

## Chapter 4

The gold march of sunset passed quickly, the ragged curtains of mist closed to. Soon Siegmund and Helena were shut alone within the dense wide fog. She shivered with the cold and the damp. Startled, he took her in his arms, where she lay and clung to him. Holding her closely, he bent forward, straight to her lips. His moustache was drenched cold with fog, so that she shuddered slightly after his kiss, and shuddered again. He did not know why the strong tremor passed through her. Thinking it was with fear and with cold, he undid his overcoat, put her close on his breast, and covered her as best he could. That she feared him at that moment was half pleasure, half shame to him. Pleadingly he hid his face on her shoulder, held her very tightly, till his face grew hot, buried against her soft strong throat.

'You are so big I can't hold you,' she whispered plaintively, catching her breath with fear. Her small hands grasped at the breadth of his shoulders ineffectually.

'You will be cold. Put your hands under my coat,' he whispered.

He put her inside his overcoat and his coat. She came to his warm breast with a sharp intaking of delight and fear; she tried to make her hands meet in the warmth of his shoulders, tried to clasp him.

'See! I can't,' she whispered.

He laughed short, and pressed her closer.

Then, tucking her head in his breast, hiding her face, she timidly slid her hands along his sides, pressing softly, to find the contours of his figure. Softly her hands crept over the silky back of his waistcoat, under his coats, and as they stirred, his blood flushed up, and up again, with fire, till all Siegmund was hot blood, and his breast was one great ache.

He crushed her to him--crushed her in upon the ache of his chest. His muscles set hard and unyielding; at that moment he was a tense, vivid body of flesh, without a mind; his blood, alive and conscious, running towards her. He remained perfectly still, locked about Helena, conscious of nothing.

She was hurt and crushed, but it was pain delicious to her. It was marvellous to her how strong he was, to keep up that grip of her like steel. She swooned in a kind of intense bliss. At length she found herself released, taking a great breath, while Siegmund was moving his mouth over her throat, something like a dog snuffing her, but with his lips. Her heart leaped away in revulsion. His moustache thrilled her strangely. His lips, brushing and pressing her throat beneath the ear, and his warm breath flying rhythmically upon her, made her vibrate through all her body. Like a violin under the bow, she thrilled beneath

his mouth, and shuddered from his moustache. Her heart was like fire in her breast.

Suddenly she strained madly to him, and, drawing back her head, placed her lips on his, close, till at the mouth they seemed to melt and fuse together. It was the long, supreme kiss, in which man and woman have one being, Two-in-one, the only Hermaphrodite.

When Helena drew away her lips, she was exhausted. She belonged to that class of 'dreaming women' with whom passion exhausts itself at the mouth. Her desire was accomplished in a real kiss. The fire, in heavy flames, had poured through her to Siegmund, from Siegmund to her. It sank, and she felt herself flagging. She had not the man's brightness and vividness of blood. She lay upon his breast, dreaming how beautiful it would be to go to sleep, to swoon unconscious there, on that rare bed. She lay still on Siegmund's breast, listening to his heavily beating heart.

With her the dream was always more than the actuality. Her dream of Siegmund was more to her than Siegmund himself. He might be less than her dream, which is as it may be. However, to the real man she was very cruel.

He held her close. His dream was melted in his blood, and his blood ran bright for her. His dreams were the flowers of his blood. Hers were more detached and inhuman. For centuries a certain type of woman has been

rejecting the 'animal' in humanity, till now her dreams are abstract, and full of fantasy, and her blood runs in bondage, and her kindness is full of cruelty.

Helena lay flagging upon the breast of Siegmund. He folded her closely, and his mouth and his breath were warm on her neck. She sank away from his caresses, passively, subtly drew back from him. He was far too sensitive not to be aware of this, and far too much of a man not to yield to the woman. His heart sank, his blood grew sullen at her withdrawal. Still he held her; the two were motionless and silent for some time.

She became distressedly conscious that her feet, which lay on the wet grass, were aching with cold. She said softly, gently, as if he was her child whom she must correct and lead:

'I think we ought to go home, Siegmund.' He made a small sound, that might mean anything, but did not stir or release her. His mouth, however, remained motionless on her throat, and the caress went out of it.

'It is cold and wet, dear; we ought to go,' she coaxed determinedly.

'Soon,' he said thickly.

She sighed, waited a moment, then said very gently, as if she were loath

to take him from his pleasure:

'Siegmond, I am cold.'

There was a reproach in this which angered him.

'Cold!' he exclaimed. 'But you are warm with me--'

'But my feet are out on the grass, dear, and they are like wet pebbles.'

'Oh dear!' he said. 'Why didn't you give them me to warm?' He leaned forward, and put his hand on her shoes.

'They are very cold,' he said. 'We must hurry and make them warm.'

When they rose, her feet were so numbed she could hardly stand. She clung to Siegmund, laughing.

'I wish you had told me before,' he said. 'I ought to have known....'

Vexed with himself, he put his arm round her, and they set off home.