The Garden of Survival

by Algernon Blackwood

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I

IT will surprise and at the same time possibly amuse you to know that I had the instinct to tell what follows to a Priest, and might have done so had not the Man of the World in me whispered that from professional Believers I should get little sympathy, and probably less credence still. For to have my experience disbelieved, or attributed to hallucination, would be intolerable to me. Psychical investigators, I am told, prefer a Medium who takes no cash recompense for his performance, a Healer who gives of his strange powers without reward. There are, however, natural-born priests who yet wear no uniform other than upon their face and heart, but since I know of none I fall back upon yourself, my other half, for in writing this adventure to you I almost feel that I am writing it to myself.

The desire for confession is upon me: this thing must out. It is a story, though an unfinished one. I mention this at once lest, frightened by the thickness of the many pages, you lay them aside against another time, and so perhaps neglect them altogether. A story, however, will invite your interest, and when I add that it is true, I feel that you will bring sympathy to that interest: these together, I hope, may win your attention, and hold it, until you shall have read the final word.

That I should use this form in telling it will offend your literary taste—you who have made your name both as critic and creative writer—for you said once, I remember, that to tell a story in epistolary form is a subterfuge, an attempt to evade the difficult matters of construction and delineation of character. My story, however, is so slight, so subtle, so delicately intimate too, that a letter to some one in closest sympathy with myself seems the only form that offers.

It is, as I said, a confession, but a very dear confession: I burn to tell it honestly, yet know not how. To withhold it from you would be to admit a secretiveness that our

relationship has never known—out it must, and to you. I may, perhaps, borrow—who can limit the sharing powers of twin brothers like ourselves?—some of the skill your own work spills so prodigally, crumbs from your writing-table, so to speak; and you will forgive the robbery, if successful, as you will accept lie love behind the confession as your due.

Now, listen, please! For this is the point: that, although my wife is dead these dozen years and more—I have found reunion and I love. Explanation of this must follow as best it may. So, please mark tie point which for the sake of emphasis I venture to repeat: that I know reunion and I love.

With the jealous prerogative of the twin, you objected to that marriage, though I knew that it deprived you of no jot of my affection, owing to the fact that it was prompted by pity only, leaving the soul in me wholly disengaged. Marion, by her steady refusal to accept my honest friendship, by her persistent admiration of me, as also by her loveliness, her youth, her singing, persuaded me somehow finally that I needed her. The cry of the flesh, which her beauty stimulated and her singing increased most strangely, seemed raised into a burning desire that I mistook at the moment for the true desire of the soul. Yet, actually, the soul in me remained aloof, a spectator, and one, moreover, of a distinctly lukewarm kind. It was very curious. On looking back, I can hardly understand it even now; there seemed some special power, some special undiscovered tie between us that led me on and yet deceived me. It was especially evident in her singing, this deep power. She sang, you remember, to her own accompaniment on the harp, and her method, though so simple it seemed almost childish, was at the same time charged with a great melancholy that always moved me most profoundly. The sound of her small, plaintive voice, the sight of her slender fingers that plucked the strings in some delicate fashion native to herself, the tiny foot that pressed the pedal—all these, with her dark searching eyes fixed penetratingly upon my own while she sang of love and love's endearments, combined in a single stroke of very puissant and seductive kind.

Passions in me awoke, so deep, so ardent, so imperious, that I conceived them as born of the need of one soul for another. I attributed their power to genuine love. The following reactions, when my soul held up a finger and bade me listen to her still, small warnings, grew less positive and of ever less duration. The frontier between physical and spiritual passion is perilously narrow, perhaps. My judgment, at any rate, became insecure, then floundered hopelessly. The sound of the harp-strings and of Marion's voice could overwhelm its balance instantly.

Mistaking, perhaps, my lukewarm-ness for restraint, she led me at last to the altar you described as one of sacrifice. And your instinct, more piercing than my own, proved only too correct: that which I held for love declared itself as pity only, the soft, affectionate pity of a weakish man in whom the flesh cried loudly, the pity of a man who would be untrue to himself rather than pain so sweet a girl by rejecting the one great offering life placed within her gift. She persuaded me so cunningly that I persuaded myself, yet was not aware I did so until afterwards. I married her because in some manner I felt, but never could explain, that she had need of me.

And, at the wedding, I remember two things vividly: the expression of wondering resignation on your face, and upon hers—chiefly in the eyes and in the odd lines about the mouth—the air of subtle triumph that she wore: that she had captured me for her very own at last, and yet—for there was this singular hint in her attitude and behaviour—that she had taken me, because she had this curious deep need of me.

This sharply moving touch was graven into me, increasing the tenderness of my pity, subsequently, a thousandfold. The necessity lay in her very soul. She gave to me all she had to give, and in so doing she tried to satisfy some hunger of her being that lay beyond my comprehension or interpretation. For, note this—she gave herself into my keeping, I remember, with a sigh.

It seems as of yesterday the actual moment when, urged by my vehement desires, I made her consent to be my wife; I remember, too, the doubt, the shame, the

hesitation that made themselves felt in me before the climax when her beauty overpowered me, sweeping reflection utterly away. I can hear to-day the sigh, half of satisfaction, yet half, it seemed, of pain, with which she sank into my arms at last, as though her victory brought intense relief, yet was not wholly gamed in the way that she had wanted. Her physical beauty, perhaps, was the last weapon she had wished to use for my enslavement; she knew quite surely that the appeal to what was highest in me had not succeeded...

The party in our mother's house that week in July included yourself; there is no need for me to remind you of its various members, nor of the strong attraction Marion, then a girl of twenty-five, exercised upon the men belonging to it. Nor have you forgotten, I feel sure, the adroit way in which she contrived so often to find herself alone with me, both in the house and out of it, even to the point of sometimes placing me in a quasi-false position. That she tempted me is, perhaps, an overstatement, though that she availed herself of every legitimate use of feminine magic to entrap me is certainly the truth. Opportunities of marriage, it was notorious, had been frequently given to her, and she had as frequently declined them; she was older than her years; to inexperience she certainly had no claim: and from the very first it was clear to me—if conceited, I cannot pretend that I was also blind—that flirtation was not her object and that marriage was. Yet it was marriage with a purpose that she desired, and that purpose had to do, I felt, with sacrifice. She burned to give her very best, her all, and for my highest welfare. It was in this sense, I got the impression strangely, that she had need of me.

The battle seemed, at first, uneven, since, as a woman, she did not positively attract me. I was first amused at her endeavours and her skill; but respect for her as a redoubtable antagonist soon followed. This respect, doubtless, was the first blood she drew from me, since it gained my attention and fixed my mind upon her presence. From that moment she entered my consciousness as a woman; when she was near me I became more and more aware of her, and the room, the picnic, the

game of tennis that included her were entirely different from such occasions when she was absent, I became self-conscious. It was impossible to ignore her as formerly had been my happy case.

It was then I first knew how beautiful she was, and that her beauty made a certain difference to my mood. The next step may seem a big one, but, I believe, is very natural: her physical beauty gave me definite pleasure. And the instant this change occurred she was aware of it. The curious fact, however, is that, although aware of this gain of power, she made no direct use of it at first. She did not draw this potent weapon for my undoing; it was ever with her, but was ever sheathed. Did she discern my weakness, perhaps, and know that the subtle power would work upon me most effectively if left to itself? Did she, rich in experience, deem that its too direct use might waken a reaction in my better self? I cannot say, I do not know.... Every feminine art was at her disposal, as every use of magic pertaining to young and comely womanhood was easily within her reach. As you and I might express it bluntly, she knew men thoroughly, she knew every trick; she drew me on, then left me abruptly in the wrong, puzzled, foolish, angry, only to forgive me later with the most enchanting smile or word imaginable. But never once did she deliberately make use of the merciless weapon of her physical beauty although—perhaps because—she knew that it was the most powerful in all her armoury.

For listen to this: when at last I took her in my arms with passion that would not be denied, she actually resented it. She even sought to repel me from her touch that had undone me. I repeat what I said before: She did not wish to win me in that way. The sigh of happiness she drew in that moment—I can swear to it—included somewhere, too, the pain of bitter disappointment.

The weapon, however, that she did use without hesitation was her singing. There was nothing special either in its quality or skill; it was a voice untrained, I believe, and certainly without ambition; her repertoire was limited; she sang folk-songs

mostly, the simple love-songs of primitive people, of peasants and the like, yet sang them with such truth and charm, with such power and conviction, somehow, that I knew enchantment as I listened. This, too, she instantly divined, and that behind my compliments lay hid a weakness of deep origin she could play upon to her sure advantage. She did so without mercy, until gradually I passed beneath her sway.

I will not now relate in detail the steps of my descent, or if you like it better, of my capture. This is a summary merely. So let me say in brief that her singing to the harp combined with the revelation of her physical beauty to lead me swiftly to the point where I ardently desired her, and that in this turmoil of desire I sought eagerly to find real love. There were times when I deceived myself most admirably; there were times when I plainly saw the truth. During the former I believed that my happiness lay in marrying her, but in the latter I recognised that a girl who meant nothing to my better self had grown of a sudden painfully yet exquisitely desirable. But even during the ascendancy of the latter physical mood, she had only to seat herself beside the harp and sing, for the former state to usurp its place, I watched, I listened, and I yielded. Her voice, aided by the soft plucking of the strings, completed my defeat. Now, strangest of all, I must add one other thing, and I will add it without comment. For though sure of its truth, I would not dwell upon it. And it is this: that in her singing, as also in her playing, in the "colour" of her voice as also in the very attitude and gestures of her figure as she sat beside the instrument, there lay, though marvellously hidden, something gross. It woke a response of something in myself, hitherto unrecognized, that was similarly gross....

It was in the empty billiard-room when the climax came, a calm evening of late July, the dusk upon the lawn, and most of the house-party already gone upstairs to dress for dinner. I had been standing beside the open window for some considerable time, motionless, and listening idly to the singing of a thrush or blackbird in the shrubberies—when I heard the faint twanging of the harp-strings in the room behind me, and turning, saw that Marion had entered and was there beside the instrument.

At the same moment she saw me, rose from the harp and came forward. During the day she had kept me at a distance. I was hungry for her voice and touch; her presence excited me—and yet I was half afraid.

"What! Already dressed!" I exclaimed, anxious to avoid a talk a deux. "I must hurry then, or I shall be later than usual."

I crossed the room towards the door, when she stopped me with her eyes.

"Do you really mean to say you don't know the difference between an evening frock and—and this," she answered lightly, holding out the skirt in her fingers for me to touch. And in the voice was that hint of a sensual caress that, I admit, bewildered both my will and judgment. She was very close and her fragrance came on me with her breath, like the perfume of the summer garden. I touched the material carelessly; it was of softest smooth white serge. It seemed I touched herself that lay beneath it. And at that touch some fire of lightning ran through every vein.

"How stupid of me," I said quickly, making to go past her, "but it's white, you see, and in this dim light I——"

"A man's idea of an evening frock is always white, I suppose, or black." She laughed a little. "I'm not coming to dinner to-night," she added, sitting down to the harp. "I've got a headache and thought I might soothe it with a little music. I didn't know any one was here. I thought I was alone."

Thus, deftly, having touched a chord of pity in me, she began to play; her voice followed; dinner and dressing, the house-party and my mother's guests, were all forgotten. I remember that you looked in, your eyes touched with a suggestive and melancholy smile, and as quickly closed the door again. But even that little warning failed to help me. I sat down on the sofa facing her, the world forgotten. And, as I listened to her singing and to the sweet music of the harp, the spell, it seemed, of some ancient beauty stole upon my spirit. The sound of her soft voice reduced my resistance to utter impotence. An aggressive passion took its place. The desire for

contact, physical contact, became a vehement aching that I scarcely could restrain, and my arms were hungry for her. Shame and repugnance touched me faintly for a moment, but at once died away again. I listened and I watched. The sensuous beauty of her figure and her movements, swathed in that soft and clinging serge, troubled my judgment; it seemed, as I saw her little foot upon the pedal, that I felt with joy its pressure on my heart and life. Something gross and abandoned stirred in me; I welcomed her easy power and delighted in it. I feasted my eyes and ears, the blood rose feverishly to my head. She did not look at me, yet knew that I looked at her, and how. No longer ashamed, but with a fiery pleasure in my heart, I spoke at last. Her song had ended. She softly brushed the strings, her eyes turned downwards.

"Marion," I said, agitation making my voice sound unfamiliar, "Marion, dear, I am enthralled; your voice, your beauty——"

I found no other words; my voice stopped dead; I stood up, trembling in every limb. I saw her in that instant as a maid of olden time, singing the love-songs of some far-off day beside her native instrument, and of a voluptuous beauty there was no withstanding. The half-light of the dusk set her in a frame of terrible enchantment.

And as I spoke her name and rose, she also spoke my own, my Christian name, and rose as well. I saw her move towards me. Upon her face, in her eyes and on her lips, was a smile of joy I had never seen before, though a smile of conquest, and of something more besides that I must call truly by its rightful name, a smile of lust. God! those movements beneath the clinging dress that fell in lines of beauty to her feet! Those little feet that stepped upon my heart, upon my very soul.... For a moment I loathed myself. The next, as she touched me and my arms took her with rough strength against my breast, my repugnance vanished, and I was utterly undone. I believed I loved. That which was gross in me, leaping like fire to claim her glorious beauty, met and merged with that similar, devouring flame in her; but in the merging seemed cunningly transformed into the call of soul to soul: I forgot the

pity.... I kissed her, holding her to me so fiercely that she scarcely moved. I said a thousand things. I know not what I said. I loved.

Then, suddenly, she seemed to free herself; she drew away; she looked at me, standing a moment just beyond my reach, a strange smile on her lips and in her darkened eyes a nameless expression that held both joy and pain. For one second I felt that she repelled me, that she resented my action and my words. Yes, for one brief second she stood there, like an angel set in judgment over me, and the next we had come together again, softly, gently, happily; I heard that strange, deep sigh, already mentioned, half of satisfaction, half, it seemed, of pain, as she sank down into my arms and found relief in quiet sobbing on my breast.

And pity then returned. I felt unsure of myself again. This was the love of the body only; my soul was silent. Yet—somehow, in some strange hidden way, lay this ambushed meaning—that she had need of me, and that she offered her devotion and herself in sacrifice.

II

THE brief marriage ran its course, depleting rather than enriching me, and I know you realized before the hurried, dreadful end that my tie with yourself was strengthened rather than endangered, and that I took from you nothing that I might give it to her. That death should intervene so swiftly, leaving her but an interval of a month between the altar and the grave, you could foreknow as little as I or she; yet in that brief space of time you learned that I had robbed you of nothing that was your precious due, while she as surely realized that the amazing love she poured so lavishly upon me woke no response—beyond a deep and tender pity, strangely deep and singularly tender I admit, but assuredly very different from love.

Now this, I think, you already know and in some measure understand; but what you cannot know—since it is a portion of her secret, of that ambushed meaning, as I termed it, given to me when she lay dying—is the pathetic truth that her discovery

wrought no touch of disenchantment in her. I think she knew with shame that she had caught me with her lowest weapon, yet still hoped that the highest in her might complete and elevate her victory. She knew, at any rate, neither dismay nor disappointment; of reproach there was no faintest hint. She did not even once speak of it directly, though her fine, passionate face made me aware of the position. Of the usual human reaction, that is, there was no slightest trace; she neither chided nor implored; she did not weep. The exact opposite of what I might have expected took place before my very eyes.

For she turned and faced me, empty as I was. The soul in her, realizing the truth, stood erect to meet the misery of lonely pain that inevitably lay ahead—in some sense as though she welcomed it already; and, strangest of all, she blossomed, physically as well as mentally, into a fuller revelation of gracious loveliness than before, sweeter and more exquisite, indeed, than anything life had yet shown to me. Moreover, having captured me, she changed; the grossness I had discerned, that which had led me to my own undoing, vanished completely as though it were transmuted into desires and emotions of a loftier kind. Some purpose, some intention, a hope immensely resolute shone out of her, and of such spiritual loveliness, it seemed to me, that I watched it in a kind of dumb amazement.

I watched it—unaware at first of my own shame, emptied of any emotion whatsoever, I think, but that of a startled worship before the grandeur of her generosity. It seemed she listened breathlessly for the beating of my heart, and hearing none, resolved that she would pour her own life into it, regardless of pain, of loss, of sacrifice, that she might make it live. She undertook her mission, that is to say, and this mission, in some mysterious way, and according to some code of conduct undivined by me, yet passionately honoured, was to give—regardless of herself or of response. I caught myself sometimes thinking of a child who would instinctively undo some earlier grievous wrong. She loved me marvellously.

I know not how to describe to you the lavish wealth of selfless devotion she bathed me in during the brief torturing and unfulfilled period before the end. It made me aware of new depths and heights in human nature. It taught me a new beauty that even my finest dreams had left unmentioned. Into the region that great souls inhabit a glimpse was given me. My own dreadful weakness was laid bare. And an eternal hunger woke in me—that I might love.

That hunger remained unsatisfied. I prayed, I yearned, I suffered; I could have decreed myself a deservedly cruel death; it seemed I stretched my little nature to unendurable limits in the fierce hope that the Gift of the Gods might be bestowed upon me, and that her divine emotion might waken a response within my leaden soul. But all in vain. My attitude, in spite of every prayer, of every effort, remained no more than a searching and unavailing pity, but a pity that held no seed of a mere positive emotion, least of all, of love. The heart in me lay unredeemed; it knew ashamed and very tender gratitude; but it did not beat for her. I could not love.

I have told you bluntly, frankly, of my physical feelings towards Marion and her beauty. It is a confession that I give into my own safe keeping. I think, perhaps, that you, though cast in a finer mould, may not despise them utterly, nor too contemptuously misinterpret them. The legend that twins may share a single soul has always seemed to me grotesque and unpoetic nonsense, a cruel and unnecessary notion too: a man is sufficiently imperfect without suffering this further subtraction from his potentialities. And yet it is true, in our own case, that you have exclusive monopoly of the ethereal qualities, while to me are given chiefly the physical attributes of the vigorous and healthy male—the animal: my six feet three, my muscular system, my inartistic and pedestrian temperament. Fairly clean-minded, I hope I may be, but beyond all question I am the male animal incarnate. It was, indeed, the thousand slaveries of the senses, individually so negligible, collectively so overwhelming, that forced me upon my knees before her physical loveliness. I must tell you now that this potent spell, alternating between fiery desire and the

sincerest of repugnance, continued to operate. I complete the confession by adding briefly, that after marriage she resented and repelled all my advances. A deep sadness came upon her; she wept; and I desisted. It was my soul that she desired with the fire of her mighty love, and not my body.... And again, since it is to myself and to you alone I tell it, I would add this vital fact: it was this "new beauty which my finest dreams have left unmentioned" that made it somehow possible for me to desist, both against my animal will, yet willingly.

I have told you that, when dying, she revealed to me a portion of her "secret." This portion of a sacred confidence lies so safe within my everlasting pity that I may share it with you without the remorse of a betrayal. Full understanding we need never ask; the solution, I am convinced, is scarcely obtainable in this world. The message, however, was incomplete because the breath that framed it into broken words failed suddenly; the heart, so strangely given into my unworthy keeping, stopped beating as you shall hear upon the very edge of full disclosure. The ambushed meaning I have hinted at remained—a hint.

III

THERE was, then, you will remember, but an interval of minutes between the accident and the temporary recovery of consciousness, between that recovery again and the moment when the head fell forward on my knee and she was gone. That "recovery" of consciousness I feel bound to question, as you shall shortly hear. Among such curious things I am at sea admittedly, yet I must doubt for ever that the eyes which peered so strangely into mine were those of Marion herself—as I had always known her. You will, at any rate, allow the confession, and believe it true, that I—did not recognize her quite. Consciousness there was, indubitably, but whether it was "recovery" of consciousness is another matter, and a problem that I must for ever question though I cannot ever set it confidently at rest. It almost seemed as though a larger, grander, yet somehow a less personal, soul looked forth

through the fading eyes and used the troubled breath.

In those brief minutes, at any rate, the mind was clear as day, the faculties not only unobscured, but marvellously enhanced. In the eyes at first shone unveiled fire; she smiled, gazing into my own with love and eager yearning too. There was a radiance in her face I must call glory. Her head was in my lap upon the bed of rugs we had improvised inside the field: the broken motor posed in a monstrous heap ten yards away; and the doctor, summoned by a passing stranger, was in the act of administrating the anaesthetic, so that we might bear her without pain to the nearest hospital—when, suddenly, she held up a warning finger, beckoning to me that I should listen closely.

I bent my head to catch the words. There was such authority in the gesture, and in the eyes an expression so extraordinarily appealing, and yet so touched with the awe of a final privacy beyond language, that the doctor stepped backwards on the instant, the needle shaking in his hand—while I bent down to catch the whispered words that at once began to pass her lips.

The wind in the poplar overhead mingled with the little sentences, as though the breath of the clear blue sky, calmly shining, was mingled with her own.

But the words I heard both troubled and amazed me:

"Help me! For I am in the dark still!" went through me like a sword. "And I do not know how long."

I took her face in both my hands; I kissed her. "You are with friends," I said. "You are safe with us, with me—Marion!" And I apparently tried to put into my smile the tenderness that clumsy words forswore. Her next words shocked me inexpressibly: "You laugh," she said, "but I——" she sighed—"I weep."

I stroked her face and hair. No words came to me.

"You call me Marion," she went on in an eager tone that surely belied her pain and weakness, "but I do not remember that. I have forgotten names." Then, as I kissed

her, I heard her add in the clearest whisper possible, as though no cloud lay upon her mind: "Yet Marion will do—if by that you know me now."

There came a pause then, but after it such singular words that I could hardly believe I heard aright, although each syllable sank into my brain as with pointed steel:

"You come to me again when I lie dying. Even in the dark I hear—how long I do not know—I hear your words."

She gave me suddenly then a most piercing look, raising her face a little towards my own. I saw earnest entreaty in them. "Tell me," I murmured; "you are nearer, closer to me than ever before. Tell me what it is?"

"Music," she whispered, "I want music——"

I knew not what to answer, what to say. Can you blame me that, in my troubled, aching heart, I found but commonplaces? For I thought of the harp, or of some stringed instrument that seemed part of her.

"You shall have it," I said gently, "and very soon. We shall carry you now into comfort, safety. You shall have no pain. Another moment and——"

"Music," she repeated, interrupting, "music as of long ago."

It was terrible. I said such stupid things. My mind seemed frozen.

"I would hear music," she whispered, "before I go again."

"Marion, you shall," I stammered. "Beethoven, Schumann,—what would please you most? You shall have all."

"Yes, play to me. But those names"—she shook her head—"I do not know."

I remember that my face was streaming, my hands so hot that her head seemed more than I could hold. I shifted my knees so that she might lie more easily a little.

"God's music!" she cried aloud with startling abruptness; then, lowering her voice again and smiling sadly as though something came back to her that she would fain forget, she added slowly, with something of mournful emphasis:

"I was a singer ..."

As though a flash of light had passed, some inner darkness was cleft asunder in me. Some heaviness shifted from my brain. It seemed the years, the centuries, turned over like a wind-blown page. And out of some hidden inmost part of me involuntary words rose instantly:

"You sang God's music then ..."

The strange, unbidden sentence stirred her. Her head moved slightly; she smiled. Gazing into my eyes intently, as though to dispel a mist that shrouded both our minds, she went on in a whisper that yet was startlingly distinct, though with little pauses drawn out between the phrases: "I was a singer... in the Temple. I sang—men—into evil. You ... I sang into ... evil."

There was a moment's pause, as a spasm of inexplicable pain passed through my heart like fire, and a sense of haunting things whereof no conscious memory remained came over me. The scene about me wavered before my eyes as if it would disappear.

"Yet you came to me when I lay dying at the last," I caught her thin clear whisper. "You said, 'Turn to God!'"

The whisper died away. The darkness flowed back upon my mind and thought. A silence followed. I heard the wind in the poplar overhead. The doctor moved impatiently, coming a few steps nearer, then turning away again. I heard the sounds of tinkering with metal that the driver made ten yards behind us. I turned angrily to make a sign—when Marion's low voice, again more like the murmur of the wind than a living voice, rose into the still evening air:

"I have failed. And I shall try again."

She gazed up at me with that patient, generous love that seemed inexhaustible, and hardly knowing what to answer, nor how to comfort her in that afflicting moment, I bent lower—or, rather, she drew my ear closer to her lips. I think her great desire

just then was to utter her own thought more fully before she passed. Certainly it was no avowal or consolation from myself she sought.

"Your forgiveness," I heard distinctly, "I need your full forgiveness."

It was for me a terrible and poignant moment. The emptiness of my pity betrayed itself too mercilessly for me to bear; yet, before my bewilderment enabled me to frame an answer, she went on hurriedly, though with a faultless certainty: the meaning to her was clear as day:

"Born of love ... the only true forgiveness..."

A film formed slowly. Her eyes began to close, her breath died off into a sigh; she smiled, but her head sank lower with her fading strength. And her final words went by me in that sigh:

"Yet love in you lies unawakened still... and I must try again...."

There was one more effort, painful with unexpressed fulfilment. A flicker of awful yearning took her paling eyes. Life seemed to stammer, pause, then flush as with this last deep impulse to yield a secret she discerned for the first time fully, in the very act of passing out. The face, with its soft loveliness, turned grey in death. Upon the edge of a great disclosure—she was gone.

I remember that for a space of time there was silence all about us. The doctor still kept his back to us, the driver had ceased his wretched hammering, I heard the wind in the poplar and the hum of insects. A bird sang loudly on a branch above; it seemed miles away, across an empty world.... Then, of a sudden, I became aware that the weight of the head and shoulders had dreadfully increased. I dared not turn my face lest I should look upon her whom I had deeply wronged—the forsaken tenement of this woman whose matchless love now begged with her dying breath for my forgiveness!

A cowardly desire to lose consciousness ran through me, to forget myself, to hide my shame with her in death; yet, even while this was so, I sought most desperately

through the depths of my anguished pity to find some hint, if only the tiniest seed, of love—and found it not.... The rest belonged to things unrealized....

I remember a hand being laid upon me. I lifted my head which had fallen close against her cheek. The doctor stood beside me, his grave and kindly face bent low. He spoke some gentle words. I saw him replacing the needle in its little leathern case, unused.

Marion was dead, her deep secret undisclosed. That which she yearned to tell me was something which, in her brief period of devotion, she had lived, had faithfully acted out, yet herself only dimly aware of why it had to be. The solution of this problem of unrequited love lay at last within her grasp; of a love that only asked to give of its unquenched and unquenchable store, undismayed by the total absence of response.

She passed from the world of speech and action with this intense desire unsatisfied, and at the very moment—as with a drowning man who sees his past—when the solution lay ready to her hand. She saw clearly, she understood, she burned to tell me. Upon the edge of full disclosure, she was gone, leaving me alone with my aching pity and with my shame of unawakened love.

"I have failed, but I shall try again...."

IV

THAT, as you know, took place a dozen years ago and more, when I was thirty-two, and time, in the interval, has wrought unexpected ends out of the material of my life. My trade as a soldier has led me to an administrative post in a distant land where, apparently, I have deserved well of my King and Country, as they say in the obituaries. At any rate, the cryptic letters following my name, bear witness to some kind of notoriety attained.

You were the first to welcome my success, and your congratulations were the first I

looked for, as surely as they were more satisfying than those our mother sent. You knew me better, it seems, than she did. For you expressed the surprise that I, too, felt, whereas mother assured me she had "always known you would do well, my boy, and you have only got your deserts in this tardy recognition." To her, of course, even at forty-five, I was still her "little boy." You, however, guessed shrewdly that Luck had played strong cards in bringing me this distinction, and I will admit at once that it was, indeed, due to little born in me, but, rather, to some adventitious aid that, curiously, seemed never lacking at the opportune moment. And this adventitious aid was new.

This is the unvarnished truth. A mysterious power dealt the cards for me with unfailing instinct; a fortunate combination of events placing in my hands, precisely at the moment of their greatest value, clear opportunities that none but a hopeless blunderer could have disregarded. What men call Chance operated in my favour as though with superb calculation, lifting me to this miniature pinnacle I could never have reached by my own skill and judgment.

So, at least, you and I, knowing my limited abilities, consent to attribute my success to luck, to chance, to fate, or to any other name for the destiny that has placed me on a height my talent never could have reached alone. You, and I, too, for that matter, are as happy over the result as our mother is; only you and I are surprised, because we judge it, with some humour, out of greater knowledge. More—you, like myself, are a little puzzled, I think. We ask together, if truth were told: Whose was the unerring, guiding hand?

Amid this uncertainty I give you now another curious item, about which you have, of course, been uninformed. For none could have detected it but myself: namely, that apart from these opportunities chance set upon my path, an impulse outside myself—and an impulse that was new—drove me to make use of them. Sometimes even against my personal inclination, a power urged me into decided, and it so

happened, always into faultless action. Amazed at myself, I yet invariably obeyed.

How to describe so elusive a situation I hardly know, unless by telling you the simple truth: I felt that somebody would be pleased.

And, with the years, I learned to recognize this instinct that never failed when a choice, and therefore an element of doubt, presented itself. Invariably I was pushed towards the right direction. More singular still, there rose in me unbidden at these various junctures, a kind of inner attention which bade me wait and listen for the guiding touch. I am not fanciful, I heard no voice, I was aware of nothing personal by way of guidance or assistance; and yet the guidance, the assistance, never failed, though often I was not conscious that they had been present until long afterwards. I felt, as I said above, that somebody would be pleased.

For it was a consistent, an intelligent guidance; operating, as it were, out of some completer survey of the facts at a given moment than my own abilities could possibly have compassed; my mediocre faculties seemed gathered together and perfected—with the result, in time, that my "intuition," as others called it, came to be regarded with a respect that in some cases amounted to half reverence. The adjective "uncanny" was applied to me. The natives, certainly, were aware of awe.

I made no private use of this unearned distinction; there is nothing in me of the charlatan that claimed mysterious power; but my subordinates, ever in growing numbers as my promotions followed, held me in greater respect, apparently, on that very account. The natives, especially, as I mentioned, attributed semi-deific properties to my poor personality. Certainly my prestige increased out of all proportion to anything my talents deserved with any show of justice.

I have said that, so far as I was concerned, there lay nothing personal in this growth of divining intuition. I must now qualify that a little. Nothing persuaded me that this guidance, so infallible, so constant, owed its origin to what men call a being; I certainly found no name for it; exactness, I think, might place its truest description

in some such term as energy, inner force or inspiration; yet I must admit that, with its steady repetition, there awoke in me an attitude towards it that eluded somewhere also an emotion. And in this emotion, in its quality and character, hid remotely a personal suggestion: each time it offered itself, that is, I was aware of a sharp quiver of sensitive life within me, and of that sensation, extraordinarily sweet and wonderful, which constitutes a genuine thrill.

I came to look for this "thrill," to lie in wait with anticipatory wonder for its advent; and in a sense this pause in me, that was both of expectancy and hope, grew slowly into what I may almost call a habit. There was an emptiness in my heart before it came, a sense of peace and comfort when it was accomplished. The emptiness and then the satisfaction, as first and last conditions, never failed, and that they took place in my heart rather than in my mind I can affirm with equal certainty.

The habit, thus, confirmed itself. I admitted the power. Let me be frank—I sought it, even longing for it when there was no decision to be made, no guidance therefore needed: I longed for it because of the great sweetness that it left within my heart. It was when I needed it, however, that its effect was most enduring. The method became quite easy to me. When a moment of choice between two courses of action presented itself, I first emptied my heart of all personal inclination, then, pausing upon direction, I knew—or rather felt—which course to take. My heart was filled and satisfied with an intention that never wavered. Some energy that made the choice for me had been poured in. I decided upon this or that line of action. The Thrill, always of an instantaneous nature, came and went—and somebody was pleased.

Moreover—and this will interest you more particularly—the emotion produced in me was, so far as positive recognition went, a new emotion; it was, at any rate, one that had lain so feebly in me hitherto that its announcement brought the savour of an emotion before unrealized. I had known it but once, and that long years before, but

the man's mind in me increased and added to it. For it seemed a development of that new perception which first dawned upon me during my brief period of married life, and had since lain hidden in me, potential possibly, but inactive beyond all question, if not wholly dead. I will now name it for you, and for myself, as best I may. It was the Thrill of Beauty.

I became, in these moments, aware of Beauty, and to a degree, while it lasted, approaching revelation. Chords, first faintly struck long years before when my sense of Marion's forgiveness and generosity stirred worship in me, but chords that since then had lain, apparently, unresponsive, were swept into resonance again. Possibly they had been vibrating all these intervening years, unknown to me, unrecognized. I cannot say. I only know that here was the origin of the strange energy that now moved me to the depths. Some new worship of Beauty that had love in it, of which, indeed, love was the determining quality, awoke in the profoundest part of me, and even when the "thrill" had gone its way, left me hungry and yearning for its repetition. Here, then, is the "personal" qualification that I mentioned. The yearning and the hunger were related to my deepest needs. I had been empty, but I would be filled. For a passionate love, holding hands with a faith and confidence as passionate as itself, poured flooding into me and made this new sense of beauty seem a paramount necessity of my life.

Will you be patient now, if I give you a crude instance of what I mean? It is one among many others, but I choose it because its very crudeness makes my meaning clear.

In this fevered and stricken African coast, you may know, there is luxuriance in every natural detail, an exuberance that is lavish to excess. Yet beauty lies somewhat coyly hid—as though suffocated by over-abundance of crowding wonder. I detect, indeed, almost a touch of the monstrous in it all, a super-expression, as it were, that bewilders, and occasionally even may alarm. Delicacy, subtlety, suggestion in any

form, have no part in it. During the five years of my exile amid this tropical extravagance I can recall no single instance of beauty "hinting" anywhere. Nature seems, rather, audaciously abandoned; she is without restraint. She shows her all, tells everything—she shouts, she never whispers. You will understand me when I tell you that this wholesale lack of reticence and modesty involves all absence in the beholder of—surprise. A sudden ravishment of the senses is impossible. One never can experience that sweet and troubling agitation to which a breathless amazement properly belongs. You may be stunned; you are hardly ever "thrilled."

Now, this new sensitiveness to Beauty I have mentioned has opened me to that receptiveness which is aware of subtlety and owns to sharp surprise. The thrill is of its very essence. It is unexpected. Out of the welter of prolific detail Nature here glories in, a delicate hint of wonder and surprise comes stealing. The change, of course, is in myself, not otherwise. And on the particular "crude" occasion I will briefly mention, it reached me from the most obvious and banal of conditions—the night sky and the moon.

Here, then, is how it happened: There had arisen a situation of grave difficulty among the natives of my Province, and the need for taking a strong, authoritative line was paramount. The reports of my subordinates from various parts of the country pointed to very vigorous action of a repressing, even of a punitive, description. It was not, in itself, a complicated situation, and no Governor, who was soldier too, need have hesitated for an instant. The various Stations, indeed, anticipating the usual course of action indicated by precedent, had automatically gone to their posts, prepared for the "official instructions" it was known that I should send, wondering impatiently (as I learned afterwards) at the slight delay. For delay there was, though of a few hours only; and this delay was caused by my uncomfortable new habit—pausing for the guidance and the "thrill." Intuition, waiting upon the thrill of Beauty that guided it, at first lay inactive.

My behaviour seemed scarcely of the orthodox, official kind, soldierly least of all. There was uneasiness, there was cursing, probably; there were certainly remarks not complimentary. Prompt, decisive action was the obvious and only course... while I sat quietly in the Headquarters Bungalow, a sensitive youth again, a dreamer, a poet, hungry for the inspiration of Beauty that the gorgeous tropical night concealed with her excess of smothering abundance.

This incongruity between my procedure and the time-honoured methods of "strong" Governors must have seemed exasperating to those who waited, respectful, but with nerves on edge, in the canvassed and tented regions behind the Headquarters clearing. Indeed, the Foreign Office, could it have witnessed my unpardonable hesitation, might well have dismissed me on the spot, I think. For I sat there, dreaming in my deck-chair on the verandah, smoking a cigarette, safe within my net from the countless poisonous mosquitoes, and listening to the wind in the palms that fringed the heavy jungle round the building.

Smoking quietly, dreaming, listening, waiting, I sat there in this mood of inner attention and expectancy, knowing that the guidance I anticipated must surely come.

A few clouds sprawled in their beds of silver across the sky; the heat, the perfume, were, as always, painfully, excessive; the moonlight bathed the huge trees and giant leaves with that habitual extravagance which made it seem ordinary, almost cheap and wonderless. Very silent the wooden house lay all about me, there were no footsteps, there was no human voice. I heard only the wash of the heavy-scented wind through the colossal foliage that hardly stirred, and watched, as a hundred times before, the immense heated sky, drenched in its brilliant and intolerable moonlight. All seemed a riot of excess, an orgy.

Then, suddenly, the shameless night drew on some exquisite veil, as the moon, between three-quarters and the full, slid out of sight behind a streaky cloud. A breath, it seemed, of lighter wind woke all the perfume of the burdened forest

leaves. The shouting splendour hushed; there came a whisper and, at last—a hint.

I watched with relief and gratitude the momentary eclipse, for in the half-light I was aware of that sharp and tender mood which was preparatory to the thrill. Slowly sailing into view again from behind that gracious veil of cloud—

"The moon put forth a little diamond peak, No bigger than an unobserved star, Or tiny point of fairy scimitar; Bright signal that she only stooped to tie Her silver sandals, ere deliciously She bowed into the heavens her timid head."

And then it came. The Thrill stole forth and touched me, passing like a meteor through my heart, but in that lightning passage, cleaving it open to some wisdom that seemed most near to love. For power flowed in along the path that Beauty cleft for it, and with the beauty came that intuitive guidance I had waited for.

The inspiration operated like a flash. There was no reasoning; I was aware immediately that another and a better way of dealing with the situation was given me.

I need not weary you with details. It seemed contrary to precedent, advice, against experience too, yet it was the right, the only way. It threatened, I admit, to destroy the prestige so long and laboriously established, since it seemed a dangerous yielding to the natives that must menace the white life everywhere and render trade in the Colony unsafe. Yet I did not hesitate.... There was bustle at once within that Bungalow; the orders went forth; I saw the way and chose it—to the dismay, outspoken, of every white man whose welfare lay in my official hands.

And the results, I may tell you now without pride, since, as we both admit, no credit attaches to myself—the results astonished the entire Colony.... The Chiefs came to me, in due course, bringing fruit and flowers and presents enough to bury all Headquarters, and with a reverential obedience that proved the rising scotched to death—because its subtle psychological causes had been marvellously understood.

Full comprehension, as I mentioned earlier in this narrative, we cannot expect to

have. Its origin, I may believe, lies hid in the nature of that Beauty which is truth and love—in the source of our very life, perhaps, which lies hid again with beauty very far away.... But I may say this much at least: that it seemed, my inspired action had co-operated with the instinctive beliefs of these mysterious tribes—cooperated with their primitive and ancient sense of Beauty. It had, inexplicably to myself, fulfilled their sense of right, which my subordinates would have outraged. I had acted with, instead of against, them.

More I cannot tell you. You have the "crude instance," and you have the method. The instances multiplied, the method became habit. There grew in me this personal attitude towards an impersonal power I hardly understood, and this attitude included an emotion—love. With faith and love I consequently obeyed it. I loved the source of my guidance and assistance, though I dared attach no name to it. Simple enough the matter might have been, could I have referred its origin to some name—to our mother or to you, to my Chief in London, to an impersonal Foreign Office that has since honoured me with money and a complicated address upon my envelopes, or even, by a stretch of imagination, to that semi-abstract portion of my being some men call a Higher Self.

To none of these, however, could I honestly or dishonestly ascribe it. Yet, as in the case of those congratulatory telegrams from our mother and yourself, I was aware—and this feeling never failed with each separate occurrence—aware that somebody, other than ourselves individually or collectively—was pleased.

V

WHAT I have told you so far concerns a growth chiefly of my inner life that was almost a new birth. My outer life, of event and action, was sufficiently described in those monthly letters you had from me during the ten years, broken by three periods of long-leave at home, I spent in that sinister and afflicted land. This record, however, deals principally with the essential facts of my life, the inner; the outer

events and actions are of importance only in so far as they interpret these, since that which a man feels and thinks alone is real, and thought and feeling, of course, precede all action.

I have told you of the Thrill, of its genesis and development; and I chose an obvious and rather banal instance, first of all to make myself quite clear, and, secondly, because the majority were of so delicate a nature as to render their description extremely difficult. The point is that the emotion was, for me, a new one. I may honestly describe it as a birth.

I must now tell you that it first stirred in me some five years after I left England, and that during those years I had felt nothing but what most other men feel out here. Whether its sudden birth was due to the violent country, or to some process of gradual preparation that had been going forward in me secretly all that time, I cannot tell. No proof, at any rate, offered itself of either. It came suddenly. I do know, however, that from its first occurrence it has strengthened and developed until it has now become a dominating influence of a distinctly personal kind.

My character has been affected, perhaps improved. You have mentioned on several occasions that you noted in my letters a new tenderness, a new kindness towards my fellow-creatures, less of criticism and more of sympathy, a new love; the "birth of my poetic sense" you also spoke of once; and I myself have long been aware of a thousand fresh impulses towards charity and tolerance that had, hitherto, at any rate, lain inactive in my being.

I need not flatter myself complacently, yet a change there is, and it may be an improvement. Whether big or small, however, I am sure of one thing: I ascribe it entirely to this sharper and more extended sensitiveness to Beauty, this new and exquisite receptiveness that has established itself as a motive-power in my life. I have changed the poet's line, using prose of course: There is beauty everywhere and therefore joy.

And I will explain briefly, too, how it is that this copybook maxim is now for me a practical reality. For at first, with my growing perception, I was distressed at what seemed to me the lavish waste, the reckless, spendthrift beauty, not in nature merely but in human nature, that passed unrecognized and unacknowledged. The loss seemed so extravagant. Not only that a million flowers waste their sweetness on the desert air, but that such prodigal stores of human love and tenderness remain unemployed, their rich harvest all ungathered—because, misdirected and misunderstood, they find no receptacle into which they may discharge.

It has now come to me, though only by & slow and almost imperceptible advance, that these stores of apparently unremunerative beauty, this harvest so thickly sown about the world, unused, ungathered—prepare yourself, please, for an imaginative leap—ore used, are gathered, are employed. By Whom?

I can only answer: By some one who is pleased; and probably by many such. How, why, and wherefore—I catch your crowd of questions in advance—we need not seek exactly to discover, although the answer of no uncertain kind, I hear within the stillness of a heart that has learned to beat to a deeper, sweeter rhythm than before.

Those who loved beauty and lived it in their lives, follow that same ideal with increasing power and passion afterwards—and for ever.

The shutter of black iron we call Death hides the truth with terror and resentment; but what if that shutter were, after all, transparent?

A glorious dream, I hear you cry. Now listen to my answer. It is, for me, a definite assurance and belief, because—I know.

Long before you have reached this point you will, I know, have reached also the conclusion (with a sigh) that I am embarked upon some commonplace experience of ghostly return, or, at least, of posthumous communication. Perhaps I wrong you here, but in any case I would at once correct the inference, if it has been drawn. You remember our adventures with the seance-mongers years ago? ... I have not changed

my view so far as their evidential value is concerned. Be sure of that.

The dead, I am of opinion, do not return; for, while individuals may claim startling experiences that seem to them of an authentic and convincing kind, there has been no instance that can persuade us all—in the sense that thunderstorm convinces us all. Such individual experiences I have always likened to the auto-suggestion of those few who believe the advertisements of the hair-restorers—you will forgive the unpoetic simile for the sake of its exactitude—as against the verdict of the world that a genuine discovery of such a remedy would leave no single doubter in Europe or America, nor even in the London Clubs! Yet each time I read the cunning article (I have less hair than when I ran away from Sandhurst that exciting July night and met you in the Strand!), and look upon the picture of the man, John Henry Smith, "before and after using," I admit the birth of an unreasonable belief that there may be something in it after all.

Of such indubitable proof, however, there is, alas, as yet no sign.

And so with the other matter—the dead do not "return." My story, therefore, be comforted, has no individual instance to record. It may, on the other hand, be held to involve a thread of what might be called—at a stretch—posthumous communication, yet a thread so tenuous that the question of personal direction behind it need hardly be considered at all. For let me confess at once that, the habit of the "thrill" once established, I was not long in asking myself point blank this definite question: Dared I trace its origin to my own unfruitful experience of some years before?—and, discovering no shred of evidence, I found this positive answer: Honestly I could not.

That "somebody was pleased" each time Beauty offered a wisdom I accepted, became an unanswerable conviction I could not argue about; but that the guidance—waking a responsive emotion in myself of love—was referable to any particular name I could not, by any stretch of desire or imagination, bring myself to

believe.

Marion, I must emphasise, had been gone from me five years at least before the new emotion gave the smallest hint of its new birth; and my feeling, once the first keen shame and remorse subsided—I confess to the dishonouring truth—was one of looking back upon a painful problem that had found an unexpected solution. It was chiefly relief, although a sad relief, I felt.... And with the absorbing work of the next following years (I took up my appointment within six months of her death) her memory, already swiftly fading, entered an oblivion whence rarely, and at long intervals only, it emerged at all. In the ordinary meaning of the phrase, I had forgotten her. You will see, therefore, that there was no desire in me to revive an unhappy memory, least of all to establish any fancied communication with one before whose generous love I had felt myself dishonoured, if not actually disgraced. Even the remorse and regret had long since failed to disturb my peace of mind, causing me no anxiety, much less pain. Sic transit was the epitaph, if any. Acute sensation I had none at all. This, then, plainly argues against the slightest predisposition on my part to imagine that the loving guidance so strangely given owned a personal origin I could recognize. That it involved a "personal emotion" is quite another matter.

The more remarkable, therefore, is the statement truth now compels me to confess to you—namely, that this origin is recognizable, and that I have traced in part the name it owns to. My next sentence you divine already; you at once suspect the name I mean. I hear you say to yourself with a smile—"So, after all...!"

Please, wait a moment, and listen closely now; for, in reply to your suspicion, I can give neither full affirmation or full denial. Yet an answer of a certain kind is ready: I have stated my firm conviction that the dead do not return; I do not modify it one iota; but I mentioned a moment ago another conviction that is mine because I know. So now let me supplement these two statements with a third: the dead, though they

do not return, are active; and those who lived beauty in their lives are—benevolently active.

This may prepare you for a further assurance, yet one less easy to express intelligibly. Be patient while I make the difficult attempt.

The origin of the wisdom that now seeks to shape and guide my life through Beauty is, indeed, not Marion, but a power that stands behind her, and through which, with which, the energy of her being acts. It stood behind her while she lived. It stands behind not only her, but equally behind all those peerless, exquisite manifestations of self-less love that give bountifully of their best without hope or expectation of reward in kind. No human love of this description, though it find no object to receive it, nor one single flower that "wastes" its sweetness on the desert air, but acknowledges this inexhaustible and spendthrift source. Its evidence lies strewn so thick, so prodigally, about our world, that not one among us, whatever his surroundings and conditions, but sooner or later must encounter at least one marvellous instance of its uplifting presence. Some at once acknowledge the exquisite flash and are aware; others remain blind and deaf, till some experience, probably of pain, shall have prepared and sensitized their receptive quality. To all, however, one day, comes the magical appeal. As in my own case, there was apparently some kind of preparation before I grew conscious of that hunger for beauty which, awakening intuition, opened the heart to truth and so to wisdom. It then came softly, delicately, whispering like the dawn, yet rich with a promise I could, at first, not easily fathom, though as sure of fulfilment as that promise of day that steals upon the world when night is passing.

I have tried to tell you something of this mystery. I cannot add to that. I was lifted, as it were, towards some region or some state of being, wherein I was momentarily aware of a vaster outlook upon life, of a deeper insight into the troubles of my fellow-creatures, where, indeed, there burst upon me a comprehension of life's pains

and difficulties so complete that I may best describe it as that full understanding which involves also full forgiveness, and that sympathy which is love, God's love.

This exaltation passed, of course, with the passing of the thrill that made it possible; it was truly instantaneous; a point of ecstasy, perhaps, in some category not of time at all, but of some state of consciousness that lifted me above, outside of, self. But it was real, as a thunderstorm is real. For, with this glimpse of beauty that I call the "thrill," I touched, for an instant so brief that it seemed timeless in the sense of having no duration, a pinnacle of joy, of vision, beyond anything attainable by desire or by. intellect alone. I stood aware of power, wisdom, love; and more, this power, wisdom, love were mine to draw upon and use, not in some future heaven, but here and now.

VI

I RETURNED to England with an expectant hunger born of this love of beauty that was now ingrained in me. I came home with the belief that my yearning would be satisfied in a deeper measure; and more—that, somehow, it would be justified and explained. I may put it plainly, if only to show how difficult this confession would have been to any one but yourself; it sounds so visionary from a mere soldier and man of action such as I am. For my belief included a singular dream that, in the familiar scenes I now revisited, some link, already half established, would be strengthened, and might probably be realized, even proved.

In Africa, as you know, I had been set upon the clue at home in England. Among the places and conditions where this link had been first established in the flesh, must surely come a fuller revelation. Beauty, the channel of my inspiration, but this time the old sweet English beauty, so intimate, so woven through with the fresh wonder of earliest childhood days, would reveal the cause of my first failure to respond, and so, perhaps, the intention of those final pathetic sentences that still haunted me with their freight of undelivered meaning. In England, T believed, my "thrill" must bring

authentic revelation.

I came back, that precarious entity, a successful man. I was to be that thing we used to laugh about together in your Cambridge days, a distinguished personality; I should belong to the breed of little lions. Yet, during the long, tedious voyage, I realized that this held no meaning for me; I did not feel myself a little lion, the idea only proved that the boy in me was not yet dead. My one desire, though inarticulate until this moment of confessing it, was to renew the thrills, and so to gather from an intenser, sweeter beauty some measure of greater understanding they seemed to promise. It was a personal hope, a personal desire; and, deep at the heart of it, Memory, passionate though elusive, flashed her strange signal of a personal love. In this dream that mocked at time, this yearning that forgot the intervening years, I nursed the impossible illusion that, somehow or other, I should become aware of Marion.

Now, I have treated you in this letter as though you were a woman who reads a novel, for in my first pages I have let you turn to the end and see that the climax is a happy one, lest you should faint by the way and close my story with a yawn. You need not do that, however, since you already know this in advance. You will bear with me, too, when I tell you that my return to England was in the nature of a failure that, at first, involved sharpest disappointment. I was unaware, as a whole, of the thrills I had anticipated with such longing. The sweet picture of English loveliness I had cherished with sentimental passion during my long exile hardly materialized.

That I was not a lion, but an insignificant quasi-colonial adventurer among many others, may have sprinkled acid upon my daily diet of sensation, but you will do me the justice to believe that this wounded vanity was the smallest item in my disenchantment. Ten years, especially in primitive, godforsaken Africa, is a considerable interval; I found the relationship between myself and my beloved home-land changed, and in an unexpected way.

I was not missed for one thing, I had been forgotten. Except from our mother and yourself, I had no welcome. But, apart from this immediate circle, and apart from the deep, comfortable glow experienced at the first sight of the "old country," I found England and the English dull, conventional, and uninspired. There was no poignancy. The habits and the outlook stood precisely where I had left them. The English had not moved. They played golf as of yore, they went to the races at the appointed time and in the appointed garb, they gave heavy dinner-parties, they wrote letters to the Times, and ignored an outside world beyond their island. Their estimate of themselves and of foreigners remained unaltered, their estimate of rich or influential neighbours was what it always had been, there were many more motor-cars and a few more peers, it was more difficult than formerly to get into a good club; but otherwise, God bless them, they were worthier than ever. The "dear old country," that which "out there" we had loved and venerated, worked and fought for, was stolid and unshaken; the stream of advancing life that elsewhere rushed, had left England complaisantly unmoved and unresponsive.

You have no idea how vividly—and in what curious minor details—the general note of England strikes a traveller returning after an interval of years. Later, of course, the single impression is modified and obscured by other feelings. I give it, therefore, before it was forgotten. England had not budged. Had it been winter instead of early spring, I might sum up for you what I mean in one short sentence: I travelled to London in a third-class railway carriage that had no heating apparatus.

But to all this, and with a touch of something akin to pride in me, I speedily adjusted myself. I had been exiled, I had come home. As our old nurse, aged and withered, but otherwise unaltered, said to me quietly by way of greeting: "Well, they didn't kill you, Master Richard!" I was, therefore, alive. It was for me, the unimportant atom, to recover my place in the parent mass. I did so. I was English. I recovered proportion. I wore the accustomed mask; I hid both my person and my new emotions, as was obviously expected of me. Having reported my insignificance to

the Foreign Office.... I came down to the Manor House.

Yet, having changed, and knowing that I had changed, I was aware of a cleft between me and my native stock. Something un-English was alive in me and eager to assert itself. Another essence in my blood had quickened, a secret yearning that I dared not mention to my kind, a new hunger in my heart that clamoured to be satisfied, yet remained, speaking generally, un-nourished. Looking for beauty among my surroundings and among my kith and kin, I found it not; there was no great Thrill from England or from home. The slowness, the absence of colour, imagination, rhythm, baffled me, while the ugliness of common things and common usages afflicted my new sensitiveness. Not that I am peculiarly alert to beauty, nor claim superior perception—I am no artist, either by virtue of vision or power of expression—but that a certain stagnant obtuseness, a kind of sordid and conservative veneration of the ugly that the English favour, distressed and even tortured me in a way I had never realized formerly. They were so proud to live without perception. An artist was a curiosity, not a leader, far less a prophet. There was no imagination.

In little things, as I said, a change was manifest, however. Much that tradition had made lovely with the perfume of many centuries I found modernized until the ancient spirit had entirely fled, leaving a shell that was artificial to the point of being false. The sanction of olden time that used to haunt with beauty was deceived by a mockery I found almost hideous. The ancient inns, for instance, adapted to week-end motor traffic, were pretentious and uncomfortable, their "menus" of inferior food written elaborately in French. The courtliness had vanished, and the cost had come. Telephones everywhere not only destroyed privacy, but brought dismay into countless gentle intimacies, their nuisance hardly justified by their usefulness. Life, it seemed, in a frantic hurry, had been cheapened, not improved; there was no real progress, but only more unrest. England—too solid to go fast, had made ungainly efforts; but she had moved towards ungraciousness where she had moved at all; I found her a cross between a museum and an American mushroom

town that advertises all the modern comforts with a violent insistence that is meant to cloak their very absence.

This, my first impression, toned down, of course, a little later; but it was my first impression. The people, however, even in the countryside, seemed proud both of mushroom and museum, and commercial ugliness, greedy and unashamed, now distorted every old-world village. The natives were pleased to the point of vanity.

For myself, I could not manage this atrocious compromise, and looking for the dear old England of our boyhood days, I found it not. The change, of course, was not in the country only, but in myself. The soul in me, awakened to a new standard, had turned round to face another way.

The Manor House was very still when I arrived from London—& late May evening between the sunset and the dark. Mother, as you know, met me at the station, for they had stopped the down-train by special orders, so that I stepped out upon the deserted platform of the countryside quite alone, a distinguished man, with my rug and umbrella. A strange footman touched his hat, an old, stooping porter stared hard at me, then smiled vaguely, while the guard, eyeing respectfully the individual for whom his train had halted, waved his red flag, and swung himself into the disappearing van with the approved manner we once thought marvellous. I left the empty platform, gave up my ticket to an untidy boy, and crossed the gloomy booking-hall. The mournfulness of the whole place was depressing. I heard a blackbird whistle in a bush against the signal-box. It seemed to scream.

Mother I first saw, seated in the big barouche. She was leaning back, but sat forwards as I came. She looked into my face across the wide interval of years now ended, and my heart gave a great boyish leap, then sank into stillness again abruptly. She seemed to me exactly the same as usual—only so much smaller. We embraced with a kind of dignity:

"So here you are, my boy, at last," I heard her say in a quiet voice, and as though she

had seen me a month or two ago, "and very, very tired, I'll be bound."

I took my seat beside her. I felt awkward, stiff, self-conscious; there was disappointment somewhere.

"Oh, I'm all right, mother, thanks," I answered. "But how are you?" And the next moment, it seemed to me, I heard her asking if I was hungry;—whereupon, absurd as it must sound, I was aware of an immense emotion that interfered with my breathing. It broke up through some repressive layer that had apparently concealed it, and made me feel—well, had I been thirty-five years younger, I could have cried—for pleasure. Mother, I think, forgot those years perhaps. To her I was still in overalls and wanted food. We drove, then, in comparative silence the four miles behind the big pair of greys, the only remark that memory credits me with being an enquiry about the identity of the coachman whose dim outline I saw looming in the darkness just above me. The lamplight showed one shoulder, one arm, one ear, the rest concealed; but the way he drove was, of course, unmistakeable; slowly, more cautiously, perhaps, but with the same flourish of the whip, the same air of untold responsibility as ever. And, will you believe it, my chief memory of all that scene of anticipated tenderness and home-emotion is the few words he gave in reply to my enquiry and recognition when at length the carriage stopped and I got out:

"Well, Brown, I'm glad to see you again. All well at home, I hope?" followed by something of sympathy about his beloved horses.

He looked down sideways at me from the box, touching his cockade with the long yellow whip in his thick, gloved hand. I can hear his warm, respectful answer now; I can see the gleam of proud pleasure in his eye:

"Yes, sir, thank you, Sir Richard, and glad to see you back again, sir, and with such success upon you."

I moved back to help our mother out. I remember thinking how calm, how solid, how characteristically inarticulate it all was. Did I wish it otherwise? I think not.

Only there was something in me beating its wings impatiently like a wild bird that felt the bars close round it.... Mother, I realized, could not have said even what the old coachman had said to save her life, and I remember wondering what would move her into the expression of natural joy. All that half-hour, as the hoofs echoed along the silence of the country road, and the old familiar woods and fields slid past, no sign of deep emotion had escaped her. She had asked if I was hungry....

And then the smells! The sweet, faint garden smell in the English twilight:—of laurels and laurestinus, of lilac, pinks, and the heavy scent of May, wall-flowers and sweet william too—these, with the poignant aroma of the old childhood house, were the background of familiar loveliness against which my subsequent disillusion of the homeland set itself in such afflicting contrast. I remember, as we entered the dim hall, the carriage lamps fell on, the flowering horse-chestnut by the door; the bats were flitting; a big white moth whirred softly against the brilliant glass as though you and I were after it again with nets and killing-bottles... and, helping mother out, I noticed, besides her smallness, how slow and aged her movements were.

"Mother, let me help you. That's what I've come home for," I said, feeling for her little hand. And she replied so quietly, so calmly it was almost frigid, "Thank you, dear boy; your arm, perhaps—a moment. They are so stupid about the lamps in the hall, I've had to speak so often. There, now! It is an awkward step." I felt myself a giant beside her. She seemed so tiny now. There was something very strong in her silence and her calm; and though a portion of me liked it, another portion resented it and felt afraid. Her attitude was like a refusal, a denial, a refusal to live, a denial of life almost. A tinge of depression, not far removed from melancholy, stole over my spirit. The change in me, I realized then, indeed, was radical.

Now, lest this narrative should seem confused, you must understand that my disillusions with regard to England were realized subsequently, when I had moved about the counties, paid many solid visits, and tasted the land and people in some

detail. And the disappointment was the keener owing to the fact that very soon after my arrival in the old Home Place, the "thrill" came to me with a direct appeal that was disconcerting. For coming unexpectedly, as it did, in this familiar scene where yet previously I had never known it, it had the effect of marking the change in me with a certainty from which there was no withdrawal possible. It standardized this change. The new judgment was made uncompromisingly clear; people and places must inevitably stand or fall by it. And the first to fall—since the test lies beyond all control of affection or respect—was our own dear, faithful mother.

You share my reverence and devotion, so you will feel no pain that I would dishonour a tie that is sacred to us both in the old Bible sense. But, also, you know what a sturdy and typical soul of England she has proved herself, and that a sense of beauty is not, alas, by any stretch of kindliest allowance, a national characteristic. Culture and knowledge we may fairly claim, no doubt, but the imaginative sense of beauty is o rare among us that its possession is a peculiarity good form would suppress. It is a pose, an affectation, it is unmanly—it is not English. We are too strong to thrill. And that one so near and dear to me, so honoured and so deeply loved, should prove herself to my new standard thus typically English, while it came as sharpest pain, ought not, I suppose, to have caused me the surprise it did. It made me aware, however, of the importance of my new criterion, while at the same time aware of a lack of sympathy between us that amounted to disenchantment. It was a shock, to put it plainly. A breath of solitude, of isolation, stole on me and, close behind it, melancholy.

From the smallest clue imaginable the truth came into me, from a clue so small, indeed, that you may smile to think I dared draw such big deductions from premises so insignificant. You will probably deny me a sense of humour even when you hear. So let me say at once, before you judge me hastily, that the words, and the incident which drew them forth, were admittedly inadequate to the deduction. Only, mark this, please—I drew no deduction. Reason played no part. Cause and effect were

unrelated. It was simply that the truth flashed into me. I knew.

What did I know? Perhaps that the gulf between us lay as wide as that between the earth and Sirius; perhaps that we were, individually, of a kind so separate, so different, that mutual understanding was impossible; perhaps that while she was of To-day and proud of it, I was of another time, another century, and proud of that. I cannot say precisely. Her words, while they increased my sense of isolation, of solitude, of melancholy, at the same time also made me laugh, as assuredly they will now make you laugh.

For, while she was behind me in the morning-room, fingering some letters on the table, I stood six feet away beside the open window, listening to the nightingales—the English nightingales—that sang across the quiet garden in the dusk. The high-pitched clamour of the jungle choruses with their monstrous turmoil, their prolific detail, came back to me in startling contrast. This exquisite and delicious sound I now heard belonged still to England. And it had not changed. "No hungry generations tread thee down..." rose in some forgotten corner of my mind, and my yearning that would be satisfied moved forth to catch the notes.

"Listen, mother," I said, turning towards her.

She raised her head and smiled a little before reading the rest of the letter that she held.

"I only pray they won't keep you awake, dear boy," she answered gently. "They give us very little peace, I'm afraid, just now."

Perhaps she caught some expression in my face, for she added a trifle more quickly: "That's the worst of the spring—our English spring—it is so noisy!" Still smiling, she picked up her letter again, while I, though still listening by the window, heard only the harsh scream and rattle of the jungle voices, thousands and thousands of miles away across the world.

VII

IT was some little time after my arrival, as I shall presently relate, that the experience I call the thrill came to me in England—and, like all its predecessors, came through Nature. It came, that is, through the only apparatus I possessed as yet that could respond.

The point, I think, is of special interest; I note it now, on looking back upon the series as a whole, though at the time I did not note it.

For, compared with yourself at any rate, the aesthetic side of me is somewhat raw; of pictures, sculpture, music I am untaught and ignorant; with other Philistines, I "know what I like," but nothing more. It is the honest but uncultured point of view. I am that primitive thing, the mere male animal. It was my love of Nature, therefore, that showed me beauty, since this was the only apparatus in my temperament able to respond. Natural, simple things, as before, were the channel through which beauty appealed to that latent store of love and wisdom in me which, it almost seemed, were being slowly educated.

The talks and intimacies with our mother, then, were largely over; the re-knitting of an interrupted relationship was fairly accomplished; she had asked her questions, and listened to my answers. All the dropped threads had been picked up again, so that a pattern, similar to the one laid aside, now lay spread more or less comfortably before us. Outwardly, things seemed much as they were when I left home so many years ago. One might have thought the interval had been one of months, since her attitude refused to recognize all change, and change, and growth, was abhorrent to her type. For whereas I had altered, she had remained unmoved.

So unsatisfying was this state of things to me, however, that I felt unable to confide my deepest, as now I can do easily to you—so that during these few days of intercourse renewed, we had said, it seemed, all that was to be said with regard to the past. My health was most lovingly discussed, and then my immediate and

remoter future. I was aware of this point of view—that I was, of course, her own dear son, but that I was also England's son. She was intensely patriotic in the insular sense; my soul, I mean, belonged to the British Empire rather than to humanity and the world at large. Doubtless, a very right and natural way to look at things.... She expressed a real desire to "see your photographs, my boy, of those outlandish places where they sent you"; then, having asked certain questions about the few women (officers' wives and so forth) who appeared in some of them, she leaned back in her chair, and gave me her very definite hopes about "my value to the country," my "duty to the family traditions," even to the point, finally, of suggesting Parliament, in what she termed with a certain touch of pride and dignity, "the true Conservative interest."

"Men like yourself, Richard, are sorely needed now," she added, looking at me with a restrained admiration; "I am sure the Party would nominate you for this Constituency that your father and your grandfather both represented before you. At any rate, they shall not put you on the shelf!"

And before I went to bed—it was my second or third night, I think—she had let me see plainly another hope that was equally dear to her: that I should marry again. There was an ominous reference to my "ample means," a hint of regret that, since you were unavailable, and Eva dead, our branch of the family could not continue to improve the eastern counties and the world. At the back of her mind, indeed, I think there hovered definite names, for a garden party in my honour was suggested for the following week, to which the Chairman of the Local Conservatives would come, and where various desirable neighbours would be only too proud to make my acquaintance and press my colonial and distinguished fingers.

In the interval between my arrival and the "experience" I shall presently describe, I had meanwhile renewed my acquaintance with the countryside. The emotions, however, I anticipated, had even cherished and eagerly looked forward to, had not

materialized. There was a chill of disappointment over me. For the beauty I had longed for seemed here so thickly veiled; and more than once I surprised in my heart a certain regret that I had come home at all. I caught myself thinking of that immense and trackless country I had left; I even craved it sometimes, both physically and mentally, as though, for all its luscious grossness, it held something that nourished and stimulated, something large, free and untamed that was lacking in this orderly land, so neatly fenced and parcelled out at home.

The imagined richness of my return, at any rate, was unfulfilled; the tie with our mother, though deep, was uninspiring; while that other more subtle and intangible link I had fondly dreamed might be strengthened, if not wholly proved, was met with a flat denial that seemed to classify it as nonexistent. Hope, in this particular connection, returned upon me, blank and unrewarded.... The familiar scenes woke no hint of pain, much less of questing sweetness. The glamour of association did not operate. No personal link was strengthened.

And, when I visited the garden we had known together, the shady path beneath the larches; saw, indeed, the very chairs that she and I had used, the framed portrait in the morning-room, the harp itself, now set with its limp and broken strings in my own chamber—I was unaware of any ghostly thrill; least of all could I feel that "somebody was pleased."

Excursion farther afield deepened the disenchantment. The gorse was out upon the Common, that Common where we played as boys, thinking it vast and wonderful with the promise of high adventure behind every prickly clump. The vastness, of course, was gone, but the power of suggestion had gone likewise. It was merely a Common that deserved its name. For though this was but the close of May, I found it worn into threadbare patches, with edges unravelled like those of some old carpet in a seaside lodging-house. The lanes that fed it were already thick with dust as in thirsty August, and instead of eglantine, wild-roses, and the rest, a smell of petrol

hung upon hedges that were quite lustreless. On the crest of the hill, whence we once thought the view included heaven, I stood by those beaten pines we named The Fort, counting jagged bits of glass and scraps of faded newspaper that marred the bright green of the sprouting bracken.

This glorious spot, once sacred to our dreams, was like a great backyard—the Backyard of the County—while the view we loved as the birthplace of all possible adventure, seemed to me now without spaciousness or distinction. The trees and hedges cramped the little fields and broke their rhythm. No great winds ever swept them clean. The landscape was confused: there was no adventure in it, suggestion least of all. Everything had already happened there.

And on my way home, resentful perhaps yet eager still, I did a dreadful thing. Possibly I hoped still for that divine sensation which refused to come. I visited the very field, the very poplar ... I found the scene quite unchanged, but found it also—lifeless. The glamour of association did not operate. I knew no poignancy, desire lay inert. The thrill held stubbornly aloof. No link was strengthened.... I came home slowly, thinking instead of my mother's plans and wishes for me, and of the clear intention to incorporate me in the stolid and conventional formulas of what appeared to me as uninspired English dullness. My disappointment crystallized into something like revolt. A faint hostility even rose in me as we sat together, talking of politics, of the London news just come to hand, of the neighbours, of the weather too. I was conscious of opposition to her stereotyped plans, and of resentment towards the lack of understanding in her. I would shake free and follow beauty. The yearning, for want of sympathy, and the hunger, for lack of sustenance, grew very strong and urgent in me.

I longed passionately just then for beauty—and for that revelation of it which included somewhere the personal emotion of a strangely eager love.

VIII

THIS, then, was somewhat my state of mind, when, after our late tea on the verandah, I strolled out on to the lawn to enjoy my pipe in the quiet of the garden paths. I felt dissatisfied and disappointed, yet knew not entirely perhaps, the reason. I wished to be alone, but was hungry for companionship as well. Mother saw me go and watched attentively, but said no word, merely following me a moment with her eyes above the edge of the Times she read, as of old, during the hours between tea and dinner. The Spectator, her worldly Bible, lay ready to her hand when the Times should have been finished. They were, respectively, as always, her dictionary of opinion, and her medicine-chest. Before I had gone a dozen yards, her head disappeared behind the printed sheet again. The roses flowed between us.

I felt her following glance, as I felt also its withdrawal. Then I forgot her.... A touch of melancholy stole on me, as the garden took me in its charge. For a garden is a ghostly place, and an old-world garden, above all, leads thought backwards among vanished memories rather than forward among constructive hopes and joys.

I yielded, in any case, a little to this subtle pressure from the past, and I must have strolled among the lilac and laburnums for a longer time than I knew, since the gardener who had been trimming the flower-beds with a hand lawn-mower was gone, and dusk already veiled the cedars, when I found myself leaning against the wooden gate that opened into the less formal part beyond the larches.

The house was not visible from where I stood. I smelt the May, the lilac, the heavy perfume everywhere of the opening year; it rose about me in waves, as though full-bosomed summer lay breathing her great promises close at hand, while spring, still lingering, with bright eyes of dew,' watched over her. Then, suddenly, behind these richer scents, I caught a sweeter, wilder tang than anything they contained, and turning, saw that the pines were closer than I knew. A waft of something purer, fresher, reached my nostrils on a little noiseless wind, as, leaning across the gate, I turned my back upon the cultivated grounds and gazed into a region of more natural,

tangled growth.

The change was sudden. It was exquisite, sharp and unexpected, too, as with a little touch of wonder. There was surprise in it. For the garden, you will remember, melts here insensibly into a stretch of scattered pines, where heather and bracken cover wide reaches of unreclaimed and useless land. Irregular trails of whitish sand gleamed faintly before the shadows swallowed them, and in the open patches I saw young silver-birches that made me think of running children arrested in mid-play. They stood outlined very tenderly against the sky; their slender forms still quivered; their feathery hair fell earthwards as they drew themselves together, bending their wayward little heads before the approaching night. Behind them, framed by the darker pines into a glowing frieze, the west still burned with the last fires of the sunset; I could see the heather, rising and falling like a tumbled sea against the horizon, where the dim heave of distant moorland broke the afterglow.

And the dusk now held this region in its magic. So strange, indeed, was the contrast between the ebony shadows and the pools and streaks of amberish light, that I looked about me for a moment, almost sharply. There was a touch of the unearthly in this loveliness that bewildered sight a little. Extraordinarily still the world was, yet there seemed activity close upon my footsteps, an activity more than of inanimate Nature, yet less than of human beings. With solidarity it had nothing to do, though it sought material expression. It was very near. And I was startled, I recognized the narrow frontier between fear and wonder. And then I crossed it.

For something stopped me dead. I paused and stared. My heart began to beat more rapidly. Then, ashamed of my moment's hesitation, I was about to move forward through the gate, when again I halted. I listened, and caught my breath. I fancied the stillness became articulate, the shadows stirred, the silence was about to break.

I remember trying to think; I wanted to relieve the singular tension by finding words, if only inner words,—when, out of the stillness, out of the silence, out of the

shadows—something happened. Some faculty of judgment, some attitude in which I normally clothed myself, were abruptly stripped away. I was left bare and sensitive. I could almost have believed that my body had dropped aside, that I stood there naked, unprotected, a form-less spirit, stirred and lifted by the passing breeze.

And then it came. As with a sword-thrust of blinding sweetness, I was laid open. Yet so instant, and of such swiftness, was the stroke, that I can only describe it by saying that, while pierced and wounded, I was also healed again.

Without hint or warning, Beauty swept me with a pain and happiness well nigh intolerable. It drenched me and was gone. No lightning flash could have equalled the swiftness of its amazing passage; something tore in me; the emotion was enveloping but very tender; it was both terrible yet dear. Would to God I might crystallize it for you in those few mighty words which should waken in yourself—in every one!—the wonder and the joy. It contained, I felt, both the worship that belongs to awe and the tenderness of infinite love which welcomes tears. Some power that was not of this world, yet that used the details of this world to manifest, had visited me.

No element of surprise lay in it even. It was too swift for anything but joy, which of all emotions is the most instantaneous: I had been empty, I was filled. Beauty that bathes the stars and drowns the very universe had stolen out of this wild morsel of wasted and uncared-for English garden, and dropped its transforming magic into—me. At the very moment, moreover, when I had been ready to deny it altogether. I saw my insignificance, yet, such was the splendour it had wakened in me, knew my right as well. It could be ever thus; some attitude in myself alone prevented....

And—somebody was pleased.

This personal ingredient lay secure in the joy that assuredly remained when the first brief intolerable ecstasy had passed. The link I desired to recognize was proved, not merely strengthened. Beauty had cleft me open, and a message, if you will, had been

delivered. This personal hint persisted; I was almost aware of conscious and intelligent direction. For to you I will make the incredible confession, that I dare phrase the experience in another fashion, equally true: In that flashing instant I stood naked and shelterless to the gaze of some one who had looked upon me. I was aware of sight; of eyes in which "burning memory lights love home." These eyes, this sight had gazed at me, then turned away. For in that blinding sweetness there was light, as with the immediate withdrawal again there was instant darkness. I was first visible, then concealed. I was clothed again and covered.

And the thick darkness that followed made it appear as though night, in one brief second, had taken the place of dusk.

Trembling, I leaned across the wooden gate and waited while the darkness settled closer. I can swear, moreover, that it was neither dream, nor hope, nor any hungry fantasy in me that then recognized a further marvel—I was no longer now alone.

A presence faced me, standing breast-high in the bracken. The garden had been empty; somebody now walked there with me.

It was, as I mentioned, the still hour between the twilight and the long, cool dark of early summer. The little breeze passed whispering through the pines. I smelt the pungent perfume of dry heather, sand, and bracken. The horizon, low down between the trunks, shone gold and crimson still, but fading rapidly. I stood there for a long time trembling; I was a part of it; I felt that I was shining, as though my inner joy irradiated the world about me. Nothing in all my life has been so real, so positive. I was assuredly not alone....

The first sharp magic, the flash that pierced and burned, had gone its way, but Beauty still stood so perilously near, so personal, that any moment, I felt, it must take tangible form, betray itself in visible movement of some sort, break possibly into audible sound of actual speech. It would not have surprised me—more, it would have been natural almost—had I felt a touch upon my hands and lips, or caught the

murmur of spoken words against my ear.

Yet from such direct revelation I shrank involuntarily and by instinct. I could not have borne it then. I had the feeling that it must mar and defile a wonder already great enough; there would have lain in it, too, a betrayal of the commonplace, as of something which I could not possibly hold for true. I must have distrusted my own senses even, for the beauty that cleft me open dealt directly with the soul alone, leaving the senses wholly disengaged. The Presence was not answerable to any lesser recognition.

Thus I shrank and turned away, facing the familiar garden and the "wet bird-haunted English lawn," a spiritual tenderness in me still dreading that I might see or hear or feel, destroying thus the reality of my experience. Yet there was, thank God, no speech, no touch, no movement, other than the shiver of the birches, the breath of air against my cheek, the droop and bending of the nearer pine boughs. There was no audible or visible expression; I saw no figure breast-high in the bracken. Yet sound there was, a moment later. For, as I turned away, a bird upon a larch twig overhead burst into sudden and exultant song.

IX

NOW, do not be alarmed lest I shall attempt to describe a list of fanciful unrealities that borrowed life from a passing emotion merely; the emotion was permanent, the results enduring. Please believe the honest statement that, with the singing of that bird, the pent-up stress in me became measurably articulate. Some bird in my heart, long caged, rang out in answering inner song.

It is also true, I think, that there were no words in me at the moment, and certainly no desire for speech. Had a companion been with me, I should probably have merely lit my pipe and smoked in silence; if I spoke at all, I should have made some commonplace remark: "It's late; we must be going in to dress for dinner...." As it was, however, the emotion in me, answering the singing of the bird, became, as I

said, measurably articulate. I give you simple facts, as though this were my monthly Report to the Foreign Office in days gone by. I spoke no word aloud, of course. It was rather that my feelings found utterance in the rapturous song I listened to, and that my thoughts knew this relief of vicarious expression, though of inner and inaudible expression. The beauty of scene and moment were adequately recorded, and for ever in that song. They were now part of me.

Unaware of its perfect mission the bird sang, of course because it could not help itself; perhaps some mating thrush, perhaps a common blackbird only; I cannot say; I only realized that no human voice, no human music, even of the most elaborate and inspired kind, could have made this beauty, similarly articulate. And, for a moment I knew my former pain that I could not share this joy, this beauty, with others of my kind, that, except for myself, the loveliness seemed lost and wasted. There was no spectator, no other listener; the sweet spring night was lavish for no audience; the revelation had been repeated, would be repeated, a thousand thousand times without recognition and without reward.

Then, as I listened, memory, it seemed, took yearning by the hand, and led me towards that inner utterance I have mentioned. There was no voice, least of all that inner voice you surely have anticipated. But there was utterance, as though my whole being combined with nature in its birth.

Into the mould of familiar sentences of long ago it ran, yet nearer at last to full disclosure, because the pregnant sentences had altered:

"I need your forgiveness born of love..." passed through me with the singing of the bird.

I listened with the closest inner attention I have ever known. I paused. My heart brimmed with an expectant wonder that was happiness. And the happiness was justified. For the familiar sentence halted before its first sorrowful completion; the poignant close remained unuttered—because it was no longer true.

Out of deep love in me, new-born, that held the promise of fulfilment, the utterance concluded:

"... I have found a better way...."

Before I could think or question, and almost as though a whisper of the wind went past, there rose in me at once this answering recognition. It seemed authentically convincing; it was glorious; it was full of joy:

"That beauty which was Marion lives on, and lives for me."

It was as though a blaze of light shone through me; somewhere in my body there were tears of welcome; for this recognition was to me reunion.

It must seem astonishing for me, a mere soldier and Colonial Governor, to confess you that I stood there listening to the song for a long interval of what I can only term, with utmost sincerity, communion. Beauty and love both visited me; I believe that truth and wisdom entered softly with them. As I wrote above, I saw my own insignificance, yet, such was the splendour in me, I knew my right as well. It could be ever thus. My attitude alone prevented. I was not excluded, not cut off. This Beauty lay ready to my hand, always available, for ever, now. It was not unharvested. But more—it could be shared with others; it was become a portion of myself, and that which is part of my being must, inevitably and automatically, be given out.

It was, thus, nowhere wasted or unharvested; it offered with prodigal opportunity a vehicle for that inspiration which is love, and being love of purest kind, is surely wisdom too. The dead, indeed, do not return, yet they are active, and those who lived beauty in their lives are still, through that beauty, benevolently active.

I will give you now the change instantaneously produced in me:

There rose in me another, deeper point of view that dispelled as by magic the disenchantment that had chilled these first days of my return. I stood here in this old-world garden, but I stood also in the heart of that beauty, so carefully hidden, so

craftily screened behind the obvious, that strong and virile beauty which is England. Within call of my voice, still studying by lamplight now the symbols of her well-established strength, burning, moreover, with the steady faith which does not easily break across restraint, and loving the man as she had loved the little boy, sat one, not wondering perhaps at my unspoken misunderstanding, yet hoping, patiently and in silence, for its removal in due time. In the house of our boyhood, of our earliest play and quarrels, unchanged and unchangeable, knowing simply that I had "come home again to her," our mother waited....

I need not elaborate this for you, you for whom England and our mother win almost a single, undivided love. I had misjudged, but the cause of my misjudgment was thus suddenly removed. A subtler understanding insight, a sympathy born of deeper love, something of greater wisdom, in a word, awoke in me. The thrill had worked its magic as of old, but this time in its slower English fashion, deep, and characteristically sure. To my country (that is, to my first experience of impersonal love) and to my mother (that is, to my earliest acquaintance with personal love) I had been ready, in my impatience, to credit an injustice. Unknown to me, thus, there had been need of guidance, of assistance. Beauty, having cleared the way, had worked upon me its amazing alchemy.

There, in fewest possible words, is what had happened.

I remember that for a long time, then, I waited in the hush of my childhood's garden, listening, as it were, with every pore, and conscious that some one who was pleased interpreted the beauty to my soul. It seemed, as I said, a message of a personal kind. It was regenerative, moveover, in so far that life was enlarged and lifted upon a nobler scale; new sources of power were open to me; I saw a better way. Irresistibly it came to me again that beauty, far from being wasted, was purposive, that this purpose was of a redeeming kind, and that some one who was pleased co-operated with it for my personal benefit. No figure, thank God, was visible, no voice was

audible, but a presence there indubitably was, and, whether I responded or otherwise, would be always there.

And the power was such that I felt as though the desire of the planet itself yearned through it for expression.

X

I WATCHED the little bird against the paling sky, and my thoughts, following the happy singing, went slowly backwards into the half-forgotten past.... They led me again through the maze of gorgeous and mysterious hopes, un-remembered now so many years, that had marked my childhood. Few of these, if any, it seemed, had known fulfilment.... I stole back with them, past the long exile in great Africa, into the region of my youth and early boyhood....

And, as though a hand uncovered it deliberately, I recalled an earliest dream—strangest, perhaps, of all the mysterious dreams of that far time. It had, I thought, remained unrealized, as, certainly, till this moment, it had lain forgotten—a boyish dream that behind the veils of the Future some one waited for me with the patience of a perfect love that was my due.

The dream reached forward towards some one who must one day appear, and whose coming would make life sweet and wonderful, fulfilling, even explaining, the purpose of my being. This dream which I had thought peculiarly my own, belongs, I learned later, to many, if not to the race in general, and, with a smile at my own incurable vanity (and probably a grimace at being neatly duped), I had laid it on one side. At any rate, I forgot it, for nothing happened to keep it active, much less revive it.

Now, however, looking backwards, and listening to the singing in the sky, I recalled what almost seemed to have been its attempt at realization. Having recovered its earliest appearance, my thought next leaped forward to the moment that might

possibly have been its reappearance. For memory bore me off without an effort on my part, and set me abruptly within a room of the house I had come home to, where Marion sat beside me, singing to the harp she loved. The scene rose up before me as of yesterday... the emotions themselves reconstituted. I recalled the deep, half-sad desire to be worthy of her, to persuade myself I loved as she did, even the curious impulse to acknowledge an emotion that came and went before it could be wholly realized—the feeling, namely, that I ought to love her because—no more, no less is the truth—because she needed it: and then the blank dismay that followed my failure, as with a kind of shameful horror before a great purpose that my emptiness left unfulfilled.

The very song came back that moved me more than any else she sang—her favourite it was as well. I heard the twanging of the strings her fingers plucked. I heard the words:

"About the little chambers of my heart Friends have been coming—going—many a year. The doors stand open there. Some, lightly stepping, enter; some depart. Freely they come and go, at will. The walls give back their laughter; all day long They fill the house with song. One door alone is shut, one chamber still."

With each repetition of the song, I remembered, how at that time my boyhood's dream came back to me, as though its fulfilment were at last at hand; as though, somehow, that "door" must open, that "still chamber" welcome the sweetness and the loveliness of her who sang. For I could not listen to the music, nor watch her fingers moving down the strings, her slender wrist and rounded arm, her foot upon the pedal as she held the instrument so close—without this poignant yearning that proved ever vain, or this shame of unshed tears my heart mysteriously acknowledged. To the end, as you know, that door remained unopened, that chamber still.

It was the singing of this sweet English bird, making articulate for me the beauty I

could not utter, that brought back to memory the scene, the music, and the words....

I looked round me; I looked up. As I did so, the little creature, with one last burst of passionate happiness, flew away into the darkness. And silence followed, so deep that I could hear the murmur of my blood... an exquisite joy ran through me, making me quiver with expectancy from head to foot....

And it was then suddenly I became aware that the long-closed door at last was open, the still chamber occupied. Some one who was pleased, stretching a hand across the silence and the beauty, drew me within that chamber of the heart, so that I passed behind the door that was now a veil, and now a mist, and now a shining blaze of light... passed into a remote and inner stillness where that direct communion which is wordless can alone take place.

It was, I verily believe, a stillness of the spirit. At the centre of the tempest, of the whirlpool, of the heart's commotion, there is peace. I stood close against that source of our life which lies hid with beauty very far away, and yet so near that it is enclosed in every hope, in every yearning, and in every tear. For the whisper came to me, beyond all telling sure.

Beauty had touched me, Wisdom come to birth; and Love, whispering through the silence those marvellous words that sum up all spiritual experience, proved it to me:

"Be still—and know...."

I found myself moving slowly across the lawn again towards the house. I presently heard the wind mousing softly in the limes. The air was fresh and cool. The first stars were out. I saw the laburnum drooping, as though thick clusters of these very stars had drifted earthwards among the branches; I saw the gleam of the lilac; across the dim tangle of the early roses shone the familiar windows, cosy now with the glow of lighted lamps... and I became suddenly, in a very intimate sense, "aware" of the garden. The Presence that walked beside me moved abruptly closer. This Presence and the garden seemed, as in some divine mysterious way, inseparable.

There was a stirring of the dimmest and most primitive associations possible. Memory plunged back among ancestral, even racial, shadows. I recalled the sweet and tender legend of the beginnings of the world, when something divine, it was whispered, was intimate with man, and companioning his earliest innocence, walked with him in that happier state those childlike poets called—a garden. That childhood of the world seemed very near.

I found again the conditions of innocence and pristine wonder—of simplicity. There was a garden in my heart, and some one walked with me therein. For Life in its simplest form—of breathing leaves and growing flowers, of trees and plants and shrubs—glowed all about me in the darkness. The blades of grass, the blossoms hanging in the air, strong stems and hidden roots, fulfilled themselves with patience upon every side, brimming with beauty and stillness did not seek to advertise. And of this simplest form of life—the vegetable kingdom—I became vividly aware, prodigal, mysterious, yet purposive. The outer garden merged with the inner, and the Presence walked in both of them....

I was led backwards, far down into my own being. I reached the earliest, simplest functions by which I myself had come to be, the state where the frontier lies between that which is dead and that which is alive. Somewhere between the mineral and vegetable worlds, I knew, that frontier lay. For the vegetable kingdom alone possesses the power of converting the mineral or the chemical into the living organism by absorption; and here, among the leaves and roots and flowers, that power was sweetly, irresistibly, at work.

It seemed I reached that frontier, and I passed it. Beauty came through the most primitive aspect of my being.

And so I would tell you, you alone of all the world, that the Presence walking beside me in the scented darkness came suddenly so close that I was aware of it in what seemed my earliest and most innocent state of soul.

Beside me, in that old-world garden, walked the Cause of all things. The Beauty that in you was truth, in Marion tenderness, was harvested: and somebody was pleased.

XI

ALL this I have told to you because we have known together the closest intimacy possible to human beings—we have shared beauty.

They said, these many days ago, that you had gone away, that you were dead. The wind on the Downs, your favourite Downs, your favourite southwest wind, received your dust, scattering it like pollen into space. No sign has come to me, no other sign than this I tell you now in my long letter. It is enough. I know.

There were thus two loves, one unrecognized till afterwards, the other realized at the time.... In the body there was promise. There is now accomplishment.

It is very strange, and yet so simple. Beauty, I suppose, opens the heart, extends the consciousness. It is a platitude, of course. You will laugh when I tell you that afterwards I tried to reason it all out. I am not apparently intellectual. The books I read would fill your empty room—on aesthetics, art, and what not. I got no result from any of them, but rather a state of muddle that was, no doubt, congestion. None of the theories and explanations touched the root of the matter. I am evidently not "an artist"—that at any rate I gathered, and yet these learned people seemed to write about something they had never "lived." I could almost believe that the writers of these subtle analyses have never themselves felt beauty—the burn, the rapture, the regenerating fire. They have known, perhaps, a reaction of the physical nerves, but never this light within the soul that lifts the horizons of the consciousness and makes one know that God exists, that death is not even separation, and that eternity is now.

Metaphysics I studied too. I fooled myself, thirty years after the proper time for doing so, over the old problem whether beauty lies in the object seen or in the mind that sees the object. And in the end I came back hungrily to my simple

starting-point—that beauty moved me. It opened my heart to one of its many aspects—truth, wisdom, joy, and love—and what else, in the name of heaven, mattered!

I sold the books at miserable prices that made Mother question my judgment: coloured plates, costly bindings, rare editions, and all. Aesthetics, Art, rules and principles might go hang for all I cared or any good they did me. It was intellect that had devised all these. The truth was simpler far. I cared nothing for these scholarly explanations of beauty's genesis and laws of working, because I felt it. Hunger needs no analysis, does it? Nor does Love. Could anything be more stultifying? Give to the first craving a lump of bread, and to the second a tangible man or woman—and let those who have the time analyse both cravings at their leisure.

For the thrill I mean is never physical, and has nothing in common with that acute sensation experienced when the acrobat is seen to miss the rope in mid-air as he swings from bar to bar. There is no shock in it, for shock is of the nerves, arresting life; the thrill I speak of intensifies and sets it rising in a wave that flows. It is of the spirit. It wounds, yet marvellously. It is unearthly. Therein, I think, lies its essential quality; by chance, as it were, in writing this intimate confession, I have hit upon the very word: it is unearthly, it contains surprise. Yes, Beauty wounds marvellously, then follows the new birth, regeneration. There is a ravishment of the entire being into light and knowledge.

The element of surprise is certainly characteristic. The thrill comes unheralded—a sudden uprush of convincing joy loosed from some store that is inexhaustible. Unlike the effect of a nervous shock which can be lived over and reconstituted, it knows no repetition; its climax is instantaneous, there is neither increase nor declension; it is unrecoverable; it strikes and is gone. Breaking across the phantasmagoria of appearances, it comes as a flash of reality, a lightning recognition of something that cannot be travestied. It is not in time. It is eternity.

I suspect you know it now with me; in fact I am certain that you do....

I remember how, many years ago—in that delightful period between boyhood and manhood when we felt our wings and argued about the universe—we discovered this unearthly quality in three different things: the song of a bird, the eyes of a child, and a wild-flower come upon unexpectedly in a scene of desolation. For in all three, we agreed, shines that wonder which holds adoration, that joy which is spontaneous and uncalculated, and that surprise which pertains to Eternity looking out triumphantly upon ephemeral things.

So, at least, in our youthful eagerness, we agreed; and to this day one in particular of the three—a bird's song—always makes me think of God. That divine, ecstatic, simple sound is to me ever both surprising and unearthly. Each time it takes me by surprise—that people do not hush their talk to kneel and listen.... And of the eyes of little children—if there is any clearer revelation granted to us of what is unearthly in the sense of divinity brought close, I do not know it. Each time my spirit is arrested by surprise, then filled with wondering joy as I meet that strange open look, so stainless, accepting the universe as its rightful toy, and, as with the bird and flower, saying Yes to life as though there could not possibly exist a No.

The wildflower too: you recall once—it was above Igls when the Tyrolean snows were melting—how we found a sudden gentian on the dead, pale grass? The sliding snows had left the coarse tufts stroked all one way, white and ugly, thickly streaked with mud, no single blade with any sign of life or greenness yet, when we came upon that star of concentrated beauty, more blue than the blue sky overhead, the whole passion of the earth in each pointed petal. A distant avalanche, as though the hills were settling, the bustle of the torrent, the wind in the pines and larches, only marked by contrast the incredible stillness of the heights—then, suddenly, this star of blue blazing among the desolation. I recall your cry and my own—wonder, joy, as of something unearthly—that took us by surprise.

In these three, certainly, lay the authentic thrill I speak of; while it lasts, the actual moment seems but a pedestal from which the eyes of the heart look into Heaven, a pedestal from which the soul leaps out into the surrounding garden of limitless possibilities which are its birthright, and immediately accessible. And that, indeed, is the essential meaning of the thrill—that Heaven is here and now. The gates of ivory are very tiny; Beauty sounds the elfin horns that opens them; smaller than the eye of a needle is that opening—upon the diamond point of the thrill you flash within, and the Garden of Eternity is yours for ever—now.

I am writing this to you, because I know you listen with your heart, not with your nerves; and the garden that I write about you know now better than I do myself. I have but tasted it, you dwell therein, unaged, unageing. And so we share the flowers; we know the light, the fragrance and the birds we know together.... They tell me—even our mother says it sometimes with a sigh—that you are far away, not understanding that we have but recovered the garden of our early childhood, you permanently, I whenever the thrill opens the happy gates. You are as near to me as that. Our love was forged inside those ivory gates that guard that childhood state, facing four ways, and if I wandered outside a-while, puzzled and lonely, the thrill of beauty has led me back again, and I, have found your love unchanged, unaged, still growing in the garden of our earliest memories. I did but lose my way for a time....

That childhood state must be amazingly close to God, I suppose, for though no child is consciously aware of beauty, its whole being cries Yes to the universe and life as naturally and instinctively as a flower turns to the sun. The universe lies in its overall pocket of alpaca, and beauty only becomes a thing apart when the growing consciousness, hearing the world cry No, steps through the gates to enquire and cannot find the entrance any more. Beauty then becomes a signpost showing the way home again. Baudelaire, of course, meant God and Heaven, instead of "genius" when he said, "Le genie n'est que l'enfance retrouvee a volonte...."

And so when I write to you, I find myself again within the garden of our childhood, that English garden where our love shared all the light and fragrance and flowers of the world together. "Time's but a golden wind that shakes the grass," and since my thought is with you, you are with me now... and now means always or it means nothing.

So these relationships are real still among a thousand shadows. Your beauty was truth, hers was unselfish love. The important thing is to know you still live, not with regret and selfish grief, but with that joy and sure conviction which makes the so-called separation a temporary test, perhaps, but never a final blow. What are the few years of separation compared to this certainty of co-operation in eternity? We live but a few years together in the flesh, yet if those few are lived with beauty and beautifully, the tie is unalterably forged which fastens us lovingly together for ever. Where, how, under what precise conditions it were idle to enquire and unnecessary—the wrong way too. Our only knowledge (in the scientific sense) comes to us through our earthly senses. To forecast our future life, constructing it of necessity upon this earthly sensory experience, is an occupation for those who have neither faith nor imagination. All such "heavens" are but clumsy idealizations of the present—"Happy Hunting Grounds" in various forms: whereas we know that if we lived beauty together, we shall live it always—"afterwards," as our poor time-ridden language phrases it. For Beauty, once known, cannot exclude us. We cooperated with the Power that makes the universe alive.

And, knowing this, I do not ask for your "return," or for any so-called evidence that you survive. In beauty you both live now with less hampered hands, less troubled breath, and I am glad.

Why should you come, indeed, through the gutter of my worn, familiar, personal desires, when the open channel of beauty lies ever at the flood for you to use? Coming in this way, you come, besides, for many, not for me alone, since behind

every thrill of beauty stand the countless brave souls who lived it in their lives. They have entered the mighty rhythm that floats the spiral nebulae in space, as it turns the little aspiring Nautilus in the depths of the sea. Having once felt this impersonal worship which is love of beauty, they are linked to the power that drives the universe towards perfection, the power that knocks in a million un-advertised forms at every human heart: and that is God.

With that beneficent power you cooperate. I ask no other test. I crave no evidence that you selfishly remember me. In the body we did not know so closely. To see into your physical eyes, and touch your hand, and hear your voice—these were but intermediary methods, symbols, at the best. For you I never saw nor touched nor heard. I felt you—in my heart. The closest intimacy we knew was when together we shared one moment of the same beauty; no other intimacy approaches the reality of that; it is now strengthened to a degree unrealized before. For me that is enough. I have that faith, that certainty, that knowledge. Should you come to me otherwise I must disown you. Should you stammer through another's earthly lips that you now enjoy a mere idealized repetition of your physical limitations, I should know my love, my memory, my hope degraded, nay, my very faith destroyed.

To summon you in that way makes me shudder. It would be to limit your larger uses, your wider mission, merely to numb a selfish grief born of a faithless misunderstanding.

Come to me instead—or, rather, stay, since you have never left—be with me still in the wonder of dawn and twilight, in the yearning desire of inarticulate black night, in the wind, the sunshine, and the rain. It is then that I am nearest to you and to your beneficent activity, for the same elemental rhythm of Beauty includes us both. The best and highest of you are there; I want no lesser assurance, no broken personal revelation. Eternal beauty brings you with an intimacy unknown, impossible, indeed, to partial disclosure. I should abhor a halting masquerade, a stammering message

less intelligible even than our intercourse of the body.

Come, then! Be with me, your truth and Marion's tenderness linked together with what is noblest in myself. Be with me in the simple loveliness of an English garden where you and I, as boys together, first heard that voice of wonder, and knew the Presence walking with us among the growing leaves.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE GARDEN OF SURVIVAL ***

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