

either view, and later on they said it. But they had other questions before them now.

'Do you mean to tell me that Paul –'

But she did not like his voice. He sounded as if he was talking to a porter, and, certain that he had deceived her at the station, she too grew angry.

'Do you mean to tell me that Paul and your niece –'

Mrs Munt – such is human nature – determined that she would champion the lovers. She was not going to be bullied by a severe young man. 'Yes, they care for one another very much indeed,' she said. 'I dare say they will tell you about it by and by. We heard this morning.'

And Charles clenched his fist and cried, 'The idiot, the idiot, the little fool!'

Mrs Munt tried to divest herself of her rugs. 'If that is your attitude, Mr Wilcox, I prefer to walk.'

'I beg you will do no such thing. I take you up this moment to the house. Let me tell you the thing's impossible, and must be stopped.'

Mrs Munt did not often lose her temper, and when she did it was only to protect those whom she loved. On this occasion she blazed out. 'I quite agree, sir. The thing is impossible, and I *will* come up and stop it. My niece is a very exceptional person, and I am not inclined to sit still while she throws herself away on those who will not appreciate her.'

Charles worked his jaws.

'Considering she has only known your brother since Wednesday, and only met your father and mother at a stray hotel –'

'Could you possibly lower your voice? The shop-man will overhear.'

'Esprit de classe' – if one may coin the phrase – was strong in Mrs Munt. She sat quivering while a member of the lower orders deposited a metal funnel, a saucepan and a garden squirt beside the roll of oilcloth.

'Right behind?'

'Yes, sir.' And the lower orders vanished in a cloud of dust.

'I warn you: Paul hasn't a penny; it's useless.'

'No need to warn us, Mr Wilcox, I assure you. The warning is all the other way. My niece has been very foolish, and I shall give her a good scolding and take her back to London with me.'

'He has to make his way out in Nigeria. He couldn't think of marrying for years, and when he does it must be a woman who can stand the climate, and is in other ways – Why hasn't he told us? Of course he's ashamed. He knows he's been a fool. And so he has – a damned fool.'

She grew furious.

'Whereas Miss Schlegel has lost no time in publishing the news.'

'If I were a man, Mr Wilcox, for that last remark I'd box your ears. You're not fit to clean my niece's boots, to sit in the same room with her, and you dare – you actually dare – I decline to argue with such a person.'

'All I know is, she's spread the thing and he hasn't, and my father's away and I –'

'And all that I know is –'

'Might I finish my sentence, please?'

'No.'

Charles clenched his teeth and sent the motor swerving all over the lane.

She screamed.

So they played the game of Capping Families, a round of which is always played when love would unite two members of our race. But they played it with unusual vigour, stating in so many words that Schlegels were better than Wilcoxes, Wilcoxes better than Schlegels. They flung decency aside. The man was young, the woman deeply stirred; in both a vein of coarseness was latent. Their quarrel was no more surprising than are most quarrels – inevitable at the time, incredible afterwards. But it was more than usually futile. A few minutes, and they were enlightened. The motor drew up at Howards End, and Helen, looking very pale, ran out to meet her aunt.

'Aunt Juley, I have just had a telegram from Margaret; I – I meant to stop your coming. It isn't – it's over.'

The climax was too much for Mrs Munt. She burst into tears.

'Aunt Juley dear, don't. Don't let them know I've been so silly. It wasn't anything. Do bear up for my sake.'

'Paul,' cried Charles Wilcox, pulling his gloves off.

'Don't let them know. They are never to know.'

'Oh, my darling Helen -'

'Paul! Paul!'

A very young man came out of the house.

'Paul, is there any truth in this?'

'I didn't - I don't -'

'Yes or no, man; plain question, plain answer. Did or didn't Miss Schlegel -'

'Charles dear,' said a voice from the garden. 'Charles, dear Charles, one doesn't ask plain questions. There aren't such things.'

They were all silent. It was Mrs Wilcox.

She approached just as Helen's letter had described her, trailing noiselessly over the lawn, and there was actually a wisp of hay in her hands. She seemed to belong not to the young people and their motor, but to the house, and to the tree that overshadowed it. One knew that she worshipped the past, and that the instinctive wisdom the past can alone bestow had descended upon her - that wisdom to which we give the clumsy name of aristocracy. High-born she might not be. But assuredly she cared about her ancestors, and let them help her. When she saw Charles angry, Paul frightened and Mrs Munt in tears, she heard her ancestors say: 'Separate those human beings who will hurt each other most. The rest can wait.' So she did not ask questions. Still less did she pretend that nothing had happened, as a competent society hostess would have done. She said: 'Miss Schlegel, would you take your aunt up to your room or to my room, whichever you think best. Paul, do find Evie, and tell her lunch for six, but I'm not sure whether we shall all be downstairs for it.' And when they had obeyed her she turned to her elder son, who still stood in the throbbing, stinking car, and smiled at him with tenderness, and

without saying a word turned away from him towards her flowers.

'Mother,' he called, 'are you aware that Paul has been playing the fool again?'

'It is all right dear. They have broken off the engagement.'

'Engagement - !'

'They do not love any longer, if you prefer it put that way,' said Mrs Wilcox, stooping down to smell a rose.

IV

HELEN and her aunt returned to Wickham Place in a state of collapse, and for a little time Margaret had three invalids on her hands. Mrs Munt soon recovered. She possessed to a remarkable degree the power of distorting the past, and before many days were over she had forgotten the part played by her own imprudence in the catastrophe. Even at the crisis she had cried, 'Thank goodness, poor Margaret is saved this!' which during the journey to London evolved into 'It had to be gone through by someone,' which in its turn ripened into the permanent form of 'The one time I really did help Emily's girls was over the Wilcox business.' But Helen was a more serious patient. New ideas had burst upon her like a thunderclap, and by them and by their reverberations she had been stunned.

The truth was that she had fallen in love, not with an individual, but with a family.

Before Paul arrived she had, as it were, been tuned up into his key. The energy of the Wilcoxes had fascinated her, had created new images of beauty in her responsive mind. To be all day with them in the open air, to sleep at night under their roof, had seemed the supreme joy of life, and had led to that abandonment of personality that is a possible prelude to love. She had *liked* giving in to Mr Wilcox, or Evie, or Charles; she had *liked* being told that her notions of life were sheltered or academic; that Equality was nonsense, Votes for

Women nonsense, Socialism nonsense, Art and Literature, except when conducive to strengthening the character, nonsense. One by one the Schlegel fetishes had been overthrown, and, though professing to defend them, she had rejoiced. When Mr Wilcox said that one sound man of business did more good to the world than a dozen of your social reformers, she had swallowed the curious assertion without a gasp, and had leant back luxuriously among the cushions of his motor-car. When Charles said, 'Why be so polite to servants? They don't understand it,' she had not given the Schlegel retort of 'If they don't understand it, I do.' No; she had vowed to be less polite to servants in the future. 'I am swathed in cant,' she thought, 'and it is good for me to be stripped of it.' And all that she thought or did or breathed was a quiet preparation for Paul. Paul was inevitable. Charles was taken up with another girl, Mr Wilcox was so old, Evie so young, Mrs Wilcox so different. Round the absent brother she began to throw the halo of Romance, to irradiate him with all the splendour of those happy days, to feel that in him she should draw nearest to the robust ideal. He and she were about the same age, Evie said. Most people thought Paul handsomer than his brother. He was certainly a better shot, though not so good at golf. And when Paul appeared, flushed with the triumph of getting through an examination, and ready to flirt with any pretty girl, Helen met him halfway, or more than halfway, and turned towards him on the Sunday evening.

He had been talking of his approaching exile in Nigeria, and he should have continued to talk of it, and allowed their guest to recover. But the heave of her bosom flattered him. Passion was possible, and he became passionate. Deep down in him something whispered: 'This girl would let you kiss her; you might not have such a chance again.'

That was 'how it happened', or, rather, how Helen described it to her sister, using words even more unsympathetic than my own. But the poetry of that kiss, the wonder of it, the magic that there was in life for hours after it – who can describe that? It is so easy for an Englishman to sneer at these chance collisions of human beings. To the

insular cynic and the insular moralist they offer an equal opportunity. It is so easy to talk of 'passing emotion', and to forget how vivid the emotion was ere it passed. Our impulse to sneer, to forget, is at root a good one. We recognize that emotion is not enough, and that men and women are personalities capable of sustained relations, not mere opportunities for an electrical discharge. Yet we rate the impulse too highly. We do not admit that by collisions of this trivial sort the doors of heaven may be shaken open. To Helen, at all events, her life was to bring nothing more intense than the embrace of this boy who played no part in it. He had drawn her out of the house, where there was danger of surprise and light; he had led her by a path he knew, until they stood under the column of the vast wych-elm. A man in the darkness, he had whispered 'I love you' when she was desiring love. In time his slender personality faded, the scene that he had evoked endured. In all the variable years that followed she never saw the like of it again.

'I understand,' said Margaret – 'at least, I understand as much as ever is understood of these things. Tell me now what happened on the Monday morning.'

'It was over at once.'

'How, Helen?'

'I was still happy while I dressed, but as I came downstairs I got nervous, and when I went into the dining-room I knew it was no good. There was Evie – I can't explain – managing the tea-urn, and Mr Wilcox reading *The Times*.'

'Was Paul there?'

'Yes; and Charles was talking to him about Stocks and Shares, and he looked frightened.'

By slight indications the sisters could convey much to each other. Margaret saw horror latent in the scene, and Helen's next remark did not surprise her.

'Somehow, when that kind of man looks frightened it is too awful. It is all right for us to be frightened, or for men of another sort – father, for instance; but for men like that! When I saw all the others so placid, and Paul mad with terror in case I said the wrong thing, I felt for a moment that

Suddenly the Pussum appeared again in the door, her small, childish face looking sullen and vindictive.

'I know you want to catch me out,' came her cold, rather resonant voice. 'But I don't care, I don't care how much you catch me out.'

She turned and was gone again. She had been wearing a loose dressing-gown of purple silk, tied round her waist. She looked so small and childish and vulnerable, almost pitiful. And yet the black looks of her eyes made Gerald feel drowned in some dreadful, potent darkness that almost frightened him.

The men lit another cigarette and talked casually.

CHAPTER VII

Totem

IN the morning Gerald woke late. He had slept heavily. Pussum was still asleep, sleeping childishly and pathetically. There was something small and curled up and defenceless about her, that roused an unsatisfied flame of passion in the young man's blood, a devouring avid pity. He looked at her again. But it would be too cruel to wake her. He subdued himself, and went away.

Hearing voices coming from the sitting-room, Halliday talking to Libidnikov, he went to the door and glanced in, knowing he might go about in this bachelor establishment in his trousers and shirt.

To his surprise he saw the two young men by the fire, stark naked. Halliday looked up, rather pleased.

'Good-morning,' he said. 'Oh — did you want towels?' And stark naked he went out into the hall, striding a strange, white figure between the unliving furniture. He came back with the towels, and took his former position, crouching seated before the fire on the fender.

'Don't you love to feel the fire on your skin?' he said.

'It is rather pleasant,' said Gerald.

'How perfectly splendid it must be to be in a climate where one could do without clothing altogether,' said Halliday.

'Yes,' said Gerald, 'if there weren't so many things that sting and bite.'

'That's a disadvantage,' murmured Maxim.

Gerald looked at him, and with a slight revulsion saw the human animal, golden skinned and bare, somehow humiliating. Halliday was different. He had a rather heavy, slack, broken beauty, white and firm. He was like a Christ in a Pietà.¹⁹ The animal was not there at all, only the heavy, broken beauty. And Gerald realised how Halliday's eyes were beautiful too, so blue and warm and confused, broken also in their expression.

The fire-glow fell on his heavy, rather bowed shoulders, he sat slackly crouched on the fender, his face was uplifted, degenerate, perhaps slightly disintegrate, and yet with a moving beauty of its own.

'Of course,' said Maxim, 'you've been in hot countries where the people go about naked.'

'Oh, really!' exclaimed Halliday. 'Where?'

'South America - Amazon,' said Gerald.

'Oh, but how perfectly splendid! It's one of the things I want most to do - to live from day to day without *ever* putting on any sort of clothing whatever. If I could do that, I should feel I had lived.'

'But why?' said Gerald. 'I can't see that it makes so much difference.'

'Oh, I think it would be perfectly splendid. I'm sure life would be entirely another thing - entirely different, and perfectly wonderful.'

'But why?' asked Gerald. 'Why should it?'

'Oh - one would *feel* things instead of merely looking at them. I should feel the air move against me, and feel the things I touched, instead of having only to look at them. I'm sure life is all wrong because it has become much too visual - we can neither hear nor feel nor understand, we can only see. I'm sure that is entirely wrong.'

'Yes, that is true, that is true,' said the Russian.

Gerald glanced at him, and saw him, his suave, golden-coloured body with the black hair growing fine and freely, like tendrils, and his limbs like smooth plant-stems. He was so healthy and well-made, why did he make one ashamed, why did one feel repelled? Why should Gerald even dislike it, why did it seem to him to detract from his own dignity? Was that all a human being amounted to? So uninspired! thought Gerald.

Birkin suddenly appeared in the doorway, also in a state of nudity, towel and sleeping suit over his arm. He was very narrow and white, and somehow apart.

'There's the bath-room now, if you want it,' he said generally, and was going away again, when Gerald called:

'I say, Rupert!'

'What?' The single white figure appeared again, a presence in the room.

'What do you think of that figure there? I want to know,' Gerald asked.

Birkin, white and strangely present, went over to the carved figure of the negro woman in labour. Her nude, protuberant body crouched in a strange, clutching posture, her hands gripping the ends of the band, above her breast.

'It is art,' said Birkin.

'Very beautiful, it's very beautiful,' said the Russian.

They all drew near to look. Gerald looked at the group of naked men, the Russian golden and like a water-plant, Halliday tall and heavily, brokenly beautiful, Birkin very white and immediate, not to be defined, as he looked closely at the carved woman. Strangely elated, Gerald also lifted his eyes to the face of the wooden figure. And his heart contracted.

He saw vividly with his spirit the grey, forward-stretching face of the negro woman, African and tense, abstracted in utter physical stress. It was a terrible face, void, peaked, abstracted almost into meaninglessness by the weight of sensation beneath. He saw the Pussum in it. As in a dream, he knew her.

'Why is it art?' Gerald asked, shocked, resentful.

'It conveys a complete truth,' said Birkin. 'It contains the whole truth of that state, whatever you feel about it.'

'But you can't call it *high* art,' said Gerald.

'High! There are centuries and hundreds of centuries of development in a straight line, behind that carving; it is an awful pitch of culture, of a definite sort.'

'What culture?' Gerald asked, in opposition. He hated the sheer African thing.

'Pure culture in sensation, culture in the physical consciousness, really ultimate *physical* consciousness, mindless, utterly sensual. It is so sensual as to be final, supreme.'

But Gerald resented it. He wanted to keep certain illusions, certain ideas like clothing.

'You like the wrong things, Rupert,' he said, 'things against yourself.'

'Oh, I know, this isn't everything,' Birkin replied, moving away.

When Gerald went back to his room from the bath, he also carried his clothes. It seemed bad form in this house, not to go about naked. And after all, it was rather nice, there *was* a real simplicity. Still, it was rather funny, everybody being so deliberately nude.

The Pussum lay in her bed, motionless, her round, dark eyes, like black, unhappy pools. He could only see the black, bottomless pools of her eyes. Perhaps she suffered. The sensation of her inchoate suffering roused the old sharp flame in him, a mordant pity, a passion almost of cruelty.

'You are awake now,' he said to her.

'What time is it?' came her muted voice.

She seemed to flow back, almost like liquid, from his approach, to sink helplessly away from him. Her inchoate look of a violated slave, whose fulfilment lies in her further and further violation, made his nerves quiver with acutely desirable sensation. After all, his was the only will, she was the passive substance of his will. He tingled with the subtle, biting sensation. And then he knew, he must go away from her, there must be pure separation between them.

It was a quiet and ordinary breakfast, the four men all looking very clean and bathed. Gerald and the Russian were both correct and *comme il faut*²⁰ in appearance and manner, Birkin was gaunt and sick, and looked a failure in his attempt to be a properly dressed man, like Gerald and Maxim. Halliday wore tweeds and a green flannel shirt, and a rag of a tie, which was just right for him. The Hindu brought in a great deal of soft toast, and looked exactly the same as he had looked the night before, statically the same.

At the end of the breakfast the Pussum appeared, in a purple silk wrap with a shimmering sash. She had recovered herself somewhat, but was mute and lifeless still. It was a torment to her when anybody spoke to her. Her face was like a small, fine mask, sinister too, masked with unwilling suffering. It was almost midday. Gerald rose and went away to his business, glad to get out. But he had not finished. He was coming back

again at evening, they were all dining together, and he had booked seats for the party, excepting Birkin, at a music-hall.

At night they came back to the flat very late again, again flushed with drink. Again the man-servant – who invariably disappeared between the hours of ten and twelve at night – came in silently and inscrutably with tea, bending in a slow, strange, leopard-like fashion to put the tray softly on the table. His face was immutable, aristocratic-looking, tinged slightly with grey under the skin; he was young and good-looking. But Birkin felt a slight sickness, looking at him, and feeling the slight greyness as an ash or a corruption, in the aristocratic inscrutability of expression a nauseating, bestial stupidity.

Again they talked cordially and rousedly together. But already a certain friability was coming over the party, Birkin was mad with irritation, Halliday was turning in an insane hatred against Gerald, the Pussum was becoming hard and cold, like a flint knife, and Halliday was laying himself out to her. And her intention, ultimately, was to capture Halliday, to have complete power over him.

In the morning they all stalked and lounged about again. But Gerald could feel a strange hostility to himself, in the air. It roused his obstinacy, and he stood up against it. He hung on for two more days. The result was a nasty and insane scene with Halliday on the fourth evening. Halliday turned with absurd animosity, upon Gerald, in the Café. There was a row. Gerald was on the point of knocking-in Halliday's face; when he was filled with sudden disgust and indifference, and he went away, leaving Halliday in a foolish state of gloating triumph, the Pussum hard and established, and Maxim standing clear. Birkin was absent; he had gone out of town again.

Gerald was piqued because he had left without giving the Pussum money. It was true, she did not care whether he gave her money or not, and he knew it. But she would have been glad of ten pounds, and he would have been *very* glad to give them to her. Now he felt in a false position. He went away chewing his lips to get at the ends of his short-clipped moustache. He knew the Pussum was merely glad to be rid of him. She had got her Halliday, whom she wanted. She wanted him

completely in her power. Then she would marry him. She wanted to marry him. She had set her will on marrying Halliday. She never wanted to hear of Gerald again; unless, perhaps, she were in difficulty; because after all, Gerald was what she called a man, and these others, Halliday, Libidnikov, Birkin, the whole Bohemian set, they were only half men. But it was half men she could deal with. She felt sure of herself with them. The real men, like Gerald, put her in her place too much.

Still, she respected Gerald, she really respected him. She had managed to get his address, so that she could appeal to him in time of distress. She knew he wanted to give her money. She would perhaps write to him on that inevitable rainy day.

CHAPTER VIII

Breadalby

BREADALBY was a Georgian house with Corinthian pillars, standing among the softer, greener hills of Derbyshire, not far from Cromford. In front, it looked over a lawn, over a few trees, down to a string of fish-ponds in the hollow of the silent park. At the back were trees, among which were to be found the stables, and the big kitchen garden, behind which was a wood.

It was a very quiet place, some miles from the high-road, back from the Derwent Valley, outside the show scenery. Silent and forsaken, the golden stucco showed between the trees, the house-front looked down the park, unchanged and unchanging.

Of late, however, Hermione had lived a good deal at the house. She had turned away from London, away from Oxford, towards the silence of the country. Her father was mostly absent, abroad, she was either alone in the house, with her visitors, of whom there were always several, or she had with her her brother, a bachelor, and a Liberal member of Parliament. He always came down when the House was not sitting, seemed always to be present in Breadalby, although he was most conscientious in his attendance to duty.

The summer was just coming in when Ursula and Gudrun went to stay the second time with Hermione. Coming along in the car, after they had entered the park, they looked across the dip, where the fish-ponds lay in silence, at the pillared front of the house, sunny and small like an English drawing of the old school, on the brow of the green hill, against the trees. There were small figures on the green lawn, women in lavender and yellow moving to the shade of the enormous, beautifully balanced cedar tree.

'Isn't it complete!' said Gudrun. 'It is as final as an old aquatint.' She spoke with some resentment in her voice, as if

She was watching a brown spaniel that had run out of a side-path, and was looking towards them with lifted nose, making a soft, fluffy bark. A man with a gun strode swiftly, softly out after the dog, facing their way, as if about to attack them; then stopped instead, saluted, and was turning downhill. It was only the new gamekeeper, but he had frightened Connie, he seemed to emerge with such a swift menace. That was how she had seen him, like a sudden rush of a threat out of nowhere.

He was a man in dark green velveteens and gaiters—the old style—with a red face and red moustache, and distant eyes. He was going quickly downhill.

“Mellors!” said Clifford.

The man faced lightly round, and saluted with a swift little gesture: a soldier!

“Will you turn the chair round and get it started. That makes it easier,” said Clifford.

The man at once slung his gun over his shoulder, and came forward, with the same curious swift, yet soft movements, as if keeping invisible. He was moderately tall, and lean; and silent. He did not look at Connie, only at the chair.

“Connie, this is the new gamekeeper Mellors. You haven’t spoken to her ladyship yet, Mellors?”

“No Sir!” came the ready, neutral words.

The man lifted his hat as he stood, showing his thick, almost fair hair. He was almost handsome without a hat. He stared straight into Connie’s eyes with a perfectly fearless, impersonal look, as if he wanted to see what she was like. He made her feel shy. She bent her head to him shyly, and he changed his hat to his left hand, and made her a slight bow, like a gentleman; but he said nothing at all. He remained for a moment still with his hat in his hand.

“But you’ve been here some time, haven’t you?” Connie said to him.

“Eight months, Madam—your ladyship!” he corrected himself calmly.

“And do you like it?”

She looked him in the eyes. His eyes narrowed a little, with irony, perhaps with impudence.

“Why yes, thank you, your ladyship! I was reared here—”

He gave another slight bow, turned, put his hat on, and strode to take hold of the chair. His voice, on the last words, had fallen into the

heavy broad drag of the dialect—perhaps also in mockery, because there had been no trace of dialect before. He might almost be a gentleman. Anyhow he was a curious, quick, separate fellow, alone but sure of himself.

Clifford started the little engine, the man carefully turned the chair and set it nose-forwards to the incline that curved gently to the dark hazel thicket.

“Is that all then, Sir Clifford?” said the man.

“No! You’d better come along, for fear she sticks. The engine isn’t really strong enough for the uphill work.”

The man glanced round for his dog—a quick, thoughtful glance. The spaniel looked at him and faintly moved her tail. A little smile, mocking or teasing her, yet gentle, came into his eyes for a moment, then faded away and his face was expressionless. They went fairly quickly down the slope, the man with his hand on the rail of the chair, steadying it. He looked like a free soldier rather than a servant. And something about him reminded Connie of Tommy Dukes.

When they came to the hazel grove Connie suddenly ran forward and opened the gate into the park. As she stood holding it, the two men looked at her in passing, Clifford critically, the other man with a curious cool wonder: impersonally wanting to see what she looked like. And she saw in his blue, impersonal eyes a look of suffering and detachment, yet a certain warmth. But why was he so aloof, apart?

Clifford stopped the chair, once through the gate, and the man came quickly, courteously, to close it.

“Why did you run to open?” said Clifford, in his quiet calm voice that showed he was displeased. “Mellors would have done it.”

“I thought you could go straight ahead,” said Connie.

“And leave you to run after us?” said Clifford.

“Oh well, I like to run sometimes!”

Mellors took the chair again, looking perfectly unheeding. Yet Connie felt he noted everything. As he pushed the chair up the steepish rise of the knoll in the park, he breathed rather quickly through parted lips. He was rather frail, really. Curiously full of vitality, but a little frail, and quenched. Her woman’s instinct sensed it.

Connie fell back, let the chair go on. The day had greyed over: the small blue sky that had poised low on its circular rims of haze was closed in again, the lid was down, there was a raw coldness. It was going to snow. All grey, all grey! The world looked worn out.

The chair waited at the top of the pink path. Clifford looked round for Connie.

"Not tired, are you?" he asked.

"Oh no!" she said.

But she was. A strange, weary yearning, a dissatisfaction had started in her. Clifford did not notice: those were not things he was aware of. But the stranger knew. To Connie, everything in her world and life seemed worn out, and her dissatisfaction was older than the hills.

They came to the house, and round to the back, where there were no steps. Clifford managed to swing himself over on to a low, wheeled house-chair: he was very strong and agile with his arms. Then Connie lifted his burden of dead legs after him.

The keeper, waiting at attention to be dismissed, watched everything narrowly, missing nothing. He went pale, with a sort of fear, when he saw Connie lifting the inert legs of the man in her arms, into the other chair, Clifford pivoting round as she did so. He was frightened.

"Thanks then for the help, Mellors," said Clifford casually, as he began to wheel down the passage through the servants' quarters.

"Nothing else, Sir?" came the neutral voice, like one in a dream.

"Nothing. Good morning."

"Good-morning Sir."

"Good morning! It was kind of you to push the chair up that hill—I hope it wasn't heavy for you," said Connie, looking back at the keeper outside the door.

His eyes came to hers in an instant, as if he wakened up. He was aware of her.

"Oh no, not heavy!" he said quickly. Then his voice dropped again into the broad sound of the vernacular: "Good mornin' to your ladyship!"

"Who is your gamekeeper?" Connie asked at lunch.

"Mellors! You saw him," said Clifford.

"Yes! But where did he come from?"

"Nowhere! He was a Tevershall boy—son of a collier, I believe."

"And was he a collier himself?"

"Blacksmith on the pit-bank, I believe: overhead smith. But he was keeper here for two years before the war—before he joined up. My father always had a good opinion of him, so when he came back and went to the pit for a blacksmith's job, I just took him back here as

keeper. I was really very glad to get him—it's almost impossible to find a good man round here, for a gamekeeper—and it needs a man who knows the people."

"And isn't he married?"

"He was! But the wife went off with—with various men—but finally with a collier at Stacks Gate, and I believe she's living there still."

"So this man is alone?"

"More or less! He has a mother in the village—and a child, I believe."

Clifford looked at Connie with his pale, slightly prominent blue eyes, in which a certain vagueness was coming. He seemed alert in the foreground, but the background was like the Midlands atmosphere, haze, smoky mist. And the haze seemed to be creeping forward. So when he stared at Connie in his peculiar way, giving her his peculiarly precise information, she felt all the background of his mind filling up with mist, with nothingness. And it frightened her. It made him seem impersonal almost to idiocy.

And dimly she realised one of the great laws of the human soul: that when the emotional soul receives a wounding shock, which does not kill the body, the soul seems to recover as the body recovers. But this is only appearance. It is, really, only the mechanism of re-assumed habit. Slowly, slowly the wound to the soul begins to make itself felt, like a bruise which only slowly deepens its terrible ache, till it fills all the psyche. And when we think we have recovered and forgotten, it is then that the terrible after-effects have to be encountered at their worst.

So it was with Clifford. Once he was "well," once he was back at Wragby, and writing his stories and feeling sure of life in spite of all, he seemed to forget, and to have recovered all his equanimity. But now, as the years went by, slowly, slowly Connie felt the bruise of fear and horror coming up and spreading in him. For a time it had been so deep as to be numb, as it were, non-existent. Now slowly it began to assert itself, in a spread of fear, almost paralysis. Mentally, he still was alert. But the paralysis, the bruise of the too-great shock was gradually spreading in his affective self.

And as it spread in him, Connie felt it spread in her. An inward dread, an emptiness, an indifference to everything gradually spread in her soul. When Clifford was roused, he could still talk brilliantly and, as it were, command the future: as when, in the wood, he talked

about her having a child and giving him an heir to Wragby. But the day after, all the brilliant words seemed like dead leaves, crumpling up and turning to powder, meaning really nothing, blown away on any gust of wind. They were not the leafy words of an effective life, young with energy and belonging to the tree. They were the hosts of fallen leaves of a life that is ineffectual.

So it seemed to her everywhere. The colliers at Tevershall were talking again of a strike. And it seemed to Connie there again, it was not a manifestation of energy, it was the bruise of the war, that had been in abeyance, slowly rising to the surface and creating the great ache of unrest, the stupor of discontent. The bruise was deep, deep, deep—the bruise of the false and inhuman war. It would take many years for the living blood of the generations to dissolve the vast black clot of bruised blood, deep inside their souls and bodies. And it would need a new hope.

Poor Connie! As the years drew on, it was the fear of nothingness in her life that affected her. Clifford's mental life, and hers—gradually it began to feel like nothingness. Their marriage, their integrated life based on a habit of intimacy, that he talked about: there were days when it all became utterly blank and nothing. It was words, just so many words. The only reality was nothingness, and over it, a hypocrisy of words.

There was Clifford's success: the bitch-goddess! It was true, he was almost famous, and his last book brought him in a thousand pounds. His photograph appeared everywhere. There was a bust of him in one of the galleries, and a portrait of him in two galleries. His seemed the most modern of modern voices, with his uncanny, lame instinct for publicity he had become, in four or five years, one of the best-known of the young "intellectuals." Where the intellect came in, Connie did not quite see. Clifford was really clever at that slightly humorous analysis of people and motives which leaves everything in bits at the end. But it was rather like puppies tearing the sofa-cushions to bits: except that it was not young and playful, but curiously old, and almost obscenely conceited. It was weird: and it was nothing. This was the feeling that echoed and re-echoed at the bottom of Connie's soul: it was all nothing, a wonderful display of nothingness. At the same time, a display. A display, a display, a display!

Michaelis had seized upon the figure of Clifford as a central figure for a play: already he had sketched in the plot, and written the first

act. For Michaelis was even better than Clifford at making a display of nothingness. It was the last bit of passion left in these men: the passion for making a display. Sexually, they were passionless, even dead. And now it was not money that Michaelis was after. Clifford had never been primarily out for money: though he made it where he could, for money is the seal and stamp of success. And success was what they wanted. They wanted, both of them, to make a real display—their display—a man's own very display, of himself, that should capture for the time the vast populace.

It was strange—the prostitution to the bitch-goddess. To Connie, since she was really outside of it, and since she had grown numb to the thrill of it, it was again nothingness. Even the prostitution to the bitch-goddess was nothingness, though the men prostituted themselves innumerable times. Nothingness even that.

Michaelis wrote to Clifford about the play. Of course Connie knew about it long ago. And Clifford was again thrilled. He was going to be displayed again: this time, somebody was going to display him, and to advantage. He invited Michaelis down to Wragby, with Act I.

Michaelis came: in summer, in a pale-coloured suit and white suède gloves, with mauve orchids for Connie, very lovely, and Act I. The reading of Act I. was a great success. Even Connie was thrilled—thrilled to what bit of marrow she had left. And Michaelis, thrilled by his power to thrill, was really wonderful—and quite beautiful, in Connie's eyes. She saw in him that ancient motionlessness of a race that can't be disillusioned any more, an extreme, perhaps, of impurity that is pure. On the far side of his supreme prostitution to the bitch-goddess, he seemed pure, pure as an African ivory mask that dreams impurity into purity, in its ivory curves and planes.

His moment of sheer thrill with the two Chatterleys, when he simply carried Connie and Clifford away, was one of the supreme moments of Michaelis' life. He had succeeded: he had carried them away. Even Clifford was momentarily in love with him—if that is the way one can put it.

So next morning Mick was more uneasy than ever: restless, devoured, with his hands restless in his trousers pockets. Connie had not visited him in the night—and he had not known where to find her. Coquetry!—at his moment of triumph.

He went up to her sitting-room in the morning. She knew he

this guest house this evening, I glanced back over my shoulder on a number of occasions and was met each time by a view of the sun setting behind that great spire.

And yet tonight, in the quiet of this room, I find that what really remains with me from this first day's travel is not Salisbury Cathedral, nor any of the other charming sights of this city, but rather that marvellous view encountered this morning of the rolling English countryside. Now I am quite prepared to believe that other countries can offer more obviously spectacular scenery. Indeed, I have seen in encyclopedias and the *National Geographic Magazine* breathtaking photographs of sights from various corners of the globe; magnificent canyons and waterfalls, raggedly beautiful mountains. It has never, of course, been my privilege to have seen such things at first hand, but I will nevertheless hazard this with some confidence: the English landscape at its finest – such as I saw it this morning – possesses a quality that the landscapes of other nations, however more superficially dramatic, inevitably fail to possess. It is, I believe, a quality that will mark out the English landscape to any objective observer as the most deeply satisfying in the world, and this quality is probably best summed up by the term 'greatness'. For it is true, when I stood on that high ledge this morning and viewed the land before me, I distinctly felt that rare, yet unmistakable feeling – the feeling that one is in the presence of greatness. We call this land of ours *Great Britain*, and there may be those who believe this a somewhat immodest practice. Yet I would venture that the landscape of our country alone would justify the use of this lofty adjective.

And yet what precisely is this 'greatness'? Just where, or in what, does it lie? I am quite aware it would take a far wiser head than mine to answer such a question, but if I were forced to hazard a guess, I would say that it is the very *lack* of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart. What is pertinent is the calmness of that beauty,

its sense of restraint. It is as though the land knows of its own beauty, of its own greatness, and feels no need to shout it. In comparison, the sorts of sights offered in such places as Africa and America, though undoubtedly very exciting, would, I am sure, strike the objective viewer as inferior on account of their unseemly demonstrativeness.

This whole question is very akin to the question that has caused much debate in our profession over the years: what is a 'great' butler? I can recall many hours of enjoyable discussion on this topic around the fire of the servants' hall at the end of a day. You will notice I say 'what' rather than 'who' is a great butler; for there was actually no serious dispute as to the identity of the men who set the standards amongst our generation. That is to say, I am talking of the likes of Mr Marshall of Charleville House, or Mr Lane of Bridewood. If you have ever had the privilege of meeting such men, you will no doubt know of the quality they possess to which I refer. But you will no doubt also understand what I mean when I say it is not at all easy to define just what this quality is.

Incidentally, now that I come to think further about it, it is not quite true to say there was no dispute as to *who* were the great butlers. What I should have said was that there was no serious dispute among professionals of quality who had any discernment in such matters. Of course, the servants' hall at Darlington Hall, like any servants' hall anywhere, was obliged to receive employees of varying degrees of intellect and perception, and I recall many a time having to bite my lip while some employee – and at times, I regret to say, members of my own staff – excitedly eulogized the likes of, say, Mr Jack Neighbours.

I have nothing against Mr Jack Neighbours, who sadly, I understand, was killed in the war. I mention him simply because his was a typical case. For two or three years in the mid-thirties, Mr Neighbours's name seemed to dominate conversations in every servants' hall in the land. As I say, at

Darlington Hall too, many a visiting employee would bring the latest tales of Mr Neighbours's achievements, so that I and the likes of Mr Graham would have to share the frustrating experience of hearing anecdote after anecdote relating to him. And most frustrating of all would be having to witness at the conclusion of each such anecdote otherwise decent employees shaking their heads in wonder and uttering phrases like: 'That Mr Neighbours, he really is the best.'

Now I do not doubt that Mr Neighbours had good organizational skills; he did, I understand, mastermind a number of large occasions with conspicuous style. But at no stage did he ever approach the status of a great butler. I could have told you this at the height of his reputation, just as I could have predicted his downfall after a few short years in the limelight.

How often have you known it for the butler who is on everyone's lips one day as the greatest of his generation to be proved demonstrably within a few years to have been nothing of the sort? And yet those very same employees who once heaped praise on him will be too busy eulogizing some new figure to stop and examine their sense of judgement. The object of this sort of servants' hall talk is invariably some butler who has come to the fore quite suddenly through having been appointed by a prominent house, and who has perhaps managed to pull off two or three large occasions with some success. There will then be all sorts of rumours buzzing through servants' halls up and down the country to the effect that he has been approached by this or that personage or that several of the highest houses are competing for his services with wildly high wages. And what has happened before a few years have passed? This same invincible figure has been held responsible for some blunder, or has for some other reason fallen out of favour with his employers, leaves the house where he came to fame and is never heard of again. Meanwhile,

those same gossipers will have found yet some other newcomer about whom to enthuse. Visiting valets, I have found, are often the worst offenders, aspiring as they usually do to the position of butler with some urgency. They it is who tend to be always insisting this or that figure is the one to emulate, or repeating what some particular hero is said to have pronounced upon professional matters.

But then, of course, I hasten to add, there are many valets who would never dream of indulging in this sort of folly – who are, in fact, professionals of the highest discernment. When two or three such persons were gathered together at our servants' hall – I mean of the calibre of, say, Mr Graham, with whom now, sadly, I seem to have lost touch – we would have some of the most stimulating and intelligent debates on every aspect of our vocation. Indeed, today, those evenings rank amongst my fondest memories from those times.

But let me return to the question that is of genuine interest, this question we so enjoyed debating when our evenings were not spoilt by chatter from those who lacked any fundamental understanding of the profession; that is to say, the question '*what* is a great butler?'

To the best of my knowledge, for all the talk this question has engendered over the years, there have been very few attempts within the profession to formulate an official answer. The only instance that comes to mind is the attempt of the Hayes Society to devise criteria for membership. You may not be aware of the Hayes Society, for few talk of it these days. But in the twenties and the early thirties, it exerted a considerable influence over much of London and the Home Counties. In fact, many felt its power had become too great and thought it no bad thing when it was forced to close, I believe in 1932 or 1933.

The Hayes Society claimed to admit butlers of 'only the very first rank'. Much of the power and prestige it went on

to gain derived from the fact that unlike other such organizations which have come and gone, it managed to keep its numbers extremely low, thus giving this claim some credibility. Membership, it was said, never at any point rose above thirty and much of the time remained closer to nine or ten. This, and the fact that the Hayes Society tended to be a rather secretive body, lent it much mystique for a time, ensuring that the pronouncements it occasionally issued on professional matters were received as though hewn on tablets of stone.

But one matter the Society resisted pronouncing on for some time was the question of its own criteria for membership. Pressure to have these announced steadily mounted, and in response to a series of letters published in *A Quarterly for the Gentleman's Gentleman*, the Society admitted that a prerequisite for membership was that 'an applicant be attached to a distinguished household'. 'Though of course,' the Society went on, 'this by itself is far from sufficient to satisfy requirements.' It was made clear, furthermore, that the Society did not regard the houses of businessmen or the 'newly rich' as 'distinguished', and in my opinion this piece of out-dated thinking crucially undermined any serious authority the Society may have achieved to arbitrate on standards in our profession. In response to further letters in *A Quarterly*, the Society justified its stance by saying that while it accepted some correspondents' views that certain butlers of excellent quality were to be found in the houses of businessmen, 'the assumption had to be that the houses of *true* ladies and gentlemen would not refrain long from acquiring the services of any such persons'. One had to be guided by the judgement of 'the true ladies and gentlemen', argued the Society, or else 'we may as well adopt the proprieties of Bolshevik Russia'. This provoked further controversy, and the pressure of letters continued to build up urging the Society to declare more fully its membership criteria. In the end, it was revealed in a

brief letter to *A Quarterly* that in the view of the Society – and I will try and quote accurately from memory – 'the most crucial criterion is that the applicant be possessed of a dignity in keeping with his position. No applicant will satisfy requirements, whatever his level of accomplishments otherwise, if seen to fall short in this respect.'

For all my lack of enthusiasm for the Hayes Society, it is my belief that this particular pronouncement at least was founded on a significant truth. If one looks at these persons we agree are 'great' butlers, if one looks at, say, Mr Marshall or Mr Lane, it does seem to me that the factor which distinguishes them from those butlers who are merely extremely competent is most closely captured by this word 'dignity'.

Of course, this merely begs the further question: of what is 'dignity' comprised? And it was on this point that the likes of Mr Graham and I had some of our most interesting debates. Mr Graham would always take the view that this 'dignity' was something like a woman's beauty and it was thus pointless to attempt to analyse it. I, on the other hand, held the opinion that to draw such a parallel tended to demean the 'dignity' of the likes of Mr Marshall. Moreover, my main objection to Mr Graham's analogy was the implication that this 'dignity' was something one possessed or did not by a fluke of nature; and if one did not self-evidently have it, to strive after it would be as futile as an ugly woman trying to make herself beautiful. Now while I would accept that the majority of butlers may well discover ultimately that they do not have the capacity for it, I believe strongly that this 'dignity' is something one can meaningfully strive for throughout one's career. Those 'great' butlers like Mr Marshall who have it, I am sure, acquired it over many years of self-training and the careful absorbing of experience. In my view, then, it was rather defeatist from a vocational standpoint to adopt a stance like Mr Graham's.

In any case, for all Mr Graham's scepticism, I can

remember he and I spending many evenings trying to put our fingers on the constitution of this 'dignity'. We never came to any agreement, but I can say for my part that I developed fairly firm ideas of my own on the matter during the course of such discussions, and they are by and large the beliefs I still hold today. I would like, if I may, to try and say here what I think this 'dignity' to be.

You will not dispute, I presume, that Mr Marshall of Charleville House and Mr Lane of Bridewood have been the two great butlers of recent times. Perhaps you might be persuaded that Mr Henderson of Branbury Castle also falls into this rare category. But you may think me merely biased if I say that my own father could in many ways be considered to rank with such men, and that his career is the one I have always scrutinized for a definition of 'dignity'. Yet it is my firm conviction that at the peak of his career at Loughborough House, my father was indeed the embodiment of 'dignity'.

I realize that if one looks at the matter objectively, one has to concede my father lacked various attributes one may normally expect in a great butler. But those same absent attributes, I would argue, are every time those of a superficial and decorative order, attributes that are attractive, no doubt, as icing on the cake, but are not pertaining to what is really essential. I refer to things such as good accent and command of language, general knowledge on wide-ranging topics such as falconing or newt-mating – attributes none of which my father could have boasted. Furthermore, it must be remembered that my father was a butler of an earlier generation who began his career at a time when such attributes were not considered proper, let alone desirable in a butler. The obsessions with eloquence and general knowledge would appear to be ones that emerged with our generation, probably in the wake of Mr Marshall, when lesser men trying to emulate his greatness mistook the superficial for the essence. It is my view that our generation

has been much too preoccupied with the 'trimmings'; goodness knows how much time and energy has gone into the practising of accent and command of language, how many hours spent studying encyclopedias and volumes of 'Test Your Knowledge', when the time should have been spent mastering the basic fundamentals.

Though we must be careful not to attempt to deny the responsibility which ultimately lies with ourselves, it has to be said that certain employers have done much to encourage these sorts of trends. I am sorry to say this, but there would appear to have been a number of houses in recent times, some of the highest pedigree, which have tended to take a competitive attitude towards each other and have not been above 'showing off' to guests a butler's mastery of such trivial accomplishments. I have heard of various instances of a butler being displayed as a kind of performing monkey at a house party. In one regrettable case, which I myself witnessed, it had become an established sport in the house for guests to ring for the butler and put to him random questions of the order of, say, who had won the Derby in such and such a year, rather as one might to a Memory Man at the music hall.

My father, as I say, came of a generation mercifully free of such confusions of our professional values. And I would maintain that for all his limited command of English and his limited general knowledge, he not only knew all there was to know about how to run a house, he did in his prime come to acquire that 'dignity in keeping with his position', as the Hayes Society puts it. If I try, then, to describe to you what I believe made my father thus distinguished, I may in this way convey my idea of what 'dignity' is.

There was a certain story my father was fond of repeating over the years. I recall listening to him tell it to visitors when I was a child, and then later, when I was starting out as a footman under his supervision. I remember him relating it again the first time I returned to see him after gaining my

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ONE

FOR A MAN of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well. On Thursday afternoons he drives to Green Point. Punctually at two p.m. he presses the buzzer at the entrance to Windsor Mansions, speaks his name, and enters. Waiting for him at the door of No. 113 is Soraya. He goes straight through to the bedroom, which is pleasant-smelling and softly lit, and undresses. Soraya emerges from the bathroom, drops her robe, slides into bed beside him. 'Have you missed me?' she asks. 'I miss you all the time,' he replies. He strokes her honey-brown body, unmarked by the sun; he stretches her out, kisses her breasts; they make love.

Soraya is tall and slim, with long black hair and dark, liquid eyes. Technically he is old enough to be her father; but then, technically, one can be a father at twelve. He has been on her books for over a year; he finds her entirely satisfactory. In the desert of the week Thursday has become an oasis of *luxe et volupté*.

In bed Soraya is not effusive. Her temperament is in fact rather quiet, quiet and docile. In her general opinions she is surprisingly moralistic. She is offended by tourists who bare their breasts ('udders', she calls them) on public beaches; she thinks vagabonds should be rounded up and put to work sweeping the streets. How she reconciles her opinions with her line of business he does not ask.

Because he takes pleasure in her, because his pleasure is unfailing, an affection has grown up in him for her. To some degree, he believes, this affection is reciprocated. Affection may not be love, but it is at least its cousin. Given their unpromising beginnings, they have been lucky, the two of them: he to have found her, she to have found him.

His sentiments are, he is aware, complacent, even uxorious. Nevertheless he does not cease to hold to them.

For a ninety-minute session he pays her R400, of which half goes to Discreet Escorts. It seems a pity that Discreet Escorts should get so much. But they own No. 113 and other flats in Windsor Mansions; in a sense they own Soraya too, this part of her, this function.

He has toyed with the idea of asking her to see him in her own time. He would like to spend an evening with her, perhaps even a whole night. But not the morning after. He knows too much about himself to subject her to a morning after, when he will be cold, surly, impatient to be alone.

That is his temperament. His temperament is not going to change, he is too old for that. His temperament is fixed, set. The skull, followed by the temperament: the two hardest parts of the body.

Follow your temperament. It is not a philosophy, he would not dignify it with that name. It is a rule, like the Rule of St Benedict.

He is in good health, his mind is clear. By profession he is, or has been, a scholar, and scholarship still engages, intermittently, the core of him. He lives within his income, within his temperament, within his emotional means. Is he happy? By most measurements, yes, he believes he is. However, he has not forgotten the last chorus of *Oedipus*: Call no man happy until he is dead.

In the field of sex his temperament, though intense, has never been passionate. Were he to choose a totem, it would be the snake. Intercourse between Soraya and himself must be, he imagines,

rather like the copulation of snakes: lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest.

Is Soraya's totem the snake too? No doubt with other men she becomes another woman: *la donna è mobile*. Yet at the level of temperament her affinity with him can surely not be feigned.

Though by occupation she is a loose woman he trusts her, within limits. During their sessions he speaks to her with a certain freedom, even on occasion unburdens himself. She knows the facts of his life. She has heard the stories of his two marriages, knows about his daughter and his daughter's ups and downs. She knows many of his opinions.

Of her life outside Windsor Mansions Soraya reveals nothing. Soraya is not her real name, that he is sure of. There are signs she has borne a child, or children. It may be that she is not a professional at all. She may work for the agency only one or two afternoons a week, and for the rest live a respectable life in the suburbs, in Rylands or Athlone. That would be unusual for a Muslim, but all things are possible these days.

About his own job he says little, not wanting to bore her. He earns his living at the Cape Technical University, formerly Cape Town University College. Once a professor of modern languages, he has been, since Classics and Modern Languages were closed down as part of the great rationalization, adjunct professor of communications. Like all rationalized personnel, he is allowed to offer one special-field course a year, irrespective of enrolment, because that is good for morale. This year he is offering a course in the Romantic poets. For the rest he teaches Communications 101, 'Communication Skills', and Communications 201, 'Advanced Communication Skills'.

Although he devotes hours of each day to his new discipline, he finds its first premise, as enunciated in the Communications 101 handbook, preposterous: 'Human society has created language in

order that we may communicate our thoughts, feelings and intentions to each other.' His own opinion, which he does not air, is that the origins of speech lie in song, and the origins of song in the need to fill out with sound the overlarge and rather empty human soul.

In the course of a career stretching back a quarter of a century he has published three books, none of which has caused a stir or even a ripple: the first on opera (*Boito and the Faust Legend: The Genesis of Mefistofele*), the second on vision as eros (*The Vision of Richard of St Victor*), the third on Wordsworth and history (*Wordsworth and the Burden of the Past*).

In the past few years he has been playing with the idea of a work on Byron. At first he had thought it would be another book, another critical opus. But all his sallies at writing it have bogged down in tedium. The truth is, he is tired of criticism, tired of prose measured by the yard. What he wants to write is music: *Byron in Italy*, a meditation on love between the sexes in the form of a chamber opera.

Through his mind, while he faces his Communications classes, flit phrases, tunes, fragments of song from the unwritten work. He has never been much of a teacher; in this transformed and, to his mind, emasculated institution of learning he is more out of place than ever. But then, so are other of his colleagues from the old days, burdened with upbringings inappropriate to the tasks they are set to perform; clerks in a post-religious age.

Because he has no respect for the material he teaches, he makes no impression on his students. They look through him when he speaks, forget his name. Their indifference galls him more than he will admit. Nevertheless he fulfils to the letter his obligations toward them, their parents, and the state. Month after month he sets, collects, reads, and annotates their assignments, correcting lapses in punctuation, spelling and usage, interrogating weak

arguments, appending to each paper a brief, considered critique.

He continues to teach because it provides him with a livelihood; also because it teaches him humility, brings it home to him who he is in the world. The irony does not escape him: that the one who comes to teach learns the keenest of lessons, while those who come to learn learn nothing. It is a feature of his profession on which he does not remark to Soraya. He doubts there is an irony to match it in hers.

In the kitchen of the flat in Green Point there are a kettle, plastic cups, a jar of instant coffee, a bowl with sachets of sugar. The refrigerator holds a supply of bottled water. In the bathroom there is soap and a pile of towels, in the cupboard clean bedlinen. Soraya keeps her makeup in an overnight bag. A place of assignation, nothing more, functional, clean, well regulated.

The first time Soraya received him she wore vermilion lipstick and heavy eyeshadow. Not liking the stickiness of the makeup, he asked her to wipe it off. She obeyed, and has never worn it since. A ready learner, compliant, pliant.

He likes giving her presents. At New Year he gave her an enamelled bracelet, at Eid a little malachite heron that caught his eye in a curio shop. He enjoys her pleasure, which is quite unaffected.

It surprises him that ninety minutes a week of a woman's company are enough to make him happy, who used to think he needed a wife, a home, a marriage. His needs turn out to be quite light, after all, light and fleeting, like those of a butterfly. No emotion, or none but the deepest, the most unguessed-at: a ground bass of contentedness, like the hum of traffic that lulls the city-dweller to sleep, or like the silence of the night to countryfolk.

He thinks of Emma Bovary, coming home sated, glazen-eyed, from an afternoon of reckless fucking. *So this is bliss!*, says Emma,

marvelling at herself in the mirror. *So this is the bliss the poets speak of!* Well, if poor ghostly Emma were ever to find her way to Cape Town, he would bring her along one Thursday afternoon to show her what bliss can be: a moderate bliss, a moderated bliss.

Then one Saturday morning everything changes. He is in the city on business; he is walking down St George's Street when his eyes fall on a slim figure ahead of him in the crowd. It is Soraya, unmistakably, flanked by two children, two boys. They are carrying parcels; they have been shopping.

He hesitates, then follows at a distance. They disappear into Captain Dorego's Fish Inn. The boys have Soraya's lustrous hair and dark eyes. They can only be her sons.

He walks on, turns back, passes Captain Dorego's a second time. The three are seated at a table in the window. For an instant, through the glass, Soraya's eyes meet his.

He has always been a man of the city, at home amid a flux of bodies where eros stalks and glances flash like arrows. But this glance between himself and Soraya he regrets at once.

At their rendezvous the next Thursday neither mentions the incident. Nonetheless, the memory hangs uneasily over them. He has no wish to upset what must be, for Soraya, a precarious double life. He is all for double lives, triple lives, lives lived in compartments. Indeed, he feels, if anything, greater tenderness for her. *Your secret is safe with me*, he would like to say.

But neither he nor she can put aside what has happened. The two little boys become presences between them, playing quiet as shadows in a corner of the room where their mother and the strange man couple. In Soraya's arms he becomes, fleetingly, their father: foster-father, step-father, shadow-father. Leaving her bed afterwards, he feels their eyes flicker over him covertly, curiously.

His thoughts turn, despite himself, to the other father, the real

one. Does he have any inkling of what his wife is up to, or has he elected the bliss of ignorance?

He himself has no son. His childhood was spent in a family of women. As mother, aunts, sisters fell away, they were replaced in due course by mistresses, wives, a daughter. The company of women made of him a lover of women and, to an extent, a womanizer. With his height, his good bones, his olive skin, his flowing hair, he could always count on a degree of magnetism. If he looked at a woman in a certain way, with a certain intent, she would return his look, he could rely on that. That was how he lived; for years, for decades, that was the backbone of his life.

Then one day it all ended. Without warning his powers fled. Glances that would once have responded to his slid over, past, through him. Overnight he became a ghost. If he wanted a woman he had to learn to pursue her; often, in one way or another, to buy her.

He existed in an anxious flurry of promiscuity. He had affairs with the wives of colleagues; he picked up tourists in bars on the waterfront or at the Club Italia; he slept with whores.

His introduction to Soraya took place in a dim little sitting-room off the front office of Discreet Escorts, with Venetian blinds over the windows, pot plants in the corners, stale smoke hanging in the air. She was on their books under 'Exotic'. The photograph showed her with a red passion-flower in her hair and the faintest of lines at the corners of her eyes. The entry said 'Afternoons only'. That was what decided him: the promise of shuttered rooms, cool sheets, stolen hours.

From the beginning it was satisfactory, just what he wanted. A bull's eye. In a year he has not needed to go back to the agency.

Then the accident in St George's Street, and the strangeness that has followed. Though Soraya still keeps her appointments, he feels a growing coolness as she transforms herself into just another woman and him into just another client.

He has a shrewd idea of how prostitutes speak among themselves about the men who frequent them, the older men in particular. They tell stories, they laugh, but they shudder too, as one shudders at a cockroach in a washbasin in the middle of the night. Soon, daintily, maliciously, he will be shuddered over. It is a fate he cannot escape.

On the fourth Thursday after the incident, as he is leaving the apartment, Soraya makes the announcement he has been steeling himself against. 'My mother is ill. I'm going to take a break to look after her. I won't be here next week.'

'Will I see you the week after?'

'I'm not sure. It depends on how she gets on. You had better phone first.'

'I don't have a number.'

'Phone the agency. They'll know.'

He waits a few days, then telephones the agency. Soraya? Soraya has left us, says the man. No, we cannot put you in touch with her, that would be against house rules. Would you like an introduction to another of our hostesses? Lots of exotics to choose from – Malaysian, Thai, Chinese, you name it.

He spends an evening with another Soraya – Soraya has become, it seems, a popular *nom de commerce* – in a hotel room in Long Street. This one is no more than eighteen, unpractised, to his mind coarse. 'So what do you do?' she says as she slips off her clothes. 'Export-import,' he says. 'You don't say,' she says.

There is a new secretary in his department. He takes her to lunch at a restaurant a discreet distance from the campus and listens while, over shrimp salad, she complains about her sons' school. Drug-pedlars hang around the playing-fields, she says, and the police do nothing. For the past three years she and her husband have had their name on a list at the New Zealand consulate, to emigrate. 'You people had it easier. I mean,

whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation, at least you knew where you were.'

'You people?' he says. 'What people?'

'I mean your generation. Now people just pick and choose which laws they want to obey. It's anarchy. How can you bring up children when there's anarchy all around?'

Her name is Dawn. The second time he takes her out they stop at his house and have sex. It is a failure. Bucking and clawing, she works herself into a froth of excitement that in the end only repels him. He lends her a comb, drives her back to the campus.

After that he avoids her, taking care to skirt the office where she works. In return she gives him a hurt look, then snubs him.

He ought to give up, retire from the game. At what age, he wonders, did Origen castrate himself? Not the most graceful of solutions, but then ageing is not a graceful business. A clearing of the decks, at least, so that one can turn one's mind to the proper business of the old: preparing to die.

Might one approach a doctor and ask for it? A simple enough operation, surely: they do it to animals every day, and animals survive well enough, if one ignores a certain residue of sadness. Severing, tying off: with local anaesthetic and a steady hand and a modicum of phlegm one might even do it oneself, out of a textbook. A man on a chair snipping away at himself: an ugly sight, but no more ugly, from a certain point of view, than the same man exercising himself on the body of a woman.

There is still Soraya. He ought to close that chapter. Instead, he pays a detective agency to track her down. Within days he has her real name, her address, her telephone number. He telephones at nine in the morning, when the husband and children will be out. 'Soraya?' he says. 'This is David. How are you? When can I see you again?'

A long silence before she speaks. 'I don't know who you are,'

she says. 'You are harassing me in my own house. I demand you will never phone me here again, never.'

Demand. She means *command*. Her shrillness surprises him: there has been no intimation of it before. But then, what should a predator expect when he intrudes into the vixen's nest, into the home of her cubs?

He puts down the telephone. A shadow of envy passes over him for the husband he has never seen.

TWO

WITHOUT THE Thursday interludes the week is as featureless as a desert. There are days when he does not know what to do with himself.

He spends more time in the university library, reading all he can find on the wider Byron circle, adding to notes that already fill two fat files. He enjoys the late-afternoon quiet of the reading room, enjoys the walk home afterwards: the brisk winter air, the damp, gleaming streets.

He is returning home one Friday evening, taking the long route through the old college gardens, when he notices one of his students on the path ahead of him. Her name is Melanie Isaacs, from his Romantics course. Not the best student but not the worst either: clever enough, but unengaged.

She is dawdling; he soon catches up with her. 'Hello,' he says.

She smiles back, bobbing her head, her smile sly rather than shy. She is small and thin, with close-cropped black hair, wide, almost Chinese cheekbones, large, dark eyes. Her outfits are always striking. Today she wears a maroon miniskirt with a mustard-coloured sweater and black tights; the gold baubles on her belt match the gold balls of her earrings.

He is mildly smitten with her. It is no great matter: barely a term