



## SOMETHING CHILDISH BUT VERY NATURAL (1914)

By Katherine Mansfield

Whether he had forgotten what it felt like, or his head had really grown bigger since the summer before, Henry could not decide. But his straw hat hurt him: it pinched his forehead and started a dull ache in the two bones just over the temples. So he chose a corner seat in a third-class “smoker,” took off his hat and put it in the rack with his large black cardboard portfolio and his Aunt B's Christmas-present gloves. The carriage smelt horribly of wet india-rubber and soot. There were ten minutes to spare before the train went, so Henry decided to go and have a look at the book-stall. Sunlight darted through the glass roof of the station in long beams of blue and gold; a little boy ran up and down carrying a tray of primroses; there was something about the people—about the women especially— something idle and yet eager. The most thrilling day of the year, the first real day of Spring had unclosed its warm delicious beauty even to London eyes. It had put a spangle in every colour and a new tone in every voice, and city folks walked as though they carried real live bodies under their clothes with real live hearts pumping the stiff blood through.

Henry was a great fellow for books. He did not read many nor did he possess above half-a-dozen. He looked at all in the Charing Cross Road during lunch-time and at any odd time in London; the quantity with which he was on nodding terms was amazing. By his clean neat handling of them and by his nice choice of phrase when discussing them with one or another bookseller you would have thought that he had taken his pap with a tome propped before his nurse's bosom. But you would have been quite wrong. That was only Henry's way with everything he touched or said. That afternoon it was an anthology of English poetry, and he turned over the pages until a title struck his eye—*Something Childish but very Natural*

Had I but two little wings,  
And were a little feathery bird,  
To you I'd fly, my dear,  
But thoughts like these are idle things,  
And I stay here.

But in my sleep to you I fly,  
I'm always with you in my sleep,  
The world is all one's own,  
But then one wakes and where am I?  
All, all alone.

Sleep stays not though a monarch bids,  
So I love to wake at break of day,  
For though my sleep be gone,



Yet while 'tis dark one shuts one's lids,  
And so, dreams on.

He could not have done with the little poem. It was not the words so much as the whole air of it that charmed him! He might have written it lying in bed, very early in the morning, and watching the sun dance on the ceiling. "It is *still* like that," thought Henry. "I am sure he wrote it when he was half-awake some time, for it's got a smile of a dream on it." He stared at the poem and then looked away and repeated it by heart, missed a word in the third verse and looked again, and again until he became conscious of shouting and shuffling, and he looked up to see the train moving slowly.

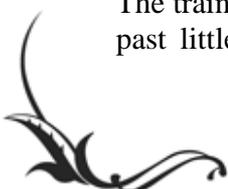
"God's thunder!" Henry dashed forward. A man with a flag and a whistle had his hand on a door. He clutched Henry somehow ... Henry was inside with the door slammed, in a carriage that wasn't a "smoker," that had not a trace of his straw hat or the black portfolio or his Aunt B's Christmas-present gloves. Instead, in the opposite corner, close against the wall, there sat a girl. Henry did not dare to look at her, but he felt certain she was staring at him. "She must think I'm mad," he thought, "dashing into a train without even a hat, and in the evening, too." He felt so funny. He didn't know how to sit or sprawl. He put his hands in his pockets and tried to appear quite indifferent and frown at a large photograph of Bolton Abbey. But feeling her eyes on him he gave her just the tiniest glance. Quick she looked away out of the window, and then Henry, careful of her slightest movement, went on looking. She sat pressed against the window, her cheek and shoulder half hidden by a long wave of marigold-coloured hair. One little hand in a grey cotton glove held a leather case on her lap with the initials E. M. on it. The other hand she had slipped through the window-strap, and Henry noticed a silver bangle on the wrist with a Swiss cow-bell and a silver shoe and a fish. She wore a green coat and a hat with a wreath round it. All this Henry saw while the title of the new poem persisted in his brain—*Something Childish but very Natural*. "I suppose she goes to some school in London," thought Henry. "She might be in an office. Oh, no, she is too young. Besides she'd have her hair up if she was. It isn't even down her back." He could not keep his eyes off that beautiful waving hair. "My eyes are like two drunken bees. ...! Now, I wonder if I read that or made it up?"

That moment the girl turned round and, catching his glance, she blushed. She bent her head to hide the red colour that flew in her cheeks, and Henry, terribly embarrassed, blushed too. "I shall have to speak—have to—have to!" He started putting up his hand to raise the hat that wasn't there. He thought that funny; it gave him confidence.

"I'm—I'm most awfully sorry," he said, smiling at the girl's hat. "But I can't go on sitting in the same carriage with you and not explaining why I dashed in like that, without my hat even. I'm sure I gave you a fright, and just now I was staring at you—but that's only an awful fault of mine; I'm a terrible starrer! If you'd like me to explain—how I got in here—not about the staring, of course,"—he gave a little laugh—"I will."

For a minute she said nothing, then in a low, shy voice—"It doesn't matter."

The train had flung behind the roofs and chimneys. They were swinging into the country, past little black woods and fading fields and pools of water shining under an apricot



evening sky. Henry's heart began to thump and beat to the beat of the train. He couldn't leave it like that. She sat so quiet, hidden in her fallen hair. He felt that it was absolutely necessary that she should look up and understand him— understand him at least. He leant forward and clasped his hands round his knees.

“You see I'd just put all my things—a portfolio—into a third-class ‘smoker’ and was having a look at the book-stall,” he explained.

As he told the story she raised her head. He saw her grey eyes under the shadow of her hat and her eyebrows like two gold feathers. Her lips were faintly parted. Almost unconsciously he seemed to absorb the fact that she was wearing a bunch of primroses and that her throat was white—the shape of her face wonderfully delicate against all that burning hair. “How beautiful she is! How simply beautiful she is!” sang Henry's heart, and swelled with the words, bigger and bigger and trembling like a marvellous bubble—so that he was afraid to breathe for fear of breaking it.

“I hope there was nothing valuable in the portfolio,” said she, very grave.

“Oh, only some silly drawings that I was taking back from the office,” answered Henry, airily. “And—I was rather glad to lose my hat. It had been hurting me all day.”

“Yes,” she said, “it's left a mark,” and she nearly smiled.

Why on earth should those words have made Henry feel so free suddenly and so happy and so madly excited? What was happening between them? They said nothing, but to Henry their silence was alive and warm. It covered him from his head to his feet in a trembling wave. Her marvellous words, “It's made a mark,” had in some mysterious fashion established a bond between them. They could not be utter strangers to each other if she spoke so simply and so naturally. And now she was really smiling. The smile danced in her eyes, crept over her cheeks to her lips and stayed there. He leant back. The words flew from him.— “Isn't life wonderful!”

At that moment the train dashed into a tunnel. He heard her voice raised against the noise. She leant forward.

“I don't think so. But then I've been a fatalist for a long time now”—a pause— “months.”

They were shattering through the dark. “Why?” called Henry.

“Oh. ...”

Then she shrugged, and smiled and shook her head, meaning she could not speak against the noise. He nodded and leant back. They came out of the tunnel into a sprinkle of lights and houses. He waited for her to explain. But she got up and buttoned her coat and put her hands to her hat, swaying a little. “I get out here,” she said. That seemed quite impossible to Henry.



The train slowed down and the lights outside grew brighter. She moved towards his end of the carriage.

“Look here!” he stammered. “Shan't I see you again?” He got up, too, and leant against the rack with one hand. “I *must* see you again.” The train was stopping.

She said breathlessly, “I come down from London every evening.”

“You—you—you do—really?” His eagerness frightened her. He was quick to curb it. Shall we or shall we not shake hands? raced through his brain. One hand was on the door-handle, the other held the little bag. The train stopped. Without another word or glance she was gone.

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Then came Saturday—a half day at the office—and Sunday between. By Monday evening Henry was quite exhausted. He was at the station far too early, with a pack of silly thoughts at his heels as it were driving him up and down. “She didn't say she came by this train!” “And supposing I go up and she cuts me.” “There may be somebody with her.” “Why do you suppose she's ever thought of you again?” “What are you going to say if you do see her?” He even prayed, “Lord if it be Thy will, let us meet.”

But nothing helped. White smoke floated against the roof of the station—dissolved and came again in swaying wreaths. Of a sudden, as he watched it, so delicate and so silent, moving with such mysterious grace above the crowd and the scuffle, he grew calm. He felt very tired—he only wanted to sit down and shut his eyes—she was not coming—a forlorn relief breathed in the words. And then he saw her quite near to him walking towards the train with the same little leather case in her hand. Henry waited. He knew, somehow, that she had seen him, but he did not move until she came close to him and said in her low, shy voice—“Did you get them again?”

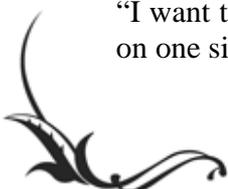
“Oh, yes, thank you, I got them again,” and with a funny half gesture he showed her the portfolio and the gloves. They walked side by side to the train and into an empty carriage. They sat down opposite to each other, smiling timidly but not speaking, while the train moved slowly, and slowly gathered speed and smoothness. Henry spoke first.

“It's so silly,” he said, “not knowing your name.” She put back a big piece of hair that had fallen on her shoulder, and he saw how her hand in the grey glove was shaking. Then he noticed that she was sitting very stiffly with her knees pressed together—and he was, too—both of them trying not to tremble so. She said “My name is Edna.”

“And mine is Henry.”

In the pause they took possession of each other's names and turned them over and put them away, a shade less frightened after that.

“I want to ask you something else now,” said Henry. He looked at Edna, his head a little on one side. “How old are you?”



“Over sixteen,” she said, “and you?”

“I’m nearly eighteen. ...”

“Isn’t it hot?” she said suddenly, and pulled off her grey gloves and put her hands to her cheeks and kept them there. Their eyes were not frightened—they looked at each other with a sort of desperate calmness. If only their bodies would not tremble so stupidly! Still half hidden by her hair, Edna said:

“Have you ever been in love before?”

“No, never! Have you?”

“Oh, never in all my life.” She shook her head. “I never even thought it possible.”

His next words came in a rush. “Whatever have you been doing since last Friday evening? Whatever did you do all Saturday and all Sunday and to-day?”

But she did not answer—only shook her head and smiled and said, “No, you tell *me*.”

“I?” cried Henry—and then he found he couldn’t tell her either. He couldn’t climb back to those mountains of days, and he had to shake his head, too.

“But it’s been agony,” he said, smiling brilliantly—“agony.” At that she took away her hands and started laughing, and Henry joined her. They laughed until they were tired.

“It’s so—so extraordinary,” she said. “So suddenly, you know, and I feel as if I’d known you for years.”

“So do I ...” said Henry. “I believe it must be the Spring. I believe I’ve swallowed a butterfly—and it’s fanning its wings just here.” He put his hand on his heart.

“And the really extraordinary thing is,” said Edna, “that I had made up my mind that I didn’t care for—men at all. I mean all the girls at College——”

“Were you at College?”

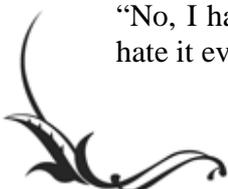
She nodded. “A training college, learning to be a secretary.” She sounded scornful.

“I’m in an office,” said Henry. “An architect’s office—such a funny little place up one hundred and thirty stairs. We ought to be building nests instead of houses, I always think.

“Do you like it?”

“No, of course I don’t. I don’t want to do anything, do you?”

“No, I hate it. ... And,” she said, “my mother is a Hungarian—I believe that makes me hate it even more.”



That seemed to Henry quite natural. “It would,” he said.

“Mother and I are exactly alike. I haven't a thing in common with my father; he's just... a little man in the City—but mother has got wild blood in her and she's given it to me. She hates our life just as much as I do.” She paused and frowned. “All the same, we don't get on a bit together—that's funny — isn't it? But I'm absolutely alone at home.”

Henry was listening—in a way he was listening, but there was something else he wanted to ask her. He said, very shyly, “Would you—would you take off your hat?”

She looked startled. “Take off my hat?”

“Yes—it's your hair. I'd give anything to see your hair properly.”

She protested. “It isn't really...”

“Oh, it *is*,” cried Henry, and then, as she took off the hat and gave her head a little toss, “Oh, Edna! it's the loveliest thing in the world.”

“Do you like it?” she said, smiling and very pleased. She pulled it round her shoulders like a cape of gold. “People generally laugh at it. It's such an absurd colour.” But Henry would not believe that. She leaned her elbows on her knees and cupped her chin in her hands. “That's how I often sit when I'm angry and then I feel it burning me up. ... Silly?”

“No, no, not a bit,” said Henry. “I knew you did. It's your sort of weapon against all the dull horrid things.”

“However did you know that? Yes, that's just it. But however did you know?”

“Just knew,” smiled Henry. “My God!” he cried, “what fools people are! All the little pollies that you know and that I know. Just look at you and me. Here we are—that's all there is to be said. I know about you and you know about me—we've just found each other—quite simply—just by being natural. That's all life is—something childish and very natural. Isn't it?”

“Yes—yes,” she said eagerly. “That's what I've always thought.”

“It's people that make things so—silly. As long as you can keep away from them you're safe and you're happy.”

“Oh, I've thought that for a long time.”

“Then you're just like me,” said Henry. The wonder of that was so great that he almost wanted to cry. Instead he said very solemnly: “I believe we're the only two people alive who think as we do. In fact, I'm sure of it. Nobody understands me. I feel as though I were living in a world of strange beings—do you?”

“Always.”



“We'll be in that loathsome tunnel again in a minute,” said Henry. “Edna! can I—just touch your hair?”

She drew back quickly. “Oh, no, please don't,” and as they were going into the dark she moved a little away from him.

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“Edna! I've bought the tickets. The man at the concert hall didn't seem at all surprised that I had the money. Meet me outside the gallery doors at three, and wear that cream blouse and the corals—will you? I love you. I don't like sending these letters to the shop. I always feel those people with ‘Letters received’ in their window keep a kettle in their back parlour that would steam open an elephant's ear of an envelope. But it really doesn't matter, does it, darling? Can you get away on Sunday? Pretend you are going to spend the day with one of the girls from the office, and let's meet at some little place and walk or find a field where we can watch the daisies uncurling. I do love you, Edna. But Sundays without you are simply impossible. Don't get run over before Saturday, and don't eat anything out of a tin or drink anything from a public fountain. That's all, darling.”

“My dearest, yes, I'll be there on Saturday—and I've arranged about Sunday, too. That is one great blessing. I'm quite free at home. I have just come in from the garden. It's such a lovely evening. Oh, Henry, I could sit and cry, I love you so to-night. Silly— isn't it? I either feel so happy I can hardly stop laughing or else so sad I can hardly stop crying and both for the same reason. But we are so young to have found each other, aren't we? I am sending you a violet. It is quite warm. I wish you were here now, just for a minute even. Good-night, darling. I am Edna.”

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“Safe,” said Edna, “safe! And excellent places, aren't they, Henry?”

She stood up to take off her coat and Henry made a movement to help her. “No—no—it's off.” She tucked it under the seat. She sat down beside him. “Oh, Henry, what have you got there? Flowers?”

“Only two tiny little roses.” He laid them in her lap.

“Did you get my letter all right?” asked Edna, unpinning the paper.

“Yes,” he said, “and the violet is growing beautifully. You should see my room. I planted a little piece of it in every corner and one on my pillow and one in the pocket of my pyjama jacket.”

She shook her hair at him. “Henry, give me the programme.”

“Here it is—you can read it with me. I'll hold it for you.”

“No, let me have it.”



“Well, then, I’ll read it for you.”

“No, you can have it after.”

“Edna,” he whispered.

“Oh, please don’t,” she pleaded. “Not here—the people.”

Why did he want to touch her so much and why did she mind? Whenever he was with her he wanted to hold her hand or take her arm when they walked together, or lean against her—not hard—just lean lightly so that his shoulder should touch her shoulder—and she wouldn’t even have that. All the time that he was away from her he was hungry, he craved the nearness of her. There seemed to be comfort and warmth breathing from Edna that he needed to keep him calm. Yes, that was it. He couldn’t get calm with her because she wouldn’t let him touch her. But she loved him. He knew that. Why did she feel so curiously about it? Every time he tried to or even asked for her hand she shrank back and looked at him with pleading frightened eyes as though he wanted to hurt her. They could say anything to each other. And there wasn’t any question of their belonging to each other. And yet he couldn’t touch her. Why, he couldn’t even help her off with her coat. Her voice dropped into his thoughts.

“Henry!” He leaned to listen, setting his lips. “I want to explain something to you. I will — I will — I promise — after the concert.”

“All right.” He was still hurt.

“You’re not sad, are you?” he said.

He shook his head.

“Yes, you are, Henry.”

“No, really not.” He looked at the roses lying in her hands.

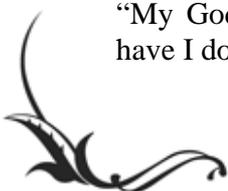
“Well, are you happy?”

“Yes. Here comes the orchestra.”

It was twilight when they came out of the hall. A blue net of light hung over the streets and houses, and pink clouds floated in a pale sky. As they walked away from the hall Henry felt they were very little and alone. For the first time since he had known Edna his heart was heavy.

“Henry!” She stopped suddenly and stared at him. “Henry, I’m not coming to the station with you. Don’t—don’t wait for me. Please, please leave me.”

“My God!” cried Henry, and started, “what’s the matter—Edna—darling—Edna, what have I done?”



“Oh, nothing—go away,” and she turned and ran across the street into a square and leaned up against the square railings—and hid her face in her hands.

“Edna—Edna—my little love—you're crying. Edna, my baby girl!”

She leaned her arms along the railings and sobbed distractedly.

“Edna—stop—it's all my fault. I'm a fool—I'm a thundering idiot. I've spoiled your afternoon. I've tortured you with my idiotic mad bloody clumsiness. That's it. Isn't it, Edna? For God's sake.”

“Oh,” she sobbed, “I do hate hurting you so. Every time you ask me to let—let you hold my hand or—or kiss me I could kill myself for not doing it—for not letting you. I don't know why I don't even.” She said wildly. “It's not that I'm frightened of you—it's not that—it's only a feeling, Henry, that I can't understand myself even. Give me your handkerchief, darling.” He pulled it from his pocket. “All through the concert I've been haunted by this, and every time we meet I know it's bound to come up. Somehow I feel if once we did that—you know—held each other's hands and kissed it would be all changed—and I feel we wouldn't be free like we are—we'd be doing something secret. We wouldn't be children any more silly, isn't it? I'd feel awkward with you, Henry, and I'd feel shy, and I do so feel that just because you and I are you and I, we don't need that sort of thing.” She turned and looked at him, pressing her hands to her cheeks in the way he knew so well, and behind her as in a dream he saw the sky and half a white moon and the trees of the square with their unbroken buds. He kept twisting, twisting up in his hands the concert programme. “Henry! You do understand me —don't you?”

“Yes, I think I do. But you're not going to be frightened any more, are you?” He tried to smile. “We'll forget, Edna. I'll never mention it again. We'll bury the bogy in this square — now — you and I — won't we?”

“But,” she said, searching his face—“will it make you love me less?”

“Oh, no,” he said. “Nothing could—nothing on earth could do that.”

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London became their play-ground. On Saturday afternoons they explored. They found their own shops where they bought cigarettes and sweets for Edna—and their own tea-shop with their own table—their own streets—and one night when Edna was supposed to be at a lecture at the Polytechnic they found their own village. It was the name that made them go there. “There's white geese in that name,” said Henry, telling it to Edna. “And a river and little low houses with old men sitting outside them—old sea captains with wooden legs winding up their watches, and there are little shops with lamps in the windows.”

It was too late for them to see the geese or the old men, but the river was there and the houses and even the shops with lamps. In one a woman sat working a sewing-machine on



the counter. They heard the whirring hum and they saw her big shadow filling the shop. “Too full for a single customer,” said Henry. “It is a perfect place.”

The houses were small and covered with creepers and ivy. Some of them had worn wooden steps leading up to the doors. You had to go down a little flight of steps to enter some of the others; and just across the road—to be seen from every window—was the river, with a walk beside it and some high poplar trees.

“This is the place for us to live in,” said Henry. “There's a house to let, too. I wonder if it would wait if we asked it. I'm sure it would.”

“Yes, I would like to live there,” said Edna.

They crossed the road and she leaned against the trunk of a tree and looked up at the empty house, with a dreamy smile.

“There is a little garden at the back, dear,” said Henry, “a lawn with one tree on it and some daisy bushes round the wall. At night the stars shine in the tree like tiny candles. And inside there are two rooms downstairs and a big room with folding doors upstairs and above that an attic. And there are eight stairs to the kitchen—very dark, Edna. You are rather frightened of them, you know. ‘Henry, dear, would you mind bringing the lamp? I just want to make sure that Euphemia has raked out the fire before we go to bed.’”

“Yes,” said Edna. “Our bedroom is at the very top—that room with the two square windows. When it is quiet we can hear the river flowing and the sound of the poplar trees far, far away, rustling and flowing in our dreams, darling.”

“You're not cold—are you?” he said, suddenly.

“No—no, only happy.”

“The room with the folding doors is yours.” Henry laughed. “It's a mixture—it isn't a room at all. It's full of your toys and there's a big blue chair in it where you sit curled up in front of the fire with the flames in your curls—because though we're married you refuse to put your hair up and only tuck it inside your coat for the church service. And there's a rug on the floor for me to lie on, because I'm so lazy. Euphemia—that's our servant—only comes in the day. After she's gone we go down to the kitchen and sit on the table and eat an apple, or perhaps we make some tea, just for the sake of hearing the kettle sing. That's not joking. If you listen to a kettle right through it's like an early morning in Spring.”

“Yes, I know,” she said. “All the different kinds of birds.”

A little cat came through the railings of the empty house and into the road. Edna called it and bent down and held out her hands—“Kitty! Kitty!” The little cat ran to her and rubbed against her knees.



“If we're going for a walk just take the cat and put it inside the front door,” said Henry, still pretending. “I've got the key.”

They walked across the road and Edna stood stroking the cat in her arms while Henry went up the steps and pretended to open the door.

He came down again quickly. “Let's go away at once. It's going to turn into a dream.”

The night was dark and warm. They did not want to go home. “What I feel so certain of is,” said Henry, “that we ought to be living there, now. We oughtn't to wait for things. What's age? You're as old as you'll ever be and so am I. You know,” he said, “I have a feeling often and often that it's dangerous to wait for things—that if you wait for things they only go further and further away.”

“But, Henry,—money! You see we haven't any money.”

“Oh, well,—perhaps if I disguised myself as an old man we could get a job as caretakers in some large house—that would be rather fun. I'd make up a terrific history of the house if anyone came to look over it and you could dress up and be the ghost moaning and wringing your hands in the deserted picture gallery, to frighten them off. Don't you ever feel that money is more or less accidental—that if one really wants things it's either there or it doesn't matter?”

She did not answer that—she looked up at the sky and said, “Oh dear, I don't want to go home.”

“Exactly—that's the whole trouble—and we oughtn't to go home. We ought to be going back to the house and find an odd saucer to give the cat the dregs of the milk-jug in. I'm not really laughing—I'm not even happy. I'm lonely for you, Edna—I would give anything to lie down and cry” and he added limply, “with my head in your lap and your darling cheek in my hair.”

“But, Henry,” she said, coming closer, “you have faith, haven't you? I mean you are absolutely certain that we shall have a house like that and everything we want—aren't you?”

“Not enough—that's not enough. I want to be sitting on those very stairs and taking off these very boots this very minute. Don't you? Is faith enough for you?”

“If only we weren't so young” she said miserably. “And yet,” she sighed, “I'm sure I don't feel very young—I feel twenty at least.”

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Henry lay on his back in the little wood. When he moved the dead leaves rustled beneath him, and above his head the new leaves quivered like fountains of green water steeped in sunlight. Somewhere out of sight Edna was gathering primroses. He had been so full of dreams that morning that he could not keep pace with her delight in the flowers. “Yes,



love, you go and come back for me. I'm too lazy." She had thrown off her hat and knelt down beside him, and by and by her voice and her footsteps had grown fainter. Now the wood was silent except for the leaves, but he knew that she was not far away and he moved so that the tips of his fingers touched her pink jacket. Ever since waking he had felt so strangely that he was not really awake at all, but just dreaming. The time before, Edna was a dream and now he and she were dreaming together and somewhere in some dark place another dream waited for him. "No, that can't be true because I can't ever imagine the world without us. I feel that we two together mean something that's got to be there just as naturally as trees or birds or clouds." He tried to remember what it had felt like without Edna, but he could not get back to those days. They were hidden by her; Edna, with the marigold hair and strange, dreamy smile filled him up to the brim. He breathed her; he ate and drank her. He walked about with a shining ring of Edna keeping the world away or touching whatever it lighted on with its own beauty. "Long after you have stopped laughing," he told her, "I can hear your laugh running up and down my veins—and yet—are we a dream?" And suddenly he saw himself and Edna as two very small children walking through the streets, looking through windows, buying things and playing with them, talking to each other, smiling—he saw even their gestures and the way they stood, so often, quite still, face to face—and then he rolled over and pressed his face in the leaves—faint with longing. He wanted to kiss Edna, and to put his arms round her and press her to him and feel her cheek hot against his kiss and kiss her until he'd no breath left and so stifle the dream.

"No, I can't go on being hungry like this," said Henry, and jumped up and began to run in the direction she had gone. She had wandered a long way. Down in a green hollow he saw her kneeling, and when she saw him she waved and said— "Oh, Henry—such beauties! I've never seen such beauties. Come and look." By the time he had reached her he would have cut off his hand rather than spoil her happiness. How strange Edna was that day! All the time she talked to Henry her eyes laughed; they were sweet and mocking. Two little spots of colour like strawberries glowed on her cheeks and "I wish I could feel tired," she kept saying. "I want to walk over the whole world until I die. Henry—come along. Walk faster—Henry! If I start flying suddenly, you'll promise to catch hold of my feet, won't you? Otherwise I'll never come down." And "Oh," she cried, "I am so happy. I'm so frightfully happy!" They came to a weird place, covered with heather. It was early afternoon and the sun streamed down upon the purple.

"Let's rest here a little," said Edna, and she waded into the heather and lay down. "Oh, Henry, it's so lovely. I can't see anything except the little bells and the sky."

Henry knelt down by her and took some primroses out of her basket and made a long chain to go round her throat. "I could almost fall asleep," said Edna. She crept over to his knees and lay hidden in her hair just beside him. "It's like being under the sea, isn't it, dearest, so sweet and so still?"

"Yes," said Henry, in a strange husky voice. "Now I'll make you one of violets." But Edna sat up. "Let's go in," she said.



They came back to the road and walked a long way. Edna said, “No, I couldn't walk over the world—I'm tired now.” She trailed on the grass edge of the road. “You and I are tired, Henry! How much further is it?”

“I don't know—not very far,” said Henry, peering into the distance. Then they walked in silence.

“Oh,” she said at last, “it really is too far, Henry, I'm tired and I'm hungry. Carry my silly basket of primroses.” He took them without looking at her.

At last they came to a village and a cottage with a notice “Teas Provided.”

“This is the place,” said Henry. “I've often been here. You sit on the little bench and I'll go and order the tea.” She sat down on the bench, in the pretty garden all white and yellow with spring flowers. A woman came to the door and leaned against it watching them eat. Henry was very nice to her, but Edna did not say a word. “You haven't been here for a long spell,” said the woman.

“No—the garden's looking wonderful.”

“Fair,” said she. “Is the young lady your sister?” Henry nodded Yes, and took some jam.

“There's a likeness,” said the woman. She came down into the garden and picked a head of white jonquils and handed it to Edna. “I suppose you don't happen to know anyone who wants a cottage,” said she. “My sister's taken ill and she left me hers. I want to let it.”

“For a long time?” asked Henry, politely.

“Oh,” said the woman vaguely, “that depends.”

Said Henry, “Well—I might know of somebody—could we go and look at it?”

“Yes, it's just a step down the road, the little one with the apple trees in front—I'll fetch you the key.”

While she was away Henry turned to Edna and said, “Will you come?” She nodded.

They walked down the road and in through the gate and up the grassy path between the pink and white trees. It was a tiny place—two rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs. Edna leaned out of the top window, and Henry stood at the doorway. “Do you like it?” he asked.

“Yes,” she called, and then made a place for him at the window. “Come and look. It's so sweet.”



He came and leant out of the window. Below them were the apple trees tossing in a faint wind that blew a long piece of Edna's hair across his eyes. They did not move. It was evening—the pale green sky was sprinkled with stars. “Look!” she said— “stars, Henry.”

“There will be a moon in two T's,” said Henry.

She did not seem to move and yet she was leaning against Henry's shoulder; he put his arm round her— “Are all those trees down there—apple?” she asked in a shaky voice.

“No, darling,” said Henry. “Some of them are full of angels and some of them are full of sugar almonds—but evening light is awfully deceptive.” She sighed. “Henry—we mustn't stay here any longer.”

He let her go and she stood up in the dusky room and touched her hair. “What has been the matter with you all day?” she said—and then did not wait for an answer but ran to him and put her arms round his neck, and pressed his head into the hollow of her shoulder. “Oh, she breathed, “I do love you. Hold me, Henry.” He put his arms round her, and she leaned against him and looked into his eyes. “Hasn't it been terrible, all to-day?” said Edna. “I knew what was the matter and I've tried every way I could to tell you that I wanted you to kiss me—that I'd quite got over the feeling.”

“You're perfect, perfect, perfect,” said Henry.

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“The thing is,” said Henry, “how am I going to wait until evening?” He took his watch out of his pocket, went into the cottage and popped it into a china jar on the mantelpiece. He'd looked at it seven times in one hour, and now he couldn't remember what time it was. Well, he'd look once again. Half-past four. Her train arrived at seven. He'd have to start for the station at half-past six. Two hours more to wait. He went through the cottage again—downstairs and upstairs. “It looks lovely,” he said. He went into the garden and picked a round bunch of white pinks and put them in a vase on the little table by Edna's bed. “I don't believe this,” thought Henry. “I don't believe this for a minute. It's too much. She'll be here in two hours and we'll walk home, and then I'll take that white jug off the kitchen table and go across to Mrs. Biddie's and get the milk, and then come back, and when I come back she'll have lighted the lamp in the kitchen and I'll look through the window and see her moving about in the pool of lamplight. And then we shall have supper, and after supper (Bags I washing up!) I shall put some wood on the fire and we'll sit on the hearth-rug and watch it burning. There won't be a sound except the wood and perhaps the wind will creep round the house once And then we shall change our candles and she will go up first with her shadow on the wall beside her, and she will call out, Good-night, Henry—and I shall answer—Good-night, Edna. And then I shall dash upstairs and jump into bed and watch the tiny bar of light from her room brush my door, and the moment it disappears will shut my eyes and sleep until morning. Then we'll have all to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow night. Is she thinking all this, too? Edna, come quickly!



Had I two little wings,  
And were a little feathery bird,  
To you I'd fly, my dear—

No, no, dearest. . . . Because the waiting is a sort of Heaven, too, darling. If you can understand that. Did you ever know a cottage could stand on tip-toe. This one is doing it now.”

He was downstairs and sat on the doorstep with his hands clasped round his knees. That night when they found the village—and Edna said, “Haven't you faith, Henry?” “I hadn't then. Now I have,” he said, “I feel just like God.”

He leaned his head against the lintel. He could hardly keep his eyes open, not that he was sleepy, but for some reason and a long time passed.

Henry thought he saw a big white moth flying down the road. It perched on the gate. No, it wasn't a moth. It was a little girl in a pinafore. What a nice little girl, and he smiled in his sleep, and she smiled, too, and turned in her toes as she walked. “But she can't be living here,” thought Henry. “Because this is ours. Here she comes.”

When she was quite close to him she took her hand from under her pinafore and gave him a telegram and smiled and went away. There's a funny present! thought Henry, staring at it. “Perhaps it's only a make-believe one, and it's got one of those snakes inside it that fly up at you.” He laughed gently in the dream and opened it very carefully. “It's just a folded paper.” He took it out and spread it open.

The garden became full of shadows—they span a web of darkness over the cottage and the trees and Henry and the telegram. But Henry did not move.

