

Star-begotten

Wells, H. G.



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H. G. Wells

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About Wells:

Herbert George Wells, better known as H. G. Wells, was an English writer best known for such science fiction novels as *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The Invisible Man* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. He was a prolific writer of both fiction and non-fiction, and produced works in many different genres, including contemporary novels, history, and social commentary. He was also an outspoken socialist. His later works become increasingly political and didactic, and only his early science fiction novels are widely read today. Wells, along with Hugo Gernsback and Jules Verne, is sometimes referred to as "The Father of Science Fiction".



Herbert George "H. G." Wells (21 September 1866 – 13 August 1946)

1 The Mind of Mr. Joseph Davis Is Greatly Troubled

1.

This is the story of an idea and how it played about in the minds of a number of intelligent people.

Whether there was any reality behind this idea it is not the business of the storyteller to say. The reader must judge for himself. One man believed it without the shadow of a doubt and he shall be the principal figure in the story.

Maybe we have not heard the last of this idea. It spread from the talk of a few people into magazines and the popular press. It had a vogue. You certainly heard of it at the time though perhaps you have forgotten. Popular attention waned. Now the thing flickers about in people's minds, not quite dead and not quite alive, disconnected and ineffective. It is a queer and almost incredible idea, but yet not absolutely incredible. It is a bare possibility that this thing is really going on.

This idea arose in the mind of Mr. Joseph Davis, a man of letters, a sensitive, intelligent, and cultivated man. It came to him when he was in a state of neurasthenia, when the strangest ideas may invade and find a lodgment in the mind.

2.

The idea was born, so to speak, one morning in November at the Planetarium Club, Yet perhaps before we describe its impact upon Mr. Joseph Davis in the club smoking-room after lunch, it may be well to tell the reader a few things about him.

We will begin right at the beginning. He was born just at the turn of the century and about the vernal equinox. He had come into the world with a lively and precocious intelligence and his 'quickness' had been the joy of his mother and his nurses. And, after the manner of our kind, he had clutched at the world, squinted at it, and then looked straight at it, got hold of things and put them in his mouth, begun to imitate, begun to make and then interpret sounds, and so developed his picture of this strange world in which we live.

His nurse told him things and sang to him; his mother sang to him and told him things; a nursery governess arrived in due course to tell him things, and then a governess and a school and lot of people and pictures and little books in words of one syllable and then normal polysyllabic books and a large mellifluous parson and various husky small boys and indeed a great miscellany of people went on telling him things and telling him things. And so continually, his picture of this world, and his conception of himself and what he would have to do, and ought to do and wanted to do, grew clearer.

But it was only very gradually that he began to realize that there was something about his picture of the universe that perhaps wasn't in the pictures of the universe of all the people about him. On the whole the universe they gave him had an air of being real and true and just there and nothing else. There were, they intimated, good things that were simply good and bad things that were awful and rude things that you must never even think of, and there were good people and bad people and simply splendid people, people you had to like and admire and obey and people you were against, people who were rich and prosecuted you if you trespassed and ran over you with motor cars if you did not look out, and people who were poor and did things for you for small sums, and it was all quite nice and clear and definite and you went your way amidst it all circumspectly and happily, laughing not infrequently.

Only—and this was a thing that came to him by such imperceptible degrees that at no time was he able to get it in such a way that he could ask questions about it—ever and again there was an effect as though this sure and certain established world was just in some elusive manner at this point or that point translucent, translucent and a little threadbare, and as though something else quite different lay behind it. It was never transparent. It was commonly, nine days out of ten, a full, complete universe and then for a moment, for a phase, for a perplexing interval, it was as if it was a painted screen that hid—What did it hide?

They told him that a God of Eastern Levantine origin, the God of Abraham (who evidently had a stupendous bosom) and Isaac and Jacob, had made the whole universe, stars and atoms, from start to finish in six days and made it wonderfully and perfect, and had set it all going and, after some necessary ennui called the Fall and the Flood, had developed arrangements that were to culminate in the earthly happiness and security and eternal bliss of our Joseph, which had seemed to him a very agreeable state of affairs. And farther they had shown him the most convincing pictures of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel and had given him a Noah's Ark to play with and told him simple Bible stories about the patriarchs and the infant Samuel and Solomon and David and their remarkable lessons for us, the promise of salvation spreading out from the Eastern Levant until it covered the world, and he had taken it all in without flinching because at the time he had no standards of comparison. Anything might be as true as anything else. Except for the difference in colour they put him into the world of *Green Pastures* and there they trained him to be a simply believing little Anglican.

And yet at the same time he found a book in the house with pictures of animals that were quite unlike any of the animals that frequented the Garden of Eden or entered the Ark. And pictures of men of a pithecoïd unpleasant type who had lived, it seemed, long before Adam and Eve were created. It seemed all sorts of thing had been going on before Adam and Eve were created, but when he began to develop a curiosity about this pre-scriptural world and to

ask questions about it his current governess snapped his head off and hid that disconcerting book away. They were 'just antediluvian animals,' she said, and Noah had not troubled to save them. And when he had remarked that a lot of them could swim, she told him not to try to be a Mr. Cleverkins.

He did his best not to be Mr. Cleverkins. He did his best to love this God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well as fear him (which he did horribly, more even than he did the gorilla in Wood's *Natural History*) and to be overcome with gratitude for the wisdom and beauty of a scheme of things which first of all damned him to hell-fire before he was born and then went to what he couldn't help thinking were totally unnecessary pains on the part of omnipotence to save him. Why should omnipotence do that? What need He do that? All He had to do was just to say it. He had made the whole world by just saying it.

Master Joseph did his very best to get his feelings properly adjusted to the established conception of the universe. And since most of the scriptures concerned events that were now happily out of date, and since his mother, his governess, the mellifluous parson, the scripture teacher at school, and everybody set in authority over him converged in assuring him that now, at the price of a little faith and conformity, things were absolutely all right here and hereafter so far as he was concerned, he did get through some years pretty comfortably. He did not think about it too much. He put it all away from him—until the subtle alchemy of growth as he became adolescent sent queer winds of inquiry and correlation banging open again unsorted cupboards of his brain.

He went to St. Hobart's school and then to Camborne Hall, Oxford. There is much unreasonable criticism of the English public schools, but it is indisputable that they do give a sort of education to an elect percentage of their boys. There was quite a lot of lively discussion at St. Hobart's in those days, it wasn't one of your mere games-and-cram schools, and the reaction against the dogmatic materialism of the later nineteenth century was in full swing there. The head in his sermons and the staff generally faced up to the fact that there had been Doubt, and that the boys ought to know about it.

The science master was in a minority of one on the staff and he came up to St. Hobart's by way of a technical school; the public school spirit cowed him. St. Hobart's did not ignore science but it despised the stuff, and all the boys were given some science so that they could see just what it was like.

Davis because of his mental quickness had specialized in the classical side; nevertheless he did his minimum of public school science. He burnt his fingers with hot glass and smashed a number of beakers during a brief interlude of chemistry, and he thought biology the worst of stinks. He found the outside of rabbit delightful but the inside made him sick; it made him physically sick. He acquired a great contempt for 'mere size' and that kept astronomy in its place. And when he came to grips with doubt, in preparation for confirmation, he realized that he had been much too crude in feeling uncomfortable about that early Bible narrative and the scheme of salvation and all the rest of it. As a matter-of-fact statement it was not perhaps in the coarser sense true, but that was because of the infirmities of language and the peculiar low state of Eastern Levantine intelligence and Eastern Levantine moral ideas when the hour to 'reveal' religion had struck. Great resort had had to be made for purposes of illustration to symbols, parables, and inaccurate but edifying stories. People like David and Jacob had been poor material for demonstration purposes, but that was a point better disregarded.

The story of creation was symbolical and its failure to correspond with the succession of life on earth did not matter in the least, the Fall was symbolical of things too mysterious to explain, and why there had to be an historical redemption when the historical fall had vanished into thin air was the sort of thing no competent theologian would dream of discussing. There it was. Through such matters of faith and doctrine Joseph Davis was taken at a considerable speed, which left him hustled and baffled rather than convinced.

But the curious thing about these initiatory explanations was that all the time another set of ideas at an entirely different level was being put before him as a complete justification for the uncritical acceptance of Bible, Church, and Creed. It was being conveyed to him that it really did not matter what foundations of myth or fantasy the existing system of Western

civilization was built upon; the fact that mattered was that it was built upon that foundation and that a great ritual of ceremonial and observance, which might be logically unmeaning, and an elaborate code of morality, which might ultimately prove to be arbitrary, nevertheless constituted the co-ordinating fabric of current social life and that social life could not now go on without them. So that all this freethinker and rationalist stuff became irrelevant and indeed contemptibly crude. Reasonable men didn't assert. They didn't deny. They were thinking and living at a different level. You could no more reconstruct religion, social usage, political tradition, than you could replan the human skeleton—which also was open to considerable criticism.

That put Joseph Davis in his place. Arguments about the Garden of Eden and Jonah's Whale passed out of discussion. He was left face to face with history and society. Christianity and its churches, the monarchy and political institutions, the social hierarchy, seemed to be regarding him blandly. It is no good inquiring into our credentials now, they seemed to say. Here we are. We work. (They seemed to be working then.) And what other reality is there?

By this time he was at Oxford, talking and thinking occasionally, pretending to think a lot and believing that he was thinking a lot. The dualism that had dawned upon him in childhood looked less like being resolved than ever. The world-that-is no longer contested his fundamental criticisms, but it challenged him to produce any alternative world-that-might-be. There it was, the ostensible world, definite, fundamentally inconsistent maybe, but consistent in texture. An immense accumulation of falsity and yet a going concern. So things are.

It looked so enduring. He wavered for a time. On one hand was the brightly lit story of current things, the front-window story, a mother's-knee story of a world made all for his reception, a world of guidance, safe government, a plausible social order, institutions beyond effective challenge, a sure triumph for good behaviour and a clear definition of right and wrong, of what was done and what was not done, and against it was no more than a shadow story which was told less by positive statement than by hints, discords that stirred beneath the brightness, murmurs from beneath, and vague threats from incidental jars. That shadow world, that mere criticism of accepted things, had no place for him, offered him nothing. No shapes appeared there but only interrogations. The brightly lit story seemed safest, brightest, and best to his ripening imagination; he did his best to thrust that other tale down among all sorts of other things, improper and indecent thoughts for example, that have to be kept under hatches in the mind.

Momentous decisions have to be made by all of us in those three or four undergraduate years; we take our road, and afterwards there is small opportunity for a return. Mr. Joseph Davis had a quick mind and a facile pen and he was already writing, and writing rather well, before he came down. He chose to write anyhow. His father had left him with a comfortable income and there was no mercenary urgency upon him. He elected to write about the braver, more confident aspects of life. He was for the show. He began to write heartening and stalwart books and to gird remorselessly at dissidence and doubt. What I write, he said, shall have banners in it and trumpets and drums. No carping, nothing subversive. Sociology is going out of fashion. So he committed himself. He began first with some successful, brave historical romances and followed up with short histories of this or that gallant interlude in the record.

King Richard and Saladin was his first book and then he wrote *The Singing Seamen*. Then came *Smite with Hammer, Smite with Sword*, and after that he ran up and down the human tree, telling of the jolly adventures of Alexander and Caesar and Jenghiz Khan (*The Mighty Riders*) and the Elizabethan pirates and explorers and so on. But as he had a sound instinct for good writing and an exceptionally sensitive nature, the more he wrote, the more he read and learned and—which was the devil of it—thought.

He should not have thought. When he took his side he should, like a sensible man, have stopped thinking.

Besides which some people criticized him rather penetratingly, and for an out-and-out champion he was much too attentive to criticism.

He became infected with a certain hesitation about what he was doing. Perhaps he was undergoing that first subtle deterioration from that assurance of youth which is called

'growing up,' a phase that may occur at any age. He wrote with diminishing ease and confidence and let qualifying shadows creep into his heroic portraits. He would sometimes admit quite damaging things, and then apologize. He found this enhanced the solidity of some of his figures, but it cast a shadow on his forthright style. He told no one of this loss of inner elasticity, but he worried secretly about it.

Then, courageously but perhaps unwisely, he resolved to make a grand culminating frontal attack upon the doubt, materialism, and pessimism of shadowland, in the form of a deliberately romanticized history of mankind. It was to be a world history justifying the ways of God to man. It was also to justify his own ways to himself. It was to be a great parade—a cavalcade of humanity.

For some reason he never made clear to himself, he did not begin at the creation of the world but on the plain of Shinar. He put the earlier history into the mouths of retrospective wise old men. From the Tower of Babel man dispersed about the world.

History regarded with a right-minded instinct has often a superficial appearance of being only a complicated tangle still awaiting analysis, and it was not always easy to show Man winning all the time and Right for ever triumphant against the odds—in the long run, that is. *The Heritage of Mankind, the Promise and the Struggle*—that was one of the tides he was considering—implies a struggle with, among other things, malignant fact. Fact sometimes can be very obstinate and malignant.

He had got himself into a tangle with the Black Death. He had started—rashly, he was beginning to realize—upon a chapter dealing with the ennobling effect of disease, one of three to be called respectively, *Flood, Fire, and Pestilence*; and that had led him into a considerable amount of special reading. He had always been for taking his own where he found it, and he had been inspired by Paul de Kruif's *Microbe Hunters* to annex some of that writer's material, infuse it with religious devotion, and then extend his discourse to show how throughout the ages these black visitations, properly regarded, had been glorious stimulants (happily no longer urgently needed) for the human soul. But he found the records of exemplary human behaviour during the Black Death period disconcertingly meagre. The stress was all on the horror of the time, and when everything was said and done, our species emerged hardly better in its reactions than a stampede of poisoned rats. That at any rate was how the confounded records showed things. And this in spite of his heroic efforts to read between the lines and in spite of his poetic disposition to supplement research with a little invention—intuition, let us say, rather than invention. That he knew was a dangerous disposition. Too much intuition might bring down the disparagement of some scholarly but unsympathetic pedant upon him, and all the other fellows would be only too glad to pick it up and repeat it.

And then suddenly his mind began to slip and slide. He had, he realized, been overworking and, what is so common an aspect of overwork, he could not leave off. Overwork had brought worry and sleeplessness in its train. He would lie awake thinking of the Black Death and the pitiful behaviour to which tormented humanity can sink. Vivid descriptive phrases in the old records it would have been healthier to forget, recurred to him. At first it was only the Black Death that distressed him and then his faith in human splendour began to collapse more widely. A cracked handbell heralded an open cart through the streets of plague-stricken London and once more the people were called upon to bring out the dead. Something revived his memory of the horror pictures of Goya in the Prado, and that dragged up the sinister paintings in the Wiertz Museum in Brussels. That again carried him to the underside in Napoleon's career and the heaped dead of the Great War. Why write a *Grand Parade of Humanity*, asked doubt, when Winwood Reade has already written *The Martyrdom of Man*? He found himself criticising his early book about Alexander the Great, *Youth the Conqueror*.

He had told that story triumphantly. Now in the black morning hours, it came back upon him in reverse. Something in his own brain confronted him and challenged him. Your Alexander, it said, your great Alexander, the pupil of Aristotle, who was, as you say, the master mind of the world, was in truth, as you know, just an ill-educated spendthrift. Why do you try to pervert the facts? By sheer accident—and most history is still a tale of accidents—he found himself in a rotten, nerveless self-indulgent world that had no grown men in it able to hold him out and

give him the spanking he deserved, and as luck would have it, he had the only up-to-date and seasoned army in existence completely at his disposal. He hadn't made it. It came to him. The fools went where he told them to go. When you wrote all that stuff about his taking Greek civilization to Persia and Egypt and India, you were merely giving him credit for what had happened already. Why? Greek civilization owed nothing to him. He took advantage of it. He picked it up and smashed it over the head of poor old Darius. Smashed it—just as these plunging dictators of today seem likely to smash your poor civilization—nobody able to gainsay them. He left the Glory that was Greece in fragments, for the Romans to pick up in their turn. He wasted the Macedonian cavalry and phalanx, just as our fools today are going to waste aviation. For no good at all; for no plain result. Alexander was just a witless accident in an aimless world. And think of his massacres and lootings and how it fared with the women and children, the common life of the world. Why did you write this florid stuff about Alexander the Great? And about Caesar—and about all these other pitiful heroes of mankind? Why do you keep it up, Joseph? If you did not know better then, you know better now. Your newspapers should be teaching you. Why do you pretend that a sort of destiny was unrolling? That it was all leading up to Anglicanism, cricket, the British Empire, and what not? Why do you go on with these pretences? These great men of yours never existed. The human affair is more intricate than that. More touching. Saints are sinners and philosophers are fools. Religions are rigmaroles. If there is gold it is still in the quartz. Look reality in the face. Then maybe something might be done about it.

He got up. He walked about his room.

'But I thought I had settled all this years ago,' he said. 'How can I get on with *Grand Parade of Humanity* if I give way to this sort of thing? Already I have spent nearly a year on this overwhelming book.'

He felt like some ancient hermit assailed by diabolical questionings. But that ancient hermit would at least have prayed and made the sign of the cross and got over it.

In his solitude Mr. Joseph Davis tried that. But on his knees he had a frightful sense of play-acting. He didn't believe there was a hearer. He didn't believe that any one believes nowadays—not Cantuar, not Ebor, not the Pope. These old boys eased down on their knees out of habit and let their minds wander along a neglected familiar lane to nothing in particular.

He got up again with his prayer half said and sat staring at the situation. *Defensor Fidei!* He couldn't pray.

3.

But this peculiar feeling of—mental duplicity shall we call it?—this doubt of himself;—this struggle to sustain the clear bright assurance of his chosen convictions, was not the only strain upon Mr. Davis's serenity. Several other matters not directly connected with his literary work were also conspiring to disturb his abnormally sensitive mind.

As he walked down Lower Regent Street from Picadilly Station towards his club, various discontents, new ones and old ones, threaded their way round and about each other, each rasping against him and eluding him, dodging down into the subconscious and giving place to another whenever he tried to pchallenge it. The day was grey and overcast and it gave him no help—was indeed definitely against him. He was inclined to think he would have been wiser to have put on his medium coat rather than his thin Burberry, and at the same time he found the air moist and stuffy.

Chief among these accessory troubles was this, that for the first time in his life he was to become a father. It is an occasion few men face with absolute calm; it stirs up all sorts of neglected or unexplored regions of possibility in the mind. No psycho-analyst as yet has investigated the imaginative undercurrents in the mind of the expectant father. No one has attempted a review of the onset of parentage in the male. Here we must confine our attention strictly to the case of Mr. Joseph Davis. For some time he had been developing a curious vague perplexity about this wife of his, who was so soon to add the responsibilities and anxieties of fatherhood to his already febrile mental activities, and that expectation had greatly intensified this perplexity.

Here again the subtle sensitiveness of the imaginative temperament came in. A literary man carries about with him in his head a collection of edged tools known as his Vocabulary. And sometimes he cuts himself. Two or three years ago 'enigmatical' had, so to speak, stuck up suddenly and caught him when he was thinking about his wife. And 'fey.' She was fifteen years younger than he was, he had married her when she was scarcely more than a girl, and yet, he had been compelled to realize, she was enigmatical, extremely enigmatical.

To begin with he had loved her in a simple, straightforward, acquisitive way and she had seemed to love him. He had not thought about her very much; he had just loved her as a man loves a woman. Their early married life, subject to the obvious discretions of our time, had been natural and happy; she had learned to type for him and they had been inseparable and all that sort of thing. Then by imperceptible degrees things had seemed to change. His satisfaction in her clouded over. She had seemed to disentangle herself from him and draw herself together. More and more was he aware of a lack of response in her.

And then came the memorable evening when she had remarked: 'I don't know whether I care for very much more of this sort of thing unless I am going to have a child.'

This sort of thing! Roses, raptures, whispers, dusk, moonlight, nightingales, all the love poetry that ever was—*this sort of thing!* So that was it!

'You are quite well off,' she said.

As though that mattered... .

There had been a certain amount of argument, in which delicacy had prevailed over explicitness, and then she had carried her point. He had made it plain to her that whatever reluctance he might have displayed at first was solely on her account and that now they were embarked together on a shining adventure. They were to make life 'more abundant.' Once the proposal was accepted his imagination seemed to bubble offspring. He buried 'this sort of thing' as deeply as he could under high-piled flower-beds of philoprogenitive sentiment; he tried his utmost to forget her strangely inhuman phrase.

Yet after everything was settled, still his uneasiness deepened, still her detachment seemed to increase.

It *seemed* to increase. But that was where another queer worry came now into his mind. Had she always had some or all of this disposition towards detachment, and had he failed to observe it hitherto? In the first bright months or so of their married life, when he had looked

at her and she had looked at him their eyes had met upon a common purpose as if they were smacking hands together. But now it was as if her hand had become a phantom hand that his own hand went right through, and his gaze seemed always just to miss meeting her deep regard. Her dark eyes had become inaccessible. 'Unfathomable' the vocabulary threw up. She scrutinized him and revealed nothing. Husbands and wives ought to become more easy with each other, more familiar, as life goes on, but she was increasingly aloof.

The majority of discontented husbands, the burden of comic literature, proverbial wisdom, testify to the terrors of a talkative wife, but indeed these terrors are nothing to those of a silent woman, a silent thoughtful woman. A scolding wife can say endless disconcerting things and she hits or misses, but a silent woman says everything.

Always nowadays she seemed to be thinking him over. And his morbidly sensitive self-consciousness filled her silences with criticisms against which he had no defence.

When he had married her, a young, dark, shy girl, he had radiated protective possession all over her. It would have seemed impossible then that he should ever feel—it is a strange word to use about a wife and as we use it here we use it in its most sublimated and attenuated sense, but the word is—fear. Latterly his uneasiness with his wife and about his wife had increased almost to the quality of that emotion.

Of course he had always realized that there was something subtly unusual about her, even about her appearance. But at first he had found that simply attractive. She was neither big nor clumsy but she was broadly built; her brow was broad and her dark grey eyes were unusually wide apart; the corners of her full mouth drooped gravely and at times she had a way of moving that was, so to speak, absentminded, preoccupied. At first he had valued all this as 'distinction,' but later he had come rather to think of her as 'unusual.' She was far more unusual than the faint foreignness of her Scotch origin and the slow deliberation of her speech justified her in being.

He had never liked her people, which was odd because he had hardly seen anything of them. She had come into his world, as it seemed at first, romantically. He had met her at a publisher's cocktail party, she had been invited there rather for her ambitions than her performance, and she had told him then that her people lived in the Outer Hebrides and that they opposed her wish to study and write. She had just spoken of them as 'people'. She had won scholarships at a Glasgow high school. She had got to the university and so worked her way to London in defiance of them. She had written poetry, she told him, and she wanted to see it printed.

But London, she said, wasn't quite what she had expected it to be. London astonished, frightened, and stimulated her, and kept on seeming stranger and stranger. She was not growing accustomed to it. People were always saying and doing the most unaccountable things.

'At times,' she said, 'I feel like a stray from another world. But then, you know, I felt very much the same when I was at home in the islands where I was born. Have you ever had that feeling? All you people here seem so sure of your world and of yourselves.'

It was when she said this that the idea of guiding this quiet, unsure, and lovely young stranger to all the braveries of life entered the head of Mr. Joseph Davis. It was so exceptional to meet an intelligent young woman who seemed unsure of herself and who was willing to be taught and hadn't already, in an irrational hurry to begin, taken the braveries of life to herself in her own fashion. It was not so much a candid inviting white virginity as an elusive elfin one she had. Here, he thought, was something fine and unformed to mould and shape and write flourishes upon.

He went about thinking of her more and more, with all those exploratory impulses aroused in him which constitute falling in love. He was soon completely in love with her.

When he offered to read some of her verse, she said she didn't want it read, she just wanted to see it in print and read it herself. When at last he saw it he liked it. It was like a missionary's translations from the Chinese; mostly vivid little word pictures. From the point of view of publication and running the gauntlet of all these modern poets and reviewers who cut you up with one hand and cut you out with the other, he did not think it likely to be successful. But it

had nevertheless a curious simplicity, a curious directness and a faint wistful flavour.

He learnt that she was living in a student's hostel in Bloomsbury, he established contacts with her and he was able to take her about very freely. Perhaps at one time he had thought simply of becoming her first lover, but she had an unobtrusive defensiveness that marriage was the only way to her.

Two rawboned fishermen in bonnets and broadcloth suddenly appeared in London to 'take a look at him' when the marriage was mooted. They were the most astonishing and unexpected 'people' for her to produce. They had her dark colouring and dark grey eyes like hers, but otherwise they were singularly unlike her. Brawny they were. They had none of her manifest fineness and restraint.

'You'll have to take great care of her,' they told him, 'for she's been the treasure of our eyes. She's better than we and we know it. Why we ever let her persuade us that she had to come on to London is more than we can explain, but the mischief's been done and you've got her.'

'She's lovely. You're telling me that?' said Davis, and the elder brother, darkly reproachful, said: 'Aye. We're telling you.'

They stayed in London until the wedding, and entertaining them was a little like making hay with seaweed. They seemed to keep on looking at him and passing Hebridean judgments on him. They were full of unspoken things.

He would say things to them and they would say: 'Eh'—just 'Eh.' Not an interrogative 'Eh?' but an ambiguous acknowledgment.

They got drunk in a dutiful, dubious, and melancholy way for the registry office, and the last he saw of them was on the platform at Victoria when he carried her off to show her the wonders of Paris. They were standing together grave and distrustful, not gesticulating nor waving good-bye but each holding up a great red hand as who should say: 'We're here.'

And when at last the curve hid them and he pulled up the carriage window and turned to her to meet the love-light in her eyes she said to him: 'And now you are going to show me the real world and all those cities and lakes and mountains where at last we shall feel at home.'

Only she never did seem to feel at home.

She never talked about this family of hers to him, after the transit of these two samples, and she corresponded with them with an infrequent regularity. She never gave him any reason to suppose she cared very much for them. But the fact which presently became apparent, that, unlike him, she was a good sailor and loved wind and rough seas, seemed to link her to them rather than to him. Many husbands have objected to their wives' relations because they were too near, but he found he objected to hers because they were too remote. And also she loved mountains and crags and precipitous places. He didn't. They climbed the Matterhorn at great expense, he gave more trouble to the guides than she did, and at the summit she seemed to be pleased but still gravely looking for more.

Once on holiday in Cornwall they had been basking together on the beach after lunch and suddenly her pose, as she sat thinking, reminded him of a picture he had seen somewhere of Undine, La Motte Fouques Undine, sweet and detached, looking across the far levels of the sea, lost in some unimaginable reverie. Undine too had had some uncouth and menacing brothers. That was when the fancy of her as a sort of changeling, as something ultra-terrestrial and not quite human first came to him. That was when 'fey' came out of the vocabulary.

This Undine suggestion hung about for months. First he let this exaggeration of her faint unearthliness play mischievously in his mind, and then he tried to restrain and banish it. Sometimes he tried to persuade himself that every man's wife is really an Undine, but he could never make really convincing observations in that matter. Maybe, he thought, you never get near enough to any woman but your own wife to appreciate her remoteness.

A multitude of possibly quite accidental divergences grouped themselves about that 'fey'.

He spun the thread of that word's suggestion into a web about her. It swept aside the one worse alternative that conceivably she was just simple and lacking in aesthetic enterprise. At first that 'fey' was a fantastic exaggeration and then it became more and more an observation, an explanation for her undeniable detachment from so much that excited and stirred him, and from so much that he believed ought to excite and stir anybody. That struggle of his ideals

with a dark underworld of doubts, which made it urgent for him to keep thinking, feeling, appreciating—like an urgent skater over thin ice and a cold abyss of disbelief—had no counterpart. She could keep still and remain content in her convictions, in something deep—whatever it was that she knew and did not communicate.

There was no malice in her detachment from him. He could have understood malice better. He had seen mutual jealousy and mutual detraction often enough among his married friends. The better the artists the worse the lovers. He understood that fight for individual assertion which makes love a legendary unreality, a blend of fantasy and grossness, in the world of the intelligentsia. But this was not the assertion of an individuality; it was a complete indifference to his values. It was a foreignness—to the whole world.

Whenever Mr. Davis had a slump in his vitality he realized this widening estrangement from his wife more acutely. The lower the ebb the intenser the realization. And this day his realization was exceptionally vivid ...

This very morning she had made a remark that stirred him to a protest he abandoned in despair. There was to be a big concert at the Pantehnicon Hall with Rodhammer conducting. He was enthusiastic for going. She did not want to go.

He argued against her disinclination. 'You used to like music.'

'But I have heard music, dearest.'

'*Heard* music! My dear, what a queer way to put things!'

She shook her head from side to side without speaking. There was a time when the self-assurance of her faint smile had seemed very lovely to him. Mona Lisa and all that, but now it irritated him with a sense of invincible and unapproachable opposition.

'But you've only heard Rodhammer once before!'

'Why should I want to hear Rodhammer again—a little better or not so good?'

'But music!'

'There's a limit to music,' she said.

'A limit!'

'I've a feeling that I've done with music. It was wonderful, charming, sustaining, all that music we went to hear—to begin with. I loved that as much as I've loved anything. But if one has taken music in—hasn't one taken it in?'

'Taken it in! You mean—?' he tried.

'I mean you don't always want to be sitting down to attend to it after you've heard—what there is to it. We aren't—professional.'

Professional! When she did use words she used them in a very deadly fashion. 'I never tire of music,' he said.

'But does the sort of music there is say anything—does it say anything fresh?'

'It's eternally fresh.'

'How?'

'He made a hopeless gesture. 'But why have you become indifferent?'

'But why are you still so enthusiastic?'

'But don't you get—something wonderful? An exaltation? A world of absolute sensuous emotion?'

'No—I did at first. A sort of exaltation. I agree. And still I like—rhythm. It's pleasant to hear music going on, but it's no longer something I want to listen to especially. Going to hear music in concerts seems to me like going to see pictures in galleries ... Or reading anthologies... . Or looking over a collection of butterflies in a museum... . A time comes... .'

'Then, in short, you won't go to the concert?'

'I feel a little tired but I will go if you like.'

'Oh! not like that,' he said and ended their talk.

But he went over it again in his own mind and now he was going over it once more. He knew people to whom music meant much and people to whom music meant little, but to take up music as Mary had, in a spirit of glad discovery, and then to put it down again as one might put down an unimportant novel, distressed his mind. But that was how she seemed to deal with everything in life. Even with friendship, even with love, she had that same flash of interest,

that rapid appreciation, and then she turned away. To what?

He spoke aloud, addressing Lower Regent Street: 'You can't *afford* to give up music like that. You can't *afford* to give up art.'



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