

Chapter II
THEY LIVE AT THE MARSH

She was the daughter of a Polish landowner who, deeply in debt to the Jews, had married a German wife with money, and who had died just before the rebellion. Quite young, she had married Paul Lensky, an intellectual who had studied at Berlin, and had returned to Warsaw a patriot. Her mother had married a German merchant and gone away.

Lydia Lensky, married to the young doctor, became with him a patriot and an *émancipée*. They were poor, but they were very conceited. She learned nursing as a mark of her emancipation. They represented in Poland the new movement just begun in Russia. But they were very patriotic: and, at the same time, very "European".

They had two children. Then came the great rebellion. Lensky, very ardent and full of words, went about inciting his countrymen. Little Poles flamed down the streets of Warsaw, on the way to shoot every Muscovite. So they crossed into the south of Russia, and it was common for six little insurgents to ride into a Jewish village, brandishing swords and words, emphasizing the fact that they were going to shoot every living Muscovite.

Lensky was something of a fire-eater also. Lydia, tempered by her German blood, coming of a different family, was obliterated, carried along in her husband's emphasis of declaration, and his whirl of patriotism. He was indeed a brave man, but no bravery could quite have equalled the vividness of his talk. He worked very hard, till nothing lived in him but his eyes. And Lydia, as if drugged, followed him like a shadow, serving, echoing. Sometimes she had her two children, sometimes they were left behind.

She returned once to find them both dead of diphtheria. Her husband wept aloud, unaware of everybody. But the war went on, and soon he was back at his work. A darkness had come over Lydia's mind. She walked always in a shadow, silenced, with a strange, deep terror having hold of her, her desire was to seek satisfaction in dread, to enter a nunnery, to satisfy the instincts of dread in her, through service of a dark religion. But she could not.

Then came the flight to London. Lensky, the little, thin man, had got all his life locked into a resistance and could not relax again. He lived in a sort of insane irritability, touchy, haughty to the last degree, fractious, so that as assistant doctor in one of the hospitals he soon became impossible. They were almost beggars. But he kept still his great ideas of himself, he seemed to live in a complete hallucination, where he himself figured vivid and lordly. He guarded his wife jealously against the ignominy of her position, rushed round her like a brandished weapon, an amazing sight to the English eye, had her in his power, as if he hypnotized her. She was passive, dark, always in shadow.

He was wasting away. Already when the child was born he seemed nothing but skin and bone and fixed idea. She watched him dying, nursed him, nursed the baby, but really took no notice of anything. A darkness was on her, like remorse, or like a remembering of the dark, savage, mystic ride of dread, of death, of the shadow of revenge. When her husband died, she was relieved. He would no longer dart about her.

England fitted her mood, its aloofness and foreignness. She had known a little of the language before coming, and a sort of parrot mind made her pick it up fairly easily. But she knew nothing of the English, nor of English life. Indeed, these did not exist for her. She was like one walking in the Underworld, where the shades throng intelligibly but have no connection with one. She felt the English people as a potent, cold, slightly hostile host amongst whom she walked isolated.

The English people themselves were almost deferential to her, the Church saw that she did not want. She walked without passion, like a shade, tormented into moments of love by the child. Her dying husband with his tortured eyes and the skin drawn tight over his face, he was as a vision to her, not a reality. In a vision he was buried and put away. Then the vision ceased, she was untroubled, time went on grey, uncoloured, like a long journey where she sat unconscious as the landscape unrolled beside her. When she rocked her baby at evening, maybe she fell into a Polish slumber song, or she talked sometimes to herself in Polish. Otherwise she did not think of Poland, nor of that life to which she had belonged. It was a great blot looming blank in its darkness. In the superficial activity of her life, she was all English. She even thought in English. But her long blanks and darkneses of abstraction were Polish.

So she lived for some time. Then, with slight uneasiness, she used half to awake to the streets of London. She realized that there was something around her, very foreign, she realized she was in a strange place. And then, she was sent away into the country. There came into her mind now the memory of her home where she had been a child, the big house among the land, the peasants of the village.

She was sent to Yorkshire, to nurse an old rector in his rectory by the sea. This was the first shake of the kaleidoscope that brought in front of her eyes something she must see. It hurt her brain, the open country and the moors. It hurt her and hurt her. Yet it forced itself upon her as something living, it roused some potency of her childhood in her, it had some relation to her.

There was green and silver and blue in the air about her now. And there was a strange insistence of light from the sea, to which she must attend. Primroses glimmered around, many of them, and she stooped to the disturbing influence near her feet, she even picked one or two flowers, faintly remembering in the new colour of life, what had been. All the day long, as she sat at the upper window, the light came off the sea, constantly, constantly, without refusal, till it seemed to bear her away, and the noise of the sea created a drowsiness in her, a relaxation like sleep. Her automatic consciousness gave way a little, she

stumbled sometimes, she had a poignant, momentary vision of her living child, that hurt her unspeakably. Her soul roused to attention.

Very strange was the constant glitter of the sea unsheathed in heaven, very warm and sweet the graveyard, in a nook of the hill catching the sunshine and holding it as one holds a bee between the palms of the hands, when it is benumbed. Grey grass and lichens and a little church, and snowdrops among coarse grass, and a cupful of incredibly warm sunshine.

She was troubled in spirit. Hearing the rushing of the beck away down under the trees, she was startled, and wondered what it was. Walking down, she found the bluebells around her glowing like a presence, among the trees.

Summer came, the moors were tangled with harebells like water in the ruts of the roads, the heather came rosy under the skies, setting the whole world awake. And she was uneasy. She went past the gorse bushes shrinking from their presence, she stepped into the heather as into a quickening bath that almost hurt. Her fingers moved over the clasped fingers of the child, she heard the anxious voice of the baby, as it tried to make her talk, distraught.

And she shrank away again, back into her darkness, and for a long while remained blotted safely away from living. But autumn came with the faint red glimmer of robins singing, winter darkened the moors, and almost savagely she turned again to life, demanding her life back again, demanding that it should be as it had been when she was a girl, on the land at home, under the sky. Snow lay in great expanses, the telegraph posts strode over the white earth, away under the gloom of the sky. And savagely her desire rose in her again, demanding that this was Poland, her youth, that all was her own again.

But there were no sledges nor bells, she did not see the peasants coming out like new people, in their sheepskins and their fresh, ruddy, bright faces, that seemed to become new and vivid when the snow lit up the ground. It did not come to her, the life of her youth, it did not come back. There was a little agony of struggle, then a relapse into the darkness of the convent, where Satan and the devils raged round the walls, and Christ was white on the cross of victory.

She watched from the sickroom the snow whirl past, like flocks of shadows in haste, flying on some final mission out to a leaden inalterable sea, beyond the final whiteness of the curving shore, and the snow-speckled blackness of the rocks half submerged. But near at hand on the trees the snow was soft in bloom. Only the voice of the dying vicar spoke grey and querulous from behind.

By the time the snowdrops were out, however, he was dead. He was dead. But with curious equanimity the returning woman watched the snowdrops on the edge of the grass below, blown white in the wind, but not to be blown away. She watched them fluttering and bobbing, the white, shut flowers, anchored by a thread to the grey-green grass, yet never blown away, not drifting with the wind.

As she rose in the morning, the dawn was beating up white, gusts of light blown like a thin snowstorm from the east, blown stronger and fiercer, till the rose appeared, and the gold, and the sea lit up below. She was impassive and indifferent. Yet she was outside the enclosure of darkness.

There passed a space of shadow again, the familiarity of dread-worship, during which she was moved, oblivious, to Cossethay. There, at first, there was nothing — just grey nothing. But then one morning there was a light from the yellow jasmine caught her, and after that, morning and evening, the persistent ringing of thrushes from the shrubbery, till her heart, beaten upon, was forced to lift up its voice in rivalry and answer. Little tunes came into her mind. She was full of trouble almost like anguish. Resistant, she knew she was beaten, and from fear of darkness turned to fear of light. She would have hidden herself indoors, if she could. Above all, she craved for the peace and heavy oblivion of her old state. She could not bear to come to, to realize. The first pangs of this new parturition were so acute, she knew she could not bear it. She would rather remain out of life, than be torn, mutilated into this birth, which she could not survive. She had not the strength to come to life now, in England, so foreign, skies so hostile. She knew she would die like an early, colourless, scentless flower that the end of the winter puts forth mercilessly. And she wanted to harbour her modicum of twinkling life.

But a sunshiny day came full of the scent of a mezereon tree, when bees were tumbling into the yellow crocuses, and she forgot, she felt like somebody else, not herself, a new person, quite glad. But she knew it was fragile, and she dreaded it. The vicar put pea flower into the crocuses, for his bees to roll in, and she laughed. Then night came, with brilliant stars that she knew of old, from her girlhood. And they flashed so bright, she knew they were victors.

She could neither wake nor sleep. As if crushed between the past and the future, like a flower that comes above-ground to find a great stone lying above it, she was helpless.

The bewilderment and helplessness continued, she was surrounded by great moving masses that must crush her. And there was no escape. Save in the old obliviousness, the cold darkness she strove to retain. But the vicar showed her eggs in the thrush's nest near the back door. She saw herself the mother thrush upon the nest, and the way her wings were spread, so eager down upon her secret. The tense, eager, nesting wings moved her beyond endurance. She thought of them in the morning, when she heard the thrush whistling as he got up, and she thought, "Why didn't I die out there, why am I brought here?"

She was aware of people who passed around her, not as persons, but as looming presences. It was very difficult for her to adjust herself. In Poland, the peasantry, the people, had been cattle to her, they had been her cattle that she owned and used. What were these people? Now she was coming awake, she was lost.

But she had felt Brangwen go by almost as if he had brushed her. She had tingled in body as she had gone on up the road. After she had been with him in the Marsh kitchen, the voice of her body had risen strong and insistent. Soon, she wanted him. He was the man who had come nearest to her for her awakening.

Always, however, betweenwhiles she lapsed into the old unconsciousness, indifference and there was a will in her to save herself from living any more. But she would wake in the morning one day and feel her blood running, feel herself lying open like a flower unsheathed in the sun, insistent and potent with demand.

She got to know him better, and her instinct fixed on him — just on him. Her impulse was strong against him, because he was not of her own sort. But one blind instinct led her, to take him, to leave him, and then to relinquish herself to him. It would be safety. She felt the rooted safety of him, and the life in him. Also he was young and very fresh. The blue, steady livingness of his eyes she enjoyed like morning. He was very young.

Then she lapsed again to stupor and indifference. This, however, was bound to pass. The warmth flowed through her, she felt herself opening, unfolding, asking, as a flower opens in full request under the sun, as the beaks of tiny birds open flat, to receive, to receive. And unfolded she turned to him, straight to him. And he came, slowly, afraid, held back by uncouth fear, and driven by a desire bigger than himself.

When she opened and turned to him, then all that had been and all that was, was gone from her, she was as new as a flower that unsheathes itself and stands always ready, waiting, receptive. He could not understand this. He forced himself, through lack of understanding, to the adherence to the line of honourable courtship and sanctioned, licensed marriage. Therefore, after he had gone to the vicarage and asked for her, she remained for some days held in this one spell, open, receptive to him, before him. He was roused to chaos. He spoke to the vicar and gave in the banns. Then he stood to wait.

She remained attentive and instinctively expectant before him, unfolded, ready to receive him. He could not act, because of self-fear and because of his conception of honour towards her. So he remained in a state of chaos.

And after a few days, gradually she closed again, away from him, was sheathed over, impervious to him, oblivious. Then a black, bottomless despair became real to him, he knew what he had lost. He felt he had lost it for good, he knew what it was to have been in communication with her, and to be cast off again. In misery, his heart like a heavy stone, he went about unliving.

Till gradually he became desperate, lost his understanding, was plunged in a revolt that knew no bounds. Inarticulate, he moved with her at the Marsh in violent, gloomy, wordless passion, almost in hatred of her. Till gradually she became aware of him, aware of herself with regard to him, her blood stirred to

life, she began to open towards him, to flow towards him again. He waited till the spell was between them again, till they were together within one rushing, hastening flame. And then again he was bewildered, he was tied up as with cords, and could not move to her. So she came to him, and unfastened the breast of his waistcoat and his shirt, and put her hand on him, needing to know him. For it was cruel to her, to be opened and offered to him, yet not to know what he was, not even that he was there. She gave herself to the hour, but he could not, and he bungled in taking her.

So that he lived in suspense, as if only half his faculties worked, until the wedding. She did not understand. But the vagueness came over her again, and the days lapsed by. He could not get definitely into touch with her. For the time being, she let him go again.

He suffered very much from the thought of actual marriage, the intimacy and nakedness of marriage. He knew her so little. They were so foreign to each other, they were such strangers. And they could not talk to each other. When she talked, of Poland or of what had been, it was all so foreign, she scarcely communicated anything to him. And when he looked at her, an overmuch reverence and fear of the unknown changed the nature of his desire into a sort of worship, holding her aloof from his physical desire, self-thwarting.

She did not know this, she did not understand. They had looked at each other, and had accepted each other. It was so, then there was nothing to balk at, it was complete between them.

At the wedding, his face was stiff and expressionless. He wanted to drink, to get rid of his forethought and afterthought, to set the moment free. But he could not. The suspense only tightened at his heart. The jesting and joviality and jolly, broad insinuation of the guests only coiled him more. He could not hear. That which was impending obsessed him, he could not get free.

She sat quiet, with a strange, still smile. She was not afraid. Having accepted him, she wanted to take him, she belonged altogether to the hour, now. No future, no past, only this, her hour. She did not even notice him, as she sat beside him at the head of the table. He was very near, their coming together was close at hand. What more!

As the time came for all the guests to go, her dark face was softly lighted, the bend of her head was proud, her grey eyes clear and dilated, so that the men could not look at her, and the women were elated by her, they served her. Very wonderful she was, as she bade farewell, her ugly wide mouth smiling with pride and recognition, her voice speaking softly and richly in the foreign accent, her dilated eyes ignoring one and all the departing guests. Her manner was gracious and fascinating, but she ignored the being of him or her to whom she gave her hand.

And Brangwen stood beside her, giving his hearty handshake to his friends, receiving their regard gratefully, glad of their attention. His heart was tormented

within him, he did not try to smile. The time of his trial and his admittance, his Gethsemane and his Triumphal Entry in one, had come now.

Behind her, there was so much unknown to him. When he approached her, he came to such a terrible painful unknown. How could he embrace it and fathom it? How could he close his arms round all this darkness and hold it to his breast and give himself to it? What might not happen to him? If he stretched and strained for ever he would never be able to grasp it all, and to yield himself naked out of his own hands into the unknown power! How could a man be strong enough to take her, put his arms round her and have her, and be sure he could conquer this awful unknown next his heart? What was it then that she was, to which he must also deliver himself up, and which at the same time he must embrace, contain?

He was to be her husband. It was established so. And he wanted it more than he wanted life, or anything. She stood beside him in her silk dress, looking at him strangely, so that a certain terror, horror took possession of him, because she was strange and impending and he had no choice. He could not bear to meet her look from under her strange, thick brows.

“Is it late?” she said.

He looked at his watch.

“No — half past eleven” he said. And he made an excuse to go into the kitchen, leaving her standing in the room among the disorder and the drinking glasses.

Tilly was seated beside the fire in the kitchen, her head in her hands. She started up when he entered.

“Why haven’t you gone to bed?” he said.

“I thought I’d better stop an’ lock up an’ do” she said. Her agitation quietened him. He gave her some little order, then returned, steadied now, almost ashamed, to his wife. She stood a moment watching him, as he moved with averted face. Then she said:

“You will be good to me, won’t you?”

She was small and girlish and terrible, with a queer, wide look in her eyes. His heart leaped in him, in anguish of love and desire, he went blindly to her and took her in his arms.

“I want to” he said as he drew her closer and closer in. She was soothed by the stress of his embrace, and remained quite still, relaxed against him, mingling in to him. And he let himself go from past and future, was reduced to the moment with her. In which he took her and was with her and there was nothing beyond, they were together in an elemental embrace beyond their superficial foreignness. But in the morning he was uneasy again. She was still

foreign and unknown to him. Only, within the fear was pride, belief in himself as mate for her. And she, everything forgotten in her new hour of coming to life, radiated vigour and joy, so that he quivered to touch her.

It made a great difference to him, marriage. Things became so remote and of so little significance, as he knew the powerful source of his life, his eyes opened on a new universe, and he wondered in thinking of his triviality before. A new, calm relationship showed to him in the things he saw, in the cattle he used, the young wheat as it eddied in a wind.

And each time he returned home, he went steadily, expectantly, like a man who goes to a profound, unknown satisfaction. At dinnertime, he appeared in the doorway, hanging back a moment from entering, to see if she was there. He saw her setting the plates on the white-scrubbed table. Her arms were slim, she had a slim body and full skirts, she had a dark, shapely head with close-banded hair. Somehow it was her head, so shapely and poignant, that revealed her his woman to him. As she moved about clothed closely, full-skirted and wearing her little silk apron, her dark hair smoothly parted, her head revealed itself to him in all its subtle, intrinsic beauty, and he knew she was his woman, he knew her essence, that it was his to possess. And he seemed to live thus in contact with her, in contact with the unknown, the unaccountable and incalculable.

They did not take much notice of each other, consciously.

“I’m betimes” he said.

“Yes” she answered.

He turned to the dogs, or to the child if she was there. The little Anna played about the farm, flitting constantly in to call something to her mother, to fling her arms round her mother’s skirts, to be noticed, perhaps caressed, then, forgetting, to slip out again.

Then Brangwen, talking to the child, or to the dog between his knees, would be aware of his wife, as, in her tight, dark bodice and her lace fichu, she was reaching up to the corner cupboard. He realized with a sharp pang that she belonged to him, and he to her. He realized that he lived by her. Did he own her? Was she here for ever? Or might she go away? She was not really his, it was not a real marriage, this marriage between them. She might go away. He did not feel like a master, husband, father of her children. She belonged elsewhere. Any moment, she might be gone. And he was ever drawn to her, drawn after her, with ever raging, ever unsatisfied desire. He must always turn home, wherever his steps were taking him, always to her, and he could never quite reach her, he could never quite be satisfied, never be at peace, because she might go away.

At evening, he was glad. Then, when he had finished in the yard, and come in and washed himself, when the child was put to bed, he could sit on the other side of the fire with his beer on the hob and his long white pipe in his fingers,

conscious of her there opposite him, as she worked at her embroidery, or as she talked to him, and he was safe with her now, till morning. She was curiously self-sufficient and did not say very much. Occasionally she lifted her head, her grey eyes shining with a strange light, that had nothing to do with him or with this place, and would tell him about herself. She seemed to be back again in the past, chiefly in her childhood or her girlhood, with her father. She very rarely talked of her first husband. But sometimes, all shining eyed, she was back at her own home, telling him about the riotous times, the trip to Paris with her father, tales of the mad acts of the peasants when a burst of religious, self-hurting fervour had passed over the country.

She would lift her head and say:

“When they brought the railway across the country, they made afterwards smaller railways, of shorter width, to come down to our town — a hundred miles. When I was a girl, Gisla, my German *gouvernante*, was very shocked and she would not tell me. But I heard the servants talking. I remember, it was Pierre, the coachman. And my father, and some of his friends, landowners, they had taken a wagon, a whole railway wagon — that you travel in ——”

“A railway carriage” said Brangwen.

She laughed to herself.

“I know it was a great scandal: yes — a whole wagon, and they had girls, you know, *filles*, naked, all the wagonful, and so they came down to our village. They came through villages of the Jews, and it was a great scandal. Can you imagine? All the countryside! And my mother, she did not like it. Gisla said to me, ‘Madame, she must not know that you have heard such things.’

“My mother, she used to cry, and she wished to beat my father, plainly beat him. He would say, when she cried because he sold the forest, the wood, to jingle money in his pocket, and go to Warsaw or Paris or Kiev, when she said he must take back his word, he must not sell the forest, he would stand and say ‘I know, I know, I have heard it all, I have heard it all before. Tell me some new thing. I know, I know, I know.’ Oh, but can you understand, I loved him when he stood there under the door, saying only ‘I know, I know, I know it all already.’ She could not change him, no, not if she killed herself for it. And she could change everybody else, but him, she could not change him ——”

Brangwen could not understand. He had pictures of a cattle truck full of naked girls riding from nowhere to nowhere, of Lydia laughing because her father made great debts and said “I know, I know”; of Jews running down the street shouting in Yiddish “Don’t do it, don’t do it” and being cut down by demented peasants — she called them “cattle” — whilst she looked on interested and even amused; of tutors and governesses and Paris and a convent. It was too much for him. And there she sat, telling the tales to the open space, not to him, arrogating a curious superiority to him, a distance between them, something strange and foreign and outside his life, talking, rattling, without

rhyme or reason, laughing when he was shocked or astounded, condemning nothing, confounding his mind and making the whole world a chaos, without order or stability of any kind. Then, when they went to bed, he knew that he had nothing to do with her. She was back in her childhood, he was a peasant, a serf, a servant, a lover, a paramour, a shadow, a nothing. He lay still in amazement, staring at the room he knew so well, and wondering whether it was really there, the window, the chest of drawers, or whether it was merely a figment in the atmosphere. And gradually he grew into a raging fury against her. But because he was so much amazed, and there was as yet such a distance between them, and she was such an amazing thing to him, with all wonder opening out behind her, he made no retaliation on her. Only he lay still and wide-eyed with rage, inarticulate, not understanding, but solid with hostility.

And he remained wrathful and distinct from her, unchanged outwardly to her, but underneath a solid power of antagonism to her. Of which she became gradually aware. And it irritated her to be made aware of him as a separate power. She lapsed into a sort of sombre exclusion, a curious communion with mysterious powers, a sort of mystic, dark state which drove him and the child nearly mad. He walked about for days stiffened with resistance to her, stiff with a will to destroy her as she was. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, there was connection between them again. It came on him as he was working in the fields. The tension, the bond, burst, and the passionate flood broke forward into a tremendous, magnificent rush, so that he felt he could snap off the trees as he passed, and create the world afresh.

And when he arrived home, there was no sign between them. He waited and waited till she came. And as he waited, his limbs seemed strong and splendid to him, his hands seemed like passionate servants to him, goodly, he felt a stupendous power in himself, of life, and of urgent, strong blood.

She was sure to come at last, and touch him. Then he burst into flame for her, and lost himself. They looked at each other, a deep laugh at the bottom of their eyes, and he went to take of her again, wholesale, mad to revel in the inexhaustible wealth of her, to bury himself in the depths of her in an inexhaustible exploration, she all the while revelling in that he revelled in her, tossed all her secrets aside and plunged to that which was secret to her as well, whilst she quivered with fear and the last anguish of delight.

What did it matter who they were, whether they knew each other or not?

The hour passed away again, there was severance between them, and rage and misery and bereavement for her, and deposition and toiling at the mill with slaves for him. But no matter. They had had their hour, and should it chime again, they were ready for it, ready to renew the game at the point where it was left off, on the edge of the outer darkness, when the secrets within the woman are game for the man, hunted doggedly, when the secrets of the woman are the man's adventure, and they both give themselves to the adventure.

She was with child, and there was again the silence and distance between them. She did not want him nor his secrets nor his game, he was deposed, he was cast out. He seethed with fury at the small, ugly-mouthed woman who had nothing to do with him. Sometimes his anger broke on her, but she did not cry. She turned on him like a tiger, and there was battle.

He had to learn to contain himself again, and he hated it. He hated her that she was not there for him. And he took himself off, anywhere.

But an instinct of gratitude and a knowledge that she would receive him back again, that later on she would be there for him again, prevented his straying very far. He cautiously did not go too far. He knew she might lapse into ignorance of him, lapse away from him, farther, farther, farther, till she was lost to him. He had sense enough, premonition enough in himself, to be aware of this and to measure himself accordingly. For he did not want to lose her: he did not want her to lapse away.

Cold, he called her, selfish, only caring about herself, a foreigner with a bad nature, caring really about nothing, having no proper feelings at the bottom of her, and no proper niceness. He raged, and piled up accusations that had some measure of truth in them all. But a certain grace in him forbade him from going too far. He knew, and he quivered with rage and hatred, that she was all these vile things, that she was everything vile and detestable. But he had grace at the bottom of him, which told him that, above all things, he did not want to lose her, he was not going to lose her.

So he kept some consideration for her, he preserved some relationship. He went out more often, to the "Red Lion" again, to escape the madness of sitting next to her when she did not belong to him, when she was as absent as any woman in indifference could be. He could not stay at home. So he went to the "Red Lion". And sometimes he got drunk. But he preserved his measure, some things between them he never forfeited.

A tormented look came into his eyes, as if something were always dogging him. He glanced sharp and quick, he could not bear to sit still doing nothing. He had to go out, to find company, to give himself away there. For he had no other outlet, he could not work to give himself out, he had not the knowledge.

As the months of her pregnancy went on, she left him more and more alone, she was more and more unaware of him, his existence was annulled. And he felt bound down, bound, unable to stir, beginning to go mad, ready to rave. For she was quiet and polite, as if he did not exist, as one is quiet and polite to a servant.

Nevertheless she was great with his child, it was his turn to submit. She sat opposite him, sewing, her foreign face inscrutable and indifferent. He felt he wanted to break her into acknowledgment of him, into awareness of him. It was insufferable that she had so obliterated him. He would smash her into regarding him. He had a raging agony of desire to do so.

But something bigger in him withheld him, kept him motionless. So he went out of the house for relief. Or he turned to the little girl for her sympathy and her love, he appealed with all his power to the small Anna. So soon they were like lovers, father and child.

For he was afraid of his wife. As she sat there with bent head, silent, working or reading, but so unutterably silent that his heart seemed under the millstone of it, she became herself like the upper millstone lying on him, crushing him, as sometimes a heavy sky lies on the earth.

Yet he knew he could not tear her away from the heavy obscurity into which she was merged. He must not try to tear her into recognition of himself, and agreement with himself. It were disastrous, impious. So, let him rage as he might, he must withhold himself. But his wrists trembled and seemed mad, seemed as if they would burst.

When, in November, the leaves came beating against the window shutters, with a lashing sound, he started, and his eyes flickered with flame. The dog looked up at him, he sunk his head to the fire. But his wife was startled. He was aware of her listening.

“They blow up with a rattle,” he said.

“What?” she asked.

“The leaves.”

She sank away again. The strange leaves beating in the wind on the wood had come nearer than she. The tension in the room was overpowering, it was difficult for him to move his head. He sat with every nerve, every vein, every fibre of muscle in his body stretched on a tension. He felt like a broken arch thrust sickeningly out from support. For her response was gone, he thrust at nothing. And he remained himself, he saved himself from crashing down into nothingness, from being squandered into fragments, by sheer tension, sheer backward resistance.

During the last months of her pregnancy, he went about in a surcharged, imminent state that did not exhaust itself. She was also depressed, and sometimes she cried. It needed so much life to begin afresh, after she had lost so lavishly. Sometimes she cried. Then he stood stiff, feeling his heart would burst. For she did not want him, she did not want even to be made aware of him. By the very puckering of her face he knew that he must stand back, leave her intact, alone. For it was the old grief come back in her, the old loss, the pain of the old life, the dead husband, the dead children. This was sacred to her, and he must not violate her with his comfort. For what she wanted she would come to him. He stood aloof with turgid heart.

He had to see her tears come, fall over her scarcely moving face, that only puckered sometimes, down on to her breast, that was so still, scarcely moving. And there was no noise, save now and again, when, with a strange, somnambulant movement, she took her handkerchief and wiped her face and blew her nose, and went on with the noiseless weeping. He knew that any offer of comfort from himself would be worse than useless, hateful to her, jangling her. She must cry. But it drove him insane. His heart was scalded, his brain hurt in his head, he went away, out of the house.

His great and chiefest source of solace was the child. She had been at first aloof from him, reserved. However friendly she might seem one day, the next she would have lapsed to her original disregard of him, cold, detached, at her distance.

The first morning after his marriage he had discovered it would not be so easy with the child. At the break of dawn he had started awake hearing a small voice outside the door saying plaintively:

“Mother!”

He rose and opened the door. She stood on the threshold in her nightdress, as she had climbed out of bed, black eyes staring round and hostile, her fair hair sticking out in a wild fleece. The man and child confronted each other.

“I want my mother” she said, jealously accenting the “my”.

“Come on then” he said gently.

“Where’s my mother?”

“She’s here — come on.”

The child’s eyes, staring at the man with ruffled hair and beard, did not change. The mother’s voice called softly. The little bare feet entered the room with trepidation.

“Mother!”

“Come, my dear.”

The small bare feet approached swiftly.

“I wondered where you were” came the plaintive voice. The mother stretched out her arms. The child stood beside the high bed. Brangwen lightly lifted the tiny girl, with an “up-a-daisy”, then took his own place in the bed again.

“Mother!” cried the child, as in anguish.

“What, my pet?”

Anna wriggled close into her mother's arms, clinging tight, hiding from the fact of the man. Brangwen lay still, and waited. There was a long silence.

Then suddenly, Anna looked round, as if she thought he would be gone. She saw the face of the man lying upturned to the ceiling. Her black eyes stared antagonistic from her exquisite face, her arms clung tightly to her mother, afraid. He did not move for some time, not knowing what to say. His face was smooth and soft-skinned with love, his eyes full of soft light. He looked at her, scarcely moving his head, his eyes smiling.

"Have you just wakened up?" he said.

"Go away" she retorted, with a little darting forward of the head, something like a viper.

"Nay" he answered, "*I'm* not going. You can go."

"Go away" came the sharp little command.

"There's room for you" he said.

"You can't send your father from his own bed, my little bird" said her mother, pleasantly.

The child glowered at him, miserable in her impotence.

"There's room for you as well" he said. "It's a big bed enough."

She glowered without answering, then turned and clung to her mother. She would not allow it.

During the day she asked her mother several times:

"When are we going home, mother?"

"We are at home, darling, we live here now. This is our house, we live here with your father."

The child was forced to accept it. But she remained against the man. As night came on, she asked:

"Where are you going to sleep, mother?"

"I sleep with the father now."

And when Brangwen came in, the child asked fiercely:

“*Why* do you sleep with *my* mother? My mother sleeps with me” her voice quivering.

“You come as well, an’ sleep with both of us” he coaxed.

“Mother!” she cried, turning, appealing against him.

“But I must have a husband, darling. All women must have a husband.”

“And you like to have a father with your mother, don’t you?” said Brangwen.

Anna glowered at him. She seemed to cogitate.

“No” she cried fiercely at length, “no, I don’t *want*.” And slowly her face puckered, she sobbed bitterly. He stood and watched her, sorry. But there could be no altering it.

Which, when she knew, she became quiet. He was easy with her, talking to her, taking her to see the live creatures, bringing her the first chickens in his cap, taking her to gather the eggs, letting her throw crusts to the horse. She would easily accompany him, and take all he had to give, but she remained neutral still.

She was curiously, incomprehensibly jealous of her mother, always anxiously concerned about her. If Brangwen drove with his wife to Nottingham, Anna ran about happily enough, or unconcerned, for a long time. Then, as afternoon came on, there was only one cry — “I want my mother, I want my mother —” and a bitter, pathetic sobbing that soon had the softhearted Tilly sobbing too. The child’s anguish was that her mother was gone, gone.

Yet as a rule, Anna seemed cold, resenting her mother, critical of her. It was:

“I don’t like you to do that, mother”, or “I don’t like you to say that.” She was a sore problem to Brangwen and to all the people at the Marsh. As a rule, however, she was active, lightly flitting about the farmyard, only appearing now and again to assure herself of her mother. Happy she never seemed, but quick, sharp, absorbed, full of imagination and changeability. Tilly said she was bewitched. But it did not matter so long as she did not cry. There was something heartrending about Anna’s crying, her childish anguish seemed so utter and so timeless, as if it were a thing of all the ages.

She made playmates of the creatures of the farmyard, talking to them, telling them the stories she had from her mother, counselling them and correcting them. Brangwen found her at the gate leading to the paddock and to the duckpond. She was peering through the bars and shouting to the stately white geese, that stood in a curving line:

“You’re not to call at people when they want to come. You must not do it.”

The heavy, balanced birds looked at the fierce little face and the fleece of keen hair thrust between the bars, and they raised their heads and swayed off, producing the long, can-canking, protesting noise of geese, rocking their shiplike, beautiful white bodies in a line beyond the gate.

“You’re naughty, you’re naughty” cried Anna, tears of dismay and vexation in her eyes. And she stamped her slipper.

“Why, what are they doing?” said Brangwen.

“They won’t let me come in” she said, turning her flushed little face to him.

“Yi, they will. You can go in if you want to” and he pushed open the gate for her.

She stood irresolute, looking at the group of bluey-white geese standing monumental under the grey, cold day.

“Go on” he said.

She marched valiantly a few steps in. Her little body started convulsively at the sudden, derisive can-cank-ank of the geese. A blankness spread over her. The geese trailed away with uplifted heads under the low grey sky.

“They don’t know you” said Brangwen. “You should tell ’em what your name is.”

“They’re *naughty* to shout at me” she flashed.

“They think you don’t live here” he said.

Later he found her at the gate calling shrilly and imperiously:

“My name is Anna, Anna Lensky, and I live here, because Mr. Brangwen’s my father now. He *is*, yes he *is*. And I live here.”

This pleased Brangwen very much. And gradually, without knowing it herself, she clung to him, in her lost, childish, desolate moments, when it was good to creep up to something big and warm, and bury her little self in his big, unlimited being. Instinctively he was careful of her, careful to recognize her and to give himself to her disposal.

She was difficult of her affections. For Tilly, she had a childish, essential contempt, almost dislike, because the poor woman was such a servant. The child would not let the serving-woman attend to her, do intimate things for her, not for a long time. She treated her as one of an inferior race. Brangwen did not like it.

“Why aren’t you fond of Tilly?” he asked.

“Because — because — because she looks at me with her eyes bent.”

Then gradually she accepted Tilly as belonging to the household, never as a person.

For the first weeks, the black eyes of the child were for ever on the watch. Brangwen, good humoured but impatient, spoiled by Tilly, was an easy blusterer. If for a few minutes he upset the household with his noisy impatience, he found at the end the child glowering at him with intense black eyes, and she was sure to dart forward her little head, like a serpent, with her biting:

“Go away.”

“I’m *not* going away” he shouted, irritated at last. “Go yourself — hustle — stir thysen — hop.” And he pointed to the door. The child backed away from him, pale with fear. Then she gathered up courage, seeing him become patient.

“We don’t live with *you*” she said, thrusting forward her little head at him. “You — you’r e— you’re a bomakle.”

“A what?” he shouted.

Her voice wavered — but it came.

“A bomakle.”

“Ay, an’ you’re a comakle.”

She meditated. Then she hissed forwards her head.

“I’m not.”

“Not what?”

“A comakle.”

“No more am I a bomakle.”

He was really cross.

Other times she would say:

“My mother *doesn’t* live here.”

“Oh, ay?”

“I want her to go away.”

“Then want’s your portion” he replied laconically.

So they drew nearer together. He would take her with him when he went out in the trap. The horse ready at the gate, he came noisily into the house, which seemed quiet and peaceful till he appeared to set everything awake.

“Now then, Topsy, pop into thy bonnet.”

The child drew herself up, resenting the indignity of the address.

“I can’t fasten my bonnet myself” she said haughtily.

“Not man enough yet” he said, tying the ribbons under her chin with clumsy fingers.

She held up her face to him. Her little bright red lips moved as he fumbled under her chin.

“You talk — nonsents” she said, re-echoing one of his phrases.

“*That* face shouts for th’ pump” he said, and taking out a big red handkerchief, that smelled of strong tobacco, began wiping round her mouth.

“Is Kitty waiting for me?” she asked.

“Ay,” he said. “Let’s finish wiping your face — it’ll pass wi’ a cat lick.”

She submitted prettily. Then, when he let her go, she began to skip, with a curious flicking up of one leg behind her.

“Now my young buck rabbit” he said. “Slippy!”

She came and was shaken into her coat, and the two set off. She sat very close beside him in the gig, tucked tightly, feeling his big body sway, against her, very splendid. She loved the rocking of the gig, when his big, live body swayed upon her, against her. She laughed, a poignant little shrill laugh, and her black eyes glowed.

She was curiously hard, and then passionately tenderhearted. Her mother was ill, the child stole about on tiptoe in the bedroom for hours, being nurse, and doing the thing thoughtfully and diligently. Another day, her mother was unhappy. Anna would stand with her legs apart, glowering, balancing on the sides of her slippers. She laughed when the goslings wriggled in Tilly’s hand, as the pellets of food were rammed down their throats with a skewer, she laughed nervously. She was hard and imperious with the animals, squandering no love, running about amongst them like a cruel mistress.

Summer came, and hay harvest, Anna was a brown elfish mite dancing about. Tilly always marvelled over her, more than she loved her.

But always in the child was some anxious connection with the mother. So long as Mrs. Brangwen was all right, the little girl played about and took very little notice of her. But corn-harvest went by, the autumn drew on, and the mother, the later months of her pregnancy beginning, was strange and detached, Brangwen began to knit his brows, the old, unhealthy uneasiness, the unskinned susceptibility came on the child again. If she went to the fields with her father, then, instead of playing about carelessly, it was:

“I want to go home.”

“Home, why tha’s nobbut this minute come.”

“I want to go home.”

“What for? What ails thee?”

“I want my mother.”

“Thy mother! Thy mother none wants thee.”

“I want to go home.”

There would be tears in a moment.

“Can ter find t’road, then?”

And he watched her scudding, silent and intent, along the hedge bottom, at a steady, anxious pace, till she turned and was gone through the gateway. Then he saw her two fields off, still pressing forward, small and urgent. His face was clouded as he turned to plough up the stubble.

The year drew on, in the hedges the berries shone red and twinkling above bare twigs, robins were seen, great droves of birds dashed like spray from the fallow, rooks appeared, black and flapping down to earth, the ground was cold as he pulled the turnips, the roads were churned deep in mud. Then the turnips were pitted and work was slack.

Inside the house it was dark, and quiet. The child flitted uneasily round, and now and again came her plaintive, startled cry:

“Mother!”

Mrs. Brangwen was heavy and unresponsive, tired, lapsed back. Brangwen went on working out of doors.

At evening, when he came in to milk, the child would run behind him. Then, in the cosy cowsheds, with the doors shut and the air looking warm by the light of the hanging lantern, above the branching horns of the cows, she would stand

watching his hands squeezing rhythmically the teats of the placid beast, watch the froth and the leaping squirt of milk, watch his hand sometimes rubbing slowly, understandingly, upon a hanging udder. So they kept each other company, but at a distance, rarely speaking.

The darkest days of the year came on, the child was fretful, sighing as if some oppression were on her, running hither and thither without relief. And Brangwen went about at his work, heavy, his heart heavy as the sodden earth.

The winter nights fell early, the lamp was lighted before teatime, the shutters were closed, they were all shut into the room with the tension and stress. Mrs. Brangwen went early to bed, Anna playing on the floor beside her. Brangwen sat in the emptiness of the downstairs room, smoking, scarcely conscious even of his own misery. And very often he went out to escape it.

Christmas passed, the wet, drenched, cold days of January recurred monotonously, with now and then a brilliance of blue flashing in, when Brangwen went out into a morning like crystal, when every sound rang again, and the birds were many and sudden and brusque in the hedges. Then an elation came over him in spite of everything, whether his wife were strange or sad, or whether he craved for her to be with him, it did not matter, the air rang with clear noises, the sky was like crystal, like a bell, and the earth was hard. Then he worked and was happy, his eyes shining, his cheeks flushed. And the zest of life was strong in him.

The birds pecked busily round him, the horses were fresh and ready, the bare branches of the trees flung themselves up like a man yawning, taut with energy, the twigs radiated off into the clear light. He was alive and full of zest for it all. And if his wife were heavy, separated from him, extinguished, then, let her be, let him remain himself. Things would be as they would be. Meanwhile he heard the ringing crow of a cockerel in the distance, he saw the pale shell of the moon effaced on a blue sky.

So he shouted to the horses, and was happy. If, driving into Ilkeston, a fresh young woman were going in to do her shopping, he hailed her, and reined in his horse, and picked her up. Then he was glad to have her near him, his eyes shone, his voice, laughing, teasing in a warm fashion, made the poise of her head more beautiful, her blood ran quicker. They were both stimulated, the morning was fine.

What did it matter that, at the bottom of his heart, was care and pain? It was at the bottom, let it stop at the bottom. His wife, her suffering, her coming pain — well, it must be so. She suffered, but he was out of doors, full in life, and it would be ridiculous, indecent, to pull a long face and to insist on being miserable. He was happy, this morning, driving to town, with the hoofs of the horse spanking the hard earth. Well he was happy, if half the world were weeping at the funeral of the other half. And it was a jolly girl sitting beside him. And Woman was immortal, whatever happened, whoever turned towards death. Let the misery come when it could not be resisted.

The evening arrived later very beautiful, with a rosy flush hovering above the sunset, and passing away into violet and lavender, with turquoise green north and south in the sky, and in the east, a great, yellow moon hanging heavy and radiant. It was magnificent to walk between the sunset and the moon, on a road where little holly trees thrust black into the rose and lavender, and starlings flickered in droves across the light. But what was the end of the journey? The pain came right enough, later on, when his heart and his feet were heavy, his brain dead, his life stopped.

One afternoon, the pains began, Mrs. Brangwen was put to bed, the midwife came. Night fell, the shutters were closed, Brangwen came in to tea, to the loaf and the pewter teapot, the child, silent and quivering, playing with glass beads, the house, empty, it seemed, or exposed to the winter night, as if it had no walls.

Sometimes there sounded, long and remote in the house, vibrating through everything, the moaning cry of a woman in labour. Brangwen, sitting downstairs, was divided. His lower, deeper self was with her, bound to her, suffering. But the big shell of his body remembered the sound of owls that used to fly round the farmstead when he was a boy. He was back in his youth, a boy, haunted by the sound of the owls, waking up his brother to speak to him. And his mind drifted away to the birds, their solemn, dignified faces, their flight so soft and broad-winged. And then to the birds his brother had shot, fluffy, dust-coloured, dead heaps of softness with faces absurdly asleep. It was a queer thing, a dead owl.

He lifted his cup to his lips, he watched the child with the beads. But his mind was occupied with owls, and the atmosphere of his boyhood, with his brothers and sisters. Elsewhere, fundamental, he was with his wife in labour, the child was being brought forth out of their one flesh. He and she, one flesh, out of which life must be put forth. The rent was not in his body, but it was of his body. On her the blows fell, but the quiver ran through to him, to his last fibre. She must be torn asunder for life to come forth, yet still they were one flesh, and still, from further back, the life came out of him to her, and still he was the unbroken that has the broken rock in its arms, their flesh was one rock from which the life gushed, out of her who was smitten and rent, from him who quivered and yielded.

He went upstairs to her. As he came to the bedside she spoke to him in Polish.

“Is it very bad?” he asked.

She looked at him, and oh, the weariness to her, of the effort to understand another language, the weariness of hearing him, attending to him, making out who he was, as he stood there fair-bearded and alien, looking at her. She knew something of him, of his eyes. But she could not grasp him. She closed her eyes.

He turned away, white to the gills.

“It’s not so very bad” said the midwife.

He knew he was a strain on his wife. He went downstairs.

The child glanced up at him, frightened.

“I want my mother” she quavered.

“Ay, but she’s badly” he said mildly, unheeding.

She looked at him with lost, frightened eyes.

“Has she got a headache?”

“No — she’s going to have a baby.”

The child looked round. He was unaware of her. She was alone again in terror.

“I want my mother” came the cry of panic.

“Let Tilly undress you” he said. “You’re tired.”

There was another silence. Again came the cry of labour.

“I want my mother” rang automatically from the wincing, panic stricken child, that felt cut off and lost in a horror of desolation.

Tilly came forward, her heart wrung.

“Come an’ let me undress her then, pet-lamb” she crooned. “You s’ll have your mother in th’ mornin’, don’t you fret, my duckie; never mind, angel.”

But Anna stood upon the sofa, her back to the wall.

“I want my mother” she cried, her little face quivering, and the great tears of childish, utter anguish falling.

“She’s poorly, my lamb, she’s poorly to-night, but she’ll be better by mornin’. Oh, don’t cry, don’t cry, love, she doesn’t want you to cry, precious little heart, no, she doesn’t.”

Tilly took gently hold of the child’s skirts. Anna snatched back her dress, and cried, in a little hysteria:

“No, you’re not to undress me — I want my mother” — and her child’s face was running with grief and tears, her body shaken.

“Oh, but let Tilly undress you. Let Tilly undress you, who loves you, don't be wilful tonight. Mother's poorly, she doesn't want you to cry.”

The child sobbed distractedly, she could not hear.

“I want — my — mother” she wept.

“When you're undressed, you s'll go up to see your mother — when you're undressed, pet, when you've let Tilly undress you, when you're a little jewel in your nightie, love. Oh, don't you cry, don't you —”

Brangwen sat stiff in his chair. He felt his brain going tighter. He crossed over the room, aware only of the maddening sobbing.

“Don't make a noise” he said.

And a new fear shook the child from the sound of his voice. She cried mechanically, her eyes looking watchful through her tears, in terror, alert to what might happen.

“I want — my — mother,” quavered the sobbing, blind voice.

A shiver of irritation went over the man's limbs. It was the utter, persistent unreason, the maddening blindness of the voice and the crying.

“You must come and be undressed” he said, in a quiet voice that was thin with anger.

And he reached his hand and grasped her. He felt her body catch in a convulsive sob. But he too was blind, and intent, irritated into mechanical action. He began to unfasten her little apron. She would have shrunk from him, but could not. So her small body remained in his grasp, while he fumbled at the little buttons and tapes, unthinking, intent, unaware of anything but the irritation of her. Her body was held taut and resistant, he pushed off the little dress and the petticoats, revealing the white arms. She kept stiff, overpowered, violated, he went on with his task. And all the while she sobbed, choking:

“I want my mother.”

He was unheedingly silent, his face stiff. The child was now incapable of understanding, she had become a little, mechanical thing of fixed will. She wept, her body convulsed, her voice repeating the same cry.

“Eh, dear o' me!” cried Tilly, becoming distracted herself. Brangwen, slow, clumsy, blind, intent, got off all the little garments, and stood the child naked in its shift upon the sofa.

“Where's her nightie?” he asked.

Tilly brought it, and he put it on her. Anna did not move her limbs to his desire. He had to push them into place. She stood, with fixed, blind will, resistant, a small, convulsed, unchangeable thing weeping ever and repeating the same phrase. He lifted one foot after the other, pulled off slippers and socks. She was ready.

“Do you want a drink?” he asked.

She did not change. Unheeding, uncaring, she stood on the sofa, standing back, alone, her hands shut and half lifted, her face, all tears, raised and blind. And through the sobbing and choking came the broken:

“I — want — my — mother.”

“Do you want a drink?” he said again.

There was no answer. He lifted the stiff, denying body between his hands. Its stiff blindness made a flash of rage go through him. He would like to break it.

He set the child on his knee, and sat again in his chair beside the fire, the wet, sobbing, inarticulate noise going on near his ear, the child sitting stiff, not yielding to him or anything, not aware.

A new degree of anger came over him. What did it all matter? What did it matter if the mother talked Polish and cried in labour, if this child were stiff with resistance, and crying? Why take it to heart? Let the mother cry in labour, let the child cry in resistance, since they would do so. Why should he fight against it, why resist? Let it be, if it were so. Let them be as they were, if they insisted.

And in a daze he sat, offering no fight. The child cried on, the minutes ticked away, a sort of torpor was on him.

It was some little time before he came to, and turned to attend to the child. He was shocked by her little wet, blinded face. A bit dazed, he pushed back the wet hair. Like a living statue of grief, her blind face cried on.

“Nay” he said “not as bad as that. It’s not as bad as that, Anna, my child. Come, what are you crying for so much? Come, stop now, it’ll make you sick. I wipe you dry, don’t wet your face any more. Don’t cry any more wet tears, don’t, it’s better not to. Don’t cry — it’s not so bad as all that. Hush now, hush — let it be enough.”

His voice was queer and distant and calm. He looked at the child. She was beside herself now. He wanted her to stop, he wanted it all to stop, to become natural.

“Come” he said, rising to turn away, “we’ll go an’ supper-up the beast.”

He took a big shawl, folded her round, and went out into the kitchen for a lantern.

“You’re never taking the child out, of a night like this” said Tilly.

“Ay, it’ll quieten her” he answered.

It was raining. The child was suddenly still, shocked, finding the rain on its face, the darkness.

“We’ll just give the cows their something-to-eat, afore they go to bed,” Brangwen was saying to her, holding her close and sure.

There was a trickling of water into the butt, a burst of raindrops sputtering on to her shawl, and the light of the lantern swinging, flashing on a wet pavement and the base of a wet wall. Otherwise it was black darkness: one breathed darkness.

He opened the doors, upper and lower, and they entered into the high, dry barn, that smelled warm even if it were not warm. He hung the lantern on the nail and shut the door. They were in another world now. The light shed softly on the timbered barn, on the whitewashed walls, and the great heap of hay; instruments cast their shadows largely, a ladder rose to the dark arch of a loft. Outside there was the driving rain, inside, the softly illuminated stillness and calmness of the barn.

Holding the child on one arm, he set about preparing the food for the cows, filling a pan with chopped hay and brewer’s grains and a little meal. The child, all wonder, watched what he did. A new being was created in her for the new conditions. Sometimes, a little spasm, eddying from the bygone storm of sobbing, shook her small body. Her eyes were wide and wondering, pathetic. She was silent, quite still.

In a sort of dream, his heart sunk to the bottom, leaving the surface of him still, quite still, he rose with the panful of food, carefully balancing the child on one arm, the pan in the other hand. The silky fringe of the shawl swayed softly, grains and hay trickled to the floor; he went along a dimly lit passage behind the mangers, where the horns of the cows pricked out of the obscurity. The child shrank, he balanced stiffly, rested the pan on the manger wall, and tipped out the food, half to this cow, half to the next. There was a noise of chains running, as the cows lifted or dropped their heads sharply; then a contented, soothing sound, a long snuffing as the beasts ate in silence.

The journey had to be performed several times. There was the rhythmic sound of the shovel in the barn, then the man returned walking stiffly between the two weights, the face of the child peering out from the shawl. Then the next time, as he stooped, she freed her arm and put it round his neck, clinging soft and warm, making all easier.

The beasts fed, he dropped the pan and sat down on a box, to arrange the child.

“Will the cows go to sleep now?” she said, catching her breath as she spoke.

“Yes.”

“Will they eat all their stuff up first?”

“Yes. Hark at them.”

And the two sat still listening to the snuffing and breathing of cows feeding in the sheds communicating with this small barn. The lantern shed a soft, steady light from one wall. All outside was still in the rain. He looked down at the silky folds of the paisley shawl. It reminded him of his mother. She used to go to church in it. He was back again in the old irresponsibility and security, a boy at home.

The two sat very quiet. His mind, in a sort of trance, seemed to become more and more vague. He held the child close to him. A quivering little shudder, re-echoing from her sobbing, went down her limbs. He held her closer. Gradually she relaxed, the eyelids began to sink over her dark, watchful eyes. As she sank to sleep, his mind became blank.

When he came to, as if from sleep, he seemed to be sitting in a timeless stillness. What was he listening for? He seemed to be listening for some sound a long way off, from beyond life. He remembered his wife. He must go back to her. The child was asleep, the eyelids not quite shut, showing a slight film of black pupil between. Why did she not shut her eyes? Her mouth was also a little open.

He rose quickly and went back to the house.

“Is she asleep?” whispered Tilly.

He nodded. The servant woman came to look at the child who slept in the shawl, with cheeks flushed hot and red, and a whiteness, a wanness round the eyes.

“God-a-mercy!” whispered Tilly, shaking her head.

He pushed off his boots and went upstairs with the child. He became aware of the anxiety grasped tight at his heart, because of his wife. But he remained still. The house was silent save for the wind outside, and the noisy trickling and splattering of water in the water butts. There was a slit of light under his wife’s door.

He put the child into bed wrapped as she was in the shawl, for the sheets would be cold. Then he was afraid that she might not be able to move her arms,

so he loosened her. The black eyes opened, rested on him vacantly, sank shut again. He covered her up. The last little quiver from the sobbing shook her breathing.

This was his room, the room he had had before he married. It was familiar. He remembered what it was to be a young man, untouched.

He remained suspended. The child slept, pushing her small fists from the shawl. He could tell the woman her child was asleep. But he must go to the other landing. He started. There was the sound of the owls — the moaning of the woman. What an uncanny sound! It was not human — at least to a man.

He went down to her room, entering softly. She was lying still, with eyes shut, pale, tired. His heart leapt, fearing she was dead. Yet he knew perfectly well she was not. He saw the way her hair went loose over her temples, her mouth was shut with suffering in a sort of grin. She was beautiful to him — but it was not human. He had a dread of her as she lay there. What had she to do with him? She was other than himself.

Something made him go and touch her fingers that were still grasped on the sheet. Her brown-grey eyes opened and looked at him. She did not know him as himself. But she knew him as the man. She looked at him as a woman in childbirth looks at the man who begot the child in her: an impersonal look, in the extreme hour, female to male. Her eyes closed again. A great, scalding peace went over him, burning his heart and his entrails, passing off into the infinite.

When her pains began afresh, tearing her, he turned aside, and could not look. But his heart in torture was at peace, his bowels were glad. He went downstairs, and to the door, outside, lifted his face to the rain, and felt the darkness striking unseen and steadily upon him.

The swift, unseen threshing of the night upon him silenced him and he was overcome. He turned away indoors, humbly. There was the infinite world, eternal, unchanging, as well as the world of life.

THE END