CHAPTER XV

THE BITTERNESS OF ECSTASY

A storm of industry raged on in the house. Ursula did not go to college till October. So, with a distinct feeling of responsibility, as if she must express herself in this house, she laboured arranging, re-arranging, selecting, contriving.

She could use her father's ordinary tools, both for woodwork and metal-work, so she hammered and tinkered. Her mother was quite content to have the thing done. Brangwen was interested. He had a ready belief in his daughter. He himself was at work putting up his work-shed in the garden.

At last she had finished for the time being. The drawing-room was big and empty. It had the good Wilton carpet, of which the family was so proud, and the large couch and large chairs covered with shiny chintz, and the piano, a little sculpture in plaster that Brangwen had done, and not very much more. It was too large and empty-feeling for the family to occupy very much. Yet they liked to know it was there, large and empty.

The home was the dining-room. There the hard rush floor-covering made the ground light, reflecting light upon the bottom their hearts; in the window-bay was a broad, sunny seat,

the table was so solid one could not jostle it, and the chairs so strong one could knock them over without hurting them. The familiar organ that Brangwen had made stood on one side, looking peculiarly small, the sideboard was comfortably reduced to normal proportions. This was the family living-room.

Ursula had a bedroom to herself. It was really a servants' bedroom, small and plain. Its window looked over the back garden at other back gardens, some of them old and very nice, some of them littered with packing-cases, then at the backs of the houses whose fronts were the shops in High Street, or the genteel homes of the under-manager or the chief cashier, facing the chapel.

She had six weeks still before going to college. In this time she nervously read over some Latin and some botany, and fitfully worked at some mathematics. She was going into college as a teacher, for her training. But, having already taken her matriculation examination, she was entered for a university course. At the end of a year she would sit for the Intermediate Arts, then two years after for her B.A. So her case was not that of the ordinary school-teacher. She would be working among the private students who came only for pure education, not for mere professional training. She would be of the elect.

For the next three years she would be more or less dependent

on her parents again. Her training was free. All college fees were paid by the government, she had moreover a few pounds grant every year. This would just pay for her train fares and her clothing. Her parents would only have to feed her. She did not want to cost them much. They would not be well off. Her father would earn only two hundred a year, and a good deal of her mother's capital was spent in buying the house. Still, there was enough to get along with.

Gudrun was attending the Art School at Nottingham. She was working particularly at sculpture. She had a gift for this. She loved making little models in clay, of children or of animals. Already some of these had appeared in the Students' Exhibition in the Castle, and Gudrun was a distinguished person. She was chafing at the Art School and wanted to go to London. But there was not enough money. Neither would her parents let her go so far.

Theresa had left the High School. She was a great strapping, bold hussy, indifferent to all higher claims. She would stay at home. The others were at school, except the youngest. When term started, they would all be transferred to the Grammar School at Willey Green.

Ursula was excited at making acquaintances in Beldover. The excitement soon passed. She had tea at the clergyman's, at the

chemist's, at the other chemist's, at the doctor's, at the under-manager's--then she knew practically everybody. She could not take people very seriously, though at the time she wanted to.

She wandered the country, on foot and on her bicycle, finding it very beautiful in the forest direction, between Mansfield and Southwell and Worksop. But she was here only skirmishing for amusement. Her real exploration would begin in college.

Term began. She went into town each day by train. The cloistered quiet of the college began to close around her.

She was not at first disappointed. The big college built of stone, standing in the quiet street, with a rim of grass and lime trees all so peaceful: she felt it remote, a magic land. Its architecture was foolish, she knew from her father. Still, it was different from that of all other buildings. Its rather pretty, plaything, Gothic form was almost a style, in the dirty industrial town.

She liked the hall, with its big stone chimney-piece and its Gothic arches supporting the balcony above. To be sure the arches were ugly, the chimney-piece of cardboard-like carved stone, with its armorial decoration, looked silly just opposite the bicycle stand and the radiator, whilst the great

notice-board with its fluttering papers seemed to slam away all sense of retreat and mystery from the far wall. Nevertheless, amorphous as it might be, there was in it a reminiscence of the wondrous, cloistral origin of education. Her soul flew straight back to the medieval times, when the monks of God held the learning of men and imparted it within the shadow of religion. In this spirit she entered college.

The harshness and vulgarity of the lobbies and cloak-rooms hurt her at first. Why was it not all beautiful? But she could not openly admit her criticism. She was on holy ground.

She wanted all the students to have a high, pure spirit, she wanted them to say only the real, genuine things, she wanted their faces to be still and luminous as the nuns' and the monks' faces.

Alas, the girls chattered and giggled and were nervous, they were dressed up and frizzed, the men looked mean and clownish.

Still, it was lovely to pass along the corridor with one's books in one's hands, to push the swinging, glass-panelled door, and enter the big room where the first lecture would be given. The windows were large and lofty, the myriad brown students' desks stood waiting, the great blackboard was smooth behind the

rostrum.

Ursula sat beside her window, rather far back. Looking down, she saw the lime trees turning yellow, the tradesman's boy passing silent down the still, autumn-sunny street. There was the world, remote, remote.

Here, within the great, whispering sea-shell, that whispered all the while with reminiscence of all the centuries, time faded away, and the echo of knowledge filled the timeless silence.

She listened, she scribbled her notes with joy, almost with ecstasy, never for a moment criticizing what she heard. The lecturer was a mouth-piece, a priest. As he stood, black-gowned, on the rostrum, some strands of the whispering confusion of knowledge that filled the whole place seemed to be singled out and woven together by him, till they became a lecture.

At first, she preserved herself from criticism. She would not consider the professors as men, ordinary men who ate bacon, and pulled on their boots before coming to college. They were the black-gowned priests of knowledge, serving for ever in a remote, hushed temple. They were the initiated, and the beginning and the end of the mystery was in their keeping.

Curious joy she had of the lectures. It was a joy to hear the

theory of education, there was such freedom and pleasure in ranging over the very stuff of knowledge, and seeing how it moved and lived and had its being. How happy Racine made her! She did not know why. But as the big lines of the drama unfolded themselves, so steady, so measured, she felt a thrill as of being in the realm of the reality. Of Latin, she was doing Livy and Horace. The curious, intimate, gossiping tone of the Latin class suited Horace. Yet she never cared for him, nor even Livy. There was an entire lack of sternness in the gossipy class-room. She tried hard to keep her old grasp of the Roman spirit. But gradually the Latin became mere gossip-stuff and artificiality to her, a question of manners and verbosities.

Her terror was the mathematics class. The lecturer went so fast, her heart beat excitedly, she seemed to be straining every nerve. And she struggled hard, during private study, to get the stuff into control.

Then came the lovely, peaceful afternoons in the botany laboratory. There were few students. How she loved to sit on her high stool before the bench, with her pith and her razor and her material, carefully mounting her slides, carefully bringing her microscope into focus, then turning with joy to record her observation, drawing joyfully in her book, if the slide were good.

She soon made a college friend, a girl who had lived in Florence, a girl who wore a wonderful purple or figured scarf draped over a plain, dark dress. She was Dorothy Russell, daughter of a south-country advocate. Dorothy lived with a maiden aunt in Nottingham, and spent her spare moments slaving for the Women's Social and Political Union. She was quiet and intense, with an ivory face and dark hair looped plain over her ears. Ursula was very fond of her, but afraid of her. She seemed so old and so relentless towards herself. Yet she was only twenty-two. Ursula always felt her to be a creature of fate, like Cassandra.

The two girls had a close, stern friendship. Dorothy worked at all things with the same passion, never sparing herself. She came closest to Ursula during the botany hours. For she could not draw. Ursula made beautiful and wonderful drawings of the sections under the microscope, and Dorothy always came to learn the manner of the drawing.

So the first year went by, in magnificent seclusion and activity of learning. It was strenuous as a battle, her college life, yet remote as peace.

She came to Nottingham in the morning with Gudrun. The two sisters were distinguished wherever they went, slim, strong girls, eager and extremely sensitive. Gudrun was the more

beautiful of the two, with her sleepy, half-languid girlishness that looked so soft, and yet was balanced and inalterable underneath. She wore soft, easy clothing, and hats which fell by themselves into a careless grace.

Ursula was much more carefully dressed, but she was self-conscious, always falling into depths of admiration of somebody else, and modelling herself upon this other, and so producing a hopeless incongruity. When she dressed for practical purposes she always looked well. In winter, wearing a tweed coat-and-skirt and a small hat of black fur pulled over her eager, palpitant face, she seemed to move down the street in a drifting motion of suspense and exceeding sensitive receptivity.

At the end of the first year Ursula got through her Intermediate Arts examination, and there came a lull in her eager activities. She slackened off, she relaxed altogether. Worn nervous and inflammable by the excitement of the preparation for the examination, and by the sort of exaltation which carried her through the crisis itself, she now fell into a quivering passivity, her will all loosened.

The family went to Scarborough for a month. Gudrun and the father were busy at the handicraft holiday school there, Ursula was left a good deal with the children. But when she could, she

went off by herself.

She stood and looked out over the shining sea. It was very beautiful to her. The tears rose hot in her heart.

Out of the far, far space there drifted slowly in to her a passionate, unborn yearning. "There are so many dawns that have not yet risen." It seemed as if, from over the edge of the sea, all the unrisen dawns were appealing to her, all her unborn soul was crying for the unrisen dawns.

As she sat looking out at the tender sea, with its lovely, swift glimmer, the sob rose in her breast, till she caught her lip suddenly under her teeth, and the tears were forcing themselves from her. And in her very sob, she laughed. Why did she cry? She did not want to cry. It was so beautiful that she laughed. It was so beautiful that she cried.

She glanced apprehensively round, hoping no one would see her in this state.

Then came a time when the sea was rough. She watched the water travelling in to the coast, she watched a big wave running unnoticed, to burst in a shock of foam against a rock, enveloping all in a great white beauty, to pour away again, leaving the rock emerged black and teeming. Oh, and if, when the

wave burst into whiteness, it were only set free!

Sometimes she loitered along the harbour, looking at the sea-browned sailors, who, in their close blue jerseys, lounged on the harbour-wall, and laughed at her with impudent, communicative eyes.

There was established a little relation between her and them. She never would speak to them or know any more of them. Yet as she walked by and they leaned on the sea-wall, there was something between her and them, something keen and delightful and painful. She liked best the young one whose fair, salty hair tumbled over his blue eyes. He was so new and fresh and salt and not of this world.

From Scarborough she went to her Uncle Tom's. Winifred had a small baby, born at the end of the summer. She had become strange and alien to Ursula. There was an unmentionable reserve between the two women. Tom Brangwen was an attentive father, a very domestic husband. But there was something spurious about his domesticity, Ursula did not like him any more. Something ugly, blatant in his nature had come out now, making him shift everything over to a sentimental basis. A materialistic unbeliever, he carried it all off by becoming full of human feeling, a warm, attentive host, a generous husband, a model citizen. And he was clever enough to rouse admiration

everywhere, and to take in his wife sufficiently. She did not love him. She was glad to live in a state of complacent self-deception with him, she worked according to him.

Ursula was relieved to go home. She had still two peaceful years before her. Her future was settled for two years. She returned to college to prepare for her final examination.

But during this year the glamour began to depart from college. The professors were not priests initiated into the deep mysteries of life and knowledge. After all, they were only middle-men handling wares they had become so accustomed to that they were oblivious of them. What was Latin?--So much dry goods of knowledge. What was the Latin class altogether but a sort of second-hand curio shop, where one bought curios and learned the market-value of curios; dull curios too, on the whole. She was as bored by the Latin curiosities as she was by Chinese and Japanese curiosities in the antique shops. "Antiques"--the very word made her soul fall flat and dead.

The life went out of her studies, why, she did not know. But the whole thing seemed sham, spurious; spurious Gothic arches, spurious peace, spurious Latinity, spurious dignity of France, spurious naivete of Chaucer. It was a second-hand dealer's shop, and one bought an equipment for an examination. This was only a

little side-show to the factories of the town. Gradually the perception stole into her. This was no religious retreat, no perception of pure learning. It was a little apprentice-shop where one was further equipped for making money. The college itself was a little, slovenly laboratory for the factory.

A harsh and ugly disillusion came over her again, the same darkness and bitter gloom from which she was never safe now, the realization of the permanent substratum of ugliness under everything. As she came to the college in the afternoon, the lawns were frothed with daisies, the lime trees hung tender and sunlit and green; and oh, the deep, white froth of the daisies was anguish to see.

For inside, inside the college, she knew she must enter the sham workshop. All the while, it was a sham store, a sham warehouse, with a single motive of material gain, and no productivity. It pretended to exist by the religious virtue of knowledge. But the religious virtue of knowledge was become a flunkey to the god of material success.

A sort of inertia came over her. Mechanically, from habit, she went on with her studies. But it was almost hopeless. She could scarcely attend to anything. At the Anglo-Saxon lecture in the afternoon, she sat looking down, out of the window, hearing no word, of Beowulf or of anything else. Down below, in the

street, the sunny grey pavement went beside the palisade. A woman in a pink frock, with a scarlet sunshade, crossed the road, a little white dog running like a fleck of light about her. The woman with the scarlet sunshade came over the road, a lilt in her walk, a little shadow attending her. Ursula watched spell-bound. The woman with the scarlet sunshade and the flickering terrier was gone--and whither? Whither?

In what world of reality was the woman in the pink dress walking? To what warehouse of dead unreality was she herself confined?

What good was this place, this college? What good was Anglo-Saxon, when one only learned it in order to answer examination questions, in order that one should have a higher commercial value later on? She was sick with this long service at the inner commercial shrine. Yet what else was there? Was life all this, and this only? Everywhere, everything was debased to the same service. Everything went to produce vulgar things, to encumber material life.

Suddenly she threw over French. She would take honours in botany. This was the one study that lived for her. She had entered into the lives of the plants. She was fascinated by the strange laws of the vegetable world. She had here a glimpse of something working entirely apart from the purpose of the human

world.

College was barren, cheap, a temple converted to the most vulgar, petty commerce. Had she not gone to hear the echo of learning pulsing back to the source of the mystery?--The source of mystery! And barrenly, the professors in their gowns offered commercial commodity that could be turned to good account in the examination room; ready-made stuff too, and not really worth the money it was intended to fetch; which they all knew.

All the time in the college now, save when she was labouring in her botany laboratory, for there the mystery still glimmered, she felt she was degrading herself in a kind of trade of sham jewjaws.

Angry and stiff, she went through her last term. She would rather be out again earning her own living. Even Brinsley Street and Mr. Harby seemed real in comparison. Her violent hatred of the Ilkeston School was nothing compared with the sterile degradation of college. But she was not going back to Brinsley Street either. She would take her B.A., and become a mistress in some Grammar School for a time.

The last year of her college career was wheeling slowly round. She could see ahead her examination and her departure.

She had the ash of disillusion gritting under her teeth. Would the next move turn out the same? Always the shining doorway ahead; and then, upon approach, always the shining doorway was a gate into another ugly yard, dirty and active and dead. Always the crest of the hill gleaming ahead under heaven: and then, from the top of the hill only another sordid valley full of amorphous, squalid activity.

No matter! Every hill-top was a little different, every valley was somehow new. Cossethay and her childhood with her father; the Marsh and the little Church school near the Marsh, and her grandmother and her uncles; the High School at Nottingham and Anton Skrebensky; Anton Skrebensky and the dance in the moonlight between the fires; then the time she could not think of without being blasted, Winifred Inger, and the months before becoming a school-teacher; then the horrors of Brinsley Street, lapsing into comparative peacefulness, Maggie, and Maggie's brother, whose influence she could still feel in her veins, when she conjured him up; then college, and Dorothy Russell, who was now in France, then the next move into the world again!

Already it was a history. In every phase she was so different. Yet she was always Ursula Brangwen. But what did it mean, Ursula Brangwen? She did not know what she was. Only she was full of rejection, of refusal. Always, always she was

spitting out of her mouth the ash and grit of disillusion, of falsity. She could only stiffen in rejection, in rejection. She seemed always negative in her action.

That which she was, positively, was dark and unrevealed, it could not come forth. It was like a seed buried in dry ash. This world in which she lived was like a circle lighted by a lamp. This lighted area, lit up by man's completest consciousness, she thought was all the world: that here all was disclosed for ever. Yet all the time, within the darkness she had been aware of points of light, like the eyes of wild beasts, gleaming, penetrating, vanishing. And her soul had acknowledged in a great heave of terror only the outer darkness. This inner circle of light in which she lived and moved, wherein the trains rushed and the factories ground out their machine-produce and the plants and the animals worked by the light of science and knowledge, suddenly it seemed like the area under an arc-lamp, wherein the moths and children played in the security of blinding light, not even knowing there was any darkness, because they stayed in the light.

But she could see the glimmer of dark movement just out of range, she saw the eyes of the wild beast gleaming from the darkness, watching the vanity of the camp fire and the sleepers; she felt the strange, foolish vanity of the camp, which said "Beyond our light and our order there is nothing," turning their

faces always inward towards the sinking fire of illuminating consciousness, which comprised sun and stars, and the Creator, and the System of Righteousness, ignoring always the vast darkness that wheeled round about, with half-revealed shapes lurking on the edge.

Yea, and no man dared even throw a firebrand into the darkness. For if he did he was jeered to death by the others, who cried "Fool, anti-social knave, why would you disturb us with bogeys? There is no darkness. We move and live and have our being within the light, and unto us is given the eternal light of knowledge, we comprise and comprehend the innermost core and issue of knowledge. Fool and knave, how dare you belittle us with the darkness?"

Nevertheless the darkness wheeled round about, with grey shadow-shapes of wild beasts, and also with dark shadow-shapes of the angels, whom the light fenced out, as it fenced out the more familiar beasts of darkness. And some, having for a moment seen the darkness, saw it bristling with the tufts of the hyena and the wolf; and some having given up their vanity of the light, having died in their own conceit, saw the gleam in the eyes of the wolf and the hyena, that it was the flash of the sword of angels, flashing at the door to come in, that the angels in the darkness were lordly and terrible and not to be denied, like the flash of fangs.

It was a little while before Easter, in her last year of college, when Ursula was twenty-two years old, that she heard again from Skrebensky. He had written to her once or twice from South Africa, during the first months of his service out there in the war, and since had sent her a post-card every now and then, at ever longer intervals. He had become a first lieutenant, and had stayed out in Africa. She had not heard of him now for more than two years.

Often her thoughts returned to him. He seemed like the gleaming dawn, yellow, radiant, of a long, grey, ashy day. The memory of him was like the thought of the first radiant hours of morning. And here was the blank grey ashiness of later daytime. Ah, if he had only remained true to her, she might have known the sunshine, without all this toil and hurt and degradation of a spoiled day. He would have been her angel. He held the keys of the sunshine. Still he held them. He could open to her the gates of succeeding freedom and delight. Nay, if he had remained true to her, he would have been the doorway to her, into the boundless sky of happiness and plunging, inexhaustible freedom which was the paradise of her soul. Ah, the great range he would have opened to her, the illimitable endless space for self-realization and delight for ever.

The one thing she believed in was in the love she had held

for him. It remained shining and complete, a thing to hark back to. And she said to herself, when present things seemed a failure:

"Ah, I was fond of him," as if with him the leading flower of her life had died.

Now she heard from him again. The chief effect was pain. The pleasure, the spontaneous joy was not there any longer. But her will rejoiced. Her will had fixed itself to him. And the old excitement of her dreams stirred and woke up. He was come, the man with the wondrous lips that could send the kiss wavering to the very end of all space. Was he come back to her? She did not believe.

My dear Ursula, I am back in England again for a few months before going out again, this time to India. I wonder if you still keep the memory of our times together. I have still got the little photograph of you. You must be changed since then, for it is about six years ago. I am fully six years older,--I have lived through another life since I knew you at Cossethay. I wonder if you would care to see me. I shall come up to Derby next week, and I would call in Nottingham, and we might have tea together. Will you let me know? I shall look for your answer.

Ursula had taken this letter from the rack in the hall at college, and torn it open as she crossed to the Women's room. The world seemed to dissolve away from around her, she stood alone in clear air.

Where could she go, to be alone? She fled away, upstairs, and through the private way to the reference library. Seizing a book, she sat down and pondered the letter. Her heart beat, her limbs trembled. As in a dream, she heard one gong sound in the college, then, strangely, another. The first lecture had gone by.

Hurriedly she took one of her note-books and began to write.

"Dear Anton, Yes, I still have the ring. I should be very glad to see you again. You can come here to college for me, or I will meet you somewhere in the town. Will you let me know? Your sincere friend----"

Trembling, she asked the librarian, who was her friend, if he would give her an envelope. She sealed and addressed her letter, and went out, bare-headed, to post it. When it was dropped into the pillar-box, the world became a very still, pale place,

without confines. She wandered back to college, to her pale dream, like a first wan light of dawn.

Skrebensky came one afternoon the following week. Day after day, she had hurried swiftly to the letter-rack on her arrival at college in the morning, and during the intervals between lectures. Several times, swiftly, with secretive fingers, she had plucked his letter down from its public prominence, and fled across the hall holding it fast and hidden. She read her letters in the botany laboratory, where her corner was always reserved to her.

Several letters, and then he was coming. It was Friday afternoon he appointed. She worked over her microscope with feverish activity, able to give only half her attention, yet working closely and rapidly. She had on her slide some special stuff come up from London that day, and the professor was fussy and excited about it. At the same time, as she focused the light on her field, and saw the plant-animal lying shadowy in a boundless light, she was fretting over a conversation she had had a few days ago with Dr. Frankstone, who was a woman doctor of physics in the college.

"No, really," Dr. Frankstone had said, "I don't see why we should attribute some special mystery to life--do you? We don't understand it as we understand electricity, even, but that

doesn't warrant our saying it is something special, something different in kind and distinct from everything else in the universe--do you think it does? May it not be that life consists in a complexity of physical and chemical activities, of the same order as the activities we already know in science? I don't see, really, why we should imagine there is a special order of life, and life alone----"

The conversation had ended on a note of uncertainty, indefinite, wistful. But the purpose, what was the purpose? Electricity had no soul, light and heat had no soul. Was she herself an impersonal force, or conjunction of forces, like one of these? She looked still at the unicellular shadow that lay within the field of light, under her microscope. It was alive. She saw it move--she saw the bright mist of its ciliary activity, she saw the gleam of its nucleus, as it slid across the plane of light. What then was its will? If it was a conjunction of forces, physical and chemical, what held these forces unified, and for what purpose were they unified?

For what purpose were the incalculable physical and chemical activities nodalized in this shadowy, moving speck under her microscope? What was the will which nodalized them and created the one thing she saw? What was its intention? To be itself? Was its purpose just mechanical and limited to itself?

It intended to be itself. But what self? Suddenly in her mind the world gleamed strangely, with an intense light, like the nucleus of the creature under the microscope. Suddenly she had passed away into an intensely-gleaming light of knowledge. She could not understand what it all was. She only knew that it was not limited mechanical energy, nor mere purpose of self-preservation and self-assertion. It was a consummation, a being infinite. Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity.

Ursula sat abstracted over her microscope, in suspense. Her soul was busy, infinitely busy, in the new world. In the new world, Skrebensky was waiting for her--he would be waiting for her. She could not go yet, because her soul was engaged. Soon she would go.

A stillness, like passing away, took hold of her. Far off, down the corridors, she heard the gong booming five o'clock. She must go. Yet she sat still.

The other students were pushing back their stools and putting their microscopes away. Everything broke into turmoil. She saw, through the window, students going down the steps, with books under their arms, talking, all talking.

A great craving to depart came upon her. She wanted also to

be gone. She was in dread of the material world, and in dread of her own transfiguration. She wanted to run to meet Skrebensky--the new life, the reality.

Very rapidly she wiped her slides and put them back, cleared her place at the bench, active, active, active. She wanted to run to meet Skrebensky, hasten--hasten. She did not know what she was to meet. But it would be a new beginning. She must hurry.

She flitted down the corridor on swift feet, her razor and note-books and pencil in one hand, her pinafore over her arm. Her face was lifted and tense with eagerness. He might not be there.

Issuing from the corridor, she saw him at once. She knew him at once. Yet he was so strange. He stood with the curious self-effacing diffidence which so frightened her in well-bred young men whom she knew. He stood as if he wished to be unseen. He was very well-dressed. She would not admit to herself the chill like a sunshine of frost that came over her. This was he, the key, the nucleus to the new world.

He saw her coming swiftly across the hall, a slim girl in a white flannel blouse and dark skirt, with some of the abstraction and gleam of the unknown upon her, and he started,

excited. He was very nervous. Other students were loitering about the hall.

She laughed, with a blind, dazzled face, as she gave him her hand. He too could not perceive her.

In a moment she was gone, to get her outdoor things. Then again, as when she had been at school, they walked out into the town to tea. And they went to the same tea-shop.

She knew a great difference in him. The kinship was there, the old kinship, but he had belonged to a different world from hers. It was as if they had cried a state of truce between him and her, and in this truce they had met. She knew, vaguely, in the first minute, that they were enemies come together in a truce. Every movement and word of his was alien to her being.

Yet still she loved the fine texture of his face, of his skin. He was rather browner, physically stronger. He was a man now. She thought his manliness made the strangeness in him. When he was only a youth, fluid, he was nearer to her. She thought a man must inevitably set into this strange separateness, cold otherness of being. He talked, but not to her. She tried to speak to him, but she could not reach him.

He seemed so balanced and sure, he made such a confident presence. He was a great rider, so there was about him some of a horseman's sureness and habitual definiteness of decision, also some of the horseman's animal darkness. Yet his soul was only the more wavering, vague. He seemed made up of a set of habitual actions and decisions. The vulnerable, variable quick of the man was inaccessible. She knew nothing of it. She could only feel the dark, heavy fixity of his animal desire.

This dumb desire on his part had brought him to her? She was puzzled, hurt by some hopeless fixity in him, that terrified her with a cold feeling of despair. What did he want? His desires were so underground. Why did he not admit himself? What did he want? He wanted something that should be nameless. She shrank in fear.

Yet she flashed with excitement. In his dark, subterranean male soul, he was kneeling before her, darkly exposing himself. She quivered, the dark flame ran over her. He was waiting at her feet. He was helpless, at her mercy. She could take or reject. If she rejected him, something would die in him. For him it was life or death. And yet, all must be kept so dark, the consciousness must admit nothing.

"How long," she said, "are you staying in England?"

"I am not sure--but not later than July, I believe."

Then they were both silent. He was here, in England, for six months. They had a space of six months between them. He waited. The same iron rigidity, as if the world were made of steel, possessed her again. It was no use turning with flesh and blood to this arrangement of forged metal.

Quickly, her imagination adjusted itself to the situation.

"Have you an appointment in India?" she asked.

"Yes--I have just the six months' leave."

"Will you like being out there?"

"I think so--there's a good deal of social life, and plenty going on--hunting, polo--and always a good horse--and plenty of work, any amount of work."

He was always side-tracking, always side-tracking his own soul. She could see him so well out there, in India--one of the governing class, superimposed upon an old civilization, lord and master of a clumsier civilization than his own. It was his choice. He would become again an aristocrat, invested with

authority and responsibility, having a great helpless populace beneath him. One of the ruling class, his whole being would be given over to the fulfilling and the executing of the better idea of the state. And in India, there would be real work to do. The country did need the civilization which he himself represented: it did need his roads and bridges, and the enlightenment of which he was part. He would go to India. But that was not her road.

Yet she loved him, the body of him, whatever his decisions might be. He seemed to want something of her. He was waiting for her to decide of him. It had been decided in her long ago, when he had kissed her first. He was her lover, though good and evil should cease. Her will never relaxed, though her heart and soul must be imprisoned and silenced. He waited upon her, and she accepted him. For he had come back to her.

A glow came into his face, into his fine, smooth skin, his eyes, gold-grey, glowed intimately to her. He burned up, he caught fire and became splendid, royal, something like a tiger. She caught his brilliant, burnished glamour. Her heart and her soul were shut away fast down below, hidden. She was free of them. She was to have her satisfaction.

She became proud and erect, like a flower, putting itself forth in its proper strength. His warmth invigorated her. His

beauty of form, which seemed to glow out in contrast with the rest of people, made her proud. It was like deference to her, and made her feel as if she represented before him all the grace and flower of humanity. She was no mere Ursula Brangwen. She was Woman, she was the whole of Woman in the human order. All-containing, universal, how should she be limited to individuality?

She was exhilarated, she did not want to go away from him. She had her place by him. Who should take her away?

They came out of the cafe.

"Is there anything you would like to do?" he said. "Is there anything we can do?"

It was a dark, windy night in March.

"There is nothing to do," she said.

Which was the answer he wanted.

"Let us walk then--where shall we walk?" he asked.

"Shall we go to the river?" she suggested, timidly.

In a moment they were on the tram, going down to Trent Bridge. She was so glad. The thought of walking in the dark, far-reaching water-meadows, beside the full river, transported her. Dark water flowing in silence through the big, restless night made her feel wild.

They crossed the bridge, descended, and went away from the lights. In an instant, in the darkness, he took her hand and they went in silence, with subtle feet treading the darkness. The town fumed away on their left, there were strange lights and sounds, the wind rushed against the trees, and under the bridge. They walked close together, powerful in unison. He drew her very close, held her with a subtle, stealthy, powerful passion, as if they had a secret agreement which held good in the profound darkness. The profound darkness was their universe.

"It is like it was before," she said.

Yet it was not in the least as it was before. Nevertheless his heart was perfectly in accord with her. They thought one thought.

"I knew I should come back," he said at length.

She quivered.

"Did you always love me?" she asked.

The directness of the question overcame him, submerged him for a moment. The darkness travelled massively along.

"I had to come back to you," he said, as if hypnotized. "You were always at the back of everything."

She was silent with triumph, like fate.

"I loved you," she said, "always."

The dark flame leaped up in him. He must give her himself. He must give her the very foundations of himself. He drew her very close, and they went on in silence.

She started violently, hearing voices. They were near a stile across the dark meadows.

"It's only lovers," he said to her, softly.

She looked to see the dark figures against the fence, wondering that the darkness was inhabited.

"Only lovers will walk here to-night," he said.

Then in a low, vibrating voice he told her about Africa, the strange darkness, the strange, blood fear.

"I am not afraid of the darkness in England," he said. "It is soft, and natural to me, it is my medium, especially when you are here. But in Africa it seems massive and fluid with terror--not fear of anything--just fear. One breathes it, like the smell of blood. The blacks know it. They worship it, really, the darkness. One almost likes it--the fear--something sensual."

She thrilled again to him. He was to her a voice out of the darkness. He talked to her all the while, in low tones, about Africa, conveying something strange and sensual to her: the negro, with his loose, soft passion that could envelop one like a bath. Gradually he transferred to her the hot, fecund darkness that possessed his own blood. He was strangely secret. The whole world must be abolished. He maddened her with his soft, cajoling, vibrating tones. He wanted her to answer, to understand. A turgid, teeming night, heavy with fecundity in which every molecule of matter grew big with increase, secretly urgent with fecund desire, seemed to come to pass. She quivered, taut and vibrating, almost pained. And gradually, he ceased telling her of Africa, there came a silence, whilst they walked the darkness beside the massive river. Her limbs were rich and tense, she felt they must be vibrating with a low, profound

vibration. She could scarcely walk. The deep vibration of the darkness could only be felt, not heard.

Suddenly, as they walked, she turned to him and held him fast, as if she were turned to steel.

"Do you love me?" she cried in anguish.

"Yes," he said, in a curious, lapping voice, unlike himself. "Yes, I love you."

He seemed like the living darkness upon her, she was in the embrace of the strong darkness. He held her enclosed, soft, unutterably soft, and with the unrelaxing softness of fate, the relentless softness of fecundity. She quivered, and quivered, like a tense thing that is struck. But he held her all the time, soft, unending, like darkness closed upon her, omnipresent as the night. He kissed her, and she quivered as if she were being destroyed, shattered. The lighted vessel vibrated, and broke in her soul, the light fell, struggled, and went dark. She was all dark, will-less, having only the receptive will.

He kissed her, with his soft, enveloping kisses, and she responded to them completely, her mind, her soul gone out. Darkness cleaving to darkness, she hung close to him, pressed herself into soft flow of his kiss, pressed herself down, down

to the source and core of his kiss, herself covered and enveloped in the warm, fecund flow of his kiss, that travelled over her, flowed over her, covered her, flowed over the last fibre of her, so they were one stream, one dark fecundity, and she clung at the core of him, with her lips holding open the very bottommost source of him.

So they stood in the utter, dark kiss, that triumphed over them both, subjected them, knitted them into one fecund nucleus of the fluid darkness.

It was bliss, it was the nucleolating of the fecund darkness. Once the vessel had vibrated till it was shattered, the light of consciousness gone, then the darkness reigned, and the unutterable satisfaction.

They stood enjoying the unmitigated kiss, taking it, giving to it endlessly, and still it was not exhausted. Their veins fluttered, their blood ran together as one stream.

Till gradually a sleep, a heaviness settled on them, a drowse, and out of the drowse, a small light of consciousness woke up. Ursula became aware of the night around her, the water lapping and running full just near, the trees roaring and soughing in gusts of wind.

She kept near to him, in contact with him, but she became ever more and more herself. And she knew she must go to catch her train. But she did not want to draw away from contact with him.

At length they roused and set out. No longer they existed in the unblemished darkness. There was the glitter of a bridge, the twinkle of lights across the river, the big flare of the town in front and on their right.

But still, dark and soft and incontestable, their bodies walked untouched by the lights, darkness supreme and arrogant.

"The stupid lights," Ursula said to herself, in her dark sensual arrogance. "The stupid, artificial, exaggerated town, fuming its lights. It does not exist really. It rests upon the unlimited darkness, like a gleam of coloured oil on dark water, but what is it?--nothing, just nothing."

In the tram, in the train, she felt the same. The lights, the civic uniform was a trick played, the people as they moved or sat were only dummies exposed. She could see, beneath their pale, wooden pretence of composure and civic purposefulness, the dark stream that contained them all. They were like little paper ships in their motion. But in reality each one was a dark,

blind, eager wave urging blindly forward, dark with the same homogeneous desire. And all their talk and all their behaviour was sham, they were dressed-up creatures. She was reminded of the Invisible Man, who was a piece of darkness made visible only by his clothes.

During the next weeks, all the time she went about in the same dark richness, her eyes dilated and shining like the eyes of a wild animal, a curious half-smile which seemed to be gibing at the civic pretence of all the human life about her.

"What are you, you pale citizens?" her face seemed to say, gleaming. "You subdued beast in sheep's clothing, you primeval darkness falsified to a social mechanism."

She went about in the sensual sub-consciousness all the time, mocking at the ready-made, artificial daylight of the rest.

"They assume selves as they assume suits of clothing," she said to herself, looking in mocking contempt at the stiffened, neutralized men. "They think it better to be clerks or professors than to be the dark, fertile beings that exist in the potential darkness. What do you think you are?" her soul asked of the professor as she sat opposite him in class. "What do you think you are, as you sit there in your gown and your spectacles? You are a lurking, blood-sniffing creature with eyes

peering out of the jungle darkness, snuffing for your desires. That is what you are, though nobody would believe it, and you would be the very last to allow it."

Her soul mocked at all this pretence. Herself, she kept on pretending. She dressed herself and made herself fine, she attended her lectures and scribbled her notes. But all in a mood of superficial, mocking facility. She understood well enough their two-and-two-make-four tricks. She was as clever as they were. But care!--did she care about their monkey tricks of knowledge or learning or civic deportment? She did not care in the least.

There was Skrebensky, there was her dark, vital self. Outside the college, the outer darkness, Skrebensky was waiting. On the edge of the night, he was attentive. Did he care?

She was free as a leopard that sends up its raucous cry in the night. She had the potent, dark stream of her own blood, she had the glimmering core of fecundity, she had her mate, her complement, her sharer in fruition. So, she had all, everything.

Skrebensky was staying in Nottingham all the time. He too was free. He knew no one in this town, he had no civic self to maintain. He was free. Their trams and markets and theatres and

public meetings were a shaken kaleidoscope to him, he watched as a lion or a tiger may lie with narrowed eyes watching the people pass before its cage, the kaleidoscopic unreality of people, or a leopard lie blinking, watching the incomprehensible feats of the keepers. He despised it all--it was all non-existent. Their good professors, their good clergymen, their good political speakers, their good, earnest women--all the time he felt his soul was grinning, grinning at the sight of them. So many performing puppets, all wood and rag for the performance!

He watched the citizen, a pillar of society, a model, saw the stiff goat's legs, which have become almost stiffened to wood in the desire to make them puppet in their action, he saw the trousers formed to the puppet-action: man's legs, but man's legs become rigid and deformed, ugly, mechanical.

He was curiously happy, being alone, now. The glimmering grin was on his face. He had no longer any necessity to take part in the performing tricks of the rest. He had discovered the clue to himself, he had escaped from the show, like a wild beast escaped straight back into its jungle. Having a room in a quiet hotel, he hired a horse and rode out into the country, staying sometimes for the night in some village, and returning the next day.

He felt rich and abundant in himself. Everything he did was a voluptuous pleasure to him--either to ride on horseback, or to walk, or to lie in the sun, or to drink in a public-house. He had no use for people, nor for words. He had an amused pleasure in everything, a great sense of voluptuous richness in himself, and of the fecundity of the universal night he inhabited. The puppet shapes of people, their wood-mechanical voices, he was remote from them.

For there were always his meetings with Ursula. Very often, she did not go to college in the afternoon, but walked with him instead. Or he took a motor-car or a dog-cart and they drove into the country, leaving the car and going away by themselves into the woods. He had not taken her yet. With subtle, instinctive economy, they went to the end of each kiss, each embrace, each pleasure in intimate contact, knowing subconsciously that the last was coming. It was to be their final entry into the source of creation.

She took him home, and he stayed a week-end at Beldover with her family. She loved having him in the house. Strange how he seemed to come into the atmosphere of her family, with his laughing, insidious grace. They all loved him, he was kin to them. His raillery, his warm, voluptuous mocking presence was meat and joy to the Brangwen household. For this house was always quivering with darkness, they put off their puppet form

when they came home, to lie and drowse in the sun.

There was a sense of freedom amongst them all, of the undercurrent of darkness among them all. Yet here, at home, Ursula resented it. It became distasteful to her. And she knew that if they understood the real relationship between her and Skrebensky, her parents, her father in particular, would go mad with rage. So subtly, she seemed to be like any other girl who is more or less courted by a man. And she was like any other girl. But in her, the antagonism to the social imposition was for the time complete and final.

She waited, every moment of the day, for his next kiss. She admitted it to herself in shame and bliss. Almost consciously, she waited. He waited, but, until the time came, more unconsciously. When the time came that he should kiss her again, a prevention was an annihilation to him. He felt his flesh go grey, he was heavy with a corpse-like inanition, he did not exist, if the time passed unfulfilled.

He came to her finally in a superb consummation. It was very dark, and again a windy, heavy night. They had come down the lane towards Beldover, down to the valley. They were at the end of their kisses, and there was the silence between them. They stood as at the edge of a cliff, with a great darkness beneath.

Coming out of the lane along the darkness, with the dark space spreading down to the wind, and the twinkling lights of the station below, the far-off windy chuff of a shunting train, the tiny clink-clink-clink of the wagons blown between the wind, the light of Beldover-edge twinkling upon the blackness of the hill opposite, the glow of the furnaces along the railway to the right, their steps began to falter. They would soon come out of the darkness into the lights. It was like turning back. It was unfulfilment. Two quivering, unwilling creatures, they lingered on the edge of the darkness, peering out at the lights and the machine-glimmer beyond. They could not turn back to the world--they could not.

So lingering along, they came to a great oak tree by the path. In all its budding mass it roared to the wind, and its trunk vibrated in every fibre, powerful, indomitable.

"We will sit down," he said.

And in the roaring circle under the tree, that was almost invisible yet whose powerful presence received them, they lay a moment looking at the twinkling lights on the darkness opposite, saw the sweeping brand of a train past the edge of their darkened field.

Then he turned and kissed her, and she waited for him. The pain to her was the pain she wanted, the agony was the agony she wanted. She was caught up, entangled in the powerful vibration of the night. The man, what was he?--a dark, powerful vibration that encompassed her. She passed away as on a dark wind, far, far away, into the pristine darkness of paradise, into the original immortality. She entered the dark fields of immortality.

When she rose, she felt strangely free, strong. She was not ashamed,--why should she be? He was walking beside her, the man who had been with her. She had taken him, they had been together. Whither they had gone, she did not know. But it was as if she had received another nature. She belonged to the eternal, changeless place into which they had leapt together.

Her soul was sure and indifferent of the opinion of the world of artificial light. As they went up the steps of the foot-bridge over the railway, and met the train-passengers, she felt herself belonging to another world, she walked past them immune, a whole darkness dividing her from them. When she went into the lighted dining-room at home, she was impervious to the lights and the eyes of her parents. Her everyday self was just the same. She merely had another, stronger self that knew the darkness.

This curious separate strength, that existed in darkness and pride of night, never forsook her. She had never been more herself. It could not occur to her that anybody, not even the young man of the world, Skrebensky, should have anything at all to do with her permanent self. As for her temporal, social self, she let it look after itself.

Her whole soul was implicated with Skrebensky--not the young man of the world, but the undifferentiated man he was. She was perfectly sure of herself, perfectly strong, stronger than all the world. The world was not strong--she was strong. The world existed only in a secondary sense:--she existed supremely.

She continued at college, in her ordinary routine, merely as a cover to her dark, powerful under-life. The fact of herself, and with her Skrebensky, was so powerful, that she took rest in the other. She went to college in the morning, and attended her classes, flowering, and remote.

She had lunch with him in his hotel; every evening she spent with him, either in town, at his rooms, or in the country. She made the excuse at home of evening study for her degree. But she paid not the slightest attention to her study.

They were both absolute and happy and calm. The fact of their

own consummate being made everything else so entirely subordinate that they were free. The only thing they wanted, as the days went by, was more time to themselves. They wanted the time to be absolutely their own.

The Easter vacation was approaching. They agreed to go right away. It would not matter if they did not come back. They were indifferent to the actual facts.

"I suppose we ought to get married," he said, rather wistfully. It was so magnificently free and in a deeper world, as it was. To make public their connection would be to put it in range with all the things which nullified him, and from which he was for the moment entirely dissociated. If he married he would have to assume his social self. And the thought of assuming his social self made him at once diffident and abstract. If she were his social wife, if she were part of that complication of dead reality, then what had his under-life to do with her? One's social wife was almost a material symbol. Whereas now she was something more vivid to him than anything in conventional life could be. She gave the complete lie to all conventional life, he and she stood together, dark, fluid, infinitely potent, giving the living lie to the dead whole which contained them.

He watched her pensive, puzzled face.

"I don't think I want to marry you," she said, her brow clouded.

It piqued him rather.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Let's think about it afterwards, shall we?" she said.

He was crossed, yet he loved her violently.

"You've got a museau, not a face," he said.

"Have I?" she cried, her face lighting up like a pure flame. She thought she had escaped. Yet he returned--he was not satisfied.

"Why?" he asked, "why don't you want to marry me?"

"I don't want to be with other people," she said. "I want to be like this. I'll tell you if ever I want to marry you."

"All right," he said.

He would rather the thing was left indefinite, and that she

took the responsibility.

They talked of the Easter vacation. She thought only of complete enjoyment.

They went to an hotel in Piccadilly. She was supposed to be his wife. They bought a wedding-ring for a shilling, from a shop in a poor quarter.

They had revoked altogether the ordinary mortal world. Their confidence was like a possession upon them. They were possessed. Perfectly and supremely free they felt, proud beyond all question, and surpassing mortal conditions.

They were perfect, therefore nothing else existed. The world was a world of servants whom one civilly ignored. Wherever they went, they were the sensuous aristocrats, warm, bright, glancing with pure pride of the senses.

The effect upon other people was extraordinary. The glamour was cast from the young couple upon all they came into contact with, waiters or chance acquaintances.

"Oui, Monsieur le baron," she would reply with a mocking courtesy to her husband.

So they came to be treated as titled people. He was an officer in the engineers. They were just married, going to India immediately.

Thus a tissue of romance was round them. She believed she was a young wife of a titled husband on the eve of departure for India. This, the social fact, was a delicious make-belief. The living fact was that he and she were man and woman, absolute and beyond all limitation.

The days went by--they were to have three weeks together--in perfect success. All the time, they themselves were reality, all outside was tribute to them. They were quite careless about money, but they did nothing very extravagant. He was rather surprised when he found that he had spent twenty pounds in a little under a week, but it was only the irritation of having to go to the bank. The machinery of the old system lasted for him, not the system. The money simply did not exist.

Neither did any of the old obligations. They came home from the theatre, had supper, then flitted about in their dressing-gowns. They had a large bedroom and a corner sitting-room high up, remote and very cosy. They ate all their meals in their own rooms, attended by a young German called Hans, who thought them both wonderful, and answered

assiduously:

"Gewiss, Herr Baron--bitte sehr, Frau
Baronin."

Often, they saw the pink of dawn away across the park. The tower of Westminster Cathedral was emerging, the lamps of Piccadilly, stringing away beside the trees of the park, were becoming pale and moth-like, the morning traffic was clock-clocking down the shadowy road, which had gleamed all night like metal, down below, running far ahead into the night, beneath the lamps, and which was now vague, as in a mist, because of the dawn.

Then, as the flush of dawn became stronger, they opened the glass doors and went on to the giddy balcony, feeling triumphant as two angels in bliss, looking down at the still sleeping world, which would wake to a dutiful, rumbling, sluggish turmoil of unreality.

[But the air was cold. They went into their bedroom, and bathed before going to bed, leaving the partition doors of the bathroom open, so that the vapour came into the bedroom and faintly dimmed the mirror. She was always in bed first. She watched him as he bathed, his quick, unconscious movements, the electric light glinting on his wet shoulders. He stood out of the bath, his hair all washed flat over his forehead, and pressed the

water out of his eyes. He was slender, and, to her, perfect, a clean, straight-cut youth, without a grain of superfluous body. The brown hair on his body was soft and fine and adorable, he was all beautifully flushed, as he stood in the white bath-apartment.

He saw her warm, dark, lit-up face watching him from the pillow--yet he did not see it--it was always present, and was to him as his own eyes. He was never aware of the separate being of her. She was like his own eyes and his own heart beating to him.

So he went across to her, to get his sleeping suit. It was always a perfect adventure to go near to her. She put her arms round him, and snuffed his warm, softened skin.

"Scent," she said.

"Soap," he answered.

"Soap," she repeated, looking up with bright eyes. They were both laughing, always laughing.]

Soon they were fast asleep, asleep till midday, close together, sleeping one sleep. Then they awoke to the ever-changing reality of their state. They alone inhabited the world of reality. All the rest lived on a lower sphere.

Whatever they wanted to do, they did. They saw a few people--Dorothy, whose guest she was supposed to be, and a couple of friends of Skrebensky, young Oxford men, who called her Mrs. Skrebensky with entire simplicity. They treated her, indeed, with such respect, that she began to think she was really quite of the whole universe, of the old world as well as of the new. She forgot she was outside the pale of the old world. She thought she had brought it under the spell of her own, real world. And so she had.

In such ever-changing reality the weeks went by. All the time, they were an unknown world to each other. Every movement made by the one was a reality and an adventure to the other. They did not want outside excitements. They went to very few theatres, they were often in their sitting-room high up over Piccadilly, with windows open on two sides, and the door open on to the balcony, looking over the Green Park, or down upon the minute travelling of the traffic.

Then suddenly, looking at a sunset, she wanted to go. She must be gone. She must be gone at once. And in two hours' time they were at Charing Cross taking train for Paris. Paris was his suggestion. She did not care where it was. The great joy was in setting out. And for a few days she was happy in the novelty of Paris.

Then, for some reason, she must call in Rouen on the way back to London. He had an instinctive mistrust of her desire for the place. But, perversely, she wanted to go there. It was as if she wanted to try its effect upon her.

For the first time, in Rouen, he had a cold feeling of death; not afraid of any other man, but of her. She seemed to leave him. She followed after something that was not him. She did not want him. The old streets, the cathedral, the age and the monumental peace of the town took her away from him. She turned to it as if to something she had forgotten, and wanted. This was now the reality; this great stone cathedral slumbering there in its mass, which knew no transience nor heard any denial. It was majestic in its stability, its splendid absoluteness.

Her soul began to run by itself. He did not realize, nor did she. Yet in Rouen he had the first deadly anguish, the first sense of the death towards which they were wandering. And she felt the first heavy yearning, heavy, heavy hopeless warning, almost like a deep, uneasy sinking into apathy, hopelessness.

They returned to London. But still they had two days. He began to tremble, he grew feverish with the fear of her departure. She had in her some fatal prescience, that made her calm. What would be, would be.

He remained fairly easy, however, still in his state of heightened glamour, till she had gone, and he had turned away from St. Pancras, and sat on the tram-car going up Pimlico to the "Angel", to Moorgate Street on Sunday evening.

Then the cold horror gradually soaked into him. He saw the horror of the City Road, he realized the ghastly cold sordidness of the tram-car in which he sat. Cold, stark, ashen sterility had him surrounded. Where then was the luminous, wonderful world he belonged to by rights? How did he come to be thrown on this refuse-heap where he was?

He was as if mad. The horror of the brick buildings, of the tram-car, of the ashen-grey people in the street made him reeling and blind as if drunk. He went mad. He had lived with her in a close, living, pulsing world, where everything pulsed with rich being. Now he found himself struggling amid an ashen-dry, cold world of rigidity, dead walls and mechanical traffic, and creeping, spectre-like people. The life was extinct, only ash moved and stirred or stood rigid, there was a horrible, clattering activity, a rattle like the falling of dry slag, cold and sterile. It was as if the sunshine that fell were unnatural light exposing the ash of the town, as if the lights at night were the sinister gleam of decomposition.

Quite mad, beside himself, he went to his club and sat with a glass of whisky, motionless, as if turned to clay. He felt like a corpse that is inhabited with just enough life to make it appear as any other of the spectral, unliving beings which we call people in our dead language. Her absence was worse than pain to him. It destroyed his being.

Dead, he went on from lunch to tea. His face was all the time fixed and stiff and colourless, his life was a dry, mechanical movement. Yet even he wondered slightly at the awful misery that had overcome him. How could he be so ashlike and extinct? He wrote her a letter.

I have been thinking that we must get married before long. My pay will be more when I get out to India, we shall be able to get along. Or if you don't want to go to India, I could very probably stay here in England. But I think you would like India. You could ride, and you would know just everybody out there. Perhaps if you stay on to take your degree, we might marry immediately after that. I will write to your father as soon as I hear from you----

He went on, disposing of her. If only he could be with her! All he wanted now was to marry her, to be sure of her. Yet all the time he was perfectly, perfectly hopeless, cold, extinct, without emotion or connection.

He felt as if his life were dead. His soul was extinct. The whole being of him had become sterile, he was a spectre, divorced from life. He had no fullness, he was just a flat shape. Day by day the madness accumulated in him. The horror of not-being possessed him.

He went here, there, and everywhere. But whatever he did, he knew that only the cipher of him was there, nothing was filled in. He went to the theatre; what he heard and saw fell upon a cold surface of consciousness, which was now all that he was, there was nothing behind it, he could have no experience of any sort. Mechanical registering took place in him, no more. He had no being, no contents. Neither had the people he came into contact with. They were mere permutations of known quantities. There was no roundness or fullness in this world he now inhabited, everything was a dead shape mental arrangement, without life or being.

Much of the time, he was with friends and comrades. Then he forgot everything. Their activities made up for his own negation, they engaged his negative horror.

He only became happy when he drank, and he drank a good deal. Then he was just the opposite to what he had been. He became a warm, diffuse, glowing cloud, in a warm, diffuse formless

fashion. Everything melted down into a rosy glow, and he was the glow, and everything was the glow, everybody else was the glow, and it was very nice, very nice. He would sing songs, it was so nice.

Ursula went back to Beldover shut and firm. She loved Skrebensky, of that she was resolved. She would allow nothing else.

She read his long, obsessed letter about getting married and going to India, without any particular response. She seemed to ignore what he said about marriage. It did not come home to her. He seemed, throughout the greater part of his letter, to be talking without much meaning.

She replied to him pleasantly and easily. She rarely wrote long letters.

India sounds lovely. I can just see myself on an elephant swaying between lanes of obsequious natives. But I don't know if father would let me go. We must see.

I keep living over again the lovely times we have had. But I don't think you liked me quite so much towards the end, did you? You did not like me when we left Paris. Why didn't you?

I love you very much. I love your body. It is so clear and fine. I am glad you do not go naked, or all the women would fall in love with you. I am very jealous of it, I love it so much.

He was more or less satisfied with this letter. But day after day he was walking about, dead, non-existent.

He could not come again to Nottingham until the end of April. Then he persuaded her to go with him for a week-end to a friend's house near Oxford. By this time they were engaged. He had written to her father, and the thing was settled. He brought her an emerald ring, of which she was very proud.

Her people treated her now with a little distance, as if she had already left them. They left her very much alone.

She went with him for the three days in the country house near Oxford. It was delicious, and she was very happy. But the thing she remembered most was when, getting up in the morning after he had gone back quietly to his own room, having spent the night with her, she found herself very rich in being alone, and enjoying to the full her solitary room, she drew up her blind and saw the plum trees in the garden below all glittering and snowy and delighted with the sunshine, in full bloom under a blue sky. They threw out their blossom, they flung it out under

the blue heavens, the whitest blossom! How excited it made her.

She had to hurry through her dressing to go and walk in the garden under the plum trees, before anyone should come and talk to her. Out she slipped, and paced like a queen in fairy pleasaunces. The blossom was silver-shadowy when she looked up from under the tree at the blue sky. There was a faint scent, a faint noise of bees, a wonderful quickness of happy morning.

She heard the breakfast gong and went indoors.

"Where have you been?" asked the others.

"I had to go out under the plum trees," she said, her face glowing like a flower. "It is so lovely."

A shadow of anger crossed Skrebensky's soul. She had not wanted him to be there. He hardened his will.

At night there was a moon, and the blossom glistened ghostly, they went together to look at it. She saw the moonlight on his face as he waited near her, and his features were like silver and his eyes in shadow were unfathomable. She was in love with him. He was very quiet.

They went indoors and she pretended to be tired. So she went quickly to bed.

"Don't be long coming to me," she whispered, as she was supposed to be kissing him good night.

And he waited, intent, obsessed, for the moment when he could come to her.

She enjoyed him, she made much of him. She liked to put her fingers on the soft skin of his sides, or on the softness of his back, when he made the muscles hard underneath, the muscles developed very strong through riding; and she had a great thrill of excitement and passion, because of the unimpressible hardness of his body, that was so soft and smooth under her fingers, that came to her with such absolute service.

She owned his body and enjoyed it with all the delight and carelessness of a possessor. But he had become gradually afraid of her body. He wanted her, he wanted her endlessly. But there had come a tension into his desire, a constraint which prevented his enjoying the delicious approach and the lovable close of the endless embrace. He was afraid. His will was always tense, fixed.

Her final examination was at midsummer. She insisted on

sitting for it, although she had neglected her work during the past months. He also wanted her to go in for the degree. Then, he thought, she would be satisfied. Secretly he hoped she would fail, so that she would be more glad of him.

"Would you rather live in India or in England when we are married?" he asked her.

"Oh, in India, by far," she said, with a careless lack of consideration which annoyed him.

Once she said, with heat:

"I shall be glad to leave England. Everything is so meagre and paltry, it is so unspiritual--I hate democracy."

He became angry to hear her talk like this, he did not know why. Somehow, he could not bear it, when she attacked things. It was as if she were attacking him.

"What do you mean?" he asked her, hostile. "Why do you hate democracy?"

"Only the greedy and ugly people come to the top in a democracy," she said, "because they're the only people who will push themselves there. Only degenerate races are

democratic."

"What do you want then--an aristocracy?" he asked, secretly moved. He always felt that by rights he belonged to the ruling aristocracy. Yet to hear her speak for his class pained him with a curious, painful pleasure. He felt he was acquiescing in something illegal, taking to himself some wrong, reprehensible advantages.

"I do want an aristocracy," she cried. "And I'd far rather have an aristocracy of birth than of money. Who are the aristocrats now--who are chosen as the best to rule? Those who have money and the brains for money. It doesn't matter what else they have: but they must have money-brains,--because they are ruling in the name of money."

"The people elect the government," he said.

"I know they do. But what are the people? Each one of them is a money-interest. I hate it, that anybody is my equal who has the same amount of money as I have. I know I am better than all of them. I hate them. They are not my equals. I hate equality on a money basis. It is the equality of dirt."

Her eyes blazed at him, he felt as if she wanted to destroy him. She had gripped him and was trying to break him. His anger

sprang up, against her. At least he would fight for his existence with her. A hard, blind resistance possessed him.

"I don't care about money," he said, "neither do I want to put my finger in the pie. I am too sensitive about my finger."

"What is your finger to me?" she cried, in a passion. "You with your dainty fingers, and your going to India because you will be one of the somebodies there! It's a mere dodge, your going to India."

"In what way a dodge?" he cried, white with anger and fear.

"You think the Indians are simpler than us, and so you'll enjoy being near them and being a lord over them," she said. "And you'll feel so righteous, governing them for their own good. Who are you, to feel righteous? What are you righteous about, in your governing? Your governing stinks. What do you govern for, but to make things there as dead and mean as they are here!"

"I don't feel righteous in the least," he said.

"Then what do you feel? It's all such a nothingness,

what you feel and what you don't feel."

"What do you feel yourself?" he said. "Aren't you righteous in your own mind?"

"Yes, I am, because I'm against you, and all your old, dead things," she cried.

She seemed, with the last words, uttered in hard knowledge, to strike down the flag that he kept flying. He felt cut off at the knees, a figure made worthless. A horrible sickness gripped him, as if his legs were really cut away, and he could not move, but remained a crippled trunk, dependent, worthless. The ghastly sense of helplessness, as if he were a mere figure that did not exist vitally, made him mad, beside himself.

Now, even whilst he was with her, this death of himself came over him, when he walked about like a body from which all individual life is gone. In this state he neither heard nor saw nor felt, only the mechanism of his life continued.

He hated her, as far as, in this state, he could hate. His cunning suggested to him all the ways of making her esteem him. For she did not esteem him. He left her and did not write to her. He flirted with other women, with Gudrun.

This last made her very fierce. She was still fiercely jealous of his body. In passionate anger she upbraided him because, not being man enough to satisfy one woman, he hung round others.

["Don't I satisfy you?" he asked of her, again going white to the throat.

"No," she said. "You've never satisfied me since the first week in London. You never satisfy me now. What does it mean to me, your having me--"] She lifted her shoulders and turned aside her face in a motion of cold, indifferent worthlessness. He felt he would kill her.

When she had roused him to a pitch of madness, when she saw his eyes all dark and mad with suffering, then a great suffering overcame her soul, a great, inconquerable suffering. And she loved him. For, oh, she wanted to love him. Stronger than life or death was her craving to be able to love him.

And at such moments, when he was made with her destroying him, when all his complacency was destroyed, all his everyday self was broken, and only the stripped, rudimentary, primal man remained, demented with torture, her passion to love him became love, she took him again, they came together in an overwhelming passion, in which he knew he satisfied her.

But it all contained a developing germ of death. After each

contact, her anguished desire for him or for that which she never had from him was stronger, her love was more hopeless. After each contact his mad dependence on her was deepened, his hope of standing strong and taking her in his own strength was weakened. He felt himself a mere attribute of her.

Whitsuntide came, just before her examination. She was to have a few days of rest. Dorothy had inherited her patrimony, and had taken a cottage in Sussex. She invited them to stay with her.

They went down to Dorothy's neat, low cottage at the foot of the downs. Here they could do as they liked. Ursula was always yearning to go to the top of the downs. The white track wound up to the rounded summit. And she must go.

Up there, she could see the Channel a few miles away, the sea raised up and faintly glittering in the sky, the Isle of Wight a shadow lifted in the far distance, the river winding bright through the patterned plain to seaward, Arundel Castle a shadowy bulk, and then the rolling of the high, smooth downs, making a high, smooth land under heaven, acknowledging only the heavens in their great, sun-glowing strength, and suffering only a few bushes to trespass on the intercourse between their great, unabateable body and the changeful body of the sky.

Below she saw the villages and the woods of the weald, and the train running bravely, a gallant little thing, running with all the importance of the world over the water meadows and into the gap of the downs, waving its white steam, yet all the while so little. So little, yet its courage carried it from end to end of the earth, till there was no place where it did not go. Yet the downs, in magnificent indifference, bearing limbs and body to the sun, drinking sunshine and sea-wind and sea-wet cloud into its golden skin, with superb stillness and calm of being, was not the downs still more wonderful? The blind, pathetic, energetic courage of the train as it steamed tinily away through the patterned levels to the sea's dimness, so fast and so energetic, made her weep. Where was it going? It was going nowhere, it was just going. So blind, so without goal or aim, yet so hasty! She sat on an old prehistoric earth-work and cried, and the tears ran down her face. The train had tunnelled all the earth, blindly, and uglily.

And she lay face downwards on the downs, that were so strong, that cared only for their intercourse with the everlasting skies, and she wished she could become a strong mound smooth under the sky, bosom and limbs bared to all winds and clouds and bursts of sunshine.

But she must get up again and look down from her foothold of sunshine, down and away at the patterned, level earth, with its

villages and its smoke and its energy. So shortsighted the train seemed, running to the distance, so terrifying in their littleness the villages, with such pettiness in their activity.

Skrebensky wandered dazed, not knowing where he was or what he was doing with her. All her passion seemed to be to wander up there on the downs, and when she must descend to earth, she was heavy. Up there she was exhilarated and free.

She would not love him in a house any more. She said she hated houses, and particularly she hated beds. There was something distasteful in his coming to her bed.

She would stay the night on the downs, up there, he with her. It was midsummer, the days were glamorously long. At about half-past ten, when the bluey-black darkness had at last fallen, they took rugs and climbed the steep track to the summit of the downs, he and she.

Up there, the stars were big, the earth below was gone into darkness. She was free up there with the stars. Far out they saw tiny yellow lights--but it was very far out, at sea, or on land. She was free up among the stars.

She took off her clothes, and made him take off all his, and

they ran over the smooth, moonless turf, a long way, more than a mile from where they had left their clothing, running in the dark, soft wind, utterly naked, as naked as the downs themselves. Her hair was loose and blew about her shoulders, she ran swiftly, wearing sandals when she set off on the long run to the dew-pond.

In the round dew-pond the stars were untroubled. She ventured softly into the water, grasping at the stars with her hands.

And then suddenly she started back, running swiftly. He was there, beside her, but only on sufferance. He was a screen for her fears. He served her. She took him, she clasped him, clenched him close, but her eyes were open looking at the stars, it was as if the stars were lying with her and entering the unfathomable darkness of her womb, fathoming her at last. It was not him.

The dawn came. They stood together on a high place, an earthwork of the stone-age men, watching for the light. It came over the land. But the land was dark. She watched a pale rim on the sky, away against the darkened land. The darkness became bluer. A little wind was running in from the sea behind. It seemed to be running to the pale rift of the dawn. And she and he darkly, on an outpost of the darkness, stood watching for the dawn.

The light grew stronger, gushing up against the dark sapphire of the transparent night. The light grew stronger, whiter, then over it hovered a flush of rose. A flush of rose, and then yellow, pale, new-created yellow, the whole quivering and poising momentarily over the fountain on the sky's rim.

The rose hovered and quivered, burned, fused to flame, to a transient red, while the yellow urged out in great waves, thrown from the ever-increasing fountain, great waves of yellow flinging into the sky, scattering its spray over the darkness, which became bluer and bluer, paler, till soon it would itself be a radiance, which had been darkness.

The sun was coming. There was a quivering, a powerful terrifying swim of molten light. Then the molten source itself surged forth, revealing itself. The sun was in the sky, too powerful to look at.

And the ground beneath lay so still, so peaceful. Only now and again a cock crew. Otherwise, from the distant yellow hills to the pine trees at the foot of the downs, everything was newly washed into being, in a flood of new, golden creation.

It was so unutterably still and perfect with promise, the golden-lighted, distinct land, that Ursula's soul rocked and

wept. Suddenly he glanced at her. The tears were running over her cheeks, her mouth was working strangely.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

After a moment's struggle with her voice.

"It is so beautiful," she said, looking at the glowing, beautiful land. It was so beautiful, so perfect, and so unsullied.

He too realized what England would be in a few hours' time--a blind, sordid, strenuous activity, all for nothing, fuming with dirty smoke and running trains and groping in the bowels of the earth, all for nothing. A ghastliness came over him.

He looked at Ursula. Her face was wet with tears, very bright, like a transfiguration in the refulgent light. Nor was his the hand to wipe away the burning, bright tears. He stood apart, overcome by a cruel ineffectuality.

Gradually a great, helpless sorrow was rising in him. But as yet he was fighting it away, he was struggling for his own life. He became very quiet and unaware of the things about him, awaiting, as it were, her judgment on him.

They returned to Nottingham, the time of her examination came. She must go to London. But she would not stay with him in an hotel. She would go to a quiet little pension near the British Museum.

Those quiet residential squares of London made a great impression on her mind. They were very complete. Her mind seemed imprisoned in their quietness. Who was going to liberate her?

In the evening, her practical examinations being over, he went with her to dinner at one of the hotels down the river, near Richmond. It was golden and beautiful, with yellow water and white and scarlet-striped boat-awnings, and blue shadows under the trees.

"When shall we be married?" he asked her, quietly, simply, as if it were a mere question of comfort.

She watched the changing pleasure-traffic of the river. He looked at her golden, puzzled museau. The knot gathered in his throat.

"I don't know," she said.

A hot grief gripped his throat.

"Why don't you know--don't you want to be married?" he asked her.

Her head turned slowly, her face, puzzled, like a boy's face, expressionless because she was trying to think, looked towards his face. She did not see him, because she was pre-occupied. She did not quite know what she was going to say.

"I don't think I want to be married," she said, and her naive, troubled, puzzled eyes rested a moment on his, then travelled away, pre-occupied.

"Do you mean never, or not just yet?" he asked.

The knot in his throat grew harder, his face was drawn as if he were being strangled.

"I mean never," she said, out of some far self which spoke for once beyond her.

His drawn, strangled face watched her blankly for a few moments, then a strange sound took place in his throat. She started, came to herself, and, horrified, saw him. His head made a queer motion, the chin jerked back against the throat, the

curious, crowing, hiccupping sound came again, his face twisted like insanity, and he was crying, crying blind and twisted as if something were broken which kept him in control.

"Tony--don't," she cried, starting up.

It tore every one of her nerves to see him. He made groping movements to get out of his chair. But he was crying uncontrollably, noiselessly, with his face twisted like a mask, contorted and the tears running down the amazing grooves in his cheeks. Blindly, his face always this horrible working mask, he groped for his hat, for his way down from the terrace. It was eight o'clock, but still brightly light. The other people were staring. In great agitation, part of which was exasperation, she stayed behind, paid the waiter with a half-sovereign, took her yellow silk coat, then followed Skrebensky.

She saw him walking with brittle, blind steps along the path by the river. She could tell by the strange stiffness and brittleness of his figure that he was still crying. Hurrying after him, running, she took his arm.

"Tony," she cried, "don't! Why are you like this? What are you doing this for? Don't. It's not necessary."

He heard, and his manhood was cruelly, coldly defaced. Yet it

was no good. He could not gain control of his face. His face, his breast, were weeping violently, as if automatically. His will, his knowledge had nothing to do with it. He simply could not stop.

She walked holding his arm, silent with exasperation and perplexity and pain. He took the uncertain steps of a blind man, because his mind was blind with weeping.

"Shall we go home? Shall we have a taxi?" she said.

He could pay no attention. Very flustered, very agitated, she signalled indefinitely to a taxi-cab that was going slowly by. The driver saluted and drew up. She opened the door and pushed Skrebensky in, then took her own place. Her face was uplifted, the mouth closed down, she looked hard and cold and ashamed. She winced as the driver's dark red face was thrust round upon her, a full-blooded, animal face with black eyebrows and a thick, short-cut moustache.

"Where to, lady?" he said, his white teeth showing. Again for a moment she was flustered.

"Forty, Rutland Square," she said.

He touched his cap and stolidly set the car in motion. He

seemed to have a league with her to ignore Skrebensky.

The latter sat as if trapped within the taxi-cab, his face still working, whilst occasionally he made quick slight movements of the head, to shake away his tears. He never moved his hands. She could not bear to look at him. She sat with face uplifted and averted to the window.

At length, when she had regained some control over herself, she turned again to him. He was much quieter. His face was wet, and twitched occasionally, his hands still lay motionless. But his eyes were quite still, like a washed sky after rain, full of a wan light, and quite steady, almost ghost-like.

A pain flamed in her womb, for him.

"I didn't think I should hurt you," she said, laying her hand very lightly, tentatively, on his arm. "The words came without my knowing. They didn't mean anything, really."

He remained quite still, hearing, but washed all wan and without feeling. She waited, looking at him, as if he were some curious, not-understandable creature.

"You won't cry again, will you, Tony?"

Some shame and bitterness against her burned him in the question. She noticed how his moustache was soddened wet with tears. Taking her handkerchief, she wiped his face. The driver's heavy, stolid back remained always turned to them, as if conscious but indifferent. Skrebensky sat motionless whilst Ursula wiped his face, softly, carefully, and yet clumsily, not as well as he would have wiped it himself.

Her handkerchief was too small. It was soon wet through. She groped in his pocket for his own. Then, with its more ample capacity, she carefully dried his face. He remained motionless all the while. Then she drew his cheek to hers and kissed him. His face was cold. Her heart was hurt. She saw the tears welling quickly to his eyes again. As if he were a child, she again wiped away his tears. By now she herself was on the point of weeping. Her underlip was caught between her teeth.

So she sat still, for fear of her own tears, sitting close by him, holding his hand warm and close and loving. Meanwhile the car ran on, and a soft, midsummer dusk began to gather. For a long while they sat motionless. Only now and again her hand closed more closely, lovingly, over his hand, then gradually relaxed.

The dusk began to fall. One or two lights appeared. The driver drew up to light his lamps. Skrebensky moved for the

first time, leaning forward to watch the driver. His face had always the same still, clarified, almost childlike look, impersonal.

They saw the driver's strange, full, dark face peering into the lamps under drawn brows. Ursula shuddered. It was the face almost of an animal yet of a quick, strong, wary animal that had them within its knowledge, almost within its power. She clung closer to Krebensky.

"My love?" she said to him, questioningly, when the car was again running in full motion.

He made no movement or sound. He let her hold his hand, he let her reach forward, in the gathering darkness, and kiss his still cheek. The crying had gone by--he would not cry any more. He was whole and himself again.

"My love," she repeated, trying to make him notice her. But as yet he could not.

He watched the road. They were running by Kensington Gardens. For the first time his lips opened.

"Shall we get out and go into the park," he asked.

"Yes," she said, quietly, not sure what was coming.

After a moment he took the tube from its peg. She saw the stout, strong, self-contained driver lean his head.

"Stop at Hyde Park Corner."

The dark head nodded, the car ran on just the same.

Presently they pulled up. Skrebensky paid the man. Ursula stood back. She saw the driver salute as he received his tip, and then, before he set the car in motion, turn and look at her, with his quick, powerful, animal's look, his eyes very concentrated and the whites of his eyes flickering. Then he drove away into the crowd. He had let her go. She had been afraid.

Skrebensky turned with her into the park. A band was still playing and the place was thronged with people. They listened to the ebbing music, then went aside to a dark seat, where they sat closely, hand in hand.

Then at length, as out of the silence, she said to him, wondering:

"What hurt you so?"

She really did not know, at this moment.

"When you said you wanted never to marry me," he replied, with a childish simplicity.

"But why did that hurt you so?" she said. "You needn't mind everything I say so particularly."

"I don't know--I didn't want to do it," he said, humbly, ashamed.

She pressed his hand warmly. They sat close together, watching the soldiers go by with their sweethearts, the lights trailing in myriads down the great thoroughfares that beat on the edge of the park.

"I didn't know you cared so much," she said, also humbly.

"I didn't," he said. "I was knocked over myself.--But I care--all the world."

His voice was so quiet and colourless, it made her heart go pale with fear.

"My love!" she said, drawing near to him. But she spoke out

of fear, not out of love.

"I care all the world--I care for nothing
else--neither in life nor in death," he said, in the same
steady, colourless voice of essential truth.

"Than for what?" she murmured duskily.

"Than for you--to be with me."

And again she was afraid. Was she to be conquered by this? She cowered close to him, very close to him. They sat perfectly still, listening to the great, heavy, beating sound of the town, the murmur of lovers going by, the footsteps of soldiers.

She shivered against him.

"You are cold?" he said.

"A little."

"We will go and have some supper."

He was now always quiet and decided and remote, very beautiful. He seemed to have some strange, cold power over her.

They went to a restaurant, and drank chianti. But his pale, wan look did not go away.

"Don't leave me to-night," he said at length, looking at her, pleading. He was so strange and impersonal, she was afraid.

"But the people of my place," she said, quivering.

"I will explain to them--they know we are engaged."

She sat pale and mute. He waited.

"Shall we go?" he said at length.

"Where?"

"To an hotel."

Her heart was hardened. Without answering, she rose to acquiesce. But she was now cold and unreal. Yet she could not refuse him. It seemed like fate, a fate she did not want.

They went to an Italian hotel somewhere, and had a sombre bedroom with a very large bed, clean, but sombre. The ceiling was painted with a bunch of flowers in a big medallion over the

bed. She thought it was pretty.

He came to her, and cleaved to her very close, like steel cleaving and clinching on to her. Her passion was roused, it was fierce but cold. But it was fierce, and extreme, and good, their passion this night. He slept with her fast in his arms. All night long he held her fast against him. She was passive, acquiscent. But her sleep was not very deep nor very real.

She woke in the morning to a sound of water dashed on a courtyard, to sunlight streaming through a lattice. She thought she was in a foreign country. And Skrebensky was there an incubus upon her.

She lay still, thinking, whilst his arm was round her, his head against her shoulders, his body against hers, just behind her. He was still asleep.

She watched the sunshine coming in bars through the persiennes, and her immediate surroundings again melted away.

She was in some other land, some other world, where the old restraints had dissolved and vanished, where one moved freely, not afraid of one's fellow men, nor wary, nor on the defensive, but calm, indifferent, at one's ease. Vaguely, in a sort of

silver light, she wandered at large and at ease. The bonds of the world were broken. This world of England had vanished away. She heard a voice in the yard below calling:

"O Giovann'--O'-O'-O'-Giovann'----!"

And she knew she was in a new country, in a new life. It was very delicious to lie thus still, with one's soul wandering freely and simply in the silver light of some other, simpler, more finely natural world.

But always there was a foreboding waiting to command her. She became more aware of Skrebensky. She knew he was waking up. She must modify her soul, depart from her further world, for him.

She knew he was awake. He lay still, with a concrete stillness, not as when he slept. Then his arm tightened almost convulsively upon her, and he said, half timidly:

"Did you sleep well?"

"Very well."

"So did I."

There was a pause.

"And do you love me?" he asked.

She turned and looked at him searchingly. He seemed outside her.

"I do," she said.

But she said it out of complacency and a desire not to be harried. There was a curious breach of silence between them, which frightened him.

They lay rather late, then he rang for breakfast. She wanted to be able to go straight downstairs and away from the place, when she got up. She was happy in this room, but the thought of the publicity of the hall downstairs rather troubled her.

A young Italian, a Sicilian, dark and slightly pock-marked, buttoned up in a sort of grey tunic, appeared with the tray. His face had an almost African imperturbability, impassive, incomprehensible.

"One might be in Italy," Skrebensky said to him, genially. A vacant look, almost like fear, came on the fellow's face. He did not understand.

"This is like Italy," Skrebensky explained.

The face of the Italian flashed with a non-comprehending smile, he finished setting out the tray, and was gone. He did not understand: he would understand nothing: he disappeared from the door like a half-domesticated wild animal. It made Ursula shudder slightly, the quick, sharp-sighted, intent animality of the man.

Skrebensky was beautiful to her this morning, his face softened and transfused with suffering and with love, his movements very still and gentle. He was beautiful to her, but she was detached from him by a chill distance. Always she seemed to be bearing up against the distance that separated them. But he was unaware. This morning he was transfused and beautiful. She admired his movements, the way he spread honey on his roll, or poured out the coffee.

When breakfast was over, she lay still again on the pillows, whilst he went through his toilet. She watched him, as he sponged himself, and quickly dried himself with the towel. His body was beautiful, his movements intent and quick, she admired him and she appreciated him without reserve. He seemed completed now. He aroused no fruitful fecundity in her. He seemed added up, finished. She knew him all round, not on any side did he

lead into the unknown. Poignant, almost passionate appreciation she felt for him, but none of the dreadful wonder, none of the rich fear, the connection with the unknown, or the reverence of love. He was, however, unaware this morning. His body was quiet and fulfilled, his veins complete with satisfaction, he was happy, finished.

Again she went home. But this time he went with her. He wanted to stay by her. He wanted her to marry him. It was already July. In early September he must sail for India. He could not bear to think of going alone. She must come with him. Nervously, he kept beside her.

Her examination was finished, her college career was over. There remained for her now to marry or to work again. She applied for no post. It was concluded she would marry. India tempted her--the strange, strange land. But with the thought of Calcutta, or Bombay, or of Simla, and of the European population, India was no more attractive to her than Nottingham.

She had failed in her examination: she had gone down: she had not taken her degree. It was a blow to her. It hardened her soul.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "What are the odds, whether you

are a Bachelor of Arts or not, according to the London University? All you know, you know, and if you are Mrs. Skrebensky, the B.A. is meaningless."

Instead of consoling her, this made her harder, more ruthless. She was now up against her own fate. It was for her to choose between being Mrs. Skrebensky, even Baroness Skrebensky, wife of a lieutenant in the Royal Engineers, the Sappers, as he called them, living with the European population in India--or being Ursula Brangwen, spinster, school-mistress. She was qualified by her Intermediate Arts examination. She would probably even now get a post quite easily as assistant in one of the higher grade schools, or even in Willey Green School. Which was she to do?

She hated most of all entering the bondage of teaching once more. Very heartily she detested it. Yet at the thought of marriage and living with Skrebensky amid the European population in India, her soul was locked and would not budge. She had very little feeling about it: only there was a deadlock.

Skrebensky waited, she waited, everybody waited for the decision. When Anton talked to her, and seemed insidiously to suggest himself as a husband to her, she knew how utterly locked out he was. On the other hand, when she saw Dorothy, and discussed the matter, she felt she would marry him promptly, at

once, as a sharp disavowal of adherence with Dorothy's views.

The situation was almost ridiculous.

"But do you love him?" asked Dorothy.

"It isn't a question of loving him," said Ursula. "I love him well enough--certainly more than I love anybody else in the world. And I shall never love anybody else the same again. We have had the flower of each other. But I don't care about love. I don't value it. I don't care whether I love or whether I don't, whether I have love or whether I haven't. What is it to me?"

And she shrugged her shoulders in fierce, angry contempt.

Dorothy pondered, rather angry and afraid.

"Then what do you care about?" she asked, exasperated.

"I don't know," said Ursula. "But something impersonal. Love--love--love--what does it mean--what does it amount to? So much personal gratification. It doesn't lead anywhere."

"It isn't supposed to lead anywhere, is it?" said Dorothy, satirically. "I thought it was the one thing which is an end in itself."

"Then what does it matter to me?" cried Ursula. "As an end in itself, I could love a hundred men, one after the other. Why should I end with a Skrebensky? Why should I not go on, and love all the types I fancy, one after another, if love is an end in itself? There are plenty of men who aren't Anton, whom I could love--whom I would like to love."

"Then you don't love him," said Dorothy.

"I tell you I do;--quite as much, and perhaps more than I should love any of the others. Only there are plenty of things that aren't in Anton that I would love in the other men."

"What, for instance?"

"It doesn't matter. But a sort of strong understanding, in some men, and then a dignity, a directness, something unquestioned that there is in working men, and then a jolly, reckless passionateness that you see--a man who could really let go----"

Dorothy could feel that Ursula was already hankering after something else, something that this man did not give her.

"The question is, what do you want," propounded Dorothy. "Is it just other men?"

Ursula was silenced. This was her own dread. Was she just promiscuous?

"Because if it is," continued Dorothy, "you'd better marry Anton. The other can only end badly."

So out of fear of herself Ursula was to marry Skrebensky.

He was very busy now, preparing to go to India. He must visit relatives and contract business. He was almost sure of Ursula now. She seemed to have given in. And he seemed to become again an important, self-assured man.

It was the first week in August, and he was one of a large party in a bungalow on the Lincolnshire coast. It was a tennis, golf, motor-car, motor-boat party, given by his great-aunt, a lady of social pretensions. Ursula was invited to spend the week with the party.

She went rather reluctantly. Her marriage was more or less

fixed for the twenty-eighth of the month. They were to sail for India on September the fifth. One thing she knew, in her subconsciousness, and that was, she would never sail for India.

She and Anton, being important guests on account of the coming marriage, had rooms in the large bungalow. It was a big place, with a great central hall, two smaller writing-rooms, and then two corridors from which opened eight or nine bedrooms. Skrebensky was put on one corridor, Ursula on the other. They felt very lost, in the crowd.

Being lovers, however, they were allowed to be out alone together as much as they liked. Yet she felt very strange, in this crowd of strange people, uneasy, as if she had no privacy. She was not used to these homogeneous crowds. She was afraid.

She felt different from the rest of them, with their hard, easy, shallow intimacy, that seemed to cost them so little. She felt she was not pronounced enough. It was a kind of hold-your-own unconventional atmosphere.

She did not like it. In crowds, in assemblies of people, she liked formality. She felt she did not produce the right effect. She was not effective: she was not beautiful: she was nothing.

Even before Skrebensky she felt unimportant, almost inferior. He could take his part very well with the rest.

He and she went out into the night. There was a moon behind clouds, shedding a diffused light, gleaming now and again in bits of smoky mother-of-pearl. So they walked together on the wet, ribbed sands near the sea, hearing the run of the long, heavy waves, that made a ghostly whiteness and a whisper.

He was sure of himself. As she walked, the soft silk of her dress--she wore a blue shantung, full-skirted--blew away from the sea and flapped and clung to her legs. She wished it would not. Everything seemed to give her away, and she could not rouse herself to deny, she was so confused.

He would lead her away to a pocket in the sand-hills, secret amid the grey thorn-bushes and the grey, glassy grass. He held her close against him, felt all her firm, unutterably desirable mould of body through the fine fibre of the silk that fell about her limbs. The silk, slipping fierily on the hidden, yet revealed roundness and firmness of her body, her loins, seemed to run in him like fire, make his brain burn like brimstone. She liked it, the electric fire of the silk under his hands upon her limbs, the fire flew over her, as he drew nearer and nearer to discovery. She vibrated like a jet of electric, firm fluid in response. Yet she did not feel beautiful. All the time, she felt

she was not beautiful to him, only exciting. [She let him take her, and he seemed mad, mad with excited passion. But she, as she lay afterwards on the cold, soft sand, looking up at the blotted, faintly luminous sky, felt that she was as cold now as she had been before. Yet he, breathing heavily, seemed almost savagely satisfied. He seemed revenged.

A little wind wafted the sea grass and passed over her face. Where was the supreme fulfilment she would never enjoy? Why was she so cold, so unroused, so indifferent?

As they went home, and she saw the many, hateful lights of the bungalow, of several bungalows in a group, he said softly:

"Don't lock your door."

"I'd rather, here," she said.

"No, don't. We belong to each other. Don't let us deny it."

She did not answer. He took her silence for consent.

He shared his room with another man.

"I suppose," he said, "it won't alarm the house if I go across to happier regions."

"So long as you don't make a great row going, and don't try the wrong door," said the other man, turning in to sleep.

Skrebensky went out in his wide-striped sleeping suit. He crossed the big dining hall, whose low firelight smelled of cigars and whisky and coffee, entered the other corridor and found Ursula's room. She was lying awake, wide-eyed and suffering. She was glad he had come, if only for consolation. It was consolation to be held in his arms, to feel his body against hers. Yet how foreign his arms and body were! Yet still, not so horribly foreign and hostile as the rest of the house felt to her.

She did not know how she suffered in this house. She was healthy and exorbitantly full of interest. So she played tennis and learned golf, she rowed out and swam in the deep sea, and enjoyed it very much indeed, full of zest. Yet all the time, among those others, she felt shocked and wincing, as if her violently-sensitive nakedness were exposed to the hard, brutal, material impact of the rest of the people.

The days went by unmarked, in a full, almost strenuous enjoyment of one's own physique. Skrebensky was one among the others, till evening came, and he took her for himself. She was allowed a great deal of freedom and was treated with a good deal of respect, as a girl on the eve of marriage, about to depart for another continent.

The trouble began at evening. Then a yearning for something unknown came over her, a passion for something she knew not what. She would walk the foreshore alone after dusk, expecting, expecting something, as if she had gone to a rendezvous. The salt, bitter passion of the sea, its indifference to the earth, its swinging, definite motion, its strength, its attack, and its salt burning, seemed to provoke her to a pitch of madness, tantalizing her with vast suggestions of fulfilment. And then, for personification, would come Skrebensky, Skrebensky, whom she knew, whom she was fond of, who was attractive, but whose soul could not contain her in its waves of strength, nor his breast compel her in burning, salty passion.

One evening they went out after dinner, across the low golf links to the dunes and the sea. The sky had small, faint stars, all was still and faintly dark. They walked together in silence, then ploughed, labouring, through the heavy loose sand of the gap between the dunes. They went in silence under the even, faint darkness, in the darker shadow of the sandhills.

Suddenly, cresting the heavy, sandy pass, Ursula lifted her head, and shrank back, momentarily frightened. There was a great whiteness confronting her, the moon was incandescent as a round furnace door, out of which came the high blast of moonlight, over the seaward half of the world, a dazzling, terrifying glare

of white light. They shrank back for a moment into shadow, uttering a cry. He felt his chest laid bare, where the secret was heavily hidden. He felt himself fusing down to nothingness, like a bead that rapidly disappears in an incandescent flame.

"How wonderful!" cried Ursula, in low, calling tones. "How wonderful!"

And she went forward, plunging into it. He followed behind. She too seemed to melt into the glare, towards the moon.

The sands were as ground silver, the sea moved in solid brightness, coming towards them, and she went to meet the advance of the flashing, buoyant water. [She gave her breast to the moon, her belly to the flashing, heaving water.] He stood behind, encompassed, a shadow ever dissolving.

She stood on the edge of the water, at the edge of the solid, flashing body of the sea, and the wave rushed over her feet.

"I want to go," she cried, in a strong, dominant voice. "I want to go."

He saw the moonlight on her face, so she was like metal, he heard her ringing, metallic voice, like the voice of a harpy to

him.

She prowled, ranging on the edge of the water like a possessed creature, and he followed her. He saw the froth of the wave followed by the hard, bright water swirl over her feet and her ankles, she swung out her arms, to balance, he expected every moment to see her walk into the sea, dressed as she was, and be carried swimming out.

But she turned, she walked to him.

"I want to go," she cried again, in the high, hard voice, like the scream of gulls.

"Where?" he asked.

"I don't know."

And she seized hold of his arm, held him fast, as if captive, and walked him a little way by the edge of the dazzling, dazing water.

Then there in the great flare of light, she clinched hold of him, hard, as if suddenly she had the strength of destruction, she fastened her arms round him and tightened him in her grip, whilst her mouth sought his in a hard, rending, ever-increasing

kiss, till his body was powerless in her grip, his heart melted in fear from the fierce, beaked, harpy's kiss. The water washed again over their feet, but she took no notice. She seemed unaware, she seemed to be pressing in her beaked mouth till she had the heart of him. Then, at last, she drew away and looked at him--looked at him. He knew what she wanted. He took her by the hand and led her across the foreshore, back to the sandhills. She went silently. He felt as if the ordeal of proof was upon him, for life or death. He led her to a dark hollow.

"No, here," she said, going out to the slope full under the moonshine. She lay motionless, with wide-open eyes looking at the moon. He came direct to her, without preliminaries. She held him pinned down at the chest, awful. The fight, the struggle for consummation was terrible. It lasted till it was agony to his soul, till he succumbed, till he gave way as if dead, lay with his face buried, partly in her hair, partly in the sand, motionless, as if he would be motionless now for ever, hidden away in the dark, buried, only buried, he only wanted to be buried in the goodly darkness, only that, and no more.

He seemed to swoon. It was a long time before he came to himself. He was aware of an unusual motion of her breast. He looked up. Her face lay like an image in the moonlight, the eyes wide open, rigid. But out of the eyes, slowly, there rolled a

tear, that glittered in the moonlight as it ran down her cheek.

He felt as if as the knife were being pushed into his already dead body. With head strained back, he watched, drawn tense, for some minutes, watched the unaltering, rigid face like metal in the moonlight, the fixed, unseeing eye, in which slowly the water gathered, shook with glittering moonlight, then surcharged, brimmed over and ran trickling, a tear with its burden of moonlight, into the darkness, to fall in the sand.

He drew gradually away as if afraid, drew away--she did not move. He glanced at her--she lay the same. Could he break away? He turned, saw the open foreshore, clear in front of him, and he plunged away, on and on, ever farther from the horrible figure that lay stretched in the moonlight on the sands with the tears gathering and travelling on the motionless, eternal face.

He felt, if ever he must see her again, his bones must be broken, his body crushed, obliterated for ever. And as yet, he had the love of his own living body. He wandered on a long, long way, till his brain drew dark and he was unconscious with weariness. Then he curled in the deepest darkness he could find, under the sea-grass, and lay there without consciousness.

She broke from her tense cramp of agony gradually, though each movement was a goad of heavy pain. Gradually, she lifted her dead body from the sands, and rose at last. There was now no moon for her, no sea. All had passed away. She trailed her dead body to the house, to her room, where she lay down inert.

Morning brought her a new access of superficial life. But all within her was cold, dead, inert. Skrebensky appeared at breakfast. He was white and obliterated. They did not look at each other nor speak to each other. Apart from the ordinary, trivial talk of civil people, they were separate, they did not speak of what was between them during the remaining two days of their stay. They were like two dead people who dare not recognize, dare not see each other.

Then she packed her bag and put on her things. There were several guests leaving together, for the same train. He would have no opportunity to speak to her.

He tapped at her bedroom door at the last minute. She stood with her umbrella in her hand. He closed the door. He did not know what to say.

"Have you done with me?" he asked her at length, lifting his head.

"It isn't me," she said. "You have done with me--we have done with each other."

He looked at her, at the closed face, which he thought so cruel. And he knew he could never touch her again. His will was broken, he was seared, but he clung to the life of his body.

"Well, what have I done?" he asked, in a rather querulous voice.

"I don't know," she said, in the same dull, feelingless voice. "It is finished. It had been a failure."

He was silent. The words still burned his bowels.

"Is it my fault?" he said, looking up at length, challenging the last stroke.

"You couldn't----" she began. But she broke down.

He turned away, afraid to hear more. She began to gather her bag, her handkerchief, her umbrella. She must be gone now. He was waiting for her to be gone.

At length the carriage came and she drove away with the rest.

When she was out of sight, a great relief came over him, a pleasant banality. In an instant, everything was obliterated. He was childishly amiable and companionable all the day long. He was astonished that life could be so nice. It was better than it had been before. What a simple thing it was to be rid of her! How friendly and simple everything felt to him. What false thing had she been forcing on him?

But at night he dared not be alone. His room-mate had gone, and the hours of darkness were an agony to him. He watched the window in suffering and terror. When would this horrible darkness be lifted off him? Setting all his nerves, he endured it. He went to sleep with the dawn.

He never thought of her. Only his terror of the hours of night grew on him, obsessed him like a mania. He slept fitfully, with constant wakings of anguish. The fear wore away the core of him.

His plan was to sit up very late: drink in company until one or half-past one in the morning; then he would get three hours of sleep, of oblivion. It was light by five o'clock. But he was shocked almost to madness if he opened his eyes on the darkness.

In the daytime he was all right, always occupied with the

thing of the moment, adhering to the trivial present, which seemed to him ample and satisfying. No matter how little and futile his occupations were, he gave himself to them entirely, and felt normal and fulfilled. He was always active, cheerful, gay, charming, trivial. Only he dreaded the darkness and silence of his own bedroom, when the darkness should challenge him upon his own soul. That he could not bear, as he could not bear to think about Ursula. He had no soul, no background. He never thought of Ursula, not once, he gave her no sign. She was the darkness, the challenge, the horror. He turned to immediate things. He wanted to marry quickly, to screen himself from the darkness, the challenge of his own soul. He would marry his Colonel's daughter. Quickly, without hesitation, pursued by his obsession for activity, he wrote to this girl, telling her his engagement was broken--it had been a temporary infatuation which he less than any one else could understand now it was over--and could he see his very dear friend soon? He would not be happy till he had an answer.

He received a rather surprised reply from the girl, but she would be glad to see him. She was living with her aunt. He went down to her at once, and proposed to her the first evening. He was accepted. The marriage took place quietly within fourteen days' time. Ursula was not notified of the event. In another week, Skrebensky sailed with his new wife to India.