

# The Coryston Family

## A NOVEL

BY MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

### CHAPTER III

"**H**ER ladyship says she would like to see you, miss, before you go." The speaker was Lady Coryston's maid. She stood just within the doorway of the room where Marcia was dressing for the opera, delivering her message mechanically, but really absorbed in the spectacle presented by the young girl before her. Sewell was an artist in her own sphere, and secretly envious of the greater range of combination which Marcia's youth and beauty made possible for the persons who dressed her, as compared with Lady Coryston. There are all kinds of subtle variants, no doubt, in "black," such as Lady Coryston habitually wore; and the costliness of them left nothing to be desired. But when she saw Marcia clothed in a new Worth or Paquin, Sewell was sorely tempted to desert her elderly mistress and go in search of a young one.

"Come in, Sewell," cried Marcia. "What do you think of it?"

The woman eagerly obeyed her. Marcia's little maid Bellows did the honors, and the two experts, in an ecstasy, chattered the language of their craft, while Marcia, amid her shimmering white and pink, submitted good-humoredly to being pulled about and twisted round, till, after endless final touches, she was at last pronounced the perfect thing.

Then she ran across the passage to her mother's sitting-room. Lady Coryston had complained of illness during the day and had not been down-stairs. But Marcia's experience was that when her mother was ill she was not less, but more, active than usual, and that withdrawal to her sitting-room generally meant a concentration of energy.

Lady Coryston was sitting with a writing-board on her knee, and a reading-lamp beside her lighting a table covered

with correspondence. Within her reach was a deep cupboard in the wall containing estate and business letters, elaborately labeled and subdivided. A revolving bookcase near carried a number of books of reference, and at her elbow, with the paper-knife inside it, lay a copy of the *Quarterly Review*. The walls of the room were covered with books—a fine collection of county histories, a large number of historical memoirs and biographies. In a corner, specially lit, a large bust of the late Lord Coryston conveyed to a younger generation the troubled, interrogative look which in later life had been the normal look of the original. His portrait by Holl hung over the mantelpiece, flanked on either side by water-color pictures of his sons and daughter in their childhood.

There was only one comfortable chair in the room, and Lady Coryston never sat in it. She objected to flowers as being in the way; and there was not a sign anywhere of the photographs and small knickknacks which generally belitter a woman's sitting-room. Altogether, an ugly room, but characteristic, businesslike, and not without a dignity of its own.

"Mother!—why don't you rest a little?" cried Marcia, eying the black-robed figure and the long, pale face, marked by very evident fatigue. "You've been writing letters or seeing people all day. How long did James stay?"

"About an hour."

"And Mr. Page?" Mr. Page was the agent of the main Coryston estate.

"Some time. There was a great deal to settle."

"Did you"—the girl fidgeted—"did you tell him about Coryston?"

"Certainly. He says there is only one house in the neighborhood he could take—"

"He has taken it." Marcia opened her right hand, in which she crushed a telegram. "Bellows has just brought me this." Lady Coryston opened and read it.

"Have taken Knatchett for three years. Tell mother." Lady Coryston's lips stiffened.

"He has lost no time. He can vex and distress us, of course. We shall have to bear it."

"Vex and distress us! I should think he can!" cried Marcia. "Has James been talking to him?"

"I dare say," said Lady Coryston; adding with a slight sarcastic laugh, "James is a little too sure of being always in the right."

From which Marcia guessed that James had not only been talking to Coryston, but also remonstrating with his mother, which no doubt accounted for Lady Coryston's worn-out looks. James had more effect upon her than most people; though never quite effect enough.

Marcia stood with one foot on the fender, her gaze fixed on her mother in a frowning abstraction. And suddenly Lady Coryston, lifting her eyes, realized her daughter and the vision that she made.

"You look very well, Marcia. Have I seen that dress before?"

"No. I designed it last week. Ah!"—the sound of a distant gong made itself heard—"there's the motor. Well, good night, mother. Take care of yourself, and do go to bed soon."

She stooped to kiss her mother.

"Who's going with you?"

"Waggin and James. Arthur may come in. He thinks the House will be up early. And I asked Mr. Lester. But he can't come for the first part."

Her mother held her sleeve, and looked up smiling—Lady Coryston's smiles were scarcely less formidable than her frowns.

"You expect to see Edward Newbury?"

"I dare say. They have their box as usual."

"Well!—run off and enjoy yourself. Give my love to Miss Wagstaffe."

"Waggin" was waiting in the hall for Marcia. She had been Miss Coryston's governess for five years, and was now in retirement on a small income,

partly supplied by a pension from Lady Coryston. It was understood that when she was wanted to act *duenna* she came—at a moment's notice. And she was very willing to come. She lived in an Earl's Court lodging, and these occasional expeditions with Marcia represented for her the gilt on her modest gingerbread. She was a small, refined woman, with a figure still slender, gray hair, and a quiet face. Her dresses were years old, but she had a wonderful knack of bringing them up to date, and she never did Marcia any discredit. She adored Marcia, and indeed all the family. Lady Coryston called her "Miss Wagstaffe"—but to the others, sons and daughters, she was only "Waggin." There were very few things about the Coryston family she did not know; but her discretion was absolute.

As she saw Marcia running downstairs, her face lit up.

"My dear, what a lovely gown!—and how sweet you look!"

"Don't talk nonsense, Waggin!—and put on this rose I've brought for you!"

Waggin submitted while Marcia adorned her and gave various pats and pulls to her hair.

"There!—you look ten years younger," said the girl, with her bright look, stepping back. "But where is James?"

The butler stepped forward. "Mr. James will meet you at the opera."

"Oh, good!" murmured Marcia in her companion's ear. "Now we can croon."

And croon they did through the long, crowded way to Covent Garden. By the time the motor reached St. Martin's Lane, Waggin was in possession of all that had happened. She had long expected it, having shrewdly noted many signs of Lady Coryston's accumulating wrath. But now that "Corry," her dear "Corry," with whom she had fought so many a school-room fight in the days of his Eton jackets, was really disinherited, her concern was great. Tears stood in her kind eyes. "Poor Corry!" alternated in her mouth with "Your poor mother!" Sinner and judge appealed equally to her pity.

Marcia meanwhile sat erect and fierce.

"What else could he expect? Father *did* leave the estates to mother—just because Corry had taken up such views—so that she might keep us straight."

"But *afterward!* My dear, he is so young!— And young men change."

Lady Coryston's death was not, of course, to be mentioned—except with this awe and vagueness—scarcely to be thought of. But hotter revolutionists than Corry have turned Tories by forty. Waggin harped on this theme.

Marcia shook her head.

"He won't change. Mother did not ask it. All she asked was—for her sake and father's—that he should hold his tongue."

A flush sprang to Waggin's faded cheek. "A *man!*—a grown man!" she said, wondering—"forbid him to speak out—speak freely?"

Marcia looked anxiously at her companion. It was very seldom that Waggin betrayed so much heat.

"I know," said the girl, gloomily. "'Your money or your life'—for I suppose it sounds like that. Corry would say his convictions are his life. But why 'a man,' Waggin?" She straightened her pretty shoulders. "I don't believe you'd mind if it were a woman. You don't believe in a *woman* having convictions!"

Waggin looked a little bewildered.

"I'm old-fashioned, I suppose—but—"

Marcia laughed triumphantly.

"Why shouldn't Corry respect his mother's convictions? She wants to prove that women oughtn't to shrink from fighting for what they believe, even—"

"Even with their sons?" said Waggin, tremulously. "Lady Coryston is so splendid—so splendid!"

"Even with their sons!" cried Marcia, vehemently. "You take it for granted, Waggin, that they trample on their daughters!"

Waggin protested, and slipped her thin hand into the girl's. The note of storm in Marcia's mood struck her sharply. She tried for a moment to change the subject. Who, she asked, was a tall, fair girl, whom she had seen with Mr. Arthur, "a week ago" at the National Gallery? "I took my little niece—and suddenly I turned, and there at the end of the room were Mr. Arthur—and this lady. Such a remarkable-looking young woman!—not exactly handsome—but you couldn't possibly pass her over."

"Enid Glenwilliam!" exclaimed Marcia, with a startled voice. "But, of course, Waggin, they weren't alone?"

"Oh no—probably not!—though—though I didn't see any one else. They seemed so full of talk—I didn't speak to Mr. Arthur. *Who* do you say she was?" repeated Waggin, innocently.

Marcia turned upon her.

"The daughter of the man mother hates most in the world! It's too bad of Arthur! It's abominable! It would kill mother if she knew! I've heard things said sometimes—but I never believed them for a moment. Oh, Waggin!—you *didn't* see them alone?"

The voice changed into what was almost a wail of indignation. "Of course, Enid Glenwilliam would never consider appearances for a moment. She does exactly what suits her. She never bothers about chaperons, unless she absolutely must. When she sees what she wants, she takes it. But *Arthur!*"

Marcia leaned back in the car, and as in the crush of traffic they passed under a lamp Waggin saw a countenance of genuine distress.

"Oh, my dear, I'm so sorry to have worried you. How stupid of me to mention it. I'm sure there's nothing in it."

"I've half suspected it for the last month," said Marcia, with low-toned emphasis. "But I wouldn't believe it!—I shall tell Arthur what I think of him! Though, mind you, I admire Enid Glenwilliam myself enormously; but that's quite another thing. It's as though mother were never to have any pleasure in any of us! Nothing but worry and opposition!—behind her back, too."

"My dear!—it was probably nothing! Girls do just as they like nowadays, and who notices!" said Waggin, disingenuously. "And as to pleasing your mother, I know somebody who has only to put out her hand—"

"To please mother—and somebody else?" said Marcia, turning toward her with perfect composure. "You're thinking of Edward Newbury?"

"Who else should I be thinking of!—after all you told me last week?"

"Oh, yes—I like Edward Newbury"—the tone betrayed a curious irritation—"and apparently he likes me. But if he tries to make me answer him too soon,

I shall say No, Waggin, and there will be an end of it!"

"Marcia—dearest!—don't be cruel to him!"

"No—but he mustn't press me! I've given him hints—and he won't take them. I can't make up my mind, Waggin. I can't! It's not only marrying him—it's the relations. Yesterday a girl I know described a week-end to me—at Hoddon Grey. A large, smart party—evening prayers in the private chapel, *before dinner!*—nobody allowed to breakfast in bed—everybody driven off to church—and such a *fuss* about Lent! It made me shiver. I'm not that sort, Waggin—I never shall be."

And as again a stream of light from a music-hall façade poured into the carriage, Waggin was aware of a flushed, rebellious countenance and dark eyes full of some passionate feeling not very easy to understand.

"He is at your feet, dear goose!" murmured the little gray-haired lady; "make your own conditions!"

"No, no!—never. Not with Edward Newbury! He seems the softest, kindest—and underneath—*iron!* Most people are taken in. I'm not."

There was silence in the car. Waggin was uneasily pondering. Nothing—she knew it—would be more acceptable to Lady Coryston than this match, though she was in no sense a scheming mother, and had never taken any special pains on Marcia's behalf. Her mind was too full of other things. Still undoubtedly this would suit her. Old family—the young man himself heir-presumptive to a marquisate—money—high character—everything that mortal mother could desire. And Marcia was attracted—Waggin was certain of it. The mingled feeling with which she spoke of him proved it to the hilt. And yet—let not Mr. Newbury suppose that she was to be easily run to earth! In Waggin's opinion he had his work cut out for him.

Covent Garden filled from floor to ceiling with a great audience for an important "first night"—there is no sight in London perhaps that ministers more sharply to the lust of modern eyes and the pride of modern life. Women reign supreme in it. The whole object of it is

to provide the most gorgeous setting possible for a world of women—women old and young—their beauty, or their jewels, their white necks and their gray heads; the roses that youth wears—divinely careless—or the diamonds wherewith age must make amends for lost bloom and vanished years.

Marcia never entered the Coryston box, which held one of the most coveted positions on the grand tier, without a vague thrill of exultation; that instinctive, overbearing delight in the goods of Vanity Fair which the Greek called *hubris*, and which is only vile when it outlives youth. It meant in her—"I am young—I am handsome—the world is all on my side—who shall thwart or deny me?" To wealth, indeed, Marcia rarely gave a conscious thought, although an abundance of it was implied in all her actions and attitudes of mind. It would have seemed to her, at any rate, so strange to be without it that poverty was not so much an object of compassion as of curiosity; the poverty, for instance, of such a man as Mr. Lester. But behind this ignorance there was no hardness of heart; only a narrow inexperience.

The overture had begun—in a shadowy house. But the stream of the audience was still pouring in from all sides, in spite of the indignant "Hush!" of those who wanted not to lose a note of something new and difficult. Marcia sat in the front of the box, conscious of being much looked at, and raising her own opera-glass from time to time, especially to watch the filling up of two rows of chairs on the floor just below the lower tier of boxes. It was there that Mr. Newbury had told her to look for him. James, who had joined them at the entrance of the theater and was now hanging on the music, observed her once or twice uneasily. Presently he bent over.

"Marcia—you vandal!—listen!"

The girl started and blushed.

"I don't understand the music, James!—it's so strange and barbarous."

"Well, it isn't Glück, certainly," said James, smiling.

Marcia turned her face toward it. And as she did so there rose from the crash of its opening tumult, like a hovering bird in a clear space of sky, a floating song of extraordinary loveliness. It

rose and fell—winds caught it—snatches of tempest overpowered it—shrieking demons rushed upon it and silenced it. But it persisted; passing finally into a processional march, through which it was still dimly, mysteriously traceable to the end.

"The song of Iphigeneia!" said James. And, as the curtain rose, "And there are the gulfs of Aulis and the Greek host."

The opera, by a young Bavarian of genius, a follower of Strauss, who had but recently captured Munich and Berlin, was based on the great play of Euripides, freely treated by a translator who had known, a hundred and fifty years after Glück, how to make it speak, through music, to more modern ears. It was carried through without any lowering of the curtain, and the splendid story unfolded itself through a music at once sensuous and heroic, with a swiftness and a passion which had soon gripped Covent Garden.

There, in a thousand ships, bound motionless by unrelenting winds, lies the allied host that is to conquer Troy and bring back the stolen Helen. But at the bidding of Artemis, whose temple crowns the coast, fierce, contrary blasts keep it prisoned in the harbor. Hellas cannot avenge itself on the Phrygian barbarians who have carried off a free Greek woman. Artemis holds back the hunters from the prey. Why? Because, as goddess of the land, she claims her toll, the toll of human blood. Agamemnon, the leader of the host, distracted by fears of revolt and of the breaking up of the army, has vowed to Artemis the dearest thing he possesses. The answer is, "Your daughter!—Iphigeneia!"

Under pressure from the other chiefs of the host and from the priests, the stricken father consents at last to send a letter to Clytemnestra at Argos, bidding her bring their young daughter to the camp, on the pretext that she is to become the bride of the hero Achilles. The letter is no sooner despatched than, tormented with remorse, he tries to recall it. In vain. Mother and child arrive, with the babe Orestes; the mother full of exultant joy in such a marriage, the daughter thinking only of her father, on whose neck she throws herself with fond, home prattle, lifting Orestes to him to

kiss, saying tender, touching things—how she has missed him—how long the time has been . . .

The young singer, an American, with a voice and a magic reminding many an old frequenter of Covent Garden, through all difference, of Giulia Ravogli in her prime, played this poignant scene as though the superb music in which it was clothed was her natural voice, the mere fitting breath of the soul.

Marcia sat arrested. The door of the box opened softly. A young man, smiling, stood in the doorway. Marcia, looking round, flushed deeply: but in the darkness only Waggin saw it. The girl beckoned to him. He came in noiselessly, nodded to James, bowed ceremoniously to Waggin, and took a seat beside Marcia.

He bent toward her—whispering, "I saw you weren't very full; and I wanted to hear this—with you."

"She's good!" was all that Marcia could find to whisper in return, with a motion of her face toward the Iphigeneia.

"Yes—but only as part of the poem! Don't mistake it—please!—for the ordinary 'star' business."

"But she is the play!"

"She is the *idea*! She is the immortal beauty that springs out of sorrow. Watch the contrast between the death she shrinks from—and the death she accepts; between the horror—and the greatness! Listen!—here is the dirge music beginning."

Marcia listened—with a strange tremor of pulse. Even through the stress of the music her mind went wandering over the past weeks and those various incidents which had marked the growth of her acquaintance with the man beside her. How long had she known him? Since Christmas only? The Newburys and the Corystons were now neighbors indeed in the country; but it was not long since his father had inherited the old house of Hoddon Grey, and of the preceding three years Edward Newbury had spent nearly two in India. They had met first at a London dinner-party; and their friendship, then begun, had ripened rapidly. But it was not till the Shrewsbury House ball that a note of excitement, of uncertain or thrilled expectation, had crept into what was at first a mere pleasant companionship.



She had danced with him the whole night, reckless of comment; and had been since, it seemed to her, mostly engaged in trying to avoid him.

But to-night there was no avoiding him. And as his murmured yet eager comments on the opera reached her, she became more and more conscious of his feelings toward her, which were thus conveyed to her, as it were, covertly, and indirectly, through the high poetry and passion of the spectacle on which they both looked. With every stage of it, Newbury was revealing himself, and exploring her.

Waggin smiled to herself in the darkness of the box. James and she once exchanged glances. Marcia, to both of them, was a dim and beautiful vision, as she sat with her loosely clasped hands lying on the edge of the box, her dark head now turned toward the stage and now toward Newbury.

The ghastly truth had been revealed; Iphigeneia—within earshot almost of the baffled army clamoring for her blood—was clinging to her father's knees, imploring him to save her:

"Tears will I bring—my only cunning—all I have! Round your knees, my father, I twine this body, which my mother bare you. Slay me not before my time! Sweet, sweet is the light!—drive me not down into the halls of death. 'Twas I first called you father—I, your first-born. What fault have I in Paris's sin? Oh, father, why, why did he ever come—to be my death? Turn to me—give me a look—a kiss! So that at least, in dying, I may have that to remember—if you will not heed my prayers."

She takes the infant Orestes in her arms:

"Brother!—you are but a tiny helper—and yet—come, weep with me!—come, pray our father not to slay your sister. Look, father, how—silently—he implores you! Have pity! Oh, light, light, dearest of all goods to men! He is mad indeed who prays for death. Better an ill living than a noble dying!"

The music rose and fell like dashing waves upon a fearful coast—through one of the most agonizing scenes ever imagined by poet, ever expressed in art. Wonderful theme!—the terror-stricken

anguish of the girl, little more than a child, startled suddenly from bridal dreams into this open-eyed vision of a hideous doom; the helpless remorse of the father; the misery of the mother; and behind it all the pitiless fate—the savage creed—the blood-thirst of the goddess—and the maddened army howling for its prey.

Marcia covered her eyes a moment. "Horrible!" she said, shivering—"too horrible!"

Newbury shook his head, smiling.

"No! You'll see. She carries in her hands the fate of her race—of the Hellenic, the nobler world, threatened by the barbarian, the baser world. She dies to live. It's the motive of all great art—all religion. Ah—here is Achilles!"

There followed the strangest, pitifulest love-scene. Achilles, roused to fury by the foul use made of his great name in the plot against the girl, adopts the shrinking, lovely creature as his own. She has been called his bride; she shall be his bride; and he will fight for her—die for her—if need be. And suddenly, amid the clashing horror of the story, there springs up for an instant the red flower of love. Iphigeneia stands dumb in the background, while her mother wails, and Achilles, the goddess-born, puts on his armor and his golden-crested helmet. An exultant sword-song rises from the orchestra. There is a gleam of hope; and the girl, as she looks at her champion, loves him.

The music sank into tenderness, flowing like a stream in summer. And the whole vast audience seemed to hold its breath.

"Marvelous!" The word was Newbury's.

He turned to look at his companion, and the mere energy of his feeling compelled Marcia's eyes to his. Involuntarily she smiled an answer.

But the golden moment dies—forever. Shrieking and crashing, the vulture—forces of destruction sweep upon it. Messengers rush in, announcing blow on blow. Achilles' own Myrmidons have turned against him. Agamemnon is threatened—Achilles—Argos! The murderous cries of the army fill the distance like the roar of an uncaged beast.

Iphigeneia raises her head. The sav-

age, inexorable music still surges and thunders round her. And just as Achilles is about to leave her, in order to throw himself on the spears of his own men, her trance breaks.

"Mother!—we cannot fight with gods. I die!—I die! But let me die gloriously—unafraid. Hellas calls to me!—Hellas, my country. I alone can give her what she asks—fair sailing and fair victory. You bore me for the good of Hellas—not for your own joy only, mother! Shall men brave all for women and their fatherland?—and shall one life, one little life—stand in their way? Nay! I give myself to Hellas! Slay me!—pull down the towers of Troy! This through all time shall be sung of me—this be my glory!—this, child and husband both. Hellas, through me, shall conquer. It is meet that Hellenes should rule barbarians, and not barbarians Hellenes. For they are slave-folk—and *we* are free!"

Achilles cries out in mingled adoration and despair. Now he knows her for what she is—now that he has "looked into her soul"—must he lose her?—is it all over? He pleads again that he may fight and die for her.

But she puts him gently aside.

"Die not for me, kind stranger! Slay no man for me! Let it be *my* boon to save Hellas, if I may."

And under her sternly sweet command he goes, telling her that he will await her beside the altar of Artemis, there to give his life for her still, if she calls to him—even at the last moment.

But she, tenderly embracing her mother and the child Orestes, forbidding all thought of vengeance, silencing all clamor of grief—she lifts the song of glorious death as she slowly passes from view, on her way to the place of sacrifice, the Greek women chanting round her.

"Hail, Hellas, Mother-land! Hail, light-giving Day—torch of Zeus!"

"To another life and to an unknown fate I go! Farewell, dear light!—farewell!"

"That," said Newbury, gently, to Marcia only, as the music died away, "is the death—*she accepts!*" Tears stood in the girl's eyes. The exaltation of great passion, great poetry, had touched her, mingled strangely with the spell, the resisted spell, of youth and sex.

Newbury's dark, expressive face, its proud refinement, its sensitive feeling; the growing realization in her of his strong, exacting personality; the struggle of her weaker will against an advancing master; fascination—revolt; of all these things she was conscious, as they both sat drowned in the passion of applause which was swelling through the opera-house, and her eyes were still vaguely following that white figure on the stage, with the bouquets at its feet. . . .

Bright eyes sought her own; a hand reached out, caught hers, and pressed it. She recoiled—released herself sharply. Then she saw that Edward Newbury had risen, and that at the door of the box stood Sir Wilfrid Bury.

Edward Newbury gave up his seat to Sir Wilfrid, and stood against the back of the box talking to Waggin. But she could not flatter herself he paid much attention to her remarks. Marcia could not see him; but his eyes were on her perpetually. A wonderfully handsome fellow, thought Waggin: the profile and brow perfect, the head fine, the eyes full—too full!—of consciousness, as though the personality behind burned with too intense a flame. Waggin liked him, and was in some sort afraid of him. Never did her small talk seem to her so small as when she launched it at Edward Newbury. And yet no one among the young men of Marcia's acquaintance showed so much courtesy to Marcia's "companion."

"Oh, very fine! very fine!" said Sir Wilfrid; "but I wanted a big fight—Achilles and his Myrmidons going for the other fellows—and somebody having the decency to burn the temple of that hag Artemis! I say!"—he spoke, smiling, in Marcia's ear—"your brother Arthur's in very bad company! Do you see where he is? Look at the box opposite."

Marcia raised her opera-glass and saw Enid Glenwilliam sitting in front of the box to which Sir Wilfrid pointed her. The Chancellor's daughter was bending her white neck back to talk to a man behind her, who was clearly Arthur Coryston. Behind her also, with his hands in his pockets, and showing a vast expanse of shirt-front, was a big, burly man, who stood looking out on the animated spectacle which the opera-house presented,

in this interval between the opera and the ballet, with a look half contemptuous, half dreamy. It was a figure wholly out of keeping—in spite of its conformity in dress—with the splendid opera-house and the bejeweled crowd which filled it. In some symbolic group of modern statuary it might have stood for the Third Estate—for Democracy—Labor—personified. But it was a Third Estate, as the modern world has developed it—armed with all the weapons of the other two!

"The Chancellor himself!" said Sir Wilfrid; "watching 'the little victims play!' I picture him figuring up all these smart people. 'How much can I get out of you?—and you?'"

Marcia abruptly put down the glass she held and turned to Sir Wilfrid. He was her godfather, and he had been her particular friend since the days when they used to go off together to the Zoo or the Pantomime.

"Do, please, talk to Arthur!" she said, eagerly, but so as not to be heard by any one else. "Perhaps he'd listen to you. People are beginning to notice—and it's too, too dreadful. You know what mother would feel!"

"I do," said Sir Wilfrid, gravely; "if that's what you mean." His eyes rested a moment on the striking figure of the Chancellor's daughter. "Certainly—I'll put in a word. But she is a very fascinating young woman, my dear!"

"I know," said Marcia, helplessly—"I know."

There was a pause. Then Sir Wilfrid asked:

"When do you go down to Coryston?"  
"Just before Whitsuntide."

He looked round with a smile, saw that Edward Newbury was still in the box, and whispered, mischievously:

"Hoddon Grey, too, I think, will not be empty?"

Marcia kept an indifferent face.

"I dare say. You're coming?" Sir Wilfrid nodded. "Oh, have you heard—?"

She murmured to him behind her fan. Sir Wilfrid knew all their history—had been her father's most intimate friend. She gave him a rapid account of Coryston's disinheriting. The old man rose, his humorous eyes suddenly grave.

"We'll talk of this—at Coryston. Ah,

Newbury—I took your chair—I resign. Hullo, Lester—good evening! Heavens, there's the curtain going up! Good night."

He hurried away. Newbury moved forward, his eager look on Marcia. But she turned, smiling, to the young librarian.

"You haven't seen this ballet, Mr. Lester?—Schumann's 'Carnival'? Oh, you mustn't stand so far back. We can make room, can't we?" She addressed Newbury, and before he knew what had happened the chairs had been so manipulated that Lester sat between Marcia and Newbury, while Waggin had drawn back into the shadow. The eyes of Marcia's duenna twinkled. It pleased her that this magnificent young man, head, it was said, of the young High Church party, distinguished in many ways, and as good as he was handsome, was not to have too easy a game. Marcia had clearly lost her head a little at the Shrewsbury House ball, and was now trying to recover it.

#### CHAPTER IV

AFTER one of those baffling fortnights of bitter wind and cold which so often mark the beginning of an English May, when all that the spring has slowly gained since March seems to be confiscated afresh by returning winter, the weather had repented itself, the skies had cleared, and suddenly, under a flood of sunshine, there were bluebells in the copses, cowslips in the fields, a tawny leaf breaking on the oaks, a new cheerfulness in the eyes and gait of the countryman.

A plain, pleasant-looking woman sat sewing out of doors, in front of a small verandahed cottage, perched high on a hillside which commanded a wide view of central England. The chalk down fell beneath her into a sheath of beechwoods; the line of hills, slope behind slope, ran westward to the sunset, while eastward it mounted to a wooded crest beyond which the cottage could not look. Northward, beginning some six hundred feet below the cottage, stretched a wide and varied country, dotted with villages and farms, with houses and woods, till it lost itself in the haze of a dim horizon.

A man of middle age, gray-headed,



spare in figure, emerged from one of the French windows of the cottage.

"Marion! when did you say that you expected Enid?"

"Between three and four, papa."

"I don't believe Glenwilliam himself will get here at all. There will be a long Cabinet this afternoon, and another tomorrow probably—Sunday or no Sunday!"

"Well, then, he won't come, father," said the daughter, placidly, thrusting her hand into a sock riddled with holes and looking at it with concern.

"Annoying! I wanted him to meet Coryston—who said he would be here to tea."

Miss Atherstone looked a little startled.

"Will that do, father? You know Enid told me to ask Arthur Coryston, and I wrote yesterday."

"Do? Why not? Because of politics? They must have got used to that in the Coryston family! Or because of the gossip that Arthur is to have the estates? But it's not his fault. I hear the two brothers are on excellent terms. They say that Arthur has warned his mother that he means to make it up to Coryston somehow."

"Enid doesn't like Lord Coryston," said Miss Atherstone, slowly.

"I dare say. He finds out her weak points. She has a good many. And he's not a ladies' man. Between ourselves, my dear, she poses a good deal. I never know quite where to have her, though I dandled her as a baby."

"Oh, Enid's all right," said Marion Atherstone, taking a fresh needleful of brown wool. Miss Atherstone was not clever, though she lived with clever people, and her powers of expressing herself were small. Her father, a retired doctor, on the other hand, was one of the ablest Liberal organizers in the country. From his perch on the Mintern hills he commanded half the midlands, in more senses than one; knew thirty or forty constituencies by heart; was consulted in all difficulties; was better acquainted with "the pulse of the party" than its chief agent, and was never left out of count by any important Minister framing an important bill.

He had first made friends with the man who was now the powerful head of Eng-

lish finance, when Glenwilliam was the young check-weigher of a large Staffordshire colliery; and the friendship—little known except to an inner ring—was now an important factor in English politics. Glenwilliam did nothing without consulting Atherstone, and the cottage on the hill had been the scene of many important meetings and some decisions which would live in history.

Marion Atherstone, on the other hand, though invaluable to her father, and much appreciated by his friends, took no intellectual part in his life. Brilliant creatures—men and women—came and went, to and from the cottage. Marion took stock of them, provided them with food and lodging, and did not much believe in any of them. Atherstone was a philosopher, a free-thinker, and a vegetarian. Marion read the *Church Family Times*, went diligently to church, and if she had possessed a vote, and cared enough about it to use it, would probably have voted Tory. All the same she and her father were on the best of terms and perfectly understood each other.

Among the brilliant creatures, however, who came and went, there was one who had conquered her. For Enid Glenwilliam, Marion felt the profound affection that often links the plain, scrupulous, conscientious woman to some one or other of the sirens of her sex. When Enid came to the cottage, Marion became her slave, and served her hand and foot. But the probability is that she saw through the siren—what there was to see through—a good deal more sharply than her father did.

Atherstone took a garden chair beside her and lit his pipe. He had just been engaged in drafting an important Liberal manifesto. His name would probably never appear in connection with it. But that mattered nothing to him. What did vex him was that he probably would not have an opportunity of talking it over with Glenwilliam before it finally left his hands. He was pleased with it, however. The drastic or scathing phrases of it kept running through his head. He had never felt a more thorough, a more passionate contempt for his opponents. The Tory party must go! One more big fight, and they would smash the unclean thing. These tyrants of land and church and

finance!—democratic England, when it once got to business—and it was getting to business—would make short work of them.

As he looked out over the plain, he saw many things well fitted to stir the democratic pulse. There among the woods, not a mile from the base of the hills, lay the great classic pile of Coryston, where "that woman" held sway. Farther off on its hill rose Hoddon Grey, identified in this hostile mind with church ascendancy, just as Coryston was identified with landlord ascendancy. If there were anywhere to be found a narrower pair of bigots than Lord and Lady William Newbury, or a more poisonous reactionary than their handsome and plausible son, Atherstone didn't know where to lay hands on them.

One white dot in the plain, however, gave him unmixed satisfaction. He turned, laughing, to his daughter.

"Coryston has settled in—with a laborer and his wife to look after him. He has all sorts of ructions on his hands already."

"Poor Lady Coryston!" said Marion, giving a glance at the classical cupolas emerging from the woods.

"My dear!—she began it. And he is quite right—he *has* a public duty to these estates."

"Couldn't he go and stir up people somewhere else? It looks so ugly."

"Oh! women have got to get used to these things, if they play such strong parts as Lady Coryston. The old kid-glove days, as between men and women, are over."

"Even between mothers and sons?" said Marion, dubiously.

"I repeat—she began it! Monstrous, that that man should have made such a will, and that a mother should have taken advantage of it!"

"Suppose she had been a Liberal," said Marion, slyly.

Atherstone shrugged his shoulders—too honest to reply.

He ruminated over his pipe. Presently his eyes flashed.

"I hear Coryston's very servants—his man and wife—were evicted from their cottage for political reasons."

"Yes—by that Radical miller who lives at Martover," said Marion.

Atherstone stared.

"My dear!—"

"The wife told me," said Marion, calmly, rolling up her socks.

"I say, I must look into that," said Atherstone, with discomposure. "It doesn't do to have such stories going round—on our side. I wonder why Coryston chose them."

"I should think—because he hates that kind of thing on both sides." The slightest tinge of red might have been noticed on Miss Atherstone's cheek as she spoke. But her father did not notice it. He lifted his head to listen.

"I think I hear the motor."

"You look tired," said Marion to her guest. The first bout of conversation was over, and Dr. Atherstone had gone back to his letters.

Enid Glenwilliam took off her hat, accepted the cushion which her hostess was pressing upon her, and lay at ease in her cane chair.

"You wouldn't wonder, if you could reckon up my week!" she said, laughing. "Let's see—four dinners, three balls, two operas—a week-end at Windsor, two bazaars, three meetings, two concerts, and tea-parties galore! What do you expect but a rag!"

"Don't say you don't like it!"

"Oh, yes, I like it. At least, if people don't ask me to things, I'm insulted, and when they do—"

"You're bored?"

"It's you finished the sentence—not I! And I've scarcely seen father this week except at breakfast. *That's* bored me horribly."

"What have you *really* been doing?"

"Inquisitor!—I have been amusing myself."

"With Arthur Coryston?"

Marion turned her large fresh-colored face and small gray eyes upon her companion.

"And others! You don't imagine I confine myself to him?"

"Has Lady Coryston found out yet?"

"That we get on? I am sure she has never imagined that Mr. Arthur could so demean himself."

"But she must find out some day."

"Oh, yes, I mean her to," said Miss Glenwilliam, quietly. She reached out a

long hand toward Marion's cat and stroked it. Then she turned her large eyes of pale hazel set under beautiful dark brows to her companion. "You see—Lady Coryston has not only snubbed me—she has insulted father."

"How?" exclaimed Marion, startled.

"At Chatton House, the other day. She refused to go down to dinner with him. She positively did. The table had to be rearranged, and little Lady Chatton nearly had hysterics."

The girl lay looking at her friend, her large but finely cut mouth faintly smiling. But there was something dangerous in her eyes.

"And one day at lunch she refused to be introduced to me. I saw it happen quite plainly. Oh, she didn't exactly mean to be insolent. But she thinks society is too tolerant—of people like father and me."

"What a foolish woman!" said Marion Atherstone, rather helplessly.

"Not at all! She knows quite well that my whole existence is a fight—so far as London is concerned. She wants to make the fight a little harder, that's all."

"Your 'whole existence a fight,'" repeated Marion, with a touch of scorn—"after that list of parties!"

"It's a good fight at present," said the girl, coolly, "and a successful one. But Lady Coryston gets all she wants without fighting. When father goes out of office, I shall be nobody. *She* will be always at the top of the tree."

"I am no wiser than before as to whether you really like Arthur Coryston or not. You have heard, of course, the gossip about the estates?"

"Heard?" The speaker smiled. "I know not only the gossip but the facts—by heart! I am drowned—smothered in them. At present Arthur is the darling—the spotless one. But when she knows about me!"—Miss Glenwilliam threw up her hands.

"You think she will change her mind again?"

The girl took up a stalk of grass and nibbled it in laughing meditation.

"Perhaps I oughtn't to risk his chances?" she said, looking sidelong.

"Don't think about 'chances,'" said Marion Atherstone, indignantly—"think about whether you care for each other!"

"What a *bourgeois* point of view! Well, honestly—I don't know. Arthur Coryston is not at all clever. He has the most absurd opinions. We have only known each other a few months. If he were *very* rich—By the way, is he coming this afternoon? And may I have a cigarette?"

Marion handed cigarettes. The click of a garden gate caught her ear.

"Here they are—he and Lord Coryston."

Enid Glenwilliam lit her cigarette, and made no move. Her slender, long-limbed body, as it lay at ease in the deep garden chair, the pale masses of her hair, and the confident, quiet face beneath it, made a charming impression of graceful repose. As Arthur Coryston reached her, she held out a welcoming hand, and her eyes greeted him—a gay, significant look.

Coryston, having shaken hands with Miss Atherstone, hastily approached her companion.

"I didn't know you smoked," he said, abruptly, standing before her with his hands on his sides. As always, Coryston made an odd figure. His worn, ill-fitting clothes, with their bulging pockets, the grasshopper slimness of his legs and arms, the peering, glancing look of his eternally restless eyes, were all of them displeasing to Enid Glenwilliam as she surveyed him. But she answered him with a smile.

"Mayn't I?"

He looked down on her, frowning.

"Why should women set up a new want—a new slavery—that costs money?"

The color flew to her cheeks.

"Why shouldn't they? Go and preach to your own sex."

"No good!" He shrugged his shoulders. "But women are supposed to have consciences. And—especially—*Liberal* women," he added slowly, as his eyes traveled over her dress.

"And pray why should Liberal women be ascetics any more than any other kind of women?" she asked him, quietly.

"Why?" His voice grew suddenly loud. "Because there are thousands of people in this country perishing for lack of proper food and clothing—and it is the function of Liberals to bring it home to the other thousands."

Arthur Coryston broke out indignantly.

"I say, Corry—do hold your tongue! You do talk such stuff!"

The young man sitting where the whole careless grace of Miss Glenwilliam's person was delightfully visible to him, showed a countenance red with wrath.

Coryston faced round upon him, transformed. His frown had disappeared in a look of radiant good humor.

"Look here, Arthur, you've got the money-bags—you might leave me the talking. Has he told you what's happened?"

The question was addressed to Miss Glenwilliam, while the speaker shot an indicating thumb in his brother's direction.

The girl looked embarrassed, and Arthur Coryston again came to the rescue.

"We've no right to thrust our family affairs upon other people, Corry," he said, resolutely. "I told you so as we walked up."

"Oh, but they're so interesting," was Coryston's cool reply, as he took his seat by Marion Atherstone. "I'm certain everybody here finds them so. And what on earth have I taken Knatchett for, except to blazon abroad what our dear mother has been doing?"

"I wish to heaven you hadn't taken Knatchett," said Arthur, sulkily.

"You regard me as a nuisance? Well, I mean to be. I'm finding out such lots of things," added Coryston, slowly, while his eyes, wandering over the plain, ceased their restlessness for a moment and became fixed and dreamy.

Dr. Atherstone caught the last words as he came out from his study. He approached his guests with an amused look at Coryston. But the necessary courtesies of the situation imposed themselves. So long as Arthur Coryston was present, the Tory son of his Tory mother, an Opposition M.P. for a constituency part of which was visible from the cottage garden, and a comparative stranger to the Atherstones, it was scarcely possible to let Coryston loose. The younger brother was there—Atherstone perfectly understood—simply because Miss Glenwilliam was their guest; not for his own *beaux yeux* or his daughter's. But having ventured onto hostile ground, for a fair lady's sake, he might look to being kindly treated.

Arthur, on his side, however, played his part badly. He rose indeed to greet Atherstone—whom he barely knew, and

was accustomed to regard as a pestilent agitator—with the indifferent good-breeding that all young Englishmen of the classes have at command; he was ready to talk of the view and the weather, and to discuss various local topics. But it was increasingly evident that he felt himself on false ground; lured there, moreover, by feelings he could hardly suppose were unsuspected by his hosts. Enid Glenwilliam watched him with secret but sympathetic laughter; and presently came to his aid. She rose from her seat.

"It's a little hot here, Marion. Shall I have time to show Mr. Coryston the view from the wood-path before tea?"

Marion assented. And the two tall figures strolled away across a little field toward a hanging wood on the edge of the hill.

"Will she have him?" said Coryston to Marion Atherstone, looking after the departing figures.

The question was disconcertingly frank. Marion laughed and colored.

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Because there'll be the deuce to pay if she does," said Coryston, nursing his knee and bubbling with amusement. "My unfortunate mother will have to make another will. What the lawyers have made out of her already!"

"There would be no reconciling her to the notion of such a marriage?" asked Atherstone, after a moment.

"If my son take to him a wife of the daughters of Heth, what good shall my life be unto me?" quoted Coryston, laughing. "Good gracious, how handy the Bible comes in—for most things! I expect you're an infidel, and don't know." He looked up curiously at Atherstone.

A shade of annoyance crossed Atherstone's finely marked face.

"I am the son of a Presbyterian minister," he said, shortly. "But to return. After all, you know, Radicals and Tories do still intermarry! It hasn't quite come to that!"

"No, but it's coming to that!" cried Coryston, bringing his hand down in a slap on the tea-table. "And women like my mother are determined it shall come to it. They want to see this country divided up into two hostile camps—fighting it out—blood and thunder, and devilries galore. Aye, and—" he brought his

face eagerly, triumphantly, close to Atherstone's—"so do you too—at bottom."

The Doctor drew back. "I want politics to be realities, if that's what you mean," he said, coldly. "But the peaceful methods of democracy are enough for me. Well, Lord Coryston, you say you've been finding out a lot of things since you've been settled here. What sort?"

Coryston turned an odd, deliberate look at his questioner.

"Yes, I'm after a lot of game—in the Liberal preserves just as much as the Tory. There isn't a pin to choose between you! Now, look here!" He checked the items off on his fingers. "My mother's been refusing land for a Baptist chapel. Half the village Baptist—lots of land handy—she won't let 'em have a yard. Well, we're having meetings every week, we're sending her resolutions every week, which she puts in the waste-paper basket. And on Sundays they rig up a tent on that bit of common ground at the park gates, and sing hymns at her when she goes to church. That's No. 1. No. 2—My mother's been letting Page—her agent—evict a jolly, decent fellow called Price, a smith, who's been distributing Liberal leaflets in some of the villages. All sorts of other reasons given, of course—but that's the truth. Well, I sat on Page's doorstep for two or three days—no good. Now I'm knocking up a shop and a furnace, and all the rest of the togs wanted, for Price, in my back yard at Knatchett. And we've made him Liberal agent for the village. I can tell you he's going it! That's No. 2. No. 3—There's a slight difficulty with the hunt I needn't trouble you with. We've given 'em warning we're going to kill foxes wherever we can get 'em. They've been just gorging chickens this last year—nasty beasts! That don't matter much however. No. 4—Ah-ha!"—he rubbed his hands—"I'm on the track of that old hypocrite Burton of Martover—"

"Burton! one of the best men in the country!" cried Atherstone, indignantly. "You're quite mistaken, Lord Coryston!"

"Am I!" cried Coryston, with equal indignation. "Not a bit of it. Talking Liberalism through his nose at all the meetings round here, and then doing a thing— Look here! He turned that man and his wife—Potifer's his name—who

are now looking after me, out of their cottage and their bit of land—why, do you think?—because *the man voted for Arthur!* Why shouldn't he vote for Arthur? Arthur kissed his baby. Of course he voted for Arthur. He thought Arthur was 'a real nice gentleman'—so did his wife. Why shouldn't he vote for Arthur? Nobody wanted to kiss Burton's baby. Hang him! You know this kind of thing must be put a stop to!"

And, getting up, Coryston stamped up and down furiously, his small face aflame. Atherstone watched him in silence. This strange settlement of Lady Coryston's disinherited son—socialist and revolutionist—as a kind of watchman, in the very midst of the Coryston estates, at his mother's very gates, might not, after all turn out so well as the democrats of the neighborhood had anticipated. The man was too queer—too flighty.

"Wait a bit! I think some of your judgments may be too hasty, Lord Coryston. There's a deal to learn in this neighborhood—the Hoddon Grey estate, for instance."

Coryston threw up his hands.

"The Newburys—my word, the Newburys! 'Too bright and good'—aren't they?—'for human nature's daily food.' Such churches—and schools—and villages! All the little boys patterns—and all the little girls saints. Everybody singing in choirs—and belonging to confraternities—and carrying banners. 'By the pricking of my thumbs,' when I see a Newbury I feel that a mere fraction divides me from the criminal class. And I tell you, I've heard a story about that estate—" the odd figure paused beside the tea-table, and rapped it vigorously for emphasis—"that's worse than any other villainy I've yet come across. You know what I mean. Betts and his wife!"

He paused, scrutinizing the faces of Atherstone and Marion with his glittering eyes.

Atherstone nodded gravely. He and Marion both knew the story. The neighborhood indeed was ringing with it. On the one hand it involved the pitiful tale of a divorced woman; on the other the unbending religious convictions of the Newbury family. There was hot championship on both sides; but on the whole the Newbury family was at the moment



unpopular in their own county because of the affair. And Edward Newbury in particular was thought to have behaved with harshness.

Coryston sat down to discuss the matter with his companions, showing a white heat of feeling. "The religious tyrant," he vowed, "is the most hideous of all tyrants!"

Marion said little. Her grave look followed her guest's vehement talk; but she scarcely betrayed her own point of view. The Doctor, of course, was as angry as Coryston.

Presently Atherstone was summoned into the house, and then Coryston said, abruptly:

"My mother likes that fellow Newbury. My sister likes him. From what I hear—he might become my brother-in-law. He sha'n't—before Marcia knows this story!"

Marion looked a little embarrassed, and certainly disapproving.

"He has very warm friends down here," she said, slowly—"people who admire him enormously."

"So had Torquemada!" cried Coryston. "What does that prove? Look here!"—he put both elbows on the table and looked sharply into Marion's plain and troubled countenance—"don't you agree with me?"

"I don't know whether I do or not—I don't know enough about it."

"You mustn't," he said, eagerly—"you mustn't disagree with me!" Then, after a pause, "Do you know that I'm always hearing about you, Miss Atherstone, down in those villages?"

Marion blushed furiously, then laughed.

"I can't imagine why."

"Oh yes, you can. I hate charity—generally. It's a beastly mess. But the things you do—are human things. Look here, if you ever want any help, anything that a fellow with not much coin but with a pair of strong arms and a decent headpiece can do, you come to me. Do you see?"

Marion smiled and thanked him.

Coryston rose.

"I must go. Sha'n't wait for Arthur. He seems to be better employed. But—I should like to come up here pretty often, Miss Atherstone, and talk to you. I shouldn't wonder if I agreed with you

more than I do with your father. Do you see any objection?"

He stood leaning on the back of a chair, looking at her with his queer simplicity. She smiled back.

"Not the least. Come when you like."

He nodded, and without any further farewell or any conventional message to her father he strode away down the garden, whistling.

Marion was left alone. Her face, the face of a woman of thirty-five, relaxed; a little rose-leaf pink crept into the cheeks. This was the fourth or fifth time that she had met Lord Coryston, and each time they had seemed to understand each other a little better. She put aside all foolish notions. But life was certainly more interesting than it had been.

Coryston had been gone some time, when at last his brother and Miss Glenwilliam emerged from the wood. The tea-table was now spread in the shade, and they approached it. Marion tried to show nothing of the curiosity she felt.

That Arthur Coryston was in no mood for ordinary conversation, at least, was clear. He refused her proffered cup, and almost immediately took his leave. Enid subsided again into her long chair, and Atherstone and Marion waited upon her. She had an animated, excited look, the reflection no doubt of the conversation which had taken place in the wood. But when Marion and she were left alone it was a long time before she disclosed anything. At last, when the golden May light was beginning to fade from the hill, she sat up suddenly.

"I don't think I can, Marion; I don't think I *can*!"

"Can what?"

"Marry that man, my dear!" She bent forward and took her friend's hands in hers. "Do you know what I was thinking of all the time he talked—and he's a very nice boy—and I like him very much. I was thinking of my father!"

She threw her head back proudly. Marion looked at her in some perplexity.

"I was thinking of my father," she repeated. "My father is the greatest man I know. And I'm not only his daughter; I'm his friend. He has no one but me, since my mother died. He tells me everything, and I understand him. Why

should I marry a man like that, when I have my father! And yet of course he touches me—Arthur Coryston—and some day I shall want a home—and children—like other people. And there is the money, if his mother didn't strip him of it for marrying me! And there's the famous name, and the family, and the prestige. Oh yes, I see all that. It attracts me enormously. I'm no ascetic, as Coryston has discovered. And yet when I think of going from my father to that man—from my father's ideas to Arthur's ideas—it's as though some one thrust me into a cave, and rolled a stone on me. I should beat myself dead, trying to get out! I told

him I couldn't make up my mind yet—for a long, long time."

"Was that kind?" said Marion, gently.

"Well, he seemed to like it better than a final No," laughed the girl, but rather drearily. "Marion! you don't know, nobody can know but me, what a man my father is!"

And, sitting erect, she looked absently at the plain, the clear hardness of her eyes melting to a passionate tenderness. It was to Marion as though the rugged figure of the Chancellor overshadowed them; just as, at that moment, in the political sense, it overshadowed England.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

## The Old House

BY ETHEL AUGUSTA COOK

HOW lost in trees a gray house stands with flowers about the door;  
A gravel path leads to the gate, a white road sweeps before.  
O brooding house, and shadowy grass, and flowers red and sweet!  
The white road sweeping straight away was made for children's feet.

Long years ago child voices thrilled among the swaying trees,  
Long years ago a blithesome laugh was borne on every breeze.  
In every mossy hollow then a goblin treasure kept;  
In every fragrant blossom then a fairy lightly slept.

All day a horde of flying feet beat down the willing grass;  
All day a bow of widened eyes watched mystic wonders pass  
In shadows gray, and circling cloud, and showers that brightened all,  
And through the hours a little bird made music with his call.

The wall closed out a world unknown and drew a world about,  
But when the gate blew open once, wide wistful eyes looked out.  
O brooding house, and shadowy grass, and flowers red and sweet!  
The white road sweeping straight away was made for children's feet.

The road so white lay here in shade, and there in sunlight gleamed,  
While all the way tall laughing grass its wayward tresses streamed.  
So far it ran no one could say what place was at its end;  
Wide, white, and straight, it swept away with never any bend.

The rushing feet have now grown slow, and go with quiet tread.  
The fairies sleeping in the flowers woke long ago and fled.  
The gate swings wide, the wall is down, the mystic road is clear;  
But no one goes with dancing feet, or ever journeys here.

They fare, staid pilgrims, far and wide; the round world is their home.  
They go on every road but this; on this they never come.  
O brooding house, and shadowy grass, and flowers red and sweet!  
The white road sweeping straight away was made for children's feet.