CHAPTER VIII

THE CHILD

From the first, the baby stirred in the young father a deep, strong emotion he dared scarcely acknowledge, it was so strong and came out of the dark of him. When he heard the child cry, a terror possessed him, because of the answering echo from the unfathomed distances in himself. Must he know in himself such distances, perilous and imminent?

He had the infant in his arms, he walked backwards and forwards troubled by the crying of his own flesh and blood. This was his own flesh and blood crying! His soul rose against the voice suddenly breaking out from him, from the distances in him.

Sometimes in the night, the child cried and cried, when the night was heavy and sleep oppressed him. And half asleep, he stretched out his hand to put it over the baby's face to stop the crying. But something arrested his hand: the very inhumanness of the intolerable, continuous crying arrested him. It was so impersonal, without cause or object. Yet he echoed to it directly, his soul answered its madness. It filled him with terror, almost with frenzy.

He learned to acquiesce to this, to submit to the awful, obliterated sources which were the origin of his living tissue. He was not what he conceived himself to be! Then he was what he was, unknown, potent, dark.

He became accustomed to the child, he knew how to lift and balance the little body. The baby had a beautiful, rounded head that moved him passionately. He would have fought to the last drop to defend that exquisite, perfect round head.

He learned to know the little hands and feet, the strange, unseeing, golden-brown eyes, the mouth that opened only to cry, or to suck, or to show a queer, toothless laugh. He could almost understand even the dangling legs, which at first had created in him a feeling of aversion. They could kick in their queer little way, they had their own softness.

One evening, suddenly, he saw the tiny, living thing rolling naked in the mother's lap, and he was sick, it was so utterly helpless and vulnerable and extraneous; in a world of hard surfaces and varying altitudes, it lay vulnerable and naked at every point. Yet it was quite blithe. And yet, in its blind, awful crying, was there not the blind, far-off terror of its own vulnerable nakedness, the terror of being so utterly delivered over, helpless at every point. He could not bear to hear it crying. His heart strained and stood on guard against the whole

universe.

But he waited for the dread of these days to pass; he saw the joy coming. He saw the lovely, creamy, cool little ear of the baby, a bit of dark hair rubbed to a bronze floss, like bronze-dust. And he waited, for the child to become his, to look at him and answer him.

It had a separate being, but it was his own child. His flesh and blood vibrated to it. He caught the baby to his breast with his passionate, clapping laugh. And the infant knew him.

As the newly-opened, newly-dawned eyes looked at him, he wanted them to perceive him, to recognize him. Then he was verified. The child knew him, a queer contortion of laughter came on its face for him. He caught it to his breast, clapping with a triumphant laugh.

The golden-brown eyes of the child gradually lit up and dilated at the sight of the dark-glowing face of the youth. It knew its mother better, it wanted its mother more. But the brightest, sharpest little ecstasy was for the father.

It began to be strong, to move vigorously and freely, to make sounds like words. It was a baby girl now. Already it knew his strong hands, it exulted in his strong clasp, it laughed and

crowed when he played with it.

And his heart grew red--hot with passionate feeling for the child. She was not much more than a year old when the second baby was born. Then he took Ursula for his own. She his first little girl. He had set his heart on her.

The second had dark blue eyes and a fair skin: it was more a Brangwen, people said. The hair was fair. But they forgot Anna's stiff blonde fleece of childhood. They called the newcomer Gudrun.

This time, Anna was stronger, and not so eager. She did not mind that the baby was not a boy. It was enough that she had milk and could suckle her child: Oh, oh, the bliss of the little life sucking the milk of her body! Oh, oh, oh the bliss, as the infant grew stronger, of the two tiny hands clutching, catching blindly yet passionately at her breast, of the tiny mouth seeking her in blind, sure, vital knowledge, of the sudden consummate peace as the little body sank, the mouth and throat sucking, sucking, sucking, drinking life from her to make a new life, almost sobbing with passionate joy of receiving its own existence, the tiny hands clutching frantically as the nipple was drawn back, not to be gainsaid. This was enough for Anna. She seemed to pass off into a kind of rapture of motherhood, her rapture of motherhood was everything.

So that the father had the elder baby, the weaned child, the golden-brown, wondering vivid eyes of the little Ursula were for him, who had waited behind the mother till the need was for him. The mother felt a sharp stab of jealousy. But she was still more absorbed in the tiny baby. It was entirely hers, its need was direct upon her.

So Ursula became the child of her father's heart. She was the little blossom, he was the sun. He was patient, energetic, inventive for her. He taught her all the funny little things, he filled her and roused her to her fullest tiny measure. She answered him with her extravagant infant's laughter and her call of delight.

Now there were two babies, a woman came in to do the housework. Anna was wholly nurse. Two babies were not too much for her. But she hated any form of work, now her children had come, except the charge of them.

When Ursula toddled about, she was an absorbed, busy child, always amusing herself, needing not much attention from other people. At evening, towards six o'clock, Anna very often went across the lane to the stile, lifted Ursula over into the field, with a: "Go and meet Daddy." Then Brangwen, coming up the steep round of the hill, would see before him on the brow of the path

a tiny, tottering, windblown little mite with a dark head, who, as soon as she saw him, would come running in tiny, wild, windmill fashion, lifting her arms up and down to him, down the steep hill. His heart leapt up, he ran his fastest to her, to catch her, because he knew she would fall. She came fluttering on, wildly, with her little limbs flying. And he was glad when he caught her up in his arms. Once she fell as she came flying to him, he saw her pitch forward suddenly as she was running with her hands lifted to him; and when he picked her up, her mouth was bleeding. He could never bear to think of it, he always wanted to cry, even when he was an old man and she had become a stranger to him. How he loved that little Ursula!--his heart had been sharply seared for her, when he was a youth, first married.

When she was a little older, he would see her recklessly climbing over the bars of the stile, in her red pinafore, swinging in peril and tumbling over, picking herself up and flitting towards him. Sometimes she liked to ride on his shoulder, sometimes she preferred to walk with his hand, sometimes she would fling her arms round his legs for a moment, then race free again, whilst he went shouting and calling to her, a child along with her. He was still only a tall, thin, unsettled lad of twenty-two.

It was he who had made her her cradle, her little chair, her

little stool, her high chair. It was he who would swing her up to table or who would make for her a doll out of an old table-leg, whilst she watched him, saying:

"Make her eyes, Daddy, make her eyes!"

And he made her eyes with his knife.

She was very fond of adorning herself, so he would tie a piece of cotton round her ear, and hang a blue bead on it underneath for an ear-ring. The ear-rings varied with a red bead, and a golden bead, and a little pearl bead. And as he came home at night, seeing her bridling and looking very self-conscious, he took notice and said:

"So you're wearing your best golden and pearl ear-rings, to-day?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you've been to see the queen?"

"Yes, I have."

"Oh, and what had she to say?"

"She said--she said--'You won't dirty your nice white frock."'

He gave her the nicest bits from his plate, putting them into her red, moist mouth. And he would make on a piece of bread-and-butter a bird, out of jam: which she ate with extraordinary relish.

After the tea-things were washed up, the woman went away, leaving the family free. Usually Brangwen helped in the bathing of the children. He held long discussions with his child as she sat on his knee and he unfastened her clothes. And he seemed to be talking really of momentous things, deep moralities. Then suddenly she ceased to hear, having caught sight of a glassie rolled into a corner. She slipped away, and was in no hurry to return.

"Come back here," he said, waiting. She became absorbed, taking no notice.

"Come on," he repeated, with a touch of command.

An excited little chuckle came from her, but she pretended to be absorbed.

"Do you hear, Milady?"

She turned with a fleeting, exulting laugh. He rushed on her, and swept her up.

"Who was it that didn't come!" he said, rolling her between his strong hands, tickling her. And she laughed heartily, heartily. She loved him that he compelled her with his strength and decision. He was all-powerful, the tower of strength which rose out of her sight.

When the children were in bed, sometimes Anna and he sat and talked, desultorily, both of them idle. He read very little. Anything he was drawn to read became a burning reality to him, another scene outside his window. Whereas Anna skimmed through a book to see what happened, then she had enough.

Therefore they would often sit together, talking desultorily. What was really between them they could not utter. Their words were only accidents in the mutual silence. When they talked, they gossiped. She did not care for sewing.

She had a beautiful way of sitting musing, gratefully, as if her heart were lit up. Sometimes she would turn to him, laughing, to tell him some little thing that had happened during the day. Then he would laugh, they would talk awhile, before the vital, physical silence was between them again.

She was thin but full of colour and life. She was perfectly happy to do just nothing, only to sit with a curious, languid dignity, so careless as to be almost regal, so utterly indifferent, so confident. The bond between them was undefinable, but very strong. It kept everyone else at a distance.

His face never changed whilst she knew him, it only became more intense. It was ruddy and dark in its abstraction, not very human, it had a strong, intent brightness. Sometimes, when his eyes met hers, a yellow flash from them caused a darkness to swoon over her consciousness, electric, and a slight strange laugh came on his face. Her eyes would turn languidly, then close, as if hypnotized. And they lapsed into the same potent darkness. He had the quality of a young black cat, intent, unnoticeable, and yet his presence gradually made itself felt, stealthily and powerfully took hold of her. He called, not to her, but to something in her, which responded subtly, out of her unconscious darkness.

So they were together in a darkness, passionate, electric, for ever haunting the back of the common day, never in the light. In the light, he seemed to sleep, unknowing. Only she knew him when the darkness set him free, and he could see with his gold-glowing eyes his intention and his desires in the dark.

Then she was in a spell, then she answered his harsh, penetrating call with a soft leap of her soul, the darkness woke up, electric, bristling with an unknown, overwhelming insinuation.

By now they knew each other; she was the daytime, the daylight, he was the shadow, put aside, but in the darkness potent with an overwhelming voluptuousness.

She learned not to dread and to hate him, but to fill herself with him, to give herself to his black, sensual power, that was hidden all the daytime. And the curious rolling of the eyes, as if she were lapsing in a trance away from her ordinary consciousness became habitual with her, when something threatened and opposed her in life, the conscious life.

So they remained as separate in the light, and in the thick darkness, married. He supported her daytime authority, kept it inviolable at last. And she, in all the darkness, belonged to him, to his close, insinuating, hypnotic familiarity.

All his daytime activity, all his public life, was a kind of sleep. She wanted to be free, to belong to the day. And he ran avoiding the day in work. After tea, he went to the shed to his carpentry or his woodcarving. He was restoring the patched, degraded pulpit to its original form.

But he loved to have the child near him, playing by his feet. She was a piece of light that really belonged to him, that played within his darkness. He left the shed door on the latch. And when, with his second sense of another presence, he knew she was coming, he was satisfied, he was at rest. When he was alone with her, he did not want to take notice, to talk. He wanted to live unthinking, with her presence flickering upon him.

He always went in silence. The child would push open the shed door, and see him working by lamplight, his sleeves rolled back. His clothes hung about him, carelessly, like mere wrapping. Inside, his body was concentrated with a flexible, charged power all of its own, isolated. From when she was a tiny child Ursula could remember his forearm, with its fine black hairs and its electric flexibility, working at the bench through swift, unnoticeable movements, always ambushed in a sort of silence.

She hung a moment in the door of the shed, waiting for him to notice her. He turned, his black, curved eyebrows arching slightly.

"Hullo, Twittermiss!"

And he closed the door behind her. Then the child was happy

in the shed that smelled of sweet wood and resounded to the noise of the plane or the hammer or the saw, yet was charged with the silence of the worker. She played on, intent and absorbed, among the shavings and the little nogs of wood. She never touched him: his feet and legs were near, she did not approach them.

She liked to flit out after him when he was going to church at night. If he were going to be alone, he swung her over the wall, and let her come.

Again she was transported when the door was shut behind them, and they two inherited the big, pale, void place. She would watch him as he lit the organ candles, wait whilst he began his practicing his tunes, then she ran foraging here and there, like a kitten playing by herself in the darkness with eyes dilated. The ropes hung vaguely, twining on the floor, from the bells in the tower, and Ursula always wanted the fluffy, red-and-white, or blue-and-white rope-grips. But they were above her.

Sometimes her mother came to claim her. Then the child was seized with resentment. She passionately resented her mother's superficial authority. She wanted to assert her own detachment.

He, however, also gave her occasional cruel shocks. He let

her play about in the church, she rifled foot-stools and hymn-books and cushions, like a bee among flowers, whilst the organ echoed away. This continued for some weeks. Then the charwoman worked herself up into a frenzy of rage, to dare to attack Brangwen, and one day descended on him like a harpy. He wilted away, and wanted to break the old beast's neck.

Instead he came glowering in fury to the house, and turned on Ursula.

"Why, you tiresome little monkey, can't you even come to church without pulling the place to bits?"

His voice was harsh and cat-like, he was blind to the child. She shrank away in childish anguish and dread. What was it, what awful thing was it?

The mother turned with her calm, almost superb manner.

"What has she done, then?"

"Done? She shall go in the church no more, pulling and littering and destroying."

The wife slowly rolled her eyes and lowered her eyelids.

"What has she destroyed, then?"

He did not know.

"I've just had Mrs. Wilkinson at me," he cried, "with a list of things she's done."

Ursula withered under the contempt and anger of the "she", as he spoke of her.

"Send Mrs. Wilkinson here to me with a list of the things she's done," said Anna. "I am the one to hear that."

"It's not the things the child has done," continued the mother, "that have put you out so much, it's because you can't bear being spoken to by that old woman. But you haven't the courage to turn on her when she attacks you, you bring your rage here."

He relapsed into silence. Ursula knew that he was wrong. In the outside, upper world, he was wrong. Already came over the child the cold sense of the impersonal world. There she knew her mother was right. But still her heart clamoured after her father, for him to be right, in his dark, sensuous underworld. But he was angry, and went his way in blackness and brutal silence again.

The child ran about absorbed in life, quiet, full of amusement. She did not notice things, nor changes nor alterations. One day she would find daisies in the grass, another day, apple-blossoms would be sprinkled white on the ground, and she would run among it, for pleasure because it was there. Yet again birds would be pecking at the cherries, her father would throw cherries down from the tree all round her on the garden. Then the fields were full of hay.

She did not remember what had been nor what would be, the outside things were there each day. She was always herself, the world outside was accidental. Even her mother was accidental to her: a condition that happened to endure.

Only her father occupied any permanent position in the childish consciousness. When he came back she remembered vaguely how he had gone away, when he went away she knew vaguely that she must wait for his coming back. Whereas her mother, returning from an outing, merely became present, there was no reason for connecting her with some previous departure.

The return or the departure of the father was the one event which the child remembered. When he came, something woke up in her, some yearning. She knew when he was out of joint or irritable or tired: then she was uneasy, she could not rest.

When he was in the house, the child felt full and warm, rich like a creature in the sunshine. When he was gone, she was vague, forgetful. When he scolded her even, she was often more aware of him than of herself. He was her strength and her greater self.

Ursula was three years old when another baby girl was born. Then the two small sisters were much together, Gudrun and Ursula. Gudrun was a quiet child who played for hours alone, absorbed in her fancies. She was brown-haired, fair-skinned, strangely placid, almost passive. Yet her will was indomitable, once set. From the first she followed Ursula's lead. Yet she was a thing to herself, so that to watch the two together was strange. They were like two young animals playing together but not taking real notice of each other. Gudrun was the mother's favourite--except that Anna always lived in her latest baby.

The burden of so many lives depending on him wore the youth down. He had his work in the office, which was done purely by effort of will: he had his barren passion for the church; he had three young children. Also at this time his health was not good. So he was haggard and irritable, often a pest in the house. Then he was told to go to his woodwork, or to the church.

Between him and the little Ursula there came into being a strange alliance. They were aware of each other. He knew the child was always on his side. But in his consciousness he counted it for nothing. She was always for him. He took it for granted. Yet his life was based on her, even whilst she was a tiny child, on her support and her accord.

Anna continued in her violent trance of motherhood, always busy, often harassed, but always contained in her trance of motherhood. She seemed to exist in her own violent fruitfulness, and it was as if the sun shone tropically on her. Her colour was bright, her eyes full of a fecund gloom, her brown hair tumbled loosely over her ears. She had a look of richness. No responsibility, no sense of duty troubled her. The outside, public life was less than nothing to her, really.

Whereas when, at twenty-six, he found himself father of four children, with a wife who lived intrinsically like the ruddiest lilies of the field, he let the weight of responsibility press on him and drag him. It was then that his child Ursula strove to be with him. She was with him, even as a baby of four, when he was irritable and shouted and made the household unhappy. She suffered from his shouting, but somehow it was not really him. She wanted it to be over, she wanted to resume her normal connection with him. When he was disagreeable, the child echoed to the crying of some need in him, and she responded blindly.

Her heart followed him as if he had some tie with her, and some love which he could not deliver. Her heart followed him persistently, in its love.

But there was the dim, childish sense of her own smallness and inadequacy, a fatal sense of worthlessness. She could not do anything, she was not enough. She could not be important to him. This knowledge deadened her from the first.

Still she set towards him like a quivering needle. All her life was directed by her awareness of him, her wakefulness to his being. And she was against her mother.

Her father was the dawn wherein her consciousness woke up. But for him, she might have gone on like the other children, Gudrun and Theresa and Catherine, one with the flowers and insects and playthings, having no existence apart from the concrete object of her attention. But her father came too near to her. The clasp of his hands and the power of his breast woke her up almost in pain from the transient unconsciousness of childhood. Wide-eyed, unseeing, she was awake before she knew how to see. She was wakened too soon. Too soon the call had come to her, when she was a small baby, and her father held her close to his breast, her sleep-living heart was beaten into wakefulness by the striving of his bigger heart, by his clasping her to his body for love and for fulfilment, asking as a magnet

must always ask. From her the response had struggled dimly, vaguely into being.

The children were dressed roughly for the country. When she was little, Ursula pattered about in little wooden clogs, a blue overall over her thick red dress, a red shawl crossed on her breast and tied behind again. So she ran with her father to the garden.

The household rose early. He was out digging by six o'clock in the morning, he went to his work at half-past eight. And Ursula was usually in the garden with him, though not near at hand.

At Eastertime one year, she helped him to set potatoes. It was the first time she had ever helped him. The occasion remained as a picture, one of her earliest memories. They had gone out soon after dawn. A cold wind was blowing. He had his old trousers tucked into his boots, he wore no coat nor waistcoat, his shirt-sleeves fluttered in the wind, his face was ruddy and intent, in a kind of sleep. When he was at work he neither heard nor saw. A long, thin man, looking still a youth, with a line of black moustache above his thick mouth, and his fine hair blown on his forehead, he worked away at the earth in the grey first light, alone. His solitariness drew the child like a spell.

The wind came chill over the dark-green fields. Ursula ran up and watched him push the setting-peg in at one side of his ready earth, stride across, and push it in the other side, pulling the line taut and clear upon the clods intervening. Then with a sharp cutting noise the bright spade came towards her, cutting a grip into the new, soft earth.

He struck his spade upright and straightened himself.

"Do you want to help me?" he said.

She looked up at him from out of her little woollen bonnet.

"Ay," he said, "you can put some taters in for me. Look--like that--these little sprits standing up--so much apart, you see."

And stooping down he quickly, surely placed the spritted potatoes in the soft grip, where they rested separate and pathetic on the heavy cold earth.

He gave her a little basket of potatoes, and strode himself to the other end of the line. She saw him stooping, working towards her. She was excited, and unused. She put in one potato,

then rearranged it, to make it sit nicely. Some of the sprits were broken, and she was afraid. The responsibility excited her like a string tying her up. She could not help looking with dread at the string buried under the heaped-back soil. Her father was working nearer, stooping, working nearer. She was overcome by her responsibility. She put potatoes quickly into the cold earth.

He came near.

"Not so close," he said, stooping over her potatoes, taking some out and rearranging the others. She stood by with the painful terrified helplessness of childhood. He was so unseeing and confident, she wanted to do the thing and yet she could not. She stood by looking on, her little blue overall fluttering in the wind, the red woollen ends of her shawl blowing gustily. Then he went down the row, relentlessly, turning the potatoes in with his sharp spade-cuts. He took no notice of her, only worked on. He had another world from hers.

She stood helplessly stranded on his world. He continued his work. She knew she could not help him. A little bit forlorn, at last she turned away, and ran down the garden, away from him, as fast as she could go away from him, to forget him and his work.

He missed her presence, her face in her red woollen bonnet, her blue overall fluttering. She ran to where a little water ran trickling between grass and stones. That she loved.

When he came by he said to her:

"You didn't help me much."

The child looked at him dumbly. Already her heart was heavy because of her own disappointment. Her mouth was dumb and pathetic. But he did not notice, he went his way.

And she played on, because of her disappointment persisting even the more in her play. She dreaded work, because she could not do it as he did it. She was conscious of the great breach between them. She knew she had no power. The grown-up power to work deliberately was a mystery to her.

He would smash into her sensitive child's world destructively. Her mother was lenient, careless The children played about as they would all day. Ursula was thoughtless--why should she remember things? If across the garden she saw the hedge had budded, and if she wanted these greeny-pink, tiny buds for bread-and-cheese, to play at teaparty with, over she went for them.

Then suddenly, perhaps the next day, her soul would almost start out of her body as her father turned on her, shouting:

"Who's been tramplin' an' dancin' across where I've just sowed seed? I know it's you, nuisance! Can you find nowhere else to walk, but just over my seed beds? But it's like you, that is--no heed but to follow your own greedy nose."

It had shocked him in his intent world to see the zigzagging lines of deep little foot-prints across his work. The child was infinitely more shocked. Her vulnerable little soul was flayed and trampled. Why were the foot-prints there? She had not wanted to make them. She stood dazzled with pain and shame and unreality.

Her soul, her consciousness seemed to die away. She became shut off and senseless, a little fixed creature whose soul had gone hard and unresponsive. The sense of her own unreality hardened her like a frost. She cared no longer.

And the sight of her face, shut and superior with self-asserting indifference, made a flame of rage go over him. He wanted to break her.

"I'll break your obstinate little face," he said, through shut teeth, lifting his hand.

The child did not alter in the least. The look of indifference, complete glancing indifference, as if nothing but herself existed to her, remained fixed.

Yet far away in her, the sobs were tearing her soul. And when he had gone, she would go and creep under the parlour sofa, and lie clinched in the silent, hidden misery of childhood.

When she crawled out, after an hour or so, she went rather stiffly to play. She willed to forget. She cut off her childish soul from memory, so that the pain, and the insult should not be real. She asserted herself only. There was not nothing in the world but her own self. So very soon, she came to believe in the outward malevolence that was against her. And very early, she learned that even her adored father was part of this malevolence. And very early she learned to harden her soul in resistance and denial of all that was outside her, harden herself upon her own being.

She never felt sorry for what she had done, she never forgave those who had made her guilty. If he had said to her, "Why, Ursula, did you trample my carefully-made bed?" that would have hurt her to the quick, and she would have done anything for him. But she was always tormented by the unreality of outside things. The earth was to walk on. Why must she avoid a certain patch,

just because it was called a seed-bed? It was the earth to walk on. This was her instinctive assumption. And when he bullied her, she became hard, cut herself off from all connection, lived in the little separate world of her own violent will.

As she grew older, five, six, seven, the connection between her and her father was even stronger. Yet it was always straining to break. She was always relapsing on her own violent will into her own separate world of herself. This made him grind his teeth with bitterness, for he still wanted her. But she could harden herself into her own self's universe, impregnable.

He was very fond of swimming, and in warm weather would take her down to the canal, to a silent place, or to a big pond or reservoir, to bathe. He would take her on his back as he went swimming, and she clung close, feeling his strong movement under her, so strong, as if it would uphold all the world. Then he taught her to swim.

She was a fearless little thing, when he dared her. And he had a curious craving to frighten her, to see what she would do with him. He said, would she ride on his back whilst he jumped off the canal bridge down into the water beneath.

She would. He loved to feel the naked child clinging on to

his shoulders. There was a curious fight between their two wills. He mounted the parapet of the canal bridge. The water was a long way down. But the child had a deliberate will set upon his. She held herself fixed to him.

He leapt, and down they went. The crash of the water as they went under struck through the child's small body, with a sort of unconsciousness. But she remained fixed. And when they came up again, and when they went to the bank, and when they sat on the grass side by side, he laughed, and said it was fine. And the dark-dilated eyes of the child looked at him wonderingly, darkly, wondering from the shock, yet reserved and unfathomable, so he laughed almost with a sob.

In a moment she was clinging safely on his back again, and he was swimming in deep water. She was used to his nakedness, and to her mother's nakedness, ever since she was born. They were clinging to each other, and making up to each other for the strange blow that had been struck at them. Yet still, on other days, he would leap again with her from the bridge, daringly, almost wickedly. Till at length, as he leapt, once, she dropped forward on to his head, and nearly broke his neck, so that they fell into the water in a heap, and fought for a few moments with death. He saved her, and sat on the bank, quivering. But his eyes were full of the blackness of death. It was as if death had cut between their two lives, and separated them.

Still they were not separate. There was this curious taunting intimacy between them. When the fair came, she wanted to go in the swing-boats. He took her, and, standing up in the boat, holding on to the irons, began to drive higher, perilously higher. The child clung fast on her seat.

"Do you want to go any higher?" he said to her, and she laughed with her mouth, her eyes wide and dilated. They were rushing through the air.

"Yes," she said, feeling as if she would turn into vapour, lose hold of everything, and melt away. The boat swung far up, then down like a stone, only to be caught sickeningly up again.

"Any higher?" he called, looking at her over his shoulder, his face evil and beautiful to her.

She laughed with white lips.

He sent the swing-boat sweeping through the air in a great semi-circle, till it jerked and swayed at the high horizontal. The child clung on, pale, her eyes fixed on him. People below were calling. The jerk at the top had almost shaken them both out. He had done what he could--and he was attracting

censure. He sat down, and let the swingboat swing itself out.

People in the crowd cried shame on him as he came out of the swingboat. He laughed. The child clung to his hand, pale and mute. In a while she was violently sick. He gave her lemonade, and she gulped a little.

"Don't tell your mother you've been sick," he said. There was no need to ask that. When she got home, the child crept away under the parlour sofa, like a sick little animal, and was a long time before she crawled out.

But Anna got to know of this escapade, and was passionately angry and contemptuous of him. His golden-brown eyes glittered, he had a strange, cruel little smile. And as the child watched him, for the first time in her life a disillusion came over her, something cold and isolating. She went over to her mother. Her soul was dead towards him. It made her sick.

Still she forgot and continued to love him, but ever more coldly. He was at this time, when he was about twenty-eight years old, strange and violent in his being, sensual. He acquired some power over Anna, over everybody he came into contact with.

After a long bout of hostility, Anna at last closed with him. She had now four children, all girls. For seven years she had been absorbed in wifehood and motherhood. For years he had gone on beside her, never really encroaching upon her. Then gradually another self seemed to assert its being within him. He was still silent and separate. But she could feel him all the while coming near upon her, as if his breast and his body were threatening her, and he was always coming closer. Gradually he became indifferent of responsibility. He would do what pleased him, and no more.

He began to go away from home. He went to Nottingham on Saturdays, always alone, to the football match and to the music-hall, and all the time he was watching, in readiness. He never cared to drink. But with his hard, golden-brown eyes, so keen seeing with their tiny black pupils, he watched all the people, everything that happened, and he waited.

In the Empire one evening he sat next to two girls. He was aware of the one beside him. She was rather small, common, with a fresh complexion and an upper lip that lifted from her teeth, so that, when she was not conscious, her mouth was slightly open and her lips pressed outwards in a kind of blind appeal. She was strongly aware of the man next to her, so that all her body was still, very still. Her face watched the stage. Her arms went down into her lap, very self-conscious and still.

A gleam lit up in him: should he begin with her? Should he begin with her to live the other, the unadmitted life of his desire? Why not? He had always been so good. Save for his wife, he was a virgin. And why, when all women were different? Why, when he would only live once? He wanted the other life. His own life was barren, not enough. He wanted the other.

Her open mouth, showing the small, irregular, white teeth, appealed to him. It was open and ready. It was so vulnerable. Why should he not go in and enjoy what was there? The slim arm that went down so still and motionless to the lap, it was pretty. She would be small, he would be able almost to hold her in his two hands. She would be small, almost like a child, and pretty. Her childishness whetted him keenly. She would he helpless between his hands.

"That was the best turn we've had," he said to her, leaning over as he clapped his hands. He felt strong and unshakeable in himself, set over against all the world. His soul was keen and watchful, glittering with a kind of amusement. He was perfectly self-contained. He was himself, the absolute, the rest of the world was the object that should contribute to his being.

The girl started, turned round, her eyes lit up with an almost painful flash of a smile, the colour came deeply in her

cheeks.

"Yes, it was," she said, quite meaninglessly, and she covered her rather prominent teeth with her lips. Then she sat looking straight before her, seeing nothing, only conscious of the colour burning in her cheeks.

It pricked him with a pleasant sensation. His veins and his nerves attended to her, she was so young and palpitating.

"It's not such a good programme as last week's," he said.

Again she half turned her face to him, and her clear, bright eyes, bright like shallow water, filled with light, frightened, yet involuntarily lighting and shaking with response.

"Oh, isn't it! I wasn't able to come last week."

He noted the common accent. It pleased him. He knew what class she came of. Probably she was a warehouse-lass. He was glad she was a common girl.

He proceeded to tell her about the last week's programme. She answered at random, very confusedly. The colour burned in her cheek. Yet she always answered him. The girl on the other side sat remotely, obviously silent. He ignored her. All his address

was for his own girl, with her bright, shallow eyes and her vulnerably opened mouth.

The talk went on, meaningless and random on her part, quite deliberate and purposive on his. It was a pleasure to him to make this conversation, an activity pleasant as a fine game of chance and skill. He was very quiet and pleasant-humoured, but so full of strength. She fluttered beside his steady pressure of warmth and his surety.

He saw the performance drawing to a close. His senses were alert and wilful. He would press his advantages. He followed her and her plain friend down the stairs to the street. It was raining.

"It's a nasty night," he said. "Shall you come and have a drink of something--a cup of coffee--it's early yet."

"Oh, I don't think so," she said, looking away into the night.

"I wish you would," he said, putting himself as it were at her mercy. There was a moment's pause.

"Come to Rollins?" he said.

"No--not there."

"To Carson's, then?"

There was a silence. The other girl hung on. The man was the centre of positive force.

"Will your friend come as well?"

There was another moment of silence, while the other girl felt her ground.

"No, thanks," she said. "I've promised to meet a friend."

"Another time, then?" he said.

"Oh, thanks," she replied, very awkward.

"Good night," he said.

"See you later," said his girl to her friend.

"Where?" said the friend.

"You know, Gertie," replied his girl.

"All right, Jennie."

The friend was gone into the darkness. He turned with his girl to the tea-shop. They talked all the time. He made his sentences in sheer, almost muscular pleasure of exercising himself with her. He was looking at her all the time, perceiving her, appreciating her, finding her out, gratifying himself with her. He could see distinct attractions in her; her eyebrows, with their particular curve, gave him keen aesthetic pleasure. Later on he would see her bright, pellucid eyes, like shallow water, and know those. And there remained the open, exposed mouth, red and vulnerable. That he reserved as yet. And all the while his eyes were on the girl, estimating and handling with pleasure her young softness. About the girl herself, who or what she was, he cared nothing, he was quite unaware that she was anybody. She was just the sensual object of his attention.

"Shall we go, then?" he said.

She rose in silence, as if acting without a mind, merely physically. He seemed to hold her in his will. Outside it was still raining.

"Let's have a walk," he said. "I don't mind the rain, do you?"

"No, I don't mind it," she said.

He was alert in every sense and fibre, and yet quite sure and steady, and lit up, as if transfused. He had a free sensation of walking in his own darkness, not in anybody else's world at all. He was purely a world to himself, he had nothing to do with any general consciousness. Just his own senses were supreme. All the rest was external, insignificant, leaving him alone with this girl whom he wanted to absorb, whose properties he wanted to absorb into his own senses. He did not care about her, except that he wanted to overcome her resistance, to have her in his power, fully and exhaustively to enjoy her.

They turned into the dark streets. He held her umbrella over her, and put his arm round her. She walked as if she were unaware. But gradually, as he walked, he drew her a little closer, into the movement of his side and hip. She fitted in there very well. It was a real good fit, to walk with her like this. It made him exquisitely aware of his own muscular self. And his hand that grasped her side felt one curve of her, and it seemed like a new creation to him, a reality, an absolute, an existing tangible beauty of the absolute. It was like a star. Everything in him was absorbed in the sensual delight of this one small, firm curve in her body, that his hand, and his whole being, had lighted upon.

He led her into the Park, where it was almost dark. He noticed a corner between two walls, under a great overhanging bush of ivy.

"Let us stand here a minute," he said.

He put down the umbrella, and followed her into the corner, retreating out of the rain. He needed no eyes to see. All he wanted was to know through touch. She was like a piece of palpable darkness. He found her in the darkness, put his arms round her and his hands upon her. She was silent and inscrutable. But he did not want to know anything about her, he only wanted to discover her. And through her clothing, what absolute beauty he touched.

"Take your hat off," he said.

Silently, obediently, she shook off her hat and gave herself to his arms again. He liked her--he liked the feel of her--he wanted to know her more closely. He let his fingers subtly seek out her cheek and neck. What amazing beauty and pleasure, in the dark! His fingers had often touched Anna on the face and neck like that. What matter! It was one man who touched Anna, another who now touched this girl. He liked best his new self. He was given over altogether to the sensuous knowledge of

this woman, and every moment he seemed to be touching absolute beauty, something beyond knowledge.

Very close, marvelling and exceedingly joyful in their discoveries, his hands pressed upon her, so subtly, so seekingly, so finely and desirously searching her out, that she too was almost swooning in the absolute of sensual knowledge. In utter sensual delight she clenched her knees, her thighs, her loins together! It was an added beauty to him.

But he was patiently working for her relaxation, patiently, his whole being fixed in the smile of latent gratification, his whole body electric with a subtle, powerful, reducing force upon her. So he came at length to kiss her, and she was almost betrayed by his insidious kiss. Her open mouth was too helpless and unguarded. He knew this, and his first kiss was very gentle, and soft, and assuring, so assuring. So that her soft, defenseless mouth became assured, even bold, seeking upon his mouth. And he answered her gradually, gradually, his soft kiss sinking in softly, softly, but ever more heavily, more heavily yet, till it was too heavy for her to meet, and she began to sink under it. She was sinking, sinking, his smile of latent gratification was becoming more tense, he was sure of her. He let the whole force of his will sink upon her to sweep her away. But it was too great a shock for her. With a sudden horrible movement she ruptured the state that contained them both.

"Don't--don't!"

It was a rather horrible cry that seemed to come out of her, not to belong to her. It was some strange agony of terror crying out the words. There was something vibrating and beside herself in the noise. His nerves ripped like silk.

"What's the matter?" he said, as if calmly. "What's the matter?"

She came back to him, but trembling, reservedly this time.

Her cry had given him gratification. But he knew he had been too sudden for her. He was now careful. For a while he merely sheltered her. Also there had broken a flaw into his perfect will. He wanted to persist, to begin again, to lead up to the point where he had let himself go on her, and then manage more carefully, successfully. So far she had won. And the battle was not over yet. But another voice woke in him and prompted him to let her go--let her go in contempt.

He sheltered her, and soothed her, and caressed her, and kissed her, and again began to come nearer, nearer. He gathered himself together. Even if he did not take her, he would make her

relax, he would fuse away her resistance. So softly, softly, with infinite caressiveness he kissed her, and the whole of his being seemed to fondle her. Till, at the verge, swooning at the breaking point, there came from her a beaten, inarticulate, moaning cry:

"Don't--oh, don't!"

His veins fused with extreme voluptuousness. For a moment he almost lost control of himself, and continued automatically. But there was a moment of inaction, of cold suspension. He was not going to take her. He drew her to him and soothed her, and caressed her. But the pure zest had gone. She struggled to herself and realized he was not going to take her. And then, at the very last moment, when his fondling had come near again, his hot living desire despising her, against his cold sensual desire, she broke violently away from him.

"Don't," she cried, harsh now with hatred, and she flung her hand across and hit him violently. "Keep off of me."

His blood stood still for a moment. Then the smile came again within him, steady, cruel.

"Why, what's the matter?" he said, with suave irony. "Nobody's going to hurt you."

"I know what you want," she said.

"I know what I want," he said. "What's the odds?"

"Well, you're not going to have it off me."

"Aren't I? Well, then I'm not. It's no use crying about it, is it?"

"No, it isn't," said the girl, rather disconcerted by his irony.

"But there's no need to have a row about it. We can kiss good night just the same, can't we?"

She was silent in the darkness.

"Or do you want your hat and umbrella to go home this minute?"

Still she was silent. He watched her dark figure as she stood there on the edge of the faint darkness, and he waited.

"Come and say good night nicely, if we're going to say it," he said.

Still she did not stir. He put his hand out and drew her into the darkness again.

"It's warmer in here," he said; "a lot cosier."

His will had not yet relaxed from her. The moment of hatred exhilarated him.

"I'm going now," she muttered, as he closed his hand over her.

"See how well you fit your place," he said, as he drew her to her previous position, close upon him. "What do you want to leave it for?"

And gradually the intoxication invaded him again, the zest came back. After all, why should he not take her?

But she did not yield to him entirely.

"Are you a married man?" she asked at length.

"What if I am?" he said.

She did not answer.

"I don't ask you whether you're married or not," he said.

"You know jolly well I'm not," she answered hotly. Oh, if she could only break away from him, if only she need not yield to him.

At length her will became cold against him. She had escaped. But she hated him for her escape more than for her danger. Did he despise her so coldly? And she was in torture of adherence to him still.

"Shall I see you next week--next Saturday?" he said, as they returned to the town. She did not answer.

"Come to the Empire with me--you and Gertie," he said.

"I should look well, going with a married man," she said.

"I'm no less of a man for being married, am I?" he said.

"Oh, it's a different matter altogether with a married man," she said, in a ready-made speech that showed her chagrin.

"How's that?" he asked.

But she would not enlighten him. Yet she promised, without promising, to be at the meeting-place next Saturday evening.

So he left her. He did not know her name. He caught a train and went home.

It was the last train, he was very late. He was not home till midnight. But he was quite indifferent. He had no real relation with his home, not this man which he now was. Anna was sitting up for him. She saw the queer, absolved look on his face, a sort of latent, almost sinister smile, as if he were absolved from his "good" ties.

"Where have you been?" she asked, puzzled, interested.

"To the Empire."

"Who with?"

"By myself. I came home with Tom Cooper."

She looked at him, and wondered what he had been doing She was indifferent as to whether he lied or not.

"You have come home very strange," she said. And there was an appreciative inflexion in the speech.

He was not affected. As for his humble, good self, he was absolved from it. He sat down and ate heartily. He was not tired. He seemed to take no notice of her.

For Anna the moment was critical. She kept herself aloof, and watched him. He talked to her, but with a little indifference, since he was scarcely aware of her. So, then she did not affect him. Here was a new turn of affairs! He was rather attractive, nevertheless. She liked him better than the ordinary mute, half-effaced, half-subdued man she usually knew him to be. So, he was blossoming out into his real self! It piqued her. Very good, let him blossom! She liked a new turn of affairs. He was a strange man come home to her. Glancing at him, she saw she could not reduce him to what he had been before. In an instant she gave it up. Yet not without a pang of rage, which would insist on their old, beloved love, their old, accustomed intimacy and her old, established supremacy. She almost rose up to fight for them. And looking at him, and remembering his father, she was wary. This was the new turn of affairs!

Very good, if she could not influence him in the old way, she would be level with him in the new. Her old defiant hostility came up. Very good, she too was out on her own adventure. Her

voice, her manner changed, she was ready for the game. Something was liberated in her. She liked him. She liked this strange man come home to her. He was very welcome, indeed! She was very glad to welcome a stranger. She had been bored by the old husband. To his latent, cruel smile she replied with brilliant challenge. He expected her to keep the moral fortress. Not she! It was much too dull a part. She challenged him back with a sort of radiance, very bright and free, opposite to him. He looked at her, and his eyes glinted. She too was out in the field.

His senses pricked up and keenly attended to her. She laughed, perfectly indifferent and loose as he was. He came towards her. She neither rejected him nor responded to him. In a kind of radiance, superb in her inscrutability, she laughed before him. She too could throw everything overboard, love, intimacy, responsibility. What were her four children to her now? What did it matter that this man was the father of her four children?

He was the sensual male seeking his pleasure, she was the female ready to take hers: but in her own way. A man could turn into a free lance: so then could a woman. She adhered as little as he to the moral world. All that had gone before was nothing to her. She was another woman, under the instance of a strange man. He was a stranger to her, seeking his own ends. Very good. She wanted to see what this stranger would do now, what he

was.

She laughed, and kept him at arm's length, whilst apparently ignoring him. She watched him undress as if he were a stranger. Indeed he was a stranger to her.

And she roused him profoundly, violently, even before he touched her. The little creature in Nottingham had but been leading up to this. They abandoned in one motion the moral position, each was seeking gratification pure and simple.

Strange his wife was to him. It was as if he were a perfect stranger, as if she were infinitely and essentially strange to him, the other half of the world, the dark half of the moon. She waited for his touch as if he were a marauder who had come in, infinitely unknown and desirable to her. And he began to discover her. He had an inkling of the vastness of the unknown sensual store of delights she was. With a passion of voluptuousness that made him dwell on each tiny beauty, in a kind of frenzy of enjoyment, he lit upon her: her beauty, the beauties, the separate, several beauties of her body.

He was quite ousted from himself, and sensually transported by that which he discovered in her. He was another man revelling over her. There was no tenderness, no love between them any more, only the maddening, sensuous lust for discovery and the

insatiable, exorbitant gratification in the sensual beauties of her body. And she was a store, a store of absolute beauties that it drove him to contemplate. There was such a feast to enjoy, and he with only one man's capacity.

He lived in a passion of sensual discovery with her for some time--it was a duel: no love, no words, no kisses even, only the maddening perception of beauty consummate, absolute through touch. He wanted to touch her, to discover her, maddeningly he wanted to know her. Yet he must not hurry, or he missed everything. He must enjoy one beauty at a time. And the multitudinous beauties of her body, the many little rapturous places, sent him mad with delight, and with desire to be able to know more, to have strength to know more. For all was there.

He would say during the daytime:

"To-night I shall know the little hollow under her ankle, where the blue vein crosses." And the thought of it, and the desire for it, made a thick darkness of anticipation.

He would go all the day waiting for the night to come, when he could give himself to the enjoyment of some luxurious absolute of beauty in her. The thought of the hidden resources of her, the undiscovered beauties and ecstatic places of delight in her body, waiting, only waiting for him to discover them,

sent him slightly insane. He was obsessed. If he did not discover and make known to himself these delights, they might be lost for ever. He wished he had a hundred men's energies, with which to enjoy her. [He wished he were a cat, to lick her with a rough, grating, lascivious tongue. He wanted to wallow in her, bury himself in her flesh, cover himself over with her flesh.]

And she, separate, with a strange, dangerous, glistening look in her eyes received all his activities upon her as if they were expected by her, and provoked him when he was quiet to more, till sometimes he was ready to perish for sheer inability to be satisfied of her, inability to have had enough of her.

Their children became mere offspring to them, they lived in the darkness and death of their own sensual activities. Sometimes he felt he was going mad with a sense of Absolute Beauty, perceived by him in her through his senses. It was something too much for him. And in everything, was this same, almost sinister, terrifying beauty. But in the revelations of her body through contact with his body, was the ultimate beauty, to know which was almost death in itself, and yet for the knowledge of which he would have undergone endless torture. He would have forfeited anything, anything, rather than forego his right even to the instep of her foot, and the place from which the toes radiated out, the little, miraculous white plain from which ran the little hillocks of the toes, and the folded,

dimpling hollows between the toes. He felt he would have died rather than forfeit this.

This was what their love had become, a sensuality violent and extreme as death. They had no conscious intimacy, no tenderness of love. It was all the lust and the infinite, maddening intoxication of the sense, a passion of death.

He had always, all his life, had a secret dread of Absolute Beauty. It had always been like a fetish to him, something to fear, really. For it was immoral and against mankind. So he had turned to the Gothic form, which always asserted the broken desire of mankind in its pointed arches, escaping the rolling, absolute beauty of the round arch.

But now he had given way, and with infinite sensual violence gave himself to the realization of this supreme, immoral, Absolute Beauty, in the body of woman. It seemed to him, that it came to being in the body of woman, under his touch. Under his touch, even under his sight, it was there. But when he neither saw nor touched the perfect place, it was not perfect, it was not there. And he must make it exist.

But still the thing terrified him. Awful and threatening it was, dangerous to a degree, even whilst he gave himself to it. It was pure darkness, also. All the shameful things of the body

revealed themselves to him now with a sort of sinister, tropical beauty. All the shameful, natural and unnatural acts of sensual voluptuousness which he and the woman partook of together, created together, they had their heavy beauty and their delight. Shame, what was it? It was part of extreme delight. It was that part of delight of which man is usually afraid. Why afraid? The secret, shameful things are most terribly beautiful.

They accepted shame, and were one with it in their most unlicensed pleasures. It was incorporated. It was a bud that blossomed into beauty and heavy, fundamental gratification.

Their outward life went on much the same, but the inward life was revolutionized. The children became less important, the parents were absorbed in their own living.

And gradually, Brangwen began to find himself free to attend to the outside life as well. His intimate life was so violently active, that it set another man in him free. And this new man turned with interest to public life, to see what part he could take in it. This would give him scope for new activity, activity of a kind for which he was now created and released. He wanted to be unanimous with the whole of purposive mankind.

At this time Education was in the forefront as a subject of interest. There was the talk of new Swedish methods, of handwork

instruction, and so on. Brangwen embraced sincerely the idea of handwork in schools. For the first time, he began to take real interest in a public affair. He had at length, from his profound sensual activity, developed a real purposive self.

There was talk of night-schools, and of handicraft classes. He wanted to start a woodwork class in Cossethay, to teach carpentry and joinery and wood-carving to the village boys, two nights a week. This seemed to him a supremely desirable thing to be doing. His pay would be very little--and when he had it, he spent it all on extra wood and tools. But he was very happy and keen in his new public spirit.

He started his night-classes in woodwork when he was thirty years old. By this time he had five children, the last a boy. But boy or girl mattered very little to him. He had a natural blood-affection for his children, and he liked them as they turned up: boys or girls. Only he was fondest of Ursula. Somehow, she seemed to be at the back of his new night-school venture.

The house by the yew trees was in connection with the great human endeavour at last. It gained a new vigour thereby.

To Ursula, a child of eight, the increase in magic was considerable. She heard all the talk, she saw the parish room

fitted up as a workshop. The parish room was a high, stone, barn-like, ecclesiastical building standing away by itself in the Brangwens' second garden, across the lane. She was always attracted by its age and its stranded obsoleteness. Now she watched preparations made, she sat on the flight of stone steps that came down from the porch to the garden, and heard her father and the vicar talking and planning and working. Then an inspector came, a very strange man, and stayed talking with her father all one evening. Everything was settled, and twelve boys enrolled their names. It was very exciting.

But to Ursula, everything her father did was magic. Whether he came from Ilkeston with news of the town, whether he went across to the church with his music or his tools on a sunny evening, whether he sat in his white surplice at the organ on Sundays, leading the singing with his strong tenor voice, or whether he were in the workshop with the boys, he was always a centre of magic and fascination to her, his voice, sounding out in command, cheerful, laconic, had always a twang in it that sent a thrill over her blood, and hypnotized her. She seemed to run in the shadow of some dark, potent secret of which she would not, of whose existence even she dared not become conscious, it cast such a spell over her, and so darkened her mind.