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THE TRAGIC BRIDE

by

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

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WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

THE YOUNG PHYSICIAN
THE CRESCENT MOON
THE IRON AGE
THE DARK TOWER
DEEP SEA
UNDERGROWTH (with E. BRETT YOUNG)

POETRY

FIVE DEGREES SOUTH POEMS, 1916-1918

BELLES LETTRES ROBERT BRIDGES: A CRITICAL STUDY MARCHING ON TANGA

TO

THE COUNTESS OF

PEMBROKE AND MONTGOMERY

PROLOGUE

I never met Gabrielle Hewish. I suppose I should really call her by that name, for her marriage took the colour out of it as surely as if she had entered a nunnery, and adopted the frigid and sisterly label of some female saint. Nobody had ever heard of her husband before she married him, and nobody ever heard of Gabrielle afterwards, except those who were acquainted with the story of Arthur Payne, as I was, and, perhaps, a coroner's jury in Devonshire, a county where juries are more than usually slow of apprehension. In these days you will not even find the name of Hewish in Debrett, for Gabrielle was the baronet's only child, and when Sir Jocelyn died, in the early days of his daughter's married life, the family, which for the last half century had been putting out no more than a few feeble and not astonishingly brilliant leaves on its one living branch, withered altogether, as well it might in the thin Irish soil where it had stubbornly held its own since the days of Queen Elizabeth. After all, baronetcies are cheap enough in Ireland, and one more or less could make very little difference to the amenities of County Galway, where Roscarna, for all I know, may have been absorbed and parcelled out by the Congested Districts Board ten years ago. Even in clubs and places where they gossip, I doubt if the Hewishes of Roscarna are remembered, for modern memories are short, and in Gabrielle's day the illustrated Sunday newspapers had not contrived to specialise in the smiles of well-connected young Irishwomen.

Of course the Payne episode—I'm not sure it should not rather be called the Payne miracle—had always lain stored somewhere in my literary attic; its theme was too exciting for a man who deals in such lumber to have forgotten; but that admirable woman, Mrs. Payne, had whetted my curiosity to such an extent that I weakly promised her secrecy before she told it to me. "I can't resist telling you," she said, "because it wouldn't be fair of me to deprive you: it's far too much in your line." She even flattered me: "You'd do it awfully well too, you know; but I have a sort of sentimental regard for her—not admiration, or anything of that kind, but an indefinite feeling that *noblesse oblige*. In her own extraordinary way she did us a good turn, and however carefully you wrapped it up she might recognise her portrait and feel embarrassed. It's she that I'm thinking of, not Arthur. Arthur was too young at the time to realize what was happening, and if he saw your picture of two women desperately fighting over the soul or body of a boy of seventeen who resembled himself I doubt if he'd tumble to the portrait. He's a dear transparently honest person like his father. Still, I don't want to hurt her, and so, if you want the story, you must gloat over it in private, and cherish it as an unwritten masterpiece. Probably if you *did* write it, it wouldn't be a masterpiece at all. Console yourself with that."

She told me her story—for of course I gave her the promise that she demanded—in a midge-infested corner of the garden at Overton, while Arthur, the unconscious subject of it, was playing tennis with the clergyman's daughter whom he married a year later. I think Mrs. Payne knew that this affair was coming off, and offered me the tale as a combination of oral confession and *Nunc Dimittis*, watching the boy while she told it to me with a sort of hungry maternal satisfaction, as somebody whom she had not only brought into the world but for whose salvation she was responsible. No doubt she had put up a hard fight for him and had every reason to be satisfied, though Gabrielle shared the honours of the mother's triumph in her own defeat. We sat there talking until all the birds were silent, but a single blackbird that made a noise in the shrubbery like that of two pebbles knocked sharply together; until the young people on the tennis court could no longer see to play, and the tall Californian poppies at the back of the herbaceous border that was her special pride shone like moon-flowers in the dusk.

"When I think of all that ... that summer," she said with a sigh, "I'm so thankful ... so thankful." And then Arthur came back with his sweater over his arm, swinging his racket, and she went straight up to him and kissed him with the sort of modesty that you would have expected in a young girl rather than a middle-aged widow.

"You dear thing, Mater," he said, kissing her forehead in return.

This is the land of digression into which memories of Overton lead one. My only excuse is that part of the story, and indeed its emotional climax belongs to Overton, to that smoothly ordered country house with its huge sentinel elms and its peculiar atmosphere of leisure and peace. No doubt Mrs. Payne was aware of this when she kissed her son. From the lawn where we were sitting she could see the yew-parlour and the cypress hedge in the shadow of which she had stood on the tremendous evening about which she had been telling me. We walked back to the terrace, and on the way she gave me a shy smile, half triumph, half apology. She never mentioned the episode again and though the story fermented in my brain, maturing, as I hoped, like a choice vintage, and has emerged from time to time when my mind has been free from other work, I have kept my promise and have neither repeated it nor written it till this day.

Now, at last, I find myself absolved. Arthur Payne, I believe, is happily married to the fresh young person with whom he was playing tennis. Soon after their marriage they emigrated to the backs of Canada, or was it New Zealand: somewhere at any rate beyond the reach of colonial editions. Overton is now in the possession of a Midland soap-boiler. Mrs. Payne, having fulfilled her main function in life and fearing English winters, has retired to a small villa at Mustapha Superieur, near Algiers, where, though she live for ever she is not likely to read this book. And Gabrielle, the beautiful Gabrielle, is dead.

The news came as a shock to me. For the moment I, who had never even set eyes on her, suffered the pain of an almost personal bereavement; I was moved, as poets are moved by the vanishing of something beautiful from the earth. Was she then so beautiful? I don't know. But I like to persuade myself that she was a fiery, elemental creature of a rare and pathetic brilliance ... for the sake of her story, no doubt. But, for the moment, when old Colonel Hoylake, who always began his *Times* by quotations from the obituary column—he had survived the age when births or marriages are interesting—suddenly brought out the word Hewish: Gabrielle Hewish, I was startled out of the state of pleasant lethargy into which a day's fishing on the Dulas and the Matthews' beer had plunged me, and became suddenly wide awake. I had the feeling that some bright thing had fallen: a kingfisher, a dragonfly. "Hewish," he murmured again. "Gabrielle Hewish ... Well, well."

"You know the family?"

"Yes, I knew her father, poor feller," he said.

Now I was full of eagerness. It had come over me all at once that this obituary notice was, for me, a happy release. It meant that, for a month or two, all through the mesmeric hours that I should spend up to my knees in the swift Dulas, alone with the dippers and the ring-ousels and the plaintive sand-pipers, I should be able to explore, to my own content, this forbidden treasure, searching in the dark soul of Marmaduke Considine and the tender heart of Gabrielle; threading the lanes that spread in a net about the schoolhouse at Lapton Huish; brooding over the deceptive peace of Overton Manor; recalling the scene in the yew-parlour, the atmosphere, terrifically charged with emotion, of the day when Mrs. Payne took her courage in her hands and fought like a maternal tigress for Arthur's soul. My heart beat faster as I led the old fisherman on with "Yes?"

He laid aside *The Times* and lit one of the long Trichinopoly cheroots that he smoked perpetually, settling himself back in the comfortable hotel chair.

"Hewish," he said. "Sir Jocelyn Hewish. That was the father's name. Lived at a place called Roscarna in the west of Ireland. He was an extraordinarily good fisherman: tied his own flies. I have some sea-trout flies in my book that he tied thirty years ago ... a kind of blue teal that he'd invented. Of course they had a fine string of white-trout lakes—many a good fish I've had there—but the remarkable thing about Roscarna was this. Right in front of the house at the bottom of the sunk fence, there ran a stretch of river,—about three hundred yards of it, clear deep slides with a level muddy bottom. One winter old Sir Jocelyn took it into his head to clean up this bit of water, and when they came to scrape the bottom they found under the mud that the whole bed of the stream was paved with marble slabs like a swimming bath ... Connemara marble. They went on with the job because it looked so well, all this green, veined stuff shining through the clear water. So they scoured the bottom and fixed up a banderbast for keeping the mud from coming downstream from above, and having made a sort of stewpond, put in four or five hundred yearling brownies. You'd never believe how those fish grew. In a couple of years the water was full of three and four pounders, lovely fish with a small head and pink flesh like a salmon. Quite a curious thing! And you'll never guess the reason. No sooner had they cleared away the mud than the place swarmed with freshwater shrimps. The yearlings throve on them like a smolt when it goes down to the sea. That was the remarkable thing about Roscarna...."

I knew, of course, that it wasn't. The remarkable thing about Roscarna, to anyone with a ha'porth of imagination, was Gabrielle Hewish. Luckily that admirable gossip Hoylake had another interest in life besides fishing stories, and one that served my purpose,—genealogy. It is an interest not uncommon with old soldiers—that is why they often write such incredibly dull memoirs—and after allowing him a number of sporting digressions in the direction of a Lochanillaun pike and the altogether admirable blackgame shooting at Roscarna, which, he assured me, was better than anything in the west except Lord Dudley's shoot on the Corrib, I played him tactfully into the deeper water that interested me and, by the end of the week, had succeeded in drawing from him a good deal of irrelevant family history and, what is more to the point, a fairly consecutive account of the last of the Hewishes, Sir Jocelyn and his amazing daughter.

As he told it to me in the parlour of the fishing inn beside the Dulas, I began to realise that accidentally, and at the moment when I needed it most, I had stumbled on a fountain of curious knowledge. If I had missed meeting him, my story, fascinating as it was, would have been incomplete. It

armed me with a whole new theory of Gabrielle, suggesting causes, or, if you like, preparations for the extraordinary episode that followed. It showed me that I had been flattering myself that I knew all about it when, as a matter of fact, I had only got hold of one—and the wrong—end of the stick. I fished the Dulas for a fortnight, hypnotised, pondering on the whole curious business, not only when the bright water rippled by me, but when old Hoylake told me stories of mahseer and tiger fish and barracuda that he had missed, when I was walking through the pinewoods under the mountain, when I was eating, and, I verily believe, when I was asleep. I had thought before that my friend Mrs. Payne was the heroine of the story. Now I am not sure that Gabrielle does not share the honours.

I

And, first of all, I dreamed of Roscarna. Partly for the sheer pleasure of reconstructing a shadowy countryside that I remembered, partly because Roscarna, the house in which the Hewish family had run to seed in its latter generations, was very much to the point. Twenty miles from Galway—and Irish miles, at that—it stands at the foot of the mountains on the edge of the tract that is called Joyce's Country, a district famous for inbreeding and idiocy where everyone was called Joyce, excepting, of course, the Hewishes of Roscarna, who were aliens, Elizabethan adventurers from the county of Devon, cousins of the Earls of Halberton, who had planted themselves upon the richest of the Joyces' lands in the early seventeenth century and built their house in the English fashion of the time.

I imagine that it was the founder of the house who paved his river bed with marble slabs, smoothing the stickles into a long clear slide. Labour, no doubt, was cheap or forced, and the Elizabethan fancy lavish. In the mouth of the valley, where it opens on the lake, they planted a girdle of dark woods growing so near to the new house that the Hewishes, walking in their gardens, could almost fancy themselves in England and lose sight of the mountain slopes that swept up into the crags behind them. The house stood with its back to the hills and all western barrenness, looking over a level, terraced sward, past a river that had been tamed to the smoothness of a chalk stream, to homely woodlands of beech and elm that might well have been haunted by nightingales if only there had been nightingales in Ireland. There were no nightingales in Devon, so that the first Hewish was under no necessity of importing them to complete his picture. But he had his gravelled walks, his poets' avenue of yews, that grew kindly, his sundials with their graceful and melancholy admonitions, his box-hedges and white peacocks, and the fancy of some Hewish unknown had blossomed at last in a Palladian bridge of freestone, spanning the quiet river.

Roscarna, in fact, was a bold experiment, destined from the first to fail. Never, in all its history, could it have become the living thing that its founders dreamed, any more than the Protestant Church that they built in the village of Clonderriff could be the home of a living faith; for though they turned their backs upon the mountains of Joyce's Country, the mountains were always there, and the house itself, which should have glowed with the warmth of red brick, or one of those soft building-stones that mellow as they weather, seemed always cold and desolate, being made of a hard, cold, Connaught rock, that made the Palladian bridge look like the fanciful toy that it was, and grew bleaker, bluer, colder, as the years went by.

I think of it as one thinks of the villas that Roman colonists built above the marches of Wales, built obstinately on the Roman plan that the climate of Italy had dictated to their fathers, with open atrium and terraces protected from the sun. "What's good enough for Rome," they said, "is surely good enough for Siluria," and, shivering, showed the latest official visitor a landscape that might have been transported bodily from the Sabine Hills ... if only there were more sun! "But we *do* miss the lizards and the cicadas," they would say with a sigh. No doubt the most enthusiastic built themselves Palladian ... I mean Etruscan bridges and marble stew-ponds for mullet, until, in the end, the immense inertia of the surrounding country asserted itself and the natural desires of mankind led to a mingling of British blood with theirs, till the Roman of the first century became the Briton of the third.

The parallel is as near as it may be, for though the first Hewish was an Englishman, his great-great-grandson was Irish, and the only thing that was left to remind him of his ancestry was the house of Roscarna, the sullen Connaught stone fixed in an alien design, and the huge belt of timber through which the gorse and heather were slowly creeping down from the mountain and settling in the valley bottom that they had once inhabited. But the foreign woods that trailed along the shore of the lake were admirable for black-cock.

The transformation was very gradual. The first Hewishes, no doubt, kept in touch with their English

cousins. London was their metropolis, and to London, in the fashions of their remote province, they would return with amusing tales of Irish savagery that made them good company in an eighteenth century coffee-house. Little by little they found their English interests waning, and the social centre shifting westwards. Dublin became their city, and to a stately house in Merrion Square the family coach migrated in the season, until, at last, it seemed hardly worth while to cross the dreariness of the central plain, and a town-house in Galway seemed the zenith of urbanity. Galway, indeed, had risen on a wave of prosperity. In the streets above the Claddagh, merchants who had grown rich in the Spanish trade were building solid houses with carved lintels and windows of stained glass. The Hewishes invested money in these new ventures. In Galway a Hewish of Roscarna was somebody: there the family was taken for granted and, following the way of least resistance, the Hewishes settled down into the state of provincial notabilities.

Notabilities as long as the Spanish money lasted—then notorieties. For, as Roscarna, the symbol of a tradition, decayed, the men of the Hewish family developed a curious recklessness in living.

It was as though the original vigour of the tree planted in a foreign soil had been enough to keep it fighting and flourishing for a couple of hundred years and then had suddenly failed, dying, as a tree will, from above downwards.

For the first half of the nineteenth century a series of dissolute Hewishes—they never bred in great numbers—lived wildly upon the edge of Connemara, drinking and fighting and gaming and wenching while the roof of Roscarna grew leaky and the long stables were turned into pigsties, and soft mud silted over the marble bottom below the Palladian bridge. If they had lived in England the estate would have vanished field by field until nothing but the house was left; but the outer land at Roscarna was of no marketable value, and when Sir Jocelyn succeeded to the property in the year 1870, he found himself master of many worthless acres and a ruined house that he was powerless to repair. It was no wonder that he went to the dogs like his father before him, for the passage of every generation had made recovery more difficult. Of course he should really have become a soldier; but soldiering in those days was an expensive calling. As a baronet—even as an Irish baronet—a good deal would have been expected of him, far more than the dwindling means of Roscarna could possibly supply, and since every career seemed closed to him but one of provincial dissipation he is scarcely to be blamed for having followed it.

When Colonel Hoylake knew him he was a middle-aged man and a reformed character, and the fact that he ever came to be either is enough to show that the original Hewish strain was still strong enough to put up some sort of fight. He cannot have been without his share of original virtue, but by his own account, his youth, hopeless and therefore abandoned, must have been pretty lurid. Of course he drank. His father must have taught him to do that as a matter of habit. He was equally at home with the ancient sherries, a few bins of which remained in the Roscarna cellars to remind him of the Spanish trading days, or with the liquid fire that the Joyces distilled in the mountains under the name of potheen.

Of course he gambled. He was sufficiently Irish for that: and his gaming passion soon made Roscarna a sort of savage Monte Carlo, to which the more dissolute younger sons of the surrounding gentry foregathered: Blakes and O'fflahertys, and Kilkellys, and all the rest of them.

In the middle of the stables, at the back of the house, stood a huge deserted pigsty surrounded by a stone wall, and this place became under Jocelyn's regime, a cockpit, in which desperate birds were pitted against one another, fighting fiercely until they dropped. Even in his later days according to Hoylake, he was not ashamed of these exploits. The gamblers invented for themselves new refinements of sport or cruelty. Spider-racing. I do not suppose that anyone living to-day knows what spider-racing is. This was the manner of it. At night, when the big black-bellied spiders that haunted the lofts came out to spread their nets, stable-boys were sent with candles to collect them in tins, and next morning, when the gamblers assembled in the pigsty at Roscarna a piece of sheet iron, fired to a dull red heat would be placed in the centre. On this hot surface the long-legged insects were thrown. Naturally they must run or be shrivelled with heat. And the one that ran the furthest was counted the winner. Betting on these unfortunate creatures Jocelyn and his friends spent many happy forenoons, and Jocelyn was counted as good a judge of a spider as any man in Galway. In his dealings with women he was relatively decent, relapsing, at an early age into a relation irregular, but so domestic as to be respectable, with a woman named Brigit Joyce who kept house for him and cooked potatoes and distilled potheen as well as any female in the district. I do not know if they had many children. If they did, it is probable that these found their vocation in collecting spiders in the stables, or even drifted back into the hill community from which their mother had come.

Through all his dissipations Sir Jocelyn preserved one characteristic, an unerring instinct for field-sports that no amount of drinking could impair. He could hit a flying bird with a stone, was a deadly

shot for snipe or mallard, rode like a centaur, and fished with the instinct of a heron. It is probable that his consciousness of this faculty was at the bottom of his startling recovery. Possibly he was frightened to find a little of his skill failing. I only know that at the age of forty-eight, he pulled himself up short. His eyes, seeing clearly for the first time in his life, became aware of the appalling ruin into which Roscarna had fallen. He became sober for six days out of the seven, setting aside the Sabbath for the worship of Bacchus, and during the remainder he devoted himself seriously, steadily to the reclamation of his estate. He repaired the roof of the house with new blue slates, cleared the attics of owls and the chimneys of jackdaws; he dredged the river and discovered the marble bottom, netted the pike and put down yearling trout. Gradually he restored Roscarna to its old position as a first-class sporting property; and so, having fought his way back, step by step, into the company of decent men, he married a wife.

Hardly the wife one would have expected from a Hewish, it is true. Her name was Parker, her father was a shop-keeper in Baggot Street, Dublin, and how Hewish met her God only knows. She was a sober, plain-sailing Englishwoman, a Protestant, with a religious bias that may have made the reformation of a dissolute baronet attractive to her. She had a little money, to which she stuck like glue, and an abundance of common-sense. It speaks well for the latter that she appreciated, from the first, the value of Bidy Joyce in the kitchen, and kept her there, boiling potatoes, although she knew that she had been her husband's mistress. Firmly, but certainly, she ordered Jocelyn's life, realising, with him, that Roscarna was worth saving, subsidising, with a careful hand, his attempts to restore the woods and waters, interesting herself in the housing of his tenants, and renewing the connection of Roscarna with the parish church of Clonderriff, of which the Hewishes were patrons. It was she who appointed Marmaduke Considine to the vacant living.

For ten years she lived soberly with Sir Jocelyn at Roscarna, hoping ardently that a son might be born to them who should carry on the family name and succeed to the fruits of her economies. In the eleventh year of their married life it seemed that her hopes were to be realised. Even Jocelyn, the new Jocelyn, appreciated the importance of the event. He and Bidy Joyce, now an old and shrivelled woman, but one unrivalled in maternal experience, nursed Lady Hewish as though the whole of their future happiness depended on it. Every Sunday young Mr. Considine dined at Roscarna with the family, and spent the evening in religious discussions with her ladyship. Every month the doctor rode over from Galway to feel her pulse. On a dark winter evening in the year eighteen eighty-three the child was born—a girl. They christened her Gabrielle, and a week later Lady Hewish died.

II

Her death knocked poor Sir Jocelyn to pieces. Not altogether because he had loved her, but because he had made the habit of depending on her and happened to be a creature of habits ... good or bad. So, having been bereft of that of matrimony, he returned, for a time to that of drinking, leaving the child in the spiritual charge of Mr. Considine, a gentleman of small domestic experience, and the physical care of Bidy Joyce, a mother of many. For the time being Jocelyn was far too busy to bother his head about her, and Bidy dragged her up in the kitchen of Roscarna where she had suckled her half-brothers before her, Mr. Considine exercising a general supervision, pending the day when her soul should be fit for salvation and ghostly admonition.

In the early stages of Jocelyn's relapse the Parkers of Baggot Street descended on Roscarna in force: a proceeding that Lady Hewish had discountenanced in her lifetime. Neither Jocelyn nor Bidy invited them to stay, and they returned to Dublin scandalised, with the report of Gabrielle, a very small baby of eighteen months with coal black eyes and hair, playing like a kitten with the foot of a dead rabbit on the kitchen floor. "Only to think what poor Laura would have felt!" they sighed, not realising that such a train of thought was in the nature of things unprofitable.

So Gabrielle grew, and so, in a few years, Jocelyn, with a tremendous effort pulled himself together, returning, as though refreshed, to his sporting pursuits, the woods, the lake and the river. He even found a new hobby: the breeding of Cocker spaniels, and worked up an interest in the development of his daughter that ran easily with that of training his puppies. He took a great delight in teasing small animals, and treated Gabrielle and the cockers on much the same lines, with the result that the puppies were usually a little cowed and puzzled when he teased them, but Gabrielle bit his hand. This pleased him; for he set great store by animal spirits in any form, and he carried his fingers bandaged in the hunting-field for several weeks in order that he might tell the story of his daughter's prowess. Jocelyn was growing rather childish in his old age.

There were really three periods in Gabrielle's early life. The first, before her father began to take notice of her, was spent altogether in the company of Biddy, who embraced her in her general devotion to children. Biddy called herself a Catholic, and for this reason secretly feared and hated the supervision of young Mr. Considine, a priest of the Church of Ireland; but at heart she was as pagan as the top of Slievegullion, and along with her favourite Christian oaths (in one of which St. Anthony of Padua was disguised as Saint Antonio Perrier), and her whispered "Aves," she taught Gabrielle enough pagan mythology and folklore to set her head spinning whenever she found herself alone in the woods or the fields.

If ever she strayed into the forbidden lanes beyond the lodge-gates at Roscarna she lived in fear of seeing the dead-coach come round the corner: a tall coach, painted black and drawn by coal-black horses and on the box two men, black-coated with black faces, who might jump from the coach and catch her up and throw her inside it. You could never know when the dead-coach was coming, for its wheels were bound with old black rags, so that they made no noise on the stones. Then, in the fields where corn was growing one might come across the "limreachaun," with consequences untold but terrible. And, above all things, she was never to pick up an old comb in the road, for as like as not the comb would be the property of the banshee, a little old woman with long nails and hairy arms. When Gabrielle asked what would happen if she picked up the banshee's comb, Biddy told her that the banshee would come crying to her window at night, and that if this ever happened, she must get a pair of red hot tongs and hold the comb in the window for the banshee to take. This seemed to Gabrielle an unnecessary complication; but Biddy told her that if she didn't follow it in every particular the banshee would scratch the hand off her. Faced with the possibility of this disaster, and not knowing how she could possibly get hold of a pair of red hot tongs in the middle of the night, Gabrielle decided that if ever she saw a comb in the road, she would not bring it home with her. And this was a wise decision, for the heads of the children in Joyce's Country were not above suspicion. Indeed most of the terrors with which Biddy inspired her were based on principles that were ethically sound and combined romantic colour with practical utility.

When she was six her father began to take her out with him at the time when he exercised the puppies. She and the puppies would run about together and by the same word be called to heel. She found that she could do most of the things that they did. Once, on a summer day when two of them had conscientiously frightened a water-rat out of its hole on the margin of the lake, Gabrielle, who was far ahead of her father and hot with running, plunged in after them. She got her mouth full of water, and thought she was drowning, and Jocelyn, frightened for her life, ran in after her and rescued her with the water up to his neck. "Now that you're here," he said, "you'd better learn to swim." And he made her, then and there, bringing her back to Biddy Joyce like a small drowned cat, with her black hair clinging close to her head. It was a great achievement, and since Biddy could not, for the moment, produce any mythological terror in the nature of a Loreley better than a pike that preyed on swimmers, Gabrielle would often go down to the lake secretly in the middle of a summer morning, and strip off her clothes and float on her back in the sunshine. She must have looked a strange little thing with her long white legs, her smooth black hair, her deep violet eyes, and her red lips; for she had this amazing combination of features that you will sometimes find in the far West. She did not get them from her mother or from Jocelyn, both of whom were blond Saxons. I suppose they came to her through the blood of some Irishwoman whom a dead Hewish had married perhaps a hundred years before.

While Biddy Joyce instructed her in oaths and legend, and her father taught her to ride, to swim, to shoot and to fish, her moral and literal education were entrusted to Mr. Considine. Physically Mr. Considine was of a type that does not change much with the passage of time. When first he came to Roscarna, a couple of years before Gabrielle was born, he was a young man of twenty. How he came to be chosen for the cure of Clonderriff I do not know, unless he were in some way connected with the Parker family. He was a Wiltshireman, tall, sandy-haired, with a long face and a square jaw to which he gave an air of determination by constantly gritting his teeth. Gabrielle, as imitative as a starling, began to mimic this habit of his until one day he found himself staring at her, as at a mirror, and told her to stop. She had meant no harm; she didn't even know that she was doing it, but he treated the offence quite seriously.

It was his nature to treat everything seriously, including his mission among the heathen or, what was worse, the Catholic Joyces. He taught her the alphabet and the Lord's Prayer, and the collect for the week, and simple fractions and the capes and headlands of England (the capes and headlands of Ireland didn't matter) and the verb "to have" in French, together with long lists of the kings of Israel and Judah. Gabrielle was very quick to learn. From the first her memory was a pleasant surprise to her—sometimes a surprise to Mr. Considine, as when she offered to give him the Kings of Judah backwards, a proceeding that struck him as not only revolutionary but irreverent, and tinged with a flavour of the Black Mass.

Gabrielle always knew when she had annoyed or embarrassed him, not because he reproved her in

any way—to have shown heat in words would have been against his principles—but because he did show heat in his neck, where a faint flush would spread upwards to his ears above the band of his clerical collar. When she was thoroughly bored Gabrielle would sometimes try this experiment, just in the same way as she made the snapdragons put out their tongues.

Jocelyn liked Considine and trusted him, partly, no doubt, because he happened to be an Englishman—the only one in this wilderness of Joyces—and partly because he was something of a sportsman: a little too serious and determined for his sport to appear natural, but for all that a good shot over dogs, and a very accurate, if not instinctive fisherman. In his boyhood, in Wiltshire, he had learned the technique of the dry fly, and his successes with trout in gin-clear water made Jocelyn respect him.

Considine's friendship with Jocelyn must be put to his credit. If he had been a prig he would either have turned up his nose at his patron's morals or condoned them with a sense of self-sacrifice and forbearance. He didn't do either. He just took Jocelyn for what he was worth, realising the shabby trick that heredity had played him; and his attitude toward Gabrielle was much the same. He knew that he couldn't and didn't want to keep pace with her enthusiasms any more than he could keep pace with the baronet's potatoes. He had been born on a bleak downland, and some of its characteristics had got into the thin, cold humour that was his blood. He was incapable of the generous passions of the people of Roscarna; but I think he was a good man, for all that. Even Mrs. Payne, who had reason to be irritated by his coldness, acknowledged this. And he was as conscientious in his education of Gabrielle as in the care of his parish.

The child matured very quickly. Physically I mean. That is the way in the west. Of course she was a great tom-boy, tall for her years, very frank in her speech and totally unconscious of her sex, as free and virginal as the young Artemis. The world of books to which Mr. Considine introduced her in her school-hours was wholly forgotten outside them. In the woods and on the mountains she thrived as a magnificent young animal, moving with an ease and grace and freedom that civilised woman has lost. Her clothes were of Connemara homespun, but to a body such as hers, clothes did not matter. She went barefoot like the girls of Joyce's Country, and her ankles were as clean cut as the cannon of a thoroughbred. She wore her black hair in a thick plait that fell below her waist. She had no friends but Biddy, her father and Considine, except a few men, contemporaries of Jocelyn, who joked with her in the hunting field. She knew no women; for ladies did not call at Roscarna, and the county could never forgive her mother's origins in Baggott Street. All her life was uncomplicated and miraculously happy.

This Arcadian state of affairs might well have gone on for ever, if Jocelyn, feeling that he would like to give her a great treat and, perhaps, becoming proudly conscious of her beauty, had not determined, in the August of her sixteenth year, to take her to Dublin for the Horse Show week. She thrilled to the idea, not because she was anxious to meet her own species but because she loved horses. They travelled up by train from Galway through the vast monotonies of the Bog of Allen, and put up at Maple's Hotel in Kildare Street, within five minutes' walk of her maternal grandmother's shop. In those days no Irish gentleman would have dreamed of dining in a public room, and they took their meals sedately in a private apartment.

Gabrielle had never set foot in a city before. The smooth pavements, the high buildings and the shop windows of Grafton Street excited her. Everything in Dublin wore an air magnificent and spacious. Even the ducks on the pond in the middle of Stephen's Green were exotic, and like no other ducks that she had known. But she could not enjoy her excitement to the full, for the feminine instinct in her realised from the first that her clothes were different from those of the people about her; and this disappointed her, for they were her best, made by the urbane fingers of Monaghan, the tailor at Oughterard.

When she walked down Grafton Street she fancied that people stared at her. It never struck her as possible that they were staring at her vivid and unusual beauty. It struck her as funny that her father did not seem to be aware of the discrepancy in her dress. He wasn't in the least. He had taken his daughter for granted. In his unconscious arrogance he imagined that the distinction of being a Hewish of Roscarna was sufficient in itself to make her independent of externals, and, as he proposed no alterations she trusted his judgment and they went to the Horse Show together in their ill-cut tweeds.

Gabrielle was entranced by the jumping. Whenever a horse topped the fences she straightened her back automatically as though she had been riding herself. With such splendid animals as those she felt that she could have made a better job of it. For the moment she forgot all about her questionable clothes; but when, later in the day, she was taken by her father to be presented to the Halbertons, the family of the Devonshire peer with whom the Hewishes were connected, she became immediately and horribly conscious of Lady Halberton's magnificence and the elegance of her daughters. It shocked and thrilled her to see that the elder Halberton girl powdered her nose. She wondered what it must feel like to have one's hands encased in skin-tight gloves, and how these English people managed to speak with

such an elegant tiredness. It seemed to her inevitable that Lady Halberton must be ashamed of her cousins, and she was relieved, but a little frightened, to hear this great lady invite her father and her to dinner at the Shelbourne on the following night. After all, she reflected, there must be something in the name of Hewish. She wondered how on earth she could make her father understand that she couldn't very well go to dinner in the dress that she was wearing, the only one that she possessed.

III

It is extraordinary to think how forty-eight hours had turned this amazing, sexless creature into a woman. The problem of a dinner-dress was solved for her almost at once by Jocelyn himself. As soon as they were safely back at Maple's he asked her if she really wanted to dine with the Halbertons at the Shelbourne, and when she said, "Of course!" he produced a five pound note from the pigskin case that he carried in his coat-tail, and turned her loose in Grafton Street. An hour later she returned, breathless with excitement, carrying the dress that she had bought, a frock of white muslin, high at the neck and hand-embroidered with a pattern of shamrock. Life was becoming a matter of great excitement.

The maid at Maple's dressed her in the evening, a blowsy young woman from Carlow who called her 'my darlin,' and told her that she had a beautiful head of hair. Bidy had never told her that her hair was beautiful, and Gabrielle herself had always considered it something of a nuisance. In the hotel bedroom a cunning combination of mirrors showed her the thick plait hanging down her back. She had never seen her own back before. Looking at it she shrugged her shoulders to see what they looked like.

Of course she was ready dressed long before she need have been. She went down into the hall of the hotel and waited for her father. She hoped, and was almost sure, that she looked lovely. While she stood there, looking into a huge oval mirror, an old gentleman of much the same cut as her father came in and stared at her as though she were some new and curious animal. She turned and smiled at him. She would have smiled at anyone on that evening. He did not give her a smile in return. He only went red in his bald scalp and cleared his throat, hobbling up to his room and wondering what the devil Maple's was coming to.

A moment later Jocelyn arrived, very stately in the evening dress of the seventies. His face looked brown and hard and weathered, like a filbert, against his white spread of shirt-front. His eyes twinkled, his temples were flushed, and the twisted cord of an artery could be seen pulsating across each of them: all three being symptoms of the bottle of Pommery on which he had dressed. When he saw Gabrielle he said "Ha—very good, very good," and she, in an access of enthusiasm, kissed him and smelt his vinous breath.

It was no more than a stone's throw from their hotel to the Shelbourne, Jocelyn remembering his long-forgotten manners stepped aside courteously when they crossed the road as if he were escorting a real lady. Gabrielle couldn't understand this at all; she would have liked to jog along with him arm in arm. The magnificence of the Shelbourne with its uniformed porters overpowered Gabrielle, and when she reached the Halbertons' private room, she, who had often been reproved for talking the heads off Bidy and Mr. Considine, was dumb. Jocelyn, however, pouring gin and bitters on his Pommery, did talking enough for both of them. He was in excellent form. His talk flowed steadily and Gabrielle, drifting as it were, into an eddy, was left at liberty to examine her cousins and their company.

Lord Halberton and Jocelyn Hewish had very little in common. The peer she noticed wore an air of great fragility, as though he had been sprinkled with powder to preserve him. His movements were all minute and precise. He walked with short steps; and when he smiled, as Jocelyn, already in the story-telling stage, compelled him to do, his lips twitched apart for a moment and then closed again as if he were afraid that any expression more violent might make his teeth fall out. Gabrielle decided that he must be very old, so old that he was only kept alive by these precautions. She had noticed, too, when she shook hands with him that the flesh of his fingers was limp, and that the joints were stiff like those of a dead man.

Lady Halberton, who, at the Horse Show had struck her as an ancient and withered woman, now appeared middle-aged, scintillating in a scheme of black and silver. Her dress and her toupet were black, relieved by silver sequins and a silver mounted tiara. High lights in keeping with the scheme were supplied by other jewels on her fingers, her glittering filbert nails and a diamond pendant that sparkled on the white and bony ridge of her breastbone. The Halberton daughters, whose accents

Gabrielle had been imitating in her bedroom when she lay awake with excitement the night before, were inclined to be friendly with her; but as all their conversation had to do with a world of which Gabrielle knew nothing, they did not get very far. Both of them were over thirty and unmarried. From time to time, taking new courage, each in turn would make a pounce on Gabrielle with some question that led nowhere, and then flutter off again. The fact that she obviously puzzled them amused Gabrielle, and she soon regained the confidence that the sight of the hall porters had shaken. From time to time Lady Halberton would turn on her a smile full of glittering teeth, and twice, apropos of nothing, Gabrielle heard her say: "Sweet child! You must really let her come and stay with us at Halberton, Sir Jocelyn," though the baronet did not seem to hear what she said.

They dined *en famille*. Lord Halberton ate as gingerly as he smiled, probably for the same reason. The party had been squared by the addition of two young men, one of them a soldier from the Curragh, named Fortescue, and the other a naval sub-lieutenant, named Radway. He and Gabrielle, as the least important persons, found themselves in each other's company, while Captain Fortescue dished up the kind of small talk to which they were accustomed to the two Halberton girls, Lady Halberton continuously sparkling at Sir Jocelyn and her husband presiding over the whole function with set lips like a cataleptic.

It was Radway who saved Gabrielle from throttling herself with the flower of a French artichoke, a vegetable with which she was unacquainted, and in a burst of gratitude she confided to him the fact that this was her first dinner party. From this they slipped into an easy intimacy; easy for her because she was so thankful to find someone to whom she could babble, and for him because she was so utterly unguarded. It had been unusual for him to meet a girl of birth or breeding who was not preoccupied with matrimonial possibilities; and this creature was as frank as she was beautiful.

Radway had never been in Ireland before. The cruiser on which he served was visiting Kingstown, and at the Horse Show he had run across the Halbertons whom he had met when he was stationed in their own county at Devonport. Beyond them he didn't know a soul in the country, and the soft western brogue of Gabrielle fascinated him. He encouraged her to talk, and she was quite willing to do so, telling of Roscarna and the hills and the river, of her lessons with Mr. Considine, of her secret bathes in the lake and other things as intimate which would have persuaded him that she was an exceedingly fast young woman if he had not been already convinced that she was nothing but a child.

It gave her a great happiness to talk about Roscarna in this alien land. And Radway was glad to listen if only for the pleasure of hearing her voice.

Radway was a straight-forward young man, twenty-four or five years of age. That he was eminently presentable one deduces from the fact that the Halbertons condescended to entertain him, though Lady Halberton, as the years went by, was known to make social sacrifices for the sake of the dear girls. I do not think it is profitable to seek for much subtlety in Radway. It is better to accept him as the clean sturdy type of youth that Dartmouth turns afloat every year. Physically he was fair (Arthur Payne also was fair), with a straight mouth, excellent teeth, and blue, humorous eyes.

There is nothing younger for its age than a naval sub-lieutenant. In the traditional simplicity of seamen there is more than a tradition; for the inhabitants of a ship are a small island community in which grown men live and accept a glorified version of life at a public school until they reach the flag-list, or are shot out into the world on a pension that is inadequate for its enjoyment. The one subject on which the wardroom claims to be authoritative is that of women; and Radway was already as well acquainted with the Irish aspects of the sport as with the Japanese. In daring, as in physical perfection, the wardroom of the *Pennant* considered that the daughters of the Irish squirearchy took some beating; and Radway had heard, no doubt, stories of many wayward and passionate episodes with which the hospitality of Irish country houses had been enlivened. Gabrielle was the first of the kind that he had met, her frankness, her beauty, and her sudden, enchanting intimacy seemed to tell him that he was in luck's way and on the edge of an adventure. It was not the part of a sailor to miss opportunities of experience. He couldn't guess, poor devil, what the end would be, but naval tradition favoured the taking of all possible risks, and he determined to let the affair develop as rapidly as possible.

The dulness of the rest of the party isolated them. To all intents and purposes they were alone. The difference between this girl and all the others that he had met was that she withheld nothing, she didn't hedge, or try to protect herself with any assumption of feminine mystery. It puzzled Radway. He wondered, in his innocence, if he had succeeded in making a swift, bewildering conquest. Of course he hadn't done anything of the sort, but the speculation disarmed him, and by the end of the evening he was thoroughly bowled over.

So was Sir Jocelyn—but in another way. All the time that she had been talking to Radway Gabrielle had kept her eye on him. She knew that things were reaching a point of danger when she saw his eyes fill with tears as he told the sympathetic Lady Halberton of the loss of his wife. The achievement of

sentiment in Jocelyn marked a fairly high degree of intoxication. In the middle of her description of the Roscarna black-game shooting Gabrielle stopped dead. Radway wondered what on earth had happened to her.

It was a difficult moment, for she hadn't the least idea of its conventional solution. She only knew that somehow she must rescue her father before he became impossible. She supposed that, in the ordinary way, it was his duty and not hers to bring the visit to an end, but she knew that as long as there was whiskey in the decanter he wouldn't dream of going. So she left Radway in the middle of her sentence, walked straight up to Lady Halberton and said, "Good-night," with a staggering abruptness, and before he knew what had happened Lord Halberton was handing Jocelyn his hat.

It took Radway more than a minute to recover from this cold douche; but he was too far gone to let the possibility of romantic developments slip, and before the Hewishes left, he contrived to let Gabrielle know that he wanted to meet her again. "Outside the gates of Trinity College to-morrow at four o'clock," he whispered. She said nothing. He wondered, for one moment, whether she was deeper than he had imagined. Then she looked him full in the eyes and nodded. It gave him a thrill of delight. He found himself listening in a dream to Lady Halberton's reminiscences of the Admiral's garden party, at which they had met, and a maternal appreciation of the accomplishments of her elder daughter, Lady Barbara.

IV

Gabrielle piloted Jocelyn, who was still in a good humour, to his bedroom door. Then she went to bed herself and slept as well as ever. Jocelyn, alone in his room, called for another bottle of whiskey and made a night of it. To be exact he made three days of it—four less than might reasonably have been expected. For Gabrielle to have taken him back to Roscarna was out of the question: and so she went on quietly living at Maple's, and absorbing the strangeness of Dublin while he finished it out. The servants of the hotel were very kind to her; and the waiter who attended to Jocelyn's desires brought her night and morning bulletins of her father's condition that were tinged with a kind of melancholy admiration. "A wonderful gentleman for his age," he said. "There's many a young man would envy the likes of him. Sure, he'd drink the cross off an ass's back, so he would!"

Of course she met Radway. They met, as he had arranged, at Trinity College gates, and went for a long walk along the blazing quays of the Liffey. It was an unusual promenade for the month of August, but neither of them knew Dublin.

He found her difficult. The affair did not develop along the lines that he had intended, and as his time was limited, this made him anxious. With Gabrielle the anticipation was always so much more wonderful than the event. It thrilled him strangely to see her approaching when they met: this tall slim girl with her splendid freedom of gait, her black hair, her pallor, her red lips. When he saw her coming he would think of all the passionate things that he wanted to say to her; but as soon as they started on their walk together she made the saying of them impossible—she was so obviously and vividly interested in other and unsentimental things.

Her interest in the commonplace and (to his mind) unromantic irritated him; but an instinct of good manners, that was not the least of his charm, compelled him to humour her. Once she sat for a whole hour in a dark cellar that smelt of tallow where a couple of men were engaged in making those enormous candles that people in Ireland light on Christmas Day; and once Radway was forced to follow her into the fore-castle of a Breton schooner reeking of garlic, where she practised the French that Considine had taught her.

Later in the afternoon he took her to tea at Mitchell's, where she consumed the first ice of her life, and was so pleased with the sensation that she demanded a second; all of which was disappointing for Radway, who wanted to arouse her appetite for romance rather than ices. It seemed as if his nuances of love-making, the indirect methods of approach that modern girls expected, were wasted on her. In the evening he took her out to Howth, relying on the influence of time and place to help him in methods more primitive. It was incredible to him that she shouldn't—or perhaps wouldn't—realise what he was driving at. Apparently she didn't understand the first conventions of the game, and when her obtuseness forced him to a sudden and passionate declaration she laughed at him.

This damping experience, so unusual in the traditions of the wardroom, took the wind out of his sails. He decided that she had been making a fool of him and that he had been wasting his time. With a desperate attempt at preserving his dignity he took her back to Maple's, conscious all the time, of her tantalising beauty. He had planned a formal goodbye; but when he told her that his ship was sailing on the next day, she said, quite simply and with an unusual tenderness in her eyes that she was sorry. "If only you meant what you say..." he said, clutching at a straw. "Of course I mean it," she said. "I shall be very lonely without you. You're the first friend I've ever had. I wish some day," she added, "you could come to Roscarna."

He told her that it was not at all unlikely that the *Pennant* would some day put into Galway, and she warmed at once to the idea. "How splendid!" she said. "I shall expect you. Don't forget to bring a gun with you."

They walked up and down Kildare Street making plans of what they might do. "But in a week you'll have forgotten all about it," she said. "Nobody ever comes to Roscarna."

"Do you think that I could possibly forget you?" he protested.

This time she did not laugh at him. "No... I don't think you will," she said, and then, after an awkward silence, "Please don't take any notice of what I said this evening. I don't really understand that sort of thing." Then they said good-bye. It was a queer unsatisfactory ending for him, but her last words had reassured him. Thinking it over in the train on the way to Kingstown he decided that she had been honestly and quite naturally amused at the conventional phrases of a modern lover, and the realisation of this only made her more unusual and more desirable. It would be a strange experience to meet her in her proper setting, and if the *Pennant* should give him the opportunity he determined not to miss it. Next morning the ship left Kingstown for Bermuda.

It was not in Radway's nature to take these things lightly. At a distance the memory of Gabrielle gained a good deal by imagination. It seemed to him that she was far too precious to lose, and the fact that she was a cousin of the exclusive Halbertons settled any social scruples that might have worried him. He forgot his repulse at Howth in the memory of the sweeter moment when they had parted. After all there was no hurry. She was only a child, as her behaviour had shown him so often. At the same time he was anxious that she should not forget him, and for this reason he wrote her a number of letters from Bermuda, from Jamaica and Barbadoes and other ports on the Atlantic station. They were not love letters in any sense of the word; but they served to keep him in her mind, and, few as they were, made an immense breach in the zone of isolation that surrounded Roscarna.

They were the first letters of any kind that Gabrielle had received. The postman from Oughterard did not visit Roscarna twenty times in the year, and since his arrival was something of an event, entailing a meal and endless gossip with Biddy Joyce, Sir Jocelyn soon became aware of his daughter's correspondence. He questioned her about it, and she, without the least demur, handed him Radway's letters. He sniffed at them. If that was all the fellow had to say it struck him as a waste of time and paper. Who was he, anyhow? Gabrielle explained that he had dined with them at the Halbertons, and Jocelyn, who naturally had no recollection of the event, was satisfied with these credentials. "I asked him to come and shoot here," said Gabrielle. Jocelyn stared at her with wrinkled eyes. "The devil you did!" said he.

Radway's letters had exactly the effect on her that he had intended. They were an excitement, and she read them over and over again till she almost knew them by heart. They were the first outside interest that had ever entered her life. With Considine's help she looked up the ports at which they were posted on a big map in the library and thinking of their romantic names and the wonders that they suggested, she also thought a good deal of the writer.

So it was, almost unconsciously, that Radway began to fill a considerable place in her thoughts. His impression had fallen on an extraordinarily virginal mind that the thought of love-making had never disturbed. Physically, she hadn't responded to him in the least; but the long silences of Roscarna and particularly those of the following winter, when Slieveannilaun loomed above the woods like an immense and snowy ghost, and the lake was frozen until the cold spell broke and snow-broth swirled desolately under the Palladian bridge, gave her time for reflection in which her fancy began to dwell on the problems of ideal love. In this dead season the letters of Radway were more than ever an excitement. They stirred her imagination with pictures of burning seas and lurid tropical sunsets, and with this pageantry the memory of him would invade the dank gloom of the library where she and Considine pursued the acquisition of knowledge.

It was inevitable that she should have found some outlet of the kind, for in the curious circumstances of her upbringing she had missed that sentimental stage which is the measles of puberty. She had never trembled with adoration of a schoolmistress and Considine was an unthinkable substitute. In

Dublin she had learned for the first time that she was beautiful, and that her country clothes did not show her at her best. This, together with Radway's attentions, had revealed to her the fact that she was a woman, and therefore made to love and be loved.

She loved Roscarna passionately, but in this neither Roscarna nor its inhabitants could help her. Under the most romantic circumstances in the world she could find no romance. Her new-born instinct revealed itself in a curious, almost maternal devotion to her father and the current litter of puppies. Jocelyn found its expression unusual but not unpleasant: the attentions of this charming daughter flattered him; and the puppies liked it, too, licking her face when she smothered them with motherly caresses. But these things were not enough for her, and it came as a great relief when she discovered another outlet in the contents of the library bookshelves.

She became a greedy student of romance. The Hewishes had never been great readers, but in the early nineteenth century one of them had felt it becoming to his position as a country gentleman to buy books. The romantic education of Gabrielle was accomplished, as became an Irishwoman, in the school of Maria Edgeworth. *Castle Rackrent* ravished her. She thrilled to the elegancies of *Belinda* and to the Irish atmosphere of *Ormond*. From these she plunged backwards into the romantic mysteries of Mrs. Radcliffe, living, for a time, in surroundings that might well have been imitated from the wintry Roscarna. She read indiscriminately, and, in her eagerness of imagination, became the heroine of fiction incarnate and the beloved of every dashing young gentleman in print that she encountered.

Jocelyn was inclined to laugh at her, but Biddy, who considered that all books except the breviary, which she possessed but could not read, were inventions of the devil, disapproved. "Sure and you'll be after rotting your poor brain with all that rubbidge," she said, rising to a more vehement protest when, in the middle of the night, she discovered Gabrielle fallen asleep with an open copy of *Don Juan* beside her pillow and a spent candle flaring within an inch of the lace bed-curtains. Gabrielle smiled when Biddy woke her with a stream of fluent abuse, for she had been dreaming that she herself was Haidee and her Aegean island lay somewhere in the Gulf of Mexico.

She lost a little of her gaiety, and irritated the serious Considine by her dreaminess at the time when she was supposed to be acquiring useful knowledge. He complained to Jocelyn, and Jocelyn, who hated being worried about his daughter, was at last induced, after consultation with Biddy Joyce, to send into Galway for the doctor. It pleased him to have the laugh of Considine when the doctor pronounced her sound in wind and limb—as well he might, for both were of the best.

Gabrielle couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. She was happy in her new world—just as happy as she had been in the old one—with the difference that she was possibly now more sensitive to the beauty that surrounded her. In the time of her childhood she had lived purely for the moment; sufficient unto each day had been its particular physical joys; now she knew that the future held more for her, that the life which she had taken for granted would not go on for ever. Strange things must happen, possibly things more strange than the adventures that she had found among books. She was now seventeen. In her heart she felt an intuition that something must happen soon. She waited for it to come with a kind of hushed excitement.

At the beginning of May she received a letter from Radway in which he told her that the *Pennant* was leaving the West Indies. Taking it for granted that he would keep his promise of coming to Roscarna she was distressed to think that the shooting season was over. She had always remembered the long grey shape of the *Pennant* that he had shewn her, lying off Kingstown on the evening of their visit to Howth. From Roscarna itself the sea was not visible, but from the knees of Slieveannilaun, a mile or so behind the house, she knew that she could overlook, not only the shining Corrib, which is an inland sea, but all the scattered lakelets of Iar Connaught, the creeks, the islands, and beyond, the open sea. Lying in the heather, hearing nothing but the liquid whinny of the curlews that had lately forsaken the tidal waters for the mountains, she would watch the foam that fringed the islands, unconscious of the sea's sound and tumult, half expecting that a miracle would happen and that someday she would see the three-funnelled *Pennant* steaming over the white sea into Galway Bay.

V

But the spring passed, and the summer wore on, and Gabrielle heard no more of him. It was a summer of terrific heat; the flanks of the mountains were parched and slippery even in that moist countryside, and it would have taken more than a dream to make her climb Slievannilaun. She lived the life that an

animal leads in summer, cooling her limbs in the lake, and only stirring abroad in the early morning or the dusk. The weather told on Bidy, who lived in the kitchen where a fire burned all the year round, on Considine, who walked up to Roscarna for Gabrielle's lessons in the morning sun, and on Jocelyn, who seemed to feel it more than either of them. Indeed, if they had noticed Jocelyn, they would have had some cause for anxiety; but Jocelyn never talked about his health, even to Bidy, though he himself perceived, with some irritation, that he was growing old. Secretly he fought against it, driving himself to youthful exertions with an artificial and desperate energy that deceived them, but he slept badly at night, and could not keep himself awake in the daytime. Even Gabrielle remarked that he was losing his memory for names, and got snubbed for her trouble. She found it was better to leave him alone, and put his irritability down to the excessive heat.

In the blue evening, when flocks of starlings were already beginning to sweep the sky above the reedbeds of the lake, and white owls fluttered out like enormous moths, Gabrielle would walk out for a breath of cool air over the baked crevasses of the bog, or more often down their only road; a track that flattered the dignity of Roscarna at the lodge gates but degenerated as it approached Clonderriff.

In the full glare of daylight Clonderriff, for all Mr. Considine's labours, was a sordid collection of cabins, whitened without, but full of peat-smoke and the odours of cattle within. The cabins stood on the brow of a hill. In winter they seemed to crouch beneath a sweeping wind—and the grass thatchings would have been whirled away if they had not been kept in position by ropes that were weighted with stones. The small irregular plots in which the villagers grew their potatoes were bounded by dry walls through crevices of which the wind whistled shrilly, and scattered with boulders too deeply imbedded to be worth the labour of moving, and the walls and boulders were alike covered with an ashen lichen that made them look as if they were crusted over with bitter salt that the wind had carried in from sea. Between the garden plots lay a wilderness of common land, on which lean cattle grazed or routed among heaps of decaying garbage: in winter a desolation, in summer a purgatory of flies. But with the coming of evening and a softer air Clonderriff became transformed. One saw no longer the sordid details, only the long and level lines of the bog, the white-washed cabins shining milky as elder-blossom in moonlight, their windows bloomed with candlelight. In every cranny of the garden walls the crickets began their tingling chorus, but every other living thing in the village seemed at rest.

Often, when she felt lonely, Gabrielle would walk down the road to Clonderriff, not because she found it beautiful, as it surely was, but for the sake of its homeliness and the contrast of its gentle life to the moribund atmosphere of Roscarna. She loved the pale cabins, each a cradle of mysterious life; she loved the sound of placid cattle feeding in the darkness, and above all she loved the sound of human voices when the men sprawled by the roadside telling old stories, and the tall, barefooted women stood above them very slim in their folded shawls. Sometimes as she passed quietly along the road, she would become conscious, without hearing, of human presences, and see a pair of lovers sitting on the end of a stone wall with their lips together, and then she would return to Roscarna full of wonder and excitement.

One night in August the impulse seized her to put on the white dress that she had worn in Dublin. When dinner was over she left Jocelyn snoring over his port and walked as though she were dreaming down the Clonderriff road. The air was full of pale grass-moths. Her heart fluttered within her: she couldn't think why. She herself was like a white, fluttering moth. She came quickly to the outskirts of the village. The cabins were asleep. In none of them could as much as a candlelight be seen. It was strange that the village should be deader than Roscarna, and she felt as though a sudden and deeper darkness had descended on her. A little frightened she decided that she would go through to the end of the village and pay a visit to Considine: not because she wanted to see him in the least, but because she loved shocking him, and nothing surely could shock him more at this time of night than the moth-like apparition that she presented. She even felt a wayward curiosity to know what he did with himself at night. For several years there had been whispers of a theological thesis that he was writing for his doctor's degree. She imagined him, with a reading lamp and red eyes, up to his ears in the minor prophets. It would be fun to see what he thought of her.

She hurried on through the silent village, but when she came to an isolated cabin at the end of it she heard a sound that explained the desolation of the rest; a noise of terrible and unearthly wailing. In the darkness of this curious night it seemed to her a very awful thing. She guessed that somebody had died in the last cabin, and that a wake was being held. For a moment she hesitated, and then, as curiosity got the better of her horror, she came gradually nearer.

The women were keening somewhere at the back of the house, but the front windows blazed with the light of many candles, and the door of the cabin was wide open. Inside its narrow compass a crowd of villagers, twenty or thirty of both sexes, was gathered. Gabrielle, clutching at the wall, drew nearer and looked inside.

The room was full of bottles, a thicket of empty bottles stood on the table, the press, and in the corner by the fireplace. The floor was strewn with the figures of men and women who had drunk until they dropped. Those who were still awake, and reasonably sober, were playing a kind of round game, passing from hand to hand a stick, the end of which had been lighted in the fire. As it passed from one to another the holder said the words: "If Jack dies and dies in my hand a forfeit I'll give." The game was quite exciting, and Gabrielle found herself wondering in whose hand the glowing stick would go out; but while she watched it her eyes became accustomed to the light of the room and fell at last upon a spectacle of cold horror. The coffin in which the dead man was to be buried had been reared up on one end against the further wall, and within it the body stood erect, held in this position by a cross-work of ropes. It was that of an old man with grey untidy hair. He stood there bound, with his eyes closed, his head lolling forward, and his mouth open. She couldn't stand it. She wanted to cry out, but her voice would not come, and so she simply turned and ran blindly along the dark road towards Oughterard.

She ran till she was out of breath and stood against a wall panting and trembling. She hated the darkness, for it seemed vaguely threatening. The thin music of the crickets made it feel as if it were charged with some electric fluid in which the silence grew more awfully intense. It came to her, with a sudden shock, that if she were to return to Roscarina she must pass that dreadful spectacle again, and alone. The only thing that she could possibly do to save herself from this calamity, was to go on to Considine's house and beg him to take her home again. She didn't want to do this, for she felt in her bones that he would laugh at her.

She stood in the shadow of a white-thorn, and though she had now ceased from her storm of trembling, her body gave a shudder from time to time, like a tree that frees its storm-entangled branches when the wind has fallen. She heard a slow step mounting the road. She prayed that the newcomer might be Considine, for then her frightened condition would spare her explanations. The steps came nearer. Out of the darkness a shadowy form approached her. It seemed to her that it was that of a man of superhuman size—one of the giants who, Biddy had told her, lay buried in the long barrows on the edge of the bog. But this was nonsense. She planned what words she would say to him. Abreast of her he stopped, and stared at her white dress. Then suddenly he cried, "Gabrielle!" in a voice that she remembered well. It was Radway's. In a moment she found herself crying, beyond control, in his arms. She clove to him, sobbing desperately, and he kissed her, her eyes, that she tried to shield from him, her neck, her lips. It was an amazing moment in the darkness.

Then she stopped crying and began to laugh unnaturally. In this way she blurted out the story of her fright, and he, still clasping her, listened until she was calm.

"But what are you doing here? How did it all happen?" she said. She did not know what she was saying for happiness.

Little by little he told her. The *Pennant* had put in to Devonport for repairs a week before. He had been granted a month's leave, and his first thought had been Roscarina. After a couple of days at his own home he had crossed to Ireland, arriving late in the afternoon at Oughterard, where he found a room at an hotel. In Dublin he had armed himself with an Ordnance map, and looking at this, it had seemed to him that it would be easy enough to walk to Roscarina in the evening and let her know that he had arrived. Time was so short that he could not bear to miss a moment of her. So he had set out from Oughterard along the road to Clonderriff, hoping to reach Roscarina in daylight and to return with the rising moon. He had reckoned without Irish miles and Irish roads, and forgotten that a sailor who has been long afloat is out of walking trim. He had made poor progress, and nothing but the distant light of the cabin on the top of the hill in which the wake was being held had prevented him from giving up his attempt to see her. And then this astounding miracle had happened, and he had found her crying in his arms ... surely a lover's luck!

"And now you'll be coming with me to Roscarina," she said.

She was so happy. She passed the cabin of the wake without a shudder. They walked as lovers, arm in arm, and soon a yellow moon, in its third quarter, rose, making Clonderriff beautiful, and flinging their moving shadows upon the pale stones at the roadside. As they breasted the hill, an arm of Corrib burned above the black like a band of sunset cloud, rather than moonlit water. Its beauty overwhelmed them. They clung to each other and kissed again. He told her that she was just as he had seen her first in her white dress, just as he had always imagined her in his days at sea, only more beautiful. She was so pale in the moonlight, and her lips so happy. She was glad that an inspired caprice had made her put on her white dress.

He asked her whether it was very far to Roscarina. "If you could miss the way," he said, "we might go on wandering for ever in the moonlight. There never could be another night like this."

But they had come already to the dark belt of woodland that the first Hewishes had planted, a

darkness unvisited by moonlight, where their feet rustled a carpet of dead leaves, and shy, nocturnal creatures made another rustling beside them. At the edge of the wood a bird flew out of a thorn tree. "It's a brown owl," cried Radway; but when its wings caught the moonlight they saw the band of white. "It's a magpie," she said. "One for sorrow ..." and smiled.

Roscarna stood before them, the ghost of a great house with many solemn windows for eyes. It looked blank, uninhabited, lifeless. Between the house and the river moonlight smoothed the lawns. The moon made that cold stone phantom imponderable, a grey mirage. Radway could not believe, for a moment, that it was real; but the sense of Gabrielle's cold cheek against his lips, her fingers twined in his, and her soft, unhurried breathing recalled him, telling him that he was a lover, awake and alive.

They crossed the bridge and entered the house by the front doors. The latch clanged to, echoing, and Bidy Joyce appeared in a red petticoat. Gabrielle introduced Radway, and Bidy was not scandalized, being used to the freedoms of Irish hospitality. Jocelyn had been in bed for half an hour or more, she said, and as the state in which he had retired was problematical they thought it better not to disturb him. They gave Radway supper in the dining-room, Gabrielle sitting opposite to him with her chin in the cup of her hands and her face white with candle-light.

In the meantime Bidy had prepared a guest-room for him, a sombre chamber with long windows, so sealed by neglect that they could not be opened, in which a broken pane served for ventilator. In the middle of it stood a bed, painted and gilt, in the manner of the seventeenth century, with panels of crimson brocade, threadbare but still beautiful, although the pattern of their ornament had faded long since. Gabrielle lighted him to his room, stepping softly along the uncarpeted passage. At the door they surrendered themselves to a passionate good-night.

VI

Radway stayed at Roscarna for three days. Irish ways are easy, and Jocelyn did not appear surprised to see his daughter's correspondent at the breakfast-table. He measured Radway shrewdly with his screwed-up eyes and decided that he was a sportsman, which, together with the Halbertons' introduction, was good enough for him. He only regretted that he could not do the sporting honours of the place for their visitor. There was a certain giddiness, he said, that troubled him at unexpected moments and made him disinclined to go too far afield; but he placed his rods and the contents of the gun-room at Radway's disposal and pressed him to stay as long as the place amused him.

Jocelyn, as host, was very much the country gentleman, picking up the thread of courtly hospitality at the point where it had been broken so many years ago, almost without any effort. It is probable that he had begun to realise that things were not well with him, and that since Gabrielle might soon be left alone in the world, it would be wiser to welcome a possible husband for her. Certainly he did his best for Radway, and Radway, no doubt, found him delightful, for Jocelyn had grown milder as he aged and had never been without a good deal of personal charm. On the other hand, it is not unlikely that Radway told him of his intentions with regard to Gabrielle, even though nothing so definite as an engagement was announced. At any rate, the guest settled down happily at Roscarna, and the morning after his arrival the luggage cart was sent in to his hotel at Oughterard to bring back his traps and gun-case.

Of course Gabrielle took possession of him. The terms of their new relation had been fixed miraculously and finally by the character of their moonlit meeting at Clonderriff. No formal words were spoken, but they knew that they were lovers, having arrived at this heavenly state after a whole year of waste. On Gabrielle's side there were never any doubts or questionings. She was his altogether. She wanted him to know all that could be known of her, and since she felt that so much of her was the product of Roscarna, it was necessary that he should know Roscarna first.

With the spells of moonshine withdrawn he knew it for the wan, neglected ruin that it was, but her romantic passion for its stones helped to maintain the first atmosphere of illusion. She showed him, with a beautiful emotion, the room in which she had been born, the lofts in which she had played with the stableboys in her childhood, her alder-screened bathing place by the lake, the library where her romantic education had been begun.

Here, by the most likely chance, they encountered Considine. He had walked up, as usual, in the morning to read Dante with her. He came through the house unannounced and entered the library

where the lovers were bending with their heads close together over the map on which Gabrielle had followed the course of Radway's West Indian voyages, and, being engrossed in these tender reminiscences, they did not see him. He stood in the doorway, gazing, uncertain as to what he should say or do. In his seventeen years at Clonderriff he had got out of the way of dealing with social problems.

At last Gabrielle looked up, saw him, and blushed. She hastened to introduce Radway: "The friend I met in Dublin" ... as if there had been only one.

By this time Considine had recovered himself. He shook hands with Radway heartily and talked to him about the shooting. In those few moments it was the man and not the parson who appeared, and Radway, frankly, took him at his own valuation and liked him.

"Quite a good sort, your padre," he said to Gabrielle afterwards, and she was glad that he was pleased. For herself it had never occurred to her to consider whether he was good or bad. To her he had never been anything more than a figure: Mr. Considine; but it pleased her that anything associated with her should give her lover pleasure. Considine was sufficiently tactful not to mention Dante, and Gabrielle solved his difficulty by asking him for a short holiday during Radway's stay. He coughed and said he would be delighted, and since he did not offer to go they left him in the library.

From the first he must have seen how things were. At the best he was a lonely man, and this must have seemed the last aggravation of his loneliness. I do not suppose he considered that he was in love with Gabrielle, but he was undoubtedly attached to her, for he was not an old man nor vowed to celibacy, and it had been his leisurely delight to watch her beauty unfolding. Leisurely ... because he was slow in everything, slow in his speech, slow to anger, and slow to love—which does not imply that he was without intelligence or feeling or sex. It would not be fair to dismiss the feelings of Considine as unimportant; but it would be even less fair to sentimentalize them, for the least thing that can be said of him is that he was not sentimental himself. When they left him he tried to persuade himself that he was not jealous by settling down to the composition of his weekly sermon; but he did not risk any further disturbance of mind by seeing them together again.

The sunny season held. The river water was so low as to be unfishable, but in the string of lakelets below Loughannilaun Radway landed half a dozen sea-trout with Gabrielle, who knew the stones in every pool, as ghillie. In the divine relaxation of their love-making they were not inclined for strenuous exercise; but when evening fell, and the sky cooled, they would wander abroad together by the lake and through the woodlands or lie dreaming, side by side, in the deep heather.

During the days of Radway's visit, Jocelyn felt an obligation to appear presentable, and every evening, when dinner was over, Radway would smoke a cigar in his company, listening to his stories of old Galway days and sportsmen long since dead. As Jocelyn's memory for immediate things had faded he seemed to remember his early days more clearly, and, like many Irishmen, he was an amusing talker. Gabrielle would sit on a low stool between them in the white dress that Radway loved. It made the solitude for which they were both waiting seem more precious to see her thus at a distance, pale and fragile and miraculous against the sombre background of the Roscarna oak. Then Jocelyn would begin to yawn, and fidget for the nightcap of hot whiskey that Bidy prepared for him, and at last discreetly vanish. And so the most precious of their moments began.

Of these one can say nothing. Naturally enough, in later years, when she made Mrs. Payne her confidante, Gabrielle did not speak of them. And even if she had done so Mrs. Payne was too surely a woman of feeling ever to have betrayed her confidence. Under that wasting moon they loved, and I know nothing, but that it must have been strange for the empty shell of Roscarna, that tragic theatre, to reawaken to such a vivid and youthful passion. The world was theirs, and nobody heeded them, unless it were Bidy Joyce, a creature whose whole life was coloured by shadowy premonitions.

Gabrielle could not bear that he should leave her, but Radway's plans for the immediate future had been made without reckoning for anything as momentous as this love-affair. He was pledged, in four days, to visit an aunt in North Wales, and though he could not undertake to disappoint the old lady, he consoled Gabrielle by showing her how short and how convenient the passage to Holyhead was. To her, England seemed a country as remote as Canada, but he promised her that he would return within a week, and suggested that this would be a good opportunity of speaking of their engagement to Jocelyn. "But I wish you were not going," she said. "I feel as if I shall lose you."

They had determined to devote the last day of his stay to visiting the top of Slieveannilaun, where there were plenty of grouse. The plan gave them an excuse for a day of the most absolute solitude and the shooting that she had promised him long ago in Dublin. Bidy would cut sandwiches for them and Gabrielle would carry them in a game-bag slung over her shoulders.

At dawn a mist of sea-fog overspread the country-side, and Radway, gazing through the open window, saw the fine stuff driven down the valley in sheets against the darkness of the woods; but by the time that they had finished breakfast the sun had broken through, soaring magnificently in the moist air and promising a greater heat than ever. Jocelyn, on the stone terrace, watched them depart. "I wish I were going with you," he said with a twinkle, "but it's a job for young people. Collar-work all the way, and you'll find the grass on the mountain as slippery as ice." They left him, laughing. He liked Radway. Gabrielle might easily do worse. At the edge of the wood she turned and waved her handkerchief; but Jocelyn was tossing biscuits to his favourite spaniel Moira and did not see.

They climbed Slieveannilaun happily, for they were young and full of vigour. Gabrielle was quieter and more serious than usual, under the shadow of his going. He killed two and a half brace of grouse. It pleased her to see the ease and precision with which his gun came up.

Near the place where they lunched they saw three fox cubs running with their mother, a sight that filled Gabrielle with delight. On a stone near by them a small mouse-coloured bird, a meadow pipit, made a noise, *tick-tick*, like the ferrule of a walking-stick on stone. From this exalted station they could no longer see Roscarna, for the house and the woods were lost in the immense trough beneath them. They only saw the Corrib and the lakes of Iar Connaught and, beyond, an immense bow of sea.

"I hate the sea," she said. "It will take you away from me."

"You can't hate it more than I do," he said laughing. "All sailors hate the sea. But somehow, I don't think I was ever born to be drowned."

The sunshine made them sleepy and they lay down in the heather. He lay there with his head on her breast and slept. But Gabrielle did not sleep. She watched him lazily and with a strange content.

When he woke the sun was beginning to sink. They walked back along the ridge in a state that was curiously light-hearted. She seemed to be able to forget for the first time the fact that he was to leave her next day. The evening was cool and fresh and the air of the mountain as clear as spring water. When they came to the descent he insisted on carrying the bag that held the game. There was a little quarrel and a reconciliation of kisses. They set off together once more hand in hand. Halfway down the mountain, on a patch of shining grass, he slipped, and the weight of the game-bag overbalanced him. Gabrielle laughed as he fell, but her laugh was lost in the report of the gun. How the accident happened no one can say, but Radway had blown his brains out.

VII

The inquest at Roscarna was Bidy Joyce's affair. It was the next best thing to a wake, and she took the opportunity of having a dhrop stirrun'—as she put it. The sergeant of the constabulary, an erect Ulsterman with mutton-chop whiskers, had spread a wide net for his jury. They came from Joyce's Country, from Iar Connaught, from islands of the Corrib, like dusty pilgrims. Bidy housed them in the stables, where they slept it off for a couple of nights. Jocelyn himself entertained the coroner. He seemed particularly anxious that nothing in the way of scandal should appear, though he really had no cause for anxiety, since a man who takes the risk of scrambling down a mountain-side with his gun loaded, supplies an obvious explanation for disaster.

Naturally it was Gabrielle who suffered most. From the first she had behaved extraordinarily well. Nobody had seen the poor child's first agony of passionate grief; but she had pulled herself together quickly, leaving Radway's body where it lay, and had hurried down to Roscarna where she found Jocelyn dosing [Transcriber's note: dozing?] on the terrace. She had been tight-lipped and pale and awfully quiet, showing no emotion but an unprofitable desire for speed when she led the stable-hands up the mountain to the place where she had left her lover.

She did not cry at all until the work was done. Then, in the rough arms of Bidy, she collapsed pretty thoroughly. Bidy put her to bed, but she would not stay there. Later in the day she was found wandering along the passages to the room where Radway had slept. She told Bidy that she only wanted to be left alone; and in that room she stayed until the time came when she had to give her evidence. In the court she did not turn a hair, though Bidy stood ready with a battery of traditional restoratives in case she faltered.

Jocelyn had a very thin time of it. The strain made him more shaky than usual, and when telegrams

began to flutter in from Radway's relatives a few days later—Radway had left no address and so they had been forced to wire to the Halbertons—he threw up the sponge altogether. His weakness was Considine's opportunity. Considine undertook the whole management of the Radways' visit, received them, conducted them to the room in which their son's remains were lying and did his best to explain to them what he had been doing in this outlandish place. I suppose that this kind of solemn condolence is part of a parson's ordinary duties, but it must be admitted that Considine performed it well. He impressed the Radways as being solid and dependable and a gentleman. His capability and discretion made them feel that Roscarna was not so disreputable and outlandish after all. He scarcely mentioned Gabrielle, except as the only witness of the accident, and the Radway family returned to England with their son's body, satisfied that he had gone to Roscarna for the grouse shooting on the invitation of people who, in spite of their questionable appearance, were actually connected with the Halbertons, and thankful that no element of intrigue or passion had any part in the tragedy.

On their return they wrote Considine a long letter in which they thanked him for his courtesy and regretted that their son's last moments had not been rejoiced by his ghostly ministrations. As a little thank-offering (not for their son's death, but for Considine's kindness) they proposed the erection of a stained glass window in his church, a proposal that Considine gladly accepted.

It was not until the Radways had disappeared and Roscarna began to recoil into its old routine of life, that Gabrielle collapsed. The blow to her imagination had been heavier than anyone dreamed, so staggering, in its first impact, that for a time she had been numbed. In a week or two, with returning consciousness, her sufferings began to be felt. She could not sleep at night, and when she did sleep she dreamed perpetually of one thing, the endless, precarious descent of a slippery mountain-side in the company of Radway. The dream always ended in the same way, with a fall, a laugh, a shattering report, and a flash of light which meant that she was awake.

In her disordered eyes the woods of Roscarna, the river, and the lake took on a melancholy tinge. Though this aspect of them was new to her, it is hardly strange that she should have seen them thus, for the beauty of Roscarna is really of an elegiac kind, an autumnal beauty of desertion and of decay. As for Slieveannilaun, she dared not look at it.

Jocelyn tried hard to cheer her up. With an effort he whipped up enough energy to take her out with his dogs and his gun, until her look of horror made him suspect that the sound of a gunshot was a nightmare to her, as indeed it was, reminding her of many dreams and one unforgettable reality. She did her best to hide this from him, for she saw that he was really trying to be kind.

Considine also tried to interest her in new things and to distract her mind. His methods were tactful. He knew perfectly well that the official manner of condolence that had gone down so well with the Radways wouldn't do for her. He just treated her as the child that he knew her to be, trying to induce her to join in a game of pretending that nothing had happened. Gabrielle realised his humane attempt from the first and even, for a time, tried to play up to him, but the affair ended disastrously in a flood of bitter, uncontrollable tears for which neither the parson nor the man could offer any remedy. It seemed to him that this was a woman's job, and so he and Jocelyn met in solemn consultation with Bidy Joyce.

At this point an easy solution seemed to offer itself in an invitation from the Halbertons. They had heard all the details of the affair from Radway's people and wrote inviting Gabrielle to stay with them in Devon for a month. The two men prepared the bait most carefully, but when their plan was disclosed to her, Gabrielle rejected it with an unusual degree of passion, imploring them to leave her alone ... only to leave her alone.

They resigned her to the care of Bidy, who had always considered it her proper function and privilege to deal with the affair. She set about it clumsily but with confidence, tempting Gabrielle to eat with carefully prepared surprises, obviously humouring her in everything she did. From the very first she had viewed the Radway affair with suspicion, and now she found it difficult not to say, 'I told you so,' though, as a matter of fact, she had done nothing of the sort.

Altogether her methods were too transparent to be successful; and since her own robust habit of body made it difficult for her to divine any subtler cause for Gabrielle's condition, she leapt at once to the physical explanation suggested to her by her own experience of the consequences of love-making in Joyce's country. She watched Gabrielle with a keen and matronly eye, collecting her evidence from day to day after the anxious manner of mothers. When she had dwelt upon the problem for a couple of months she prepared the results of her scrutinies and offered them in a complete and alarming dossier to Jocelyn. In her opinion—and on this subject at least her opinion was of value—there could be no doubt as to Gabrielle's condition.

To Bidy Joyce this seemed the most natural thing in the world, but to Jocelyn the announcement came as a tremendous surprise. He knew well enough that this sort of accident was an everyday affair,

in effect the usual prelude to matrimony, among the peasantry of Connaught; but that such an ugly circumstance should intrude itself into the Hewish family—in the case of one of its female members—seemed a monstrous calamity. He was in no condition to stand another shock, and Biddy's pronouncement completely knocked him over. In a case of this kind it was idle to doubt her authority. He only wondered how he could make the best of a desperate job.

Distasteful as the business was to him, he decided to tackle Gabrielle herself. It was a very strange interview. On Jocelyn's part there were no recriminations. He was growing gentle in his old age, and in any case he regarded Gabrielle as the victim of a tragedy. All that he wanted to do was to get at the truth, and than this nothing could have been harder, for in Gabrielle he found not only an amazing ignorance—or if you prefer the word, innocence—but a flaming, passionate determination to keep silence on the subject of her intimacies with Radway. To her the story was sacred, and far too precious to be bruised by the examination of any living soul.

It is probable that Jocelyn tackled the matter with the utmost delicacy. Fundamentally, he had the instincts of a gentleman, and, as Gabrielle knew, he loved her; but on this one subject no amount of entreaties or tenderness could make her speak. In the end, when he could get nothing out of her, he compelled himself to tell her of Biddy's suspicions. It seemed to him that this might force her into a full confession of her relations with her lover. It did nothing of the sort. She simply stood clutching a tall oak chair and looking straight out of the window over the dark woods. Then she said: "Does Biddy really think I am going to have a baby?" And Jocelyn nodded his head. Then she said nothing more. She simply went out of the room like a sleep-walker, leaving poor Jocelyn overwhelmed with misery by a silence that he interpreted as an admission of guilt. For him, at any rate, the matter was settled and the acuteness of Biddy Joyce finally established.

And there one must leave it. Gabrielle herself accepted the verdict without question, but whether from her own secret knowledge or out of an innocence that is almost incredible but not, in her case, impossible, I cannot say. Naturally enough, in that other strange interview with Mrs. Payne, she did not go into details, and as far as we are concerned the truth will never be known. Not that it really matters. The only thing that concerns us is the effect upon her fortunes of this real or imaginary catastrophe. All that we can say is that when she walked out of the Roscarna dining-room after her hour with Jocelyn she was subtly and curiously changed.

From that moment she became, in fact, a person hypnotised, possessed by the contemplation of her approaching motherhood. She was no longer restless or tearful. She began to sleep again, and her sleep was no longer troubled by that recurrent dream. A strange calm descended on her, the calm of a Madonna thrilled by an angelic annunciation—a hallucinated calm that made her remote and independent, utterly unmoved by the commotion into which the household of Roscarna had been thrown.

Her acceptance of the situation crumpled up Jocelyn entirely. He could not for a moment see any way out of the difficulty. As usual he fell back on Biddy, who brought her practical knowledge to his rescue. Biddy was emphatic. In the circumstances there was only one thing to be done. Gabrielle must be married—somehow—anyhow—and the sooner the better. It was the sort of thing that happened every day of the week and the resources of civilisation had never been able to find another solution. Jocelyn shook his head. It was all very well to talk about marriage, but where, in the neighbourhood, could a bridegroom be found at such short notice? Biddy's suggestion of half a dozen available Joyces failed to satisfy him. However suitable the Joyces might be for casual relations the idea of marriage with one of them was unthinkable. After all, whatever she had done, Gabrielle was a Hewish and the heiress, whatever that might mean, of the Roscarna mortgages. Biddy, impatient of his obstinacy, gave him up.

With feelings of sore humiliation he consulted Considine. It was a hard confession for Jocelyn and the awkwardness of Considine did not make it easier. It seemed as if the two of them were up against a stone wall. Considine blushing and monosyllabic, begged for time to consider what might be done; and the fact that he did not seem to be utterly hopeless cheered Jocelyn considerably. Gabrielle, in the meantime, continued rapt and passive.

In a week the result of Considine's deliberations emerged, and, in a fortnight, Gabrielle, only daughter of Sir Jocelyn Hewish, Baronet, of Roscarna, County Galway, was married to the Rev. Marmaduke Considine at the church of Clonderriff. The *Irish Times* described the wedding as quiet.

It is a curious task to enquire into the motives of Considine. Without doubt he felt under some obligation to the family of Hewish, and particularly to that dead lady Gabrielle's mother, and it is conceivable that he had known enough of Jocelyn during their eighteen years' acquaintance to have separated his good points from his weakness, and even to respect him. But the conditions of his dependence on the Roscarna family can hardly be said to have included the fathering of its errors, and no degree of respect for Jocelyn could have made him think it his duty to marry the daughter. Was it, perhaps, a sense of religious duty that compelled him? It is difficult to think of marriage with a creature of Gabrielle's physical attractions as a mortification of the flesh; and though the ceremony of marriage is supposed to save the reputation of a person in Gabrielle's position, there was no religious dogma which decreed that marriage with a clergyman could save her soul.

Then was it a matter of sheer Quixotism! That vice, indeed, might conceivably have smouldered in the mind of this queer stick of a man, a lonely fellow cherishing in solitude exaggerated ideals of womankind and quick to rise to a point of honour. Even this will not do. There is nothing in the rest of Considine's history that suggests the sentimentalist. For a parson he was decidedly a man of the world, with a good business head, a sense of proportion, and a keen, if deliberate humour. In matters of sentiment I should imagine him reliable.

Only one other cause for his conduct suggests itself, and that I believe to be the true explanation. He married Gabrielle Hewish because he wanted to do so; because he loved her. And that is not difficult to imagine since he had known her intimately ever since she was born, had helped and witnessed the whole awakening of her intelligence; had found in her company his principal diversion; had watched her growing beauty, and seen its final perfection. He knew her so well, body and mind, that, whatever might have happened, he could not help believing in her complete innocence—so well that he could afford to disregard conventional prejudices in looking at her misfortune.

It is even possible that he may have dreamed of marrying her before the misfortune came, waiting, in his leisurely way, for the suitable moment. At Roscarna he had no great cause to fear any rival in love; and since an ugly providence had obligingly removed the intruder Radway, there was no reason why he should not benefit by Radway's death. Considine was a man of forty, full of vigour and not too old for passion. The prospect of a fruitful marriage was doubtless part of the programme which he had mapped out for himself. Nor must it be forgotten that he was a poor man and Gabrielle her father's only daughter.

With Gabrielle herself the problem is more difficult still. It is not easy to imagine her submitting to the embraces of her tutor, however deep and ardent his affection may have been, within a few months of the catastrophe that had overwhelmed her first love. We may take it for certain that she did not then, nor at any time, love Considine. It is impossible that she should have thought of him in the character of a lover, though I have little doubt but that she would have preferred him to any of the swarm of Joyces whom Bidy was ready to produce.

Perhaps she was offered the alternative,—I cannot tell. It is certain that Jocelyn and Bidy told her, in different ways, that marriage was a necessity to her virtue, and since she was compelled by threats and blandishments and entreaties to make a virtue of necessity, she chose, no doubt the course that was least distasteful to her. One cannot even be certain, in the light of after events, that she understood the meaning of marriage, or anything about it save that it was the only thing that could make an honest woman of her. She was so young, so lonely, so numbed and overwhelmed by her misfortune. I do not suppose that she minded very much what they did with her as long as they left her at last in peace. That she was impressed by the serious persuasion of Bidy Joyce goes without saying, for there was no other woman by whom she could set her standard of conduct. No doubt the distress of Jocelyn, who was now something of a pathetic figure, moved her too. It must have given her pleasure of a sort to see the way in which he was relieved by her acceptance of the Considine plan—if anything so passive can be called an acceptance. The shame of the moment had so broken him that his sudden recovery of spirits must have been affecting. It must have seemed to her that she had saved her father's life.

When once the matter was settled Jocelyn became almost light-hearted, trying by little tokens of affection and an attitude that was almost jocular, to pretend that nothing had happened and that the marriage was no more than the happy conclusion of a normal courtship. On the eve of the wedding he gave her the contents of her mother's jewel-box, which included some beautiful ornaments of early Celtic work. He kissed her and fondled her and hoped she would be happy, but she could not smile. He dressed elaborately for the ceremony, and when he had left her behind with Considine, feasted solemnly at Roscarna until Bidy and the coachman carried him upstairs. Never in the history of Roscarna was such a tragic bride.

The married couple settled down at Clonderriff in the small grey house that Considine inhabited. In his bachelor days it had been a comfortless place, but Jocelyn had seen to it that it was furnished with

some of the lumber of Roscarna: the presses were filled with fine Hewish linen and the plate engraved with the Hewish crest.

Jocelyn had hoped, in the beginning, that Considine would forsake his village and come to live at Roscarna. He himself, he said, needed no more in his old age than a couple of rooms; his daughter and his son-in-law might take a wing to themselves and do what they liked with it. He had counted a good deal on the attraction to Considine of the Roscarna library. His offer was refused. Considine already had his plans cut and dried. Quite apart from the fact that his parochial duties tied him to Clonderriff, he had decided that it would be better for Gabrielle to be separated from all her old associations. Like everything else he undertook, whether it were catching a trout or reclaiming a drunkard, the plan was carefully reasoned. Gabrielle was embarking on a new life that would, presumably, always be that of a country parson's wife. He had caught her young—it was unfortunate, of course, that he hadn't caught her three months younger—but in any case she was still young enough to be plastic and amenable to marital influence. It seemed to him that he had a good chance of moulding her into the shape that would suit his purpose, and it was obvious that the process would be easier if she were isolated from the free and easy manners of Roscarna which had—so very nearly—proved her ruin, and particularly those of Biddy Joyce, who was not only a Catholic, but the possessor of an unvarnishable past in which his father-in-law had a share.

Considine's decision was final, and Jocelyn perforce submitted to it. Indeed, Jocelyn was far too feeble in these days to pit himself against Considine's more vigorous personality, even if he had not recognised the fact that he was in Considine's debt; so he went on living at Roscarna, wholly dependent on Biddy for his creature comforts, and on the dogs for his amusement. It was a mild and placid sunset.

Meanwhile Gabrielle, innocent of all domestic accomplishments, struggled with the complications of her husband's housekeeping, and Considine returned, like a giant refreshed, to the composition of his doctor's thesis.

The estate of matrimony suited Considine. In the soft clean climate of Galway a man ages slowly, and this marriage renewed his youth. It made him full of new energies and enthusiasms, and revealed a boyish aspect in his character that seemed to Gabrielle a little grotesque, or even frightening. He wanted to express himself boisterously, flagrantly, and the proceeding was extraordinary in the case of a man who had always been so self-contained. Lacking any other outlet for these ebullitions he threw himself energetically into his theological writings and worked off his surplus physical steam in the management of the Roscarna estate, for which Jocelyn was gradually becoming more and more unfitted. In this, as in most things that he undertook, Considine showed himself efficient, and Jocelyn began to congratulate himself on the fact that he had secured a son-in-law with a genuine passion for the land that meant so much to him.

During all this time Gabrielle remained the same indefinitely tragic figure. There was nothing physically repulsive in Considine, but even if there had been, I do not suppose that she would have felt it acutely. She had become passive. The abruptness of the first tragedy had numbed her so completely that nothing less than another emotional catastrophe could awaken her to consciousness.

In this expectant hallucinated state she passed through the early months of her married life, faithfully performing her domestic duties, sad, yet almost complacent in her sadness. Autumn swept over the countryside. Mists rising from the Corrib at dawn lapped the feet of the hills on which Clonderriff stood, mingling, at last, with the melancholy vapour of white fog rolling in from sea. Leaves began to fall in the parsonage garden, and the lawn was frosted at daybreak with cold dew. The hint of chilliness in the air only stimulated Considine to fresh energies, sending him out on long tramps with his gun. He seemed to think it strange that Gabrielle, in her new state, should hate the sight, and above all, the sound of firearms. He tried to joke her out of it—he would never treat her as anything but a child—but to her it was not a subject on which jokes could be made.

Biddy was a frequent and puzzled visitor at Clonderriff, puzzled, and a little disappointed because her physiological prophecies did not seem to be approaching fulfilment. By the time that Gabrielle had been married a couple of months it became questionable whether there had been any social necessity for the hurried ceremony; but though she had her own doubts on the subject, Biddy was far too cunning to give this away to her own discredit, and when Jocelyn or Considine consulted her as to how these matters were proceeding, she armed herself with inscrutable feminine mystery trusting to luck and assuring them it was only a question of time. After all, probabilities were on her side, and no doubt it came as a great relief to her when, in due course, the doctor from Galway confirmed her diagnosis. With this vindication of her judgment she became more and more attentive to Gabrielle, walking over two or three times a week to Clonderriff and instructing her in the traditional duties of motherhood as they are taught in the west.

All through the days of autumn Gabrielle sat at her window looking over the misty lawn and making

the clothes for her baby. It is not surprising, under the circumstances, that Considine did not show any symptoms of paternal pride. This, it must be confessed, was the most unpleasant condition of his bargain. Still, he had undertaken it deliberately, and meant to go through with it like a man. He looked forward to the time when it should be over and done with. Then they would be able to make a new start; Gabrielle would be wholly his, and Radway, he confidently expected, forgotten.

In the meantime, having, in the flush of marriage completed his theological thesis and sent it off to the university from which he expected a doctor's degree, he determined to enjoy the sporting possibilities of Roscarna to the full. His shooting took him far afield, and he saw very little of Gabrielle in the daytime. He kept away deliberately, for her condition made her strange and irritable at times, and he did not consider that devotion to her in a difficulty for which he had not been responsible was part of his contract. Later, no doubt, his turn would come. For the present, moreover, he felt that he could not quite trust himself, and the fear that his suppressed grudging might make him lose control of his temper made him anxious to avoid the risk. Gabrielle was thankful for this. She never felt unkindly towards him, and yet she was glad when she could feel sure of not seeing him for a time. In the dusk he would return, too drugged with air and exercise to take much notice of her, and for this also she was thankful.

One evening in February, when Gabrielle was sitting in a dream over her turf fire, Considine came home from a day's blackcock shooting in the woods on the edge of the lake. She did not hear him coming, for the garden path was now deep in fallen leaves. As he turned to open the house door Considine saw a small shadow moving under the garden hedge. He thought it was a rabbit, and quickly, without considering, he slipped a cartridge into his gun, aimed at it, and fired. The sound of a shattering report at close quarters broke Gabrielle's dream, recalling an old horror. She jumped to her feet and cried out. Considine, hearing her cry, dropped his gun and ran into the house. He found her standing with her hands pressed to her eyes and trembling violently. She did not see him when he called her name, and then, still shaken like a poplar in a storm, she turned on him with eyes full of hate and let loose on him a flood of language such as she must have learned from the Roscarna stable-boys, words that she couldn't possibly have spoken if she were sane. He apologised for his carelessness and tried to soothe her, and when she had stopped abusing him and broken down into desolate tears he picked her up in his arms, carried her to their bedroom, and sent a messenger riding to Roscarna for Bidy Joyce.

She lay on the bed quivering, and Considine, white and harassed, stayed beside her. He did not dare to leave her alone, even though she would not look at him. By the time that Bidy arrived in a fluster, Gabrielle's child had been prematurely born. There was never any question of independent life. The case remained in Bidy's hands, and whether the child were Radway's or Considine's, nobody in the world but Bidy Joyce and Gabrielle ever knew. There is no doubt that Bidy would have committed herself to any lie rather than lose her reputation as an authority, for Bidy was a Joyce. Personally I cherish the passionate belief that no man but Considine was the father.

IX

It is certain that Considine secretly regarded the death of Gabrielle's child with thankfulness. It had brought their equivocal relation to an end, and now that the matter was cleared up there was no reason why their married life should not be as plain-sailing as he desired. This was the beginning.

As for Gabrielle, she recovered slowly. The emotional storm that had been the cause of her accident had affected her more deeply than the illness itself, which Bidy, as might be expected, mismanaged. The wintry season was at its loneliest when she came downstairs again, very pale and transparent, and began to settle down into the ways of the house. Even so the storm had cleared the air, and when she began to recover her strength she also recovered some of her spirit. Looking backward she realised the depths in which she had been struggling and determined, rather grimly, that whatever happened she would never descend to them again. She was naturally a healthy and a happy creature, and now that her troubles were over she meant to enjoy life.

Considine rejoiced at her recovery. It must not be forgotten that Considine was genuinely in love with her, that he found her physically exquisite, and had always delighted in her swift mind. And even if Gabrielle could not give him in return an ideal passion, she did not, in the very least, dislike him. She had always looked upon him as a good friend. Before their marriage, ever since her earliest childhood they had spent many happy hours together. As a tutor he had been able to interest her, and apart from

the fact that he was now her husband and could offer her tenderness and admiration as well, there was no reason why her life should be very different from what it had been. The only thing that she loved of which he had deprived her was Roscarna. At first, she had felt that more than anything; but when she recovered from her illness and was able for the first time to accompany Considine on his visits to the estate, it seemed to her that her passion for Roscarna had faded. Perhaps also she was now a little frightened by its associations, and felt that it would be safer for her to cut herself entirely free from everything that reminded her of the old era. When she visited the house to see her father she would look wistfully, almost fearfully, at her old haunts; the path to the lake, the woods that she never entered now, and, above them, the cloudy vastness of Slieveannilaun. She used to go there once a week, and Considine, as a matter of course, went with her.

By the beginning of the spring her reason for these visits ceased. Jocelyn, who had been ailing for a year or more, suddenly died.

I suppose it was the kind of death that he might have expected. It was now two years since he had been able to take the keen physical delight in country life that had been his chief apology for his early excesses. Even before the blow of Radway's accident and Gabrielle's marriage had fallen upon him his arteries had been ageing, and though he was barely sixty years of age a man is as old as his arteries. The end came swiftly with a left-sided cerebral haemorrhage that robbed him of his speech and paralysed the right side of his body, not in the middle of any unusual exertion, but when he was sitting quietly over the fire after dinner. Bidy found him there when she brought him in his nightcap, huddled up on the floor where he had fallen. She had expected something of the kind for long enough. No one in the world knew Jocelyn as well as she did.

She guessed that nothing could be done, and waited for the morning before she sent for Considine or the doctor. In the afternoon when Gabrielle and Considine visited him Jocelyn was almost good-humoured, laughing sardonically and screwing up one of his bird-like eyes while, from the other, tears escaped. He passed from laughter to tears quite easily. It was very horrible to see one side of his childish grey-whiskered face pucker up with crying and the other limp and blank. He finished by making cheerful signs to them that he was sure he would be better in a week. Of course he wasn't. Within five days his poor brain was smitten with two more tremendous blows. The third stroke killed him, coming in the night. It was Bidy who kissed his face and put Peter's pence upon his eyes and folded his arms on his breast. If any woman in the world had a right to perform this melancholy function for Jocelyn it was she. He was hers, and when he died she was alone with him, which was as it should have been.

Even when he was dead, Bidy had not finished with him. For many years he had trusted her with the key of the cellar, and this privilege allowed her to arrange a wake exceeding in magnificence anything in the memory of Joyce's Country. They kept it up for three days, the scattered Joyces foregathering from outlandish corners of Mayo and Connemara. Naturally she didn't tell Considine. He himself discovered the darkened dining-room at Roscarna strewn with human débris and lit with fifty candles. The candles were popish and the drinkers were pagan, so he turned on Bidy and told her more or less what he thought of her. He pointed with disgust to a couple of drinkers who lay snoring on a sofa under the window. "All the riff-raff of the country!" he said. Bidy flared up. "Riff-raff, is it? Sure it's his own sons and mine who do be after paying respect to their own father, and him lying dead!"

But Considine was not to be beaten. He had known for many years that Bidy was a kindly humbug. He knew that if he didn't now get rid of her Roscarna would become nothing more than a warren in which her innumerable relatives might swarm. He purged Roscarna of Joyces, Bidy included. He buried Jocelyn decently according to the ritual of the Church of Ireland, and proceeded to put his wife's estate in order as soon as her father's remains were disposed of.

There was more work in it than he had bargained for. Even the small immediate courtesies and formalities took time; the announcements in the papers and short obituary notices; letters, discreetly composed, announcing the melancholy event to Lord and Lady Halberton; an official search for Jocelyn's last will; a formal application for probate.

When these things were finished, Considine's real work had only begun. He had to readjust the whole financial fabric of Roscarna, to find out what money was owed or owing, to decide how much of Gabrielle's paper inheritance was tangible. He unearthed the firm of Dublin solicitors in whose hands the business of the estate had been allowed to drift for the last twenty years. They seemed to him a pack of shifty rogues. He was not used to dealing with lawyers, and what he took for cunning was nothing more than the traditional gesture of the profession. It was unthinkable that a firm of such ancient establishment should show any traces of haste in a matter of business. When Considine began to hurry them up they simply offered to surrender the business. No doubt they knew far better than Considine that there wasn't much in it. He imagined that they were bluffing and took them at their

word, with the result that there fell upon Clonderriff a snowstorm of documents—leases and mortgages and conveyances and post-obits—all the documentary débris of a crumbled estate, from the Elizabethan charter on which the first Hewish had founded Roscarna to the illiterate IOU's of Jocelyn's spider-racing days. Considine, up to his neck in it, called on Gabrielle to help in the ordering of her affairs. At Clonderriff they had not room enough for this accumulation of papers, so they set aside the library at Roscarna for the purpose, sorting and indexing the Hewish dossier as long as the daylight lasted. Considine worked steadily through them as though he were dealing with a mathematical calculation. To Gabrielle, on the other hand, there was something mysterious in her occupation; fingering these papers that other fingers had touched she communed with the dead—not with her father, who could scarcely write his own name, but with the ancient stately Hewishes who had built Roscarna and grown rich on the Spanish trade. Sitting at the long table with Considine, a pile of papers before her, her attention would wander, and while her eyes watched the west wind blowing along the woods she would feel that she was not herself but another Hewish woman staring out of the library windows on a rough day in March a hundred years ago. And in this dream she would be lost until the light died on the woods in a stormy sunset, and Considine began to collect the papers in sheaves and lock them in the press.

By the time that spring appeared, Considine doing his best to put the affairs of Roscarna in order, had realised the hopeless disorder in which they were involved. In the whole of Jocelyn's tenure of the estate the only stable period had been that of his bourgeois marriage. In youth he had been wildly profligate, in old age negligent, in neither caring for anything beyond his immediate needs. His tenants owed him thousands of pounds that he had never attempted to recover, for he had found it easier to borrow money on mortgage than exact it in rent. As a result of Jocelyn's finance Considine found that Gabrielle's only hope of saving anything from the ruined fortune lay in the sacrifice of Roscarna itself. The property, hopelessly degenerated as an agricultural estate, had still some value as a fishing or shooting box, and there was a chance that some wealthy Englishman might buy it for that purpose. For a moment the idea of selling Roscarna hurt her, but after a little thought she consented to the sale. Considine advertised the opportunity in the English sporting papers, but the only reply that came to him was a long and anxious letter from Lord Halberton, who had been shocked to see the Irish branch of his family reduced to selling their house and lands. His lordship offered to come over in person and give Considine the benefit of his opinion. Considine wrote very fully in reply, enclosing a balance-sheet that made Lord Halberton sit up and rub his eyes. The business-like tone of Considine's letter struck him very favourably; that sort of thing was so rare in a parson. As a matter of fact he had already heard from the Radways how tactfully Considine had managed the difficult situation of their son's death.

It struck him that Considine was too good a man to be wasted in the wilds of Ireland where the cause of tradition and aristocracy needed no bolstering. A fellow who could wind up an estate as entangled as Roscarna would be useful in the sphere of the Halberton territorial influence. He talked the matter over with his wife, and in the end wrote to Considine at some length, concurring in his wise determination to get rid of Roscarna.

"If you sell Roscarna," he wrote, "it will scarcely be fitting for your wife to remain in the district occupying a small house in Clonderriff. My lady and I both consider that this proceeding would be incompatible with Gabrielle's dignity. As luck will have it the living of Lapton Huish (that is the way in which your wife's name is spelt in England) will shortly be vacant. I have persuaded Dr. Harrow, the present incumbent, who is over ninety and not very active, that it would be well for him to make way for a younger man. The living is not generously endowed, but it has the advantage of being on the edge of my estates, and I have great pleasure in offering it to you. There is no reason why it should not lead to further advancement."

The receipt of this letter made Considine tremulous with pleasure. His original settlement in Ireland had been the result of a romantic inclination to play the missionary in a godless Catholic country. When first he came to Clonderriff he hadn't for a moment realised that the huge inertia of the west would get hold of him and enchain him; but with the passage of time this was what had happened. He knew now that he could not, of his own will, escape; and at the very moment when Jocelyn's death had created a general upheaval and made the situation in Clonderriff restless, Lord Halberton's offer gave him the chance not only of returning to his own country, but of making up for lost time. He jumped at it, and Gabrielle, who could not bear the idea of seeing her own Roscarna in the occupation of strangers, gladly consented. I do not suppose it would have made much difference to Considine if she had objected.

At Lapton Huish, in the following autumn, Mrs. Payne found them. The details of what had happened in the interval are not very clear, but the effect of the change upon Gabrielle must have been considerable, for the Mrs. Considine who appeared to Mrs. Payne does not seem to have had much in common with the dazed, hysterical child we left at Roscarna. I doubt if it was the experience of her marital relations with Considine that made her grow up; from the first she had tacitly disregarded them. I suppose the change was simply the result of living in a more civilised and populous country, for South Devon was both, in comparison with her lost Roscarna.

The Halbertons had been very kind to them. How much of their kindness sprang from original virtue, and how much from anxiety that the least connection of the family should be worthy of their reflected lustre, it is difficult to say. No doubt it pleased them to be generous on a feudal scale, particularly since Gabrielle, with her striking beauty and sharp wits, showed possibilities of doing them credit. As soon as the aged Dr. Harrow had been bundled out, the establishment of the Considines became a game as entertaining to Lady Halberton in the sphere of religious culture, as chemical experiments were to her husband in that of root-crops—with the delightful difference that human souls ran away with much less money than mangolds.

While the Rectory at Lapton was having its roof repaired, its walls painted, and the fungus that grew in the cupboards of old Canon Harrow's bedroom removed, the Considines were housed at Halberton and instructed in the family tradition. In the case of Dr. Considine—his honeymoon activities had pulled off the degree in divinity—this was easy, for he had spent his childhood on a feudal estate in Wiltshire and his politics were therefore identical with Lord Halberton's. With Gabrielle, whom Lady Halberton took in hand, the process was more difficult. She couldn't, at first, quite catch the Halberton air, but, being an admirable mimic, she soon tumbled into it. The clothes with which Lady Halberton supplied her helped her to realise the character that she was expected to assume. Sometimes she felt so pleased with her performance that she was tempted to overdo it and suddenly found herself presenting a caricature of Halberton manners that was so acute as to be cruel. And sometimes, when she felt that she couldn't keep it up, she would suddenly drop the whole pretence and relapse into the insinuating brogue of Bidly Joyce; an amazing trick that she employed with scandalous effect in later years. But although she occasionally laughed at it, Gabrielle found the ease and luxury of Halberton House very much to her taste. She lost her thin and anxious expression and became a great favourite, not only with Lady Halberton, but also with the old gentleman and Lady Barbara, the elder daughter, who was still unmarried and likely to remain so.

After six weeks at Halberton the Considines moved into the Rectory at Lapton, a square, solid building, endowed with luxuriant creepers and protected on the side that faced the prevailing wind and the roadway, with a covering of hung slates. On the three other sides lay a garden which had been too much for Canon Harrow and his gardener Hannaford. Both of them had been old and withered, and the tremendous vitality of the green things that grew in that rich red soil had overcome all their efforts at repression so that the house had been besieged and choked with vegetation and mildewed with the dampness of rain and sap. It was all very lush and generous and cool, no doubt, in summer; but when the rain that drove in from the Channel glistened on the hung slates and dripped incessantly from myriads of shining leaves, the Rector of Lapton Huish might as well have been living in a tropical swamp. To the north of them, the huge masses of Dartmoor stole the air, so that their life seemed to be lost in a windless eddy, and in the deep valleys with which the country was scored the air lay dead for many months at a time. Gabrielle, accustomed to the free spaces of Connemara, felt the change depressing, though she would not admit it; indeed, she had far too many things to think about to have time for speculating on her own health.

First of all the callers. At Roscarna the reputation of Jocelyn and, above all, his relations with Bidly Joyce, had saved the Hewishes from these formalities; and the great distances that separated the houses of gentlefolk in the west of Ireland would have made hospitality a more spontaneous and less formal affair in any case. In Devon, as Gabrielle soon discovered, calling was a ritual complicated by innumerable shades of social finesse. Lady Halberton had already coached her in the list of people whom she must know, people she could safely know at a distance, and people whom it was her duty to discourage. As soon as she was settled in at Lapton the county descended on her and she was overwhelmed with visitors from all three classes.

If she had been a stranger the Devonshire people would probably have watched her with a preconceived suspicion and dislike for a couple of years, but even her questionable qualities of youth and spontaneity could not dispose of the fact that she had been born a Hewish and had lately visited at Halberton House. In that mild climate people remain alive, or, if you prefer it, asleep, longer than in any other part of England, and the visitors who came flocking to Lapton were, for the most part, in a stage of decrepitude or suspended life. They drove through the steep and narrow lanes in all sorts of ancient vehicles, in jingles, victorias, barouches and enormous family drags. Their coachmen, older and more withered than themselves, wore mid-Victorian whiskers, and shiny cockades on their hats. In

Gabrielle's drawing-room the visitors sat on the extreme edges of their chairs. They spoke with a faded propriety, dropped their final "g's," and specialised in the abbreviation "ain't." They stayed for a quarter of an hour exactly by the French clock on the mantelpiece, contriving, in this calculated period, to make it quite clear that they were on terms of intimacy with the Halbertons, and they invariably finished by inviting the Considines to lunch.

In this way Gabrielle became familiar with a number of dining-rooms furnished in mahogany and horsehair and hung with opulent studies of still life in oils and engravings after Mr. Frith. The meal was usually served by the whiskered coachman, who wore, for the occasion, a waistcoat decorated with dark blue and yellow stripes, and there was always cake for lunch. After the port, which generally made her feel sleepy, Considine would be taken off to see the stables, and Gabrielle conducted to a walled garden, heavy with the scent of ripening fruit, where there was no shade but that of huge apple trees, frosted with American blight, that reminded her, in their passive mellowness, of the people who owned them. Nothing more violent than archery, in its old and placid variety, ever invaded the lives of these county families. If it had not been for the headaches with which their society always afflicted her, Gabrielle would have been tempted time after time to scandalise them, but the example of Considine, who was always frigidly at ease, restrained her, and so she allowed herself to be lulled to sleep, recovering slowly as they drove back through the green lanes to Lapton.

Her symptoms of boredom were taken, in this society, for evidence of her good breeding, and since she was too tired to be scandalous, Gabrielle became a social success. Her success is important, not because it changed her in any way, but because it paved the way for the development by which she became acquainted with Mrs. Payne, and the most intriguing episode of her life began.

It was notorious that Considine's parochial labours occupied very little of his time. The parish was small and scattered, Lapton Huish itself being a mere hamlet, and the neighbouring farmers so soaked in respectable tradition and isolated from opportunities of vice that their souls lay in no great danger of damnation. The activities of Considine were practically limited to his Sunday services, but though the softness of the climate might eventually have transformed him into a likeness of the ancient automaton who had preceded him, it was not in his nature to take things easily. He came of a vigorous stock. The clear, thin air of the Wiltshire downland that his ancestors had breathed makes for energy of temperament. At Roscarna he had given vent to this in the education of Gabrielle, the acquisition of his doctor's degree, and the management of his father-in-law's estate. His capacity for management, of which he had shown evidence in his winding-up of the Roscarna affairs, appealed to Lord Halberton, and it was not long before he proposed a series of improvements to the Lapton property that took his patron's fancy. In Considine's ideas there was not only imagination, but money, and Halberton was getting rather tired of his own expensive agricultural experiments.

The big house of the parish, Lapton Manor, had lain for several years unoccupied, for no other reason apparently but that it was isolated and out of date. To Lord Halberton it represented at least a thousand pounds a year in waste. When Considine had been at Lapton Huish for a little more than six months this deserted mansion suggested itself to him as an outlet for his energies. He told Gabrielle nothing of this—he was not in the habit of discussing business matters with Gabrielle—but he rode over to Halberton House one day with an elaborate and practical paper scheme. He proposed, in effect, to vacate the Rectory, and take over Lapton Manor as it stood.

The idea had been suggested to him at first by one of the consequences of Gabrielle's social success. The wife of a neighbouring baronet had fallen in love with her—the fact that her husband had followed suit made things easier. This woman was the mother of two sons, of whom the elder, the heir to the title, was delicate. She did not wish to separate the boys, and realising that it was impossible to send them together to an ordinary preparatory school, the notion had come to her of asking the Considines if they would take them into their house at Lapton. Doctor Considine, no doubt, would find time to equip them with a good classical education, while Gabrielle could supply the feminine influence which was so essential to real refinement. She was not only tired of tutors—their equivocal social status was so tiresome!—but sufficiently Spartan to feel that her sons would be better away from home for a little while. Away, but not too far away. Gabrielle had thought it would be rather fun to have a couple of boys, even dull boys like the Traceys, in the house. She had told Considine that she would like the arrangement if only the Rectory were bigger. As it was they couldn't possibly entertain the proposal.

This set Considine thinking, and from his deliberations emerged the much more ambitious scheme of taking over Lapton Manor, and equipping it as a special school for the education of really expensive boys. He decided that he would not take a greater number than he could educate by himself. His pupils must all be well-connected or wealthy. He would teach them not only the things with which a public school might reasonably be expected to equip them, but the whole duty of a landed proprietor. The neglected Manor lands, already a drag on the Halberton property, should be his example. His pupils should see it recover gradually with their own eyes. The fees they paid should go to its development,

and provide at the end of three or four years' work the satisfaction of a model and profitable estate.

All Considine's heart was in the plan. He loved teaching, and he loved the land. He had a natural aptitude for both, and the opportunity of developing them seemed too good to be missed. Lord Halberton agreed. A lease was signed in which Considine, paying a nominal rent for Lapton Manor, undertook to restore the lands and house to the condition from which they had fallen. Both landlord and tenant were delighted with their bargain. In six weeks the Rectory had been vacated and relet to an old lady from the north of England who wanted to die in Devonshire, and the Considines had moved to the Manor, under the benignant eyes of Lady Halberton. In another fortnight the first pupils, the Tracey boys, arrived, and Considine was advertising in *The Morning Post* and *The Times* for three at fees that even Lord Halberton considered outrageous. "There's plenty of money in the country," said Considine. With the insight of genius he added to his advertisement, "Special care is given to backward or difficult pupils."

XI

When Mrs. Payne had the good luck to stumble on Considine's advertisement—for, in spite of the strange complications that ensued for the Considines the occasion was certainly fortunate for her—that remarkable person was at her wits' ends. If she had not been a woman of resource and character as well as a devoted mother I think she would have given up the problem of Arthur as a bad job long before this; but it was literally the only thing that really mattered to her in life, and if she had abandoned the struggle I do not know what would have become of her.

By ordinary canons Mrs. Payne could not be considered an attractive woman. The only striking features in her plain, and rather expressionless face were her eyes, which were of a soft and extraordinarily beautiful grey. She had large hands and feet, no figure to speak of, and she dressed abominably. She possessed in fact, all the virtues and none of the graces, and was, in this respect at any rate, the diametrical opposite of her son. Her appearance suggested that life had given her a tremendous battering, a condition that would have been pitiful if it were not that she also gave the impression of having doggedly survived it; and for this reason one could not help admiring her.

Her husband had been a business man of exceptional brilliance, of a brilliance, indeed, that was almost pathological, and may have accounted in part for the curious mentality of Arthur. In a short, but incredibly active life, he had amassed a fortune that was considerable, even in the midlands where fortunes are made. I do not know what he manufactured, but his business was conducted in Gloucester, and the Overton estate, which he acquired shortly before his death, lay under the shadow of Cotswold, between its escarpment and the isolated hill of Bredon, within twenty miles of that city. Mr. Payne had died of acute pneumonia in a sharp struggle that was in keeping with his strenuous mode of life. Seven months after his death his only child, Arthur, was born.

In the care of her son, and the control of the fortune to which he would later succeed, Mrs. Payne, who was blessed with an equal vocation for motherhood and finance, became happily absorbed. Everything promised well. The business in Gloucester realised more than she could have expected, and she settled down in the placid surroundings of Overton with no care in the world but Arthur's future.

He was a singularly beautiful child, fair-haired, with a skin that even in manhood was dazzlingly white, and eyes that were as arresting as his mother's: a creature of immense vitality, who shook off the usual diseases of childhood without difficulty, and developed an early and almost abnormal physical perfection. He was not, it is true, particularly intelligent. He did not begin to talk until he was over three years old; but this slowness of development was only in keeping with his mother's physical type, and his early childhood was a period of sheer delight to her in which no shadow of the imminent trouble appeared.

By the time that he had reached his seventh year, Mrs. Payne was beginning to be worried about him. His bodily health was still magnificent, but there was a strain in his character that worried her. It appeared that it was impossible for him to tell the truth. Haphazard lying is no uncommon thing in children, proceeding, as it sometimes does, from an excess of imagination and an anxiety to appear startling; but imagination was scarcely Arthur's strong point, and his lies were not haphazard, but deliberately planned.

To a woman of Mrs. Payne's uncompromising truthfulness this habit appeared as a most serious

failing. She could not leave it to chance, in a vague hope that Arthur would "grow out of it." She tackled it, heroically and directly, by earnest persuasion, and later, by punishments. By one method and another she determined to appeal to his moral sense, but after a couple of years of hopeless struggling she was driven to the conclusion that this, exactly, was what he lacked. It seemed that he had been born without one.

The thing was impossible to her, for his father had been a man of exceptional probity and, without self-flattery, she knew that she herself was the most transparently honest person on earth. As the boy grew older his opportunities for showing this fatal deficiency increased. Whatever she said or did, and however sweetly he accepted her persuasions and punishments, it became evident that she, at any rate, was incapable of keeping his hands from picking and stealing and his tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slandering. The condition was the more amazing in the face of his great natural charms. All her friends and visitors at Overton found the boy delightful; his physical beauty remained as wonderful as ever; on the surface he was a normal and exceptionally attractive child; but in her heart she realised bitterly that he was a completely a-moral being.

In nothing was this more apparent than in his behaviour towards animals. Overton, lying as it did in the midst of a green countryside, was a natural sanctuary for all wild creatures, in which Arthur, from his earliest years, had always shown a peculiar interest. As a child, he would spend many hours with the keeper, developing an instinct for wood-craft that seemed to be the strongest in his composition. He knew all the birds of the estate, their habits, their calls, their refuges. Once in the shadow of the woods, he himself was a wild animal, a creature of faunish activity and grace. Mrs. Payne always encouraged this passion of his as a natural and admirable thing, until, one day, the keeper, who was no more humane than the majority of keepers, came to her with a shocking story of Arthur's cruelty: an enormity that it would have taken the mind of a devil, rather than a man, to imagine. When she taxed the boy with it he only laughed. She thrashed the matter out; she pointed out to him that he had done a devilish thing; but in the end she had to give it up, for it became clear to her that he was trying as hard as he could to see her point of view but couldn't, simply because it wasn't in him. She began to realise slowly and reluctantly that it was no good for her to appeal to something that didn't exist. The boy had been born with a body a little above the normal, and a mind a little below the average, but nature had cruelly denied him the possession of a soul, and neither her prayers nor her devotion could give him what he congenitally lacked.

She wondered whether the isolation of his life at Overton had anything to do with it, whether contact with other children of his own age would reduce him to the normal. She took the risk, and sent him at the age of twelve, to a preparatory school in Cheltenham. Before the first term was half over they sent for her and asked her to remove him. The head master confessed that the case was beyond him. On the surface the boy was one of the most charming in the whole school, but his heart was an abyss of the most appalling blackness. Mrs. Payne entreated him to tell her the worst. He hedged, said that it wasn't just one thing that was wrong, but everything—everything. She asked him if he had ever known a case that resembled Arthur's. No, he thanked Heaven that he hadn't. Could he advise her what to do? Lamely he suggested a tutor, and then, as an afterthought, a mental specialist.

The word sent a chill into Mrs. Payne's heart. The idea that this bright, delightful child, the idol of her hopes, was the victim of some obscure form of moral insanity frightened her. But she was a woman of courage and determined to know the worst. She took him to a specialist in London.

Arthur thoroughly enjoyed this desolating trip. The specialist talked vaguely, leaving her nothing but the faintest gleam of hope. There were more things in heaven and earth, he said, than were dreamed of in the philosophy of the most distinguished alienists. He talked indefinitely of internal secretions. It was possible, he said—and underlined the word—possible, just barely possible, that in a year or two—to put it bluntly, at the time of puberty—the boy's disposition might suddenly and unaccountably change. He implored her not to count on it, and assured her that, for the present, medical science could do no more. If, by any chance, his prophecy should be fulfilled, he begged Mrs. Payne to let him know. The case, if she would pardon the use of this objectionable word, was one of the greatest professional interest.

She took Arthur back to Overton and waited desperately. Tutor succeeded tutor. Each of them found Arthur charming and impossible. For herself she saw no change in him that was not physical. By this time she had abandoned any idea of finding him a profession. At the same time, she was anxious to make him capable of managing the Overton estate, and though she dared not send him to one of the ordinary agricultural colleges for fear of a repetition, on a larger scale, of the Cheltenham disaster, she thought that it might be possible to find a capable land-agent who would give him some kind of training and put up with his idiosyncrasy for the sake of a substantial fee.

While searching for a suitable instructor she happened to see Considine's advertisement. The fact

that he gave the name of a great landowner, Lord Halberton, as a reference, convinced her that the opportunity was genuine, and the prospectus promised instruction in all the subjects that would be most useful to Arthur. The fact that only a small number of pupils was to be taken, and that the place should be regarded as a friendly country-house rather than as a school, attracted her; but the part of the advertisement that finally persuaded her to a faint glimmer of hope was Considine's artfully worded final paragraph: "Special care is given to backward or difficult pupils."

Like all sufferers from incurable diseases she was only too ready to place confidence in any person who laid claim to special knowledge. She began to wonder if Considine was such a specialist. She wrote to him, looking for a miracle to save her from her afflictions.

Considine replied formally. He did not jump at the idea of taking Arthur, a fact which convinced her that education at Lapton Manor was something of a privilege, and this made her disregard the fact that the privilege was expensive. Still, his note was direct and business-like. He made it clear that if he were willing to take backward or difficult boys he expected to be paid a little more for his trouble, but the confident tone in which he wrote suggested that he was a man who knew his business.

He did know his business. Considine was a clear-headed and capable person with a degree of confidence in himself that went a long way towards assuring his success. He proposed, finally, that it would be more satisfactory for both of them if Mrs. Payne were to visit him at Lapton and see the place and its owners for herself. Then they could talk the matter over, and define the peculiar difficulties of Arthur's case. More and more impressed, she accepted the proposal. Considine met her train at Totnes with a dogcart and drove her to Lapton Manor.

XII

In that part of the world the early autumn is the most lovely season of the year. The country in its variety and sudden violences of shape and colour seemed to her sensationally lovely after the mild beauty of her own midland landscape, dominated and restrained by the level skylines of Cotswold. Considine, who spoke very little as he drove, but was a stylish whip, told her the names of the villages through which they passed, names that were as soft and sleepy as Lapton Huish itself. He showed her his church, with a flicker of pride, and the hung slates of the Rectory wall through a gap in the green. Then they passed into the open drive of Lapton Manor.

He explained to her that the estate had been neglected and was now the subject of an experiment; but it seemed to her that the level fields through which the drive extended had already come under the influence of his orderly mind. To everything that Considine undertook there clung an atmosphere of formal precision that suggested nothing so much as the eighteenth century. The Manor, suddenly sweeping into view from behind a plantation of ilex, confirmed this impression. It was such a house as Considine must inevitably have chosen, a solid Georgian structure, square and sombre, with a pillared portico in front shading the entrance and its flanking windows. The window panes of the upper storey blazed in the setting sun.

In the hall Gabrielle Considine awaited them. She was dressed in black—probably she was still in mourning for Jocelyn—with a white muslin collar such as a widow might have worn. To Mrs. Payne, by an unconscious personal contrast, she seemed very tall and graceful and exceedingly well-bred. No doubt Considine had prepared the way for this impression. On the drive up he had spoken several times of Lord Halberton, "my wife's cousin." Mrs. Considine's voice was very soft, with the least hint of Irish in it, an inflection rather than a brogue. Her hands, her neck and her face were very white. Possibly her skin seemed whiter because of the blackness of her hair and of her dress and the beautiful shape of her pale hands. Curiously enough, the chief impression she made on Mrs. Payne was not the obvious one of youth; and this shows that Gabrielle, outwardly, at any rate, had changed enormously in the last year. Mrs. Payne did not know then, and certainly would never have guessed, that the lady of the house was under twenty years of age. She only saw a creature full of grace, of dignity, and of quietness, and she knew that Considine was proud of these qualities that his wife displayed. There was nothing to suggest that the pair were not completely happy in their marriage.

After dinner they proceeded to business. They sat together in the drawing-room, Mrs. Considine busy with her embroidery at a small table apart, while her husband, capably judicial, begged Mrs. Payne to tell him the peculiar features of Arthur's case. She found Considine sympathetic, and the telling so easy that she was able to express herself naturally in the most embarrassing part of her story. Considine

helped her with small encouragements. Gabrielle said nothing, bending over her work while she listened. Indeed, she had scarcely spoken a dozen words since Mrs. Payne's arrival. When she came to the episode of Arthur's expulsion from the school at Cheltenham, Considine made an uneasy gesture suggesting that his wife should retire, and Gabrielle quietly rose.

Mrs. Payne begged her to stay. "It is much better that you should both know everything," she said. "I want you to realise things at their worst. It is much better that you should know exactly where we stand."

She wondered afterwards why Considine had suggested that Gabrielle should go. At first she had taken it for granted that he was merely considering her own maternal feelings in an unpleasant confession. It was not until she thought the matter out quietly at Overton that she decided that his action was really in keeping with the rest of his attitude towards his wife; that he did, in fact, regard her as a small child who should be repressed and denied an active interest in his affairs. Gabrielle's quietness had puzzled her. Perhaps this was its explanation.

For the time the story absorbed her and she thought no more of Gabrielle. Considine was such an excellent listener, sitting there with his long fingers knotted and his eyes fixed on her, that she found herself subject to the same sort of mesmeric influence as had overcome Lord Halberton. He inspired her with a curious confidence, and she began to hope, almost passionately, that he would undertake the care of Arthur. Before she had finished her narrative she was assailed with a fear that he wouldn't—he seemed to be weighing the matter so carefully in his mind—and burst out with an abrupt: "But you *will* take him, won't you?"

Considine smiled. "I shall be delighted," he said.

Her thankfulness, at the end of so much strain, almost bowled her over.

"You make me feel more settled about him already," she said. "I'm almost certain that he will be happy here. I feel that I'm so lucky to have heard of you. You and your wife," she added, for all the time that she had been speaking, she had been conscious of the silent interest of Gabrielle. When it came to a question of terms there was nothing indefinite about Considine. The fees that he suggested were enormous, but Mrs. Payne's faith in him was by this time so secure that she would gladly have paid anything. All through the rest of her visit this slow and steady confidence increased. From the bedroom in which she slept she could see the wide expanse of the home fields. It seemed to her that the quiet of Lapton was deeper and mellower and more intense than any she had ever known. It was saturated with the sense of ancient, stable, sane tradition. It breathed an atmosphere in which nothing violent or strange or abnormal could ever flourish. She felt that, in contrast with their restless modern Cotswold home, its intense normality must surely have some subtle reassuring effect upon her son. Gazing over those yellow fields in the early morning she felt a more settled happiness than she had ever known since her husband's death.

So, full of hope, she returned to Overton and announced the arrangements she had made to Arthur. He took to them gladly. He was tired of the unnatural indolence of Overton, and in any case he would have welcomed a change. In everything but his fatal abnormality he was an ordinary healthy boy, and the prospect of going into a new county, and learning something of estate management, a subject in which he was really interested, appealed to him. She described the drive from the station, the house, and the general conditions in detail. Her enthusiasm for Considine rather put him off.

"I hope he isn't quite such a paragon as you make out," he said, "or he'll have no use for me."

Gabrielle appeared as a rather shadowy figure in his mother's background. "Oh, there's a wife, is there?" he said. "That's rather a pity." She smiled, for this was typical of his attitude towards women.

Even though she smiled at it her heart was full of thankfulness, for, as he had grown older, she had lived in an indefinite terror of what might happen when Arthur did begin to notice women. It was quite bad enough that he should be without a conscience in matters of truth and property; if he were to be found without conscience in matters of sex there was no end to the complications with which she might have to deal. She always remembered the specialist's prophecy that the period of puberty might be marked by a complete change for the better in his dangerous temperament, but she was secretly haunted by a fear that this critical age might, by an equal chance, reveal some new abnormality or even aggravate the old. Arthur was now nearly seventeen, and physically, at any rate, mature. For the present she lived in a state of exaggerated hopes and fears.

The amazing part of the whole business was that Arthur didn't realise it. He looked upon the anxiety which Mrs. Payne found it so difficult to conceal as feminine weakness. He wished to goodness that she wouldn't fuss over him, being convinced that he himself was an ordinary, plain-sailing person who had

submitted for long enough to an unreasonable degree of pampering. He didn't see any reason why he shouldn't be treated like any other boy of his age, and felt that he had already been cheated of many of the rights of youth. One of the principal reasons why he welcomed the Lapton plan was that it would free him from the constant tug of apron-strings, and allow him to mix freely with creatures of his own age and sex.

He went off to Lapton in the highest spirits, determined to have a good time, rejoicing in the prospect of freedom in a way that made his mother feel that she had been something of an oppressor. She could not resist the temptation of seeing the last of him, and so they travelled down together. This time she stayed a couple of days at Lapton. It was part of Considine's plan to let parents see as much of the place as they wanted, if only to convince them that they were getting their money's worth.

Everything that Mrs. Payne saw reassured her. The routine of the house seemed to be reasonable and healthy. The mornings were devoted to lessons in the library. After lunch the pupils went out over the fields or into the woods where Considine instructed them in details of farming and forestry. Their work was not merely theoretical. They had to learn to use their hands as well as their brains, to plough a furrow, or bank a hedge, or dig a pit for mangolds. Considine kept them busy, and at the same time made them useful to himself. They used to come in at tea-time flushed with exercise and pleasantly fatigued. The late afternoon and evening were their own. They played tennis or racquets, or read books in the library, a long room with many tall windows that had been set aside for their instruction and leisure.

Mrs. Payne rejoiced to find that their life at Lapton was so full. In the absence of any idleness that was not well-earned she saw the highest wisdom of Considine's system; for it seemed to her that her anxiety for Arthur had probably done him an injustice in depriving him of a natural outlet for his energies. At Lapton he could scarcely find time for wickedness.

In this way her admiration for Considine increased. She only regretted that she had not been able in the past to secure a tutor of his capable and energetic type. Reviewing the series of languid and futile young men whom the very best agencies had sent her, she came to the conclusion that no man of Considine's type could ever have been forced to accept a tutor's employment. Even in the choice of his pupils she saw signs of his discrimination. In addition to the two Traceys, whose delightful manners were undeniable, he had secured two other boys: one the younger son of an East Anglian peer, and the other a boy whose father was a colonel in the Indian army. The paragraph in Considine's advertisement that had first attracted her had made her wonder if his school might not develop into a collection of oddities, but all the pupils that she saw were not only the sons of gentlemen but obviously normal. She felt that their influence, seconding the control of Considine, must surely have a stabilising effect upon Arthur, and was content.

During the two days of her visit she still found Gabrielle a little puzzling. She couldn't quite believe that her extreme quietness and reserve were nothing more than simplicity. Knowing nothing of her origins she did not realise that Gabrielle was actually shy of her, and that this, and nothing else, explained her air of mystery. On the last night, however, feeling that after all Gabrielle was the only woman in the house in whom she could confide, she overcame her own diffidence, and told her the whole story over again from a personal and feminine point of view. Gabrielle listened very quietly.

"I'm so anxious that I felt bound to tell you, just in the hope that you'd be interested," said Mrs. Payne. "One woman feels that it takes another woman to understand her. If you had children of your own, you'd understand quite easily what I mean."

"I think I do understand," said Gabrielle.

"There are little things about which I should be ashamed to worry your husband. I wonder if it would be asking too much of you to hope that you would sometimes write to me, and tell me how he is? Naturally I can't expect you to take a special interest in Arthur, more than in others——" She found it difficult to say more.

"Of course I will write to you if you want me to," said Gabrielle.

Mrs. Payne, impulsively, kissed her.

Gabrielle fulfilled her promise. All through the first term, while autumn hardened into winter, at Lipton a season of sad sunlight, she kept Mrs. Payne posted in the chronicle of Arthur's progress, and these dutiful letters comforted his mother in her unusual loneliness at Overton. They were not particularly interesting letters, and they never brought to her any announcement of the long-awaited miracle, but they gave her the assurance that some other woman had her eye on him, and this, for some strange reason that may have been explained by Arthur's dependence on her through her long widowhood, comforted her.

In the beginning Gabrielle interested herself in Arthur simply for the sake of Mrs. Payne; she had been touched by the mother's anxiety and found her, perhaps, a little pathetic; but in a little time she began to be interested in Arthur for himself.

In the ordinary way she did not see a great deal of her husband's pupils. Nominally, of course, she was the female head of the household, but Considine, aware of her limited domestic experience, and her ignorance of English customs, had secured a housekeeper from his own home in Wiltshire, a Mrs. Bemerton, who also filled the office of matron. As might be expected in a woman of Considine's choice, Mrs. Bemerton was capable and, as luck would have it, she was also kindly. All the domestic arrangements at Lipton ran smoothly under her direction. She was reasonably popular with the boys and mothered them. She even found time to mother Gabrielle—respectfully, for she had come from a county that is staunchly feudal, and was aware of her mistress's august connections.

It was fortunate for Gabrielle in her relations with the boys that she had so little to do with their domestic management. The fact that she only saw them in their moments of recreation saved her from being regarded as an ogress, her only suspicious circumstance being the fact that she was married to Considine. Before the winter came she had played games with them, and since she had so much of the tomboy in her, had made herself acceptable as a sportswoman and a good sort. By the time that Arthur Payne arrived the days were drawing in, and she saw very little of them, except in the evenings, after dinner, when she and Considine would join them in a game of snooker in the billiard-room, or take a hand of whist, old-fashioned whist, in the library.

It was here that she first became personally aware of Arthur's disability. For several weeks she had been getting used to him as a normal being, attractive because he was so undeniably handsome and well-developed, more than usually attractive to her, perhaps, because she was dark and he was fair. She had noticed his eyes, so like the beautiful eyes of Mrs. Payne, his splendid teeth, and the charming ingenuousness of his manner. Subtly influenced by these physical features, and taking him for granted, she had almost forgotten the curious history that Mrs. Payne had confided to her, and it came as a shock to her playing cards against him one evening, to realise suddenly that he was cheating.

Her first impulse was one of indignation; but as she was not quite sure of herself she said nothing, waiting to see if she could possibly have been mistaken. In a few moments he cheated again, this time beyond any possible doubt. She flushed with vexation. It seemed to her an enormous thing. She was just on the point of throwing down her cards when Mrs. Payne's story came back to her. Instead of dislike she felt a sudden wave of pity and wonder. She had wanted, on the spur of the moment, to give him away; but she realised that this would only discredit him with the other boys and probably lay him open to a sort of persecution. If he wasn't really responsible, that would be a pity; and so she held her tongue.

All the same she couldn't go on playing cards with him. She knew that if she did she would be bound to continue on the look-out, and be shocked by a series of these ugly incidents. She asked Considine if he would read to them, and he consented readily. He liked reading aloud, partly because he was, not unreasonably, vain of his speaking voice and partly because the practice was part of his theory of education. At that time he was reading Stevenson, an author who was supposed to combine a flawless literary style with the soundest moral precepts and an attitude towards life that encouraged the manly virtues peculiar to Englishmen. Gabrielle enjoyed his reading thoroughly, for she had so much of the boy in herself, and was quite unacquainted with any Victorian literature. He read *Catriona* slowly, and with gusto. Gabrielle from her corner watched Arthur Payne, sprawling on a sofa at the edge of the lamp-light. He was really a remarkably handsome young animal with his fair hair tangled and his hands clasped on his knees. She could see his eyes in the gloom. They seemed to burn with eagerness while he listened, as though his imagination were on fire within. She forgot that Considine was reading and went on watching the boy. It seemed to her incredible that it was he whom she had detected in such a deliberate dishonour half an hour before. It was melancholy. She felt most awfully sorry for him. She wished, above all things, that she could help him. People said that he was beyond help. In the end he became conscious of her scrutiny and smiled across at her. And this broke the spell of reflection. She heard Considine's voice:

'I will take up the defence of your reputation,' she said. 'You may leave it in my hands.' And with that

she withdrew out of the library. "That's the end of chapter nineteen."

He closed the book, putting a marker in it methodically, as was his wont. Gabrielle thanked him. She smiled to herself, for it seemed to her that the words of Miss Grant with which he had recalled her from her abstraction had a curious and prophetic meaning for herself. She was thankful, for a moment, that she hadn't thoughtlessly given Arthur's reputation away to his comrades. She felt herself thrilled by a new and curious interest. She determined, as a part of her duty to his mother, to speak to Arthur himself about what she had observed.

She caught him in the passage just as the boys were going to bed, and drew him aside into the drawing-room. The room was quite dark.

"Arthur, I want to speak to you," she said.

He laughed. "What's the matter?"

"When we were playing cards to-night you cheated."

For a moment there was silence. Then he laughed again—not an uneasy, shameful laugh, but one of sheer amusement. It shocked her. At last he said:

"Did you see it? Then why didn't you make a fuss about it?"

She was thankful, at any rate, that he had not lied to her. That was what she had fearfully expected.

"I didn't want to give you away to the others."

"Why not? It wouldn't have been any news to them. They know that I cheat already. That's why they're up against me. But that doesn't worry me."

"I don't understand you. It seemed to me a horrible thing to do. Can't you see that?"

"No, I can't. Perhaps I'm different. When I play I play to win."

"But that's the whole point. If you don't stick to the rules of the game there's no credit in winning, is there?"

He was silent for a moment. Then, with an effort of the most courageous honesty, he said: "Well, it feels the same to me. I like winning—anyhow."

She hesitated for a moment.

"It makes it so that—so that we can't respect you," she said.

"Now I suppose you'll go and tell Dr. Considine. Just my luck."

"Indeed, and I shan't do anything of the sort. It's between us two," she replied.

He was silent.

"Well, it does no good talking about it," he said mournfully. "I'm made differently, that's all. Do you want anything else?"

She didn't, and he left her in the dark.

This small incident and the conversation that followed opened her eyes to the reality of the problem. She didn't indeed tell Considine what had happened, but she did talk to him once or twice about the history of Arthur Payne. He did not tell her much, for it was part of his plan that his wife should not be mixed up in the business of the school. These things, in his opinion, lay entirely outside a woman's province. Her place was in the drawing-room and her position that of a hostess or, providentially, that of a mother. For the present there were no signs of her fulfilling the latter.

In spite of Considine's discouragement her interest in Arthur was now fully aroused, and more eagerly for the very reason of the limits which her husband had set to her activities. Life at Lapton Manor to a person of Gabrielle's essential vitality was dull. The nature of the surrounding country with its near horizons and lack of physical breadth or freedom imprisoned her spirit. Even Roscarna in its decay had been more vital than this sad, smug Georgian manor-house set in its circle of low hills. Over there, in winter, there had been rough Atlantic weather, and a breath of ice from the snowy summits of Slieveannilaun or the mountains of Maamturk. Here, even in their more frequent sunshine, the air lay dead, ebbing like a sluggish river, from Dartmoor to the sea. In winter the county families went to sleep

like dormice, so that no strange-calling conveyances passed the lodge-gates at Lapton, and the life of Gabrielle was like that of those sad roses that lingered on the south wall beneath her bedroom window in a state that was neither life nor death. If she had shared Considine's interest in his profession things might have been different. No doubt she would have thrown herself into it with enthusiasm; but her enthusiasm was of a very different nature from the steady flame that burned in Considine. No doubt he knew this, and felt that her sharing would be disturbing by its violence. In the ordinary course of events I suppose he expected that she would have another child, but as this interest was denied her, she was thrown more and more upon her own resources.

Her promise to Mrs. Payne gave her a reasonable excuse for her growing interest in Arthur. She had never returned to the card-playing incident; but as time went on a number of others equally distressing presented themselves. Having constituted herself his special protectress and the saviour of his reputation she tackled each of them with courage. In every case she found herself baffled by the fact that arguments which seemed to her unanswerable made no appeal to him, not because he wasn't anxious to see things with her eyes, but because they came within the area of a kind of blind-spot in his brain. She soon found that she couldn't appeal on moral grounds to an a-moral intelligence. She would have appealed on grounds material, but it seemed to be ironically decreed that material and moral grounds should be rarely at one. Sweet persuasion was equally useless. And indeed, how could she expect to succeed by her influence where maternal love had failed so signally? Even so, she would not own herself beaten. It was tantalising; for the more she saw of Arthur the better she liked him, and in these days she was seeing a good deal of him.

The opportunity arose from Arthur's trouble. He had told her the truth when he said his fellow-pupils at Lapton were already aware of his lack of honour in games. Nothing is less easily forgiven by boys, and when the others discovered that he cheated and lied, not so much by accident as on principle, they began to treat him as an outcast from their decent society. The Traceys went so far as to report his failing to Considine. An unpleasant *contretemps*, but one that Considine had expected. He explained to them that Payne was not entirely to blame, and that his constitution was not normal. He advised them to take the weakness for granted. Even when he did this he knew that such distinctions were unlikely to be acceptable to a boyish code of honour. On the other hand the special fees that Mrs. Payne was paying him were essential to the development of his plans. As a compromise he decided to keep Arthur apart from the others in their amusements in the most natural way he could devise. Practically for want of a better solution he handed him over to the care of Gabrielle.

Arthur resented this. He was fond of games and of sport. He liked winning and he liked killing; he thought it humiliating to his manly dignity to be relegated to Gabrielle's society. He wrote bitterly to his mother about it, using the contemptuous nickname that the boys had invented for Mrs. Considine.

"I think old Considine," he wrote, "must be thinking of turning me into a nursemaid. I'm always being told off to help Gaby in the garden or take her for drives in the pony-cart. Not much fun taking a woman shopping!"

But Gabrielle was glad of it. The new plan supplied her with the first prolonged companionship of a person of her own age—there were less than three years between them—that she had known. Little by little Arthur accepted it, and they became great friends.

It was a curious relation, for though it must have been simple on his side, on hers it was full of complication. To begin with his society was a great relief from her loneliness. Again, she had already, for want of another enthusiasm, conceived an acute interest in his curious temperament, and her eagerness to get to the bottom of it, and, if possible, to find a cure, was now fanned by something that resembled a maternal passion. They spent the greater part of his spare time together, and often, at hours when he would normally have been working with Considine, she would ask for him to take her driving into Totnes or Dartmouth, their two market towns. In the evenings they would walk out together in search of air along the lip of the basin in which Lapton Manor lay.

On one of these evening walks a strange thing happened. They had climbed the hills and had sat for a few minutes on the summit watching the sun go down behind the level ridges that lead inward from the Start. While they were sitting there in silence, Arthur suddenly slipped away over the brim of a little hollow full of bracken on the edge of the wood. A moment later Gabrielle heard him laughing, and walked over quietly to see what he was doing. She saw him crouched, quite unconscious of her presence, among the ferns at the bottom of the hollow. He had caught a baby rabbit, and now he was torturing the small terrified creature, its beady eyes set with fear, just as a cat plays with a mouse. He was watching it intently: letting it escape to the verge of freedom and then catching it and throwing it violently back. For a second it would lie motionless with terror and then make another feeble attempt at escape. She watched this display of animal cruelty with horror, and yet she could not speak, for she wanted to see what he would do next. At last the rabbit refused to keep up the heartless game any

longer. It simply lay and trembled. Arthur prodded it with his foot, but it would not move. This appeared to incense him. He took a flying kick at the poor beast and killed it. It lay for a moment twitching, its muzzle covered in blood. A little thing no bigger than a kitten two months old—

Gabrielle ran to him flaming with anger. She picked up the mutilated rabbit and hugged it to her breast.

"Why did you do that? You beast, you devil!" she cried.

She could have flown at him in her anger. Arthur only laughed. He stood there laughing, staring straight at her with his wide honest eyes.

"It's dead. It's all right," he said.

Her fingers were all dabbled with the blood of the rabbit that twitched no longer. She could do nothing. She dropped the carcass with a pitiful gesture of despair and burst into bitter tears.

She sat sobbing on the edge of the hollow. She could not see him, but presently she heard his voice, curiously shaken with emotion, at her side.

"I say, Mrs. Considine," he said. "Don't—please don't—I simply can't stand it."

"Oh, get away—leave me alone," she sobbed. "I can't bear you to be near me. It was so little. So happy—"

He wouldn't go. He spoke again, and his voice was quite changed—she had never heard a note of feeling in it before. "I can't bear it. You—I can't bear that you should suffer. I swear I won't do a thing like that again—not if it hurts you. On my honour I won't."

"Yes, you will. I suppose you can't help it. It's awful. You haven't a soul. You aren't human."

His voice choked as he replied. "I swear it—I do really. I could do anything for you, Mrs. Considine. I feel that I could. For God's sake try me!"

She compelled herself, still sobbing, to look at him. She saw that his face was tortured, and his eyes full of tears. But she could say no more, and they walked home in silence.

XIV

This distressing picture troubled Gabrielle for several days, and yet, beneath her remembrance of anger and disgust, she could not help feeling a curious excitement when she reflected that, for the first time since she had known him, Arthur had shown her signs of pity and tenderness. For a little while they lived under its shadow though neither of them spoke of it again. Arthur, in particular, was awkward; but whether he were ashamed of his cruelty, or merely of the effect that it had produced on her, she could not say. Although she found it difficult to believe in the first explanation she was deeply touched, and perhaps a little flattered, by the possibility of the second. Certainly his attitude toward her had changed. In everything that he said or did, he now seemed pathetically anxious to please her, and even this was encouraging. She didn't tell Considine what had happened. She knew very well that he would consider the incident trivial and, in a few words, shatter her illusion of its significance. And this fear proved that she was not so very sure that it was significant herself.

The curious atmosphere that now developed between them revealed itself more particularly in the letters which they were both of them writing to Mrs. Payne at Overton. Arthur's had never been very fluent, but Gabrielle had found an outlet for herself in this correspondence. In his early letters from Lapton Arthur had rarely mentioned Gabrielle; whenever he had done so it had been half contemptuously, as though the feeling of repression which emanates from the best of schoolmasters had attached itself to the schoolmaster's wife. At the same time Gabrielle had been brief, but extremely natural. With the card-playing incident a new situation had developed. Arthur, as we have seen, had been inclined to turn up his nose at Gabrielle's society when it was thrust upon him by Considine, while Gabrielle had given signs of a more maternal care. In the later stages of this period Gabrielle, being taken as a matter of course, had practically dropped out of Arthur's letters. The episode of the rabbit changed all this, for while Arthur now began to expand in a naïve enthusiasm, Gabrielle's attempts at writing about him fell altogether flat. Judging by her letters Mrs. Payne might reasonably have

supposed that she had grown thoroughly sick of the boy.

The real cause of her reticence was not so easily fathomable. I suppose it was her instinctive method of withdrawing a subject that was secretly precious to her from the knowledge of the one person in the world who might reasonably assert a right to share it. If she had analysed it, no doubt she would have proved that her interest in Arthur was more intimate than she had ever confessed. But she didn't analyse it. Neither, for that matter, did Mrs. Payne. Looking backward, a year later, that good woman realised what a psychological howler she had made. At the time she was merely thankful that Arthur was happy in the society of a woman whom she liked and trusted—to whom, indeed, she had more or less confided him—and sorry that at the very moment when her influence might have counted, Gabrielle appeared to be losing interest in the boy. It cheered her to think that Arthur was expressing any admiration so human and, to be frank, so unlike himself. She was even more cheered when she received Considine's report on him at the beginning of the Christmas holidays. "*There have been one or two unpleasant incidents,*" wrote the tactful Considine, "*but during the latter part of the term I must say that your boy's conduct has been practically unexceptionable. I think it is only right to tell you that I have great hopes of him.*" At the same time Gabrielle was silent.

Of course Considine didn't really know as much about it as she did. He had seen the broad effects of Arthur's adoration—for that is what it was now becoming—but he knew nothing of the struggles that had gone to their making. During the latter part of the term his conduct had not been by any means "unexceptionable"; but it was part of Gabrielle's queer policy of secrecy to hide any lapse on Arthur's part from her husband. She tackled them alone, forcing herself, against her own compassionate instincts, to play upon Arthur's feelings. She had now discovered that where appeals to general morality, or even to reason, were bound to fail, the least sign of suffering on her part could reduce Arthur to a miserable and perfectly genuine repentance. Such was the end of all their struggles; and there were many; for she would not let the least sign of his old weakness pass. At times she felt that she was cruel, but she allowed herself to be harrowed, finding, perhaps, in the pain that she inflicted on both of them, something that was flattering both to her conscience and to her self-esteem.

During all this time there was nothing approaching intimacy between them. To him, however he might adore her, she was always Mrs. Considine. In all their relations they preserved the convention that she was a creature of another world and of another age. No doubt his childishness made the illusion easy to him. With her there must surely have been moments of emotion when she realised that the barrier was artificial. It is impossible to say how soon the first of these moments came.

Certainly when he returned to Overton for the holidays with Considine's encouraging report, she felt terribly lonely. For the last two months she had concerned herself so passionately with the discovery—one might almost say the creation—of his soul, that his departure left her not only with a physical blank, but with a spiritual anxiety. She wondered all the time what was happening to him; whether in her absence he was keeping it up or drifting into a state of tragic relapse. On the evening before he left she had made him promise to write to her, but his boyish letters were wholly unsatisfactory. She believed that he was telling her the truth in them, and yet he told her so little. She even wished that she had kept up the habit of writing to Mrs. Payne; for the least sidelight on the condition of affairs at Overton would have been grateful to her. She did write to Mrs. Payne, but destroyed the letter, feeling that a sudden revival of her custom when Arthur was no longer at Lapton would seem merely ridiculous.

The Christmas holidays were a dreary time for her. Deserted by all youth the Manor House slipped back into its ancient and melancholy peace. Winter descended on them. She had been told that the climate of South Devon resembled that of Connemara, but this was not the kind of winter that she had known before. Snow never fell, as it used to fall on her own mountains, turning Slieveannilaun into a great ghost, and bringing the distant peaks of the Twelve Pins incredibly nearer. Perhaps snow fell on Dartmoor; but from Lapton Dartmoor could not be seen. In those deep valleys it could only be felt as a reservoir of chilly moisture, or a barrier confining cold, dank air. Instead of snowing it rained incessantly. The soft lanes became impassable with mud, turning Lapton into a peninsula, if not an island.

At the New Year they went on a visit to Halberton House. During their stay there Lady Barbara conceived a sudden and violent passion for Gabrielle, that culminated in Gabrielle being taken solemnly to her cousin's virginal bedroom and hearing the story of an old unhappy love-affair. All the time that she listened to Lady Barbara's plaintive voice Gabrielle was wondering what had happened at Overton, and whether Arthur was keeping to the solemn undertaking that he had given her. She wondered if it were possible that regard for his mother's feelings might now be filling the place of her own influence; if Mrs. Payne were arrogantly taking to herself the credit for the miracle which Lapton had seen so laboriously begun. She hoped, knowing that it was wicked of her to do so, that this had not happened. She felt that the change in Arthur was hers and hers only. She found herself forced to confess that she

was jealous of Mrs. Payne....

"And then," said Lady Barbara, "just when I was certain, positively certain that he cared for me—after that morning in church, you know—his mother broke her leg huntin' in Leicestershire. The wire came in with the mornin' letters, and the first thing I knew of his goin' was seein' the luggage cart with his hat-box in the drive. Then, poor dear, he met this widow at a dance at Belvoir. I begged mother to let me go and stay with the Pagets at Somerby, but she said it would be undignified. He was killed in the Chitral a year later. I felt I must tell you, dear, because I can't help feelin' a little envious of your happy marriage. Dr. Considine is such a man ... and I always feel it's so safe marryin' a clergyman."

The idea of envying her marriage with Considine was so ridiculous that Gabrielle couldn't repress an inexcusable smile, but Lady Barbara cut short her blushing apology. "I don't begrudge you your happiness, my dear," she said.

Seeing Lady Barbara sitting opposite to her with her thin arms sticking straight out of a camisole, and two plaits of hair pathetically trailing one on either side of her narrow forehead, Gabrielle was suddenly overwhelmed with the consciousness of her own youth—not only that, but her amazing difference in temperament from these people of her own blood. Retiring from her cousin's chaste kisses to her own room, she stood for a long while in front of her mirror, tinglingly aware of her freshness and beauty and vitality. Considine, emerging from his dressing-room, found her there.

"Vanity, vanity!" he said, taking her in his arms and kissing her. Gabrielle suddenly thought how glad she would be to hand him over to the admiring Lady Barbara. She remembered the chill kiss of her cousin, and then the kiss of Considine. Neither of them, she decided, was a real kiss.

The new term began on the twenty-fifth of January. Gabrielle had awaited it with a subdued excitement. When the day came, she compelled herself to appear more placid than usual. It was a sunny morning of the kind that often gives a feeling of spring to the Devon winter, a morning full of promise. Considine had suggested that she should drive into Totnes and do some shopping before meeting the train from the Midlands, but she would not do so. All morning she made herself busy in the house, and later in the day, hearing the wheels of the wagonette on the drive, she slipped out into the garden to visit a border where the crocus spears were pushing through the soil. She could not explain her own sudden shyness. She was tremulous, tremulous with life. There was a smell of spring in the air. Arthur came out to find her in the garden. His eyes glowed with the pleasure of seeing her again, but she would not look at him.

"Well," she said, "what happened?"

"Oh, it was all right," he said. "I think it was all right. I'm almost sure of it. I always thought of you, you see. Imagined what you'd think of me." He didn't say that he had considered what his mother would think. She was suddenly, jealously, thankful.

With his return she regained her content, feeling no longer the weight of winter. He spoke no more regretfully of his exclusion from the sports of the other pupils and they settled down once again into their happy routine of walks and drives. In a little while the crocuses burst into flame in the borders, and in the hedges the wild arums began to unfold.

One Friday afternoon in the middle of March she asked Considine to let Arthur drive her into Dartmouth. The day was so mild that they chose the high-road that skirts the edge of Start Bay. There was a feeling of holiday in the air, for the sea beneath them was of a pale and shimmering blue like a stone blazing with imprisoned light or a butterfly's wing. On the road they met a long procession of carriers' vans heaped high with shopping baskets, and the happy faces of country people stared at them from under the hoods. The road shone white, having been scoured with rain, and all the hedgerows smelt of green things growing, with now and then a waft of the white violet. The sky was so clear that they could see the smoke of many liners, hull down, making the Start. When they reached the crest of the hill above Dartmouth a man-of-war appeared, a three-funnelled cruiser, steaming fast towards the land. She was so fleet and strong that she seemed to share in the exhilaration of the day. They dropped down slowly into Dartmouth and lost sight of her.

Gabrielle had a great deal of shopping to do, and Arthur drove her from one shop to another, waiting outside in the pony-trap while she made her purchases. Then they had tea together in a restaurant on the quay. They had never been more happy together. When they came out of the tea-shop on to the pavement they found themselves entangled in a group of sailors, liberty-men who had been disembarked from the cruiser that now lay anchored in the mouth of the Dart. They came along the footpath laughing, pleased to be ashore. Arthur and Gabrielle stood aside to let them pass, and as they did so Gabrielle saw the name *H.M.S. Pennant* upon their cap-ribbons. She became suddenly pale and silent. The light had faded from the day. She begged Arthur to drive her home as quickly as he could.

Arthur was puzzled by her strangeness. He could not understand why she did not speak to him. They drove on in silence through the dusk. So they came to the point at which the coast road turns inward towards Lapton Huish, a lonely spot where the cliffs break away into low hills, and the highroad runs between a ridge of shingle on one side and on the other two reedy meres. The night was windless, and they heard no sound but a faint shivering of reed-beds, and the splash and withdrawal of languid waves lapping the miles of fine shingle with a faint hiss like that of grain falling on to a mound.

On the bridge that spanned the channel connecting the two meres Gabrielle asked him to stop. He did so, wondering, and she climbed out of the trap, and leaned upon the coping, looking out over the water. He couldn't think what to make of her. He did not know how dear is mystery to the heart of a woman. He stood by, awkwardly looking at her. At last she said slowly, "I hate the sea.... I hate it. But I love lake-water," which didn't lead much further. But he knew that she was for some reason unhappy, and found this difficult to bear. He came near to her, leaning over the bridge at her side.

"I wish you'd tell me what's the matter," he said. "It's all very well your helping me, but it's a bit one-sided if I can't do anything for you."

She gazed at his shadowy face in the darkness, and then gently put her hand on his. She felt a kind of shudder go through him as he clasped it.

XV

After that night it is difficult to believe that Gabrielle any longer deceived herself, though I do not suppose that Arthur realised the true meaning of their relation. The significant feature in it is that he was gradually and almost imperceptibly becoming a normal human being. Gabrielle had begun by developing in him a substitute for a conscience; for since he had begun to consider everything that he said or did in the light of its probable effect upon his idol, it had become a habit with him to follow a definite code of conduct, and the saying that habit is second nature finds an example in his extraordinary case.

It is fascinating, but I believe profitless, to speculate on the subtle hereditary influences that underlay their attraction for each other. One can imagine that their state presented an example of the way in which people of abnormal instincts tend to drift together: Arthur, the a-moral prodigy, and Gabrielle, the last offshoot of the decayed house of Hewish, daughter of the definitely degenerate Sir Jocelyn. But I do not think that there was anything abnormal or decadent in Gabrielle's composition. Her nature was gay and uncomplicated, in singular contrast to her involved and sombre fate. One is forced to the conclusion that the Payne miracle was the result of nothing more uncommon than the natural birth of a tender passion between two young people of opposite sexes, whom chance had isolated and thrown into each other's company. The specialist who had vaguely suggested to Mrs. Payne the hope that manhood might work a change in Arthur had been nearer the mark than he himself supposed, for though the physical state effected nothing in itself, its first consequence, the growth of an ideal love, became his soul's salvation.

Of all that happened during the Easter term we can know nothing, save that it was spring, that they were supremely happy, and that Considine was blind ... blind, that is, to everything in the case but the results of Arthur's infatuation. These, indeed, were so obvious that he could not very well miss them. The boy's essential childishness, the thing that had added an aspect of horror to his habits of stealth and cruelty, gradually disappeared. He began to grow up. I mean that his mind grew up, for he had already shown a premature physical development. Practically the space of a single term had changed him from a child into a man. Considine, seeing this, innocently flattered himself upon the admirable results of his educational system. A country life, with plenty of exercise in the open air, and an unconventional but logical type of literary education that was his own invention. Result: "*Mens sana in corpore sano*." Arthur was a show case, and seemed to make possible the acquisition of a long series of "difficult" pupils at enormous and suitable fees.

When once the boy got going, the rate of his mental development made it difficult for Considine to keep pace with him. His mind, that had once been slow, worked with a sort of feverish activity, as though he were subconsciously aware that he had whole years of leeway to make up. The other pupils, who had always taken Arthur's comparative dulness for granted, and looked down upon him for it, noticed the change, and found that if they were not careful he would outstrip them. At the same time they began to discover that he was a thoroughly good fellow and to wonder how on earth they had been

so mistaken in him before. From being something of an outcast he now became a favourite, asserting, for the first time, the full advantage of his physical maturity.

Considine was quick to take advantage of the change. He had always been tempted by the idea of examination successes, and although he realised the disadvantage with which Arthur, in his renaissance, was starting, he saw no reason why the boy should not eventually do him credit in some public competition. There should be no difficulty for example, in getting him into Sandhurst ... or, perhaps, Woolwich, as his new aptitude for mathematics suggested. He wrote at length to Mrs. Payne, discussing these possibilities. This was his quiet and considered way of revealing to her his success.

Mrs. Payne, whose glimpses of the new Arthur in the Christmas holidays had buoyed her with hopes in which she dared not place too much faith, replied to his letter in a fever of excitement. Was it really possible to think of such a career? Was there now no fear that if Arthur went to Woolwich or Sandhurst something terrible might happen? Of course, seeing what he had done already, she was prepared to trust Dr. Considine's judgment in everything; but in any case, if the future that he suggested were remotely possible, she would very much rather that Arthur should not go into the army. One of their neighbours had lately been killed in the Boer War.

Her letter paved the way for Considine's triumph. He wrote and told her that he thought he could now safely say that there was nothing at all abnormal about her son. He did not wish to take undue credit for the revolutionary change in Arthur's disposition, but could not help feeling that the boy was a credit to the Lupton regime. Seeing that Arthur was her only son he could quite understand her objection to his adopting the hazardous calling of a soldier. As an alternative he now suggested the Civil Service. Arthur's money—if he might descend to such a practical consideration—would be extremely useful to him if he served under the Foreign Office. Of course he could not promise success, but under the new conditions he thought it worth while trying to prepare Arthur for one of the examinations. Mrs. Payne consented. She only hoped that Considine had not been deceived.

Arthur did not object to the process of cramming that he now underwent at Considine's hands. His newly-awakened thirst for knowledge was not easily quenched. Considine, taking his education as a serious proposition for the first time, naturally considered that the many hours that Arthur spent with Gabrielle were waste. He also felt that since he was now acceptable to them as a sportsman, Arthur should take his place again with the other boys. He had not calculated the effect of his decision on Gabrielle or on Arthur himself. That it could have any effect at all upon her had never entered his mind.

Gabrielle painfully decided that she would say nothing, but Arthur found himself torn between two interests. Even during the growth of his devotion to Gabrielle he had always felt a sneaking suspicion that his constant enjoyment of her society was a little derogatory to his manly dignity. He knew that his big limbs were made for more active pursuits than walking over a hillside at a woman's pace, or driving a pony-cart into Dartmouth. At the same time he saw that he could not now desert her without a feeling of shame in addition to that of love.

"What shall I do about it?" he said to her.

"You must do what you think right." The sentence would have had no meaning less than six months before.

"It isn't that exactly, I suppose I must do what Dr. Considine orders."

"Very well.... You must do what he orders."

"I shall never see you, Mrs. Considine!" She was still Mrs. Considine to him. For answer she only took his hand and smiled.

From that time he followed obediently his master's plans. Considine kept him busy, and the walks and drives that he had taken with Gabrielle almost ceased. At first, making a deliberate sacrifice, she had wondered if she would lose him; but she need never have feared this. The moments in which they met were stolen and therefore sweet. She still remained the confidante of all his emotions and thoughts, and since the time in which these confidences could be given to her was now so short, each moment of it burned with a new intensity. They met by calculated chances and in strange places; and their meetings were lovers' meetings, even if they never spoke of love.

If the holidays at Christmas had been a desolation to Gabrielle, her parting from Arthur next Easter was clouded by a sense of more positive want. It was the season of lovers, days of bright sunshine, evenings of a surpassing tenderness. She went to the station with him in the pony-cart alone. She sat like a statue in the trap while the train puffed its way slowly up the gradient and its noise died away in a rhythmical rumble. When she awoke to the fact that he had gone she felt a sudden impulse to do something desperate, if only she could think of anything desperate to do. She felt that she would like to

shock Considine and the Halbertons and the whole county, to be, for one moment, outrageous and unrestrained. But she couldn't do anything of the kind; her wild spark of energy seemed so pathetically small and feeble against the vast inertia of that dreamy countryside. Even if she were to cry out at the top of her voice she couldn't assert her identity; those huge passive folds of green country wouldn't believe her. They wouldn't accept the fact that she was Gabrielle Hewish, now called Considine. To them she was just the wife of a country parson dawdling through the leafy lanes in a pony-trap. She lashed the pony into a canter, but felt no better for it. The animal settled down again into his shamble. No power on earth could make him keep on cantering over the hills of the South Hams, and he knew it.

Arrived at Lapton she handed over the pony to a groom and set off walking violently across country, hoping in this way to cool the heat of her blood. She felt that she would like to go on walking till she dropped, but as soon as her limbs began to tire she knew that this would not bring her content. She hurried back to the Manor a few minutes late for dinner. Considine, to whom unpunctuality was the eighth deadly sin, was pacing up and down the hall, his hands behind his back, with the impatience of an animal prowling in a cage.

"Ah, here you are at last!" he said.

They went in to dinner, but she could not eat. Considine's appetite was as regular as everything else in his time-table. He ate heartily and methodically. She found it difficult to sit still and watch him eating.

"What's the matter with you?" he said at last.

"I don't know. I'm restless to-day."

"Well, there's no reason why you shouldn't rest now that the house is empty again. The holidays come as a great relief in a place like this. And the Spring Term is always the most trying."

He watched her narrowly, then and for several days afterwards. When he became solicitous about her health she always knew that he was wondering if at last she was going to fulfil his desire for a child of his own. On these occasions he overwhelmed her with attentions.

Meanwhile Arthur, in the best of spirits, had arrived at Overton. Mrs. Payne awaited him in a state of tremulous emotion. Now, for the first time, she was to see her son made whole. Her elation was not without misgiving, for the news of the miracle was almost too good to be true; she couldn't help feeling that the Considines had judged him with a scrutiny more superficial than her own, and though it was not for her to dispute the intellectual blossoming that had raised such hopes in his master, she couldn't be sure about the deeper, moral change until she had seen for herself. Certainly his appearance on the station platform gave her a sudden thrill of pleasure. Her boy had become a man; his body had gained in solidity and balance, and his upper lip was fledged with a fair down. He took her in his arms and kissed her with a serious manliness that was new to her, and made her heart leap with pride. His voice, too, had deepened. It was soft and low and uncannily like his father's. Time after time she was struck by little tricks of gesture and expression that were familiar to her, but had never appeared in him before. He was indeed a stranger, yet a hundred times more lovable than the son she had known.

A couple of days convinced her that the change was not merely something added, but vital and elemental. He showed it in a multitude of small things—in his consideration for the servants, in his attentions to herself, in the serious interest that he showed in matters that had not touched him before, in affairs, in books, in newspaper politics. Even so she had been flattered too often by transient improvements to be convinced. Deliberately and fearfully she tested him, but never found him wanting. Then her joy and thankfulness were too deep for words.

And yet the position was not without its awkwardness. She knew that Arthur was kinder, more human, and—if that were possible to her—more lovable, but, in spite of these things, she could not help feeling that there was something in this new and delightful nature that was foreign to herself ... foreign, and even, subtly, hostile. It seemed to her that in some peculiar way he was on the defensive. Up to a certain point she could enter freely into his confidence, but after that point she knew in her heart that there was something that he denied her. Now, more than ever in her life, she wanted to feel that he was wholly hers; and now, if she were to confess the truth, he seemed less hers than he had ever been before. At times, indeed, when their intimacy should have been at its best, she felt that she had lost him altogether, and that his mind was hundreds of miles away from her, as indeed it was. She consoled herself by supposing that his life was now so crowded with new interests and dreams of future adventure that he could be forgiven if their wonder enthralled and overwhelmed him. It was indeed a wonderful thing if this son of hers, at the age of seventeen, should see life with the eyes of a child new-born into the world. She envied him this ecstasy, even though its real explanation was far simpler than that which she imagined. When he walked in silence with her through the fields, or sat dreaming under

the cedar on the lawn when evening came, it is possible that Arthur had sight of the new heaven and new earth that she imagined, for his eyes were lover's eyes. But this she never guessed.

XVI

In the last week of the holidays, if only Mrs. Payne had been more acute, she might have surprised his secret. Walking the lowest of their meadows on the side of Bredon Hill, they came suddenly upon a southern slope already powdered with the flowers of cowslips. This cloth of gold was the chief glory of their spring, blooming mile on mile of meadowland, and drenching the air with a faint perfume. Mrs. Payne stooped to pick some, for the scent provoked so many memories, and to her it was one of the sensations that returned year by year with amazing freshness—that and the spice of pinks in early summer or the green odour of phlox. "Smell them, they smell like wine," she said, giving her bunch to Arthur.

"Mrs. Considine told me that there are no cowslips in their part of Devon," he said. And then, after a moment of hesitation, he went down on his knees and began to pick the flowers. The hue of their smooth stalks was pale as the first apple-leaves, springing straight and slender each above its leafy mat.

"Why are you picking so many? They're more beautiful as they are."

"If they haven't any I'd like to send her some?"

He went on picking cowslips till the light faded from the fields. Next morning he packed them carefully, and posted them, with a letter, to Lapton. She thought it very charming and thoughtful of him to send Mrs. Considine the flowers. It merely struck her as typical of his new nature, and she thought it rather shabby of Gabrielle, when, after three days of waiting, she had not acknowledged the gift. Altogether she felt that Mrs. Considine had been rather a broken reed as far as Arthur was concerned. In the beginning she had taken to her, and expected quite a lot of her. Arthur, too, seemed disturbed that she did not reply. Day after day he waited for a letter from Lapton with eagerness. There was no reason why he shouldn't have been anxious to know that his present had not gone astray. She had not seen the note that Arthur posted with his flowers.

With no more than the vaguest mistrust—for she still felt that in some way she had fallen short of full possession, Mrs. Payne saw him return to Lapton for the summer term. During the early weeks Arthur scarcely ever wrote to her, and when she protested mildly, his reply seemed to her evasive. It was a dutiful reply, and though she couldn't help admitting that in Arthur the recognition of any duty was a new thing, the suspicion that for some obscure reason she was losing him, persisted. She was not in the ordinary way a woman of acute intuitions, but her whole mind had been so wrapped up in that son of hers that she was sensitive to the smallest changes of tone, and she knew that while he was writing her letters his head had been full of other things. At the same time she had sense enough to see that with his recovery Arthur's life had become crowded with so many new interests that she couldn't reasonably expect the old degree of absorption in herself. This was the price of his recovery, and she determined to pay it without grudging.

She settled down into this state of patience and resignation. She even prepared to deny herself her usual privilege of a visit to Lapton in term-time, feeling that it would be unfair of her to interrupt the progress of Considine's remarkable system. In the meantime she kept in touch with Arthur through her jealous care of the things that he had left behind, in the arrangement of his books, in the mending of his clothes, and in the preparation of an upstairs room that he had begun to turn into a study for his holiday reading. On these inanimate traces of him she lavished a peculiar tenderness, for their presence had the effect of making her feel less lonely.

One day she took up to his new study a number of note-books that he had used during the Easter holidays. When he had sat out under the cedar in the evenings she had often noticed him writing with a pencil though she had never thought to enquire what he was doing. Now, with a chance curiosity, she happened to open one of these books and examine what he had written. She saw at once that they were verses, and laughed at the idea. But when she had read one or two of his poems she laughed no longer. She realised at once that they were love-poems, feeble and amateurish in their expression, but daringly sensual and passionate in their content. They made the good woman blush—her husband had never been so direct in his days of courtship—but to her blushes succeeded a moment of fierce maternal

alarm. It was impossible, she thought, that anyone innocent of a violent sexual passion could have conceived the ideas that the verses contained. They were fully as physical, and nearly as direct, as the love-songs of Herrick. She was not only shocked, but frightened, for her long years of widowhood had isolated her from all feelings of the kind that Arthur expressed so glibly. She read the poems over again and again. She could not sleep at night for thinking of them. In the end she became convinced that the thing which she had feared most had come to pass; that even if the coming of manhood had brought to Arthur the birth of a moral sense in matters of ordinary social intercourse, the gain had been neutralised by the release of a new instinct that was powerful enough to wreck the rest. The boy was obviously and violently in love—not with any shadowy dreamed ideal, but actually with a woman of definite physical attributes. It was almost possible to reconstruct a picture from the poems. A skin of ivory, grey eyes, hair that was like night, red lips, pale hands, all rather commonplace, but, none the less, damningly definite.

It is curious that the image of Gabrielle never suggested itself to her. Perhaps it was the fact that Arthur, for some unaccountable reason, probably because he usually saw them in a half-light, had made her violet eyes—an unmistakable feature—grey. As the matter stood Mrs. Payne was convinced that he had become entangled, and intimately entangled, with some dangerous and designing woman. It was her plain duty to save him. The only thing that restrained her from immediate action was the fear that any big emotional disturbance might undo the work that Considine had already accomplished. She didn't in the least connect the passion with the reformation, and yet she wondered if interference with the one might somehow prejudice the other. It was a harrowing dilemma.

In the end, with her accustomed courage, she decided to face the risk. At any rate no harm need be done by her taking Considine into her confidence. She encouraged herself with a pathetic trust in his stability and wisdom in all matters that affected Arthur. Without even the warning of a telegram she made her decision, ordered the carriage for the station and set off for Lapton.

She arrived there late on a Saturday night to the astonishment of the Considines, who had disposed of the boys for the evening, and were sitting together in the library. Considine, who prided himself on never being surprised by an emergency, welcomed her as if there were nothing unusual in her visit, and Gabrielle, a little nervous, went off to see the housekeeper, and arrange about a room for the visitor. At the door Mrs. Payne stopped her. "If you don't mind," she said, "I should be glad if you wouldn't let Arthur know that I'm here."

Considine was quick to agree: "Certainly not, if you wish it."

Gabrielle left them and he prepared to hear her story. She was very agitated, and found it difficult to express herself. For a little time, in spite of Considine's encouragements, she beat about the bush. She felt that her revelation would amount to a criticism of Considine's management.

At last, realising that she was getting no further, she produced her documents and handed them to him.

Considine examined them slowly and judicially without a flicker of emotion. It seemed to Mrs. Payne a very solemn moment, full of awful possibilities. She waited breathlessly for his verdict.

"Well?" he said at last, putting the papers aside.

"Arthur wrote them."

"Yes.... I recognised his writing."

"He is in love with some woman."

"Presumably ... yes. But I'm not so sure of that."

"What do you mean?" She gasped at the prospect of relief.

He explained to her at length. It was a very common thing for boys of Arthur's age, he said, to write verse.

"Verses of that kind?"

Yes... even verses of that kind. To be perfectly candid he himself, when a boy in his teens, had done very much the same sort of thing. It was true perhaps that the verses which he had written had not been quite so ... perhaps frank was the best word. On the other hand his own development had followed more normal lines. He hadn't, in the manner of Arthur, burst suddenly into blossom. All boys wrote verses. Often they wrote verses of an amatory character, not particularly because they happened to be in love, but because the bulk of English lyrical poetry, to which they went for their models, was,

regrettably, of an amatory character. At this stage in a boy's development, even in the development of the greatest poets (and Arthur, he noticed in passing, did not show any signs of amazing genius) the verses were usually imitative. It rather looked as if he had been reading Herrick, or possibly the Shakespeare sonnets ... the dark lady, you know. Seriously, he didn't think there was anything to worry about. He folded the papers and handed them back to her.

For once in a way Considine didn't satisfy her. There were other things, she said. Things that she hadn't attached any value to at the time when they happened, but which now seemed significant. When she came to think of it Arthur's whole behaviour during the holidays had been that of a youth who was in love. With all deference to Dr. Considine she felt that she couldn't pass the matter over. It was her plain duty to enquire into it, and find, if possible, a more obvious reason for this strange and sudden outburst.

Considine agreed that no harm could be done by a little quiet investigation. At the same time he couldn't possibly see what opportunities Arthur could have had for falling in love at Lupton.

"We're very isolated here," he said. "The Manor is a kingdom in itself. It seems to me that circumstances would force him to invent an ideal for the want of any living model."

She shook her head. There was no isolation, she said, into which love could not enter; and this, in the face of classical precedent, Considine was forced to admit. Could she, then, make any suggestions?

Mrs. Payne said, "Servants," and blushed.

Considine also blushed, but with irritation. The suggestion brought the matter uncomfortably near home.

"I think you can put that out of your mind," he said. "I'll admit that I did not consider this point when I engaged them, but I do not think you'll find any one peculiarly attractive among them."

"They're women," said Mrs. Payne obstinately.

It seemed to her that Considine's incredulity was forcing them both into a blind alley.

"If you don't mind," she said, "I think it would be better for me to talk the matter over with your wife. A woman, if you'll allow me to say so, is much more acutely sensitive to ... this kind of thing."

Again Considine blushed. The prospect of engaging Gabrielle in the matter was altogether against his principles. He had always made it a rule that her essential femininity should not be compromised by any contact with the business of the school. He did not even like her to take an intimate share in the management of the house. After all she was a Jewess and a cousin of the august Halbertons. That was why he had employed Mrs. Bemerton as housekeeper.

"I shall be obliged," he said, "if you don't mention a matter that may possibly become unsavoury, to Mrs. Considine. She knows nothing of the servants, and I prefer her to take no part in the affairs of my pupils."

Altogether the good woman felt that she had been snubbed for her pains. She had expected a great deal from Considine, and even more from Gabrielle. Still, if Considine objected to his wife being consulted, she was prepared to accept his decision. The only course that remained open to her was to make enquiries for herself, and determine, by observation, what women were possibly available for the disposal of Arthur's affections.

"Very well," she said with a sigh. "If you don't wish me to speak to your wife, of course I won't."

"If you'll pardon my saying so, I think you're unduly anxious. After all, the most obvious thing is to ask Arthur himself. Why not do that?"

She hesitated and then spoke the truth.

"I'm afraid he'd tell me a lie. I don't want him to do that ... now. I'd much rather find out for myself. I wish I could believe you. I do indeed."

She paused for a moment and then said, almost as if she were speaking to herself, "There's no place where there aren't opportunities. Farmer's daughters ... village girls. There are more women in the world than there are men."

He couldn't help smiling at the mathematical accuracy of her remark, but once more he shook his head.

"At any rate," she said, returning to the practical aspect of the case, "I suppose you've no objection to my staying here for a day or two, and keeping my eyes open. Failing anything else I will speak to Arthur about it."

"Please consider the house your own," said Considine, who had now recovered his usual politeness.

"Thank you," she said. "You're very kind. But you know how grateful I am to you already."

Mrs. Considine returned, and a little later showed her to her room. In the candle-light of the passage Mrs. Payne was assailed by an overwhelming desire to break her promise and disclose her troubles to Gabrielle. She felt that her quest was so lonely. Gabrielle seemed to her sympathetic and she knew that it would be a great relief to her to discuss the affair with another woman. As they paused at her bedroom door, her old attraction towards Mrs. Considine that had once culminated in an impulsive kiss took hold of her again. She wanted, for some obscure reason, to kiss Gabrielle once more. Perhaps there was something in the attraction of her opposite physical type that accounted for this impulse as well as for Arthur's infatuation. For the present she suppressed her inclination. After all Considine had acted fairly enough with her, and she felt that she could not fail him in a point of honour.

Alone in her room she read over Arthur's poems again. Now that she was so near to him they impressed her less with a sense of fear and anxiety than with one of pity and of love. He was her child, and therefore to be protected and caressed. She found it difficult not to leave her room in the night, and grope her way along the creaking corridors to the room in which she knew he was sleeping. She wanted to kiss him and hold him in her arms. She placed the poems on the table at her bedside and blew out the candle. It was unfortunate for her bewilderment that Arthur had not left in his notebook the rough copy of the verses that he had sent to Gabrielle with the box of cowslips, the verses to which she had not dared to reply.

Next morning at breakfast Arthur and his mother met. All through the holidays she had been indefinitely conscious of an awkwardness between them; now, with so much guilty knowledge in her mind, the relation became definitely embarrassing. She wondered if he felt it as deeply as she did. Certainly he showed no sign of any emotion but surprise at her visit.

"But if you came last night, why on earth didn't you come along to my room?" he said. "And why are you so mysterious? What's it all about?"

She put him off as well as she could. "I wanted to see you, that was all," she said. "I thought you would be pleased by the surprise," and then: "You don't seem very pleased."

"Of course I'm pleased," he said, blushing. "But I don't understand it."

Whatever he said she knew in her heart that she wasn't wanted. It was a bitter thing to realise, but it made her more than ever certain that there was a secret to be disclosed.

After breakfast the Sunday morning routine of a country house began. She and Arthur walked together over the fields to church. The whole country breathed a lazy atmosphere of early summer. Its beauty and its placidity mocked her. Before them went the Considines. He wore a long cassock that swept the grass, as they went, while Gabrielle walked in silence at his side. Never once in their journey did she look back. It struck Mrs. Payne for the first time how young she was, how very much younger and more supple than her husband. And yet they seemed to be happy.

The service was the usual slow ceremony of a village church, Considine moving with the dignity of his vestments from the lectern and the altar to the organ seat which he also occupied. Arthur, standing or kneeling at his mother's side, appeared to be properly engrossed in the service. Singing the psalms beside him she became aware how much of a man he was now, for his voice, that had been cracking for several years, had now sunk to a deep and sonorous bass.

It was not until Considine ascended the pulpit and began to preach, that Mrs. Payne became conscious of anything extraordinary. At first she was held by the sermon, which was unusually well constructed, but in the middle of it she became aware that Arthur was not listening. He sat straight in the pew beside her as though he were intent on the preacher, but all the time his eyes were wandering to the other side of the aisle. Mrs. Payne tried to follow their direction. Here, presumably, was a fairly representative collection of the female inhabitants of the village. Here she might expect to find the farmer's daughter, or, in the last emergency, the housemaid, on whom his affections were centred. She heard no more of Considine, only watching Arthur's eyes, and watching, she soon discovered that these were for Mrs. Considine and her alone. She could not deny the fact that Gabrielle, with her fine pale profile set against a pillar of grey sandstone, was a creature of amazing beauty. She herself was fascinated by this vision of refinement and grace to such a degree that she almost shared in Arthur's rapture.

For a little while she could not be sure of it, for this was the last possibility that had entered her mind: but at last it seemed that Gabrielle became conscious of the gaze that she could not see. Suddenly, without the least warning, she turned her head in Arthur's direction. Their eyes met. She blushed faintly, and, at the same moment, became aware of Mrs. Payne. The blush deepened, spreading into the ivory whiteness of her neck; and Mrs. Payne had no need to look at her any longer, for she knew.

Her mind leapt quickly to the whole situation. In the light of this evidence she recalled a hundred things that had not even puzzled her before. She saw the reason for the strange fate that had overtaken their correspondence, she divined the secret of Gabrielle's sudden reticence, and the break in Arthur's frank enthusiasms. She knew that she had made a triumphant discovery, but in her elation realised that it would be wiser to go gently. This was a secret that could not be blurted out without disaster. The situation needed careful handling.

Once in possession of certain knowledge it was no longer difficult for her to interpret Arthur's moods. In the afternoon when they sat out under the trees on the lawn, she stumbled on a strange corroboration. She had fallen into a doze in a lounge chair at his side, and when she awoke she saw that he was reading poetry. He seemed to be reading one poem over and over again, and a sudden curiosity made her ask what he was reading. "Tennyson," he said, and closed the book. But he had left a long grass for marker between the pages, and when they moved towards the house at tea-time she picked up the book and opened it. Her eyes fell upon a significant stanza from "Maud."

She came to the village church,
And sat by a pillar alone;
An angel watching an urn
Wept over her, carved in stone:
And once, but once, she lifted her eyes,
And suddenly, sweetly, strangely blushed,
To find they were met by my own ...

Mrs. Payne's heart beat faster as she read the verse. Later in the day, to test him, she asked him what he had been reading. She half expected him to tell her a lie, but, strangely enough, it was the truth that he gave her.

"What do you like about 'Maud'?" she said.

"I like it all," he replied. "It's the kind of thing that anyone might feel." He hesitated. "And there's one part of it in particular——"

She waited, with her heart in her mouth.

"What is that?" she said.

"Oh, right at the beginning. I don't suppose it would mean much to you. I can't remember it exactly, but it starts like this:

I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood,
Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red heath,
The red-ribbed ledges drip with a silent horror of blood ...

I can't remember any more..."

"But why should that appeal to you?" she asked, disappointed.

"I don't know. It reminds me of something that happened to me once."

She did not feel that it would be profitable to press him further on this uninteresting point.

XVII

All that afternoon and evening Mrs. Payne watched them. The rôle of detective was unnatural to her, and once or twice she couldn't help feeling that it was unworthy, and that she herself was an ogress, they were so young and so unsuspecting. She had an impression not that they were deliberately hiding

anything from her, but that the understanding between them somehow tacitly excluded her from their intimacy. She felt out of it at Lapton, hovering impotently on the edge of the magic circle that their passion had created. The strangest thing of all about this amazing relation of theirs was its air of innocence. She was so keenly aware of this, and felt herself so likely to fall a victim to the idea's persuasions, that she had to make an unusual effort, to remain awake and alive to her plain duty, and to the fact that this simple and natural love affair was a crime against society, a disaster that might wreck not only Considine's home, but all Arthur's future.

She could not make up her mind what to do, and this unsettled her, for in the ordinary way she was a woman of determination who acted first and afterwards considered the propriety of her actions. Her first impulse was to go straight to Considine and say, "I told you so." This course presented her with the opportunity of an easy triumph, and was in keeping with her downright traditions; but in this case she was not in the least anxious to make a personal score. She saw that if she told Considine she would be firing the train to an explosion that might end in nothing but useless wreckage. Considine, for instance, admittedly touchy on the subject of Gabrielle, might refuse to believe her and show her the door. Arthur would be forced to leave Lapton; and she thought too highly of Considine's influence on him to run the risk of a relapse. On the other hand Considine might believe her, and put the very worst construction on what she told him. She saw the possibility of Arthur's being landed in the Divorce Court, which was unthinkable. She abandoned the idea of approaching Considine at all.

The next course that suggested itself was that of tackling Arthur; but the atmosphere of mistrust, if not of actual hostility, that at present involved their relations made her think twice about this. She could not dare to treat Arthur as a normal person, for she knew that his hold on normality was recent and precarious, and feared that a violent or passionate scene might undo in a moment all the developments that had been accomplished in the last six months. Even if they escaped this catastrophe it was possible that she might offend him so deeply as to lose him.

There remained Gabrielle, and though she knew that she was old enough to speak to Gabrielle with the authority of a mother, she felt that this would be impossible at Lapton. It was a curious attitude that she found difficult to explain, but it seemed to her that to tackle Mrs. Considine in her husband's house was dangerous, that it would give to Gabrielle an unreasonable but inevitable advantage. At Lapton Mrs. Payne felt she was a stranger, insecure of her ground, and therefore in an inferior position; and this struck her more forcibly when she reflected that, though she was confident of the rightness of her conclusions, the actual evidence that she possessed was extremely small. She admitted to herself that it would be difficult to carry her point on the strength of looks and blushes, and was thankful that she had not been betrayed by her instincts into hasty action.

Lying sleepless on her bed that night with her eyes open in the dark she evolved a new plan that would not only give her the advantage of choosing the site of the coming struggle, but would eliminate the uncertain element of Considine and probably provide her with evidence to strengthen her charge. This change of plan involved a duplicity against which her straightforward nature rebelled, but with Arthur's future at stake she would have stopped at nothing. After breakfast on the Monday morning she went to Considine in his study, thanked him for his kind consideration, and confessed that she had been needlessly alarmed. Considine gracefully accepted this confession and the implied apology, assuring her once more that there was really nothing to worry about. Then, very carefully she made another suggestion. It was usual at Lapton for the pupils to go home for a long week-end at half term. She wondered if Mrs. Considine would like to come back to Overton with Arthur? The rest and change would do her good, and it would be interesting for Gabrielle, who had seen so little of England, to visit Cotswold. Mrs. Payne promised to take great care of her. She gave her invitation in a way that suggested that it was an attempt to make amends for her suspicions. It conveyed at the same time an implicit confidence and an anxiety to please.

Considine tumbled headlong into her trap. He thanked her for her invitation, saying that he had no objection, but that Gabrielle, of course, must decide for herself. His tone made it clear that such a visit must be regarded as a condescension. The Halbertons, he said, had been begging Gabrielle for a long time to spend a week with them, but she was devoted to Lapton.

"At any rate I may ask her?" said Mrs. Payne.

"Certainly, certainly—you'll find her in the garden."

Mrs. Payne was in some doubt as to what Gabrielle's answer would be.

She moved to the proposal obliquely, feeling like a conspirator, and one so unused to conspiracy that her manner was bound to betray her. They began by talking about the gardens at Overton, the beauty of Cotswold stone, the essential difference of her country from that in which Lapton lay.

"You can't know England," she said, "until you've seen the Vale of Evesham."

She didn't care twopence ha'penny for the Vale of Evesham—she was just talking for time. Gabrielle listened to her very quietly, and Mrs. Payne took her silence for evidence that she was playing her hand badly. This flustered her. She became conscious of the fact that nature had built her too roughly for diplomacy. Not daring to hedge any longer she blurted out her invitation, and Gabrielle, instantly delighted, accepted, transforming herself, in Mrs. Payne's mind from a subtle designing creature into something very like a victim. So, for one moment she appeared; but in the next Mrs. Payne felt nothing but exultation at the successful beginning of her plan.

"Arthur has told me that there are nightingales at Overton," said Gabrielle dreamily. "I wonder if I shall hear one? There are no nightingales in Ireland or in this part of England." And although Mrs. Payne could hardly accept an interest in ornithology for explanation of her readiness to come to Overton, she was quick to promise that nightingales should be in full song at the next weekend.

Thus having laid her plans, she resisted, though with difficulty, all her impulses to continue her search for evidence. It was hard to do so, for all through the evening Gabrielle and Arthur were together in her presence, and she found it impossible not to watch them out of the corner of her eye or strain her ears to catch what they were saying; but she realised that the least slip at this stage might ruin her chances of success, and devoted her attention or as much of it as she could muster, to Considine. Next morning, with a sense of successful strategy, she returned to Overton by an early train.

The rest of the week was for her a period of acute suspense. For Gabrielle and Arthur it was one of delightful anticipation. On Friday at midday Considine drove them to Totnes station, the scene of their last parting, and set them on their journey. They watched him standing serious on the platform as the train went out, and when they lost sight of his tall figure at a curve in the line, it seemed to them as though the last possible shadow had been lifted from them. In the first part of their journey a soft rain hid the shapes of the country through which they passed, so soft that they could keep the windows open, and yet so dense as to give them a feeling of delicious loneliness, for they could see nothing but the grassed embankments starred with primroses. All through the Devon valleys and over the turf moors of Somerset this weather held. It was not until they had changed at Bristol and crept under the escarpment of the lower Cotswolds that the air cleared.

At a junction below the southern end of Bredon they emerged in an air that this vast sheeting of fine moisture had washed into a state of brilliant clarity. The evening through which they drove to Overton was full of birdsong and sweet with the smell of young and tender green. There was not a breath of wind, but the sky was cool, and into it the old trees lifted their branches with an air of youth and vernal strength. When the road climbed, scattered woodlands stretched beneath them in clear and comely contours. A hovering kestrel hung poised like a spider swinging from a thread. She swooped, and her chestnut back was lit into flame. The great elms that gird the village of Overton received them. Arthur touched up the horse as they swung past the church and a row of cottages with long trim gardens.

Mrs. Payne, who was working on the herbaceous border in front of the house, heard the grating of the carriage wheels on the gravel of the drive. She took off her gardening gloves and came to meet them. Arthur jumped down from the carriage and kissed his mother. Gabrielle, also approaching her, put up her face to be kissed, and Mrs. Payne, who could not very well refuse her, felt that the kiss was a kind of betrayal. She wished, in her instinctive honesty, that it could have been avoided.

It was a bad beginning, and gave her a hint of the kind of emotional conflict that she had let herself in for when she assumed the rôle of detective. What made it a hundred times worse was the fact that she really liked kissing Gabrielle, for her kindly heart warmed to the girl again as it had warmed when first they met. "I'm sentimental," she thought, "for heaven's sake let us get it over!"

Gabrielle, however, was quite unconscious of the struggle that divided Mrs. Payne's breast. She was a child launched on a holiday with the friend of her choice in the most delightful season of the year. She didn't scent any hostility in the atmosphere of Overton; and this was strange in a person who moved through life by the aid of intuitions rather than reasons. She felt contented at Overton, just as she had felt contented at Roscarna. She was more at home there than she could ever have been at Lapton or Clonderriff; her mind was as sensitive to sky changes as the surface of a lonely lake. Mrs. Payne had given her an airy bedroom facing west, and while the maid unpacked her things Gabrielle stood at the window looking out over meadows, golden in the low sun. Beneath her lay the lawns, smooth and kempt and of a rich, an almost Irish green, on which the black shadows of cedar branches were spread. A tall hedge of privet divided the lawns from the vegetable garden in which a man was working methodically. She saw the pattern of paths and hedges from above as though they were lines in a picture. In the middle of the lawn stood a square of clipped yew trees, making a hollow chamber of the kind that formal gardeners call a yew-parlour, with a stone sundial in the middle of it. "What a jolly place for

children to play in," she thought. A blackbird broke into a whistle in the privet hedge and brought her heart to her mouth. Could any nightingale sing sweeter?

"I think that is all, madam," said the maid demurely. Gabrielle smiled at her and thanked her, and the girl smiled back. Like everything else in Mrs. Payne's admirably managed house she was fresh and clean, homelier than the frigid servants at Halberton House, happier—that was the only word—than Gabrielle's own servants at Lapton. Yes, happier—

When she came downstairs Arthur was waiting for her.

"I thought you were never coming," he said. Their time was short and he was anxious to show her all the altars of his childhood. They met Mrs. Payne in the hall. She smiled at them with encouragement, for it was part of her settled plan to let them have their own way and so tempt them into a naturalness that might betray them. She, too, had the feeling that she was fighting against time.

Arthur was full of enthusiasms. They went together to the stables, where he introduced her to Hollis, the coachman standing in his shirtsleeves in a saddle-room that smelt of harness-polish. He stood in front of a cracked mirror brushing his hair, hissing softly, as though he were grooming a horse, and round his waist was a red-striped belt of the webbing out of which a horse's belly-band is made.

"Well, Mr. Arthur, you're looking up finely, sir," he said, touching his forelock. Even the stables exhaled the same atmosphere of pleasant leisure as the house.

"I want you to get a side-saddle ready for Brunette to-morrow, Hollis," said Arthur. "Mrs. Considine and I are going for a ride over the hill."

At the end of the stables they encountered a pair of golden retrievers. For a moment they stared at Arthur, and then, suddenly recognising him, made for him together, jumping up with their paws on his shoulders and licking him with their pale tongues.

"What beauties," Gabrielle cried.

"Yes, they come from Banbury," he said. "I'll get you a pup next term if you'd like one."

Their evening was crowded with such small wonders. "I can't show you half the things I want to," he said. "It's ridiculous that you should only be here for three days." He would have gone on for ever, and she had to warn him when the clock in the stables struck seven that they had only just time to dress for dinner. On the way upstairs he showed her his new study, with the bookshelves that he had bought in the last holidays.

"I do all my writing here," he said, and then suddenly but shyly emboldened: "it was here that I wrote to you when I sent you the cowslips."

He had never dared to mention the incident before.

"You didn't answer me," he went on. "Why didn't you answer me? I wish you'd tell me."

"Arthur—I couldn't—you know that I couldn't."

A panic seized her and she went blushing to her room.

She was still flushed with excitement or pleasure when she came down to dinner. Mrs. Payne, in a matronly dress of black, sat at the head of the table with Arthur and Gabrielle on either side of her facing each other. The arrangement struck her as a triumph of strategy. From this central position she could see them both and intercept any such glances as had passed between them in the church at Lapton. In this she was disappointed, for there was nothing to be seen in the behaviour of either but a transparent happiness. "They only want encouragement," she thought, and settled down deliberately to put them at their ease, a proceeding that was quite unnecessary for the last feeling that could have entered either of their minds was that of guilt.

So the evening passed, in the utmost propriety. No look, no sign, no symptom of unusual tenderness appeared. It even seemed that Gabrielle was particularly anxious to make the conversation general. "Oh, you're artful!" thought Mrs. Payne, "but I'll have you yet." They talked of Lapton, of Considine and of the Traceys. Only once did Mrs. Payne surprise a single suspicious circumstance.

"I showed Mrs. Considine the dogs, mother," he said. "She's fallen in love with Boris."

"Yes, his eyes are like amber," said Gabrielle.

"So I thought I'd like to write to Banbury to-morrow and get her a puppy."

"Certainly, dear," said Mrs. Payne suavely. Bedtime came. Gabrielle and Arthur shook hands in the most ordinary fashion. Mrs. Payne, seeing Gabrielle to her door and submitting, once again, to an uncomfortable kiss, felt that her triumphant plan had already shown itself to be a failure. She went along the passage to her own room with a sense of bewilderment and defeat. She could not sleep for thinking. She wondered, desperately, if when all other methods had failed, as she now expected they would, she could possibly approach their secret from another angle, laying aside her watchful inactivity and becoming in defiance of all her principles an "agent provocateuse." If it came to the worst she might be forced to do this, for very little time was left to her. If she remained static she would be powerless. Next day, she reflected, they had planned a ride over the flat top of Bredon Hill. She could not go with them; she could not even watch them; yet who knew what shames might be perpetrated in that secrecy as they rode through the green lanes of the larch plantations? Never was a better solitude made for lovers. Her imaginings left her tantalised and thwarted, for she was sure now, more than ever, that there was a secret to be surprised.

She lay there sleepless in the dark till the stable clock slowly struck twelve. Then she sighed to herself and decided that she must try to sleep.

XVIII

Lying thus, upon the verge of slumber, Mrs. Payne became aware of a sound of light steps in the corridor outside her room. She opened her eyes and lay with tense muscles listening. The sound was unmistakable, and the steps came from the direction of Arthur's room, the only one on that side of hers that was occupied. The steps came nearer. Passing her bedroom door they became tiptoe and cautious, as though the walker, whoever he might be, was anxious not to arouse her attention. The sound passed and grew fainter down the length of the corridor, and she knew then that the very worst had happened, for Gabrielle's room lay at the end of the passage. Many things she had dreaded, but not this last enormity.

She crept out of bed, neglecting in her anxiety to put on a dressing-gown, and went softly to the door. She wondered how she could open it without making a noise, and if, when she had opened it, she could hear at such a distance.

Very carefully with her hot hand she turned the door handle and opened a small chink that fortunately allowed her to look along the passage towards Gabrielle's room. Through a window halfway down the corridor moonlight cut across it, throwing on the floor the distorted shadow of an Etruscan vase. She remembered that Arthur's father had bought it in Italy on their honeymoon, yet, while this thought went through her mind, her ears were strained to listen. She could do no more, for the further end of the passage was plunged by this insulating flood of moonlight into inscrutable darkness.

It was so quiet that she felt that she had missed him; he had already entered her room; but while she considered the awful indignity of surprising him there, the sound of a light tapping on the door's panel relieved her. She thanked God that she was still in time.

The knock was repeated and evidently answered, for now she heard him speak in a whisper. He called her Mrs. Considine—it was ridiculous! "Are you awake?" she heard. "The nightingale—yes, the nightingale. We could go down into the garden under the trees. If you're game. How splendid of you! ... Yes, I'll wait below Outside, under your window."

Before Mrs. Payne could pull herself together she heard his steps returning. She closed the door fearfully. He came along the passage and stopped for a moment just outside her room. There was nothing between them but an oak door, so thin, she felt, that he must surely hear her anxious breath. She dared not breathe, but in a moment he passed by.

Why had he stopped outside her door? What curious filial instinct had made him think of her at that moment? Had he thought kindly, or only perhaps suspiciously, wondering if she were safely asleep? She couldn't tell. Her mind was too full of disturbing emotions to allow her to think. One thing emerged foremost from her confusion, a feeling of devout thankfulness that her first fears had not been justified, and as the dread of definite and paralysing defeat lifted from her mind, she realised with a sudden exultation that chance had given her the very opportunity for which she had been waiting and scheming. If she went carefully she might see them together, alone and unsuspecting, and know for certain by their behaviour how far matters had gone.

She dared not switch on the light or strike a match for fear that her windows might become conspicuous. Very gently she released one of the blinds, admitting the light of the luminous sky. She dressed hurriedly, catching sight of her figure in the long pier glass as she pulled on her stockings. For the moment it struck her as faintly ludicrous to see this middle-aged woman in a long white nightdress behaving like a creature in a detective story. It was extravagant. People of her age and figure and general sobriety didn't do this sort of thing in real life. But the seriousness of her mission recalled her, and while she had been considering the picturesque aspects of the case she found that she had actually, unconsciously dressed ... and only just in time, for now she heard the lighter step of Gabrielle in the passage.

The sound gave her a sudden flush of anger. She wanted, there and then, to open her door and ask Gabrielle where she was going. It was tantalising to let the thing go on and hold her hand. She clutched on to the foot of the bed to save herself from doing anything so rash. Gabrielle's steps passed, and the house was quiet again. The most difficult moment had come. "I hope to goodness none of the servants are awake," she thought...

Reaching the top of the staircase she heard them whispering in the hall. It seemed that they were going out brazenly by the front door, and since it seemed to her that to follow them closely would be dangerous she herself hastened round to the back staircase and let herself out of the house by a side door set in an angle of the building that sheltered her.

An eastward drift of cloud came over, hiding the moon, and she was glad of this, for the crude moonlight had put her to shame by its brilliance. She wondered to see the clouds moving so fast, for in the garden not a tree stirred but one aspen that made a sound as of gentle rain. She heard the grating of their feet on the drive, and then, by the sudden cessation of this sound, guessed that they had stepped on to the lawn. Arthur's low voice came to her clearly. "He's stopped singing, but I think he'll sing again," and from Gabrielle a whispered "Yes."

Mrs. Payne could scarcely be certain of the words she heard: she knew that she ought in some way to get nearer to them, but the expanse of dewy turf by which they were surrounded made it impossible for her to approach without being seen. Very cautiously she cut across to the left and into the shelter of the privet hedge, along which she stole until she reached their level.

They stood together in the middle of the lawn without speaking. At last Gabrielle shivered. Arthur noticed it quickly. "I hope you're not cold," he said.

"No, I'm not cold—only—only we're so exposed out here. If we could get a little more into the shadow I should feel more comfortable——"

"That's easily managed," he said laughing. "We can go over by the sundial. It's called a yew-parlour, I think. It might have been made for us."

So they passed into its shade. Mrs. Payne noticed eagerly that his hand was not on her arm. The yew hedge that now sheltered them concealed her also from their sight, and, greatly relieved, she crept along her cover of privet into the shadow of a mulberry tree where, by stooping a little, she could watch them unperceived.

"What a wonderful night," Gabrielle whispered.

"I never knew such a night," he said. "It feels a bit like that evening when we stood leaning over the bridge by the lake."

"Don't," she said. "I want to forget it. Can you smell the dew?"

"Yes, and the scent of may coming over from the meadows."

"We call it whitethorn in Ireland."

There was a long pause, then he spoke again.

"I think you look sad to-night," he said. "Are you sorry that you came?"

"No, no—of course not. It's the moonlight that makes me paler than usual. But I'm always pale. You shouldn't look at me so closely, Arthur."

"I love to look at you. It isn't always that I get the chance. I just wanted to be certain that you weren't anxious. You don't think that we oughtn't to have come here?"

"No, why shouldn't we?" she said, turning her face away.

Then suddenly, in the edge of the copse beyond the nearest field, the nightingale began. The song was so beautiful in the stillness of the night that even Mrs. Payne, who had other things to think of, felt its influence. It was a strange, unearthly moment.

"You hear it?" Arthur whispered; but Gabrielle did not answer; she laid her hand on his sleeve and Arthur trembled at her touch. So they stood listening, close together, while Arthur took the hand that held him. She smiled and turned her eyes towards him but they could not look at each other for long. She surrendered herself to his arms and they kissed.

Mrs. Payne saw their faces close together in the dusk and their shadowy bodies entwined. She could bear it no longer, but turned and groped her way back along the privet hedge to the door from which she had first come. She did not know where she was going or how she went until she found that she had reached her own bedroom again. There, in her dressing-gown, she threw herself on the bed and fell into a fit of violent sobbing. She lay there shaken by sobs like a disconsolate child. Over in the coppice the nightingale sang exultantly as if he knew of the wonder that his song had revealed to the lovers who listened to him with their lips together.

XIX

It seemed to Mrs. Payne an endless time before she heard the steps of Gabrielle returning. She thanked heaven when she knew that she was coming back alone. The bedroom door closed and the sound pulled her together. It suggested to her that the time had now come when something must be done, and though it would have been much pleasanter to let the matter stand over until the morning, she knew that nothing could be gained by waiting, since all of the three people concerned were at that moment awake, and the crisis of the affair had been reached.

The reasons that had dissuaded her from tackling Arthur himself when first her suspicions were aroused still held. She regarded a scene with him as dangerous, for she could not be certain that a big emotional disturbance would not throw him back into his old nature, quite apart from the fact that it would wound her motherly heart. Against Gabrielle, on the other hand, she knew that she could steel herself. Gabrielle was a woman, a woman younger than herself, and, what was more, a visitor in her house. She was satisfied that she could tell Gabrielle what she thought of her, and, in a single interview bring this most uncomfortable and dangerous state of affairs to an end.

She got out of bed again and dressed methodically. This time she wasn't going to put up with any condition that detracted from her dignity. So, having done her hair afresh and satisfied herself that all traces of her breakdown had disappeared, she set out with a high degree of confidence to Gabrielle's room. There was no light in it, but while she stood at the door she heard Gabrielle softly singing to herself inside. Singing! ... Mrs. Payne hardened her heart and knocked at the door. The singing stopped. There was no other sound. Then she knocked again. She heard a soft rustle as Gabrielle stepped to the door. The door opened, and Gabrielle, in her nightdress and bare feet, stood before her. She stared at Mrs. Payne. Who could guess that she knew the reason of her visit? She only said: "Oh ... it's you! I wondered...."

"May I come in?" said Mrs. Payne in a hard voice. As a matter of fact nothing could have stopped her going in.

"Of course," said Gabrielle. "Do...." She shivered slightly.

"You'd better put on a dressing-gown," said Mrs. Payne firmly. "I want to talk to you."

Gabrielle obeyed her, like a small child, slipped an embroidered kimono over her shoulders and stood facing Mrs. Payne. She looked her straight in the eyes, and said in a low voice: "Well, what is it?"

"We won't pretend," said Mrs. Payne. "You know quite well what it is."

"Yes ... I suppose you mean Arthur."

"And you."

"You saw us go out to-night ... heard us?"

"Yes."

Gabrielle made a gesture of impatience. "Well, why shouldn't we? It was the nightingale. Why shouldn't we listen to a nightingale? I'd never heard one."

"I followed you into the garden."

"That was a mean thing to do!"

"Perhaps it was. No ... I'd a right to do it. I saw everything that happened."

"When we kissed each other?"

Mrs. Payne nodded. Gabrielle looked at her challengingly. "It was the first time," she said. There was a pause and then she burst out passionately. "I love him ... we love each other. You can't stop us!"

"It's got to be stopped," said Mrs. Payne.

Gabrielle turned away and perched herself on the end of the bed. She appeared to be thinking, and when next she spoke it was almost dreamily.

"It was the first time. We didn't know before to-night."

There was nothing dreamy about Mrs. Payne's reply. She believed that Gabrielle was acting a part, and had no patience with her.

"That's rubbish," she said. "I don't believe it."

Gabrielle jumped to her feet and faced her again, blazing with pride and anger and amazingly beautiful.

"You don't believe me? How dare you? I've told you that we didn't know. I don't tell lies. You're insulting me...."

She was so passionate that Mrs. Payne was almost convinced. She softened for a moment. "After all, you *ought* to have known," she said. "You're a married woman."

"Married ..." Gabrielle repeated. "Yes ... but I didn't know. I've told you I didn't. That's enough."

"Well, if you didn't know, I *did*," said Mrs. Payne with a laugh.

"How? Tell me how?"

"It wasn't difficult to see."

"I can't imagine it. But I know nothing of love. Only once..." and Gabrielle relapsed into her dream, standing with her hand on the bedpost gazing towards the window. After a second she turned again quickly. "Then, if you knew, was that why you invited me here?"

Mrs. Payne said: "Yes——"

"Why didn't you tell me instead of doing that?"

"I wanted to make certain."

"Why didn't you tell my husband?"

"For your sake. I wanted to save you."

"No, you didn't... You weren't thinking of me. You were thinking of Arthur."

This was perfectly true, but Mrs. Payne had not gone through hell to discuss fine points of that kind. She had left her room in very much the same frame of mind as she would have adopted in approaching the dismissal of a servant. She had expected to be met with passionate denials, had prepared herself, indeed, for a stormy "scene"; instead of which Gabrielle appeared to be curious rather than disturbed about her discovery, and a great deal more interested in the psychological than in the practical aspects of the case. If she had offered any violent opposition to Mrs. Payne, Mrs. Payne could have given her violence in return. But she didn't. The mood of exaltation into which their love-making had lifted her made her regard this woman with something nearer to pity than dislike. Her attitude implied that to consider the practical aspect of the affair would be in the nature of a condescension. Mrs. Payne naturally resented this, but in any case Gabrielle had taken the wind out of her sails. They were drifting

—rather unpleasantly—away from the object of her visit. She pulled herself—and then Gabrielle—up short.

"You can't pretend not to realise the seriousness of your position," she said. "You're a married woman. If you persist in this madness you'll ruin your whole life. I'll be candid with you. What happens to you doesn't matter to me; but what happens to Arthur does. Can't you see the end of it?"

"No ... it's only begun...."

"Then I'll tell you the end. Your husband will divorce you."

"Then I shall be free? And why not? We don't love each other. Why should we go on living together? The thought of him makes me shudder ... now."

"That is your affair. I'm afraid I can't help you in it. But Arthur is mine. I'm not going to see him dragged into this ... impossibility. No ... we can't discuss it like this. You may be as innocent as you pretend to be—though it's difficult to believe it. You imagine you're in love. You're drifting out of an ordinary sort of friendship into ... what I saw to-night. Well, that can only lead to the most awful unhappiness for all of us. You must consider it finished. We won't have any disturbance; but, all the same, you can't see Arthur again. We'll invent some reason to explain your going away to-morrow ... something plausible ... to satisfy him. With your husband it will be more difficult. But I'm prepared to help you. It can be managed without any scandal if we work together... I'm sure you'll agree with me and be sensible about it. If you won't, I can't answer for the consequences."

Mrs. Payne was presuming too much. All the time that she spoke Gabrielle sat with lowered eyes, motionless but for little protesting movements of her hands; now she turned upon her, speaking very low and rapidly.

"You think I can give him up? You think it's possible? Love ... the only thing I want! The thing I've never had! Happiness... Why should you ruin our happiness? You've had yours. Oh, you're selfish. I shan't give him up if he wants me. Ask him yourself if he loves me... Ah, you're afraid. You daren't. You daren't!"

She almost laughed, and Mrs. Payne knew that she had spoken the truth. It looked, for a moment, as if she were going to be beaten on this point, for Gabrielle snatched at her weakness, repeating the unanswerable "You daren't!" Then, suddenly, without any warning, the girl's triumphant spirit collapsed. From the verge of laughter she toppled over into tears. She put her hands to her eyes and then, turning her back on Mrs. Payne, collapsed on her bed, weeping bitterly.

At the sight of this thankfulness flooded Mrs. Payne's heart; but beneath this dominant emotion, which came almost as the result of her conscious wish, flowed another that she would gladly have suppressed: pity, nothing less, for the child who lay sobbing on the bed. A minute before she had seen in Gabrielle her most dangerous enemy in the world; now, even though she rejoiced in the girl's sudden collapse, she felt that she wanted to take her in her arms and kiss her and comfort her. For a moment or two she fought against it, but in the end, scarcely knowing what she had done, she found that she was fondling Gabrielle's hand and being shaken by the communicated passion of her sobs. One thought kept running through her brain: "I've won ... I've won, and can afford to be generous," and this, together with the curious physical liking that she had always felt for Gabrielle, disarmed her. She set herself to comforting the child. It was the last thing in the world she had intended to do, but it came natural to her motherly soul. She was glad, indeed, that Gabrielle did not resent these attentions, as she very well might have done. Gradually her sobbing ceased and she began to speak, clinging all the time to Mrs. Payne, herself not guiltless of a sympathetic tear, while she told her the story of her early years: of the wild life she had led at Roscarna, of Jocelyn's debauches and Bidy's rough mothering.

It was the first time that all this flood of reminiscence had been loosed. Gabrielle had never made a confidante before, and it was an ecstasy of tears and laughter to dwell upon these memories, and to rehearse them. "I was so happy as a child," she said, "so awfully happy. But now there's nothing left."

Mrs. Payne, still sympathetic, found herself suddenly plunged into the ardours of the Radway affair; the miraculous meeting on the Clonderriff road; the halcyon days of August, and then the overwhelming tragedy.

"They made me marry him," said Gabrielle, clutching at her hand. "They made me. I didn't understand. It was cruel. It would have been better if I had died like my baby."

She relapsed into tears, and Mrs. Payne, quite bowled over by the piteousness of her case, tried to soothe her with caresses. It was a curious end, she reflected, to the punitive expedition on which she had set forth. Holding Gabrielle triumphantly in her arms she did not realize the mistake that she had

made. It wasn't the end at all, it was merely the beginning.

"You see what a terrible time I've had," Gabrielle pleaded, drying her tears. "I always felt that you were the only person I could talk to about these things. I knew you would sympathize ... you're so human. Now you can understand why I can't live without Arthur. Do you see?" She looked up, pleading, into Mrs. Payne's eyes.

Her quiet words staggered that good woman. She had to pull herself together and begin all over again. It wasn't easy, for the sympathetic mood into which the girl's story had betrayed her had subtly weakened her purpose. She felt that her position was false. She must reassert herself, and so she hurriedly freed herself from Gabrielle's arms and stood with her back to the door. Gabrielle too rose and faced her. Her tears had put an end to the dreamy mood in which Mrs. Payne had found her at first. Now she was determined, dangerous, ready to fight with all the quickness of her wits and the suppleness of her youth against the elder woman's dogged devotion. They faced one another, ready to fight to the end, for the possession of the thing they each loved best, and both of them realized the bitter nature of the struggle.

"We can't speak of that again," said Mrs. Payne. "I thought that was understood. Surely you didn't imagine that by playing on my feelings you could make me change my mind? I'm sorry you misunderstood me. I will write to your husband to-morrow. For Arthur's sake I hope you won't tell him the real explanation of your going back, and of Arthur's staying here. I think you owe that to us ... even if you don't realise that it's also the best for yourself." She turned towards the door. "I think we had better say good-night. There is a train at seven-fifty in the morning. I'm sorry it's so early, but there's no other. As I may not see you again I'll say good-bye now. There's no reason why we shouldn't part friends."

She held out her hand, she couldn't think why, but as she did so Gabrielle clasped it. "No ... don't go!" she pleaded.

"There's nothing more to be said." But Gabrielle still held her hand and would not let it go.

"Only be merciful to me," she cried. "Let us think about it. There must be some other way. Supposing ... supposing that we go back to Lapton just in the ordinary way: supposing that I promise you faithfully that nothing more shall happen. Listen, we never, never kissed before to-night. I'll give you my word of honour that it shan't happen again ... if only you'll let him go back to us. Isn't that fair? Surely it's fair...."

Mrs. Payne shook her head.

"You mean that you don't believe me ... you won't trust me?"

"I can't trust both of you. Do you think I don't know what love is?"

"But think ... think of all these months in which we've been so happy together without a word of love! I love him ... you know I love him ... I believe I love him more than you do. No, don't be angry with me for saying that! Don't you think my love is strong enough to prevent me from doing anything that could possibly harm him? Can't you believe that?"

"No ... it's too dangerous. You can answer for yourself, but you can't answer for Arthur."

"Oh, if you loved him as you say you do ... as I believe you do ... wouldn't you trust him? I'll talk to him. I can tell him anything. I'll tell him exactly how things stand. I'll tell him what I've promised you. Only don't take him away from me altogether. I couldn't bear it ... I couldn't." She turned back on herself. "Why won't you believe in him?"

"You should know why that's impossible. Haven't I told you his history? You've only known him for a year. I've had him for seventeen and loved him all the time." She became almost passionate. "He's my son. And all those years my love has been full of the awful bitterness of his trouble. The tears! The disappointments! You know nothing of them. You can't realize how I've struggled and schemed and had my hopes raised and dashed to the ground ... time after time. To see the person that you love best in the world, a part of your own body, living without a soul: a thief, a liar—that's the plain truth—inhuman and cruel ... But you know as well as I do what he was."

"I do know what he was."

"And now, thanks to your husband—God knows I'm grateful!—he's better. He's what I knew he ought to have been all these awful years. And then you come on the scene—you, who've borne nothing of all the years before—and begin to drag him down again. You must be mad to think I could risk it!"

"But don't I know all this? Do you think I'm less anxious than you are that he should stay as he is? Only trust me ... trust me! His future ... think of that...."

Mrs. Payne laughed bitterly, but Gabrielle persisted.

"His future ... My husband says that he can make a success of him. He can take a high place in a Government examination; he can get into the diplomatic service. Just believe that I love him too much to stand in his way. Why, I can even help him. If he does this I know that he'll want influence. *You* haven't influence to help him. I don't want to belittle you, but I know you've nothing but your money, while I *can* help him. My cousin is Lord Halberton. He's been a Cabinet minister. There's no knowing what he mightn't do with his help. If you love anyone as I do him, why shouldn't you give your life to his interests? That's what I'd do. I'd think of nothing else. I'd give all my thoughts to him. And I promise ... oh, I promise faithfully, that I won't let him love me ... if only you'll let me love him."

Mrs. Payne stiffened. "You're trying to bribe me," she said, "and I'm not the kind of person who can be bribed. I don't care that much about his future! Until the last month I never so much as dreamed that any future of that kind was possible. It's quite enough for me that he should settle down here into the sort of life that his father would have lived if he'd been spared. I don't want to share his successes with you...."

"Ah, you're jealous!"

"Of course I'm jealous. I've reason to be. He's mine. But even if I could trust you ... and I believe I could ... Arthur's future wouldn't tempt me to risk his present. No ... it's too dangerous."

"Dangerous..." Gabrielle clutched at the word. "Dangerous!" She became suddenly quiet and intense. "I don't believe you know where the danger lies," she said.

"I can see the most obvious danger, and that's a love affair with a married woman."

"You can't see any other? You said just now that Arthur had changed thanks to my husband. Perhaps my husband took the credit for it and you believed it. But it isn't true. I've seen the change coming hour by hour, day by day. Every moment of it I've watched and treasured. He did not change because he worked with my husband. He changed because I loved him and he loved me. I know it ... I've known it all the time. What did your love do for him in all those years? Nothing ... nothing at all. For heaven's sake don't think I'm boasting! Your love never changed him a hair's breadth, and you know it!"

Mrs. Payne gasped. "You don't realize what you're saying."

"But I do ... I do. You say his body's part of you—belongs to you. I'll give you that. But this soul ... his new soul ... is mine. That's part of our love. Ours and nobody else's...."

Mrs. Payne choked back her emotion. "I don't grudge it you," she said, "I only thank God for it gratefully ... gratefully."

"But you don't see what I mean," said Gabrielle slowly. "Arthur has changed because he loves me. He's ceased to be cruel because he knows that for him to be cruel pains me. He's learned to see things just as I see them. And now you want to separate us ... even after what I have promised you. Can't you see what I'm afraid of?"

She paused, and Mrs. Payne was silent. Gabrielle quickly pressed her advantage.

"If you separate us, if you try to destroy our love, you'll be taking away from him the thing that's saved him. How do you know that he won't slip back again? You can take his body from me ... I know that ... but you may lose more than you get."

Mrs. Payne stood staring straight in front of her.

"Then you will know what you are worth to him." Gabrielle's tone was almost scornful. "You see how it stands," she continued. "We both of us want him for ourselves, we want him as he is to-day ... and we can't either of us have him without the other's consent. You hold his body, and I hold his soul. Let's be reasonable. Let's compromise. I'm ready to do my part. Oh, I beg you to be reasonable!"

"You're a devil, not a woman," said Mrs. Payne.

"But you see that I'm right?" Gabrielle persisted.

Mrs. Payne summoned all her strength. "No, I don't. I don't believe it."

"Ah, you pretend that you don't! But you're bluffing me. I know it. Why did you come to me about this

instead of to Arthur himself? Because you were afraid. That was the reason."

The shot was made at a venture, but Gabrielle quickly saw that it had taken effect. She followed it up:

"You thought that if you upset him he might lose what he's gained. You don't know—we none of us know yet—how deep the change is. You didn't dare to face that little risk; but it's nothing compared with the one you want to take now. That's what you've got to face!"

She could say no more. When she stopped speaking Mrs. Payne knew that the girl's eyes were fixed on her eagerly, desperately, trying to search into her mind. The older woman stood there still and bewildered by the choice that had been presented to her. It was the most awful moment in her emotional life. Her mind was a battlefield on which her love, her sense of right, her acquired conventions, her religion, and her hungry maternal passion were pitted against one formidable dread. She wanted to shield Arthur against harm: from a social disaster no less than from what she considered a mortal sin; and, above all, after these years of patient suffering, she wanted him for herself. It was neither religion nor morality that drove her to her final decision, but a thing far stronger: her passionate instinct to possess the son of her body. Even if she were to lose him, to rescue no more than the changeling that she had always known, she could not bring herself to share him with any other woman on earth. He was hers and hers alone. She did not know if she were right. She did not care if she were wrong. The decision formed itself inexorably in her mind. She could only obey it. Gabrielle, watching her narrowly, saw a sudden peace descend upon her agonised face. Mrs. Payne gave a long shuddering sigh. Then she spoke, dully, mechanically:

"The train goes at seven-fifty. I will order the carriage. I will write to Dr. Considine in the morning."

Gabrielle clutched at her breast. "You can't realise what you're doing! It's too great a risk. Think of it again ... I beg you!"

"No," said Mrs. Payne slowly. "I've made up my mind. We must invent some plausible excuse. Illness will do ... anything. And you must help me, if only for your own sake."

Desperate tears came into Gabrielle's eyes.

"For your own sake," Mrs. Payne repeated. "You've realised, I know, that if you go on with this unfortunate love-affair you must ruin not only your own happiness and your husband's, but Arthur's as well. If you love him at all you can't drag him into social ruin. Well, I've made my decision. If anything disastrous happens my blood's on my own head. We must make the best of a bad job. Don't think I'm not sorry for you, my dear."

This final tenderness was too much for Gabrielle. She broke down, sobbing so tragically in Mrs. Payne's arms that the older woman was almost ashamed of her victory. She knew that she could afford to be kind. She felt that she would like to tell her that under any other circumstances she knew none whom she would rather trust as Arthur's wife; but to say so would have been a bitter mockery. She waited in silence while Gabrielle mastered her own feelings and raised, at last, her haggard eyes.

"What can you say to my husband?" she said.

"We must say that I am ill. That will give you a good reason for returning."

"And Arthur?"

"The same reason will explain why he doesn't go back to Lapton on Tuesday. After that I don't know what I shall do."

"But I can see him before I go?"

"That would be quite useless. It might even do harm. You are going to help me, you know, for his sake."

"He'll wonder. How can we satisfy him? What can I do?"

"You had better write to him. Tell him that after to-night it's impossible for you to stay. Only ... only please don't mention me."

"It will kill him...."

"Or save him. It's the only thing that you can do."

"I'll write it now."

She went over to the writing table in the window, and there, with streaming eyes, she wrote her letter. It took her a long time to do, and when she had finished she brought it with the envelope to Mrs. Payne.

"Do you want to read it?" she asked.

"No ... Of course I trust you."

"Thank you." She fastened the envelope and addressed it. "I feel as if I were dead," she said.

"You're young," said Mrs. Payne.

"But you'll let me know what happens, you'll write to me?"

"Yes, I'll write to you."

"I have a dread, an awful dread of what may happen. I can't be sure that we've done right."

"Neither can I. I had to make a decision. I pray God that it will turn out well. We can do no more."

"I know now that you love him. I'm glad to know that."

"Did you ever doubt it?"

"But for me there's nothing left ... nothing." Gabrielle stood for a moment in silence. Then she said, "I'd better pack," and Mrs. Payne clutching at any refuge from the intensity of the moment offered to help her.

"No," said Gabrielle, "if you don't mind, I'd rather be alone. We'd better say good-bye."

"I don't like to leave you," said Mrs. Payne, "but perhaps you're right."

With a sudden impulse Gabrielle came over to her. Mrs. Payne took her in her arms and they kissed.

"I could love you," said Gabrielle. "You have Arthur's eyes...."

Mrs. Payne left her.

XX

Much to the disgust of Hollis, who was in the habit of making the most of his Sundays, Gabrielle left Overton by the early morning train while Arthur slept undisturbed after his night of wonder, and Mrs. Payne rose anxiously to face the certain embarrassments and the possible bitterness of her victory. She had not slept at all, for though she never for one moment dreamed of going back on the decision which her conscience, amongst other things, had dictated, she was still in doubt as to whether she had won her son or lost him for ever. She almost regretted the burst of generosity in which she had refused to read Gabrielle's letter of renunciation. For all she knew the wording might be provocative and calculated to wreck her plans at the last moment. The letter lay sealed upon her dressing-table. It speaks well for her sense of honour in a bargain that this pathetic document remained unopened. Meanwhile she only prayed that the hours might pass and her fate be revealed. She could only rack her brains imagining some means by which the severity of the blow might be tempered for Arthur.

Next morning he came down ten minutes late for breakfast. He missed Gabrielle at once.

"Where's Mrs. Considine?" he said. "I called at her door as I came down, but I don't think she's there."

"No," said Mrs. Payne. "She had to go back to Lapton by the first train. An urgent call of some kind."

"A telegram? The old man isn't ill, is he?"

"She left a letter for you," said Mrs. Payne, handing him Gabrielle's envelope.

"What a rotten shame," he said as he took it. "It's a splendid morning for a ride. I hope it's not serious."

He opened the letter and read it. What Gabrielle had written Mrs. Payne never knew, for even in later years he did not tell her. She had expected a terrible and passionate outburst and prepared herself to meet it with argument and consolation, but no outburst came. She saw him go very red and then white. Then he steadied himself and said in a curious voice: "Mother ... if you'll excuse me, I must go out."

She put out her hand to him but he pushed back his chair and went quickly through the French window of the dining-room, into the garden. She wanted to follow him, for she feared that on the impulse of the moment he might do something terrible, but controlled herself in time.

She stood on the terrace, impotent, watching him as he crossed the lawn and made for the fields. It was a terrible day for her. She felt that she couldn't go to church in her usual way, but stayed at home tortured by the most hopeless and tragic anticipations of evil. At lunch time he had not returned. It was with difficulty that she restrained herself from sending Hollis out over the hill with a search party, but the curious fatalism that had settled on her when once her decision was made, compelled her to patience. It was his own battle, she reflected, and if he had wanted her help he would have come to her. Evidently, he had decided to fight it out alone. She went to her own room and prayed desperately for his salvation.

In the evening he returned, tired out with ceaseless wandering. He had eaten nothing all day and looked very old and haggard. She had expected a tender scene of confidence and was ready to overwhelm him with the consolations of her love; but even now he said nothing to her, and she dared not take the first step herself. From his silent misery she gathered that Gabrielle had not told him that she knew of the secret. Evidently, and very wisely, she had given him general and conventional reasons for her renunciation, treating it as a matter that concerned themselves and no one else, denying Mrs. Payne the privilege and pain of sharing in Arthur's disillusionment. Therefore, his mother judged it wiser to behave as though she knew nothing of what he was suffering, though she saw by the steadiness of his demeanour that he had taken the blow squarely, and come through.

The fact that he didn't break down miserably, as she had expected he would, convinced her more than ever that he had become a man. She felt certain now that she had been right in following her instinct and facing the risk that her action involved. She believed that she had triumphed. Certainly, the boy who faced her at the dinner-table in suffering and awkward silence was very different from the Arthur of six months before. There was a look of determination in his eyes that made her confident. He kissed her good-night without the least tremor, and she went to bed herself full of serene thankfulness. Nor did she forget how much she owed to the girl who was breaking her heart in the loneliness of Lapton. She wrote to Gabrielle that night. "I think it is all right," she said. "Heaven only knows what I owe you for your generosity ... what Arthur owes you."

He never mentioned Gabrielle's name to her again. Next morning, in a calm and serious mood, he approached her on the subject of his return to Lapton.

"Would you mind very much," he said, "if I don't go back to Devonshire? I feel that I'm rather out of place there. You see, I'm older than the others. Do you think it could be arranged?"

At first she feigned surprise—she could do nothing else—but in doing so she cleverly contrived to make it easy for him.

"If you wish it I will write to Dr. Considine," she said. She didn't suggest the elaborate falsehoods on which she would build her letter. "I think you are old enough to decide," she told him. "What would you like to do?"

"Is there any reason why I shouldn't travel?" he said. "I feel that I want a change. I should like to see something of the world."

So, without further difficulty, it was arranged. She sent him round the world with a new tutor, waiting placidly and happily at Overton for his return. It was in these days that I became acquainted with her and conceived the admiration for her that I still hold. She often spoke to me in terms of the most utter devotion of her son. I imagined her an ideal mother, as indeed she was.

After a year or more abroad Arthur returned, very much the man of the world. At his own desire he went up to Oxford, where he passed a perfectly normal three years and took a decent degree. In his last term he fell in love with the daughter of a neighbouring parson, whom, in due course, he married. The following year the young people went out to New Zealand, a country to which Arthur had been attracted on his travels, and that is all that I know of him.

During all this time Mrs. Payne corresponded regularly with Gabrielle. Now that Arthur's safety was beyond question and even in the earlier debatable period, she had not the least objection to sharing him with her rival ... at a distance. She even sent her his letters from abroad. In this way they arrived at a curious and altogether happy intimacy. Gabrielle's letters became part of her life, and when, in the autumn after Arthur's engagement was announced, they suddenly stopped, Mrs. Payne felt that she had suffered a loss. She wrote two or three times to Lapton, but received no reply, and it was only by the chance meeting of a friend who had been staying in Devonshire that she learned what had happened. It came to her as a piece of idle gossip, but the shock of an extraordinary coincidence upset her for many days. It appeared that Dr. Considine, by this time a well known figure in the county, had gone out one evening rabbit-shooting with his wife. As they were returning from their expedition down one of the steep slopes above Lapton Manor, he had slipped in getting over a gate and fallen. It was the usual type of shooting accident that no one could explain. The gun had gone off and shot him dead. "He was terribly mutilated about the head," said Mrs. Payne's informant. She did not know what had happened to his widow. Probably she had gone to her cousins the Halbertons. In any case the jury had completely exonerated her.

Mrs. Payne flared up in Gabrielle's defence. "Exonerated?"

"It was well known that they were not on the best of terms," said her visitor discreetly.

XXI

I do not know what has possessed me since I began to write this story. I have grown tired of this river, where the trout are always shy, and more tired than ever of Colonel Hoylake's fishing stories and his obituary reflections. The place is haunted for me by the tragic image of Gabrielle Hewish. It is strange that I should be affected by the loss of a woman whom I have never seen or known. But I feel that I cannot stay here any longer. Wherever I go in this valley I am troubled by a feeling of desolation: a curious feeling, as though some bright thing had fallen—a kingfisher, a dragon-fly.

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