for qualities of brain that were beyond her practical reach. She always had to explain to Dan, to Ishmael never. She slipped her arm through his now and gave it a little hug.

"Don't worry! After all something must come to all of us," she said.

The phrase knocked at Ishmael's heart. "Something must come to all of us...." Everyone had to die of something, from some outrage on nature. There had to be some convulsion out of the ordinary course to bring it about; cases where the human machine simply ran down, as with the Parson, were rare. This horror was lying in wait for all—the manner of their leaving. It was astonishing, looked at in cold blood, that people lived and were gay and happy with this hanging over them from their birth onwards. He realised that it was this fact—that only by some disruption of the ordinary course could death come—which had always made death seem so unnatural to him. He had for a flash the feeling that every woman, however maternal, has when she knows she is to have a baby—a feeling of being caught in something that will not let one go. "Something must come to all of us...."

Her "something" had come to Vassie. She had to submit to the operation, but, though she rallied from it, no real good could be done, and the end became merely a question of time. She did not kick against the pricks, as Ishmael had done all his life; she accepted it all with a certain stoicism that was not without its grandeur, and, though she became very irritable, she had moments of greater softening than ever before. She was dying when the clouds of the coming war with the South African Republics first began to lower over the country. The Flynns were in London, for Vassie was now too ill ever to think of crossing over to Ireland again, but she suddenly took it into her head to wish to be taken down to Cloom. This was when she heard the news that Nicky, who had been a volunteer for some time, had enlisted in the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. She had always been very attached to him, spending upon him what of thwarted motherhood she alone knew, and he for his part had responded to her rather more than he did to most people. Ishmael was wired to, and in November of '99, a month after

the declaration of war, Dan brought her down with a couple of hospital nurses and she was installed in the biggest and sunniest room at Cloom.

With Nicky's absorption into the Army and Vassie's incursion hard upon the edge of her final parting Ishmael was more strangely affected than by anything that had happened merely to himself in his whole life. The approach of death for Vassie, the perpetual chance of it for Nicky, gave him the fulness of life, in so far as life means the power to feel. He had thought the loss of power to feel for himself an inevitable part of age, as it had been of the thickening and greater materialism of middle life; but now he knew that never had he been ravaged as now, because never before had he encountered fear for someone he loved.

Bitter loss, the loss of disappointment which at the time the soul tells one is worse than loss by death, he had known over Blanche; pain, anger, hardness, with his family he could not have missed; horror and remorse had both assailed him over Phoebe; natural sorrow that held no sense of outrage he had felt for the loss of Killigrew and Boase. But this was something different—this aching sense of helplessness, of a passion of protectiveness that could avail neither Vassie under his roof nor Nicky on the far veldt. He had not been of those who are insensitive to the pain of the world—rather had it held too much of his sympathies; but now, in the sublime selfishness of great personal grief, he felt he would give everything—the war, the whole rest of the world—to have Nicky back in safety. That was only at first, or when the fear was strongest; at other times his sense of proportion and knowledge of how Nicky himself would feel towards such a sentiment, brought him to a truer poise.

The war dragged on. The nation began to see that it was not to be the "walk-over" so confidently expected; disasters occurred, long sieges wore the folk at home even as those in the beleaguered towns, growls against the Government were raised, people talked of "muddling through," and every barrel-organ in the land ground out "Soldiers of the Queen" and "The Absent-minded Beggar." Then the world went mad and mafficked, felt a little ashamed of itself, and became, for the first time for years, rather usefully introspective and self-critical. And "Nicky ... Nicky ... Nicky ..." beat out every swing of the pendulum of Time at Cloom.

Between the beats of intensest feeling Ishmael would fall into the arid spaces which all deep emotion holds as a strongly-running sea holds hollows—spaces where it did not seem to matter so much after all, when in a dry far-off way he could tell himself that nothing really made any difference in life. From these hollows he came up again as a man comes floating into consciousness after chloroform—recalled by a sense of pain. He had one of these spaces just after Vassie had been buried, and all the time he was consoling Dan's frantic and noisy sorrow he was feeling a hypocrite, because, so he told himself, he really did not care. He did care, and deeply, but he was making the mistake of thinking that any grief can go the whole way, that all else in life can possibly be blotted out. True instinct told him it could not, that all of life could never fall in ashes round the head even when it was bowed in irrevocable loss; but a remnant of the conventional made him feel as though it ought to, and this made him distrust what grief he felt. His thought for Nicky, even when he was in his dry spaces, he always knew was eating at him. When, with peace, came the expectation of Nicky's return in safety, it seemed to Ishmael that never before had he known all that fatherhood meant. Cloom, the future, all that he had worked for all his life, would surely come back with Nicky.

CHAPTER VII

EARTH

"When Nicky comes home" grew to be the watchword in the household at Cloom. The two girls, clever Lissa and thoughtful Ruth, were now grown up, and far from the childish griefs of postponed drives; they had built up a very pretty legend round the figure of Nicky these three years of the war. Ruth had copied out his letters from South Africa and made a manuscript book of them, that Lissa, who was "going in" for craftsmanship, bound in khaki with the badge of the D.C.L.I. on the cover, and they gave it to their father with great pomp. All of life centred round "when Nicky comes home." He had done very well, having gained a commission and won a D.S.O., and there was talk of a public reception in Penzance for him and the rest of the local heroes.

One day Nicky came home, but with a wife, and the homecoming was consequently quite unlike everything that had been planned. The girls declared loudly that he had spoilt everything and that they had wanted him to themselves, though privately Ruth thought Marjorie very fascinating.

Marjorie was a Colonial by birth—a good-looking, vigorous modern young woman, with a rather twangy voice. She admired Cloom so much as an antique that her enthusiasm seemed somehow to belittle it. Yet there was something splendid about her—in her confidence and poise, her candour, her superb health, and the simplicity of her thoughts. Ishmael could not but think her the perfect wife for Cloom and the future of Cloom. She would bring fresh, clear blood to the old stock, which showed signs of falling on unhealth. For the first time in his thirty-odd years Nicky was in contact with someone he admired more than himself, and the result was excellent. His early discontent had settled into ambition—the limited honest ambition of the country gentleman such as Ishmael would most have wished to see in him. Canada and the war between them had carried him far from the politics of his father—as far as Ishmael had found himself from Boase long ago; and when a bye-election occurred in the division he stood for it in the Unionist interests, and won, his honours still thick upon him, even in that Radical locality. He was now growing more and more to be master of Cloom, taking an interest in it even during his inevitable absences in town, Ishmael falling into the background; for his sixty years, though vigorous within him if he took care of himself, made him suffer for any violent exertion.

He had slipped into the background—to all but Georgie. She kept pace with him, although so much younger, because in him she saw her own youth. Her children had grown up and away from her as children must, and she clung to her husband as she had not been wont to do when the practical affairs of a family had absorbed more of her attention.

Ishmael endeavoured to live up to the Parson's advice and keep fluid, and his naturally mobile nature helped him in this. Where and when he did fall short, as the inevitable prejudices of age in favour of the ways it knows arose in him, he at least could see it and smile at himself. But, following on the intense period of personal feeling he had lived through while Nicky was at the war, had come the inevitable reaction, and from that reaction, as far as the capacity for any outstanding emotion went, he was too old to recover.

He had learned the lesson of life too well, saw the whole pattern with too great clarity. This alone would have relegated him to the background, for it is the frame of mind which, when it is temperamental from the outset, makes the looker-on at life; while when it is attained it creates the person to whom other people come for sympathy and help in matters that seem to them enormously important, even while they appeal to the wider view for better proportion.

He was in the background; but he was not yet content to be there. He was content to be thought a person who could have feelings that started and ended in others—even as a young man he had worked for that; but he had not filled in his background with anything that satisfied the portion of himself, which, even if a man live for others ever so completely, still clamours for satisfaction. Every part of him that was in relation to others had adjusted, but that one spot which always answers to the self alone was merely going on from day to day as best it could. He was content to have no burning emotions, no strong longings, to be considered less important than themselves by all the younger people amongst whom he lived, but within him the voice that says "I am I ... I still want something for myself alone, some solution of the riddle, something to make up for loss of youth and beauty and strength," still stirred and muttered. Not prosperity, not children, not a wife who took step by step with him, could give this, or even help him to find out what it was. Not his memory of what the Parson had lived and died by could fill him wholly; he had not yet come to that perfect satisfaction, life was too insistent in him. Not in the next world, or in any personal contact, however intimate, in this, could the stuff of life be found. He had imagined while Nicky was away that after all he too had attained the personal fusion that most people seemed to cling to as the chief support in life, but now he knew that that way was not for him any more than for any other at the loneliest pass.

A few days after Nicky's triumphant election, when thought was once more possible at Cloom, Ishmael felt more depressed than he had for long; he had been living not so much in the valleys as upon the straight plains of late. To-day his eyes were hurting him and he could not read; there was no work crying to be done, and the heavy warm air was misted with damp that seemed to melt into the bones. He went out, shaking off Georgie's protests, and struck up the valley leading from the sea. The old mood was on him that had recurred again and again through life—the mood when nothing would satisfy but to go out alone and walk and walk and breathe in peace from earth and air. He went on, not walking fast, for the depression that was on him was not like a definite grief that urges the body to fierce exertion, and as he went it was as though he had neglected the charm too long and it was going to fail him. A blight seemed to hang upon everything, and a dread that had no form but that pressed on him grew as he went.

He came at last to the marshy bottom of the valley, where the wet and tussocky grass was set in a tangle of blackberry bushes and bracken higher than a man. A few forlorn tufts of cotton-grass still blew out in the languid breeze and the yellow stars of the cinquefoil shone from the moss, but disfigured by the dozens of evil-looking black slugs, three or four inches long, that lay motionless all

over the marsh. A faint, subtle smell hung on the air, the fragrance of the dodder, that covered the gorse bushes with a fine vermilion net, studded with pale pink flowers like fat flesh-coloured flies caught in a vast red spider's web. The whole place seemed redolent of evil—the motionless glossy slugs, the deadly parasite with its curiously obscene flowers, the littered undergrowth rotting in the water, all these filled Ishmael with a suffocating sense of doom. He stayed at gaze, yet longing to get away from this steamy place, where the gorse had gone grey beneath the false embraces of the dodder.

At last he turned and climbed slowly up the valley side; when he reached the top he had to pause and lean upon a gate to get his breath. His heart was pounding in his ears. He did not look up; for a few minutes the world was dark and filled with a great roaring. Then he felt his breath coming more easily and the giddiness passed; he opened his eyes and straightened himself.

He opened them on to the wide stretch of sky that arched over the sea, and there he saw, stretched from headland to headland, one gleaming foot springing from an irradiated field, the other dying into a swirl of misty foam, a perfect arch of rainbow. It was so triumphant, so brilliant, so unexpected, that at first he stood staring, his mouth open, his whistling breath coming unheeded.

A rainbow alone in Nature always looks an alien thing—it is never part of a landscape, but the added touch which means wonder. Like snow, it is always a phenomenon. It has never lost the quality of miracle.

Far below the glowing span lay Cloom, wet grey roofs gleaming, and a dazzle of sun upon its whitewash; around the fields lay like a jewelled canopy, lighter than the sky, which still wore a deep purple-grey, against which the arch burned like fire.

As Ishmael looked the tears swam in his eyes, making the whole radiant vision reel and run together in a blaze of passionate light and colour.

As he stood there, feeling a keener joy than he could ever remember the personal having given him, all his philosophy, all his changing beliefs in what was most worth while, resolved themselves into the passionate cry: "Let beauty not die for me.... May dawn and sunset, twilight and storm, hold their thrill to the last; may the young moon still cradle magic and the old moon image peace; may the wind never fail to blow freedom into my nostrils, and the sunlight strike to my heart till I die. And if colour, light, shadow, and sound of birds' calling all fall away from my failing senses, at least let the touch of earth be sweet to my fingers and the air to my eyelids."

BOOK V

HARVEST

CHAPTER I

THE FOUR-ACRE

A little boy was riding into Cloom farmyard astride a big carthorse, whistling and beating time with a toy switch upon its irresponsive flanks. He was so small that his bare brown legs stuck straight out on either side of him, but he sat upright and clutched the dark tangled mane firmly. The horse planted his big gleaming hoofs with care, his broad haunches heaved slightly as he went, and the child swayed securely to the action. Beside the horse's arched neck walked an old man, less sure of step than the animal; the child drummed with his sandalled feet against the round sides of his steed and managed to kick the old man as he did so.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Granpa!" he said in a clear treble, laughing a little, not because he thought it was funny to have hit his grandfather, but because it was such a fine day and it was so jolly on the big horse, and he knew his grandfather would understand that he could not help laughing at everything. The old man put up his hand and laid it gently on the slim brown leg, keeping it there till the horse stopped in the middle of the yard, when he held up both his arms and the boy slipped down into them.

"Jim!" called at woman's voice from the house. "Jim! Hurry up; it's past lesson-time."

"Bother!" said Jim regretfully; "it's always lesson-time just as I'm really occupied. I wish I was a grown-up and could do what I liked."

The old man did not contradict him with a well-worn platitude, because he knew that in the way the child meant grown-ups did have a great deal of freedom.

"You wouldn't like to be as old as I am, would you, Jim?" he asked. Jim regarded him thoughtfully; evidently this was the first time he had even imagined such a thing ever being possible. He cast about in his mind to think of some answer that would not hurt his grandfather's feelings.

"Well, perhaps not quite as old as you, Granpa!" he said; "as old as Daddy; not with white hair like you—just a grown-up man."

"Jim ...!" came the voice again more insistently, and his mother appeared at the back door and stood framed in its arch of carved granite. Marjorie Ruan was still a fine young woman; her thirty-odd years sat lightly upon her. Her tanned skin and the full column of her long, bare throat gave her a look of exuberant health. She was dressed in a smart suit of white linen and her brown head was bare.

"Have you been having a ride?" she asked. "But you mustn't stop when I call you, you know! You shouldn't keep him when he ought to come, Granpa!" The grandfather remained unperturbed. He liked and admired Marjorie, but there were times when he considered her manners left something to be desired. Jim ran into the house, and Marjorie, shepherding him in with a sweeping motion of her strong, big arm, disappeared also, curved a little over him. Ishmael was left alone in the yard, stroking the velvet-soft muzzle of the waiting horse.

Ishmael made a fine figure as he stood there, a little stooped, but handsome in his thin old way, with his strongly-modelled nose and his dark hazel eyes deep-set beneath the shaggy white brows. He was clean-shaven, and the fine curve of his jaw, always rather pointed than heavy, gave a touch of the priestly which looked oddly alien with his loose Norfolk jacket and corduroy breeches and the brown leather gaiters that protected his thin old legs. His close-cropped grey head was uncovered, and he still carried it well; he looked his years, but bore them bravely, nevertheless.

"You are going to finish sowing the four-acre to-day?" he asked the man who came out from a shed leading another horse. "I shall come along myself later on. Mind you regulate the feed of the drill carefully; it's not been working quite well lately." He stood watching a moment while the man harnessed the horses to the big drill, which, standing quiescent now, was soon to rattle and clank over the ploughed and harrowed earth of the four-acre field. Then he turned, and, going through the house, went out on to the lawn, where on a long chair in the sun, carefully swathed in shawls, an old lady was lying.

"Have you everything you want, Judy?" he asked, sitting slowly down on the garden-chair beside her. She looked up at him through the large round spectacles, that gave her an air as of a fairy godmother in a play, and nodded. "Everything, thanks! Marjorie has been very good. My knitting—which I always take about with me, because I think it's only decent for an old lady to knit, not because I can do it well, for I can't; to-day's *Western Morning News* and yesterday's *Times*; and my writing-pad, if I should take it into my head to write letters, which I shan't, because, as you know, I think letters are thoroughly vicious. One of the few signs of grace about the present generation is the so-called decay of the art of letter-writing."

"Jim would agree with you. He has just had to go in to his lessons; and he thinks that letters are a lot of rot, anyway!"

"What are you doing to-day, Ishmael?"

"I am thinking of helping with the four-acre. Nicky will soon be down for the Easter recess, and then I shall be so carefully looked after I shall not get the chance to overtire myself."

"Nicky has turned out a dear boy, and good son," said Judy kindly.

"Nicky always was a dear boy—even at his most elusive. Jim is more human than Nicky was at his age, but he hasn't Nicky's charm, that something of a piskie's changeling that made Nicky so attractive. Yes, he's a 'good son,' to use your horrible expression, Judy. And Marjorie is a very good wife for him, though I must say I enjoy it when I can have the two boys, the big and the little one, to myself."

"I sometimes wonder how much you ever really liked women," said Judy.

"I have always liked them, as you call it, very much indeed. But I don't think I've ever thought of them as women first and foremost, but as human beings more or less like unto myself."

"That's where you've made your mistake. Not because they aren't—for they are—but because that destroys the mystery, and no one is keener on keeping up the idea that women are mysterious creatures, unlike men, than women themselves."

"I daresay you're right. But to look at, merely externally, I've always been able to get the mystery. They can look so that a man is afraid to touch such exquisite, ethereal creatures, all the time that they're wanting to be touched most. Georgie always used to say I never understood women."

"When she meant that you showed your understanding too clearly. Dear Georgie!"

"Yes, dear Georgie! It does seem rough luck that she should have gone the first when she was so much younger than I, doesn't it?"

"Rough luck on you, or on her, are you meaning at the moment?"

"At the moment I was meaning on her. She was so in love with life. But I suppose really on me. I might, humanly speaking, have been fairly sure that I should have had her as a companion all the last years."

"Do you find it very lonely since Ruth married her tame clergyman and Lissa went away to become a full-blown painter?"

"Doesn't it always have to be lonely? Isn't it always really? The only thing is that when we are young we have distractions which prevent us seeing it. We can cheat ourselves with physical contact that makes us think it possible to fuse with any one other human being. But it isn't. When we are our age—well, we know it's always isolated, but that it doesn't matter."

"What does matter? Those to come?"

"Yes, those to come—always them first; yet not that alone, or there would be no more value in them than in ourselves if it were always to be a vicious circle like that. Each individual soul is equally important, the old as much as the young, in the eternal scheme. It is only in the economy of this world that youth is more important than age."

"I think I can fairly lay claim to being a broadminded "vert" said Judith, "but of course, you know, I can't help feeling I've got something in the way of what makes things worth while that you haven't?"

"Yes, I know you do. I see you're bound to have. But of course, owing to what the Parson inculcated into me, I think I've got it too, but I quite see I can't expect you to think so."

"It's seeing the light that matters most, I think," said Judy. "We believe the same though I *know* I've got it, and you only *think* you have! But it's the thinking that is all important. The mystery to me is how anyone can be satisfied with the phenomena of this world alone as an answer to the riddle."

"It's not so much of a mystery to me. The world is so very beautiful that it can stand instead of human love, so why not, to some people, instead of Divine love also? The beauty of it is what I have chiefly lived by. It could for very long thrill me to the exclusion of everything else."

"And now?" asked Judith.

"Now? Now I am old that has been young, and still I cannot answer you that. I believe these airmen tell you of air pockets they come to, holes in the atmosphere, where their machines drop, drop.... I think I am in an air pocket, a hole between the guiding winds of the spirit ... one is too occupied in not dropping when in those holes to think of anything else. Action is the best thing, which is why I am now going to leave you to sow the four-acre."

He got up, slowly and painfully, though he stood as erect as ever once he was upon his feet. He stood a moment looking at Judith.

"Judy, d'you ever have those times when you feel something is going to happen?" he asked, "when you expect something to come round the corner, so to speak, at every moment. One so often had it in one's youth—one woke with it every morning: I don't mean that, but the expectation of some one thing that is in the air so near one that any moment it may break into actuality?"

"I never have it now, my dear, but I know what you mean. Why? Have you got it?"

"Yes."

"Is it about anything particular you are feeling it?"

"No, no; my uncanny vision doesn't go as far as that, I'm afraid."

"Dare I murmur indigestion?" she asked, with a gentle chuckle, hunching herself into her shawls.

"You may murmur, but I scorn you as a materialist and one who isn't even genuine. I go to my sowing, but you'll see if this old man is not justified of his dreams." He left her, and she watched him across the lawn with the detached affection of the old in her eyes; then she took up, not her knitting or her writing-pad, but the little book of devotions that lay in a fold of her shawl, and started to read, her lips moving slightly but soundlessly.

In the four-acre field there was a strong wind blowing that for days had been drying the turned earth to powder. The soil, so rich of hue when freshly turned, now showed a pale drab, dry and crumbling beneath the feet, while every step stirred up the fine particles and made them blow about like smoke.

Ishmael superintended the pouring of a sack of dredge-corn into the gaping maw of the drill, and the man took the rope reins, and, throwing over the lever, set the horses off, following as faithfully as might be the curve of the hedge. The sun gleamed on the glossy haunches of the horses, on the upper curve of the spidery wheels, whose faded vermilion seemed to revolve under a quivering splash of living gold that magically stayed poised, as it were, to let the wheels slip perpetually from under. The wind blew the horses' forelocks away between their ears; while about their plummy fetlocks, wreathing around the wheels and the sharp nozzles of the drill and from the heavy feet of the man who followed, rose the blown clouds of powdery soil, as though the earth were smoking at some vast sacrifice.

All the way up and down the field, back and forth, with a clanking as the lever was thrown in and out of gear for the turn at either end, this cloud went with them, blowing fine and free, encompassing them high as the horses' bellies. Ishmael watched, checked the man at the turn, and finding the corn was flowing too freely, altered the indicator, and then himself took the reins and in his turn went up and down the lines of smoking earth. And gradually, as he went, his sense of sight, and through it his brain, became gently mesmerised as the shallow furrows made by the nozzles of the drill drew themselves perpetually just before him. He could see the bright seeds dribbling into the top of the serpentine tubes, but no eye could catch their swift transit into the earth, which closed and tossed over itself in the wake of the nozzles as foam turns and throws itself about in the wake of a screw. Ishmael, his eyes on that living earth that surged so rhythmically yet with such freedom of pattern that no clod fell like another, while the dust blew back from it like spray, was soothed in exactly the same way that a man is soothed when he watches the weaving of the foam-patterns as they slip perpetually from beneath a ship.

Every year upon his farm there now came something of the joy of the gambler to Ishmael, who never sowed without feeling that it might be for the last time. Curiously enough, it never occurred to him as possible that he could die before what he had sown was grown and reaped. Every threshing over, he wondered if he should live to see another; every sowing he told himself it might be the last time he saw the earth closing over the trail of the seeds, that before another spring came round the earth might be closed over him instead, and this gave an extra keenness of appreciation to all he did and watched. Now, as he sowed, peace seemed to come to him as well as pleasure, a feeling that though sowing was always for a blind future, yet that future was as securely in the womb of the thought of God as the seeds in the womb of the earth. He walked on, up and down, till the last furrow had been sown and the seeds lay all hidden and the ruffled earth only awaited the quieting of the roller. Then he leant upon the drill and stared out over the acres that were to him as the flesh of his flesh; he bent down and crumpled a clod between his fingers for sheer joy of the feel of it.

When he straightened himself it was to see the figure of an old man he did not know coming through the gate that led from the lane into the farmyard. There was only one field intervening, and Ishmael's eyes were still very good at a distance; he could see the old man was no one from those parts. There was something outlandish, too, about the soft slouch hat and the cut of the clothes, of a slaty grey that showed up clearly amidst the earthy and green colours all around. The old man stood fumbling with the gate in his hand, then, when it swung back, he stayed staring round him as though he were looking for something he did not find. He made two or three little steps forward, then paused. Ishmael, having bidden the man see to the horses, went into the next field that gave into the yard.

The stranger looked round, saw him, hesitated again, then went forward, more surely this time, as though he had either remembered something or suddenly made up his mind. He passed through the archway into the court. Ishmael stood, his hand on the gate, staring after him, his heart thumping painfully, why, he could not or would not admit to himself. Then he, too, went on and into the court. He

crossed it, went through the passage door that stood open, and on into the kitchen which lay on the left. There was no one there. He passed into the sitting-room on the right of the passage, and there he saw the old man standing by the fireplace and looking round him with an odd, bewildered air. He looked up as Ishmael came in, and their eyes met. Afterwards Ishmael realised that he had always known it was Archelaus from the moment he had seen him stand and look round him at the gate.

Archelaus looked a very old man. He was old even in actual years, and almost ageless if some indefinable look on his seamed face registered more truly the period sustained by the ravaged spirit. He stood staring at Ishmael, then spoke in a husky, uncertain voice that went suddenly from gruffness to a high querulousness.

"Who be you?" he asked. "I be Archelaus Beggoe, and I'm come home to where I was born and reared.... I'm come home, I tell 'ee."

The two old men stood looking at each other.

"Don't you remember me?" asked Ishmael gently. "I'm Ishmael, your brother; you know...." He went forward and took the other's unresisting hand. "Welcome home, Archelaus!"

The elder brother said nothing, but slowly a look of comprehension began to dawn in his bleared old eyes, a look that was inexpressibly sly and yet harmless, so infantine was his whole aspect of helplessness. He shook Ishmael's hand very slowly, then dropped it.

"I'm come home," he repeated obstinately.

CHAPTER II

ARCHELAUS, NICKY, JIM

The next day it became plain to Ishmael that Archelaus spoke the truth when he announced that he had come home. His legs were old and stiff, but after pottering all the morning after his brother, who suddenly felt years younger through sheer force of contrast, he followed him obstinately out to the four-acre field, where Ishmael had hoped to get away from him. And Ishmael watched the rolling, as he had only the day before watched the sowing, but with a sinking of the heart instead of the lightening that had been his only twenty-four hours earlier. The mere presence of Archelaus, though they were now both old men, past rivalry, held for him an antagonism he could hide but could not keep himself from feeling.

As the ridgy clods flattened out to a level of purplish fawn beneath the one passing of the cumbrous roller, that yet looked so small behind the huge mare, Ishmael felt his spirits being as flattened as the four-acre itself. Yet even as yesterday the two horses had done, so to-day the mare spread her powerful haunches and raised clouds of earth with each firm impact of her gleaming hoofs; but the joy was gone from the sight. Even Hester, the farm-dog, lineal descendant of poor Wanda, seemed to feel the inaction in the air, and, leaving off her slavish following of the roller, flung herself down on a stretch of field where it had already passed, legs outspread, looking so flattened as she lay there, a mere pattern of black and white, that the roller might have passed over her also. Archelaus stood leaning upon a favourite stick of Nicky's that he had taken from the hall, and commented shrewdly enough upon the affairs of the farm. He seemed suddenly to be showing a great interest in them, and during the days that followed this did not diminish. For all his years his wits seemed bright; only whenever the suggestion arose that he might be happier if he took up his quarters elsewhere his eyes seemed actually to film over like a bird's with the blankness that descended on them. Indeed, there seemed no real reason for getting rid of him. He was old and strange, but he behaved himself and played with the children, both Ruth's couple and little Jim; he was a huge success. He ousted the grandfather—so much more vivid were his tales, so much more amusing the things he could do with a penknife and a bit of wood. Whistles, whips, boats, all seemed to grow under his gnarled old hands, with their discoloured and broken nails, as though without effort. And watching his success, knowing by some instinct he would not have told for fear of misconstruction to any but Judy, who always understood, that some malign wish to hurt lay at the springs of his brother's complaisance towards the children, Ishmael felt a stirring of the old unease that he admitted to himself was not without a leaven of jealousy.

For the Easter recess Nicky came down, and no lover ever waited for his mistress with a more high-

beating heart than Ishmael did for his son. And at the back of his mind was the haunting fear of Archelaus as affecting his relations with Nicky, a fear such as he might have had had Nicky been a woman and he and Archelaus young men.

Nicky came, charming as ever. He was so full of life that his forty-odd years seemed nothing to him. He had that immense vitality, sparkling but full of reserved strength, that brings with it a sense of completeness apart from youth or age. Ishmael felt the old pang of disappointment that Nicky gave so little, repented of directly some little thing showed how Nicky was thinking of and for him. Nicky drew his brows together when he heard of his uncle's advent. He was a great stickler for the conventions, and did not like this appearance in the flesh of old family scandals that might again become a topic for busy tongues.

Archelaus was out when Nicky arrived, but when the family party was assembled on the lawn for tea he made his appearance. Everyone was there. Ruth had driven over from her Vicarage with her two little girls, with whom Jim was playing and occasionally quarrelling; Marjorie sat by Nicky and waited on him with an indulgence she generally showed him on the first day together after they had been separated for a few weeks; and even the volatile Lissa was there, in a sense, as Ruth had had a long letter from her that morning which she had brought over to read to her father. Ruth's husband, a gentle, kindly, abstracted creature, was there too, pulling his long fingers through his beard and saying very little. Ishmael liked him, but preferred him to come to the Manor rather than himself going to the Vicarage. He had never got over the idea bred in him by association with the Parson that a priest should not be married.

Archelaus wandered on to the lawn looking his most spruce; he had evidently tried to tidy himself, having shaved and put on a clean collar of extraordinarily antiquated make. His clothes might have had "American ready-made" written upon them. He advanced towards them slowly, leaning heavily on his stick.

"Nicky," said Ishmael, "this is your Uncle Archelaus.... This is my boy."

Nicky got to his feet and said rather coldly that he hoped his uncle was well, but it was the old man whose eagerness in holding out his hand made Nicky's advance seem laggard. Nicky had taken a dislike to his uncle; he could not tell why. He flattered himself he was not a snob, but he thought this old Rip Van Winkle a terrible thing to drop into any family out of the blue. Archelaus lowered himself into a chair beside his nephew and began to try and make conversation. There was something pathetic about his evident efforts and Nicky's hidden distaste that was all there was to meet it, masked by courtesy. Ishmael suddenly felt his heart soften towards his brother; he told himself almost with a pang that he need not have been afraid that this old prodigal would have beguiled Nicky as he did the children; his simple wiles were not for grown men busy with affairs. Yet he still watched anxiously, though now the faint feeling of anxiety had rather transferred itself from Nicky to Archelaus.

As the days went on his heart grew no lighter, though in the society of Nicky, busy as he was with showing him all the latest improvements, he had not much time to think of anything else. Archelaus was too old and enfeebled to go all over the estate as Ishmael was still able to do, and gloried in the doing now he saw that there were others less able to than he. Yet, had he had more leisure to observe, his anxiety would have grown, not lessened, for a cloud began to gather upon Archelaus that was like the old brooding of his youth, though less articulate, but perhaps none the less dangerous for that. There had been a softening about him those first days of Nicky's return, as there was still when he played with Jimmy; but now the look that had held a timid eagerness when it was turned on Jimmy's father glowed with something else less good, a something that deepened when it was turned on Ishmael.

About this time Judith brought her visit to a close, and Ishmael was chiefly occupied with getting her off in safety and with as little fatigue as might be. Each year now their parting held something of the quality possessed by his yearly gamble with his crops, only in the former case the chances against them were doubled, for it might be Judy who failed to come again on the long journey from town.

She had a companion, a devoted creature but colourless, whom she could be said rather to suffer gladly than enjoy, and her interests, were divided between the little slum church she lived near in London, her friends at Cloom, and the rare visits of Lissa, of whom she was very fond, and who sometimes went and poured out to her enthusiasms about Futurist paintings, which Judy, who had remained true to the early Impressionist school, could only consider a perverse return to cave art.

"Shall I give your love to Lissa?" asked Judith as Ishmael tucked her into the cosiest seat of Nicky's car, which was to take her to Penzance. "No, I won't," she went on. "I shall tell her she's to come and give it for herself. She is coming, I know, now she's got her International picture off her mind. She's a very gifted woman, but I sometimes think it's a pity for her to fill her life with nothing but paint and

canvases. I'm old-fashioned, I suppose!"

"Lissa and I understand each other," said Ishmael. "She is the only other human being beside myself I've ever met who finds the deepest joy in things and places instead of people."

"Do you still? Not you; they've failed you for a long time now, I know, and they'll fail Lissa. I wish I hadn't given her the advice I did when she came to town."

"What was that?" asked Ishmael, stepping back as Nicky climbed into the driver's seat.

"Never to trust a man or offend a woman. She's stuck to it too well. I've got to the age when I think it's better to have trusted too much than too little. Good-bye, my dear! Take care of yourself. I shan't come again."

"What ..." began Ishmael; but at a sign from Judith Nicky had put in the clutch and the car was sliding off down the drive. Ishmael turned and went thoughtfully into the house. He wondered whether Judy too had suffered from that same sense of a shattered atmosphere that he had since the return of Archelaus.

It seemed absurd that he should, he told himself. He was seventy, Archelaus older; it was surely time they found it possible to live together in harmony.... And yet it was not that there was any definite bad feeling between them, that he could find any holes in the scheme of his brother's behaviour. It was only that Archelaus, old as he was, still retained the quality of a satyr, of something oddly malevolent, that boded ill. Ishmael tried to break himself of the feeling, life-old with him, though for so many years forgotten, but he found that, though he could force himself not to dwell on it, beyond that he was powerless. There was no actual harm Archelaus could do him, and he told himself repeatedly that there must be something rather hateful in himself that he could still feel this profound troubling of aversion.

He called for Jim to go over the farm with him; but the little boy was not to be found, and one of the maids told him she had seen him go off with his new uncle. Ishmael paused to put on a big coat, for the wind was fresh although it was late in May, and then he too went out.

In the four-acre the young corn he had sown on that day of Archelaus's return showed some four or five inches of green blades. Lest it should grow too fast and rank, the roller had been busy over it the day before, and, though the elastic tissue of its frail-looking growth was already springing erect again, the field still showed alternate stripes of light and dark, marking this way and that of the roller's passing, as though some giant finger had brushed the nap of this fine velvety tissue the wrong way.

Ishmael leant upon the gate and looked at the corn, mechanically noting its good condition, but feeling no pleasure at the sight. It was for him as though a blight had come over the Cloom of his idolatry, and he told himself it could never again be the same for him. He felt very old and tired, though it was still early in the day. His brain was working slowly; it took him a long time to register upon it his thoughts about anything at which he was looking, and the knowledge of this distressed him.

Judy had gone and was not coming back—she had said so. That aroused no acute sensation in him, but rather a dreary feeling of being sorry. Judy was old in spite of her vigour and her ever-quick tongue, which age had quickened. She had always been articulate, he always the reverse, and on this morning he felt a dumb impotency even towards himself. He stared out over the acres filmed with that thin, fine green, and past it to the wine-coloured ploughed lands and the pastures, and, turning a little against the gate, he saw the house, a pale pearl-grey on this clear day. He turned to his left and saw cultivated land far as the cliffs where once waste had been; and here and there on the rolling slopes of the moor beyond he saw a little grey farmstead that was his too, whose tenants owed their prosperity to him. And for the first time in his life the sight gave him no joy. Archelaus had drawn a blight over it all. He might tell himself with the resentful anger of old age that the thing was all wrong, absurd even; but that availed nothing. Years had not softened the fact that the presence of Archelaus had power to spoil things for him, now as when he had been a child. Archelaus was somewhere now with little Jimmy, telling him tales of the far places of the earth, which he, Ishmael, had never seen, never would see. Jim was listening entranced, his bright brown eyes shining as Nicky's did when he was moved, as Phoebe's had been wont to do.

A bright whistling sounded from the direction of the house, and Nicky came to the gate leading from the farmyard and stood looking across it. He saw Ishmael, and, waving his hat, began to come over the field towards him. And quite suddenly a certain balm slipped into Ishmael's grieved heart. At least he had Nicky ... and that, after all, was what Cloom meant. Cloom might in all these years have failed him as far as she herself was concerned, leaving him feeling bereft and lost, but it was not in her power or in that of Archelaus to spoil whatever since Nicky's birth had been his chief reason for loving Cloom. This was not a blind love as the mere instinct for acres had been—this was the motive power of love

itself. He waited in sudden gladness by the gate.

The day sharpened as it went on, cold rain blew up, and the inmates of the Manor began to be anxious that Archelaus had not yet come in with little Jim. No one seemed to know where he had gone or taken the child. As the day wore on Marjorie, usually a very placid, strong-minded mother, began to grow frantic. She declared that never since he came to the place had she considered Archelaus quite sane or responsible, and that Ishmael ought to have known better to keep such a queer old man on in the same house as a child. Nicky tried to comfort her before he went out for the third time on his horse to try and find some trace of the two missing members of the family. Ishmael could do nothing but wander from room to room, oppressed by a sense of fear such as he had not suffered from since Nicky had gone to South Africa. Once he shook his fist in the air as he waited by himself in the dining-room, whence he could watch the drive, and the facile, burning tears of age ran down his face as he spoke aloud of Archelaus in a cracked old voice he hardly recognised for his own. If Archelaus had let the boy come to any harm, if he had done him any hurt.... Back on his mind came flooding old memories of Archelaus—the night in the wood, for instance.... He had done wrong to believe that even at eighty years old that deep malevolence had faded. His instinct had been the thing all his life long which had made genius for him, and he had been wrong not to trust it now he was old. It was probably the only thing about him which had not aged, and he should have let himself go with it....

Late that night, through wind and sharp rain-shower, Nicky came back, with Jim, sleepy but unhurt and full of his adventure, before him on the horse. Archelaus and the child had been found wandering on the moor by Botallack mine, now long disused; Jim was crying with hunger and alarm and the old man babbling of the days when he had worked there. He was trying to find one particular shaft to show the child, he said. As it was ruined, with an unguarded lip and a sheer drop in the darkness of some five hundred feet, it was as well that the search for it had failed. Archelaus was following with the doctor in his trap, said Nicky briefly. He had seemed as though suddenly broken down, the doctor thought, and would probably never recover. And, indeed, when Archelaus was half-carried, half-helped, into the hall, he looked, save for the two spots of colour on his high cheek-bones, like some huge old corpse galvanised into a shocking semblance of life.

He was taken up to his room, the one with the four-poster bed in which the old Squire had died, with the wide view of the rolling fields. And there, it was soon plain, Archelaus would remain for what was left to him of his earthly course.

CHAPTER III

THE LETTERS

A week later there was no doubt that Archelaus was dying. He had passed the week only half-conscious—some spring both in the machinery of his splendid old body and his brain seemed as though they had given way together. He lay dying, and Ishmael, standing day by day beside the bed, looking down on the seamed, battered, gnarled thing that lay there so helplessly, felt a stirring of something new towards Archelaus. It was not any touch of that irrational affection that very easily affected people experience for those they have never really liked and yet towards whom they feel a warm outflow merely because of the approach of death; neither was it any regret that he had not loved Archelaus in life. That would have been absurd; there had been nothing to make him like his brother and everything to make him do the reverse, and he was not of those whose values are upset by approaching death. But his antipathy for Archelaus had all his life been so deep, if not so very violent a thing, that it had hitherto prevented him feeling towards him even as amicably as one human being naturally feels towards another. This was the change that took place now—he was not enabled to yearn over a brother, but he was, for the first time, able to look with the detached impersonal sympathy and kindness of one man towards another whom he has no particular reason to dislike. A profound pity wrung his heart as he looked—the pity he would have felt from the beginning if Archelaus had ever let him, the pity which had prompted his forbearance at the time of the bush-beating in the wood.

This broken old man had wandered all his days; he had lived all over the earth and called no place his, even as he had possessed many women and yet called none his own. That such had been his nature and would have been even under other circumstances did not at this pass make the wanderings less pitiful. For the whole time that sense of wrong had kept telling him that he ought to have one special place for his own, and that one the place where he was born, which his father had held before him.

Looking down on him, Ishmael wondered what it was that had driven him back to it at the latter end, whether it were blind instinct or some more reasoned prompting. He was soon to know, for on the day a week after Archelaus had been brought home he seemed to become himself again in mind and demanded to see his brother alone.

Ishmael went upstairs and into the bedroom.

Archelaus lay in the big bed, looking smaller than seemed possible; his face, deep in the pillows, jutted sharply between the mounds of whiteness with an effect as of some gaunt old bird of prey. His hands and long corded wrists looked discoloured against the sheet. Ishmael went across to the bed and sat down beside it. Archelaus was very still; only his eyes glittered as they stared up at Ishmael from between his thickly veined lids.

"You wanted to see me," said Ishmael. His voice was expressionless, but not from any hard feeling on his part. It seemed to him as he sat there that nothing as vigorous as animosity could be left alive between them—both old, both frail, both drawing near to sleep. And yet, as their eyes stared into each other's, some tremor of the old distaste still seemed to communicate itself....

Archelaus began to speak, very slowly, very low, so that Ishmael had to stoop forward to hear, but each word was distinct, and evidently with that extraordinary clarity that comes sometimes to the dying, even to those whose brains have been troubled, the old man knew what he was saying.

"I want to tell 'ee," said Archelaus. Ishmael stayed bent forward, attentive.

"What do 'ee suppose I came back for?" asked Archelaus—and this time there was definite malice in voice and look; "because I loved 'ee so?"

"No, I never thought that. I wondered rather ... and I thought it was just that—" he broke off. Archelaus finished the sentence for him.

"That I was old and wandering in my wits, and came home as a dog does? No; it wasn't that. I came home to tell 'ee something—something I've hid in my heart for years past, something that'll make I laugh if I find myself in hell!"

Ishmael waited in silence. When he again began to speak it was as though Archelaus were wandering away from the point which he had in mind.

"You've set a deal of store by Cloom, haven't you, Ishmael?" he asked.

Ishmael nodded. Archelaus went on:

"Not just for Cloom, is it? To hand it on better'n you got it—to have your own flesh and blood to give it to? To a man as is a man it wouldn't be so much after all wi'out that?"

Again Ishmael assented. Again Archelaus went on without any fumbling after words, as though all his life he had known what he was going to say at this moment. He lifted his hand and began fumbling at the neck of his nightshirt. Ishmael guessed what he was wanting, for when he had been undressed they had found a little flat oilskin bag slung around his neck which they had left there. Now he bent forward, and, loosening the shirt, lifted out the bag. In obedience to a nod from Archelaus, he took out his knife and, cutting the dark, greasy string that looked as though it had rested there for years, slipped the bag from off it. Then, still in obedience to Archelaus, he slit the oil-silk and a few discoloured letters fell out. He gathered them up from off the coverlet and waited.

"Read," said Archelaus. Ishmael dived into a pocket for his spectacles, found them, adjusted them, and began to turn over the letters. Archelaus pointed to one with his trembling old finger. "That first," he whispered; "take that one first." Then, as Ishmael settled himself to read, he added with a low chuckle: "Knew the writen', do 'ee?"

It had seemed vaguely familiar to Ishmael, but no more, and not even now could he say whose it was. It was very old-fashioned writing and very characterless, the hand which had in his youth been called "Italian," and it seemed to him to have nothing distinctive about it. "Never mind," said Archelaus as he shook his head; "you'll know fast enough. Read."

This is what Ishmael read by the evening light that flooded the room:

"Dear Archelaus," ran the letter, "I don't know whatever I shall do. I wish I was dead. Why did you come back and trouble me? There were plenty of women where you came from. You have told me about them often enough. I never wanted you to make love to me. I never liked it, only I couldn't help it. And now there's a baby coming and he hasn't been near me for over two months. He seems as though he

didn't want me any more, and I don't know what to do, because now he'll have to know...."

Ishmael read so far, and though he did not understand what he read, and it sent no rush of knowledge over his soul, yet a deadly sense of fear, of yet he knew not what, sent his heart pounding through his frame. The letter fell to his knee and Archelaus, watching, said:

"I told her to speak 'ee soft and let her lil' body lie against 'ee...."

Ishmael picked up the letter again, looked from the date—the month of January, in 1868—to the signature, "Phoebe Ruan," before he let the letter drop again. Still he said nothing, and after a minute Archelaus went on.

"Read the next," he said.

The next was but a further plaint, signed with Phoebe's name, in a rather more uneven hand. Ishmael found himself remembering, as his eye met them again, her little tricks with the pen—the wandering tails to her words, the elaborate capitals which gave a touch of individuality to the regular slanting lines. He picked up the last letter.

"Dear Archelaus," it began—Phoebe would never have suffered sufficiently from a sense of fitness to alter the conventional beginning, whatever the stress under which she wrote—"I have done it, and now he need never know unless you tell him, and you won't ever, will you, dear, dear Archelaus? Please promise me."

"Did you promise?" was all Ishmael's voice asked.

Archelaus stirred a little in the bed.

"I promised never to hurt her by tellen' 'ee," he said. There was a moment of silence, and then he broke into vehement speech. Even his voice had gathered strength; it was as though in the full flood of what was sweeping out of him, after being dammed for so many years, all physical disabilities were washed away.

"Aw, what do 'ee think I ded it for?" he asked; "for love of Phoebe? Her!... I could have got as good at any brothel to Penzance.... It wasn't for love I ded it; it was for hate. Hate of 'ee, Ishmael! To get my revenge, and for you not to knaw till it was too late, much too late, to cast her off or the child. I wanted to wait till the boy should be the world to 'ee ... till he had grown as your own soul, and you saw his son ready to come after him and thought it was your own flesh and blood you was leaving behind you, and you too old to leave any other.... Cloom's been yours all your life, but when you and I are both on us dead and rotting, it'll be I and not you who's living on at Cloom. So 'tes mine, after all, not yours...."

A moment later and the triumphant voice went on again.

"There's another letter," it said, "from your old Parson. I wrote to he after I'd met Nicky—my son—casual-like once in Canada. That's what he answered."

Again Ishmael picked up the letter, almost mechanically, and read:

"I have received your letter dated July, 1891. I cannot find words to write to you as I would wish. If what you tell me is true—and I do not think you could have invented the letters of which you send me copies—it would matter very little if I found the pen of men and of angels to tell you what I thought. I can only tell you that even if the wish is wicked I hope with all my heart, and pray it too, that you may never be allowed to come home to tell your brother what it is in your heart to tell him. That the boy may never in his turn have a son to gratify you with the sight of your grandchild at Cloom. That this weapon you have forged against your brother may be under Providence to your own undoing. And since the ways of God are mysterious—though I am tempted to say not as past finding out as the ways of man—even if you carry out your threat it may be that Ishmael will be given strength to withstand the horror of what you tell him, and that the Lord has a comfort for him in ways you could not understand, so that you will be robbed of all but an empty victory...."

As Ishmael slowly and with meticulous care put the letters safely on to the bed a step was heard coming along the passage, the step of Nicky, the only step in that house which was both that of a man and vigorous. Archelaus turned his head a little on the pillow, and Ishmael, for the first time showing any emotion, leant towards him. "If you say a word to him—" he began. The steps paused at the door and then went on again. Ishmael stayed bent forward, eyes sidelong. Archelaus began to speak, as though his mind had drifted backwards from the acuteness of the present.

"All these years ..." he muttered, "all these years ... wandering auver the earth, I've thought on it.... Phoebe, she was a light woman and many was the time I'd held her lil' body to mine, but she was soft as

a lil' lamb fresh from its mother, so she was.... The likes of you wants too much from a woman; I was never one of they chaps. If a woman was lil' and soft, said I—"

"Archelaus," said Ishmael, speaking very distinctly and bending over the old man to try and attract his wandering attention, "when you came back from California, had you it in your mind to do this thing?"

He had to repeat the question, and at last Archelaus showed a gleam of knowledge. "When I came back from Californy ..." he murmured, "I came back, so I ded.... No, I'd forgot all about her then, sure enough; she was but a soft lil' thing. But he'd got her, him as had taken all of mine, got the wench as had been mine, that I might ha' wanted again, and I was mad as fire. And then I was glad of it, for I saw my way, if so be as I could only get a cheild by her...." He turned a little on his pillows towards Ishmael and became confidential. "That was my fear," he went on, "that I'd go wi' her again and no cheild 'ud come any more than it had afore. But there's often a change in women after a few years, and besides ... I'd not wanted to get 'en afore. I knew I'd get 'en that time, and I ded. She was some whisht, she was, weth you and your fine gentleman ways of not sleeping along o' she, when she found the way she was in...." He laughed, a tiny, little old thread-like laugh, as out of the trough of the years there floated up to him Phoebe's predicament and his advice as to how to meet it—a thin little thread of laughter that spanned the years and connected that time of which he spoke with this present moment by the bed of death. The laugh died away and fell again into the abysses from which it had been evoked, and there only hung a silence in the room, but it was a silence thin, brittle as glass.

His lids drooped. Over his fast dimming brain the films of approaching dissolution began to swirl, now thick and fast, now tenuous again, so that he recognised Ishmael and what had happened for a fleeting moment during which the old glee peeped out of his blurred eyes. Then he drifted into sleep with the suddenness of an infant, a sleep quite peaceful, as of one who has accomplished well his task and now may rest. Ishmael sat on by the bed; sometimes he looked at him, even laid his fingers on his pulse to make sure, with as much mechanical care as ever, that he was indeed only sleeping. He sat on where he was, but with his eyes staring out of the window, though they hardly saw the rolling fields that lay, a burnished green, beneath the evening light. Once a step came again to the door, and a voice asked if everything were all right. Ishmael answered "Yes," bidding the questioner go away, and he never knew that it had been Nicky's voice which asked.

CHAPTER IV

HESTER

Ishmael sat and watched his own thoughts pass before him. It is not given to every man to see all that he has lived by lying broken around him, and this was what had happened to Ishmael. He could see, now that he had lost him, how it was the thought of his son at Cloom, far more than Cloom itself, which had held ever deepening place in his heart and soul. He remembered the night when Phoebe had whispered to him that she was going to have a baby ... how she had clung about his neck and how happy she had seemed. He remembered too—the recollection swam up to him through years of blurred forgetting—an earlier night, when Phoebe had won him back to her ... that night of passion which must have been on her side a calculated thing, a trap for him to fall in blindly—as he had. Phoebe—who had seemed so transparent, and whom, as he now realised, no one but Archelaus had ever really known.... Yet none of that hurt or even outraged him. What Phoebe had been was of supreme unimportance. Not at this distance of years could he conjure up the emotions of an outraged husband which even at the time would have seemed to him both inadequate and ridiculous. Not the realisation that that night of passion had been a faked thing on her part—a set-piece on a stage—touched him. He took, as he was guiltily aware, too little to it himself, beyond animal appetite, for him to dare judge of that.

But that other night, after she had told him he was to expect a child to be born to him, that night when he had gone out into the scented garden and felt drowning and yet uplifted on the tide of the deepest emotion of his life—to know that that had all been based on a delusion was what upset the whole of life now.

Could truth be built on untruth? If what he had felt then was all the time based upon a lie, how could there be anything worth the living for in that which he had left? The rapture, the deep and sacred joy, when through his fatherhood he had felt kin to God Himself—what of that? What of the life, the religion, the love, the hopes, that had gone on piling up upon that one thing from that day on? Were

they all as valueless as what they had been built on? If so, then he was bereft indeed, left in an empty world, that only echoed mockery to the plaints of men and the quiet eternal laughter of the Being who made them for ends of supreme absurdity.

It was not his relationship towards Nicky that Ishmael was weighing as he sat in the still room; it was his whole relationship towards life. It was not his fatherhood that he felt reeling; it was the fatherhood of God. It was not love that he felt slipping from his grasp; it was truth: not Nicky that he was despairing of, but the figure of Christ Himself.

If all that emotion, that love, that faith, that ardent passion of joy and work, were founded, caused by, built upon what had never been, could they really exist either?

Once he did hear his voice saying aloud "My boy ... mine ..."; but even then, his passion for truth outweighing indulgence to self, he knew that it was the mere mechanical speech of the situation rising to his lips unconsciously. He said the words again to try and get at exactly what their import was. "Mine...."

All that had struck him while Archelaus had been lying watching him read the letters was "This couldn't happen to a woman ... how unfairly it's arranged ... it's only a man this could happen to ..."; and that had shown him how small, after all, was the man's share, that such a thing could be possible. Him or another, it really did not seem to matter so very much. Both he and Archelaus had had Phoebe. That this spark of life should have been from him or from Archelaus ... was that, after all, so important? It seemed such a small share. Fatherhood, looked at dispassionately, seemed to him a thing very artificial in its convention. Life, that there should be life—yes, that was different, but not that it should have been from him or another on that particular occasion.... When one thought that both had equally possessed the woman they seemed to merge so in her personality as to lose individual personalities of their own.

If he had not kept away from Phoebe for those two months, thus, in the light of her letter, putting the matter beyond doubt, how would any of the three of them ever have known whose son Nicky was? Women always said they knew, even when they were going equally with two men; but did they? Was it not rather that they always decided it was the child of the man they cared for most? And if conditions had all along been normal between him and Phoebe, then how would he have felt in the light of his brother's avowal? It would have been impossible to say whether the child had been his or his brother's; and yet Nicky would have been himself, even as he was now, and he, Ishmael, would have felt the same about him, and nothing would have been really different any more than if he had never known; or, knowing that there was doubt, still could not have told for certain which of the two it was who had fathered Nicky. How, then, was it different now that he did know beyond a doubt? Nicky was the same....

Ishmael clung on to that. Nicky was the same. Then—and the light came sliding into his heart with a sensation of easing—if Nicky were the same, then the truth might be the same too; all that he had lived by not be the more overset than was the Nicky he had known and loved all these years. Though Nicky was not what was called his son, all he had built upon Nicky might not be valueless any more than Nicky himself had become valueless, or one jot of his character or personality been overthrown.... Nicky stood where he had; then why not more than Nicky? These were the eternal verities, not the mere accident of fatherhood.

Ishmael gave a long, tired sigh, and his body slipped a little down into his chair; his eyes still stared at the light in the sky. He felt suddenly terribly tired, so tired that his body grew very heavy and his mind of a thistledown lightness, which refused any more to concentrate. Yet he knew that there were certain things he must face for the sake of Nicky, certain things he must ensure. He made a violent effort and forced his mind and body to respond to his will. To him, on the far rim of life, it might be vouchsafed to see how little certain things mattered after all; but there was Nicky, still in the midst of it, with a mind that lived more in the present than Ishmael's had ever done. It was important for Nicky's peace of mind that he should never know he was in fact, if not in law, what so many of his family had been, what he would have thought of as "base-born." And Nicky so disliked Archelaus and all he stood for.... Nicky's happiness—that was what mattered now, what must be ensured.

Slowly Ishmael turned in his chair and faced Archelaus once more. He bent down and spoke into his ear, but Archelaus did not stir beyond a muttering in his sleep. As he looked at him Ishmael saw how easy it would be to slip a pillow over his mouth and hold it there till he had been put beyond the reach to hurt Nicky. Yet he felt no temptation to do it, not because of any scruple of conscience—the suggestion did not get as far as arousing that—but simply for the reason that most people do not commit crime, because it does not seem a possible thing in the scheme of life as it is normally known. Things horribly unbelievable, out of the ordinary course, did happen in life, even as this thing that had happened to him; but the angle of life was not thereby changed, it was still the things that were

abnormal. Ishmael saw the impossibility of killing his brother even while he saw the possibility.

"Archelaus!..." he said again, speaking clearly and insistently. "You are not to tell anyone else. You are not to tell Nicky. Do you hear me!"

Archelaus stirred and opened his eyes; they stared at Ishmael for a long moment without recognition. Then a flame of understanding came into their dimmed look.

"I'm come home to tell my son," he said. "He'm my flesh and blood; I'm come home to tell en."

"No—no!" Ishmael put out his hand to take the letters which Archelaus had gathered into his grasp again. With surprising strength Archelaus rolled his body over on to them, and his voice was raised in a cry before Ishmael could stop him. At the same moment a step sounded in the corridor. It was Nicky, doubtless anxious, coming along for a third time to listen if all were well. At the cry he hurried and opened the door and came quickly in.

Hester the dog was with him and, bounding forward in the boisterous manner of the well-meaning foolish creatures of her type, she sprang upon the bed. Nicky ran forward as Archelaus uttered another cry, but unlike the first. This was of pure high terror. Nicky seized the dog by the scruff of the neck, so that she hung suspended for a moment in his grasp above the bed, before he bore her to the door. Archelaus stared as though he saw a ghost; his old mouth fell open, showing slack and curved inwards like the mouth of a very young baby. His eyes glazed with his terror; his cheeks had in that one minute assumed a pale, purplish hue, on which the deep lines and darker veins stood out like a network laid over his shrunken skin. He sat up in bed—he who had not lifted his head for a week—and stayed rigid so for a few beating moments. Then he fell back, crumpled up amid the pillows. Nicky had flung the dog outside, and came to bend over him, casting a watchful eye towards Ishmael to see how he was standing it. Ishmael's hand was slipped into the bed under his brother's body; his eyes were fixed on his face.

"Go for the doctor, quickly, Nicky!" he said. "Go yourself."

The dying man opened his eyes and fixed them on Ishmael.

"No," he said, so faintly that Nicky had to bend low to hear; "no. You don't need to send him away.... I've had a sign, Ishmael; I've had a sign.... Oh, my soul, I've had a sign!..."

Ishmael bent over to him, trembling, waiting, wondering.

"All these years I've tried to forget ..." said Archelaus, "and the Lard hasn't forgotten.... *Phoebe, Phoebe, keep the dog from off me!...*" His voice cracked on arising scream. Then he fell into an exhausted silence, but his eyes still sought Ishmael's. Profoundly stirred, knowing that, at what was literally for him the last hour, Archelaus was agreeing to forego the full cup of his revenge, wondering why and yet too shaken to wonder intelligently, Ishmael called to him in sudden passion:

"Archelaus ... brother! Try and think one thought of love, only one, don't think of your fear. There's nothing there to hurt you. There's only me and Nicky...." But Archelaus never spoke again. He lay and gazed as though he were struggling for speech; in his eyes struggled the tortured questioning of the inarticulate.

What it was that had struck home to his brother at the last Ishmael was never to know, but he recognised that in that minute's space was all of remorse and understanding and forbearance, of a blind effort towards something not wholly self, that Archelaus had ever known. The dying man flung a failing hand out to Nicky, and his eyes were on him when what light still lingered in them faded and went out.

Nicky wanted to take Ishmael away, but the old man insisted on being left alone with his dead brother for a while, and when Nicky, determined not to go far or be more than a few minutes away, had left the room, Ishmael went to the fire and dropped the letters in it one by one. He watched them burn away, and then crossing over to the bed again he sat down slowly in the chair beside it.

Nicky had to send for the doctor, give the news to Marjorie, parry Jim's questionings; and when at last he went upstairs again it was to find Ishmael, in a deep sleep, slipped forward in his chair as though he had never left it, his head against the edge of the bed, so that the outflung dead hand of Archelaus almost touched his white hair.

CHAPTER V

REAPING

August came in hot and clear, all over the countryside the crops ripened well, and now, in the last quarter of the moon, they were ripe to cut. Ishmael went down to the four-acre with Nicky to see the men at work, and Jim, who for days had been on the tiptoe of excitement over the advent of "the machine," as the binder was always called, ran in front of them.

The men had cleared a path some five feet wide all round the field with their scythes, and now the clattering thing, crimson painted, blatant, was going on with the work, and the great square of oats and barley stood up compact and close; while round and round it, diminishing it every time, went the machine, drawn by three glossy horses harnessed unicorn fashion.

Up the slope of the field they went, heads nodding, swelling sides glistening in the sun, while Jimmy, proudly perched upon the leader, his legs sticking out straight on either side, chirruped an encouragement lost in the clatter. Up they came, till the three brown heads, the forelocks blown about their rolling eyes, were clear cut against the blue of the sea; then the man perched on his high iron seat tugged at the reins, and the three horses and the clamorous machine came swirling round the bend of the field and past the waiting knot of people. The huge wheel, made of flail-like pieces set horizontally on spidery arms, went thrashing round, scooping the standing corn on to the knife, which cut it and thrust it into the mysterious recesses of the machine in the twinkling of the blade. The next instant the bound bundle, neatly knotted round with string, was vomited forth on the far side....

So the machine—capable, crimson, noisy—went on its magic way with a glitter of whirling metal and a rhythmic clatter, the white blades of the wheel flashing up against the sky. And a quiet little old man in shirt-sleeves and trousers all of a soft faded blue bent about in the stubble at its wake, leaning the bundles up, three together, against each other, the delicate heads interlacing, and the fresh green of the "lug"—the clover and other green things cut with the crop that make it so rich a food for the cattle—showing through the stems here and there.

"How d'you find it, John-Willy?" asked Ishmael of the little old man, who rolled an ear of barley in his horny fingers and answered:

"Rich, Maister Ishmael, rich!..."

So it had come to the time of the harvest at Cloom, and the crops were sound and sweet, and, if the weather held, the threshing would soon follow. Life and harvest went on as they had for years, and Ishmael saw that all things were done as they should be, and now the House had adjourned and Nicky had come down to help him. For this, after all, was life, Ishmael told himself—this seeing to the earth and her fulness, this dealing with men and their wages and their work. This was definite; about it there could be no illusion, no shattering of beliefs.

Nicky, who for all his years was still occasionally swept by the impulse to play, now when he saw Jimmy riding so triumphantly upon the leader stopped the machine as it came past, and, bidding the driver dismount, took his place upon the high iron seat and started off. Jimmy shrieked with delight, and urged on his horse so fast that Nicky had to shout to him to keep quiet. Jimmy kept on turning his head to see the completed bundles being emitted from the back of the binder, and at every one he gave a whoop of joy as though it were a result of his and his father's cleverness. Nicky cracked his whip neatly round the boy's head without ever touching him, as he had learnt to do in Canada, and every time the little group of men and women standing beside Ishmael, his tenants, applauded, admiringly. "They make a handsome pair, so they do!" said old John-Willy Jacka. "I reckon you'm rare proud of your son and grandson, Maister Ishmael!"

Ishmael nodded. His eyes were fixed on the two of them as they appeared up the slope—Jim coming in view first, so young and glowing against the sunlit blue of the sky, so small upon the big powerful horse; then Nicky, lean and handsome, his grave face lit to mirth, looking, with his slouch felt hat and bare neck and chest exposed by the loose open shirt he wore, like some brown god of the harvest—not a young deity of spring, but the fulfilled presentment of life at the height of attainment, at harvest.

Yet he had been as young as Jim, would be as old as himself—so thought Ishmael, with that impotency the watching of the flight of time evokes in the heart. To Ishmael it seemed such a mere flash as he looked back to the evening when the Neck had been cried in that field, and he had thought the moment so vivid it must last for ever. That moment seemed hardly further ago than when he had first broken his own earth in this field with his new iron plough. Neither seemed really long ago at all—time had gone

too swiftly for that—yet both seemed very far away, not set there by period, but by being in another life. What seemed furthest away of anything was the morning last spring when he had sown these acres with the dredge-corn now being reaped, and when the figure of an old man in slaty-grey clothes had paused by the gate and stared across the farmyard.... Archelaus now lay in six feet of earth, while he himself still walked free upon these broad acres; and yet—what was it Archelaus had said? "It'll be I, and not you, who's living on at Cloom; 'tes my flesh and blood'll be there, so 'tes mine, after all...."

How much did that affect it? thought Ishmael now, as he watched for them to come round once more, and gave a nod and a wave of the hand as they breasted the slope. It was not, it occurred to him, not for the first time, but more deeply than ever before, as though Archelaus had been some stranger. He had built to make Cloom a good place for his descendants, for his flesh and blood, but the same blood ran in Nicky whether he or Archelaus had fathered him. Not one jot of it was different. And this, which to Archelaus, had he been in Ishmael's position, would have been the sharpest pang—which he had meant to be the sharpest—was to Ishmael the saving element. For it prevented Cloom being made in his eyes a thing of no account, the mere vehicle of strangers. Cloom was more to him than his dislike of Archelaus—that was what it amounted to. Nicky was more to him as himself than his idea of him as his son. Jim was everything to him as the future of Cloom, not as his grandson any more than that of Archelaus. But sonship struck more nearly than any matter of a generation twice removed, and not so simply as all that could the thing be harmonised with his groping soul. For he was still tormented by doubts as to whether all he had lived on and by must not be valueless since they were conceived on what did not exist, still feeling lost, without anything definite to hold to, without any solution of the riddle. He refused to believe that the whole riddle of life might be without an answer, that there could be no pattern, only a blind mingling of threads; that was a supposition everything in him, inborn and learned, failed to tolerate.

This summer had been a ghastly effort for him, who, for all his reserve, had never been any use at deception; he had felt as though he took about with him all day a sensation as of a hollow weight—something that bore him down and yet had no solidity, that was rather the nightmare heaviness of a dream. Also he was obsessed by the triumphant face of Archelaus that leered at him, that stared at Nicky and Jim with a deadly possessiveness in his eyes while they went their unconscious ways, that said, as plainly as words could have, "I have won ... I have won!..."

Life was not simple even at seventy, when such a mixture of motives and sensations could hold sway—the old fear of Archelaus crystallised into a definite writhing under this triumph of his, the aching sense of personal loss in his son, and, sharpest pang of any, the fear that all of life lay hollow behind and before.... Ever since Nicky's birth it had seemed to him that every revelation had come to him through his fatherhood of Nicky—ecstasies he had otherwise not touched.... Never, much as he loved his girls, could they have given him hours such as Nicky had; neither when Georgie had told him of the advent of each, nor at the time of birth, had there been for him the deep significance of the night when Phoebe had whispered to him.... There the fact that he could only feel a thing at its height for the first time had stepped in, preventing ever again a renewal of such ecstasy.

And what was ecstasy worth if based on a lie? Back to the old question he came, turning it over and over, aware of it in the back of his mind even when he was thrusting it sternly away from the forefront of his attention.

He turned it over again now as the clattering binder went round and round, diminishing the square of waving gold, littering the stubble with swathes; and at every passing of it he waved to Jimmy, even when the child had forgotten his presence and was showing off for the benefit of some newcomer in the little group. The machine was nearing the tall monolith of granite that stood up amid the corn, and Nicky was driving carefully so as not to scrape the flails against its stone side. High as he sat on his iron perch, it towered above him, and he turned the horses carefully round it with a swirl that made Jimmy shriek for pleasure. Jimmy leant sideways from his steed to try and slap the grey granite in passing, but could not reach it save with the end of his little whip.

The last film of standing crop fell away from before the monolith, and it reared up grim and gaunt, but sparkling with a thousand little points of light as the bright flecks in the stone caught the sun. Nicky, who had grown rather tired of his freak, undertaken to please Jimmy, brought it, to an end with the successful negotiation of the monolith, and, getting down, went to lift Jimmy also from his perch.

"Dinner-time," he told him, and let him sit upon his shoulder, big boy as he was, to ride to the gate.

"Come along, father," said Nicky, slipping one hand upon Ishmael's arm, and keeping the other folded over the slim brown ankles crossed against his chest; "I promised Lissa I wouldn't let you tire yourself."

They set off towards the house, the three of them, but it was Nicky who answered Jim's eager talk as they went, and Ishmael who in silence tried to answer his own thoughts. To one thing only he clung just

then, with a blind, almost superstitious, clinging, and that to his determination to taste every moment of this harvesting, to see that everything was done in the way he liked, to watch the rhythmic procession of it while yet he could say that it was all his own. Physically also he had not been the same man these months since the death of Archelaus. With his uncertainty of mind as to the whole meaning of life went a feeling of insecurity about everything. Often he had to keep a firm hold on himself not to cry aloud that the world was slipping, slipping....

When the corn was all built into the great arishmows that stood bowing towards each other like the giant dancers in some stately minuet, he was there to watch. All day he went from field to field and watched the strong young labourers building; those on the ground tossing to those on the stooks, while the air was full of a deep rustling. One man would crawl about on the growing mow, arranging each sheaf as it was tossed up to him, so that its feathery crown lay towards the centre, away from chance of rain. At last it was all finished—all the precious grain tucked away out of possible harm in the heart of the arishmows, save for the feathery bunch at the crest that fastened all off with a flourish. It had been a lovely task, the building of the arishmows, for, like all work to do with the land, it was the perfection of rhythm, and this, added to the unending flow of tossing and packing, held always that lovely rustling of stalk and ear as an accompaniment of music to the action.

Not many days later and the stately arishmows were destroyed and the sheaves brought in on waggons and built into great stacks in the field which lay next to the farmyard, where the threshing would take place. There was a pile of the dredge-corn, another of deeply-golden oats, a third of the greyer-tinted wheat, which was a little smaller than the other two, though that also was as high as the roof of the barn.

In the cleared space between the stacks the great steam thresher would be brought; but now the men who would help in that work were still all part of the weaving pattern of stacking; one man tossed from the high-piled waggon, another, on the highest point of the growing stack, caught it with his pitchfork and threw it on, with a sideways twist, to the man on the lower end who got further and further along as he packed the sheaves, so that the thrower had to increase the tangent of his twist at every throw. Each of the men caught and tossed and placed, always to the moment, with the unending flow of machinery. And again —so often before, but never so keenly as now—was Ishmael struck with the pattern of it all.... This could not surely be the only thing that moved so rhythmically towards harvest; this inevitable flow, this deeply necessary procession of events, of sowing and ripening, of cutting and building and threshing, must surely hold its counterpart in the garnering of men's lives ...; or did they alone reap the whirlwind, and when the swirl of that was past, subside into formless dust?

CHAPTER VI

THRESHING

That day had come to which the whole of the farming year leads up—the day of the threshing, when the grain is at last released from danger and made ready to be stored in barns, to be ground in mills. "Guldise," as it is still called in West Cornwall, is an epic occasion, when all the months, from the first breaking of the land to the piling of the reaped sheaves, culminate at the apex of achievement.

In the field, between the waiting stacks, was the thresher; the traction-engine which had dragged it there stood beyond, only harnessed to it now by the long driving-belt that would, when the time came, make of the thresher a living creature. Presently all the men began to arrive, not only the labourers who always worked on the Manor farm, but the men from the neighbouring farms, from those owned by Ishmael and from others, for every threshing is a festival with a great dinner and refreshments in the field and good cheer, even for the crowds of children and stray dogs that always turn up out of nowhere. In the kitchen the maids were busy with the preparations for the dinner, and in the breakfast-room even Lissa, always late, was hurrying through her breakfast so as to go out and start work on the series of quick sketches she meant to do of the thresher at work and the groups around it.

Lissa was a young-looking woman for her thirty-five years, no more pretty than she had ever been, but graceful, and with a strong charm in her lazy voice and long grey eyes and in the mouth that was so like Georgie's, only less regular. Her chin and jaw had the clear sharpness of Ishmael's; she was far more like him both in character and aspect than the sweet round Ruth, and Ishmael had grown to feel more and more that no matter how long a time elapsed between the occasions when he and Lissa saw each other, yet they could always pick up where they had left off, that there was never need for more

than half-sentences between them. She, who was supposed to be the selfish one of the family because she lived in London most of the year and seldom wrote—she was still the only member of the household who had known something was wrong with Ishmael. She had found him uncommunicative on the subject, but she watched him with her clear understanding eyes that always made him think her so restful.

"Come on, do Auntie Lissa!" urged Jim. "It's begun; I can hear it."

"So can I," said Lissa drily; for the great moaning hum of the thresher filled the air, went on and on as it would all day except at food-times, sounding like some vast wasp held captive and booming unceasingly—some great dragon of a wasp, as Jimmy put it.

They went out together, but Lissa insisted on going to find grandpa first and helping him on with his light coat; then they all three went out across the farmyard and through the open gate into the field.

The thresher stood humming and palpitant, its great bulk painted a dull pinkish colour like a locust, but faded and stained with rust. Upon its trembling roof the piles of oats, thrown by the men on the stack alongside, showed a pure golden; above the sky was dazzlingly blue, and in it the white cumuli rode brilliantly. The men working on the top of the thresher showed bronzed against the luminous blue, their shirts as brightly white as the clouds, the shadows under their slouched hats lying soft and blue across their clear eyes.

Poised on the stacks the men were busy feeding the sheaves to the men on the thresher, who in their turn tilted them into the great concave drum in its hidden heart. From one end poured out steady streams of golden grain, into the hanging sacks that boys took away as they filled, bringing in their place empty sacks that hung limply for a minute and then began to fill, swelling and puffing out to sudden solidity. The sieves beneath the thresher shook back and forth, back and forth, tirelessly, while chaff poured away from the open jaws at the side in a fine dusty column of pale gold, from which the topmost husks blew up into the air, so that it was always filled with a whirling cloud that danced and gleamed in the sunlight like a swarm of golden bees.

At the far end of the thresher, away from the traction-engine, the fumbling lips of the shakers, mouthing in and out beneath their little penthouse, pushed out the beaten straw into the maw of an automatic trusser, which Ishmael had only bought that year and which he was watching eagerly. For one moment the formless tumble of straw, pushed out by those wagging wooden lips above, was lost in the trusser, then it shot forth below in bound bundles that had been made and tied by the hidden hands of the machinery within, to the never-ceasing wonder of the gaping children, who stared at the solemnly revolving spools of string in the little pigeon-holes on either side and from them back to where the string was perpetually disappearing, sucked into the interstices of the trusser, as though, if only they stared hard enough, they must eventually see how the miracle was accomplished. And from the ground yet more men picked up the bundles on their pitchforks and tossed them to men who were building the straw-ricks at the same time as the corn-stacks were diminishing. Little boys bore away the chaff gathered into sacks or swept it into a golden pile, feather-soft, from which smoke-like whirls wreathed in the little breezes.

In line with the thresher stood the engine, looped to it by trembling curves of driving-belt, that wavered like a great black ribbon from the driving-wheel of the traction-engine to that of the thresher, and that showed a line of quivering light along its edge. A trail of dark smoke blew ceaselessly from the traction-engine, staining the blue of the sky, against which it faded and died away. The engine rocked a little unceasingly upon its wheels as it stood, even as the thresher did, and its governor whirled round and round like a demented spirit, so fast that its short arms with the blobs on their ends made a little dark circle in the air. A pool of steamy water lying in the grass beneath the waste-pipe gave off white wreaths that wavered upwards and fell again, while from a huge black butt upon wheels the greedy boiler sucked up more and more through a coiling tube that glittered like a serpent.

It was dark, ugly, smelly, the traction-engine, but it was what endowed the murmurous thresher with life. In spite of its dirt and oil and dripping secretions, it kept going that wonderful life which was filling the world, the rising and falling hum, the streams of pouring grain, the swelling sacks, the great glossy bundles of straw, the blown column of chaff, the cloud of dancing golden magic bees that made of the air an element transmuted, glorified.

With all the threshings he had seen, it seemed to Ishmael that he had still never seen any quite so wonderful, so radiant, so rich to eye and ear and nostril, as this; and to little Jimmy, who had never been there for guldise before, it was a golden miracle. He stood, silent for once, transfixed, fronting the wondrous monster who did so many different things at once with such perfect ease, never making a mistake or getting out of time....

He helped, too, to carry out "crowse"—the midmorning lunch—to the men, and he wandered about with the crowds of stray children and patted the unresponsive dogs, and was admired by the women and bored by them, and himself partook of big saffron buns, that Marjorie said would spoil his dinner, but that didn't. Nothing, he felt, could have spoiled anything that day.

With evening and the last whirring of the thresher Ishmael, watching him at play, felt, as he always had, that it is impossible to watch children without an ache for the inevitable pity of it that they should have to grow up. It was not, he felt, because they are particularly happy—for never again can there be griefs blacker than those which darken all a child's horizon, but simply because they stand for something beautiful which can never come again. Now, looking at Jim and the other children, he felt the old pity, but tinged with something new. For the first time he saw that it was only by realising that children were symbols, the mere passing exponents of a lovely thing which was itself ever present, that it became possible to look at them without that aching. There would always be, he supposed, some people who could look at children and feel, not so much pity that these young things must age as self-pity that they themselves had lost childhood; but others looked as he always had, with a more impersonal pang, sorry that so beautiful a thing should fade. And it was for the comfort of such as he to realise that it did not matter in the least, because, though children grew up and away, childhood remained—a bright banner carried from hand to hand, always in a new grasp before the old one could tarnish it. More, he saw that it was this very evanescence which had for him given childhood its sadness that also gave it its beauty; if there were anywhere on earth a race of perpetual children it would not be beautiful. For he saw that it was the inevitable slipping-away of all life which gave poignancy to loveliness.

He spoke something of his thought to Lissa, and she nodded in comprehension.

"That's why no picture or sculpture can be as beautiful as the human model," she said, "not because of any necessary inferiority, but simply in the terrible permanence of man's work as compared with God's."

They stood a while longer side by side, and then Jimmy, who with the last whirring note of the thresher suddenly felt very tired, came and leant up against his grandfather. Ishmael stooped over the boy, and with a great heave, despite Marjorie's protests—she had come out to take her son to bed—he hoisted him up to his old bowed shoulder.

"Say good-night to the thresher," he told him. "You are going to bed, and it is going to bed too."

"Is it very tired?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes, nicely tired, like you when you have been running about all day."

"Not nasty tired like I am after lessons?"

"No, not nasty tired."

"Are you tired, Grandad?"

"Yes," said Ishmael.

"Nice tired or nasty tired?"

"Nice tired," said Ishmael; "old men and little boys both go nice tired."

"Like the thresher?" persisted Jimmy, and, receiving an answer that satisfied him, allowed his grandfather to carry him in to bed, though he could have gone in so much more quickly himself, for grandpapa could not run with him on his shoulder as his father could. But Jimmy was in no hurry, because every minute gained was a minute out of bed and in this wonderful world where threshers hummed and golden clouds wove themselves ceaselessly in the air.

Ishmael too felt very tired, as he had said; but, as he had also said, it was a pleasant tiredness. His day had been too full for thought other than of what was happening before his eyes. An exquisite sense of fitness, of something that was falling into place as everything in the history of the harvest had done, a sense as of gathered sheaves and stored grain, was with him, though sub-consciously. His brain felt filled with visual impressions, his old eyes held a riot of blue and gold, and a humming was still in his ears. As he closed his lids that night golden motes danced within them.

He sank off into sleep, and then drifted, half-awake again, to that state when the mind is not fully aware of where it is or of what has happened. It seemed to him, for one blurred moment, that he was a little boy again, falling to sleep on that evening when the Neck was cried ...; and then, out of the far past, came back to him the remembrance that it was at the Vicarage he had slept that night. Something

told him he was not there now.... Vaguely, in the darkness, he put up his hand to feel if the plaster Christ were above his head. His groping old fingers found it, and he stayed, half-reared up against his pillows for an instant, while he touched the drooping head with its thorny crown, and on that familiar touch he let his hand fall, and with it fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII

GARNERED GRAIN

The next morning he was found lying as though worn out suddenly, never to move or speak again. Only his brain was still alert as he lay there and watched them all from under his heavy lids. Three days he lay, and they could not even tell how much he understood, for he was past the effort that communicating with them would have meant; but all the while he was feeling his brain was clearer than it had ever been in his life, that at last he knew many things he could have told them if he could have spoken, only they were things that cannot be taught by one man to another, for every man must find them for himself.

At first it seemed to him he was floating very peacefully on a clear sea, untroubled in mind or body, though seeing he was drifting, because he was also aware that whither he was drifting was the inevitable direction of a kindly current. Then after a little or long while, he could not have told which, he seemed himself to become stationary, while past him flowed the pattern of his life as he remembered it—scenes grey and many-coloured, blurred at the edges, but sharp with an aching clarity at the core. They had all gone, these happenings, but it was not that which gave the poignancy; it was that the Ishmael who had taken part in them was gone too, and each had borne something of himself away with it.

Those first childish years after he had known Cloom was to be his, that he had to regenerate it; then those years at St. Renny ... Killigrew floated past him, joyous and pagan. There was Hilaria, joyous also ... he had forgotten her for years now. At St. Renny life was always just ahead, and he only had the sense of preparing for it, of being ready to leap into it as into some golden cool stream of running waters.... In those days it had been Cloom, the place made for him in life, that had held so much of glamour in its grey walls and hard acres. Yet even then there had been something else, some recognition of the fact that even this was not an end to itself alone.... Then youth—the first years at Cloom and that wonderful incursion into the London that was as past as he was, that London that had been half-wonder, half-nightmare, and that had held his love for Blanche. There had been a brief spell when he had told himself that this was the chief thing, that in that passionate fusing of two spirits, that absorption in some one other loved being, lay the end in life, but the mirage had dissolved then even as the image of it wavered and faded now. While he was lost and groping in the wastes it had left him in, there swam up the memory of Hilaria again, but no horror went with it. And though this second impinging of her life on his bore the far-off memory of fear, yet it now seemed as vital and natural as the first. She had shown him something long ago which he was fully understanding now.

He passed on, and again there lifted its head the thing which, in his clean, boyish horror, he had taken to hold a terror which he now saw it did not of necessity. He had learnt to mistrust it because it had led him into what had at the time been such a mistaken marriage with poor little Phoebe; but that, too, seemed to matter very little now. He saw again how in that one hectic year he had tried to tell himself that physical passion was at least the chief drug of life, that the wonder and the intoxication of it made all else pale, that it made even sordidness and strain worth while; and he saw again his revulsion from it, his effort to break away.

He drifted into the blackness he supposed was night, and came up out of it at the hour of his life when for the first time he had found something which, however it had modified or changed, had yet never entirely been swamped by anything else, which in some ways had strengthened—the wonder of fatherhood that he had felt, the ecstasy of creation, which had dawned for him on that night when Phoebe had whispered to him.... What now of that hour, that hour which had seemed so utterly broken by what Archelaus had told him all these years after? He still could not see quite clearly, though now it was with no sense of being hopelessly baffled that he fell back awhile from before that curtain. He went on passing again through his life, and he saw the harder years that came crowding along, those definite, clear-cut years of young manhood when he had somehow drifted a little away from Boase, when he had first begun to be a man in the country, when all his schemes and working out of them had

filled the hours—still with Nicky as the chief personal interest.

In his childhood he had lived by what would happen in a far golden future, in his youth by what might happen any dawning day; but in his years of manhood, and from then till he began to feel the first oncoming of age, he had lived by what he did. Then he came again to Georgie, and saw how insensibly he had been won to softer ways, though never to the glamour-ridden ways of first youth. They had been sweet, those years, and the sweeter for the outside things—the friendship with Killigrew that had vivified his life, the pleasant intermittent times with Judith, the renascence of intimacy with Boase and the growth of his children, growing away from him every year, but none the less to be loved for that. What had he lived by during those years? Not, consciously, by anything, except a mere going on and a determination to make the best of things, to get the most out of everything. When the Parson died he had a glimpse of a world he had lost sight of since his youth, but not then could he give up this one sufficiently to do more than glimpse it. And when Nicky was in South Africa he had suffered that second violent onslaught of the personal which racked him this way and that. Vassie—the horror that her death had held now seemed to him as empty of all save peace as Hilaria's. But all the while he had been living by what he found in that passionate moment when he stood, a man of sixty, at the top of the hill above the seaward valley and had seen the rainbow arching over Cloom and the distant sea. Beauty, the actual joy of the world, that had been feeding his soul all the time, giving him those moments of ecstasy without which Killigrew had always said the soul could not be saved alive. From that moment the slope of the ten years down to the present seemed so swift that he found his vision of them less clear than of preceding periods. What of these last years, each of which was bringing him with, it seemed, such increasing momentum, towards the end?

And in a flash he saw what he had, all unknowingly, lived by since the decline of his powers had fallen upon swiftness, and he saw it as what alone makes life bearable. He had lived by the knowledge of death, by the blessed certainty that life could not go on for ever, that there must be an end to all the wanderings and pain, to all the dulnesses and unsatisfactory driftings, to all the joys that would otherwise fall upon sluggishness or cloy themselves. This it was that gave its fine edge to pleasure, its sweet sharpness to happiness, and their possible solace to pain and grief. He had lived, as all men do, knowingly or not, by death. This was the secret bread that all men shared.

Again came that period of unconsciousness which corresponded to night, and the third day dawned. Again his brain felt of a crystal clearness; he was undistressed by the fact he could not speak to those around him or even return the pressure of their hands, for he was feeling all the old intoxicating joy of discovery at breaking into new lands. He even felt a mischievous elation that all this secret pageant, this retrospective wonder that was life, should be his to watch and enjoy, while all around thought him past emotion already.

If, then, men lived by death, what was death? Not a mere cessation—then a going-on.... He made no definite images of it in his mind, did not even wonder whether he should see those others he had known and loved who had passed into these tracts before him. That seemed to him now, as it always had when he had thought of it, rather unimportant. What mattered, he had always known, was the adjustment of the soul to something beyond it, to which it and the whole of life stood in inextricably close and vital relationship. Those other relationships, those other meetings, might be included in that as an added pleasure, but the other thing, if there at all, would necessarily be of such supreme importance as in its bright light to drown all minor effulgence. And that it was there, always, in this world and the next, he knew, for he had always felt his soul breathe it as surely as his lungs had inhaled the free airs of the earth. That the first meeting with it might not be all happiness, that as, in the Parson's creed, inevitable pains would have to be worked through before the soul could be sufficiently purged to meet it clearly upon its ultimate levels, mattered very little. At least, the pains would be different pains, not the same old wearying ones of earth—the disappointments and the mortifications, the burning anxieties and the bitter losses, the overwhelming physical disasters, that everyone had to go through sooner or later.

It lay before him, not as a darkness, but a brightness, that he knew. He felt an exquisite easing, even of the very muscles of his stricken body, as he thought of it—a brightness which every soul went to swell, which gained a glowing, luminous pulse of light from each one that slipped into its shining spaces....

And with that came light on all that puzzled and tormented him since he had known the facts about Nicky, and the mere physical paternity of him seemed a small thing beside such light as this. That passion of joy he had felt when he had heard of Nicky's coming had not been wasted: it had gone to make something in himself he would never otherwise have known; it had gone on in him as a living force, and had helped him to make Nicky what he was as much as one human being can make another. Archelaus had "won" in that Cloom would belong, though no man knew it, to his son and his grandson after him, but it no longer seemed to Ishmael to matter whether Archelaus "won" or not. There was at last no striving, no unacknowledged but hidden combat, no feeling of lingering unfairness.

Ishmael knew how, with all his elusiveness, Nicky had been very malleable, immensely open to impressions, to what was held before him, and he knew how different Nicky would have been if Archelaus had had the moulding of him. Just as even at this hour he was reverting to all he had learnt—more from watching and imbibing it than any other way—from Boase, so Nicky had absorbed from him what made him what he was. And yet, so till the end did the deep inherited instinct of the man who lives by land hold him, Ishmael took pleasure in the thought that, after all, Nicky was of Ruan blood.... So much of earth held by him as everything else began to slip away.

Then towards evening thought fell away too, leaving him only with what he had called to Jimmy a "nice tiredness." So do children feel after a day's play, so do old, old men feel after a life's work....

He was dimly but certainly aware that Nicky was beside his pillow, his hand upon him, that other figures were beyond, of Nicky's bent head, but in his drowsy mind it was confused with the head of the plaster Christ that had leaned forward from the wall behind and was drooping low over him. The hair fell softly over his eyes like the falling of a shadow, and under it he could see the Divine eyes, that had beamed at him now and again throughout his life, but never as brightly as in boyhood, smiling into his. He smiled back, and then, with a queer little apology in his mind, he turned his eyes away to take a last look at the soft dusk through the window.

Later, when Nicky had closed the sightless eyes, the young moon swam up upon her back. She who had just gone through her full round scarred maturity and died of old age was now virgin once again, with that renascent virginity some of the greatest courtesans have known, a remoteness of spirit, a chill freshness that is in itself eternal youth.

EPILOGUE

Jimmy Ruan went through the farmyard and climbed upon the gate that led into the field. He saw the big straw stacks that had been built up only four days ago at the time of the threshing; he saw the black and sodden patch upon the turf where the steamy water had dripped ceaselessly, the ruts where the heavy thresher and the traction engine had driven deep into the soil. He saw, too, the last little scales of chaff, still palely golden, that had lain hidden till this frolicsome wind had come to whirl them up in one last mad dance before it lost them for ever. For it was a morning of clear and windy brightness, one of those first days of autumn which are also a last flicker of the summer.

The wind was everywhere—high in the flocculent clouds, low between the closest grass-blades; scattering the seeded flowers in the hedgerows, rippling under the tarpaulin covers of the stacks so that they seemed to be drawing deep breaths, twisting the golden straws upon the cobbled yard until they seemed to be playing together—playing mad games of wrestling, each slim golden combatant writhing from beneath his fellow at the last moment of contact. The wind lifted also the collar of Jim's tunic, making it flap about his rosy cheeks, and it sent streaming out the black silk tie that his mother had knotted there herself.

Jim put up his hand to make sure the black tie was still safe. He was sorry that his grandfather was what people called dead, but with his sorrow went a tiny thrill. Nothing so important had ever happened to Jimmy before. He wondered if he would be put into black altogether so that the other children he met would know he was in mourning.

He swayed back and forth upon the gate. First he pretended he was a soldier riding on horseback like his father had been in South Africa-on-the-map. Next he was a sailor in a storm at sea, and the wind was shaking his good ship under him, and the waves were mounting, high, high, as they often had over the ship of old Uncle Archelaus, whom he had met long ago.

Thought of the sea and sight of the tiny ripples on the surface of the horse-trough suggested a new game to him. He had been told to run away out of doors and not bother, so it was very quietly that he crept into the empty breakfast-room, which was also his playroom, and began to search in his toy chest for something he could pretend was a ship. With a cry of joy he pounced upon a walnut shell that lay tucked away in a corner. He sat upon his heels, the shell in his little brown hand. He was remembering that it was one his grandfather had cracked for him and made into a boat by the addition of matches for seats and mast. He loved it until his uncle Archelaus had made him a real boat of wood, and then he had thrown it aside and forgotten it. In this corner it must have lain ever since while he played with and broke the other ship of wood.

He took it out now into the sunny, windy yard and on into the lane, on the other side of which there was a tiny thread of water that trickled down the slope to the stream which raced along the bottom of the rock garden. Jim was not allowed to go down to the real stream by himself, so he stayed in the lane and carefully launched his recovered treasure upon the tiny rivulet. He watched anxiously—yes, it floated. He bent forward and poked with a twig to dislodge it from a tiny tangle of weed; then his foot slipped and he splashed his clean socks. Bother! He had promised not to be a nuisance. He soon was wetter still, and began to feel happier.

When the little boat was fairly caught in the current it went bobbing away out of his reach, and he saw it disappear in the pipe under the road. He pictured it emerging, being hurtled down to the real stream and then hurried upon that right out to sea.... He felt no pang at losing it in his excitement at its adventurous career. Soon he was busy upon other matters; he was by turns a pirate, an engineer who built a dam, and an airman who jumped off a boulder and had one intoxicating moment in mid-air.... Then for a while he played at being grandfather and lying still with his eyes shut.

But that was dull, and he was glad when he heard his mother's voice calling him in to dinner. He shook off the earth with which he had tried to besprinkle himself and scrambled up. It was dull being dead. He would never be dead, but he would be anything and everything else—when he was a man.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SECRET BREAD ***

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