CHAPTER XII

SHAME

Ursula had only two more terms at school. She was studying for her matriculation examination. It was dreary work, for she had very little intelligence when she was disjointed from happiness. Stubbornness and a consciousness of impending fate kept her half-heartedly pinned to it. She knew that soon she would want to become a self-responsible person, and her dread was that she would be prevented. An all-containing will in her for complete independence, complete social independence, complete independence from any personal authority, kept her dullishly at her studies. For she knew that she had always her price of ransom--her femaleness. She was always a woman, and what she could not get because she was a human being, fellow to the rest of mankind, she would get because she was a female, other than the man. In her femaleness she felt a secret riches, a reserve, she had always the price of freedom.

However, she was sufficiently reserved about this last resource. The other things should be tried first. There was the mysterious man's world to be adventured upon, the world of daily work and duty, and existence as a working member of the community. Against this she had a subtle grudge. She wanted to make her conquest also of this man's world.

So she ground away at her work, never giving it up. Some things she liked. Her subjects were English, Latin, French, mathematics and history. Once she knew how to read French and Latin, the syntax bored her. Most tedious was the close study of English literature. Why should one remember the things one read? Something in mathematics, their cold absoluteness, fascinated her, but the actual practice was tedious. Some people in history puzzled her and made her ponder, but the political parts angered her, and she hated ministers. Only in odd streaks did she get a poignant sense of acquisition and enrichment and enlarging from her studies; one afternoon, reading As You Like It; once when, with her blood, she heard a passage of Latin, and she knew how the blood beat in a Roman's body; so that ever after she felt she knew the Romans by contact. She enjoyed the vagaries of English Grammar, because it gave her pleasure to detect the live movements of words and sentences; and mathematics, the very sight of the letters in Algebra, had a real lure for her.

She felt so much and so confusedly at this time, that her face got a queer, wondering, half-scared look, as if she were not sure what might seize upon her at any moment out of the unknown.

Odd little bits of information stirred unfathomable passion in her. When she knew that in the tiny brown buds of autumn were

folded, minute and complete, the finished flowers of the summer nine months hence, tiny, folded up, and left there waiting, a flash of triumph and love went over her.

"I could never die while there was a tree," she said passionately, sententiously, standing before a great ash in worship.

It was the people who, somehow, walked as an upright menace to her. Her life at this time was unformed, palpitating, essentially shrinking from all touch. She gave something to other people, but she was never herself, since she had no self. She was not afraid nor ashamed before trees, and birds, and the sky. But she shrank violently from people, ashamed she was not as they were, fixed, emphatic, but a wavering, undefined sensibility only, without form or being.

Gudrun was at this time a great comfort and shield to her. The younger girl was a lithe, farouche animal, who mistrusted all approach, and would have none of the petty secrecies and jealousies of schoolgirl intimacy. She would have no truck with the tame cats, nice or not, because she believed that they were all only untamed cats with a nasty, untrustworthy habit of tameness.

This was a great stand-back for Ursula, who suffered agonies

when she thought a person disliked her, no matter how much she despised that other person. How could anyone dislike her, Ursula Brangwen? The question terrified her and was unanswerable. She sought refuge in Gudrun's natural, proud indifference.

It had been discovered that Gudrun had a talent for drawing. This solved the problem of the girl's indifference to all study. It was said of her, "She can draw marvellously."

Suddenly Ursula found a queer awareness existed between herself and her class-mistress, Miss Inger. The latter was a rather beautiful woman of twenty-eight, a fearless-seeming, clean type of modern girl whose very independence betrays her sorrow. She was clever, and expert in what she did, accurate, quick, commanding.

To Ursula she had always given pleasure, because of her clear, decided, yet graceful appearance. She carried her head high, a little thrown back, and Ursula thought there was a look of nobility in the way she twisted her smooth brown hair upon her head. She always wore clean, attractive, well-fitting blouses, and a well-made skirt. Everything about her was so well-ordered, betraying a fine, clear spirit, that it was a pleasure to sit in her class.

Her voice was just as ringing and clear, and with unwavering,

finely-touched modulation. Her eyes were blue, clear, proud, she gave one altogether the sense of a fine-mettled, scrupulously groomed person, and of an unyielding mind. Yet there was an infinite poignancy about her, a great pathos in her lonely, proudly closed mouth.

It was after Skrebensky had gone that there sprang up between the mistress and the girl that strange awareness, then the unspoken intimacy that sometimes connects two people who may never even make each other's acquaintance. Before, they had always been good friends, in the undistinguished way of the class-room, with the professional relationship of mistress and scholar always present. Now, however, another thing came to pass. When they were in the room together, they were aware of each other, almost to the exclusion of everything else. Winifred Inger felt a hot delight in the lessons when Ursula was present, Ursula felt her whole life begin when Miss Inger came into the room. Then, with the beloved, subtly-intimate teacher present, the girl sat as within the rays of some enrichening sun, whose intoxicating heat poured straight into her veins.

The state of bliss, when Miss Inger was present, was supreme in the girl, but always eager, eager. As she went home, Ursula dreamed of the schoolmistress, made infinite dreams of things she could give her, of how she might make the elder woman adore her.

Miss Inger was a Bachelor of Arts, who had studied at Newnham. She was a clergyman's daughter, of good family. But what Ursula adored so much was her fine, upright, athletic bearing, and her indomitably proud nature. She was proud and free as a man, yet exquisite as a woman.

The girl's heart burned in her breast as she set off for school in the morning. So eager was her breast, so glad her feet, to travel towards the beloved. Ah, Miss Inger, how straight and fine was her back, how strong her loins, how calm and free her limbs!

Ursula craved ceaselessly to know if Miss Inger cared for her. As yet no definite sign had been passed between the two. Yet surely, surely Miss Inger loved her too, was fond of her, liked her at least more than the rest of the scholars in the class. Yet she was never certain. It might be that Miss Inger cared nothing for her. And yet, and yet, with blazing heart, Ursula felt that if only she could speak to her, touch her, she would know.

The summer term came, and with it the swimming class. Miss Inger was to take the swimming class. Then Ursula trembled and was dazed with passion. Her hopes were soon to be realized. She would see Miss Inger in her bathing dress.

The day came. In the great bath the water was glimmering pale emerald green, a lovely, glimmering mass of colour within the whitish marble-like confines. Overhead the light fell softly and the great green body of pure water moved under it as someone dived from the side.

Ursula, trembling, hardly able to contain herself, pulled off her clothes, put on her tight bathing-suit, and opened the door of her cabin. Two girls were in the water. The mistress had not appeared. She waited. A door opened. Miss Inger came out, dressed in a rust-red tunic like a Greek girl's, tied round the waist, and a red silk handkerchief round her head. How lovely she looked! Her knees were so white and strong and proud, and she was firm-bodied as Diana. She walked simply to the side of the bath, and with a negligent movement, flung herself in. For a moment Ursula watched the white, smooth, strong shoulders, and the easy arms swimming. Then she too dived into the water.

Now, ah now, she was swimming in the same water with her dear mistress. The girl moved her limbs voluptuously, and swam by herself, deliciously, yet with a craving of unsatisfaction. She wanted to touch the other, to touch her, to feel her.

"I will race you, Ursula," came the well-modulated voice.

Ursula started violently. She turned to see the warm, unfolded face of her mistress looking at her, to her. She was acknowledged. Laughing her own beautiful, startled laugh, she began to swim. The mistress was just ahead, swimming with easy strokes. Ursula could see the head put back, the water flickering upon the white shoulders, the strong legs kicking shadowily. And she swam blinded with passion. Ah, the beauty of the firm, white, cool flesh! Ah, the wonderful firm limbs. Ah, if she did not so despise her own thin, dusky fragment of a body, if only she too were fearless and capable.

She swam on eagerly, not wanting to win, only wanting to be near her mistress, to swim in a race with her. They neared the end of the bath, the deep end. Miss Inger touched the pipe, swung herself round, and caught Ursula round the waist in the water, and held her for a moment.

"I won," said Miss Inger, laughing.

There was a moment of suspense. Ursula's heart was beating so fast, she clung to the rail, and could not move. Her dilated, warm, unfolded, glowing face turned to the mistress, as if to her very sun.

"Good-bye," said Miss Inger, and she swam away to the other pupils, taking professional interest in them.

Ursula was dazed. She could still feel the touch of the mistress's body against her own--only this, only this. The rest of the swimming time passed like a trance. When the call was given to leave the water, Miss Inger walked down the bath towards Ursula. Her rust-red, thin tunic was clinging to her, the whole body was defined, firm and magnificent, as it seemed to the girl.

"I enjoyed our race, Ursula, did you?" said Miss Inger.

The girl could only laugh with revealed, open, glowing face.

The love was now tacitly confessed. But it was some time before any further progress was made. Ursula continued in suspense, in inflamed bliss.

Then one day, when she was alone, the mistress came near to her, and touching her cheek with her fingers, said with some difficulty.

"Would you like to come to tea with me on Saturday, Ursula?"

The girl flushed all gratitude.

"We'll go to a lovely little bungalow on the Soar, shall we? I stay the week-ends there sometimes."

Ursula was beside herself. She could not endure till the Saturday came, her thoughts burned up like a fire. If only it were Saturday, if only it were Saturday.

Then Saturday came, and she set out. Miss Inger met her in Sawley, and they walked about three miles to the bungalow. It was a moist, warm cloudy day.

The bungalow was a tiny, two-roomed shanty set on a steep bank. Everything in it was exquisite. In delicious privacy, the two girls made tea, and then they talked. Ursula need not be home till about ten o'clock.

The talk was led, by a kind of spell, to love. Miss Inger was telling Ursula of a friend, how she had died in childbirth, and what she had suffered; then she told of a prostitute, and of some of her experiences with men.

As they talked thus, on the little verandah of the bungalow, the night fell, there was a little warm rain.

"It is really stifling," said Miss Inger.

They watched a train, whose lights were pale in the lingering twilight, rushing across the distance.

"It will thunder," said Ursula.

The electric suspense continued, the darkness sank, they were eclipsed.

"I think I shall go and bathe," said Miss Inger, out of the cloud-black darkness.

"At night?" said Ursula.

"It is best at night. Will you come?"

"I should like to."

"It is quite safe--the grounds are private. We had better undress in the bungalow, for fear of the rain, then run down."

Shyly, stiffly, Ursula went into the bungalow, and began to remove her clothes. The lamp was turned low, she stood in the shadow. By another chair Winifred Inger was undressing.

Soon the naked, shadowy figure of the elder girl came to the younger.

"Are you ready?" she said.

"One moment."

Ursula could hardly speak. The other naked woman stood by, stood near, silent. Ursula was ready.

They ventured out into the darkness, feeling the soft air of night upon their skins.

"I can't see the path," said Ursula.

"It is here," said the voice, and the wavering, pallid figure was beside her, a hand grasping her arm. And the elder held the younger close against her, close, as they went down, and by the side of the water, she put her arms round her, and kissed her. And she lifted her in her arms, close, saying, softly:

"I shall carry you into the water."

[Ursula lay still in her mistress's arms, her forehead against the beloved, maddening breast.

"I shall put you in," said Winifred.

But Ursula twined her body about her mistress.]

After awhile the rain came down on their flushed, hot limbs, startling, delicious. A sudden, ice-cold shower burst in a great weight upon them. They stood up to it with pleasure. Ursula received the stream of it upon her breasts and her limbs. It made her cold, and a deep, bottomless silence welled up in her, as if bottomless darkness were returning upon her.

So the heat vanished away, she was chilled, as if from a waking up. She ran indoors, a chill, non-existent thing, wanting to get away. She wanted the light, the presence of other people, the external connection with the many. Above all she wanted to lose herself among natural surroundings.

She took her leave of her mistress and returned home. She was glad to be on the station with a crowd of Saturday-night people, glad to sit in the lighted, crowded railway carriage. Only she did not want to meet anybody she knew. She did not want to talk. She was alone, immune.

All this stir and seethe of lights and people was but the rim, the shores of a great inner darkness and void. She wanted very much to be on the seething, partially illuminated shore,

for within her was the void reality of dark space.

For a time Miss Inger, her mistress, was gone; she was only a dark void, and Ursula was free as a shade walking in an underworld of extinction, of oblivion. Ursula was glad, with a kind of motionless, lifeless gladness, that her mistress was extinct, gone out of her.

In the morning, however, the love was there again, burning, burning. She remembered yesterday, and she wanted more, always more. She wanted to be with her mistress. All separation from her mistress was a restriction from living. Why could she not go to her to-day, to-day? Why must she pace about revoked at Cossethay whilst her mistress was elsewhere? She sat down and wrote a burning, passionate love-letter: she could not help it.

The two women became intimate. Their lives seemed suddenly to fuse into one, inseparable. Ursula went to Winifred's lodging, she spent there her only living hours. Winifred was very fond of water,--of swimming, of rowing. She belonged to various athletic clubs. Many delicious afternoons the two girls spent in a light boat on the river, Winifred always rowing. Indeed, Winifred seemed to delight in having Ursula in her charge, in giving things to the girl, in filling and enrichening her life.

So that Ursula developed rapidly during the few months of her intimacy with her mistress. Winifred had had a scientific education. She had known many clever people. She wanted to bring Ursula to her own position of thought.

They took religion and rid it of its dogmas, its falsehoods. Winifred humanized it all. Gradually it dawned upon Ursula that all the religion she knew was but a particular clothing to a human aspiration. The aspiration was the real thing,--the clothing was a matter almost of national taste or need. The Greeks had a naked Apollo, the Christians a white-robed Christ, the Buddhists a royal prince, the Egyptians their Osiris. Religions were local and religion was universal. Christianity was a local branch. There was as yet no assimilation of local religions into universal religion.

In religion there were the two great motives of fear and love. The motive of fear was as great as the motive of love. Christianity accepted crucifixion to escape from fear; "Do your worst to me, that I may have no more fear of the worst." But that which was feared was not necessarily all evil, and that which was loved not necessarily all good. Fear shall become reverence, and reverence is submission in identification; love shall become triumph, and triumph is delight in identification.

So much she talked of religion, getting the gist of many writings. In philosophy she was brought to the conclusion that the human desire is the criterion of all truth and all good. Truth does not lie beyond humanity, but is one of the products of the human mind and feeling. There is really nothing to fear. The motive of fear in religion is base, and must be left to the ancient worshippers of power, worship of Moloch.

We do not worship power, in our enlightened souls. Power is degenerated to money and Napoleonic stupidity.

Ursula could not help dreaming of Moloch. Her God was not mild and gentle, neither Lamb nor Dove. He was the lion and the eagle. Not because the lion and the eagle had power, but because they were proud and strong; they were themselves, they were not passive subjects of some shepherd, or pets of some loving woman, or sacrifices of some priest. She was weary to death of mild, passive lambs and monotonous doves. If the lamb might lie down with the lion, it would be a great honour to the lamb, but the lion's powerful heart would suffer no diminishing. She loved the dignity and self-possession of lions.

She did not see how lambs could love. Lambs could only be loved. They could only be afraid, and tremblingly submit to fear, and become sacrificial; or they could submit to love, and

become beloveds. In both they were passive. Raging, destructive lovers, seeking the moment when fear is greatest, and triumph is greatest, the fear not greater than the triumph, the triumph not greater than the fear, these were no lambs nor doves. She stretched her own limbs like a lion or a wild horse, her heart was relentless in its desires. It would suffer a thousand deaths, but it would still be a lion's heart when it rose from death, a fiercer lion she would be, a surer, knowing herself different from and separate from the great, conflicting universe that was not herself.

Winifred Inger was also interested in the Women's Movement.

"The men will do no more,--they have lost the capacity for doing," said the elder girl. "They fuss and talk, but they are really inane. They make everything fit into an old, inert idea. Love is a dead idea to them. They don't come to one and love one, they come to an idea, and they say 'You are my idea,' so they embrace themselves. As if I were any man's idea! As if I exist because a man has an idea of me! As if I will be betrayed by him, lend him my body as an instrument for his idea, to be a mere apparatus of his dead theory. But they are too fussy to be able to act; they are all impotent, they can't take a woman. They come to their own idea every time, and take that. They are like serpents trying to swallow themselves because they

are hungry."

Ursula was introduced by her friend to various women and men, educated, unsatisfied people, who still moved within the smug provincial society as if they were nearly as tame as their outward behaviour showed, but who were inwardly raging and mad.

It was a strange world the girl was swept into, like a chaos, like the end of the world. She was too young to understand it all. Yet the inoculation passed into her, through her love for her mistress.

The examination came, and then school was over. It was the long vacation. Winifred Inger went away to London. Ursula was left alone in Cossethay. A terrible, outcast, almost poisonous despair possessed her. It was no use doing anything, or being anything. She had no connection with other people. Her lot was isolated and deadly. There was nothing for her anywhere, but this black disintegration. Yet, within all the great attack of disintegration upon her, she remained herself. It was the terrible core of all her suffering, that she was always herself. Never could she escape that: she could not put off being herself.

She still adhered to Winifred Inger. But a sort of nausea was

coming over her. She loved her mistress. But a heavy, clogged sense of deadness began to gather upon her, from the other woman's contact. And sometimes she thought Winifred was ugly, clayey. Her female hips seemed big and earthy, her ankles and her arms were too thick. She wanted some fine intensity, instead of this heavy cleaving of moist clay, that cleaves because it has no life of its own.

Winifred still loved Ursula. She had a passion for the fine flame of the girl, she served her endlessly, would have done anything for her.

"Come with me to London," she pleaded to the girl. "I will make it nice for you,--you shall do lots of things you will enjoy."

"No," said Ursula, stubbornly and dully. "No, I don't want to go to London, I want to be by myself."

Winifred knew what this meant. She knew that Ursula was beginning to reject her. The fine, unquenchable flame of the younger girl would consent no more to mingle with the perverted life of the elder woman. Winifred knew it would come. But she too was proud. At the bottom of her was a black pit of despair. She knew perfectly well that Ursula would cast her off.

And that seemed like the end of her life. But she was too hopeless to rage. Wisely, economizing what was left of Ursula's love, she went away to London, leaving the beloved girl alone.

And after a fortnight, Ursula's letters became tender again, loving. Her Uncle Tom had invited her to go and stay with him. He was managing a big, new colliery in Yorkshire. Would Winifred come too?

For now Ursula was imagining marriage for Winifred. She wanted her to marry her Uncle Tom. Winifred knew this. She said she would come to Wiggiston. She would now let fate do as it liked with her, since there was nothing remaining to be done. Tom Brangwen also saw Ursula's intention. He too was at the end of his desires. He had done the things he had wanted to. They had all ended in a disintegrated lifelessness of soul, which he hid under an utterly tolerant good-humour. He no longer cared about anything on earth, neither man nor woman, nor God nor humanity. He had come to a stability of nullification. He did not care any more, neither about his body nor about his soul. Only he would preserve intact his own life. Only the simple, superficial fact of living persisted. He was still healthy. He lived. Therefore he would fill each moment. That had always been his creed. It was not instinctive easiness: it was the inevitable outcome of his nature. When he was in the absolute

privacy of his own life, he did as he pleased, unscrupulous, without any ulterior thought. He believed neither in good nor evil. Each moment was like a separate little island, isolated from time, and blank, unconditioned by time.

He lived in a large new house of red brick, standing outside a mass of homogeneous red-brick dwellings, called Wiggiston. Wiggiston was only seven years old. It had been a hamlet of eleven houses on the edge of healthy, half-agricultural country. Then the great seam of coal had been opened. In a year Wiggiston appeared, a great mass of pinkish rows of thin, unreal dwellings of five rooms each. The streets were like visions of pure ugliness; a grey-black macadamized road, asphalt causeways, held in between a flat succession of wall, window, and door, a new-brick channel that began nowhere, and ended nowhere. Everything was amorphous, yet everything repeated itself endlessly. Only now and then, in one of the house-windows vegetables or small groceries were displayed for sale.

In the middle of the town was a large, open, shapeless space, or market-place, of black trodden earth, surrounded by the same flat material of dwellings, new red-brick becoming grimy, small oblong windows, and oblong doors, repeated endlessly, with just, at one corner, a great and gaudy public house, and somewhere lost on one of the sides of the square, a large window opaque and darkish green, which was the post office.

The place had the strange desolation of a ruin. Colliers hanging about in gangs and groups, or passing along the asphalt pavements heavily to work, seemed not like living people, but like spectres. The rigidity of the blank streets, the homogeneous amorphous sterility of the whole suggested death rather than life. There was no meeting place, no centre, no artery, no organic formation. There it lay, like the new foundations of a red-brick confusion rapidly spreading, like a skin-disease.

Just outside of this, on a little hill, was Tom Brangwen's big, red-brick house. It looked from the front upon the edge of the place, a meaningless squalor of ash-pits and closets and irregular rows of the backs of houses, each with its small activity made sordid by barren cohesion with the rest of the small activities. Farther off was the great colliery that went night and day. And all around was the country, green with two winding streams, ragged with gorse, and heath, the darker woods in the distance.

The whole place was just unreal, just unreal. Even now, when he had been there for two years, Tom Brangwen did not believe in the actuality of the place. It was like some gruesome dream, some ugly, dead, amorphous mood become concrete.

Ursula and Winifred were met by the motor-car at the raw little station, and drove through what seemed to them like the horrible raw beginnings of something. The place was a moment of chaos perpetuated, persisting, chaos fixed and rigid. Ursula was fascinated by the many men who were there--groups of men standing in the streets, four or five men walking in a gang together, their dogs running behind or before. They were all decently dressed, and most of them rather gaunt. The terrible gaunt repose of their bearing fascinated her. Like creatures with no more hope, but which still live and have passionate being, within some utterly unliving shell, they passed meaninglessly along, with strange, isolated dignity. It was as if a hard, horny shell enclosed them all.

Shocked and startled, Ursula was carried to her Uncle Tom's house. He was not yet at home. His house was simply, but well furnished. He had taken out a dividing wall, and made the whole front of the house into a large library, with one end devoted to his science. It was a handsome room, appointed as a laboratory and reading room, but giving the same sense of hard, mechanical activity, activity mechanical yet inchoate, and looking out on the hideous abstraction of the town, and at the green meadows and rough country beyond, and at the great, mathematical colliery on the other side.

They saw Tom Brangwen walking up the curved drive. He was

getting stouter, but with his bowler hat worn well set down on his brows, he looked manly, handsome, curiously like any other man of action. His colour was as fresh, his health as perfect as ever, he walked like a man rather absorbed.

Winifred Inger was startled when he entered the library, his coat fastened and correct, his head bald to the crown, but not shiny, rather like something naked that one is accustomed to see covered, and his dark eyes liquid and formless. He seemed to stand in the shadow, like a thing ashamed. And the clasp of his hand was so soft and yet so forceful, that it chilled the heart. She was afraid of him, repelled by him, and yet attracted.

He looked at the athletic, seemingly fearless girl, and he detected in her a kinship with his own dark corruption. Immediately, he knew they were akin.

His manner was polite, almost foreign, and rather cold. He still laughed in his curious, animal fashion, suddenly wrinkling up his wide nose, and showing his sharp teeth. The fine beauty of his skin and his complexion, some almost waxen quality, hid the strange, repellent grossness of him, the slight sense of putrescence, the commonness which revealed itself in his rather fat thighs and loins.

Winifred saw at once the deferential, slightly servile,

slightly cunning regard he had for Ursula, which made the girl at once so proud and so perplexed.

"But is this place as awful as it looks?" the young girl asked, a strain in her eyes.

"It is just what it looks," he said. "It hides nothing."

"Why are the men so sad?"

"Are they sad?" he replied.

"They seem unutterably, unutterably sad," said Ursula, out of a passionate throat.

"I don't think they are that. They just take it for granted."

"What do they take for granted?"

"This--the pits and the place altogether."

"Why don't they alter it?" she passionately protested.

"They believe they must alter themselves to fit the pits and the place, rather than alter the pits and the place to fit

themselves. It is easier," he said.

"And you agree with them," burst out his niece, unable to bear it. "You think like they do--that living human beings must be taken and adapted to all kinds of horrors. We could easily do without the pits."

He smiled, uncomfortably, cynically. Ursula felt again the revolt of hatred from him.

"I suppose their lives are not really so bad," said Winifred Inger, superior to the Zolaesque tragedy.

He turned with his polite, distant attention.

"Yes, they are pretty bad. The pits are very deep, and hot, and in some places wet. The men die of consumption fairly often. But they earn good wages."

"How gruesome!" said Winifred Inger.

"Yes," he replied gravely. It was his grave, solid, self-contained manner which made him so much respected as a colliery manager.

The servant came in to ask where they would have tea.

"Put it in the summer-house, Mrs. Smith," he said.

The fair-haired, good-looking young woman went out.

"Is she married and in service?" asked Ursula.

"She is a widow. Her husband died of consumption a little while ago." Brangwen gave a sinister little laugh. "He lay there in the house-place at her mother's, and five or six other people in the house, and died very gradually. I asked her if his death wasn't a great trouble to her. 'Well,' she said, 'he was very fretful towards the last, never satisfied, never easy, always fret-fretting, an' never knowing what would satisfy him. So in one way it was a relief when it was over--for him and for everybody.' They had only been married two years, and she has one boy. I asked her if she hadn't been very happy. 'Oh, yes, sir, we was very comfortable at first, till he took bad--oh, we was very comfortable--oh, yes--but, you see, you get used to it. I've had my father and two brothers go off just the same. You get used to it'."

"It's a horrible thing to get used to," said Winifred Inger, with a shudder.

"Yes," he said, still smiling. "But that's how they are.

She'll be getting married again directly. One man or another--it does not matter very much. They're all colliers."

"What do you mean?" asked Ursula. "They're all colliers?"

"It is with the women as with us," he replied. "Her husband was John Smith, loader. We reckoned him as a loader, he reckoned himself as a loader, and so she knew he represented his job. Marriage and home is a little side-show.

"The women know it right enough, and take it for what it's worth. One man or another, it doesn't matter all the world. The pit matters. Round the pit there will always be the sideshows, plenty of 'em."

He looked round at the red chaos, the rigid, amorphous confusion of Wiggiston.

"Every man his own little side-show, his home, but the pit owns every man. The women have what is left. What's left of this man, or what is left of that--it doesn't matter altogether. The pit takes all that really matters."

"It is the same everywhere," burst out Winifred. "It is the office, or the shop, or the business that gets the man, the

woman gets the bit the shop can't digest. What is he at home, a man? He is a meaningless lump--a standing machine, a machine out of work."

"They know they are sold," said Tom Brangwen. "That's where it is. They know they are sold to their job. If a woman talks her throat out, what difference can it make? The man's sold to his job. So the women don't bother. They take what they can catch--and vogue la galère."

"Aren't they very strict here?" asked Miss Inger.

"Oh, no. Mrs. Smith has two sisters who have just changed husbands. They're not very particular--neither are they very interested. They go dragging along what is left from the pits. They're not interested enough to be very immoral--it all amounts to the same thing, moral or immoral--just a question of pit-wages. The most moral duke in England makes two hundred thousand a year out of these pits. He keeps the morality end up."

Ursula sat black-souled and very bitter, hearing the two of them talk. There seemed something ghoulish even in their very deploring of the state of things. They seemed to take a ghoulish satisfaction in it. The pit was the great mistress. Ursula looked out of the window and saw the proud, demonlike colliery

with her wheels twinkling in the heavens, the formless, squalid mass of the town lying aside. It was the squalid heap of side-shows. The pit was the main show, the raison d'etre of all.

How terrible it was! There was a horrible fascination in it--human bodies and lives subjected in slavery to that symmetric monster of the colliery. There was a swooning, perverse satisfaction in it. For a moment she was dizzy.

Then she recovered, felt herself in a great loneliness, where-in she was sad but free. She had departed. No more would she subscribe to the great colliery, to the great machine which has taken us all captives. In her soul, she was against it, she disowned even its power. It had only to be forsaken to be inane, meaningless. And she knew it was meaningless. But it needed a great, passionate effort of will on her part, seeing the colliery, still to maintain her knowledge that it was meaningless.

But her Uncle Tom and her mistress remained there among the horde, cynically reviling the monstrous state and yet adhering to it, like a man who reviles his mistress, yet who is in love with her. She knew her Uncle Tom perceived what was going on. But she knew moreover that in spite of his criticism and condemnation, he still wanted the great machine. His only happy

moments, his only moments of pure freedom were when he was serving the machine. Then, and then only, when the machine caught him up, was he free from the hatred of himself, could he act wholely, without cynicism and unreality.

His real mistress was the machine, and the real mistress of Winifred was the machine. She too, Winifred, worshipped the impure abstraction, the mechanisms of matter. There, there, in the machine, in service of the machine, was she free from the clog and degradation of human feeling. There, in the monstrous mechanism that held all matter, living or dead, in its service, did she achieve her consummation and her perfect unison, her immortality.

Hatred sprang up in Ursula's heart. If she could she would smash the machine. Her soul's action should be the smashing of the great machine. If she could destroy the colliery, and make all the men of Wiggiston out of work, she would do it. Let them starve and grub in the earth for roots, rather than serve such a Moloch as this.

She hated her Uncle Tom, she hated Winifred Inger. They went down to the summer-house for tea. It was a pleasant place among a few trees, at the end of a tiny garden, on the edge of a field. Her Uncle Tom and Winifred seemed to jeer at her, to cheapen her. She was miserable and desolate. But she would never

give way.

Her coldness for Winifred should never cease. She knew it was over between them. She saw gross, ugly movements in her mistress, she saw a clayey, inert, unquickened flesh, that reminded her of the great prehistoric lizards. One day her Uncle Tom came in out of the broiling sunshine heated from walking. Then the perspiration stood out upon his head and brow, his hand was wet and hot and suffocating in its clasp. He too had something marshy about him--the succulent moistness and turgidity, and the same brackish, nauseating effect of a marsh, where life and decaying are one.

He was repellent to her, who was so dry and fine in her fire. Her very bones seemed to bid him keep his distance from her.

It was in these weeks that Ursula grew up. She stayed two weeks at Wiggiston, and she hated it. All was grey, dry ash, cold and dead and ugly. But she stayed. She stayed also to get rid of Winifred. The girl's hatred and her sense of repulsiveness in her mistress and in her uncle seemed to throw the other two together. They drew together as if against her.

In hardness and bitterness of soul, Ursula knew that Winifred was become her uncle's lover. She was glad. She had loved them

both. Now she wanted to be rid of them both. Their marshy, bitter-sweet corruption came sick and unwholesome in her nostrils. Anything, to get out of the foetid air. She would leave them both for ever, leave for ever their strange, soft, half-corrupt element. Anything to get away.

One night Winifred came all burning into Ursula's bed, and put her arms round the girl, holding her to herself in spite of unwillingness, and said,

"Dear, my dear--shall I marry Mr. Brangwen--shall I?"

The clinging, heavy, muddy question weighed on Ursula intolerably.

"Has he asked you?" she said, using all her might of hard resistance.

"He's asked me," said Winifred. "Do you want me to marry him, Ursula?"

"Yes," said Ursula.

The arms tightened more on her.

"I knew you did, my sweet--and I will marry him. You're fond of him, aren't you?"

"I've been awfully fond of him--ever since I was a child."

"I know--I know. I can see what you like in him. He is a man by himself, he has something apart from the rest."

"Yes," said Ursula.

"But he's not like you, my dear--ha, he's not as good as you. There's something even objectionable in him--his thick thighs--"

Ursula was silent.

"But I'll marry him, my dear--it will be best. Now say you love me."

A sort of profession was extorted out of the girl.
Nevertheless her mistress went away sighing, to weep in her own chamber.

In two days' time Ursula left Wiggiston. Miss Inger went to Nottingham. There was an engagement between her and Tom

Brangwen, which the uncle seemed to vaunt as if it were an assurance of his validity.

Brangwen and Winifred Inger continued engaged for another term. Then they married. Brangwen had reached the age when he wanted children. He wanted children. Neither marriage nor the domestic establishment meant anything to him. He wanted to propagate himself. He knew what he was doing. He had the instinct of a growing inertia, of a thing that chooses its place of rest in which to lapse into apathy, complete, profound indifference. He would let the machinery carry him; husband, father, pit-manager, warm clay lifted through the recurrent action of day after day by the great machine from which it derived its motion. As for Winifred, she was an educated woman, and of the same sort as himself. She would make a good companion. She was his mate.