The Trespasser

By

D.H. Lawrence

Chapter 1

'Take off that mute, do!' cried Louisa, snatching her fingers from the piano keys, and turning abruptly to the violinist.

Helena looked slowly from her music.

'My dear Louisa,' she replied, 'it would be simply unendurable.' She stood tapping her white skirt with her bow in a kind of a pathetic forbearance.

'But I can't understand it,' cried Louisa, bouncing on her chair with the exaggeration of one who is indignant with a beloved. 'It is only lately you would even submit to muting your violin. At one time you would have refused flatly, and no doubt about it.'

'I have only lately submitted to many things,' replied Helena, who seemed weary and stupefied, but still sententious. Louisa drooped from her bristling defiance.

'At any rate,' she said, scolding in tones too naked with love, I don't like it.'

'Go on from Allegro,' said Helena, pointing with her bow to the place on Louisa's score of the Mozart sonata. Louisa obediently took the

chords, and the music continued.

A young man, reclining in one of the wicker arm-chairs by the fire, turned luxuriously from the girls to watch the flames poise and dance with the music. He was evidently at his ease, yet he seemed a stranger in the room.

It was the sitting-room of a mean house standing in line with hundreds of others of the same kind, along a wide road in South London. Now and again the trams hummed by, but the room was foreign to the trams and to the sound of the London traffic. It was Helena's room, for which she was responsible. The walls were of the dead-green colour of August foliage; the green carpet, with its border of polished floor, lay like a square of grass in a setting of black loam. Ceiling and frieze and fireplace were smooth white. There was no other colouring.

The furniture, excepting the piano, had a transitory look; two light wicker arm-chairs by the fire, the two frail stands of dark, polished wood, the couple of flimsy chairs, and the case of books in the recess--all seemed uneasy, as if they might be tossed out to leave the room clear, with its green floor and walls, and its white rim of skirting-board, serene.

On the mantlepiece were white lustres, and a small soapstone Buddha from China, grey, impassive, locked in his renunciation. Besides these, two tablets of translucent stone beautifully clouded with rose and blood,

and carved with Chinese symbols; then a litter of mementoes, rock-crystals, and shells and scraps of seaweed.

A stranger, entering, felt at a loss. He looked at the bare wall-spaces of dark green, at the scanty furniture, and was assured of his

unwelcome. The only objects of sympathy in the room were the white lamp that glowed on a stand near the wall, and the large, beautiful fern, with narrow fronds, which ruffled its cloud of green within the gloom of the window-bay. These only, with the fire, seemed friendly.

The three candles on the dark piano burned softly, the music fluttered on, but, like numbed butterflies, stupidly. Helena played mechanically. She broke the music beneath her bow, so that it came lifeless, very hurting to hear. The young man frowned, and pondered. Uneasily, he turned again to the players.

The violinist was a girl of twenty-eight. Her white dress, high-waisted, swung as she forced the rhythm, determinedly swaying to the time as if her body were the white stroke of a metronome. It made the young man frown as he watched. Yet he continued to watch. She had a very strong, vigorous body. Her neck, pure white, arched in strength from the fine hollow between her shoulders as she held the violin. The long white lace of her sleeve swung, floated, after the bow.

Byrne could not see her face, more than the full curve of her cheek. He

watched her hair, which at the back was almost of the colour of the soapstone idol, take the candlelight into its vigorous freedom in front and glisten over her forehead.

Suddenly Helena broke off the music, and dropped her arm in irritable resignation. Louisa looked round from the piano, surprised.

'Why,' she cried, 'wasn't it all right?'

Helena laughed wearily.

'It was all wrong,' she answered, as she put her violin tenderly to rest.

'Oh, I'm sorry I did so badly,' said Louisa in a huff. She loved Helena passionately.

'You didn't do badly at all,' replied her friend, in the same tired, apathetic tone. 'It was I.'

When she had closed the black lid of her violin-case, Helena stood a moment as if at a loss. Louisa looked up with eyes full of affection, like a dog that did not dare to move to her beloved. Getting no response, she drooped over the piano. At length Helena looked at her friend, then slowly closed her eyes. The burden of this excessive affection was too much for her. Smiling faintly, she said, as if she

were coaxing a child:

'Play some Chopin, Louisa.'

'I shall only do that all wrong, like everything else,' said the elder plaintively. Louisa was thirty-five. She had been Helena's friend for years.

'Play the mazurkas,' repeated Helena calmly.

Louisa rummaged among the music. Helena blew out her violin-candle, and came to sit down on the side of the fire opposite to Byrne. The music began. Helena pressed her arms with her hands, musing.

'They are inflamed still' said the young man.

She glanced up suddenly, her blue eyes, usually so heavy and tired, lighting up with a small smile.

'Yes,' she answered, and she pushed back her sleeve, revealing a fine, strong arm, which was scarlet on the outer side from shoulder to wrist, like some long, red-burned fruit. The girl laid her cheek on the smarting soft flesh caressively.

'It is quite hot,' she smiled, again caressing her sun-scalded arm with peculiar joy.

'Funny to see a sunburn like that in mid-winter,' he replied, frowning. 'I can't think why it should last all these months. Don't you ever put anything on to heal it?'

She smiled at him again, almost pitying, then put her mouth lovingly on the burn.

'It comes out every evening like this,' she said softly, with curious joy.

'And that was August, and now it's February!' he exclaimed. 'It must be psychological, you know. You make it come--the smart; you invoke it.'

She looked up at him, suddenly cold.

'I! I never think of it,' she answered briefly, with a kind of sneer.

The young man's blood ran back from her at her acid tone. But the mortification was physical only. Smiling quickly, gently--'

'Never?' he re-echoed.

There was silence between them for some moments, whilst Louisa continued to play the piano for their benefit. At last:

'Drat it,' she exclaimed, flouncing round on the piano-stool.

The two looked up at her.

'Ye did run well--what hath hindered you?' laughed Byrne.

'You!' cried Louisa. 'Oh, I can't play any more,' she added, dropping her arms along her skirt pathetically. Helena laughed quickly.

'Oh I can't, Helen!' pleaded Louisa.

'My dear,' said Helena, laughing briefly, 'you are really under no obligation whatever.'

With the little groan of one who yields to a desire contrary to her self-respect, Louisa dropped at the feet of Helena, laid her arm and her head languishingly on the knee of her friend. The latter gave no sign, but continued to gaze in the fire. Byrne, on the other side of the hearth, sprawled in his chair, smoking a reflective cigarette.

The room was very quiet, silent even of the tick of a clock. Outside, the traffic swept by, and feet pattered along the pavement. But this vulgar storm of life seemed shut out of Helena's room, that remained indifferent, like a church. Two candles burned dimly as on an altar, glistening yellow on the dark piano. The lamp was blown out, and the flameless fire, a red rubble, dwindled in the grate, so that the yellow

glow of the candles seemed to shine even on the embers. Still no one spoke.

At last Helena shivered slightly in her chair, though did not change her position. She sat motionless.

'Will you make coffee, Louisa?' she asked. Louisa lifted herself, looked at her friend, and stretched slightly.

'Oh!' she groaned voluptuously. 'This is so comfortable!'

'Don't trouble then, I'll go. No, don't get up,' said Helena, trying to disengage herself. Louisa reached and put her hands on Helena's wrists.

'I will go,' she drawled, almost groaning with voluptuousness and appealing love.

Then, as Helena still made movements to rise, the elder woman got up slowly, leaning as she did so all her weight on her friend.

'Where is the coffee?' she asked, affecting the dullness of lethargy. She was full of small affectations, being consumed with uneasy love.

'I think, my dear,' replied Helena, 'it is in its usual place.'

'Oh--o-o-oh!' yawned Louisa, and she dragged herself out.

The two had been intimate friends for years, had slept together, and played together and lived together. Now the friendship was coming to an end.

'After all,' said Byrne, when the door was closed, 'if you're alive you've got to live.'

Helena burst into a titter of amusement at this sudden remark.

'Wherefore?' she asked indulgently.

'Because there's no such thing as passive existence,' he replied, grinning.

She curled her lip in amused indulgence of this very young man.

'I don't see it at all,' she said.

'You can't, he protested, 'any more than a tree can help budding in April--it can't help itself, if it's alive; same with you.'

'Well, then'--and again there was the touch of a sneer--'if I can't help myself, why trouble, my friend?'

'Because--because I suppose I can't help myself--if it bothers me, it

does. You see, I'--he smiled brilliantly--'am April.'

She paid very little attention to him, but began in a peculiar reedy, metallic tone, that set his nerves quivering:

'But I am not a bare tree. All my dead leaves, they hang to me--and--and go through a kind of danse macabre--'

'But you bud underneath--like beech,' he said quickly.

'Really, my friend,' she said coldly, 'I am too tired to bud.'

'No,' he pleaded, 'no!' With his thick brows knitted, he surveyed her anxiously. She had received a great blow in August, and she still was stunned. Her face, white and heavy, was like a mask, almost sullen. She looked in the fire, forgetting him.

'You want March,' he said--he worried endlessly over her--'to rip off your old leaves. I s'll have to be March,' he laughed.

She ignored him again because of his presumption. He waited awhile, then broke out once more.

'You must start again--you must. Always you rustle your red leaves of a blasted summer. You are not dead. Even if you want to be, you're not. Even if it's a bitter thing to say, you have to say it: you are

not dead....'

Smiling a peculiar, painful smile, as if he hurt her, she turned to gaze at a photograph that hung over the piano. It was the profile of a handsome man in the prime of life. He was leaning slightly forward, as if yielding beneath a burden of life, or to the pull of fate. He looked out musingly, and there was no hint of rebellion in the contours of the regular features. The hair was brushed back, soft and thick, straight from his fine brow. His nose was small and shapely, his chin rounded, cleft, rather beautifully moulded. Byrne gazed also at the photo. His look became distressed and helpless.

'You cannot say you are dead with Siegmund,' he cried brutally. She shuddered, clasped her burning arms on her breast, and looked into the fire. 'You are not dead with Siegmund,' he persisted, 'so you can't say you live with him. You may live with his memory. But Siegmund is dead, and his memory is not he--himself,' He made a fierce gesture of impatience. 'Siegmund now--he is not a memory--he is not your dead red leaves--he is Siegmund Dead! And you do not know him, because you are alive, like me, so Siegmund Dead is a stranger to you.'

With her head bowed down, cowering like a sulky animal, she looked at him under her brows. He stared fiercely back at her, but beneath her steady, glowering gaze he shrank, then turned aside.

'You stretch your hands blindly to the dead; you look backwards. No, you

never touch the thing,' he cried.

'I have the arms of Louisa always round my neck,' came her voice, like the cry of a cat. She put her hands on her throat as if she must relieve an ache. He saw her lip raised in a kind of disgust, a revulsion from life. She was very sick after the tragedy.

He frowned, and his eyes dilated.

'Folk are good; they are good for one. You never have looked at them. You would linger hours over a blue weed, and let all the people down the road go by. Folks are better than a garden in full blossom--'

She watched him again. A certain beauty in his speech, and his passionate way, roused her when she did not want to be roused, when moving from her torpor was painful. At last--

'You are merciless, you know, Cecil,' she said.

'And I will be,' protested Byrne, flinging his hand at her. She laughed softly, wearily.

For some time they were silent. She gazed once more at the photograph over the piano, and forgot all the present. Byrne, spent for the time being, was busy hunting for some life-interest to give her. He ignored the simplest--that of love--because he was even more faithful than she

to the memory of Siegmund, and blinder than most to his own heart.

'I do wish I had Siegmund's violin,' she said quietly, but with great intensity. Byrne glanced at her, then away. His heart beat sulkily. His sanguine, passionate spirit dropped and slouched under her contempt. He, also, felt the jar, heard the discord. She made him sometimes pant with her own horror. He waited, full of hate and tasting of ashes, for the arrival of Louisa with the coffee.