

Imogen sat down at the dressing table and combed her hair. It had been fair in childhood and was now a pale brown. There was no pronounced colouring in her appearance. Her eyes were large and round, but though they were a true grey her lack of complexion, providing them with no heightening contrast, left their colour sometimes uncertain. The charm of her looks, so far as it depended on purely visual effect, was that of shape and contour. Her head was poised very gracefully on her neck, her upper lip had the true outline of the cupid's bow, her bosom was round and her waist small. The fault in her appearance came from temperament: she looked too often harassed or wistful, or to have withdrawn behind a cloud. Her step was naturally light and she was apt to walk with a slight, pensive bend of the head; at times these characteristics became so marked that their effect was as irritating to a highly strung man as would have been the presence of some Amazonian hockey player tramping through the house. Not, however, to a man who saw her infrequently and for whom her ways and mannerisms had the enchanting quality of some favourite work of art.

Looking at her reflection with keen, practical attention, Imogen thought again, as she had often done in the past two hours, of Paul Nugent. She divined the nature of his feeling for her and though he was not a man on whom her affections would have settled of their own accord, she was a little agitated by it. If he had ever shown the slightest sign of giving way to his fondness, even of speaking of it, she would have become greatly moved by it; as it remained unspoken, it was no more than slightly troubling, a little painful, rather pleasurable, melancholy and interesting. She sat, her eyes withdrawn from her reflection and fixed sightlessly on the hands clasped in her lap. When she raised them again, she saw by

the travelling clock beside her that nearly half an hour must have gone by since their arrival. The housekeeper would be waiting to hear that they were ready for tea. She rose quickly and, turning towards the right-hand window, saw to her surprise that Evelyn and Miss Silcox were still in conversation. Evelyn still stood with one hand on the gate, the other tucked behind his back. He must be speaking, she supposed, for Blanche was standing silent, looking a little down over the bulk of her jacket. 'We must ask her to tea,' thought Imogen, and it passed through her mind that it was fortunate that Blanche's walk to the village had brought her to their gate almost to the minute of their arrival. The end window was not usually opened, and while Imogen unlocked the sashes before raising the lower one, she had the scene below full in her eye. She noticed again their unmoving position, and that the light while still limpid gold above the trees had died away from the undergrowth which now pressed dense and dark around the gate. The grind of the sash made them both look up, and before Imogen could call out her greeting and invitation, Blanche had given her a brisk nod and set off down the road followed by three Yorkshire terriers veiled in waterfalls of hair like spun glass. A rough-looking Airedale plunged out of the bushes and followed their retreating forms. Evelyn's face raised to the window bore its frequent look of repressed irritation. 'But it cannot be meant for me this time,' Imogen thought. 'I was doing the right thing.' It was an idea of Evelyn's which she tried hard to disprove, that she did not care for any friends of his.

'She had to get home,' he called up. 'Her sister and the children are here for the week-end.'