The Greater Trumps

Charles Williams

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## **Chapter** One - THE LEGACY

"...perfect Babel," Mr. Coningsby said peevishly, threw himself into achair, and took up the evening paper. "But Babel never was perfect, wasit?" Nancy said to her brother in a low voice, yet not so low that herfather could not hear if he chose. He did not choose, because at themoment he could not think of a sufficiently short sentence; a minuteafterwards it occurred to him that he might have said, "Then it'sperfect now." But it didn't matter; Nancy would only have been rudeagain, and her brother too. Children were. He looked at his sister, whowas reading on the other side of the fire. She looked comfortable andinterested, so he naturally decided to disturb her.

"And what have you been doing to-day, Sybil?" he asked, with aninsincere good will, and as she looked up he thought angrily, "Herskin's getting clearer every day."

"Why, nothing very much," Sybil Coningsby said. "I did some shopping,and I made a cake, and went for a walk and changed the library books.And since tea I've been reading."

"Nice day," Mr. Coningsby answered, between a question and a sneer,wishing it hadn't been, though he was aware that if it hadn't been...but then it was certain to have been. Sybil always seemed to have nicedays. He looked at his paper again. "I see the Government are putting afresh duty on dried fruits," he snorted.

Sybil tried to say something, and failed. She was getting stupid, shethought, or (more probably) lazy. There ought to be something to sayabout the Government putting a duty on dried fruits. Nancy spokeinstead.

"You're slow, auntie," she said. "The correct answer is: 'I suppose thatmeans that the price will go up!' The reply to that is, 'Everything goesup under this accursed Government!'"

"Will you please let me do my own talking, Nancy?" her father snapped ather.

"Then I wish you'd talk something livelier than the Dead March in Saul,"Nancy said.

"You're out of date again, Nancy," jeered her brother. "Nobody playsthat old thing nowadays."

"Go to hell!" said Nancy.

Mr. Coningsby immediately stood up. "Nancy, you shall not use such language in this house," he called out.

"O, very well," Nancy said, walked to the window, opened it, put herhead out, and said to the world, but (it annoyed her to feel) in a moresubdued voice, "Go to hell." She pulled in her head and shut the window."There, father," she said, "that wasn't in the house."

Sybil Coningsby said equably, "Nancy, you're in a bad temper."

"And suppose I am?" Nancy answered. "Who began it?"

"Don't answer your aunt back," said Mr. Coningsby, still loudly. "She atleast is a lady."

"She's more," said Nancy. "She's a saint. And I'm a worm and the childof..."

She abandoned the sentence too late. Her father picked up his paper,walked to the door, turned his head, uttered, "If I am wanted, Sybil, Ishall be in my study," and went out. Ralph grinned at Nancy; their auntlooked at them both with a wise irony.

"What energy!" she murmured, and Nancy looked back at her, half inanger, half in admiration.

"Doesn't father ever annoy you, auntie?" she asked.

"No, my dear," Miss Coningsby said.

"Don't we ever annoy you?" Nancy asked again.

"No, my dear," Miss Coningsby said.

"Doesn't anyone ever annoy you, aunt?" Ralph took up the chant.

"Hardly at all," Miss Coningsby said. "What extraordinary ideas youchildren have! Why should anyone annoy me?"

"Well, we annoy father all right," Nancy remarked, "and I never mean towhen I begin. But Ralph and I weren't making all that noise--and anyhowBabel wasn't perfect."

Sybil Coningsby picked up her book again. "My dear Nancy, you never dobegin; you just happen along," she said, and dropped her eyes soresolutely to her page that Nancy hesitated to ask her what she meant.

The room was settling back into the quiet which had filled it before Mr.Coningsby's arrival, when the bell of the front door rang. Nancy sprangto her feet and ran into the hall. "Right, Agnes," she sang: "I'll seeto it."

"That'll be Henry," Ralph said as she disappeared. "Wasn't he coming todinner?"

"Yes," his aunt murmured without looking up. One of the things aboutSybil Coningsby that occasionally annoyed other people--Ralph amongthem--was her capacity for saying, quite simply, "Yes" or "No", andstopping there, rather as if at times she were literally followingChrist's maxim about conversation. She would talk socially, ifnecessary, and sociably, if the chance arose, but she seemed to be ableto manage without saying a lot of usual things. There was thus, to heracquaintances, a kind of blank about her; the world for a moment seemedwith a shock to disappear and they were left in a distasteful void.

"Your aunt," Mr. Coningsby had once said, "has no small talk. It's apity." Ralph had agreed: Nancy had not, and there had been one of thosecontinual small rows which at once annoyed and appeased their father.Annoyed him--for they hurt his dignity; appeased him--for they at leastgave him a dignity to be hurt. He was somebody then for a few minutes;he was not merely a curiously festering consciousness. It was true hewas also a legal officer of standing--a Warden in Lunacy. But--hisemotions worried him with a question which his intellect refused todefine--what, what exactly was the satisfaction of being a Warden inLunacy? Fifty-eight; fifty-nine. But Sybil was older; she was oversixty. Perhaps in a few years this gnawing would pass. She wascontented: no doubt time would put him also at peace.

He was not thinking of this while he sat in the room they called hisstudy, looking at the evening paper and waiting for dinner. He wasthinking how shameful Nancy's behaviour had been. She lacked respect,she lacked modesty, she almost lacked decency. All that he had done...no doubt her engagement to--her understanding with--whatever it was shehad along with this young Henry Lee fellow--had hardened her. There hadbeen a rather vague confidence, a ring had appeared, so had Henry quiteoften. But to what the engagement was tending or of what theunderstanding was capable--that Mr. Coningsby could not or had not beenallowed to grasp. He sat thinking of it, consoling himself with thereflection that one day she'd be sorry. She wasn't...she was...confused; all confused...confusion confounded...yes...SuddenlyNancy was in the room--"Look here, old thing"--no, he wasn't asleep; shewas saying it. He hated to be discovered asleep just before dinner;perhaps she hadn't noticed--"and all that. Come and talk to Henry aminute before we eat."

If her father had been quite clear how far the apology had gone, hewould have known whether he might reasonably accept it. But he wasn't,and he didn't want to argue because of not having been asleep. So hemade a noise in his throat and got up, adding with a princelymagnanimity, "But don't be rude to your aunt: I won't tolerate that."

Nancy, glowing with her past brief conversation with Henry, and lookingforward to the immediate future with zest, subdued an inclination topoint out that it was she who had called Sybil a saint, and they bothreturned to the drawing-room.

Although Mr. Coningsby had known his daughter's fiancé--if indeed hewere that--for some months now, he still felt a slight shock at seeinghim. For to him Henry Lee, in spite of being a barrister--a young, abriefless barrister, but a barrister--was so obviously a gipsy that hisprofession seemed as if it must be assumed for a sinister purpose. Hewas fairly tall and dark-haired and dark-skinned, and his eyes werebright and darting; and his soft collar looked almost like ahandkerchief coiled round his throat, only straighter, and his longfingers, with their quick secret movements--"Hen-roosts," Mr. Coningsbythought, as he had thought before. A nice thing for Nancy to be trampingthe roads--and Nancy was a gipsy name. That was her mother's fault.Names had for him a horrid attraction, largely owing to his own, whichwas Lothair. That disastrous name had to do with his father's godmother,a rich old lady with a passionate admiration for Lord Beaconsfield. Toplease that admiration her godson's first child had been named Sybil;the second Lothair. It might have been Tancred or Alroy; it might evenhave been Endymion. Mr. Coningsby himself allowed that EndymionConingsby would have been worse. The other titles would no doubt havebeen allocated in turn, but for two facts; first, that the godmotherabandoned politics for religion and spent large sums of money onAnglican sisterhoods; second, that there were no more children. But theyounger was at once there, and there too soon to benefit by theconversion which would have saved others. Lothair--always, through adocument-signing, bank-corresponding, cheque-drawing, letter-writing,form-filling, addressed, directoried, and important life, always LothairConingsby. If only he could have been called Henry Lee!

He thought so once more as they settled to dinner. He thought so throughthe soup. Something had always been unfair to him, luck or fate orsomething. Some people were like that, beaten through no fault of theirown, wounded before the battle began; not everybody would have done sowell as he had. But how it dogged him--that ghastly luck! Even in thelast month Duncannon (and everyone knew that Duncannon was well off) hadleft him...no honest, useful, sincere legacy, but a collection ofplaying-cards, with a request that it should be preserved intact by hisold friend, the legatee, Lothair Coningsby, and a further request thatat the said legatee's death the collection should be presented to theBritish Museum. About that the legatee refused to think; some of thepacks were, he believed, rather valuable. But for a couple of years orso, or anyhow for a year, nothing could be done: too many people knew ofit. There had even been a paragraph in one of the papers. He couldn'tsell them--Mr. Coningsby flinched as the word struck him for the firsttime--not yet awhile anyhow.

"Father," Nancy said, "will you show us Mr. Duncannon's playing-cardsafter dinner?" Mr. Coningsby just checked a vicious sneer. "Henry,"Nancy went on, "saw about them in the papers." Mr. Coningsby saw a gipsyreading torn scraps of newspapers under a hedge. "And he knows somethingabout cards. What a lot you do know, Henry!" Yes, in a fair, cheatingyokels out of their pennies by tricks or fortune-telling: which card isthe pea under? Something like that, anyhow. Bah!

"My dear," he said, "it's rather a painful business. Duncannon was mydear friend."

"Still, father, if you would...He'd have loved people to beinterested."

Mr. Coningsby, looking up suddenly, caught a swift, tender smile onSybil's face, and wondered what she was grinning at. Nancy had hit onthe one undeniable fact about the late Mr. Duncannon, and he couldn'tthink of any way of getting round it. But why should Sybil be amused?

"I'd be very grateful if you would, sir," the young man said. "I do findthem interesting--it's in my blood, I suppose," he added, laughing atNancy.

"And can you tell fortunes? Can you tell mine?" she answered joyously.

"Some by cards and some by hands," he said, "and some by the stars."

"O, I can tell some by hands," she answered. "I've told father's andauntie's. Only I can't understand father's line of life--it seems tostop at about forty, yet here he is still alive." Mr. Coningsby, feelingmore like a death's head than a living Warden in Lunacy, looked downagain.

"And Miss Coningsby's?" Henry asked, bowing towards her.

"O, auntie's goes on for ever, as far as I can see," Nancy answered,"right round under the finger."

Henry for a moment looked at Sybil a little oddly, but he said nothing,and the chatter about palmistry was lost in Ralph's dominating theconversation with an announcement that those things, like Spiritualism,were all great rubbish. "How can you tell from the palm of my handwhether I'm going to be ill at fifty or have a fortune left me at sixtyor go to Zanzibar at seventy?"

"Hands are strange things," Henry said. "Nobody knows very much aboutthem yet."

"Eh?" said Ralph, surprised.

"Auntie's got the loveliest hands I ever saw," Nancy said, sending aside-glance at Henry, and meeting the quick astonishment of hiseyebrows. This being what he was meant to show--because she did thinkshe had good hands, the rest of her being tolerable but unnoticeable,hair, face, figure, and everything--she allowed her own hand for amoment to touch his, and added, "Look at them."

They all looked, even Sybil herself, who said softly, "They are rathernice, aren't they?"

Her brother thought privately that this remark was in execrable taste;one didn't praise one's own belongings, still less oneself. What wouldpeople think if he said his face was "rather nice"?

"They're dears," said Nancy.

"Jolly good," said Ralph.

"They're extremely beautiful," said Henry.

"There's a very striking hand in the British Museum," Mr. Coningsbysaid, feeling the time had come for him to break silence, "belonging toan Egyptian king or something. Just a giant head and then in front of ita great arm with the fist closed--so." He illustrated.

"I know it, sir," Henry said, "the hand of the image of Rameses: it is ahand of power."

"The hand of power! I thought that was something to do with murderers;no, of course, that was glory," Nancy said, adding immediately, "Andnow, father, do let's look at the cards while we have coffee."

Mr. Coningsby, seeing no easy way out, gloomily assented. "Where did youhave them put, Sybil?" he asked as the whole party rose.

"In the chest in your study," she answered. "The catalogue's with them."

"Catalogue?" Ralph said. "He did it in style, didn't he? Fancy me makinga catalogue of my old tennis racquets."

"These cards," Mr. Coningsby said with considerable restraint, "were notworn-out toys. They are a very valuable and curious collection ofremarkable cards, gathered together with considerable difficulty and insome sense, I believe, priceless."

Nancy pinched Henry's arm as they followed their father from thedining-room. "The dear!" she said. "I've heard him say the same thinghimself, before they belonged to him."

Ralph was whistling. "O, but I say now, priceless?" he said. "That'd bepretty valuable, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know exactly what the value would be to collectors, butconsiderable," Mr. Coningsby said as he opened the large wooden chest,and then, thinking of the British Museum, added in a more sullen voice,"Considerable."

Sybil took from the chest a fat writing-book. "Well, shall I read thedescriptions?" she asked. "If someone will call out the numbers." Foreach pack was contained in a special little leather cover, with a placeon it for a white slip containing a number.

"Right ho!" Ralph said. "I'll call out the numbers. Are they in order?It doesn't look like it. Number ninety-four."

"I think I will read, Sybil," Mr. Coningsby said. "I've heard Duncannontalk of them often and it's more suitable. Perhaps you'd pick them upand call the numbers out. And then the young people can look at them."

"Give me that chair, then, if you will, Henry," Sybil assented. Herbrother sat down on the other side of a small table, and "the youngpeople" thronged round it.

"Number--," Sybil began and paused. "Ralph, if you wouldn't mind goingon the same side as Nancy and Henry, I could see too."

Ralph obeyed, unaware that this movement, while removing an obstaclefrom his aunt's gaze, also removed his own from the two lovers. Sybil,having achieved the maximum of effort, said again, "Number--"

"I didn't think you'd be very interested, aunt," Ralph, with a belatedsense of apology, threw in.

Sybil smiled at him and said again, "Number--"

"I have never known your aunt not be interested in anything, my boy,"Mr. Coningsby said severely, looking up, but more at Sybil than atRalph, as if he were inclined to add, "and how the devil she does it Ican't think!"

"Darling," said Nancy, "aunt's a perfect miracle, but can't we leave herfor now and get on with the cards?"

"We are on the point of 'getting on' with them, as you call it, Nancy,"her father answered. "I wish you'd remember this is something of anordeal to me, and treat it more seriously."

Nancy's hand, under the table, squeezed its impatience into Henry's andrelieved her tongue. When the momentary silence had achieved seriousnessbut had not reached self-consciousness, Sybil's voice collected and, asit were, concluded it with the words, "Number ninety-four".

"Ninety-four," Mr. Coningsby read out, "'French; circa 1789--Supposed tohave been designed by David. A special Revolutionary symbolism. In thispack the Knaves are painted as a peasant, a beggar, an aubergiste, and asansculotte respectively; the Queens (Marie Antoinette) have each a redline round the neck, as if guillotined; the Kings are reversed; over theace is the red cap of liberty. Round the edge of each card is thelegend, La Republique, une, libre, indivisible.'"

"Number nine," Sybil said, and put down another pack.

"Nine," read Mr. Coningsby. "'Spanish pack, eighteenth century. TheCourt cards are ecclesiastical--cardinals, bishops, and priests. It isunlikely that this pack was ever used for playing; probably it waspainted as an act of devotion or thanksgiving. See Appendix for possibleportraits.'"

"Number three hundred and forty-one," Sybil said.

"'Most rare'," Mr. Coningsby read. "'Very early pack of Tarot cards. Ihave not been able to trace the origin of these; they have someresemblances to a fifteenth-century pack now in the Louvre, but wouldseem to be even earlier. The material of which they are made isunusual--papyrus? The four suits are, as usual, sceptres, swords, cups,and coins; the Greater Trumps are in the following order (numbered atthe foot in Roman): (i) The Juggler, (ii) The Empress, (iii) The HighPriestess, or Woman Pope--'"

"The what?" Nancy exclaimed. "What! Pope Joan? Sorry, father, I didn'tmean to interrupt."

"'(iv) The Pope--or Hierophant, (v) The Emperor--or Ruler, (vi) TheChariot, (vii) The Lovers, (viii) The Hermit, (ix) Temperance, (x)Fortitude, (xi) Justice, (xii) The Wheel of Fortune, (xiii) The HangedMan.'"

"Jolly game of bridge we could have with these," Ralph remarked. "I leadthe Hanged Man."

There was a tremendous pause. "Ralph, if you can only make fun--" Mr.Coningsby began, and stopped.

"Do go on," Sybil Coningsby's voice implored. "I should have had to saysomething silly if Ralph hadn't. It's so exciting."

Mr. Coningsby gave a suppressed grunt, fortunately missed Nancy'slow-breathed comment on it "The Hanged Man!"--and proceeded.

"'(xiv) Death, (xv) The Devil, (xvi) The Falling Tower, (xvii) The Star,(xviii) The Moon, (xix) The Sun, (xx) The Last Judgement--'"

Mr. Coningsby paused to shift his eyeglasses; in a perfect silence theothers waited.

"'(xxi) The Universe, (o) The Fool.'"

"Nought usually comes at the beginning," Ralph said.

"Not necessarily," said Sybil. "It might come anywhere. Nought isn't anumber at all. It's the opposite of number."

Nancy looked up from the cards. "Got you, aunt," she said. "What aboutten? Nought's a number there--it's part of ten."

"Quite right, Nancy," Mr. Coningsby said with something like pleasure."I think the child has you, Sybil."

"Well, if you say that any mathematical arrangement of one and noughtreally makes ten--" Sybil smiled. "Can it possibly be more than a way ofrepresenting ten?"

"It doesn't matter, anyhow," Nancy hastily said. "Aren't theyfascinating? But why are they? And what do they all mean? Henry, why areyou looking at them like that?"

Henry indeed was examining the first card, the juggler, with closeattention, as if investigating the smallest detail. It was a man in awhite tunic, but the face, tilted back, was foreshortened, and darkenedby the brim of some black cap that he wore: a cap so black thatsomething of night itself seemed to have been used in the painting. Theheavy shadow and the short pointed beard hid the face from the observer.On the breast of the tunic were three embroidered circles--the firstmade of swords and staffs and cups and coins, balanced one on the otherfrom the coin at the bottom to the apex of two pointing swords at thetop; and within this was a circle, so far as Nancy could see, made up ofrounded representations of twenty of the superior cards each in its ownround; and within that was a circle containing one figure, but that wasso small she couldn't make out what it was. The man was apparentlysupposed to be juggling; one hand was up in the air, one was low andopen towards the ground, and between them, in an arch, as if tossed andcaught and tossed again, were innumerable shining balls. In the topleft-hand corner of the card was a complex device of curiouslyinterwoven lines.

Henry put it down slowly as Nancy spoke and turned his eyes to her. Buthers, as they looked to plunge into that other depth--ocean pouring intoocean and itself receiving ocean--found themselves thwarted. Instead ofoceans they saw pools, abandoned by a tide already beyond sight: sheblenched as a bather might do in the cold wind across an empty shore."Henry!" she exclaimed.

It was, surely, no such great thing, only a momentary preoccupation. Buthe was already glancing again at the cards; he had already picked upanother, and was scrutinizing the figure of the hierophantic woman. Ithad been drawn sitting on an ancient throne between two heavy pillars; acloud of smoke rolled high above the priestly head-dress and solemn veilthat she wore, and under her feet were rivers pouring out in fallingcataracts. One hand was stretched out as if directing the flow of thosewaters; the other lay on a heavy open volume, with great clasps undone,that rested on her knees. This card also was stamped in the topleft-hand corner with an involved figure of intermingled lines.

"Well!" said Nancy, as she stared at it.

"But, look here," Ralph asked, "does one play with them, or what?" Hepeered over Henry's shoulder. "Old Maid, I suppose; and Beggar myNeighbour with the first."

"They're very wonderfully done, aren't they?" Sybil Coningsby asked, andherself delicately picked up one of what her brother had called theGreater Trumps. It was the nineteenth card--that named the Sun--and wasperfectly simple: the sun shone full in a clear sky, and two children--aboy and a girl--played happily below. Sybil smiled again as shecontemplated them. "Aren't they the loveliest things?" she breathed, andindeed they were so vivid, so intense, so rapturous under thatbeneficent light, of which some sort of reflection passed into Sybil'sown face while she brooded. Or so it seemed to Henry, who had put downhis card when Ralph spoke and over Nancy's bent head was now watchingher aunt. Sybil looked up and saw him. "Aren't they perfect, Henry?" sheasked.

"They are very, very fine," Lee said, and yet seemed a little puzzled,as if he had expected something, but not quite that.

"But what--are--they--all--about?" Ralph asked. "What's the idea ofit?"

"Duncannon used to tell me," Mr. Coningsby said; he had put down hiscatalogue now, and was standing by the table with the others; his high,bald forehead gleaming a little in the light, his thin, dissatisfiedface bent towards the pack, "that the Tarot cards were an invention ofthe fourteenth century, though supposed by some to be Egyptian." Hestopped, as if everything were explained.

"Stupendous bit of work--inventing them," Ralph said gravely. "But whydid anyone bother? What I mean--it seems rather...rather needless,doesn't it?"

"We have a tale about them," Henry Lee began, with a cautious ease, andMr. Coningsby said, "We?"

Ever so slightly the young man flushed. "I mean the gipsies," heanswered lightly, and added to Nancy, "That's your fault, darling, foralways pretending that I'm a real gipsy with a caravan, a tin kettle,and a grandmother with a black pipe."

"Wouldn't she love these cards?" Nancy said enthusiastically "Henry,darling, do have a grandmother, so that she can tell us stories aboutTarots, and perhaps even tell fortunes with--what did you call them,father?--the Greater Trumps."

"Well," said Ralph, abandoning the whole subject, "shall we look at somemore?"

"At least, I've a grandfather--" Henry said to Nancy; but "O, agrandfather!" she mocked him. "But he lives in a house with electriclight, doesn't he? Not in a caravan under the moon. Still, can he tellus what this is?" She picked up the last card, that numbered nought, andexhibited it. It might have needed some explanation, for it was obscureenough. It was painted with the figure of a young man, clothed in anoutlandish dress of four striped colours--black and grey and silver andred; his legs and feet and arms and hands were bare, and he had over oneshoulder a staff, carved into serpentine curves, that carried a roundbag, not unlike the balls with which the juggler played. The bag restedagainst his shoulder, so that as he stood there he supported as well asbore it. Before him a dragon-fly, or some such airy creature, danced;by his side a larger thing, a lynx or young tiger, stretched itself upto him--whether in affection or attack could not be guessed, so poisedbetween both the beast stood. The man's eyes were very bright; he wassmiling, and the smile was so intense and rapt that those looking at itfelt a quick motion of contempt--no sane man could be as happy as that.He was painted as if pausing in his stride, and there was no scenicbackground; he and his were seen against a flatness of dull gold.

"No," said Henry, "that's the difficulty--at least, it's the unknownfactor."

"The unknown factor in what?" Mr. Coningsby asked.

"In--" Henry paused a second, then he added, "in telling fortunes by theTarots. There are different systems, you know, but none of them is quiteconvincing in what it does with the Fool. They all treat it as if itwere to be added to the Greater Trumps--making twenty-two."

"So there are twenty-two," Mr. Coningsby said. "I've just read themout."

"No, sir," Henry answered, almost reluctantly, "not exactly. Strictlythere are the twenty-one and the nought. As Miss Coningsby said. And yousee the nought--well, it's nought--nothing, unaccountable."

"Well, shall we look at some more?" Ralph asked.

"Can you tell fortunes by them?" Nancy said eagerly, but Henry shook hishead.

"Not properly," he answered; "at least, I'd rather not try. It can bedone; my grandfather might know. They are very curious cards, and thisis a very curious pack."

"Why are they curious cards?" Nancy went on questioning.

Henry, still staring at them, answered, "It's said that the shuffling ofthe cards is the earth, and the pattering of the cards is the rain, andthe beating of the cards is the wind, and the pointing of the cards isthe fire. That's of the four suits. But the Greater Trumps, it's said,are the meaning of all process and the measure of the everlastingdance."

"Some folk-lore survival, I suppose?" Mr. Coningsby said, wishing thathis daughter hadn't got herself mixed up with a fellow very much like afolk-lore survival.

"Certainly it may be that, sir," the young man answered, "from the talesmy people used to tell round their fires while they were vagabonds."

"It sounds frightfully thrilling," Nancy said. "What is the everlastingdance, Henry darling?"

He put his arm round her as Mr. Coningsby turned back to his chair."Don't you know?" he whispered. "Look at the seventh card."

She obeyed; and on it, under the stamped monogram, she saw the twolovers, each aureoled, each with hands stretched out; each clad in somewild beast's skin, dancing side by side down a long road, that ran froma far-off point right down to the foreground. Her hand closed on Henry'sand she smiled at him. "Just that?" she said.

"That's at least the first movement," he answered; "unless you go withthe hermit."

"Sybil, I'm waiting," Mr. Coningsby said, and Sybil hastily picked upanother pack, while Ralph very willingly collected and put away theTarots.

But the interest had flagged. Henry and Nancy were preoccupied, Mr.Coningsby and his son were beginning to be bored, and in a few minutesSybil said pleasantly, "Don't you all think we've looked at about enoughfor to-night?"

"She really does know when to stop," Mr. Coningsby thought to himself,but he only said cheerfully, "Just as you like, just as you like. Whatdo you say, Henry?"

"Eh?...O, just as you like," Henry agreed with a start.

"I vote we push them back then," Ralph said, even more cheerfully thanhis father. "Jolly good collection. But those what-you-may-call-them arethe star lot."

Hours later, by the door, the sight of a single star low in the heavensbrought one of the "what-you-may-call-thems" back to Nancy's mind. "O,and darling," she said, "will you teach me how to tell fortunes by thoseother cards--you know, the special ones?"

"The Tarots?" Henry asked her, with a touch of irony in his voice.

"If that's what you call them," she said. "I can do a bit by theordinary ones."

"Have you got the sleight of hand for it?" he asked. "You have to feelhow the cards are going, and let yourself do what they mean."

Nancy looked at her hands, and flexed them. "I don't see why not, unlessyou have to do it very quickly. Do try me, Henry sweet."

He took both her hands in one of his. "We'll try, darling," he answered;"we'll try what you can do with the Greater Trumps. If it's the pack Ithink it is. Tell me, do you think your father would ever sell them tome?"

"Why? Do you want them?" she asked in surprise. "Henry, I believe you'rea real gipsy after all! Will you disguise yourself and go to the races?O, let's, and I'll be the gipsy maiden. 'Kind sir, kind sir,'" shetrilled, "and everyone'll cross my palm with pound notes because I'm sobeautiful, and perhaps the King will kiss me before all the Courtladies. Would you like that? He might give me a diamond ring too, andyou could show it to the judges when they came to tea. No, don't tell methey won't, because when you're a judge they will, and you'll all talkabout your cases till I shall only have the diamond ring to think aboutand how the King of England once gave it to Nancy the little gipsy girl,before she became Lady Lee, and tried to soften her husband's hard heartfor the poor prisoners--the ruffians--the police brought to him. So whenyou see me dreaming you'll know what I'm dreaming of, and you mustnever, never interrupt."

"I don't really have much chance, do I?" Henry asked.

"O, cruel!" she said, "to mock your Nancy so! Will you call me achatterbox before all the world? or shall I always talk to you on myfingers--like that?"--they gleamed before him, shaping the letters--"andtell you on them what shop I've been to each day, as if I were dumb andyou were deaf?"

He caught a hand in one of his, and lightly struck the fingers of hisother over its palm. "Don't flaunt your beauties," he said, "or when I'ma judge you'll be before me charged with having a proud heart, and I'llsend you to spoil your hands doing laundry-work in a prison."

"Then I'll trap the governor's son, and escape," she said, "and make aballad of a wicked judge, and how first he beat and then shut up his owntrue sweetheart. Darling, you must be getting on. I'll see youto-morrow, won't I? O, good night. Do go home and sleep well. Goodnight. Don't let anything happen to you, will you?"

"I'll stop it at once," he said. "If anything starts to happen, I'll bevery angry with it."

"Do," she said, "for I don't want anything to happen ever any more. O,good night--why aren't you gone? It doesn't take you long to get home,does it? You'll be asleep by midnight."

But when she herself fell asleep Henry was driving his car out of Londonsouthward, and it was long past midnight before he stopped it at alonely house among the Downs.

## Chapter Two - THE HERMIT

An old man was sitting alone in a small room. He was at a table facingthe door; behind him was another door. The walls were bare of pictures;the table was a large one, and it was almost completely covered with aset of Tarot cards. The old man was moving them very carefully fromplace to place, making little notes on a sheet of paper, and sometimesconsulting an old manuscript book that lay by him. He was so absorbedthat he did not hear the step outside, and it was not till the dooropened that he looked up with a sudden exclamation. Henry Lee camelightly into the room.

"Why, Henry!" the old man said. Henry looked at the table, let his eyesrun over the whole arrangement of the cards, and smiled.

"Still no nearer, grandfather?" he asked.

"Nearer? No, no, not nearer yet," his grandfather answered. "Not quite,yet awhile. But I shall do it." He sighed a little. "I keep the accountvery carefully," he said, "and some day I shall do it. I spend all mytime on it."

Henry nodded towards the other door. "And--they?" he asked, lowering hisvoice a trifle.

"Yes," the old man said. "I watch them too. But, you know--it's toodifficult. But I must do it at last. You're not...you're not comingback to help me, are you?"

"Why, I may even do that," Henry said, taking off his motoring-coat.

Aaron Lee got to his feet. He was certainly very old--nearly a century,one might think, looking at the small wizened figure, dark-skinned andbald; but his movements, though slow, were not uncertain: his hands weresteady as he leaned on the table, and if his voice shook a little, itwas with excitement and not from senility.

"What do you mean, Henry?" he asked. "Have you found out anything? Whathave you heard? Have you--have you the secret?"

Henry sat down on the edge of the table, and idly fingered one of thecards. "Don't believe me too much," he said. "I don't believe myself. Idon't know about the secret--no, I think we still have to find that out.But I think"--he dropped the card and looked burningly at hisgrandfather--"I think I have found the originals."

Aaron gave a short gasp. "It's not possible," he began, and fell into afit of trembling so great that he dropped again into his chair. When toa degree it had passed, he said once more, "It's not possible."

"You think not?" the younger man asked.

"Tell me," Aaron exclaimed, leaning forward, "what are they? Why do youbelieve--how can you--that--" His voice stopped, so anxious was he,but after a moment's pause he added--"Tell me; tell me."

"It is so unlikely," Henry began, "and yet with them there is nothingeither likely or unlikely, is there? One cannot tell how they will moveto-morrow. Tell me first, grandfather, do you still watch my futureevery day?"

"Every day by the cards," Aaron said.

"And did yesterday promise nothing for to-day?" the young man asked.

"Nothing that I thought important," Aaron answered. "Something was tocome to you, some piece of good luck; the ace of cups lay on the Wheelof Fortune--but I thought it had to do with your law. I put it by to askyou about when you came."

"You are old, grandfather," Henry said. "Are the cups only deniers foryou to think so?"

"But what could I think?" Aaron protested. "It was a day's chance--Icouldn't--But what is it? What have you found?"

"I have told you I am betrothed," Henry went on, using the solemn wordas if deliberately, "and her father has had left him--by a friend of hiswho is dead--a collection of playing-cards...O, the usual thing,except for a set of the symbols. He showed them to us and I tell you,grandfather, I think it is the very one original set. I've come hereto-night to see."

"Have you got them?" the old one asked eagerly, but Henry shook hishead.

"Time enough," he said. "Listen, among them is not the Chariot anEgyptian car, devised with two sphinxes, driven by a Greek, and havingon it paintings of cities and islands?"

"It is just that," the other said.

"And Death--is not Death a naked peasant, with a knife in his hand, withhis sandals slung at his side?"

"It is so," the other said again.

"Certainly then they are the same," Henry concluded. "But let us look atthem, for that's why I have come."

The old man got up, and took from an inner pocket of his coat a key. Hewalked slowly to the inner door, and Henry followed him. He put the keyin the lock, turned it, and opened the door. Within the room they wereon the point of entering, and directly before them, there hung fromceiling to floor thick black curtains, and for a moment, as he laid hishand on one of these, the old man hesitated. Then he half pulled itaside, half lifted it, and went through, holding it so that his grandsonmight enter after him.

The place into which they came was smaller than the outer room. It washung all round with a heavy black stuff, and it was filled with acurious pale light, which certainly did not come through any window orother opening. The colour of that pale light was uncertain; it seemed tochange softly from one hue to another--now it was red, as if it were thereflection of a very distant fire; now it was green, as if diffusedthrough invisible waters that covered them; now it was darker and halfobscured by vapour; now those vapours were dispelled and the clearpallor of early dawn exhibited itself within the room. To this changingphenomenon of light the two men paid no attention; they were gazing at atable which stood in the centre.

It was a table made of some strange kind of wood: so much could be seenfrom the single central support which opened at the bottom into fourfoot-pieces, and each of these again into some twelve or fourteen claws,upon the whole fifty-six of which the table rested. But the top washidden, for it was covered by a plate of what looked like gold, markedvery intricately with a pattern, or perhaps with two patterns, one ofsquares, and one of circles, so that the eyes, as with a chessboard, sawnow one and now the other as predominant. Upon that plate of gold were anumber of little figures, each about three inches high, also of gold, itseemed, very wonderfully wrought; so that the likeness to thechess-board was even more pronounced, for to any hasty spectator (couldsuch a one ever have penetrated there) the figures might have seemedlike those in a game; only there were many of them, and they were all inmovement. Gently and continuously they went, immingling, unresting--asif to some complicated measure, and as if of their own volition. Theremust have been nearly a hundred of them, and from the golden plate uponwhich they went came a slight sound of music--more like an echo than asound--sometimes quickening, sometimes slowing, to which the goldenfigures kept a duteous rhythm, or perhaps the faint sound itself was buttheir harmonized movement upon their field.

Henry took a few steps forward, slowly and softly, almost as if he wereafraid that those small images would overhear him, and softly and slowlyAaron followed. They paused at a little distance from the table, andstood gazing at the figures, the young man in a careful comparison ofthem with his memory of the newly found cards. He saw among them thosewho bore the coins, and those who held swords or staffs or cups; andamong those he searched for the shapes of the Greater Trumps, and one byone his eyes found them, but each separately, so that as he fastened hisattention on one the rest faded around it to a golden blur. But therethey were, in exact presentation--the juggler who danced continuouslyround the edge of the circle, tossing little balls up and catching themagain; the Emperor and Empress; the masculine and feminine hierophants;the old anchorite treading his measure and the hand-clasped loverswheeling in theirs; a Sphinx-drawn chariot moving in a dancing guard ofthe four lesser orders; an image closing the mouth of a lion, andanother bearing a cup closed by its hand, and another with scales butwith unbandaged eyes--which had been numbered in the paintings underthe titles of strength and temperance and justice; the wheel of fortuneturning between two blinded shapes who bore it; two other shapes whobore between them a pole or cross on which hung by his foot the image ofa man; the swift ubiquitous form of a sickle-armed Death; a hornedmystery bestriding two chained victims; a tower that rose and fell intopieces, and then was re-arisen in some new place; and the woman who worea crown of stars, and the twin beasts who had each of them on theirheads a crescent moon, and the twin children on whose brows were tworayed suns in glory--the star, the moon, the sun; the heavenly form ofjudgement who danced with a skeleton half freed from its graveclothes,and held a trumpet to its lips; and the single figure who leapt in arapture and was named the world. One by one Henry recognized them andnamed them to himself, and all the while the tangled measure wentswiftly on. After a few minutes he looked round: "They're certainly thesame; in every detail they're the same. Some of the attributed meaningsaren't here, of course, but that's all."

"Even to that?" Aaron asked in a low voice, and pointed to the Fool inthe middle of the field.

It was still: it alone in the middle of all that curious dance did notmove, though it stood as if poised for running; the lynx or other greatcat by its side was motionless also. They paused--the man and thebeast--as if struck into inactivity in the very midst of activity. Andall about them, sliding, stepping, leaping, rolling, the complex dancewent on.

"That certainly," Henry said, turning slowly away.

The old man took a step to meet him. "But then," he whispered, so thathis faint voice blended with the faint music, "but then we can findout--at any moment--what the dance says? We can tell what the futurewill be--from what the present is?"

Henry spread out his hands towards the table, as if he were layingsomething down. "That could be done, I suppose," he answered. "But ifthe Fool does not move, how will it affect divination? Don't your bookstell you anything?"

"There are no writings which tell us anything at all of the Fool," Aaronsaid.

They stood still for what might have been two or three minutes, watchingthat unresting movement, hearing that unceasing sound, themselveschanged from moment to moment in that altering light; then Aaron said,"Come away now. I don't like to watch too long, unless I am working atthe order of the dance."

Henry stood for a moment longer. "I wonder if you can know the dancewithout being among the dancers," he said.

"But we are," the old man answered hurriedly; "we are--everything is."

"O, as everything is," Henry uttered scornfully, "as stones or winds orships. But stones and winds and ships don't know. And to know--" Hefell silent, and stood meditating till the other pulled at his arm;then, a little reluctantly, he turned to withdraw, and between thecurtains and through the doorway they came into the outer room. Aaronlocked the door and went back to his seat at the table, whence he lookedinquiringly at his grandson.

"What will you do now about the cards?" he asked.

Henry came back from his secret thoughts with an abrupt movement of hisbody, and smiled, though his eyes remained brilliant and sombre. "Idon't know," he admitted. "Remember, I've only just seen them."

"This owner, this father--will he sell them?" Aaron asked.

Henry played a tune on the table. "If he doesn't," he answered slowly,"I don't know quite how...He is supposed, at his death--or before,perhaps--to give them to the British Museum. All of them."

"What?" Aaron cried out in something like terror. "But that's imbecile.Surely he'd sell--if we offered him enough?"

Henry shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "He's a man who's gotpretty well everything he wants and finds it entirely useless to him. Hedoesn't need money at all badly. He can think of nothing that will givehim pleasure, and because of that he doesn't like other people to havetoo much pleasure. No, he isn't cruel; he's even kind in his own way.But he holds on to his own as a child does to a broken toy--because oneday it might want it or because it doesn't like to see another childplaying with what was once its own."

"But money?" Aaron urged.

"I tell you he doesn't want money," Henry said.

"Wouldn't he give it to his daughter?" Aaron asked more hopefully. "Areyou going to marry her?"

"He can't easily give her one pack out of the whole collection, and therest to the Museum," Henry answered. "Yes--I shall marry her. I thinkperhaps--but that doesn't matter. But if he gives her the whole lot hewill be bothered by his friend's wish; and if he gives her one pack hewill be bothered by the explanations; and if he leaves it all to theMuseum he will be bothered by losing it."

"But how will he lose it--if he keeps it while he's alive?" the old manasked.

"I think he's already unhappy, even while he's alive, at the idea oflosing at his death so much that he could never enjoy," Henry said. "Heis for ever waiting for satisfaction."

Aaron Lee leaned forward. "But it's necessary that he should sell it orgive it--or lose it somehow," he said anxiously.

"It would be very difficult for him to lose it," the other answered."And how do you know what virtue might pass from the cards?"

"Only violence...that's unwise," Aaron answered. "But to take them...to take them for this purpose...I don't see the wrong."

"Mr. Lothair Coningsby would see the wrong," Henry said drily. "And Idoubt if I could persuade Nancy."

"What's she to do with it?" his grandfather asked contemptuously.

Henry smiled again, a bright but almost threatening flash of amusement."I wonder," he said. "But, whatever I wonder, be certain, grandfather,that I'm determined not to go against her till..."

He stopped for so long that Aaron said, "Till--till when?"

"Till I've seen whether the image of the Lovers has another use," Henryfinished. "To know--to see from within--to be aware of the dance. Well,we shall see." His eyes fixed on the inner door, he added slowly, "Nancy--Nancy--Nancy."

Aaron said: "But you must do something soon. We can't run any risk. Anaccident--"

"Or a spasm of gloom," Henry added, "and the cards would be in theMuseum. Yes, you're right; we can't wait. By the way, do you ever seeanything of Joanna?"

"I haven't seen her for months," the old man answered, with a slightshudder. "She came here in the summer--I told you."

"I know you did," Henry said. "Is she still as mad as ever? Is she stillcrying out on the names of the old dead gods?"

The other moved uneasily. "Don't let's talk of it. I am afraid ofJoanna."

"Afraid of her?" Henry said scornfully. "Why, what can she do to harmus?"

"Joanna's mad, with a terrifying madness," Aaron said. "If she knowsthat the Tarots might be brought back to their originals and the workingof the mystery be complete--"

"What could an old woman and an idiot boy do?" Henry asked.

"Call them an insane prophetess and a young obedient Samson," Aaronanswered. "I dream of her sometimes as if she belonged to them. If shethought the body of her child was found and formed and vivified...andif she knew of the cards, she might...A mad hierophant...a hieratichate..."

"Mightn't she be appeased if she thought her child was found?" Henryasked.

"If she thought that we kept it from her?" the old man said. "Ask yourown blood, Henry, what your desire would do. Your spirit is more likehers than mine. When she and I were young together, I set myself todiscover the prophetic meaning of the dance, but she imagined herself apartner in it, and she studied the old tales and myths of Egypt--thirtyyears she studied them, and her child was to be a Mighty One born withinthe measure. It was born, and the same day it died--"

Henry interrupted him sharply. "You've never told me this," he said."Did Joanna mean knowingly to create life within the dance? Why did thechild die? Who was the father?"

"Because its heart was too great, perhaps, or its body too feeble: howshould I know?" his grandfather answered. "She married a man who wasreckoned knowledgeable, but he led an evil life and he was a playthingcompared to Joanna. She longed to adore him, and she could only mock athim and herself. Yet she was fierce for him after the flesh, and shemade him her child's father and hated him for his feebleness. She wouldstrike and taunt him while the child was in her womb--for love andanger and hate and scorn and fear. The child was a seven-months' child,and it died. The father ran away from her the day before it was born,and the same night was killed in a street accident when he was drunk.But Joanna, when she heard that the child was dead, screamed once andher face changed, and the Tarot cards that she sought (as we have alldone), and the myth of gods that she studied, and the child that shouldhave been a lord of power and was instead a five-hours-old body ofdeath--these tangled themselves in her brain for ever; and for fiftyyears she has sought the thing that she calls Osiris because it dies andHorus because it lives and at night little sweet names which onlyStephen hears. And it has one and twenty faces, which are the faces ofthem within and of the Tarots, and when she finds the limbs that havebeen torn apart by her enemy, who is her husband and is Set and is wewho seek the cards also, she thinks she will again become the Queen ofHeaven, and the twice twenty-one gods shall adore her with incense andchanting. No doubt she is mad, Henry, but I had rather deal with yourother mad creature than with her."

Henry meditated for some time, walking about the room in silence; thenhe said, "Well, there's no reason why she should hear of it, unless shesnuffs the news up out of the air."

"She may even do that," Aaron said. "Her life is not as ours, and theair and the lords of the sceptres are one."

"In any case, I don't see what she can do to interfere with us," Henryanswered. "She had her chance and lost it. I will see that I don't losemine. As for Coningsby--" He walked up and down the room for a fewminutes in silence; then he said, "I've a good mind to try and get themhere for Christmas. It's a month off--that ought to give me time. Youcould manage, I suppose?"

"What good would that be?" his grandfather asked.

Henry sat down again. "Why, it's clear," he said, "that we shall have tolet them know something--Nancy and her father anyhow. If he's got togive us the cards he's got to have a reason for doing it, and so far asI can see--"

"You're not going to show him them?" Aaron exclaimed, glancing over hisshoulder at the door of the inner room.

"Why not?" Henry asked lightly. "What does it matter? There're all sortsof explanations. Besides, I want to show Nancy, and she'll be able towork on him better if he's seen them."

"But he'll tell people!" Aaron protested.

"What can he tell them?" Henry asked. "And, if he does, who's to believehim? Besides--after we've got the cards...well, we don't know what wecan do, do we? I'm sure that's the best. See, I'll ask Nancy--and she'llbring her aunt, I suppose--"

"Her aunt?" Aaron interrupted sharply. "How many are you going to bring?Who is this aunt?"

"Her aunt," Henry said, "is just the opposite to her father. As sereneand undisturbed as...as they are. Nothing puts her out; nothingdisturbs her. Yet she isn't a fool. She'll be quite harmless, however:it won't matter whether she sees or not. She'll be interested, but notconcerned. Well, Nancy and her aunt and her father. I'll try and dodgethe brother; he's simply a bore. There'll be the three of them, and me;say, for--Christmas Day's on a Saturday, isn't it?--say, from Thursdayto Tuesday, or a day or two longer. Well?"

"But will he come?" Aaron asked doubtfully.

"I think he may," Henry said. "Oh, of course he won't want to, but, ashe won't want to do anything else in particular, it may be possible towork it. Only you'd better keep Joanna out of the way."

"I don't know in the least where she is," the old man said irritably.

"Can't you find out by the cards?" Henry smiled. "Or must you wait forthe Tarots?" On the word his face changed, and he came near to thetable. "We will certainly have them," he said in a low, firm voice. "Whoknows? perhaps we can find out what the Fool means, and why it doesn'tdance."

Aaron caught his sleeve. "Henry," he breathed, "if--if there should bean accident--if there should--who would get the cards?"

"Don't be a fool," Henry said roughly. "Haven't you always told me thatviolence breaks the knowledge of the cards?"

"They told me so," the old man answered reluctantly, "but I don'tsee...anyhow, we needn't both..."

"Wait," his grandson answered, and turned to pick up his coat. "I mustget back." He stretched himself, and laughed a little. "Nancy told me tohave a good night," he said, "and here I am spending it talking to you."

"Don't talk too much to these people of yours," Aaron grumbled, "Nancyor any of them."

His grandson pulled on his coat. "Nancy and I will talk to one another,"he said, "and perhaps what we say shall be stranger talk than everlovers had before. Good night. I will tell you what I can do about itall in London."

## Chapter Three - THE SHUFFLING OF THE CARDS

The Coningsbys usually went to Eastbourne for Christmas. The habit hadbeen begun because Mr. Coningsby had discovered that he preferred hotellife for those few days to having his own house treated as an hotel.Groups of young people would arrive at any hour of day or night, andNancy or Ralph, if in, would leap up and rush to welcome them or, if notin, would arrive soon after, inquiring for friends who had alreadydisappeared. Mr. Coningsby disapproved strongly, but for once foundhimself helpless, so sudden was the rush; he therefore preferred to begenerous and give everyone a thorough change. It was never quite clearwhether he regarded this as on his sister's account chiefly or on hischildren's. She was supposed to need it, but they were supposed to enjoyit, and so after the first year they all went back each Christmas to thesame hotel, and Mr. Coningsby put up with playing bridge andoccasionally observing the revels and discussing civilization with othergentlemen of similar good nature.

It annoyed him slightly at times that Sybil never seemed quite gratefulenough for the mere change--as change. Even the profound content inwhich she normally seemed to have her being--"sluggish, sluggish," Mr.Coningsby said to himself when he thought of it, and walked a littlemore briskly--even that repose must surely be all the pleasanter for achange. There were always some nice women about for her to talk to. Ofcourse, she was pleased to go--but not sufficiently pleased to gratifyMr. Coningsby: he was maddened by that continuous equable delight. Sheenjoyed everything--and he, he enjoyed nothing.

But this year things were different--had got, or anyhow were going, tobe different. It had begun with Ralph, who, rather confusedly, hadintimated that he was going to have a still more thorough change bygoing off altogether with some friend of his whose people livedsomewhere near Lewes. Mr. Coningsby had not said much, or did not seemto himself to have done so, but he had made it clear that he dislikedsuch secession from the family life. To summer holidays spent withfriends he had (he hoped) never objected, but Christmas was different.Christmas was, in fact, the time when Mr. Coningsby most nearly realizedthe passage of time and the approach of age and death. For Christmasevery year had been marked by small but definite changes, through hisown childhood, his youth, his marriage, his children's infancy andchildhood, and now there were only two possibilities of change--thecoming of a third generation or the stopping of Christmas. Each yearthat Mr. Coningsby succeeded in keeping Nancy and Ralph by him forChristmas postponed either unwelcome change, and enabled him to enterthe New Year with the pretence that it was merely the Old Year beginningover again. But this year his friend's death had already shaken him, andif he and Sybil and Nancy--an engaged Nancy--were to be without Ralph,the threat of an inevitable solitude would loom very near. There wouldbe a gap, and he had nothing with which to fill the gap or to meet whatmight come through it; nothing except the fact that he was a Warden inLunacy, and had all the privileges of a Warden--such as going in todinner before the elder sons of younger sons of peers. He did not knowwhere, years before, he had picked up that bit of absurd knowledge, inwhat odd table of precedence, but he knew it was so, and had evenmentioned it once to Sybil. But all the elder sons of younger sons ofpeers whose spectres he could crowd into that gap did not seem to fillit. There was an emptiness brought to mind, and only brought to mind,for it was always there, though he forgot it. He filled it with hisoffice, his occupation, his family, his house, his friends, hispolitics, his food, his sleep, but sometimes the emptiness was too bigto be filled thus, and sometimes it rolled up on him, along the streetwhen he left the home in the morning, blowing in at evening through theopen window or creeping up outside when it was shut, or even sometimeslooking ridiculously at him in the unmeaning headlines of his morningpaper. "Prime Minister," he would read, "Announces Fresh OilLegislation"--and the words would be for one second all separate andmeaningless--"Prime Minister"--what was a Prime Minister? Blur, blot,nothingness, and then again the breakfast-table and The Times and Sybil.

Ralph's announced defection therefore induced him unconsciously todesire to make a change for himself, and induced him again to meet moreequably than he otherwise might have done Nancy's tentative hints aboutthe possibility of the rest of them going to Henry's grandfather. Itdidn't strike him as being a very attractive suggestion for himself, butit offered him every chance of having Nancy and Henry as well as Ralphto blame for his probable discomfort or boredom or gloom, and thereforeof lessening a concentration on Ralph, Ralph's desertion, change,age--and the other thing. Sybil, when he consulted her, was happy tofind him already half-reconciled to the proposal.

"I'm afraid it'll be very dull for you," he said.

"O, I don't think so," she answered. "It'll have to be very dull indeedif it is."

"And of course we don't know what the grandfather's like," he added.

"He's presumably human," Sybil said, "so he'll be interesting somehow."

"Really, Sybil," Mr. Coningsby answered, almost crossly, "you do say themost ridiculous things. As if everybody was interesting."

"Well, I think everybody is," Sybil protested, "and things apart fromtheir bodies we don't know, do we? And considering what funny, lovelythings bodies are, I'm not especially anxious to leave off knowingthem."

Her brother kept the conversation straight. "I gather that he's old butquite active still, not bed-ridden or anything."

"Then we shan't be expected to sit with him," Sybil said happily, "and,as Nancy and Henry certainly wouldn't want to, you and I will be muchfreer."

"If I thought I was expected to sit with a senile old man--" Mr.Coningsby said in alarm, "but Henry implied that he'd got all hisfaculties. Have you heard anything?"

"Good heavens, no!" said Sybil, and, being in what her brother calledone of her perverse moods, added, "I love that phrase."

"What phrase?" Mr. Coningsby asked, having missed anything particular.

"Good heavens," Sybil repeated, separating the words. "It sayseverything almost, doesn't it? I don't like to say 'Good God' too often;people so often misunderstand."

"Sometimes you talk exactly in Nancy's irresponsible way, Sybil," herbrother complained. "I don't see any sense in it. Why should one want tosay 'Good God'?"

"Well, there isn't really much else to say, is there?" Sybil asked, andadded hastily, "No, my dear, I'm sorry, I was only--" She hesitated fora word.

"I know you were," Mr. Coningsby said, as if she had found it, "but Idon't think jokes of that kind are in the best of taste. It's possibleto be humorous without being profane."

"I beg your pardon, Lothair," Sybil said meekly. She tried her best notto call her brother "Lothair", because that was one of the things whichseemed to him to be profane without being humorous. But it was pain andgrief to her; there wasn't all that time to enjoy everything in life asit should be enjoyed, and the two of them could have enjoyed thatridiculous name so much better together. However, since she loved him,she tried not to force the good God's richness of wonder too much on hisattention, and so she went on hastily, "Nancy's looking forward to it somuch."

"At her age," Mr. Coningsby remarked, "one naturally looks forward."

"And at ours," Sybil said, "when there isn't the time there isn't thenecessity: the present's so entirely satisfactory."

Mr. Coningsby just stopped himself saying, "Good God," with quite adifferent intonation. He waited a minute or two and said, "You knowHenry's offered to take us down in his car?"

"Nice of him," Sybil answered, and allowed herself to become involved ina discussion of what her brother would or would not take: at the end ofwhich he suddenly said, "O, and by the way, you might look through thosepacks of cards and put in a few of the most interesting--and thecatalogue--especially the set we were looking at the other evening.Nancy asked me; it seems there are some others down there, and Henry andshe want to compare them. A regular gipsy taste! But if it amusesthem...He's promised to show her some tricks."

"Then I hope," Miss Coningsby said, "that Nancy won't try to show themto us before she's practised them. Not that I mind being surprised in anunintentional way, but it'd show a state of greater sanctity on herpart."

"Sanctity!" Mr. Coningsby uttered derisively. "Nancy's not very nearsanctity."

"My dear, she's in love," his sister exclaimed.

"And what's that got to do with sanctity?" Mr. Coningsby askedtriumphantly, and enjoyed the silence to which Sybil sometimes foundherself driven. Anyone who didn't realize the necessary connexionbetween love and sanctity left her incapable of explanation.

"Tricks" was hardly the word which Nancy would have used that sameevening, though it was one which Henry himself had used to her a week orso before. It wanted still some ten days to Christmas, and in thefortnight that had elapsed since the examination of the late Mr.Duncannon's legacy the subject of the cards had cropped up several timesbetween the two young people. Nancy had the natural, alert interest ofyouth, as Sybil had the--perhaps supernatural--vivid interest of age,and Henry's occasional rather mysterious remarks had provoked it stillmore. She had, in fact, examined the cards by herself, and re-read theentry in the catalogue, and looked up "Tarot" in the encyclopaediawithout being much more advanced. As she sat now coiled in front of thedining-room fire, playing gently with her lover's fingers, at oncestirred and soothed by the contact, she suddenly twisted round to facehim in the deep chair to her right.

"But, Henry, dearest, what is it you mean?" she said. "You keep ontalking of these cards as if they were important."

"So they are," Henry answered. "Exactly how important depends on you,perhaps."

Nancy sat up on her heels. "Henry," she said, "are you teasing me or areyou not? If you are, you're not human at all."

"Then you don't know what you'd miss," Henry said.

Nancy threw out her arms. "O wretched me!" she cried dramatically."Henry, if I pretend I don't want to know, are you sure you'll play up?You won't take a mean advantage, will you?"

"If you really don't want to know," he told her, "I certainly won't tellyou. That's the whole point. Do you really want to know?"

"Have I bared my heart to have it mistrusted?" she said. "Must I pineaway in an hour or so to persuade you? Or will it do if I sob myself tosleep on the spot? As I used not to say when we did Julius Caesar atschool, if you don't tell me, 'Portia is Brutus's harlot, not his wife.'What a nasty little cad and cat Portia was--to squeeze it out of himlike that! But I swear I'll give myself a wound 'here in the thigh'unless you do tell me, and bleed to death all over your beautifultrousers."

He took her hand in his so strongly that her eyes changed to immediategravity.

"If you want to know," he said, "I will tell you what I can here; andthe rest--there. If you can bear it."

"Do as you will," she answered seriously. "If it's no joke, then try meand let me go if I fail. At that," she added with a sudden smile, "Ithink I won't fail."

"Then bring the Tarot cards now, if you can," he said. "But quietly. Idon't want the others to know."

"They're out--father and Ralph," she answered. "I will go and get them,"and on the word was away from the room.

For the few minutes that elapsed before she returned he stood lookingabsently before him, so that he did not at once hear her entrance, andher eyes took him in, his frown, his concentrated gaze, the hand thatmade slight unpurposed movements by his side. As she looked, she herselfunconsciously disposed herself to meet him, and she came across the roomto him with something in her of preparation, as if, clear and splendid,she came to her bridal; nor did they smile as they met, though it wasthe first time in their mutual acquaintance that so natural a sweetnesshad been lacking. He took the cards from her, and then, laying his handon her shoulder, lightly compelled her towards the large table in themiddle of the room. Then he drew the cards from their case, which hethrew carelessly from him to the floor, and began to separate them intofive piles.

"Look," he said, "these are the twenty-two cards--the twenty-one and theone which is nothing--that we looked at the other night. Those are theGreater Trumps, and there's nothing to tell you about them now; theymust wait till another time. But these others are the four suits, andyou will see what we did not carefully look at then--they're not theusual designs, not clubs and spades and hearts and diamonds, but staffsor sceptres, and swords and cups and coins--or deniers: those last areshaped sometimes as pentacles, but this is the better marking. Andsee--there are fourteen and not thirteen in each suit, for besides theKnave and Queen and King there is in these the Knight: so that here, forinstance, are the Knave--or Esquire--of sceptres, and the Knight, Queen,and King of sceptres; and so with the swords, the cups, and the deniers.Look, here they are."

She bent above them, watching, and after a moment he went on.

"Now these cards are the root and origin of all cards, and no one knowsfrom where they came, for the tale is that they were first heard ofamong the gipsies in Spain in the thirteenth century. Some say they areolder, and some even talk of Egypt, but that matters very little. Itisn't the time behind them, but the process in them, that's important.There are many packs of Tarot cards, but the one original pack, which isthis, has a secret behind it that I will show you on Christmas Eve.Because of that secret this pack, and this only, is a pack of greatmight."

He paused again, and still she made no movement. He glanced at her handsresting on the edge of the table, and resumed.

"All things are held together by correspondence, image with image,movement with movement: without that there could be no relation andtherefore no truth. It is our business--especially yours and mine--totake up the power of relation. Do you know what I mean?"

As she suddenly looked up at him, she almost smiled.

"Darling," she murmured, "how couldn't I know that? I didn't need thecards to tell me. Ah, but go on: show me what it means in them."

For another second he paused, arrested: it was as if she had immediatelybefore her something which he sought far off. A little less certainly heagain went on, his voice recovering itself almost immediately.

"There is in these suits a great relation to the four compacted elementsof the created earth, and you shall find the truth of this now, if youchoose, and if the tales told among my people and the things that werewritten down among them are true. This pack has been hidden from us formore than two centuries, and for all that time no one, I think, can havetried it till to-night. The latest tale we know of is that once, underElizabeth, a strange ancestor of mine, who had fled to England from theauthority of the King of Spain, raised the winds which blew the Armadanorthward past Scotland."

Nancy wrinkled her forehead as he paused. "Do you mean," she began, "doyou mean that he...I'm sorry, darling, I don't seem to understand. Howcould he raise the winds?"

"'The beating of the cards is the wind'," he answered, "but don't tryand believe it now. Think of it as a fable, but think that on some pointof the sea-shore one of those wild fugitives stood by night and shookthese cards--these"--he laid his hand on the heap of the suit of staffsor sceptres--"and beat the air with them till he drove it into tumultand sent the great blasts over the seas to drive the ships of KingPhilip to wreck and destruction. See that in your mind; can you?"

"I can," she said. "It's a mad picture, but I can."

He stooped to pick up the case, and restored to it the swords, thestaffs, and the cups, and the Greater Trumps, all in silence; then helaid it by, and took up the suit deniers, or coins, or pentacles.

"Now," he said, smiling at her, "shall we see what your hands and minecan do?"

"Tell me," she answered.

He gave the fourteen cards to her, and, standing close by her, he madeher hold them in both hands and laid his own over hers. "Now listen," hesaid in her ear, speaking slowly and commandingly; "you will think ofearth, garden-mould, the stuff of the fields, and the dry dust of theroads: the earth your flowers grow in, the earth to which our bodies aregiven, the earth which in one shape or another makes the land as partedfrom the waters. Will you do as I say?"

Very serious, she looked up at him. "Yes, Henry," she said, and hervoice lingered a little on the second word, as if she gave herself sothe more completely to his intention. He said again: "Earth, earth ofgrowing and decaying things--fill your mind with the image of it. Andlet your hands be ready to shuffle the cards. Hold them securely butlightly, and if they seem to move let them have their way. Help them;help them to slide and shuffle. I put my hands over yours; are youafraid?"

She answered quite simply, "Need I be?"

"Never at all," he said, "neither now nor hereafter. Don't be afraid;these things can be known, and it's good for us to know them.Now--begin."

She bent her mind to its task, a little vaguely at first, but soon moredefinitely. She filled it with the thought of the garden, the earth thatmade it up, dry dust sometimes, sometimes rich loam--the worms thatcrawled in it and the roots of the flowers thrusting down--no, not wormsand roots--earth, deep thick earth. Great tree-roots going deep intoit--along the roots her mind penetrated into it, along the dividing,narrowing, dwindling roots, all the crannies and corners filled withearth, rushing up into her shoulder-pits, her elbows sticking out,little bumps on those protracted roots. Mould clinging together, fallingapart; a spade splitting it, almost as if thrust into her thoughts, aspadeful of mould. Digging--holes, pits, mines, tunnels, graves--no,those things were not earth. Graves--the bodies in them being made onewith the earth about them, so that at last there was no difference.Earth to earth--she herself earth; body, shoulders, limbs, earth in herarms, in her hands.

There were springs, deep springs, cisterns and wells and rivers of waterdown in the earth, water floating in rocky channels or oozing throughthe earth itself; the earth covering, hampering, stifling them, theybursting upwards through it. No, not water--earth. Her feet clung to it,were feeling it, were strangely drawing it up into themselves, and moreand more and higher and higher that sensation of unity with the stuff ofher own foundation crept. There were rocks, but she was not a rock--notyet; something living, like an impatient rush of water, was bubbling upwithin her, but she felt it as an intrusion into the natural part of herbeing. Her lips were rough against each other; her face must be stainedand black. She almost put up her wrist to brush the earth from hercheek--not her hand, for that also was dirty; her fingers felt the grit.They were, both hands, breaking and rubbing a lump of earth betweenthem; they were full and heaped with earth that was slipping over themand sliding between the fingers, and she was trying to hold it in--notto let it escape.

"Gently, gently," a voice murmured in her ear. The sound brought herback with a start, and dispelled the sensation that held her; she sawagain the cards in her hands, and saw now that her hands, with Henry'slying over them, were shuffling the cards, each moment more quickly. Shewas trying to keep up with the movement, she wasn't initiating it--andthat feeling of earth escaping was in fact only this compulsion whichthe cards were exercising. They were sliding out and sliding back--nowshe saw the four of deniers on top, and now the ace, and now theEsquire, and now the King, a hatted figure, with a four-forked beard,holding the coin--or whatever it was--in a gloved hand. It shone up ather, and a card from below slipped out, and her fingers thrust it back,and it covered the King--the nine of deniers. A slight sound reachedher--a curious continuous sound, yet hardly a sound at all, a faintrustle. The cards were gritty, or her hands were; or was it thepersistent rubbing of her palms against the edges of the cards? What wasthat rustling noise? It wasn't her mere fancy, nor was it mere fancythat some substance was slipping between her fingers. Below her handsand the cards she saw the table, and some vague unusualness in itattracted her. It was black--well, of course, but a dull heavy black,and down to it from her hands a kind of cloud was floating. It was fromthere that the first sound came; it was something falling--it was earth,a curtain, a rain of earth falling, falling, covering the part of thetable immediately below, making little sliding sounds--earth, real blackearth.

"Steady," said the voice in her ear. She had a violent impulse to throwthe cards away from her--if she could, if she could rend her hands fromthem, but of course she couldn't: they, earthy as they were, belonged tothis other earth, the earth that was slipping everywhere over andbetween her fingers, that was already covering the six of deniers as itslid over the two. But there were other hands; hers weren't alone; shepressed them back into her lover's, and said, keeping her voice assteady as she could: "Couldn't we stop?"

Breath deeply drawn answered her: then Henry's voice. "Yes," it said."Steady, steady. Think with me, think of the cards--cards--drawings--just drawings--line and colour. Press them back, harder: useyour hands now--harder."

It was as if a brief struggle took place between her hands and thatwhich they held: as if the thing refused to be governed and dominated.But it yielded; if there had been any struggle, it ceased. Her stronghands pressed back the cards, pushed them level; her thumb flicked them.Henry's hands left hers and took the suit. She let hers drop, took astep away, and looked at the table. There lay on it a little heap ofwhat seemed like garden mould.

Faintness caught her; she swayed. Henry's arm round her took her to achair. She gasped out, "I'm all right. Stop a minute," and held on tothe arm. "It's nothing," she said to herself, "it's quite simple. It'sonly that I'm not used to it--whatever it is." That it was any kind oftrick did not even enter her mind; Henry and that sort of trick couldnot exist together. Earth on the dining-room table. Aunt Sybil wouldwonder why it was there. She deliberately opened her eyes again, and hermouth opened in spite of her. It was still there.

"All right?" Henry's voice said.

Nancy made a great effort. "Yes," she said. "Henry, what's happened? Imean--"

"You're frightened!" he said accusingly.

"I'm not frightened," she said.

"If you are, I can't tell you anything," he said. "I can't share withyou unless you want me to. This is only the beginning: you'd betterunderstand that at once."

"Yes, darling," she said. "Don't be cross with me. It's a little sudden,isn't it? Is it...is it real?"

He picked up some of the earth and scattered it again.

"Quite," he said. "You could grow evergreens in it."

"Then," said Nancy, with a slightly hysterical note in her voice, "Ithink you'd better ring for Agnes to clear it up."

"Touch it," he said, "feel it, be sure it's real."

"I wouldn't touch it for anything," she exclaimed. "Do ring, Henry. Iwant to see Agnes taking it away in a dustpan. That'll prove it's real."

Agnes indeed removed it in a dustpan, without any other emotion than aslight surprise and a slight perplexity. It was clear that she couldn'tthink what Miss Nancy and her young man had been about; but it was alsoclear that she supposed whatever they had been about had resulted in asmall heap of earth on the dining-room table, which she efficientlyremoved, and then herself disappeared. Nancy lay back in her chair, andthere was a complete silence for a long time.

At last she stirred and looked at Henry. "Tell me now," she said.

He leaned against the mantelpiece, looking down on her. "I've told you,"he answered. "I told you at first; at least, I hinted at it. There iscorrespondence everywhere; but some correspondences are clearer thanothers. Between these cards"--he pointed to the leather case in which hehad replaced the denier suit "and the activities of things there is avery close relation..."

She broke in. "Yes, darling; don't explain it, just tell me," she said."What you said about the wind, and this, and everything."

"Earth, water, air, and fire," he said. "Deniers, cups, sceptres,swords. When the hands of a man deal in a certain way with the cards,the living thing comes to exist."

She looked down at the hands that lay in her lap. "Hands," she said."Can they do it?"

"They can do anything," he said. "They have power."

"But why the cards...?" she asked.

He smiled at her, and suddenly she threw out her arms to him and heleant and caught her in his own. The movement gathered her, but it wasshe who was raised from her chair, not he who was brought down to thatother level, and even while he murmured to her his voice was chargedwith an exultant energy, and when upon her moving he loosed her at lastthere was in his action something of one who lays down a preciousinstrument till it shall be required. Or, since he kept his eyes on her,something of one who watches a complex and delicate piece of machineryto see if everything runs smoothly, and the experiment for which it ismeant may be safely dared.

Nancy patted her hair and sat down again. "Next time," she said, "Ishall be more prepared."

"There is to be a next time?" he asked, testing a screw in themachinery.

Her eyes were seriously upon him. "If you choose," she said, "and youwill, won't you? If you want me to help, I will. But next time perhapsyou'd better tell me more about it first. Why does it happen?"

"I don't know why," he said, "but how is clear enough. These cards arein touch with a thing I'll show you at Christmas, and they're in touchwith--, well, there aren't any words for it--with the Dance."

"The Dance?" she asked.

"The Dance that is...everything," he answered. "You'll see. Earth,air, fire, water--and the Greater Trumps. There's a way to all knowledgeand prophecy, when the cards and they are brought together. But, ONancy, Nancy, if you'll see what I see and want what I want, there's away--if it can be found, there's a way." He caught her hands in his."Hands," he cried, "hands among them and all that they mean. Feel it;give it to me; take it."

She burned back to his ardour. "What will you do?" she asked, panting.

He held her hands more tightly. "Who knows?" he answered, rising on thewings of his own terrific dream. "Create."

## Chapter Four - THE CHARIOT

On the Wednesday before Christmas, Henry had arranged to take theConingsbys to his grandfather's house. Mr. Coningsby had decided to givethem a week of his Christmas vacation from the preoccupations of aWarden in Lunacy, and Henry was very willing that the chances of thosecritical days should have so long a period in which to be tested. Thestrange experiment which he and Nancy had tried had left him in a highstate of exaltation; he felt his delight in her as a means to hisimagined end. Of its effect upon Nancy herself he found it difficult tojudge: she did not refer to it again, and was generally rather moresilent with him than was her wont. But his own preoccupations wereintense, and it may be it was rather his preoccupation than her ownwhich shrouded and a little constrained her. To the outer world,however, she carried herself much as usual, and only Sybil Coningsbynoted that her gaiety was at times rather a concealment than amanifestation. But then among that group only Sybil was aware of howmany natural capacities are found to be but concealments, how manyphenomena disappear before the fact remains. It was long since in herown life the search had begun; with eyes that necessarily veiled theirpassion she saw in her niece the opening of some other abyss in thatfirst abyss which was love. Mr. Coningsby had spoken more truly than hethought when he accused Sybil of an irresponsibility not unlike Nancy's;their natures answered each other across the years. But between them laythe experience of responsibility, that burden which is only given inorder to be relinquished, that task put into the hands of man in orderthat his own choice may render it back to its creator, that yoke which,once wholly lifted and put on, is immediately no longer to be worn.Sybil had lifted and relinquished it; from the freedom of a love moresingle than Nancy's she smiled at the young initiate who from afar inher untrained innocence beheld the conclusion of all initiations.

She stood now on the steps of the house and smiled at Henry, who wasbeside her. Nancy was in the hall; Mr. Coningsby was telephoning somelast-minute instructions in lunacy to the custodians of lunacy who werefor a while to occupy the seat of the warden. Ralph had gone off thatmorning. It was late afternoon; the weather was cold and fine.

Sybil said: "Have I thanked you for taking us down, Henry?"

He answered, his voice vibrating with great expectation, "It's adelight, Aunt Sybil: mayn't I call you that too?"

She inclined her head to the courtesy, and her eyes danced at him as shesaid, "For Nancy's sake or mine?"

"For all our sakes," he answered. "But you're very difficult to know,aren't you? You never seem to move."

"Simeon Stylites?" she asked. "Do I crouch on a tall pillar in the sky?What an inhuman picture!"

"I think you are a little inhuman," he said. "You're everything that'snice, of course, but you're terrifying as well."

"Alas, poor aunt!" she said. "But nowadays I thought maiden aunts werenothing uncommon?"

"A maiden aunt--" he began and stopped abruptly. Then he went on with anote of wonder in his voice, "That's it, you know; that's exactly it.You're strange, you're maiden, you're a mystery of self-possession."

She broke into a laugh, almost as delightful, even to him, as Nancy's."Henry, mon vieux," she said, "what do you know about old women?"

"Enough to know you're not one," he said. "Aunt Sybil. Sibyl--your veryname means you. You're the marvel of virginity that rides in theZodiac."

"That," she said, "is a most marvellous compliment. If I wasn't in fursI'd curtsey. You'll make me wish myself Nancy's age--for one evening."

"I think it's long," he said, "since you have wished yourself anythingbut what you are."

She was prevented from answering by Mr. Coningsby, who hurried Nancy outbefore him on to the steps and shut the door. They all went down to thecar, and a policeman on the pavement saluted Mr. Coningsby as he passed.

"Good evening, good evening, constable," he said. "Here." Somethingpassed. "A merry Christmas."

"Gracious," Nancy said in Henry's ear, "father's almost jovial."

"That," Henry answered, "is because he doesn't regard the police ashuman. He'd never be harsh to a dog or a poor man. It's those of his ownkind that trouble and fret him."

"Well, darling," she said, "I've never heard you speak of standing apoliceman a drink." She slipped her hand into his. "O, I'm so thrilled,"she went on, "what with you and Christmas and...and all. Is thatpoliceman part of it, do you think? Is he in the sceptres or the swords?Or is he one of your mysterious Trumps?"

"What about the Emperor?" Henry threw at her, as Mr. Coningsby, who hadstopped to speak to the constable, probably about the safety of thehouse, came to the car. Sybil was already in her seat. Nancy slippedinto hers, as Mr. Coningsby got in next to Sybil: Henry closed the door,sprang in, and started the car.

There was silence at first. To each of them the movement of the carmeant something different and particular; to the two men it was movementto something, to the two women it was much more like movement insomething. Mr. Coningsby felt it as a rush towards an immediate futureto which he had been compelled and in which he gloomily expected defeat.Henry's desire swept on to a future in which he expected trial andvictory. But to Nancy and Sybil separately the future could not beimagined except as a blessed variation on what they knew; there wasnowhere to go but to that in which they each existed, and the time theytook to go was only the measure of delight changing into delight. Inthat enclosed space a quadruple movement of consciousness existed, andbecame, through the unnoticeable, infinitesimal movements of theirbodies, involved and, to an extent, harmonized. Each set up against eachof the others a peculiar strain; each was drawn back and controlled bythe rest. Knowledge danced with knowledge, sometimes to trouble,sometimes to appease, the corporeal instruments of the days of theirflesh.

A policeman's hand held them up. Henry gestured towards it. "Behold theEmperor," he said to Nancy.

"You're making fun of me, my dear," she half protested.

"Never less," he said seriously. "Look at him."

She looked, and, whether the hours she had given to brooding over theTarots during the last few days, partly to certify her courage toherself, had imposed their forms on her memory, or whether something inthe policeman's shape and cloak under the lights of the dark streetsuggested it, or whether indeed something common to Emperor and Khalif,cadi and magistrate, praetor and alcalde, lictor and constable, shonebefore her in those lights--whichever was true, it was certainly truethat for a moment she saw in that heavy official barring their way theEmperor of the Trumps, helmed, in a white cloak, stretching out onesceptred arm, as if Charlemagne, or one like him, stretched out hiscontrolling sword over the tribes of Europe pouring from the forests andbade them pause or march as he would. The great roads ran below him, toRome, to Paris, to Aix, to Byzantium, and the nations establishedthemselves in cities upon them. The noise of all the pausing street cameto her as the roar of many peoples; the white cloak held them by agesture; order and law were there. It moved, it fell aside, the torrentof obedient movement rolled on, and they with it. They flashed past thehelmed face, and she found that she had dropped her eyes lest she shouldsee it.

With the avoidance of that face she seemed to have plunged herselfdeeper into the dream, as if by avoiding it she had assented to it andhad acknowledged its being and power. They were not stopped again, butyet, as the car ran smoothly on, she seemed to see that white-clothedarm again and again, now in the darkness beyond the headlights, nowpointing forward just outside the window. The streets were busy withChristmas shoppers, but the car shut them out and her in, and, thoughthey were there, it was running steadily away from them--as if down asloping road while they were all on the high level banks on either hand.They never actually did go down that road, but--as in nightmare--theywere always on the very point of plunging. Nancy held desperately to herrecollection of a car and a policeman and Henry; she was reallybeginning to pull herself together when suddenly--somewhere on theoutskirts of London--the car slowed for a moment outside the gate of alarge building. Over the gate was a light, and under the light was anurse holding a big key. A gate--a light--a nurse; yet one lobe of herbrain showed her again a semblance of one of the Tarot cards--ceremonialrobes; imperial headdress, cloak falling like folded wings, proud,austere face lifted towards where in the arch of the gate, so that thelight just caught it, was a heraldic carving of some flying creature.Someone, somewhere--perhaps her father behind her--grunted a little,and the grunt seemed to her as if it were wrung from a being in profoundpain. And then the car quickened again, and they were flying into thedarkness, and away in the roads behind them was that sovereign figureand the sound of a suffering world coming up to it out of the night.

She would have liked to speak to Henry, but she couldn't. She and hewere in the same car, side by side, only she wasn't at all clear thatthere was anyone else in the car at all, or that it was a car, that itwas anything but herself mysteriously defined to her own knowledge. Shewas in a trance; the car, though moving, was still--poised, rushing andmotionless at once, at the entrance to a huge, deep, and dark defile,from which on either side the mighty figures rose, themselves at onceswift and still, and fled past her and yet were for ever there.Indefinable, they defined; they made and held steady the path that wasstretched for her. It was a cloud; it was the moon; it was vapour andillusion--or it was the white cloak of the Emperor and the clear coldface of the Empress, as she had seen them when she pored over theGreater Trumps. But the darkness of the low defile awaited her; deeperand deeper, motionless and rushing on, they--she and hercompanions--were sinking into it. She dared not speak to Henry; he wasthere, but he was guiding the car; if he were distracted for a momentthey might all crash into utter ruin. She let herself take oneside-glance at him, a supplication in her heart, but never a fingerstirring; and, even as she saw his face, she remembered to have seen itelsewhere. There was a painting--somewhere--of a chariot, driven bysome semi-Greek figure scourging on two sphinxes who drew that car, andthe face in the painting was Henry's. Henry's, and yet there was adifference...there was some other likeness: was it (most fantastic ofall dreams!) her aunt? The faces, the figures, all rushed togethersuddenly; something that was neither nurse nor policeman, Empress norEmperor, Sybil nor Henry, sphinx nor charioteer, grew out of andpossessed them all. It was this to which they were rushing, some formthat was immediately to be revealed, some face that would grow outof...

The car slowed, wheeled as if sweeping round a curve in the road, andsuddenly--despite herself--she screamed. For there, with light full onit, thrown up in all its terrible detail, gaunt, bare, and cold, was aman, or the image of a man, hanging by his hands, his body thrust outfrom the pole that held it, his head dropping to one side, and on it adreadful tangled headdress. It hung there right before her, and she onlyknew that it was the wrong way up--the head should have been below; itwas always so in the cards, the Hanged Man upside down. But here theHanged Man was, livid and outstretched before her, his head decked butabove. She screamed and woke. At least, everyone supposed she woke.Henry was solicitous and her father was irritable, and, after all, itwas only a village war memorial with a rather badly done crucifix.

They took her away from it and Henry comforted her, and she settled downagain, apologizing with the most utter shame. A bad dream, of course.

"Darling, of course it was," Henry murmured.

"Of course it was," her father snapped.

"Of course it is," Sybil Coningsby said. "One wakes, Nancy." So thenthey went on again, and, except for one other unusual incident--but thatwas certainly not a dream--reached their destination undisturbed. Theincident indeed occurred not far away.

The car had slid through a village--the nearest village to hisgrandfather's, Henry told them, and at that a couple of miles away. Ithad issued thence past the church and rectory on to an upland road, andclimbed steadily across the Downs. Mr. Coningsby looked out at thewinter darkness and shuddered, thinking of London, Eastbourne, and thenext five or six days. Henry had just looked over his shoulder to say"Not far now," much as one of Dante's demons might have spoken to a soulhe was conducting to its particular circle in Hell. He looked back,swore, and jammed on the brakes. The car protested, slid, and came to astandstill. Six feet in front of it an old woman squatted on the ground,right in the middle of the road. Two feet behind her stood a tall,rough-looking young fellow, as if waiting.

"Good God!" said Mr. Coningsby.

The old woman was apparently speaking, but, shut in the car, they couldnot hear. Henry opened the door and jumped out. Mr. Coningsby opened hiswindow; Nancy and Sybil instinctively did the same.

"Welcome home, Henry!" the old creature said, in a high shrill voice.Henry took a couple of steps forward--the unknown man moved level withthe squatting hag. In the lights of the car she was seen to be very old,shrivelled, and brown. She was wrapped head and body in a stained shawlthat had once been red; one foot, which was thrust out from under aragged skirt, wore a man's heavy boot. She pushed a hand out frombeneath the shawl and waggled the skinny fingers at Henry as if ingrotesque greeting.

"What are you doing here?" he asked fiercely.

"He, he!" the grotesque being tittered at him. "I've come to see Aaron,Henry. I'm very tired. Won't you take me up in your grand coach? Me andStephen. Good little Stephen--he takes care of his grandmother--hisgran--" She went off into an indescribable fit of chuckling and choking.Henry looked at Stephen. "Get her out of the way," he said.

The man looked stupidly back. "She does what she likes," he said, andturned his eyes again on the old woman.

"Two nice ladies and one nice gentleman," she babbled. "Kind lady"--shepeered at Nancy, who was leaning from the window--"kind lady, have yourfortune told? He"--she jerked a thumb at Henry--"thinks he knowsfortunes, but is he a goddess? Good luck to you, kind lady, to meet agoddess on the roads. Great good luck for you and your children to havea goddess tell you your doom."

Henry said something in a low voice that the others couldn't hear. Sybilopened her door and got out of the car. Mr. Coningsby said sharply,"Sybil, come back," but she only threw him a smile and remained standingin the road. Most reluctantly he also got out. The hag put her head onone side and looked at them.

"Is the young miss afraid of the goddess?" she said. "Or will she helpme look? Blessings on whoever finds him."

"Out of my way, Joanna," Henry said, with anger in his voice. "Henrydear," Sybil said, "is she going our way?" He made a fierce gesture, butdid not reply. "Do you know her, Henry?" Mr. Coningsby said sharply."Father!" Nancy breathed, and touched his arm. "Don't be cross with us;Henry couldn't help it."

"Us," Mr. Coningsby thought. "You...us...O!"

"Do you want to come to the house?" Henry asked.

"What house?" she shrilled. "Fields, rivers, sea--that's his house.Cover for you, beds for you, warmth for you, but my little one's cold!"

Henry looked over at his friends and made a sign to them that all wouldbe well in a moment. The hag thrust her head on one side and looked upat him.

"If you know--" she cried, more wildly than before. "Curses on you,Henry Lee, if you know and don't tell me. I'm an old fool, aren't I, andyou're a clever man and a lawyer, but you've gone to live in houses andforgotten the great ones who live in the gipsy tents. And if you find somuch as a shred of skin and don't tell me, so much as the place where adrop of blood has soaked into the ground and don't tell me, you shall bedestroyed with the enemy when I and my son take joy in each other again.I'll curse you with my tongue and hands, I'll lay the spell on you, I'll--"

"Be quiet," he said harshly. "Who are you to talk, Joanna, the oldgipsy-woman?"

"Gipsy I was," she said, "and I'm something more now. Ha, littlefrightened ones! Ha, Henry Lee the accursed! Stephen! Stephen!"

"Aye, grandmother," the man said.

"Say the answers, say the answers. Who am I?"

The man answered in a voice entirely devoid of meaning, "A goddess areyou."

"What's the name of the goddess?" she shrilled.

"Isis the Wanderer," he said mechanically.

"What does Isis the Wanderer seek?"

"The flesh and the bones and the heart of the dead," he answered, andlicked his lips.

"Where are the flesh and the bones and the heart of the dead?" sheshrilled again.

"Here, there, everywhere," he said.

"Good Stephen, good Stephen," she muttered, appeased; and then suddenlyscrambled to her feet. Henry jumped forward to interpose himself betweenher and the other women, and found himself in turn blocked by Stephen.They were on the point of closing with each other when Sybil's voicechecked them.

"And where does the Divine Isis search?" she asked in a perfectly clearvoice of urgent inquiry.

The old woman turned her eyes from Nancy to Sybil, and a look of delightcame into her face. She took a step or two towards the other.

"Who are you," she said, "to speak as if you knew a goddess? Where havewe seen each other?"

Sybil also moved a step forward. "Perhaps in the rice-fields," she said,"or in the towns. I don't remember. Have you found anything that youlook for?"

The old creature came nearer yet, and put out her hand as if to feel forSybil's. In turn Miss Coningsby stretched out her own, and with thosecuriously linked hands they stood. Behind, on the one side, the twoyoung men waited in an alert and mutually hostile watch; on the other,Mr. Coningsby, in a fever of angry hate, stood by Nancy at the car door;the Downs and the darkness stretched about them all.

"Aren't you a stranger and a Christian rat?" the hag said. "How do youknow the goddess when you meet her in Egypt?"

"Out of Egypt have I called my son," Sybil said. "Could you search forthe god and not belong to his house?"

"Worship me then, worship me!" the insane thing cried out. "Worship theDivine Isis!"

"Ah, but I've sworn only to worship the god," Sybil answered gently."Let Isis forgive me, and let us look for the unity together."

"They've parted him and torn him asunder," the creature wailed. "He wasso pretty, so pretty, when he played with me once."

"He will be so lovely when he is found," Sybil comforted her. "We'llcertainly find him. Won't you come with me and look?"

The other threw up her head and snuffed the air. "It's coming," shesaid. "I've smelt it for days and days. They're bringing himtogether--the winds and waters are bringing him. Go your way, stranger,and call me if you find him. I must be alone. Alone I am and alone I go.I'm the goddess." She peered at Sybil. "But I will bless you," she said."Kneel down and I'll bless you."

Mr. Coningsby made a sound more like a real Warden in Lunacy than everin his life before as the tall furred figure of his sister obeyed. ButNancy's hand lay urgently on his shoulder, even had he meant tointerfere. Sybil kneeled in the road, and the woman threw up her arms inthe air over her, breaking into a torrent of incomprehensible,outlandish speech, which at the end changed again to English--"This isthe blessing of Isis: go in peace. Stephen! Stephen!" He was by her in amoment. "We'll go, Stephen--not with them, not to-night. Not to-night. Ishall smell him, I shall know him, my baby, my Osiris. He was killed andhe is coming. Horus, Horus, the coming of God!" She caught the young manby the arm, and hastily they turned and fled into the darkness. Sybil,unaided, rose to her feet. There was a silence, then she saidcharmingly, "Henry, don't you think we might go on now?...It doesn'tlook as if we could be of any use."

He came to hold the door for her. "You've certainly done it," he said."How did you know what to say to her?"

"I thought she talked very sensibly," Sybil said, getting into the car."In her own way, of course. And I wish she'd come with us, that is,if...would it be very rude to say I gathered she had something to dowith your family?"

"She's my grandfather's sister," he answered. "She's mad, of course;she--but I'll tell you some other time. Stephen was a brat she picked upsomewhere; he's nothing to do with us, but she's taught him to call her'grandmother', because of a child that should have been."

"Conversation of two aunts," said Sybil, settling herself. "I've knownmany wilder minds."

"What were you at, Sybil?" Mr. Coningsby at last burst out. "Of all thescandalous exhibitions! Really, Henry, I think we'd better go back toLondon. That my sister should be subjected to this kind of thing! Whydidn't you interfere?"

"My dear, it would mean an awful bother--going back to London," Sybilsaid. "Everything's settled up there. I'm a little cold, Henry, so doyou think we could go fairly fast? We can talk about it all when we getin."

"Kneeling in the road!" Mr. Coningsby went on. "O, very well--if youwill go. Perhaps we shall smell things too. Is your grandfather anythinglike his sister, Henry? If so, we shall have a most agreeable Christmas.He might like me to kneel to him at intervals, just to make thingsreally comfortable."

Sybil laid a hand on his knee. "Leave it to me to complain," she said."All right, Henry; we all know you hated it much more than the rest ofus." Nancy's hand came over the seat and felt for hers; she took it."Child, you're frozen," she said. "Let's all get indoors. Even aChristian rat--all right, Henry--likes a little bacon-rind by the fire.Lothair dear, I was going to ask you when we stopped--what star exactlyis that one over there?"

"Star!" said Mr. Coningsby, and choked. He was still choking over histroubles when they stopped before the house, hardly visible in thedarkness. He was, however, a trifle soothed by the servant who was atthe door and efficiently extricated them, and by the courtesies whichthe elder Mr. Lee, who was waiting just within the hall, immediatelyoffered them. He found it impossible not, within the first two minutes,to allude to the unfortunate encounter; "the sooner," he said tohimself, "this--really rather pleasant--old gentleman understands whathis sister's doing on the roads the better."

The response was all he could have wished. Aaron, tutored at intervalsduring the last month by his grandson in Mr. Coningsby's character andhabits, was highly shocked and distressed at his guests' inconvenience.Excuses he proffered; explanations he reasonably deferred. They werecold; they were tired; they were, possibly, hungry. Their rooms wereready, and in half an hour, say, supper--"We won't call it dinner,"Aaron chatted on to Mr. Coningsby while accompanying him upstairs; Sybiland Nancy had been given into the care of maids. "We won't call itdinner to-night. You'll forgive our deficiencies here--in your ownLondon circle you'll be used to much more adequate surroundings."

"It's a very fine house," said Mr. Coningsby, stopping on what wascertainly a very fine staircase.

"Seventeen-seventeen," Aaron told him. "It was built by a Jacobite peerwho only just escaped attainder after the Fifteen and was compelled toleave London. It's a curious story; I'll tell it you some time. He was astudent and a poet, besides being a Jacobite, and he lived here for therest of his life in solitude."

"A romantic story," Mr. Coningsby said, feeling some sympathy with theJacobite peer.

"Here's the room I've ventured to give you," Aaron said. "You can't seemuch from the windows to-night, but on a clear day you can sometimesjust catch a glimpse of the sea. I hope you've everything. In half anhour, then, shall we say?"

He pattered away, a small, old, rather bent, but self-possessed figure,and Mr. Coningsby shut his door. "Very different from his sister," hethought. "Curious how brothers and sisters do differ." His mind went toSybil. "In a way," he went on to himself, "Sybil's rather irresponsible.She positively encouraged that dreadful old woman. There's a streak ofwildness in her; fortunately it's never had a chance to get out. Perhapsif that other had had different surroundings...but if this is herbrother's house, why's she wandering about the country? And, anyhow,that settles the question of giving Henry those cards. I shall tellNancy so if she hints at it again. Fancy giving poor dear Duncannon'sparting gift--the things he left me on his very death-bed--to a fellowwith a mad gipsy for an aunt! Isis," he thought, in deep disgust, "theDivine Isis. Good God!"

## Chapter Five - THE IMAGE THAT DID NOT MOVE

Much to her own surprise when she found it out in the morning, Nancyslept extremely well: rather to his own disgust, so did her father. Noone ever thought of asking Sybil--or, at least, no one ever listened tothe answer; it was one of the things which wasn't related to her. Shenever said anything about it, nor, as a consequence, did anybody else;it being a certain rule in this world that what is not made of vividpersonal importance will cease to be of social interest. The shoemaker'sconversation therefore rightly returns to leather. Nancy woke andstretched, and, as her sense returned, considered healthily,voluptuously, and beautifully the immediate prospect of a week of Henry,interspersed with as much of other people as would make him more rare ifnot more precious. It occurred to her suddenly that he might already bedownstairs, and that she might as well in that case be downstairsherself. But as she jumped out of bed--with the swinging movement--sheswung into a sudden change of consciousness. Here they were--at hisgrandfather's, and here then all his obscure hints and promises were tobe explained. He wanted something; he wanted something of her, and shewas not at all clear that she wasn't rather frightened, or anyhow alittle nervous, when she tried to think of it. She took a deep breath.Henry had something to show her, and the earth had grown in her hands;however often she washed them she never quite seemed to get away fromthe feel of it. Being a semi-educated and semi-cultured girl, shedutifully thought of Macbeth--"the perfumes of Arabia", "this littlehand". For the first time in her life, however, she now felt as ifShakespeare had been talking about something more real than she hadsupposed; as if the words echoed out of her own deep being, and againechoed back into it "cannot cleanse this little hand". She rubbed herhands together half-unconsciously, and then more consciously, untilsuddenly the remembrance of Lady Macbeth as she had once seen her on thestage came to her, and she hurriedly desisted. Lady Macbeth hadturned--a tall, ghostly figure caught in a lonely perdition--at thebottom corner of the stage, where the Witches...what was it they hadsung?

The weird sisters, hand in hand, Posters of the sea and land.

"Posters of the sea and land"--was that what she had been yesterday inthe car--in her sleep, in her dreams? Or that mad old woman? The weirdsisters--the old woman and Aunt Sybil--hand in hand, posters of the seaand land? Posters--going about the world--from point to point in asupernatural speed? Another line leapt at her--"Peace! the charm's woundup." Wound up--ready for the unwinding; and Henry ready too. Herexpectation terrified her: this day which was coming but not yet quitecome was infinite with portents. Her heart filled and laboured with itslove; she pressed a hand against it to ease the bursting pain. "OHenry," she murmured aloud, "Henry!" What did one do about it? What wasthe making of earth beside this? This, whatever it was--this joy, thisagony--was not out of key with her dreams, with the weird women; it tooposted by the sea and land; the universe fell away below the glory ofits passion.

She rose, unable any longer to sit still, drawing deep breaths of love,and walked to the window. The morning as it grew was clear and cold;unseen, miles away, lay the sea. Along the sea-shore, between earth andwater, was the woman of the roads now hobbling? Or were the royal shapesof the Emperor and the Empress riding out in the dark heavens above theocean? Her heart laboured with power still, and as that power floodedher she felt the hands that rested on the window-frame receive it; sheleaned her head on the window and seemed to expect mysteries. This wasthe greatest mystery; this was the sea and land about which she herselfwas now a fortunate and happy poster.

It was too early; Henry wouldn't be about yet. But she couldn't go backto bed; love and morning and profound intention called to her. Her auntwas in the next room; she decided to go there, and went.

Her aunt, providentially, was awake, contemplating nothing with a remoteaccuracy. Nancy looked at her.

"I suppose you do sleep?" she said. "Do you know, I've never found youasleep?"

"How fortunate!" Sybil said. "For after all I suppose you've generallywanted something--if only conversation?"

Nancy, wrapping herself in her aunt's dressing-gown as well as her own,sat down, and looked again, this time more attentively.

"Aunt Sybil," she said, "are you by any chance being offensive?"

"Could I and would I?" Sybil asked.

"Your eyes are perpetually dancing," Nancy said. "But is it true--do Ionly come to you when I want something?"

"Why," said Sybil, "if you're asking seriously, my dear, then by andlarge the answer is yes." She was about to add that she herself wasquite content, but she saw something brooding in Nancy's face, andceased.

"I don't mean to be a pig," Nancy said. Sybil accepted that as asoliloquy and said nothing. Nancy added, "I'm not all that selfish, amI?"

"I don't think you're particularly selfish," her aunt said, "only youdon't love anyone."

Nancy looked up, more bewildered than angry. "Don't love?" she said. "Ilove you and father and Ralph very much indeed."

"And Henry?" Sybil asked.

"Well--Henry," Nancy said, blushing a little, "is different."

"Alas!" Sybil murmured, but the lament was touched with laughter.

"What do you mean--'alas'?" Nancy asked. "Aunt Sybil, do you want me tofeel about everybody as I do about Henry?"

"A little adjustment here and there," Sybil said, "a retinting perhaps,but otherwise--why, yes! Don't you think so?"

"Even, I suppose," Nancy said, "to Henry's great-aunt or whatever shewas?" But the words died from a soft sarcasm to a softer doubt: the veryframing of the question, as so often happens, was itself an answer. "Herbody thought"; interrogation purged emotion, and the purified emotionreplied to the interrogation. To love...

"But I can't," she exclaimed, "turn all this"--she laid her hand on herheart "towards everybody. It can't be done; it only lives for--him."

"Nor even that," Sybil said. "It lives for and in itself. You can onlygive it back to itself."

Nancy brooded. After a while, "I still don't see how I can love Joannawith it," she said.

"If you give it back to itself," Sybil said, "wholly and utterly, itwill do all that for you. You've no idea what a lot it can do. I thinkyou might find it worth trying."

"Do you?" Nancy said soberly; then she sighed, and said with a change oftone, "Of course I simply adore this kind of talk before breakfast. Youought to have been a missionary, Aunt Sybil, and held early services forcannibals on a South Sea island."

"The breakfast," Sybil said gravely, "would have a jolly time listeningto the bell before the service--if I had a bell."

"O, you'd have a bell," Nancy said, "and a collection of cowrie-shellsor bananas, and open-air services on the beach in the evening. And Henryand I would lean over the side of our honeymoon liner and hear yourvoice coming to us over the sea in the evening, and have--what is itthey have at those times?--Heimweh, and be all googly. And father wouldsay, 'Really, Sybil!' without being googly. Well, thank you for yourkind interest in a Daughter of the Poor." She kissed her aunt. "I do,you know," she said, and was gone.

The day passed till dinner without anything particularly striking havingtaken place. They looked over the house; they lunched; they walked. TheTimes arrived, sent up from the village, about midday, and Mr. Coningsbysettled down to it. Henry and Nancy appeared and disappeared; Sybilwalked and rested and talked and didn't talk, and contemplated theuniverse in a serene delight. But after dinner and coffee there came apause in the conversation, and Aaron Lee spoke.

"My grandson thinks," he said to his visitors, "that you'd be interestedto see a curiosity which we have here."

"I'm sure anything--" answered Mr. Coningsby, who was feeling ratherinclined to be agreeable.

Nancy said to Henry in a low voice, "Is it whatever you meant?" and henodded.

The old man rose. "If I may trouble you, then, to come with me," hesaid, leading the way from the room, and Mr. Coningsby sauntered afterhis sister without the smallest idea that the attack on his possessionof the Tarot cards was about to begin. They came into Aaron's room; theycrossed it and stood about the inner locked door. Aaron inserted thekey; then, before turning it, he looked round and said, "Henry thinksthat your ownership of a particular pack of our gipsy cards may make youpeculiarly interested in...in what you'll see. The pack's rather rare,I believe, and this"--he unlocked the door--"is, I may say, very muchrarer."

Henry, from the back, watched him a little anxiously. Aaron had not beenat all eager to disclose the secret dancing images to these strangers;it was only the absolute necessity of showing Mr. Coningsby anoverpoweringly good reason for giving away the cards that had at lastconvinced him. A day's actual acquaintance with Mr. Coningsby had donemore towards conviction than all Henry's arguments--that, and theknowledge that the Tarot cards were at last in the house, so close tothe images to which, for mortal minds, they were the necessary key. Yet,under the surface of a polite and cultured host which he had presented,there stirred a longing and a hostility; he hated this means, yet it wasthe only means to what he desired. In the conflict his hand trembled andfumbled with the door-handle, and Henry in his own agitation loosedNancy's arm. She felt his trouble and misunderstood it. "Darling," shemurmured, "you don't mind us seeing, do you? If you do, let's go away."

"You must see," he answered, low and rapidly, "you especially. And theothers too--it's why they're here."

She took his "here" to mean at that door, and his agitation to be thepromise of the mystery he had spoken of, and delighted to share it withhim. "You'll tell me everything," she whispered. "I'll do whatever youwant." Her eyes glowed at him as he looked at her. He met them, but hispreoccupation was heavy upon him. "Your father," he whispered back, "getyour father to give me the cards."

The door was open. Aaron said, "You'll excuse me if I go first; there'sa curtain." He stepped forward, passed between the hangings, steppedaside, and raised them, so that, one by one, the others also came intothe light of the inner chamber--Mr. Coningsby first, then Sybil, thenthe two young ones. Aaron let the curtain fall, and joined them wherethey stood, he and Henry closing them in on either side.

The light had been tinged with red when they entered; but it changed, soswiftly that only Aaron noticed it, to a lovely green, and then--moreslowly--to an exquisite golden beauty. Aaron's eyes went to Henry's, butthe young man was looking at the moving images; then they passed to thevisitors--to Nancy, who also was raptly gazing at the spectacle; to Mr.Coningsby, who was surveying it with a benevolent generosity, as if hemight have shown his host something similar in his own house, but hadn'tthought it worth while; to Sybil, who was half-smiling in pure pleasureat the sight.

"These," Aaron said, "are a very ancient secret among the folk from whomHenry and I come, and they have never been shown to anyone outside ourown people till now. But since we are to be so closely joined"--hesmiled paternally at Nancy--"the reason against revealing them hardlyexists."

He had to pause for a moment, either because of his inner excitement orbecause (as, for a moment, he half-suspected) some sense stronger thanusual of the unresting marvel before them attacked him and almost beathim down. He mastered himself, but his age dragged at him, and his voicetrembled as he went carefully on, limiting himself to what Henry and hehad agreed should be said.

"You see those little figures? By some trick of the making they seem tohold--what we call--the secret of perpetual motion. You see, how theyare dancing--they do it continually. They are--we believe--in some waymagnetized--by the movements of the earth--and they--they vibrate toit."

He could say no more. He signed to Henry to go on, but Mr. Coningsbyunintentionally interrupted.

"Very curious," he said, "very interesting indeed." He looked all roundthe room. "I suppose the light comes from behind the curtains somehow?"

"The light comes from the figures," Henry said.

"Does it indeed?" Mr. Coningsby said, as if he was perfectly ready tobelieve anything reasonable, and even to refrain from blaming his hostfor offering him something perfectly unreasonable. "From the figures?Well, well." He settled his eyeglasses and leaned forward. "Are theymoving in any order?" he asked, "or do they just"--he waggled his hand"jump?"

"They certainly move in order," Henry answered, "all but one: the one inthe centre. You may recognize them; the figures are those which arepainted on the Tarot cards you showed us."

"O, really?" Mr. Coningsby said, a small suspicion rising in him. "Justthe same kind, are they? Well, well. But the cards aren't moving thewhole time. At least," he added, half in real amusement, half insuperior sarcasm, "I hadn't noticed it."

"No," Henry agreed. "But, if you'll excuse me, sir, the point is ratherthat the cards explain--or anyhow may be supposed to explain--themovements of these figures. We think probably that that's what allfortune-telling by cards comes from, but the origin's been forgotten,which is why it's the decadent and futile thing it is."

Nothing occurred to Mr. Coningsby in answer to this; he didn'tunderstand it but he didn't want to be bothered with an explanation. Hestrolled forward till he stood by the table. "May one pick them up?" heasked. "It's difficult to examine the workmanship properly while they'reall bustling round."

"I don't think I should touch them, sir," Henry said, checking hisgrandfather's movement with a fierce glance. "The balance that keepsthem dancing must be very delicate."

"O, just as you like," Mr. Coningsby said. "Why doesn't the one in themiddle dance?"

"We imagine that its weight and position must make it a kind ofcounterpoise," Henry answered. "Just as the card of the Fool--whichyou'll see is the same figure--is numbered nought."

"Has he a tiger by him for any particular reason?" Mr. Coningsbyinquired. "Fools and tigers seem a funny conjunction."

"Nobody knows about the Fool," Aaron burst in. "Unless the cards explainit."

Mr. Coningsby was about to speak again when Sybil forestalled him.

"I can't see this central figure," she said. "Where is it exactly, Mr.Lee?"

Aaron, Henry, and her brother all pointed to it, and all with verydifferent accents said, "There". Sybil stepped slightly forward, then toone side; she moved her head to different angles, and then saidapologetically, "You'll all think me frightfully silly, but I can't seeany figure in the middle."

"Really, Sybil!" her brother said. "There!"

"But, my dear, it isn't there," she said. "At least, so far as I canpossibly see. I'm sorry to be so stupid, Mr. Lee, because it's all quitethe loveliest thing I ever saw in the whole of my life. It's perfectlywonderful and beautiful. And I just want, if I can, to see where you saythis particular figure is."

Henry leant forward suddenly. Nancy put her left hand up to where hislay on her shoulder. "Darling," she said, "please! You're hurting me."He took no notice; he did not apparently hear her. He was looking withintense eagerness from Sybil to the golden images and back. "MissConingsby," he said, reverting unconsciously to his earlier habit ofaddress, "can you see the Fool and his tiger at all?"

She surveyed the table carefully. "Yes," she said at last, "there--no,there--no--it's moving so quickly I can hardly see it--there--ah, it'sgone again. Surely that's it, dancing with the rest; it seems as if itwere always arranging itself in some place which was empty for it."

Nancy took hold of Henry's wrist and pulled it; tears of pain were inher eyes, but she smiled at him. "Darling, must you squeeze my shoulderquite so hard?" she said.

Blankly he looked at her; automatically he let go, and though in amoment she put her own hand into the crook of his arm he did not seem tonotice it. His whole attention was given to Sybil. "You can see itmoving?" he uttered.

On the other side, Aaron was trembling, and putting his fingers to hismouth as if to control it and them. Sybil, gazing at the table, did notsee him. "But it seems so," she said. "Or am I just distracted?"

Henry made a great effort. He turned to Nancy. "Can you see it?" heasked.

"It looks to me to be in the centre," she said, "and it doesn't seem tobe moving--not exactly moving."

"What do you mean--not exactly moving?" Henry asked, almost harshly.

"It isn't moving at all," said Mr. Coningsby. "It's capitally made,though; the tiger's quite lifelike. So's the Fool," he added handsomely.

"I suppose I meant not moving," Nancy said. "In a way I feel as if Iexpected it to. But it isn't."

"Why should you expect it to?" Henry asked.

"I can't think," Nancy admitted. "Perhaps it was Aunt Sybil saying itwas that made me think it ought to be."

"Well," Sybil said, "there we are! If you all agree that it's notmoving, I expect it isn't. Perhaps my eyes have got St. Vitus's dance orsomething. But it certainly seems to me to be dancing everywhere."

There was a short and profound silence, broken at last by Nancy. "Whatdid you mean about fortune-telling?" she said, addressing ostensibly Mr.Lee, but in fact Henry.

Both of them came jerkily back to consciousness of her. But the old manwas past speech; he could only look at his grandson. For a moment Henrydidn't seem to know what to say. But Nancy's eager and devoted eyes werefull on him, and something natural in him responded. "Why, yes," hesaid, "it's here that fortunes can be told. If your father will let ususe his pack of cards?" He looked inquiringly across.

Mr. Coningsby's earlier suspicion poked up again, but he hesitated torefuse. "O, if you choose," he said. "I'm afraid you'll find nothing init, but do as you like. Get them, Nancy; they're in my bag."

"Right," said Nancy. "No, darling," as Henry made a movement toaccompany her. "I won't be a minute: you stay here." There had been aslight effect of separation between them, and she was innocently anxiousto let so brief a physical separation abolish the mental; he, reluctantto leave Aaron to deal with Mr. Coningsby's conversation, assented.

"Don't be long," he said, and she, under her breath, "Could I?" and wasgone. As she ran she puzzled a little over her aunt's difficulty inseeing the motionless image, and over the curious vibration that itseemed to her to possess. So these were what Henry had meant; he wouldtell her more about them presently, perhaps, because he certainly hadn'tyet told her all he meant to. But what part then in the mystery did thecentral figure play, and why was its mobility or immobility of suchconcern to him? Though--of course it wasn't usual for four people to seea thing quite still while another saw it dancing. Supposing anyone sawher now, could they think of her as quite still, running at this speed?Sometimes one had funny feelings about stillness and motion--there hadbeen her own sensation in the car yesterday, but that had only been afeeling, not a looking, so to speak. No one ever saw a motionless cartearing along the roads.

She found the Tarot pack and ran back again, thinking this time howagreeable it was to run and do things for Henry. She wished she found itequally agreeable to run for her father. But then her father--it was herfather's fault, wasn't it? Was it? Wasn't it? If she could feel ashappy--if she could feel. Could she? Could she, not only do, but feelhappy to do?

Couldn't she? Could she? More breathless within than without, she cameagain to the room of the golden dance.

She was aware, as through the dark screen of the curtain she entered thesoft spheral light and heard, as they had all heard, that faint sound ofmusic, of something changed in three of those who waited for her. Henryand her father were standing near each other, as if they had beentalking. But also they were facing each other, and it was not a friendlyopposition. Mr. Coningsby was frowning, and Henry was looking at himwith a dominating hostility. She guessed immediately what had beenhappening--Henry had himself raised the possibility of his buying orbeing given or otherwise procuring the cards. And her father, with thatpersistent obstinacy which made even his reasonable decisionsunreasonable, had refused. He was so often in a right which hisimmediate personal grievance turned into a wrong; his manners changedwhat was not even an injury into something worse than an insult. To beso conscious of himself was--Nancy felt though she did not define it--aninsult to everyone else; he tried to defy the human race with aplaintive antagonism--even the elder sons of the younger sons of peersmight (he seemed to suggest) outrage his decencies by treading tooclosely on his heels. So offended, so outraged, he glanced at Henry now.

She came to them before either had time to speak. Aaron Lee and Sybilhad been listening to the finished colloquy, and both of them willinglyaccepted her coming.

"Here we are," she said. "Henry, how frightfully exciting!" It wasn't,she thought at the same moment, not in the least. Not exciting; that waswholly the wrong word for this rounded chamber, and the moving figures,and the strange pack in her hand by which the wonder of earth hadhappened, and the two opposed faces, and Aaron Lee's anxious eyes, andthe immortal tenderness of Sybil's. No--not exciting, but it wouldserve. It would ease the moment. "Who'll try first?" she went on,holding out the Tarots. "Father? Aunt? Or will you, Mr. Lee?"

Aaron waved them on. "No, no," he said hurriedly. "Pray one ofyou--they're yours. Do try--one of you."

"Not for me, thank you. I've no wish to be amused so--" Her fatherhesitated for an adverb, and Sybil also with a gesture put them by.

"O, aunt, do!" Nancy said, feeling that if her aunt was in it thingswould be safer.

"Really, Nancy. I'd rather not--if you don't mind," Sybil said,apologetic, but determined. "It's--it's so much like making someone tellyou a secret."

"What someone?" Henry said, anger still in his voice.

"I don't mean someone exactly," Sybil said, "but things...theuniverse, so to speak. If it's gone to all this trouble to keep the nextminute quiet, it seems rude to force its confidence. Do forgive me." Shedid not, Nancy noticed, add, as she sometimes did, that it was probablysilly of her.

Nancy frowned at the cards. "Don't you think we ought to?" she asked.

"Of course, if you can," Sybil answered. "It's just--do excuse me--thatI can't."

"You sound," Henry said, recovering a more normal voice, "on remarkablyintimate terms with the universe. Mayn't it cheat you? Supposing it hadsomething unpleasant waiting for you?"

"But," said Sybil, "as somebody says in Dickens, 'It hasn't, you know,so we won't suppose it.' Traddles, of course. I'm forgetting Dickens; Imust read him again. Well, Nancy, it's between you and Henry."

Nancy looked at her lover. He smiled at her at first with that slightpre-occupation behind his eyes which always seemed to be there, shethought a little ruefully, since the coming of the Tarots. But in amoment this passed, and they changed, though whether she or that otherthing were now the cause of their full, deep concentration, she couldnot tell. He laid his hand on hers that held the Tarots.

"And what does it matter which?" he said. "But I'd rather we triedyours, if you don't mind."

"Can't we try them together?" she asked, "and say good night toseparation?"

"Let's believe we've said it," he answered, "but you shall try them forus both and let me read the fates. Do you believe that it's true?"

"Is it true?" she asked.

"As the earth in your hands," he answered, and Mr. Coningsby's hostilityonly just conquered his curiosity, so as to prevent him asking what onearth Henry meant. "It's between those"--he pointed to the ever-movingimages--"and your hands that the power flows, and on the power the cardsmove. See."

He turned her, and Aaron Lee, who stood between her and the table, movedhastily back. Then, taking the cards from their case, he made her holdthem in her hands, as she had held the suit of deniers on that otherevening, and the memory of it came back on her with sudden force. Butthis time, having settled her hands, he did not enclose them in his own;instead, he stepped away from her and waved away Sybil also, who wasclose on her left side, so that she stood alone, facing the goldentable, her hands extended towards it, holding within them the whole packof cards, opened a little fanwise so that from left to right the edgesmade a steeply sloping ascent.

"Move forward, slowly," he said, "till I tell you to stop. Go on."

The earth that had lain in her hands...and now she was to go forward astep, or stop. It was not beyond her power to withdraw; she might pauseand laugh and apologize to them all--and to Henry privately and beyondall--and lay aside the things she held. It was not beyond her power torefuse to enter the light that seemed now to grow to a golden sheen, aveil and mist of gold between her and the table; she could step back,she could refuse to advance, to know, to be. In the large content of thelove that filled her she had no strong desire to find her future--if thecards indeed could tell her of it--though she could not feel, as Sybildid, that the universe itself was love. But, pausing on the verge of thefuture, she could find no reason noble enough for retreat--retreat wouldbe cowardice or--no, nothing but cowardice. She was Henry's will; shewas her own will to accomplish that will; having no moral commandagainst her, she must needs go on.

She took a step forward, and her heart beat fast and high as she seemedto move into the clouded golden mist that received her, andfantastically enlarged and changed the appearance of her hands and thecards within them. She took another step, and the Tarots quivered in herhold, and through the mist she saw but dimly the stately movement of theeverlasting measure trodden out before her, but the images werethemselves enlarged and heightened, and she was not very sure of whatnature they were. But nothing could daunt the daring in which she went;she took a third step, and Henry's voice cried to her suddenly, "Stopthere and wait for the cards."

She half-turned her head towards him at the words, but he was too farbehind for her to see him. Only, still looking through that floating anddistorting veil of light, she did see a figure, and knew it for Aaron's:yet it was more like one of the Tarots--it was the Knight of Sceptres.The old man's walking-stick was the raised sceptre; the old face wasyoung again, and yet the same. The skull-cap was a heavy medievalhead-dress--but as the figure loomed it moved also, and the mist swirledand hid it. The cards shook in her hands; she looked back at them, andsuddenly one of them floated right out into the air and slowly sanktowards the floor; another issued, and then another, and so theyfollowed in a gentle persistent rain. She did not try to retain them;could she have tried she knew she could not succeed. The figures beforeher appeared and disappeared, and as each one showed, so in spiralconvolution some card of those she still held slipped out and wheeledround and round and fell from her sight into the ever-swirling mist.

They were huge things now, as if the great leaves of some aboriginaltree, the sacred bodhi-tree under which our Lord Gautama achievedNirvana or that Northern dream of Igdrasil or the olives of Gethsemane,were drifting downward from the cluster round which her hands wereclasped. The likenesses were not in her mind, but the sense of destinywas, and the vision of leaves falling slowly, slowly, carried gentlyupon a circling wind that touched her also in its passage, and blew thegolden cloud before it. She grew faint in gazing; the grotesque handsthat stretched out were surely not those of Nancy Coningsby, but of agiant form she did not know. With an effort she wrested her eyes fromthe sight, and looked before her, only more certainly to see thedancers. And these now were magnified to twenty times their firstheight; they were manikins, dwarfs, grotesques, yet living. Moredefinitely visible than any before, a sudden mingled group grew out ofthe mist before her. Three forms were there--with their left arms higharched, and finger-tips touching, wheeling round a common centre; sheknew them as she gazed--the Queen of Chalices, holding her cup againsther heart; and the naked figure of the peasant Death, his sickle in hisright hand; and a more ominous form still, Set of the Egyptians, withthe donkey head, and the captives chained to him, the power of infinitemalice. Round and round, ever more swiftly, they whirled, and each as itpassed seemed to stretch out towards her the symbol of itself that itcarried; and the music that had been all this while in her ears rose tothe shrieking of a great wind, and the wind about her grew strong andcold. Higher still went the shrieking; more bitterly against her thefierce wind beat. The cold struck and nipped her; she was alone and herhands were empty, and the bleak wind died; only she saw the lastfragments of the golden mist blown and driven upon it. But as it passed,and as she graspingly realized that her lover and friends were near her,she seemed yet for a moment to be the centre of that last measure: thethree dancers whirled round her, their left hands touching over herhead, separating and enclosing her. Some knowledge struck to her heart;and her heart ached in answer, a dull pain unlike her glorious agonywhen it almost broke with the burden of love. It existed and it ceased.

Henry's voice said from behind her: "Happy fortune, darling. Let's lookat the cards."

She felt for the moment that she would rather he looked at her. Thereshe was, feeling rather pitiable, and there were all the cards lying ather feet in a long twining line, and there was her father looking atrifle annoyed, and there was Henry kneeling by the cards, and there wasAaron Lee bending over him, and then between her and the table at whichshe didn't want to look came the form of her aunt. So she looked at herinstead, which seemed much more satisfactory, and went so far as to slipan arm into Sybil's, though she said nothing. They both waited forHenry, and both with a certain lack of immediate interest. But thisHenry, immersed in the cards, did not notice.

"You're likely to travel a long distance," he said, "apparently in thenear future, and you'll come under a great influence of control, andyou'll find your worst enemy in your own heart. You may run seriousrisks of illness or accident, but it looks as if you might be successfulin whatever you undertake. And a man shall owe you everything, and awoman shall govern you, and you shall die very rich."

"I'm so glad," Nancy said in a small voice. She was feeling very tired,but she felt she ought to show a little interest.

"Henry," she went on, "why is the card marked nought lying right awayfrom the others?"

"I don't know," he said, "but I told you that no one can reckon theFool. Unless you can?" he added quickly, to Sybil.

"No," said Sybil. "I can see it right away from the others too." Shewaited a minute, but, as Henry showed no signs of moving, she added in adeliberately amiable voice: "Aren't you rather tired, Nancy? Henry dear,it's been the most thrilling evening, and the way you read fortunes issuperb. I'm so glad Nancy's to be successful. But would you think itvery rude if she and I went to bed now? I know it's early, but the airof your Downs..."

"I beg your pardon?" Henry said. "I'm afraid I wasn't listening."

Sybil, even more politely, said it all again. Henry sprang to his feetand came over to them. "My darling, how careless of me," he said toNancy, while his eyes searched and sought in hers, "of course you mustbe fagged out. We'll all go back now--unless," he added politely to Mr.Coningsby, "you'd like to try anything further with"--there was theslightest pause--"your cards."

"No, thank you," Mr. Coningsby said frigidly. "I may as well take themdown myself"; and he looked at them where they lay on the floor.

"I'll come back and collect them as soon as I've seen Nancy along,"Henry answered. "They'll be safe enough till then."

"I think I would as soon take them now," Mr. Coningsby said. "Thingshave a way of getting mislaid sometimes."

"Nothing was ever mislaid in this room," Henry answered scornfully.

"But the passages and other rooms might be less fortunate," Mr.Coningsby sneered. "Nancy can wait a minute, I'm sure."

"Nancy," he said, "will pick them up while you're talking about it," andmoved to do it. But Henry forestalled him, though his dark skin flushedslightly, as he rose with the pack, restored it to its case, andostentatiously presented it to Mr. Coningsby, who clasped it firmly,threw a negligent look at the dancing figures, and walked to the openingin the curtains. Henry drew Nancy from her aunt into his own care, andfollowed him; as they passed through she said idly: "Why do you havecurtains?"

He leaned to her ear. "I will show you now, if you like," he said; "thesooner the better. Are you really too tired? or will you see what largerfutures the cards show us?"

She looked back at the room. "Darling, will to-morrow do?" she said. "Ido feel rather done."

"Rest, then," he answered; "there's always sound sleep in this house.To-morrow, I'll show you something else--if," he added, speaking stillmore softly, "if you can borrow the cards. Nancy, what good can theypossibly be to your father?"

She smiled faintly. "Did you quarrel with him about them?" she said, butas she saw him frown added swiftly, "None."

"Yet he will hold on to them," Henry said. "Don't you think they belongto--those behind us?"

"I suppose so," Nancy said uncertainly. "I feel as if we all belonged tothem, whatever they are. Your golden images have got into my bones,darling, and my heart's dancing to them instead of to you. Aren't yousorry?"

"We'll dance to them together," he said. "The images and the cards, andthe hands and the feet--we'll bring them all together yet."

"That's what your aunt said," she answered, "something coming together.What did she mean by Horus?"

"My aunt's as mad as your father," he answered, "and Horus has been adream for more than two thousand years."

## Chapter Six - THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE FOOL

It was some time later, their visitors having all retired, after more orless affectionate partings, that Henry came to his grandfather in theouter room. The old man was waiting eagerly; as the door shut behind hisgrandson he broke out, "Did you hear? Did she mean it?"

Henry came across and sat down. "She must have meant it," he said;"there's no conceivable way by which she could have known what we need.Besides, unless she was playing with us--but she wouldn't, she's notthat kind. So if she saw--". He got up again and walked in extremeexcitement about the room. "It can't be--but why not? If we've found thelast secret of the images! If time's at last brought sight along withthe cards!"

Aaron put his hand to his heart. "But why should she be able to see?Here have all our families studied this for centuries, and none ofthem--and not you nor I--has ever seen the Fool move. There's only atale to tell us that it does move. Why should this woman be able to seeit?"

"Why should she pretend if she doesn't?" Henry retorted. "Besides, Itell you she's a woman of great power. She possesses herself entirely;I've never seen anything dismay or distract her. She's like the Woman onthe cards, but she doesn't know it--hierophantic, maid and matron atonce."

"But what do you mean?" Aaron urged. "She knew nothing of the cards orthe images. She didn't know why they danced or how. She's merelycommonplace--a fool, and the sister of a fool."

"None of us has ever known what the Fool of the Tarots is," the othersaid. "You say yourself that no one has ever seen it move. But thiswoman couldn't see it in the place where we all look for it. She saw itcompleting the measures, fulfilling the dance."

"She doesn't know the dance," Aaron said.

"She doesn't know what she does or doesn't know," Henry answered."Either she was lying, I tell you, or by some impossible chance she cansee what we can't see: and if she can, then the most ancient tale of thewhole human race is true, and the Fool does move."

"But then she'll know the thing that's always been missing," Aaronalmost sobbed. "And she's going away next week!"

"It's why she could manage Joanna as she did," Henry went on unheeding."She's got some sort of a calm, some equanimity in her heart. She--theonly eyes that can read the future exactly, and she doesn't want to knowthe future. Everything's complete for her in the moment. It's beautiful,it's terrific--and what do we do about it?" He stopped dead in his walkand stared at Aaron.

"She's going away next week," the old man repeated.

Henry flung himself back into a chair. "Let us see," he said. "TheTarots are brought back to the images; there is a woman who can read themovements rightly; and let us add one more thing, for what it'sworth--that I and Nancy are at the beginning of great experiments. Onthe other hand, the Tarots may be snatched from us by the idiot whopretends to own them; and the woman may leave us and go God knows where;and Nancy may fail. But, fail or not, that's a separate thing, and myown business. The other is a general concern, and yours. When the Tarotshave been brought back to the dancers, and we can read the meaning ofthe dance, are you willing to let them go?"

"But let us see then," Aaron said, "what we can do to keep them."

Henry looked over at him and brooded. "If we once let them out of thishouse we may not see them again--they will be hidden in the Museum whilewe and our children die and rot: locked in a glass case, with a ticketunder them, for hogs' faces of ignorance to stare at or namby-pambyprofessors to preach about." He leapt to his feet. "When I think of it,"he said, "I grow as mad as Joanna, with her wails about a dismemberedgod. Shall we let the paintings and the images be torn apart once more?"

Aaron, crouching over the table, looked up sneeringly. "Go and pray toHorus, as Joanna does," he said, "or run about the fields and thinkyourself Isis the Divine Mother. Bah! why do you jump and tramp? I'm anold man now, desire is going out of me, but if I'd your heat I'd do morewith it than waste it cursing and shouting. Sit down; let us talk. Thereare four days before they go."

Henry stamped. "You can't be sure of four hours," he said. "Any momentthat fool may take offence and be off. Get over to-morrow safely, and hecan't go on Christmas Day, but after that how can we keep him againsthis will?"

"By leaving him to use his will," Aaron said.

Henry came slowly back to the table. "What do you mean?" he asked. "Youwon't run the risk of violence, will you? How can we? We don't know whatthe result on the Tarots may be; there are warnings against it.Besides--it would be hard to see how to do it without--O no, it'simpossible."

Aaron said, "He has the Tarots--can't he be given to the Tarots? Is windnothing? Is water nothing? Let us give him wind and water, and let ussee if the obstinacy that can keep the cards will bring him safelythrough the elements of the cards. Don't shed blood, don't be violent;let's loose the Tarots upon him."

Henry leaned forward and looked at the ground for a long time. "I'vethought of something of the sort," he said at last. "But there's Nancy."

Aaron sneered again. "Spare the father for the child's sake, hey?" hesaid. "You fool, what other way is there? If you steal the cards fromhim, if you could, can you show them to her or use them with her? D'youthink she won't be bothered and troubled, and will that be good for yourexperiment? She'll always be worried over her honesty."

"I might show her that our use and knowledge is a high matter," Henrysaid uncertainly, "and teach her..."

"All in time, all in time," the old man exclaimed, "and any day he maygive the Tarots to the Museum. Besides, there's the woman."

"The woman!" Henry said, "That's as great a difficulty. Can you persuadeher to come and live with you and be the hierophant of the images of thecabalistic dance?"

"If," said Aaron slowly, stretching out a hand and laying it on theyoung man's arm, "if her brother was--gone, and if her niece was marriedto you, would it be so unlikely that she should live with her niece? Ifher niece studied the images, and loved to talk of them, and asked thiswoman for help, would it be so unlikely that she would say what she cansee?" He ceased, and there was a pause.

At last "I know," Henry said. "I saw it--vaguely--even to-night I sawit. But it may be dangerous."

"Death is one of the Greater Trumps," Aaron said. "If I had thestrength, I would do it alone; as it is, I can't. I haven't the energyor will to control the cards. I can only study and read them. You mustdo the working, and however I can help you I will."

"The Greater Trumps--" Henry said doubtfully. "I can't yet use--that'sthe point with Nancy--I want to see whether she and I can live--and shemustn't know--"

"There are wind and water, as I told you before," the old man answered."I don't think your Mr. Coningsby will manage to save himself even fromthe twos and threes and fours of the sceptres and cups. He has no will.I am more afraid of Joanna."

"Joanna!" Henry said. "I never heard that she saw the movement of theFool."

Aaron shrugged. "She looked to find that out when she had succeeded incarrying out her desire," he said.

"She was right," Henry said.

"And has Sybil Coningsby carried out her desire?" Aaron asked. "What wasit, then?"

"I can't tell you," Henry said, "but she found it and she stands withinit, possessing it perfectly. Only she doesn't know what she's done. Butshe doesn't matter at the moment, nor Joanna. Only Nancy and...andthat man."

"Shall there then be only Nancy?" Aaron asked softly.

Henry looked back at him steadily. "Yes," he answered, "unless he canovercome the beating of the cards."

"Be clear upon one thing," Aaron said. "I will have no part in thiswhich you are wanting to achieve with them. I do not want even to knowit. If all things go well, it will be enough for me to have restored theknowledge of the dance, and perhaps to have traced something of the lawof its movement. But supposing Nancy--later--discovers somehow, in thegrowth of her wisdom, what you've done? Have you considered that?"

"I will believe," Henry said, "that if indeed it's the growth of herwisdom that discovers it, her wisdom will justify me. She'll know thatone man must not keep in being the division of unity; she'll acknowledgethat his spirit denied something greater than itself and perishedinevitably. His spirit? His mere habitual peevish greed."

"You will take that risk?" Aaron said.

"It is no risk," Henry answered; "if it were, then the whole intentionis already doomed."

Aaron nodded, and got to his feet. "Yet ten minutes ago you weren't socertain," he said.

"I hadn't then determined," Henry answered. "It's only when one hasquite determined that one understands."

"When will you do it?" Aaron asked. "Do you want me to help you? Youshould consider that if what you do succeeds, then the girl may be toodistressed to go your way for a while."

"If it may be," Henry said slowly, "I will wait over tomorrow, forto-morrow I mean to show her the fortunes of nations. But we must notwait too long--and you're right in what you say: she will need time, sothat I won't try to carry her with me till later. And if after Christmasher father should determine to go...it would be done more convenientlyhere. Let's see how things fall out, but if possible let it be done onChristmas Day. He always walks in the afternoon--he told me weeks agothat he hasn't missed a sharp walk on Christmas afternoon forthirty-four years."

"Let it be so, then," his grandfather answered. "I will talk to thewomen, and do you rouse the winds. If by any chance it fails, it can betried again. At a pinch you could do it with the fire in the car whenyou return."

Henry made a face. "And what about Nancy and her aunt?" he asked.

Aaron nodded. "I forgot," he said. "Well, there will be always means."

## Chapter Seven - THE DANCE IN THE WORLD

The sense of strain that had come into being on the Thursday nightexisted still on the morning of Christmas Eve. Henry and Mr. Coningsbywere markedly the centres of conflicting emotions, and Mr. Coningsby wasdisposed to make his daughter into the battle-field since she seemed tohesitate to support him with a complete alliance. He alluded, as the twoof them talked after a slightly uncomfortable breakfast, to the unusualsight which had been exposed to them the night before.

"I must say," he remarked, "that I thought it showed poorer taste than Ihad hoped for in Henry, to try that trick of the moving dolls on us."

"But why do you call it a trick, father?" Nancy objected. "They weremoving; and that was all Henry said."

"It was not by any means all," Mr. Coningsby answered. "To be quitecandid, Nancy, he disappointed me very much; he practically tried toswindle me out of that pack of cards by making an excuse that the dollswere very much like them. Am I to give up everything that belongs to mebecause anyone has got something like it?"

Nancy thought over this sentence without at once replying.

Put like that, it did sound unreasonable. But how else could it be put,to convince her father? Could she say, "Father, I've created earth, andseen policemen and nurses become emperors and empresses, and moved in agolden cloud where I had glimpses of a dance that went all through myblood?" Could she? Could she tell him that her mind still occasionallyremembered, as if it were a supernatural riddle, the shock of seeing thecrucifix with its head above its feet, and the contrast with the HangedMan of the cards? She said at last, "I don't think Henry meant it quitelike that. I'd like you to be fair to him."

"I hope I'm always fair," said Mr. Coningsby, meaning that he couldn'timagine Eternal Justice disagreeing with him, "but I must say I'mdisappointed in Henry."

Nancy looked at the fire. Dolls? She would have been annoyed, only shewas too bothered. Her father must be there, if she could only get athim. But, so far as that went, he might as well be shut away from her inthe gleaming golden mist. He might as well be a grey automaton--he wasmuch more like a moving doll than the images of the hidden room, thanHenry, than Sybil and Joanna hand in hand, than the white-cloakedgovernor of the roads, than Henry, than the witches of Macbeth'sencounter, than the staring crucifix, than the earth between her hands,than Henry...She looked at him dubiously. She had meant to ask him ifshe and Henry might have the Tarot pack again that evening, becauseHenry wanted to tell her something more, and she wanted to know. But hewouldn't, he certainly wouldn't. Might she borrow them for an hourwithout asking him? It wouldn't hurt them or him. They were on hisdressing-table; she had seen them there, and wondered why he hadn'tlocked them away. But she knew--it was because he hadn't really expectedthem to be taken; he had only wanted to be nasty to Henry. Suppose sheasked him and he refused--it would be too silly! But was she to lose allthis wonder, which so terrified and exalted her, because he wanted toannoy Henry? O, in heaven's name what would a girl who was trying tolove do?

Love (presumably) at that moment encouraged Mr. Coningsby, meditating onhis own fair-mindedness and his generous goodwill, to say, "I'd alwaysbe willing for him to borrow them, if I could be sure of getting themback. But--"

Nancy lifted eyes more affectionate than she knew. "If I promised I'dgive them back, father, whenever you liked?"

Mr. Coningsby, a little taken aback, said evasively, "It isn't you I'mdoubtful about. You're my daughter, and you know there's such a thing asdecency."

It would be only decent, Nancy thought, for her not to take the cardsfor use without his consent; but it would also be only decent for him tolend them. She said, "You'd trust me with them?"

"Of course, of course, if the necessity arose," Mr. Coningsby said, atrifle embarrassed, and feeling glad that the necessity couldn't arise.Nancy, relieved from her chief embarrassment, decided that the necessityhad arisen. She felt that it would be silly to compel her father to aclearer statement. She said, as clearly as possible, "I'll take care ofthem," but Sybil came into the room at that moment and the remark waslost. Nancy, a little bewildered by the sudden appearance in her life ofa real moral problem, and hoping sincerely that she had tried to solveit sincerely, slid away and went to look for Henry.

It was with Henry, and holding the Tarots, that she entered the roomthat evening and passed the curtains; together they stood before thegolden images. Nancy felt the difference; what had on the previous nightbeen a visit of curiosity, of interest, was now a more important thing.It was a deliberate repetition, an act of intention, however small; butit was also something more. By her return, and her return with Henry,she was inviting a union between the mystery of her love and the mysteryof the dance. As she stood, again gazing at it, she felt suddenly apremonition of that union, or of the heart of it. It must be in herselfthat the union must be, in a discovery of some new state perhaps asunlike her love and her vision as they were unlike the ignorant Nancy ofthe previous year--there was no other place nor other means, whateveroutward change took place. All that she did could but more deeply revealher to herself; if only the revelation could be as good and lovelyas...as Henry found her. Could she believe in herself so? Dared shetrust that such a beauty was indeed the final answer, or could be madeso?

But before she could search out her own thoughts he spoke to her.

"You saw last night how fortunes can be told," he said. "The cards thatyou held are the visible channel between the dance and you. You holdthem in your hands and--"

"Tell me first," she said, "now we're here alone, tell me more of thisdance. It's more than fortune-telling, isn't it? Why do the cards makeearth? Why do you call some of them the Greater Trumps? Is it only aname? Tell me; you must tell me now."

He drew a deep breath, began to speak, and then, checking, made adespairing movement with his hands. "O, how shall I explain," he criedout, "what we can only be taught to imagine? What only a few among myown people can imagine? I've brought you here, I've wanted you here, andnow it's too much for me. There aren't any words--you'll think me as madas that wretched woman on the roads."

"How do you know I think her mad?" Nancy said. "Did Aunt Sybil seem to?You must try and tell me, Henry--if you think it's important. If youdon't," she added gravely, lifting serious eyes to his, "I should besorry, because it would all be only a conjurer's trick."

He stood away from her a step or two, and then, looking not at her butat the table, he began again to speak. "Imagine, then, if you can," hesaid, "imagine that everything which exists takes part in the movementof a great dance--everything, the electrons, all growing and decayingthings, all that seems alive and all that doesn't seem alive, men andbeasts, trees and stones, everything that changes, and there is nothinganywhere that does not change. That change--that's what we know of theimmortal dance; the law in the nature of things--that's the measure ofthe dance, why one thing changes swiftly and another slowly, why thereis seeming accident and incalculable alteration, why men hate and loveand grow hungry, and cities that have stood for centuries fall in aweek, why the smallest wheel and the mightiest world revolve, why bloodflows and the heart beats and the brain moves, why your body is poisedon your ankles and the Himalayas are rooted in the earth--quick or slow,measurable or immeasurable, there is nothing at all anywhere but thedance. Imagine it--imagine it, see it all at once and in one!"

She did not speak, and after a minute's silence he broke out again.

"This is all that there is to learn; our happiest science guesses at thesteps of a little of it. It's always perfect because it can't beanything else. It knows nothing of joy or grief; it's movement, quick aslight, slow as the crumbling of a stone tomb in the jungle. If you cry,it's because the measure will have it so; if you laugh, it's becausesome gayer step demands it, not because you will. If you ache, the dancestrains you; if you are healthy, the dance carries you. Medicine is thedance; law, religion, music, and poetry--all these are ways of tellingourselves the smallest motion that we've known for an instant before itutterly disappears in the unrepeatable process of that. O Nancy, see it,see it--that's the most we can do, to see something of it for the poorsecond before we die!"

The very dance itself seemed to have paused in her, so motionless herlight form held itself, so rapt in its breathless suspension as thewords sounded through her, and before her eyes the small shapes of gloryturned and intertwined.

"But once," he went on, "--some say in Egypt long before the Pharaohheard of Yussuf Ben-Yakoob, and some in Europe while the dreamingrabbis whispered in the walled ghetto over fables of unspeakable words,and some in the hidden covens of doctrine which the Church calledwitchcraft--once a dancer talked of the dance, not with words, but withimages; once a mind knew it to the seventy-eighth degree of discovery,and not only knew it, but knew how it knew it, so beautifully in onesecret corner the dance doubled and redoubled on itself. And then themeasure, turning here and there, perpetually harmonious, wrought outthese forms of gold in correspondence with something at least of itself,becoming its own record, change answering to change. We can't guess who,we can't tell how, but they were carried in the vans of the gipsiesabout Europe till they were brought here, and here they still are."

She moved a hand and he paused; as if willing to speak from herself, shesaid--the voice and the words desiring a superfluous but compensatingconfirmation, as of step answering to step: "To look at these then is tohave the movement made visible? This is what is going on...now,immediately now? Isn't there anything anywhere that isn't happeningthere?"

He pointed to the table. "This is the present," he said, "and this isthe only present, and even that is changed before it can be known."

"Yet you said," she answered, "that this unknown man knew how it was tobe known. How was that? and why, dearest, are the figures--the images, Imean--made as they are?"

"It would need another seer to explain," he said, "and that seer wouldhave to pass behind the symbols and see them from within. Do youunderstand, Nancy? Do you understand that sometimes where one can hardlygo, two may? Think of that, and think what might be seen and done withinthe dance if so much can be seen without. All we know is that the imagesare the twenty-one and the nought, and the four fours and the four tens.Doubtless these numbers themselves are of high necessity for properknowledge, but their secret too is so far hidden within the dance."

"Yet you must have considered the shapes, darling?" she asked.

"The shapes, perhaps, are for two things," he answered more slowly, "forresemblance and for communication. On the one hand they must mean somestep, some conjunction, some--what we call a fact--that is oftenrepeated in the infinite combinations; on the other, it must besomething that we know and can read. This, I think, is what was meant,but even the secondary meaning has been lost--or was lost while thecards were separated from the golden images, as if a child were takenfrom its mother into some other land and never learned her language,that language which should have been the proper inheritance of itstongue."

He stopped short, as if the thought troubled him, and the girl, with thesame memory in her mind, said, "Did the woman on the road mean that whenshe talked to us?"

"I don't care what she meant," he said almost harshly. "Neither she noranyone but ourselves concerns us now. No one but ourselves has a properright to talk of the cards or the images."

He glanced at her as he spoke, but, smiling very slightly, she let theutterance die, and said only: "Tell me more of the cards."

"The cards were made with the images," he answered; "the mark in thecorner of each of them is the seal of the bottom of each golden shape;seventy-eight figures and as many seals on as many cards. The papyruspaintings are exactly the same as the figures; they are the paintings ofthe figures. This, as I told you a month ago, when we first saw them, isthe only perfect set, correspondence to correspondence, and thereforethe only set by which the sublime dance can be read. The movementchanges incessantly, but in every fractional second it is so, and whenthese cards are brought to it they dispose themselves in that order,modified only by the nature of the hands between which they are held,and by the order into which they fall we read the fortune of whoeverholds them."

"But the suits, you said, are the elements?" she asked.

He nodded. "But that is in the exterior world; they are the increasingstrength of the four elements, and in the body of a man there arecorresponding natures. This is the old doctrine of humours which yourschoolmistress taught you, no doubt, that you might understand BenJonson or what not."

"And the others?" she said; "the Greater Trumps?"

He came near to her and spoke more low, almost as if he did not want thegolden dancers to know that he was talking of them. "They," he said,"are the truths--the facts--call them what you will--principles ofthought, actualities of corporate existence, Death and Love and certainVirtues and Meditation and the Benign Sun of Wisdom, and so on. You mustsee them--there aren't any words to tell you."

"The Devil--if it is a devil?" she said.

"It is the unreasonable hate and malice which moves in us," he answered.

"The juggler--if it is a juggler?" she asked.

"It is the beginning of all things--a show, a dexterity of balance, aflight, and a falling. It's the only way he--whoever he was--could formthe beginning and the continuation of the dance itself."

"Is it God then?" Nancy asked, herself yet more hushed.

Henry moved impatiently. "What do we know?" he answered. "This isn't aquestion of words. God or gods or no gods, these things are, and they'remeant and manifested thus. Call it God if you like, but it's better tocall it the juggler and mean neither God nor no God."

"And the Fool who doesn't move?" she said after a pause.

"All I can tell you of that," he said grimly, "is that it is the Foolwho doesn't move. There are tales and writings of everything but theFool; he comes into none of the doctrines or the fortunes. I've neveryet seen what he can be."

"Yet Aunt Sybil saw him move," she said.

"You shall ask her about it some time," he answered, "but not yet. Now Ihave told you as much as I can tell of these things; the sense of themis for your imagination to grasp. And when you have come to understandit so, then we may see whether by the help of the Tarots we may find ourway into the place beyond the mists. But meanwhile I will show yousomething more. Wait for me a minute."

He paused, considering; then he went to a different part of the curtainsand disappeared through what she supposed was another opening in them.She heard a sound, as if he were opening a window, then he came back toher.

"If you look up at this room from without," he said, "you will see ithas four windows in it. I have opened the eastern one. Now see."

He went to the part of the table nearest to the window he had opened,and, feeling beneath it, drew out a curved ledge, running some third ofthe way round the table. It was some three feet wide, and it reached,when it was fully extended, almost to the curtains; it also was of gold,and there were faint markings on it, though Nancy could not see verywell what they were--some sort of map of the world, she thought. Henryturned a support of wood to hold it rigid and began to lay the Tarotcards upon it. He spread the Greater Trumps along the table edge in theorder of their numbering. But he began, not with the first, but with thesecond card, which was that of the Empress, and so on till he came tothe pictures which were called xx The Last Judgement--where a Handthrust out of cloud touched a great sarcophagus and broke it, so thatthe skeleton within could arise, and xxi The World--where a singlesinging form, as of a woman, rose in a ray of light towards a clearheaven of blue, leaving moon and sun and stars beneath her feet. Thefirst, however, which showed a juggler casting little balls into theair, he laid almost in the middle, resting it upon the twelfth card,which was the Wheel of Fortune, and supporting it against the edge ofthe table itself behind, over which it projected; under the Wheel ofFortune he hid the Fool. Having done this carefully, he went on veryquickly with the rest of his task. He took the four suits and laid themalso on the ledge from left to right, the deniers, the cups, thesceptres, the swords. Of each suit he laid first, against and slightlyoverlapping the Greater Trumps, the four Court cards--the King, theQueen, the Knight, the Esquire; in front of, and again overlappingthese, the ten, the nine, the eight, and the seven; then, similarlyarranged, the six, the five, and the four; then the three and the two;and in front of all, pointing outwards, the ace of each suit, so thatthe whole company of the Tarots lay with their base curved against thetable of the dance, and pointing with a quadruple apex towards thecurtains behind which was the open window.

As soon as this was done he stepped back to Nancy, thrust an arm roundher, and said: "Look at the curtains." She obeyed, but not continuously;her eyes turned back often to the cards on the ledge, and it was whileshe gazed at them that she became aware how, in the movement of thedance, the Juggler among the images had approached the correspondingcard. He seemed to her to run swiftly, while still he kept the score orso balls spinning over him in the air, and as he went he struck againstthe card and it slid from its place. Its fall disturbed the Wheel ofFortune on which it stood, and immediately the whole of the cards werein movement, sliding over and under each other--she gazed, enchanted,till Henry whispered in her ear, "The curtain!"

She looked, and at first instead of a curtain she saw only the goldenmist in which she had found herself on the previous night. But it wasalready gathering itself up, dissipated, lost in an increasing depth ofnight. At first she thought the curtains had disappeared and she waslooking out through the open window, but it was hardly that, for therewas no frame or shape. The dark hangings of the room here lostthemselves in darkness. She had not passed through the mist, but she waslooking beyond it, and as within it her own fortune had been revealed sonow some greater thing came into conjunction with the images, and thecards moved under the union of the double influence. For within thedarkness a far vision was forming. She saw a gleam of green close beforeher; she heard for an instant what seemed the noise of waves on theshore. Then against that line of greenish-blue a shore actually grew;she saw the waves against it. As she gazed, it dwindled, growing less aswhat was beyond it was shaped in the darkness. Small and far, as ifmodelled with incredible minute exactitude, there emerged the image of aland with cities and rivers, railways and roads. The shape defineditself and was familiar; she was looking at a presentation of Hollandand Belgium and Northern France, and--for, even as she understood, thelimits expanded and what she saw seemed to grow smaller yet, as widerstretches came into view--there were the Alps, there was Italy; thatdome of infinitesimal accuracy, above like infinitesimal detail, was St.Peter's--and beyond were more seas and islands and the sweep of greatplains. Before her breath had thrice sighed itself out she saw India andAsia, with its central lakes, and Everest, its small peak dazzling whiteagainst the dark, and, as she breathed again, Tibet expanded into China,and the horizon of that mysterious night fled farther away and closed atlength upon the extreme harbours of Japan. The whole distance lay beforeher, and she knew certainly within her that she was seeing noreproduction or evoked memory, but the vast continents themselves, withall that they held. She looked on the actual thing; earth was stretchedbefore her, and the myriad inhabitants of that great part of earth.

Fast in Henry's arm, as if leaning forward from a height, she strainedto see; and something of man's activities she did indeed discern. Therewere moving specks on certain roads especially away in Northern China;and, since there chiefly she could trace movement, without deliberateintention concentrated on it. It grew larger before her, and the rest ofthe vision faded and diminished. She unconsciously desired to see, andshe saw men--companies of men--armies--all in movement--details shecould not hold her gaze steadily enough to observe, but there was nodoubt that they were armies, and moving. There was a town--they wereabout it--it was burning. Her concentration could not but relax, andagain all this receded, and again before her the whole of Europe and ofAsia lay. But now the seas and continents were no longer still; theywere shaken as if with earthquake; they were dissolving, taking freshshapes, rising into, changing into, the golden images that danced upontheir golden ground. Only here they danced in night upon no ground. Theystarted from the vanishing empires and nations; cities leapt together,and Death came running instead; from among the Alps the Imperial cloakswept snow into itself; rivers poured into the seas and the seas intonothing, and cups received them and bearers of cups, and a swiftprocession of lifted chalices wound among the gathering shapes. FromTibet, from Rome, some consummation came together, and the hierophant,the Pope of the Tarots, took ritual steps towards that other joinedbeauty of the two lovers for which her grateful heart always searched.All earth had been gathered up: this was the truth of earth. The dancewent on in the void; only even there she saw in the centre themotionless Fool, and about him in a circle the juggler ran, for evertossing his balls.

She felt, being strangely, and yet not strangely, conscious of his closeneighbourhood, Henry draw himself together as if to move. She felt himmove--and between those two sensations she saw, or she thought she saw,a complete movement in the dance. Right up to the hitherward edge of thedarkness the two lovers came; they wheeled back; her eyes followed them,and saw suddenly all the rest of the dancers gathering in on eitherside, so that the two went on between those lines towards where the Foolstood still as though he waited them. After them other opposing formswheeled inward also, the Emperor with the Empress, the mitred hierophantwith the woman who equalled him; and the first twain trod on the top ofthe Wheel of Fortune and passed over; before them rose the figure of theHanged Man, and they disjoined to pass on either side and went eachunder his cross, and Death and the Devil ran at them, and they runningalso came to a tower that continually fell into ruin and was continuallyre-edified; they passed into it, and when they issued again they wererunning far from each other, but then the golden light broke from eachand met and mingled, and over them stars and the moon and the sun wereshining; yet a tomb lay in their path, and the Fool--surely themotionless Fool!--stretched out his hand and touched it, and from withinrose a skeleton; and it joined the lovers in their flying speed, and waswith each, and the Fool was moving, was coming; but then she lost sightof lovers and skeleton, and of all the figures there were none left butthe Juggler who appeared suddenly right under her eyes and went speedilyup a single path which had late been multitudinous, and ran to meet theFool. They came together; they embraced; the tossing balls fell overthem in a shower of gold--and the golden mist covered everything, andswirled before her eyes; and then it also faded, and the hangings of theroom were before her, and she felt Henry move.

## Chapter Eight - CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE COUNTRY

It had been settled at dinner on Christmas Eve that the three Coningsbyswould go to the village church on Christmas Day. Mr. Coningsbytheoretically went to church every Sunday, which was why he alwaysfilled up census forms with the statement "Church of England". Of theparticular religious idea which the Church of England maintains he hadnever made any special investigation, but he had retained the doublehabit of going to church on Christmas morning and for a walk onChristmas afternoon. In his present state of irritation with the Lees hewould rather have walked to church than not have gone, especially asAaron pleaded his age and Henry professional papers as reasons for notgoing. But Aaron had put the car and chauffeur at his disposal for thepurpose, so that he was not reduced to any such unseemly effort. Mr.Coningsby held strongly that going to church, if and when he did go,ought to be as much a part of normal life as possible, and ought not todemand any peculiar demonstration of energy on the part of thechurch-goer.

Sybil, he understood, had the same view; she agreed that religion andlove should be a part of normal life. With a woman's naturalexaggeration, she had once said that they were normal life, that theywere indeed life. He wasn't very clear whether she usually went tochurch or not; if she did, she said nothing much about it, and wasalways back in time for meals. He put her down as "Church of England"too; she never raised any objection. Nancy went under the same heading,though she certainly didn't go to church. But her father felt that shewould when she got older; or that, anyhow, if she didn't she would feelit was right to do so. Circumstances very often prevented one doing whatone wished: if one was tired or bothered, it was no good going to churchin an improper state of mind.

Nancy's actual state of mind on the Christmas morning was too confusedfor her to know much about it. She was going with her father partlybecause she always had done, but even more because she badly needed ashort refuge of time and place from these shattering new experiences.She felt that an hour or so somewhere where just for once even Henrycouldn't get at her was a highly desirable thing. Her mind hadn'tfunctioned very clearly during the rest of the time they had spent inthe inner room; or else her memory of it wasn't functioning clearly now.Henry had explained something about the possibility of reading thefortunes of the world in the same manner as those of individuals couldbe read, but she had been incapable of listening; indeed, she had beatena rather scandalous retreat, and (for all his earlier promises of soundsleep) had lain awake for a long time, seeing only that last wild rushtogether of the Fool and the juggler, that falling torrent of ballsbreaking into a curtain of golden spray, which thickened into cloudbefore her. One last glance at the table had shown her upon it thefigure of the Fool still poised motionless, so she hadn't seen what AuntSybil had seen. But she had seen the Fool move in that other vision. Shewanted to talk to her aunt about it, but her morning sleep had only justbrought her down for breakfast, and there had been no opportunityafterwards before church. She managed to keep Sybil between herself andher father as they filed into a pew, and sat down between her and apillar with a sense of protection. Nothing unusual was likely to happenfor the next hour or two, unless it was the vicar's new setting of theAthanasian Creed. Aaron Lee had remarked that the man was a musicalenthusiast, doing the best he could with the voices at his disposal,assisted by a few friends whom he had down at Christmas. This Christmas,it seemed, he was attempting a little music which he himself hadcomposed. Nancy was quite willing that he should--nothing seemed moreremote from excitement or mystery than the chant of the AthanasianCreed. During the drive down her father had commented disapprovingly onthe Church's use of that creed. Sybil had asked why he disliked it. Mr.Coningsby had asked if she thought it Christian; and Sybil said shedidn't see anything very unChristian about it--not if you remembered thehypothesis of Christianity.

"And what," Mr. Coningsby said, as if this riddle were entirelyunanswerable, "what do you call the hypothesis of Christianity?"

"The Deity of Love and the Incarnation of Love?" Sybil suggested,adding, "Of course, whether you agree with it is another thing."

"Certainly I agree with Christianity," Mr. Coningsby said. "Perhaps Ishouldn't put it quite like that. It's a difficult thing to define. ButI don't see how the damnatory clauses--"

However, there they reached the church. Nancy thought, as she looked atthe old small stone building, that if Henry was right about the dance,then this member of it must be sitting out some part of the time on somestarry stair. Nothing less mobile had ever been imagined. But herintelligence reminded her, even as she entered, that the apparentquiescence, the solidity, the attributed peace of the arched doorway wasone aspect of what, in another aspect, was a violent and riotousconflict of...whatever the latest scientific word was. Strain andstress were everywhere; the very arch held itself together by extremeforce; the latest name for matter was Force, wasn't it? Electricalnuclei or something of that sort. If this antique beauty was all made ofelectrical nuclei, there might be--there must be--a dance going onsomewhere in which even that running figure with the balls flying overit in curves would be outpaced. She herself outpaced Sybil by a step andentered the pew first.

And she then, as she knelt decorously down, was part of the dance; shewas the flying feet passing and repassing; she was the conjunction ofthe images whose movement the cards symbolized and from which theyformed the prophecy of her future. "A man shall owe you everything"--everything? Did she really want Henry to owe her everything, or didshe--against her own quick personal desire--desire rather that thereshould be something in him to which she owed everything? "And a womanshall govern you"--that was the most distasteful of all; she had no useat all for women governing her; anyhow, she would like to see the womanwho would do it. "And you shall die very rich"--by this time she had gotup from her knees, and had sat down again--well, that was veryfortunate. If it meant what it said--"You shall die very rich"--but theforms of Death and the Devil and the Queen of Chalices had danced roundher, and the words shook with threat, with promise, with obscure terror.But what could even that do to harm her while Henry and she togetherdared it? While that went on, it was true in its highest and mostperfect meaning; if that went on, she would die very rich.

A door opened; the congregation stirred; a voice from the vestry said:"Hymn 61. 'Christians, awake,' Hymn 61." Everyone awoke, found theplace, and stood up. The choir started at once on the hymn and theprocession. Nancy docilely sent her voice along with them.

Christians, awake, salute the happy morn, Whereon the Saviour of theworld was born: Rise to a--

Her voice ceased; the words stared up at her. The choir and thecongregation finished the line:

adore the mystery of love.

"The mystery of love." But what else was in her heart? The Christmasassociations of the verse had fallen away; there was the direct detachedcry, bidding her do precisely and only what she was burning to do. "Riseto adore the mystery of love." What on earth were they doing, singingabout the mystery of love in church? They couldn't possibly be meaningit. Or were they meaning it and had she misunderstood the whole thing?

The church was no longer a defence; it was itself an attack. Fromanother side the waves of some impetuous and greater life swept in uponher. She turned her head abruptly towards Sybil, who felt the movementand looked back, her own voice pausing on "the praises of redeeminglove". Nancy, her finger pointing to the first of those great verses,whispered a question, "Is it true?" Sybil looked at the line, lookedback at Nancy, and answered in a voice both aspirant and triumphant,"Try it, darling." The tall figure, the wise mature face, the darkineffable eyes, challenged, exhorted, and encouraged. Nancy throbbed tothe voice that broke into the next couplet--"God's highest glory wastheir anthem still."

She looked back at the hymn and hastily read it--it was really a verycommonplace hymn, a very poor copy of verses. Only that one commandingrhythm still surged through her surrendered soul--"Rise to adore themystery of love." But now everyone else was shutting up hymn-books andturning to prayer-books; she took one more glance at the words, and didthe same.

The two lovers had run straight on--not straight on; they had beendivided. Separately they had run up the second part of the way,separately each had danced with the skeleton. She could see them now,but more clearly even than them she remembered the juggler--"neither Godnor not-God," Henry had said--running to meet the unknown Fool. "Amen,"they were singing all round her; this wasn't getting very far from thedance. It hadn't occurred to her that there was so much singing, so muchexchanging of voices, so much summoning and crying out in an ordinarychurch service. Sybil's voice rose again--"As it was in the beginning,is now--" What was in the beginning and was now? Glory, glory.

Nancy sat down for the Proper Psalms, though she was aware her fatherhad looked at her disapprovingly behind Sybil's back. It couldn't behelped; her legs wouldn't hold her up in the midst of these dim floodsof power and adoration that answered so greatly to the power andadoration which abode in her heart, among these songs and flights ofdancing words which wheeled in her mind and seemed themselves to becomepart of the light of the glorious originals of the Tarots.

She was still rather overwhelmed when they came to the Athanasian Creed,and it may have been because of her own general chaos that even thatdespised formulary took part in the general break-up which seemed to beproceeding within her. All the first part went on in its usual way; sheknew nothing about musical setting of creeds, so she couldn't tell whatto think of this one. The men and the boys of the choir exchangedmetaphysical confidences; they dared each other, in a kind ofrapture--which, she supposed, was the setting--to deny the Trinity orthe Unity; they pointed out, almost mischievously, that though they werecompelled to say one thing, yet they were forbidden to say somethingelse exactly like it; they went into particulars about an entirelyimpossible relationship, and concluded with an explanation thatsomething wasn't true which the wildest dream of any man but thecompiler of the creed could hardly have begun to imagine. All this Nancyhalf-ignored.

But the second part--and it was of course the setting--for one verseheld her. It was of course the setting, the chance that sent one boy'svoice sounding exquisitely through the church. But the words whichconveyed that beauty sounded to her full of sudden significance. Themingled voices of men and boys were proclaiming the nature ofChrist--"God and man is one in Christ"; then the boys fell silent, andthe men went on, "One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, butby taking of the manhood into God". On the assertion they ceased, andthe boys rushed joyously in, "One altogether, not"--they looked at theidea and tossed it airily away--"not by confusion of substance, but byunity"--they rose, they danced, they triumphed--"by unity, byunity"--they were silent, all but one, and that one fresh perfectionproclaimed the full consummation, each syllable rounded, prolonged,exact, "by unity of person".

It caught the young listening creature; the enigmatic phrase quiveredwith beautiful significance. Sybil at her side somehow answered to it;she herself perhaps--she herself in love. Something beyond understandingbut not beyond achievement showed itself, and then the choir wereplunging through the swift record of the Christhood on earth, and oncemore the attribution of eternal glory rose and fell--"is now," "is nowand ever shall be". Then they were all kneeling down and the vicar waspraying in ritual utterance of imperial titles for "our sovereign lordKing George".

For the rest of the service Nancy moved and rose and sat and kneltaccording to the ritual, without being very conscious of what was goingon. She felt two modes of being alternating within her--now the swiftrush of her journey in the car, of her own passion, of the images seenin the night, of the voices roaring upward in the ceremonies ofChristmas; now again the pause, the silence and full restraint of theEmperor, of Sybil, of her own expectation, of that single voicedeclaring unity, of the Fool amid the dance of the night. She flew withthe one; she was suspended with the other; and, with downcast eyes andparted lips, she sought to control her youth till one should disappearor till both should come together. Everything was different from what ithad so lately seemed; even the two who sat beside her. Her respect forher aunt had become something much more like awe; "Try it, darling," wasa summons to her from one who was a sibyl indeed. Her father wasdifferent too. He seemed no more the absurd, slightly despicable,affected and pompous and irritating elderly man whom she had known; allthat was unimportant. He walked alone, a genie from some other world,demanding of her something which she had not troubled to give. If shewould not find out what that was, it was no good blaming him for thefailure of their proper relation. She, she only, was to blame; the sinlay in her heart whenever that heart set itself against any other. Hemight be funny sometimes, but she herself was very funny sometimes. AuntSybil had told her she didn't love anyone; and she had been slightlyshocked at the suggestion. The colour swept into her cheeks as shethought of it, sitting still during the sermon. But everything would bedifferent now. She would purify herself before she dared offer herselfto Henry for the great work he contemplated.

At lunch it appeared that his ordinary work, however, was going tooccupy him for the afternoon as well as the morning. He apologized toher for this in a rather troubled way, and she mocked him gently.

"Father's going," she said, "and you'll be shut up. It'll be perfectheaven to look at the furniture or read a murder story--only yourgrandfather doesn't seem to have many murder stories, does he, darling?All his literature seems so very serious, and quite a lot of it's inforeign languages. But there's yesterday's paper, if I'm driven to it."

"I must do it," Henry said, rather incoherently. "There's no other way."

"Where there's a will there's a way," she said. "You haven't got thewill, Henry. You don't think the world's well lost for me."

"I've a will for what's useful," he said, so seriously that she wasstartled.

"I know you have, dearest," she said. "I'm not annoying you, am I? Yousounded as if you were going to do something frightfully important, thatI hadn't a notion of."

He found no answer to that, but wandered off and stood looking out ofthe window into the frosty clearness of the day. He dared not embraceher lest she should feel his heart beating more intensely than ever ithad beaten for his love; nor speak lest his voice should alarm hersensitive attention to wonder what he purposed. It was one thing to seewhat had to be done, and if it had not been for Nancy he could have doneit easily enough, he thought. But to sit at lunch with her and "themurdered man". If she ever knew, would she understand? She must, shemust! If she didn't, then he had told his grandfather rightly that allhis intention was already doomed. But if she did, if she could seeclearly that her father's life was little compared to the restoration ofthe Tarots, so that in future there might be a way into the mysticaldance, and from within their eyes might see it, from within they--moresuccessful than Joanna--might govern the lesser elements, and perhapssend an heir to all their knowledge out into the world. If theyperished, they perished in an immense effort, and no lesser creature,though it were Nancy's father or his own--though it were Nancy herself,should she shrink--must be allowed to stand in the way. She wouldunderstand when she knew; but till she had learned more he dared nottell her. It would be, he told himself, cruel to her; the decision forboth of them must be his.

The sombre determination brooded over the meal. As if a grey cloud hadovercast the day and the room, those sitting at the table were dimmedand oppressed by the purpose which two of them cherished. Aaron's eyesfixed themselves, spasmodically and anxiously, on the women whom hisbusiness was to amuse; Henry once or twice, in a sudden sharp decision,looked up at Mr. Coningsby, who went on conversing about Christmaslunches he had known, about lunches in general, the ideal lunch, thediscovery of cooking, fire, gas-fires, air, space, modern science,science in the Press, the present state of newspapers, and other things.Sybil assisted him, more talkative than usual, because the other threewere more silent. Nancy felt unexpectedly tired and chilly, though theroom was warm enough. A natural reaction of discouragement took her, anatural--yet to her unnatural--disappointment with Henry. Her eyes wentto him at intervals, ready to be placated and delighted, but noanswering eyes met hers. She saw him, once, staring at his own hands,and she looked at them too, without joy, as if they were two strangeinstruments working at a little-understood experiment. The dark skin,the long fingers, the narrow wrists--the hands that had struck andcaressed hers, to which she had given her free kisses, which she hadpressed and stroked and teased--they were so strange that they made herunion with them strange; they were inhuman, and their inhumanity creptdeeper into the chill of her being. Her glance swept the table; fivepairs of hands were moving there, all alien and incomprehensible.Prehensile...monkeys swaying in the trees: not monkeys...somethingmore than monkeys. She felt Sybil looking at her, and refused to lookback. Her father's voice maddened her; he was still talking--stupid,insane talk. He a Warden in Lunacy! He was a lunatic himself, the worsefor being uncertifiable. O, why didn't he die?

A fork and spoon tinkled. Mr. Coningsby was saying that forks came inwith Queen Elizabeth. She said, quite unexpectedly, "In Swift's timepeople used to say 'Queen Elizabeth's dead' instead of 'Queen Anne'sdead'."

Henry's hand jerked on the cloth, like some reptile just crawled up frombelow the table. She went on perversely, "Did you know that, Henry?"

He answered abruptly, "No," and so sharp was the syllable that it leftall five of them in silence, a silence in which either Elizabeth or Annemight have passed from a world she knew to a world she could notimagine. Sybil broke it by saying, "It was the change of dynasty thatmade their ends so important, I suppose? No one ever said 'George II isdead', did they?"

"Aren't we being rather morbid?" Aaron asked, in a kind of high croak,almost as if the reptile Nancy had imagined had begun to speak. Cold...cold...and cold things making discordant noises. O, this wouldn't do:she was being silly. She made an effort and reminded herself that thiswas Mr. Lee speaking--and it was a gloomy conversation: not so muchgloomy as horrid. Everyone was unnatural--at least, Henry was unnatural,and her father was overwhelmingly natural, and Mr. Lee...He was sayingsomething else. She bent her attention to it.

"There are some manuscripts," he was saying, "you might like to look atthis afternoon. Some poems, part of a diary, a few letters."

"I should like to very much," Sybil said. "What sort of a man does heseem to have been?"

"I'm afraid I've not read them carefully enough to know," Aaron replied."He was, of course, disappointed; the cause had been ruined, and hiscareer with it."

Sybil smiled. "He believed that?" she asked. "But how foolish of him!"

Henry said, "Is it foolish to give oneself to a purpose and die if itperishes?"

"Disproportioned, don't you think?" Sybil suggested. "One might dierather than forsake a cause, but if the cause forsakes you? They'repathetic creatures, your lonely romantics. They can't bear to bemistaken."

Nancy shivered again. Even Sybil's lovely voice couldn't help giving theword "mistaken" rather a heavy and fatal sound. "Mistaken"--utterlymistaken. To mistake everything life had concentrated in, to be wrong,just wrong...O, at last the meal was ending. She got up and followedher aunt and Aaron to the drawing-room, loathing herself and everybodyelse, and especially the manuscript relics of the unfortunate peer.

Henry saw Mr. Coningsby off. "Which way shall you go?" he asked.

"I shall walk as far as the village and back," his guest said. "If I seethe vicar I shall congratulate him on the service this morning--bright,short, and appropriate. A very neat little sermon too. Quiet andconvincing."

"What was it about?" Henry said, against his will trying to delay theother. He looked at him curiously: "bright, short, and appropriate" werehardly the words for the thing that was gathering round him who hadspoken. The reared tower of his life was already shaking; and it wasHenry whose hand pushed it.

"O, behaving kindly--and justly," Mr. Coningsby said. "Very suitable tothe villagers who go. Well, I mustn't delay. I'll be off."

"Take care you take the left path at the division as you come back,"Henry said.

"Quite, quite; the left," Mr. Coningsby said, and disappeared. Henrywent his own way--not to the drawing-room, where Nancy, with all herheart but much against her temper, expected him to look in for a fewminutes. He didn't. She cursed herself, and went on staring at thepeer's extremely eighteenth-century diary, taking no part in the chat ofthe other two. Sybil began reading a poem aloud.

TO CLARINDA: ON RECEIVING A LETTER

Ah, cruel Clarinda, must this Paper show All of thy Fortune that I nowmay know? Though still the Town retain thee, perjured Maid, May not someThought of me the Town invade? Was I forgotten when I did depart, Andthou oblivious of a Faithful Heart? Despair to thee is but a gratefulPain, Coolly pretended by the Amorous Swain; But O, in me Despair is allmy Sense As hateful as impoverished Joy's Pretence--

"Impoverished joy's pretence"--Nancy knew that was what she was feeling,and knew how hateful it was. At the same time she realized that she wasfeeling tired--O, so absolutely tired. She must get away and lie downand rest: she'd be better then by tea-time. And perhaps Henry would befree, and impoverished joy need no longer pretend. When the poem wasfinished, she said, rather ungrateful to the wretched peer, "He wasn't avery good poet, was he? I suppose Clarinda had thrown him over. Mr. Lee,would you think me a perfect pig if I went and lay down and went tosleep? I'm only just keeping my eyes a little way open."

"My dear girl, of course," Aaron said. "Anything you like. I'm so sorry.You're not overtired, are you?"

"No, O no," Nancy protested. "It's just...it's just...that I'munutterably sleepy. I can't think what's come over me."

As he went to open the door, she smiled at her aunt. Sybil said in a lowvoice, "Being in love is a tiring business--I mean getting into love.Sleep well, darling."

She slept at least without dreams, unless that sudden vision of herfather falling from a high precipice from which she woke and sprang upwas a dream. It was his scream that had wakened her; was it--or was itthat howling wind? There was something driving against the windows; fora moment she thought it was a great white face staring in, then she knewit for snow-heavy, terrific snow. Bewildered, she blinked at it. The dayhad changed completely: it was dark, and yet, from the unlit room, whitewith snow. The wind or the scream sounded again, as, still half-asleep,she clung to the bed and gazed. Her father--he must be in by now. It wasclose on five. Her father--faces looking for him--her father cryingout. She ran uncertainly to the door, and, driven by an unknown fear,went hurrying to the hall. There was Sybil and Aaron--Sybil with hercoat on, Aaron protesting, offering...Nancy came up to them.

"Hallo," she said. "I say, aunt, you're not going out, are you?"

Sybil said something that was lost in the noise of the blizzard; Nancylooked round. "Where's father?" she asked.

"Out," Sybil said. "I was just going to meet him."

"Hasn't he come back?" Nancy said. "But, I say, he'll never find hisway..." If only she hadn't dreamed of his being thrown over aprecipice. There was no precipice here. But he'd screamed.

"But it's absurd," Aaron said. "Henry'll go. I'll call him. I've let thechauffeur go home. But Henry'll go."

Sleep was leaving Nancy, but dream and fear and cold took her. Herfather ought to have been back long ago--and where was Henry? Hecouldn't be working all this time, in this tumult. He and her fatherwere missing--and her aunt was going out--and she?

"I'll go," she said. "You can't go, aunt. I'll go."

"You," Sybil said, "can go and look for Henry. We can't leave Mr. Lee todo everything. I've no doubt your father's all right, but he may be gladof an arm. Even mine. Help Mr. Lee to shut the door."

If her father had taken the wrong road--if hands were guiding him thewrong way--if he were being thrust--

Sybil opened the door: the wind struck at their throats and half-stifledthem; the snow drove at their faces. Over her shoulder Sybil said, "Itis rather thick."

"O, don't go," Nancy said. "You'll be flung over the edge too. I'llgo--I hated him--I'll go. What can you do?"

"You go and find Henry," Sybil said, leaning forward against the wind."I can adore the mystery of love." The tall figure was poised for amoment against the raging turmoil beyond and around, then it took acouple of steps forward and was lost to sight. Aaron struggled to closethe door, desperately alarmed; it had been no part of his intention thatSybil also should be exposed to the powers that were abroad. But hehadn't been able to stop her. Nancy, in a torment of anger at herself,flung forward to help him; that done, she turned and fled to find Henry.Where was Henry? Some terror beat in her: Henry and her father--a screamin the storm. She ran into Henry's room; he wasn't there. She rushed outagain--to other rooms; she raced through the house, and couldn't findhim. Was he in the room of the images? If so, the old man must open itfor her. But Aaron had vanished too, and the wind was howling evenlouder round the house. She burst in on the maids in the kitchenthrilling at the storm--"Mr. Lee; where's Mr. Lee?" Before they couldanswer with more than the beginning of stammered ignorance she was offagain. Well, if he wasn't here she would go without him. She must go.She rushed into her own room, and as she pulled on her coat she gazedout of the window on the wild chance of seeing her father's returningfigure, though (could she have thought) she would have remembered thather room looked out over the terrace at the side of the house. But itwas then that she saw Henry.

He was standing at one end of the terrace facing slantingly out so as tocommand from a distance the road that led to the village, and to behimself unseen except from one or two higher windows. He was standingthere; she could only just see his figure through the dark snow-sweptday, but it was he--certainly it was he. What he was doing there shecouldn't think; he couldn't be watching for her father--that would besilly. He must have a reason, but, whatever the reason, it must wait;his business now was to come with her. She flew out of the room,downstairs, along a corridor that led to a small door giving on to theother end of the terrace, just beside the drawing-room which occupiedthe bottom corner of the house; not more than thirty yards from Henryshe'd be then. She opened it and desperately fought her way out.

The next thing she knew was that the wind had flung her back against thewall of the house and was holding and stifling her there. Bludgeons ofit struck her; snow and wind together choked her. She turned her head toface the wall, drew a sobbing breath or two, and cried out "Henry" once.Once, for she could hardly hear herself, and with her remainingintelligence she kept her breath for other things. Surely Henry couldn'tbe out in this; the wind beat and bruised her again, thrusting heragainst the wall. For a moment she forgot everything, and reached out tofind the doorway and drag herself into shelter, but even as her handtouched the edge she tore it away. No, Henry wasn't indoors and he wasout here; and her business was to get to him. She began to edge alongthe wall. He had been standing at the extreme end of the terrace; so ifshe worked along the wall, and then (if necessary) crawled out on herhands and knees, she ought to find him. Unless he had gone...

She ventured to look over her shoulder. The wind, even in its violence,was rhythmical; it rose to its screaming height and ceased a little, andthen began to rise again. In a pause she looked and could see only thefalling snow. She looked back just in time to avoid a blast that seemedalmost to smash at her as if it were a great club, and went onstruggling along the wall. Aunt Sybil was out in this, and her father,and Henry. In God's name, why Henry? Her father by accident, and Sybilby--by love. Love--O, to get away from this, and anyone who liked couldhave love! "No, no," she gasped. "No, darling; I'm sorry." She lookedround once more and saw--not Henry, but another shape. In the snow,leaping through the air, preluding the new blast of wind that blindedand strangled her, there swept a wild figure waving in each hand a staffof some kind, and another like it followed. She saw the swinging clubs,she heard shrieking--the wind shrieking--and almost lost her footing asthe renewed strength of it came against her. For some minutes she clungto the wall; mad memories that the crisis of the last half-hour haddriven from her mind returned. Death with the sickle--earth from thedeniers--the gipsy who drove the Armada--and the powers of the windscreamed again as if once more they saw the dismasted and broken shipsswept before them through the raging seas. Henry--where was Henry? Whatwas Henry doing out at the end of the terrace? Before the thought hadformed in her mind she herself screamed--one protesting shriek: "Henry,my darling, don't, don't!" And as she did so she began to struggle onagain towards an end which she did not dare imagine. Whatever it was,she must be there; Sybil had told her to find Henry--but Sybil must bedead by now; nothing could live in this storm, any more than the Spanishvessels flung on the Scottish rocks. Sybil must be dead--well, then, itall lay on her; she was left to do the bidding of a greater thanherself. And if Sybil wasn't dead--Sybil who had seen the Fool moving,who had said "Try it, darling." "Try it"--and she was crawling along thehouse-wall! Though Death ran at her, though the Hanged Man faced her,though the Tower fell upon her, though a skeleton rose in herpath--"Rise to adore the mystery of love." She pulled herself uprightand passionately flung round to face the wind and snow.

Something, away, among them was moving: something was sweeping up anddown. She forced herself a step out from the wall: there was the end,there was where Love meant her to be, there then was where she wasexcept for the slight inconvenience of getting there. Another step;another--she was, by the mere overwhelming force of the storm, drivendown, she stumbled and fell on to one knee; there she looked up to thosemoving shapes and knew them for hands. Regularly, monotonously, theyswept down and out, holding something; they were huge, gigantic--as herown had seemed in the golden mist. As her own in the golden mist, sothese in the white surges of the snow, and the snow swept out from them.On one knee she fought to get nearer--to face another terror, she dimlyfelt, but of a different kind. This, if that other were true, this couldbe stopped. The great hands swept down again, and colossal snowflakesdrove towards her on a renewed blast that drove her down literally tohands and knees. But she crawled and dragged herself on; she was almostthere; she was under them--those awful moving origins of storm. Shekneeled upright, she struck up at them and missed, they had swept rightoutward and as they more lightly turned she flung at them with her ownhands outstretched. She caught and held them, but as they struggled withhers in that first surprise, and dragged themselves away and up,bringing her to her feet with them, something that they held slipped andwas gone. She clutched and clung to them, holding them in, pressing themback, and as she did so and was drawn inward with them she fell forwardand knew suddenly that she lay on Henry's breast.

Lost in the concentration and movement of the spell, he did not know shewas near him till his hands were seized and, pulling them franticallyaway, he dragged her grey-coated form up with them out of the storm. Itwas against his heart before he knew it; he had one spasm of terror lestsomething unknown had turned on him, lest an elemental being, a bearerof staffs, had crept near to embrace its master. He cried out, then,recovering, checked, and then again broke into a shout of rage. "Youfool," he cried, "you fool! You've knocked the cards away!" In his handhe held but a few; peering at them in the dusk, he discerned but thefour princely chiefs; the rest, as she clutched them, had slipped orblown off, and were now tossing in the wind which rose from them,seething with power, vagabond and uncontrolled. Even with her weightagainst him he took a step or two forward, but her arms clung round hisshoulders and he could not shake himself free. The catastrophe--thedouble catastrophe, for the magical instruments were lost, and the wildwhirlwind was free--struck at his heart; he stood still, stricken. Shehalf-raised her head. "Henry, please don't," she murmured.

"You've stopped it," he said. There could be no secrets now; by anotherway than either had intended they had been brought into knowledge ofeach other, and might speak clearly. "Stop it now," she urged. "Darling,don't do it. Not this way."

"I can't stop it," he said. "I haven't got them. You've--Get in, get in;we mustn't be here. Anything may happen."

In that great ending of both their spirits they could not clamour. TheTower that each had raised--the Babel of their desired heavens--hadfallen in the tumult of their conflicting wills and languages, and aterrible quiet was within their hearts. They were joined in anunformulated union of despair. He accepted the arm about his shoulder;he put his own arm round her. "Back," he said, "to the wall; to thedoor. Come."

The storm was still soaring upward and outward from around them, so thattheir way was at first easier. But before they reached their refuge ithad spread more wildly; battle raged in the air, and the heavens, oncedisturbed only at a distance where the invoked disturbance struck them,were now themselves in full action. Natural and supernatural riot ruledeverywhere. Once Nancy was torn from him, and only as if by chance theirclutching hands re-gripped, frenzied with the single desire and power ofpreservation. Twice they were beaten down amid the already heaping snow,and had to drag themselves along till an accidental and local lull intheir enemy let them scramble to their feet. They were dashed againstthe wall; they were held motionless by the madness of the elements. Atlast they came, almost broken, to the harbour of the open doorway. Theystumbled through the drift that was forming in it, and the need for newlabour presented itself. But other human aid was near. Henry,half-blind, staggered towards the kitchen, called the maids, and orderedone of them to help him to clear the doorway and fasten the door, whilethe other took charge of Nancy. With his last effort he saw the lockturned, the bolt driven home; then he dropped to the floor of thepassage, unconscious at once of his purpose, his thwarting, and hisaccomplishment.

## Chapter Nine - SYBIL

Sybil Coningsby stepped out into the storm and tried to see before her.It was becoming very difficult, and the force of the wind for the momentstaggered and even distressed her. She yielded to it a little both inbody and mind; she knew well that to the oppositions of the world shecould in herself offer no certain opposition. As her body swayed and letitself move aside under the blast, she surrendered herself to the onlycertain thing that her life had discovered: she adored in this movementalso the extreme benevolence of Love. She sank before the wind, but notin impotence; rather as the devotee sinks before the outermanifestations of the God that he may be made more wholly one with thatwhich manifests. Delaying as if both she and it might enjoy theexquisite promise of its arrival, it nevertheless promised, and, asalways, came. She recovered her balance, swaying easily to each moment'sneed, and the serene content which it bestowed filled again andsatisfied her.

It satisfied, but for no more than the briefest second did she allowherself to remain aware of that. Time to be aware, and to be gratefulfor that awareness, she enjoyed; literally enjoyed, for both knowledgeand thankfulness grew one, and joy was their union, but that uniondarted out towards a new subject and centre. Darted out and turned in;its occupation was Lothair Coningsby, and Lothair was already within it.It did not choose a new resting-place, but rather ordered its owncontent, by no greater a movement than the shifting of the accent fromone syllable back to the other. So slight a variation as gives the wordto any speaker a new meaning gave to this pure satisfaction a newconcern. She was intensely aware of her brother; she drew up theknowledge of him from within her, and gave it back within her. In waveafter wave the ocean of peace changed its "multitudinous laughter" fromone myriad grouping to another. And all, being so, was so.

Such a state, in which the objects of her concern no longer struck uponher thoughts from without, recalled by an accident, a likeness, or adutiful attention, but existed rather as they did in their own world--astate in which they were brought into being as by the same energy whichhad produced their actual natures--had not easily been reached. Thatsovereign estate, the inalienable heritage of man, had been in her, asin all, falsely mortgaged to the intruding control of her own greedydesires. Even when the true law was discovered, when she knew that shehad the right and the power to possess all things, on the one conditionthat she was herself possessed, even then her freedom to yield herselfhad been won by many conflicts. Days of pain and nights of prayer hadpassed while her lonely soul escaped; innocent joys as well as guiltyhopes had been starved. There had been a time when the natural laughterthat attended on her natural intelligence had been hushed, when herbrother had remarked that "Sybil seemed very mopy". She had been shockedwhen she heard this by a sense of her disloyalty, since she believedenjoyment to be a debt which every man owes to his fellows, partly forits own sake, partly lest he at all diminish their own precarious holdon it. She attempted dutifully to enjoy and failed, but while sheattempted it the true gift was delivered into her hands.

When the word Love had come to mean for her the supreme greatness of manshe could hardly remember: one incident and another had forced it on hermind--the moment when her mother, not long before death, had said toher, "Love, Sybil, if you dare; if you daren't, admit it"; the solemnuse of the name in the great poets, especially her youthful reading ofDante; a fanatic in a train who had given her a tract: Love God or go toHell. It was only after a number of years that she had come to theconclusion that the title was right, except perhaps for go to--since thetruth would have been more accurately rendered by be in Hell. She wasdoubtful also about God; Love would have been sufficient by itself butit was necessary at first to concentrate on something which could bedistinguished from all its mortal vessels, and the more one lived withthat the more one found that it possessed in fact all the attributes ofDeity. She had tried to enjoy, and she remembered vividly the momentwhen, walking down Kingsway, it had struck her that there was no needfor her to try or to enjoy: she had only to be still, and let thatrecognized Deity itself enjoy, as its omnipotent nature was. She stillforgot occasionally; her mortality still leapt rarely into action, andconfused her and clouded the sublime operation of--of It. But rarely andmore rarely those moments came; more and more securely the working ofthat Fate which was Love possessed her. For it was fatal in its nature;rich and austere at once, giving death and life in the same moment,restoring beyond belief all the things it took away--except theindividual will.

Its power rose in her now and filled her with the thought of herbrother. As she came from the drive into the road she looked as alertlyas she could before her in case he staggered into sight. Whether she wasgoing to find him or not she couldn't tell, but it was apparently herbusiness to look for him, or she wouldn't have felt so strongly theconviction that, of all those in the house, she alone was to go out andsearch. That she should be walking so lightly through the storm didn'tstrike her as odd, because it wasn't really she who was walking, it wasLove, and naturally Love would be safe in his own storm. It was,certainly, a magnificent storm; she adored the power that was displayedin it. Lothair, she thought, wouldn't be adoring it much at the moment:something in her longed passionately to open his eyes, so that the twoof them could walk in it happily together. And Nancy, and Henry--O, andAaron Lee, and Ralph, and everyone they all knew, until the vision ofhumanity rejoicing in this tumultuous beauty seemed to show itself toher, and the delight of creation answered the delight of the Creator,joy triumphing in joy.

It was the division in the road where Lothair might go wrong: to takethe right-hand path would lead him away over the Downs. If she got therewithout meeting him, should she go on or herself turn up the other road?She had long ago discovered that Love expected you to do the best youcould to solve such questions before leaving It to decide. The intellecthad to be finely ready before It deigned to use it. So she tried tothink, and kicked something in the road.

It wasn't her brother at any rate, she thought, yet it had felt as if itwere soft and alive. She bent down, put her hand out, and, graspingsomething just at her feet, gathered it up--to discover that it was arather large kitten. Where it came from she couldn't think--probablyfrom the Lees' house. She warmed and caressed and petted it, till thehalf-frozen brute began to pay some attention, then she undid a buttonof her coat and thrust in her hand and wrist, extended upon which thekitten lay contentedly purring. Sybil went on, smiling to think thatperhaps Lothair had passed her and was already safe; the Power thatgoverned her would be quite capable of dragging her out of the house tosave a kitten from cold. She adored It again: perhaps the kittenbelonged to some child in the village, and she was taking a four-milewalk in a snowstorm to make a child and a kitten happy. Lothair, shethought, would be honestly puzzled by that, and (she thought moreregretfully) while he was honestly puzzled he probably wouldn't beencouraged to take the four-mile walk. So everyone would be satisfied.

The storm lifted, and she found herself at the parting of the roads, andthere, by the hedge, on the extreme wrong side, was a crouching figure.The snow was beginning to pile round it; the wind and flakes seemed tobe rushing at it and centring on it. Sybil, holding the kitten firmly,went quickly across the road. For a moment, as she ran, she thought shesaw another form, growing out of the driving snow--a tall figure thatran down on the white stairs of the flakes, and as it touched earthcircled round the overwhelmed man. Before it a gleam of pale gold, as ofits own reflection, since no break in the storm allowed the sinking sunto lighten the world, danced in the air, on the ground, on hands thatwere stretched out towards the victim. They seemed to touch him, as inthe Sistine Chapel the Hand of God for ever touches the waking Adam, andvanished as she reached it. Only, for a moment again, she saw that gleamof flying gold pass away into the air, lost within the whiteness and thegloom. Then she was by him; she leaned down; she touched a shoulder, andheld and shook it gently. She herself knelt in the snow to see thebetter--it was Lothair. His hat was gone; his glasses were gone; hiscoat was half-off him, flying loose; the buttons, she found, as shetried, with one hand, to pull it round him, were all off. He was blueand dangling.

"What a thing it is to be a Warden in Lunacy," Sybil thought, "and howmuch like a baby the dear looks! and how he'd hate to think so! Lothair!Lothair, darling! Lothair!"

He took no notice, save that he seemed to relax and sink even lower. "Odear," Sybil sighed, "and I can't put the kitten down!" She pulled atthe coat till she got it more or less properly over him; then she stoodup, put her left arm round him beneath the shoulders, and made anenormous effort to pull him up also. It was impossible; he was tooheavily irresponsible. She stilled herself--either Love would lift himor Love would in some other way sufficiently and entirely resolve thecrisis that held them. The practised reference possessed her, and then,kneeling by him, she went on shaking him and calling to him: "Lothair!Lothair! Lothair!"

He opened dull eyes on her. "'S that you, Sybil?" he said. "Are yougo'?"

"Are who gone?" she said. "Do take me home, Lothair. It's such aterrific storm."

"'ur quite all righ'," he muttered. "Jus' res' a min' an get alon'. Arethey go'?"

She shook him again. "I've never been out in such weather. Lothair, youalways look after me. Do, please, please, take me back!"

She put a poignant wail into her voice that disturbed him. He made hisfirst movement. "I'll look a'ter you," he said. "I'll take...back inmin'. Didn' know you were here."

"I came to you to meet you," she said, distraught and appealing. "AndI'm out in it too."

He gently shook his head, as he had often done over her folly. "Silly o'you," he said. "Ver' silly. Stop indoors. Did they hit you?"

She clutched his shoulder with a strength that brought him back to clearconsciousness. "Ow!" he said, "Sybil, be careful. We must get on. Youshouldn't have come out." But even as he began to struggle slowly to hisfeet he looked round, still only half-restored. "Funny," he went on."Sure I saw them. Running by me, beating me. Each side. Great men withclubs."

She thought of the figure she had seemed to see, but she answered, "I'venot seen them, my dear. O, Lothair, help me up." Her arm was in his asshe spoke, and, so twined, they both struggled awkwardly to their feet.The kitten, alarmed at the earthquake, stuck its claws into Sybil'swrist. She rubbed it with her little finger to pacify it, and it slowlyremoved them. Once on his feet, Mr. Coningsby began to take charge."Keep your arm in mine, and don't be frightened. It was a good thing yousaw me--you'd have been quite lost. I'd stopped for a minute--get mybreath. Had you better hold on--both hands?"

"One's enough, I think," Sybil said. "We'd both better keep our coatsround us, and we shall have to hold them."

She didn't feel like producing the kitten, and also she was engaged insecretly getting him on to the right road: she didn't think Love meantthem to stand in the snow arguing which was the way to go. And ifLothair thought it was the left...

He vacillated, but not between the roads. The screaming and howling ofthe blizzard grew louder, and as they moved away from the hedge, bothhuddled against the wind, for his crouching dragged her upright bodydown, he paused. "I wonder," he gasped, "if...hadn't better...shelterthere...a bit."

"O, take me back," said Sybil. "I've got you." The ambiguity of thosewords pleased her immensely, and she said them over again, more slowly,separating them, enjoying the exquisite irony of the universe, whichmade them even more subtle than at first she had seen. For certainly shehadn't got him; something other than she was, as she had known it would,carrying and encouraging them both.

"Yes," Mr. Coningsby panted. "You're quite all right."

"Good God," said Sybil--she thought she might allow herself that, in thecircumstances--"yes. Only don't leave me."

"I won't--" he began, but had to abandon it, and merely gasp, "No."

They went on, struggling back along the way she had come so easily. Mostof the time he hung on her arm, leaned on her, or even stumbled and fellagainst her. But he murmured protective assurances at intervals, andSybil, her arm pulled and wrenched, her breath knocked from her at everystumble, couldn't help thinking how really charming and affectionate hewas. Because he certainly thought he was helping her on, and he nevergrew irritable through all that task of salvation, or not beyond pantingonce or twice, "Can't think...why you...came out. Horrible day"; andonce, "Good thing you...found me."

"It was," she answered. "I'm very grateful." He was really moved, evenin his present state, by the thought of her danger; he was very good."My dear," she said, pressing his arm.

Slowly, under that imperious command of death, they drove their wayonward; each, with more or less strength and intensity, devoted to theother's preservation. Away on the terrace, Nancy clung to the terriblemoving hands, and the magical invocation of wind and snow broke from thehands of the practitioner and rode free: storm to the tenth degree ofpower was loosed without control.

Fortunately, when, unknown to them, that mischief chanced, they werealready near the drive; fortunately for them also, the widerdissemination of the origins of storm weakened it a little directlyround them. But as they turned in for the last effort to reach thehouse, Mr. Coningsby almost halted; only Sybil's determination kept himmoving; as a mere human being, she felt that if the kitten stuck itsclaws in her once more she should forget that she loved it. It had doneso whenever he dragged her over to him. "Need you hold on quite sofirmly, darling?" she silently asked it. "You're quite safe, you know.Sparrows falling to the ground, and so on. I suppose you're like us;you've made your mind up not to fall to the ground, whether yourheavenly Father knows it or not. O, Lothair dear, you nearly had meover. Kitten, don't please. That is, if either of you could possiblymanage without."

Mr. Coningsby almost halted. Right in front of them--in the blind tumultthey had almost collided--were other figures; three of them, it seemed.Sybil peered forward.

"I...told...you so..." her brother managed to articulate; "men...with clubs."

One figure seemed to have a kind of club; indeed, as it struggled on,Sybil saw that it had, but it was rather a staff on which it leant thana club. But the other two hadn't. They were all going more slowly thanthe two behind them, who had, indeed, everything considered, come alongwith remarkable speed. Or, everything considered, perhaps not soremarkable.

"They're making for the house, I expect," Sybil said. "Though how theycan see their way..." Unobtrusively she guided her brother to one side."We'd better catch them up," she added.

Mr. Coningsby nodded. He was drifting again towards unconsciousness."Then all of us have good res'," he said; Sybil could only just hearhim. "Nice quiet time."

There was, even Sybil admitted, something attractive in the idea of anice quiet time. She peered again at the other travellers as they drewlevel, and saw that the middle one of the three was a woman, a smallwoman hanging on the arms of the others, but talking. Sybil could justcatch the sound of a voice: then the man nearest her turned his facetowards her, and she recognized it.

"Ralph!" she cried.

"Hallo, aunt!" Ralph gasped. "Hell of a day...what...you doing ...outin it?"

"Walking," Sybil said vaguely, but he couldn't hear her, and theconversation ended. He made some inquiring gesture in front of him; shenodded. All five of them beat on together. But the sound from the womanwent on, and even pierced the storm and reached Sybil's ears; it was akind of chanting. The shrill voice mingled with the wind and was theonly thing that was not silenced by it. Its scream answered the wind'sscream; though it was blown away, it was not lost, but carried as if onthe music of a mad unison. The storm sang with its companion, reinforcedher, made way for her. A word or two came to Sybil.

"...coming...coming...the whole one shall awake..."

Ralph turned his head with difficulty and made a face at her. Discreetlyturned from her brother, she grimaced back. She wondered--could it bethe old gipsy Henry had called Joanna? That might explain why theseothers held so straight a course for the house. But with what wild songwas she challenging or hailing the blizzard? and what energy of insanevision so filled her as to give her voice and spirit this strength,though her body hung on the arms of her supporters? Certainly it was notfor Sybil Coningsby to deny the dismemberment through earth of theever-triumphant Osiris, nor the victory that the immortal freshness ofLove continually won over his enemies. If it was Love that the old womanwas praising now, the shrill voice didn't quite sound like it. But itmight be; with the sweet irony of Perfection, one could never tell. Itwas never what you expected, but always and always incredibly more.

Something dim loomed in front of them; they were there--they were rightup against the front door, Lothair and the kitten and Ralph and theseothers and she herself: not for salvation from death, but for the meremanifestation of its power, she adored the Mystery of Love. She pressedthe bell steadily; Ralph hammered on the door; the other man--Stephen,if it was Stephen--beat on it with his stick. Her brother fell againstthe door-post. The old woman turned her head--Sybil and she gazed at oneanother, their eyes recognizing mysteries of remote initiations.

"Perfect hellish weather!" Ralph said.

They heard someone within. The door was opened by Aaron himself, and theblizzard and they entered together. Sybil helped her brother in; thenshe gave Ralph a quick hand with the door. It closed gradually and wasmade fast. Her back against it, Sybil turned gently, removing the kittenfrom her numb arm, and saw Lothair sinking on to a seat; Stephen leaningagainst the opposite wall; and Joanna, all dripping with melting snow,facing a snarling Aaron.

"I've come," she cried, "I've come. Don't hide him, Aaron. I've come tosee him wake."

## Chapter Ten - NANCY

It was still hardly six o'clock. Mr. Coningsby had been put to bed,after Nancy had flown to welcome him and her aunt--to rather more thanwelcome her aunt, perhaps, for Sybil felt in the clinging embracesomething she could have believed to be a clutching despair. She lookedat the girl intently as they drew apart. Nancy's face was colourless,her eyes very tired: the new light which had for weeks shone from herwas eclipsed, and her movements were heavy and troubled. "Where'sHenry?" Sybil casually asked. "O, shut away somewhere," Nancy said, andshut herself away even more secretly.

Ralph was introduced and taken to have hot drinks and a hot bath. Itappeared that he had determined to rush across in his car from the housewhere he was staying, to hurl Christmas greetings at his people onChristmas Day, and then to tear back. He was slightly ashamed of theintention, more especially as in the first excited feeling of safety hehad told Sybil that he had thought it would please his father.

"That was very nice of you, Ralph," she said warmly.

"O, I don't know," he answered vaguely. "I mean--he was looking a bitaged the other day, I thought, and if a man's getting on...well, Imean he likes people to think about him a bit, I suppose. I mean, itwouldn't matter two grey Grimalkins to me whether anyone came to see meon Christmas Day or not; there's always plenty of people about anyhow.But he doesn't seem to get up to more than about forty per h. at thebest, does he?"

"And what's yours normally?" Sybil said gravely.

"O, I don't know; say, a lusty sixty," Ralph meditated. "But I'm rathera quiet one really, Aunt Sybil. I mean--"

Here he was interrupted, and only given time hastily to explain how thestorm had caught and held the car; how he had at last got out and gone alittle way to see if there was another road or anything; how he had losthis way back, and then encountered the other two wanderers, with whom hehad gone along--partly because they had seemed to be aiming somewhere,partly to give Joanna an arm. "And I must say," he added quietly andhastily to Sybil, "the set of carols that she sung all the time curdledanything in me that the snow didn't. O, she was a lively little RobinRedbreast."

Sybil thought, as she herself was carried off--quite unnecessarily, sheassured them--that there was something not wholly inapplicable in thephrase. The two women were apparently the least exhausted of all thefive. Joanna was sitting on one of the hall chairs, her old red cloakpulled round her, and snow melting and pouring from her on every side.Aaron obviously wasn't a bit pleased, but nothing could be done. Hecouldn't push Joanna and Stephen out into the blizzard, and no onenaturally would help him, and they wouldn't go. "But I wonder," Sybilthought, "why they dislike each other so. Is it just family, or is itsomething special?"

She would not go to bed, certainly not, but hot drinks--yes; and a hotbath--yes; and a complete change--yes. Drinks and baths and changes wereexquisite delights in themselves; part of an existence in which onebeauty was always providing a reason and a place for an entirelyopposite beauty. As society for solitude, and walking for sitting down,and one dress for another, and emotions for intellect, and snowstormsfor hot drinks, and in general movement for repose, repose for movement,and even one movement for another, so highly complex was the admirableorder of the created universe. It was all rather like Henry's charminglittle figures in their perpetual dance; perhaps they were a symbol ofit; perhaps that was what was meant by Aaron's uncertain phrase aboutbeing magnetized by the earth. They were the most beautiful things, withthat varying light irradiating and striking outward from each, and akind of gold aureole hanging in the air, which had expanded andheightened while Nancy's fortune was being tried. As she saw them againin her mind she saw at the same time the faint golden gleam that hadpossessed the air around her brother. She knew where the golden lightcame from among the images; it came from the figure of the Fool whomoved so much the most swiftly, who seemed to be everywhere at once,whose irradiation shone therefore so universally upward that itmaintained the circle of gold high over all, under which the many otherrays of colour mingled and were dominated now by one, now by another. Ithad been, this afternoon, as if some figure--say, the Fool himself--hadcome speeding down from his own splendid abode of colour to herbrother's side. She contemplated the idea; so, one might imagine, onlyno imagination could compass it, so did the beautiful perfection whichwas in and beyond all things make haste to sustain its creatures intheir mood; immediacy to immediacy. She moved her foot lazily throughthe water of the bath, and half-pretended, half-believed, that littlesparkles of gold rose and floated off as she did so: then she abandonedthe fancy hastily. "I'm getting mythical," she said aloud; "this is theway superstitions and the tantum mali arise. Only," she added, in acharming apology, "I knew I was doing it, and I have left off. sPeople,"she went on thinking, "have killed one another on questions likethat--did you or did you not see a golden sparkle? Well, the answer is,no, I didn't, but I saw the ripples in the water, and the top of my toe,and even though it may annoy Lothair, it is a very well-shaped toe. Howsweet of Love to have a toe like that!"

She wondered as she dressed where Henry was; she'd rather expected tofind him also in the hall. Nancy's "shut away somewhere" had beenobscure--not merely in the meaning but in the tone. It hadn't beenbitter; it hadn't been plaintive; it had been much more like an echo ofdespair. Despair? Had Henry refused to come out or something? Had he acomplex about snow? Did it make him go what Ralph--if she had the phraseright--called "ga-ga"? If so, Nancy's winters--except for the luck ofthe English climate, to which Lothair (judging from his continualprotests about it) had a profound objection--Nancy's winters might berather trying. Henry might have to hibernate. She imagined Nancyteaching her children: "Mother, what animals hibernate?" "Bears,tortoises, hedgehogs, and your father." Squirrels, snakes? Did snakesand squirrels hibernate? It couldn't be that; he wouldn't have become abarrister if the Long Vacation was merely a prelude to a sound sleep. Soawkward if he could only have summer clients. "Nobody could have muchaffiance in a barrister who could only take summer clients."

She re-ordered her thoughts; this was mere dithering. But dithering wasrather nice; occasionally she and Nancy had dithered together. Nancy.What was wrong with the child? She had sat down to put on her shoes,and--one off and one on--she turned to her habitual resource. Sheemptied her mind of all thoughts and pictures: she held it empty tillthe sudden change in it gave her the consciousness of the spreading outof the stronger will within; then she allowed that now unimportant dailymind to bear the image and memory of Nancy into its presence. She didnot, in the ordinary sense, "pray for" Nancy; she did not presume tosuggest to Omniscience that it would be a thoroughly good thing if Itdid; she merely held her own thought of Nancy stable in the midst ofOmniscience. She hoped Nancy wouldn't mind, if she knew. If, shethought, as, the prayer over, she put on her other shoe--if she hadbelieved in a Devil, it would have been awkward to know whether or notit would be permissible to offer the Devil to Love in that way. Becausethe Devil might dislike it very much, and then...However, she didn'tbelieve in the Devil, and Nancy, up to lunch anyhow, had believed ina--if not the--mystery of Love. She determined to go and see if Nancy byany chance would like her to listen. Besides, there was Lothair--who ina strange home would certainly want her to be somewhere about. Alsothere was Joanna--Sybil rather looked forward to a conversation withJoanna, who seemed to her to have, on the whole, a just view of theworld, if rather prejudiced against the enemies of Horus.

On the point of going downstairs, she checked herself. It was possiblethat Nancy, relieved from anxiety about her father, was not downstairs,but in her own room next door. Sybil considered this, and decided, ifshe were, that there would be no harm in venturing a visit; it couldeasily be ended. She went and knocked. A high, shaking voice said, "Comein."

Nancy was lying on the bed; she barely looked round as her aunt entered,and, on the point of speaking, gave up the effort.

She looked worse than she had done downstairs; a more complete collapseshowed in her. Sybil, from the door, beheld a dying creature, one inwhom the power of Life was on the point of evacuating its last defences.But she looked also a creature betrayed, one in whom the power of Lifehad changed to Death while she was still aware. The storm that hadattacked the bodies of others might have crushed her soul; a wanrecognition of the earth lingered in her eyes before she fell intoentire ruin. Sybil came swiftly across the room.

"What's the matter, darling?" she said.

Nancy made a small movement with one hand, but didn't answer. Sybil satdown on the bed, and very lightly took the hand in her own. Theyremained so for some minutes in silence; then, in a voice hardlybreathing it, Sybil said:

"All beauty returns. Wait a little."

Nancy trembled, as if the storm shook her from within; she said "No" ina moan and was silent. But the moan was at least life; the denial was atleast consciousness; and Sybil ventured then so far as to put an armround the girl's shoulders. There she rested silent again, bending allthe power that she had to find what remote relic of power still existedsomewhere in that strange overthrow. Time went past, but after a longwhile Nancy's fingers had closed ever so little more tightly on Sybil'shand; her shoulder pressed ever so little more willingly against theencircling arm. The blizzard without struck again and again at thewindow, and suddenly for the first time Nancy shuddered when she heardit. In a horrible stifled voice she said, "You don't know what that is."

Sybil tightened her grasp and gathered Nancy more closely into eternity.As if the remorseless will of that peace broke her into utterance, Nancysaid, still in the same horrible voice, "It's Henry killing father."

The executive part of Sybil's mind had been so disciplined that it wasnot allowed to be startled. She said, and though her voice was low itwas full of profounder wisdom than the words seemed to carry: "He cameback with me."

"If he didn't," Nancy answered, "if he'd died out there, if I'd died,the storm would have stopped. It won't stop, now. It'll go on for ever.It's Henry killing father, and he can't leave off. I've stopped him."

Her brother's fancy of "great men with clubs" came into Sybil's mind fora perplexing moment. She dismissed it gently, not to break the deeperlabour on which she was engaged. She answered with all the tenderness ofher certainty: "You couldn't do anything at all unless you were let,could you? And if you were let stop it, then stopping it was the mostperfect thing that could happen. Only you mustn't stop now."

The storm shook and rattled at the windows. Nancy jerked violently andcried out: "Nothing can stop it. He's lost them; he can't."

"What is it that's lost?" Sybil asked commandingly, and the girlanswered in almost a shriek, "The Tarots, the magical leaves." She wenton in a high torment: "He had them; he beat them up and down; he madethe storm to kill father, and I knocked them away, and they're gone, andnothing can stop the wind and the snow for ever. It'll find father andit'll drown the whole world. Hear it dancing! hear it singing! that'sthe dance Henry keeps in his little room."

"I know the dance," Sybil said instantly. "Nancy, do you hear? I knowthe dance, and the figures that make the dance. The crown's gold overthem, and there's a movement that Henry's not known yet. Do you supposethat storm can ever touch the Fool?"

Why she used the words she didn't know, but something in them answeredthe girl in the same terms in which she had cried out. Her face changed;there came into it a dim memory of life. She said, arrested in the midstof terror and death, "The Fool--"

"I saw the gold in the snow," Sybil said, "and your father was in it andsafe. Do you think the Tarots can ever escape while the Fool is here tohold them?"

"They say he doesn't move," Nancy breathed.

"But I saw him move," Sybil answered, eternal peace in her voice, "andthere's no figure anywhere in heaven or earth that can slip from thatpartner. They are all his for ever."

"The snow?" Nancy said.

"And you and I and Henry and your father," Sybil answered. "It is onlythe right steps we have to mind." She was not very clear what languageshe was using; as from the apostles on Pentecost, the single gospelflowed from her in accents she had not practised and syllables she hadnever learned. She added, deeply significant: "Your father came backwith me; mayn't Henry be waiting for you?"

As a proselyte in the streets of Jerusalem, drawn from the parts ofLibya about Cyrene, hearing a new message in a familiar tongue, Nancylooked up for the first time.

"Why?" she said.

"Do you think the mystery of Love is only between those who like oneanother?" Sybil said. "Darling, you're part of the mystery, and you'llbe sent to do mysterious things. Tell me--no, never mind the storm; it'snothing; it's under the feet of the Fool--tell me what's happened."

Uncertainly at first, and in no sort of order, Nancy began to pour outher story of all that she had known of the Tarots. She broke off, shewent back to the beginning and leapt to the end, she confused her ownexperiences with what Henry had told her, and that again with what shebelieved Henry to desire, and all of it with her outraged will to love.It was confusion, but in the confusion, as if in a distant unity ofperson, went the motionless and yet moving figure of the Fool, and abouthis feet as he went flowed the innocent and ardent desire of the girlwho told it to do all that she could--for Henry perhaps, but, even morethan for Henry, for the unfathomable mystery of which she had knownsomething and had half hoped, half-despaired to know more.

Sybil herself, being prepared for anything at any moment, as those whohave surrendered themselves must naturally be, all amazement beingconcentrated in a single adoring amazement at the mere fact of Love,and leaving no startled surprise for the changes and new beauties thatattend It--Sybil herself listened gravely and intelligently to the tale.She saw, not in her own mind so much as in Nancy's, the whole earth,under the stress of what had been heard and seen, taking on a strangeaspect. She saw--but this more in her own mind--the remote figure of thejuggler, standing in the void before creation was, and flinging up theglowing balls which came into being as they left his hands, and becameplanets and stars, and they remained some of them poised in the air, butothers fell almost at once and dropped down below and soared again,until the creating form was lost behind the flight and the maze of theworlds. She saw, as the girl's excited voice rushed on, the four greatfigures between whom the earth itself hovered--the double manifestationof a single fact, the body and soul of human existence, the Emperor andthe Empress, and diagonally opposite them, the hierophants male andfemale, the quadruple security of knowledge and process upon earth. Therushing chariot of the world came from among them, and it again parted,and on one side went the Hermit, the soul in its delighted solitude ofcontemplation, and on the other the Lovers, the soul in its delightedsociety of terrestrial love.

"And earth came out of them," Nancy said breathlessly. Earth and air andfire and water--the lesser elements pouring down from below the GreaterTrumps, but these also in the dance, and in each of those four cataractsshe saw the figure of the Fool, leaping and dancing in joy. "So Ithought it was the Hanged Man, and I screamed." Nancy had dashed toanother part of the tale, and Sybil remembered the crucifixions of herpast, and by each of them, where she herself hung and screamed andwrithed, she saw the golden halo and the hands of the Fool holding andeasing her, and heard his voice murmuring peace. "And what shall we do?what shall we do?" the young creature babbled at last, and, half-risen,clutched hard at Sybil and broke into a storm of tears. But as she weptand agonized Sybil's hands held and eased her and Sybil's voice murmuredpeace.

How far her vivid intelligence at the moment believed the tale wasanother matter. Whether the pieces of painted papyrus and theever-moving images, the story of newly created earth and the swiftstorm, Henry's desire and her brother's firmness, the sight of her owneyes and the vision of the rest, Nancy's tragic despair and Joanna'swild expectation--whether all these corresponded to some revelation ofultimate things she could not then tell, nor did she much mind. Thething that immediately concerned her was Nancy's own heart. There wasthe division; there, justified or not, were bewilderment and fear. If itwere delusion that possessed her, still it was clear that that delusionwas too deep and far-reaching to be torn up by a few words of brightencouragement. If it were not delusion, if the strange and half-mysticalsigns and names of the Greater Trumps had meaning and life, then nodoubt in due time of beneficence her own concern with them would berevealed. She held Nancy more closely.

"Dearest," she said, "your father's safe. Do you understand that?"

"Yes," Nancy sobbed.

"Tell me then--there, darling, quietly; all is well, all is most well--tell me, where's Henry?"

"In his own room, I suppose," Nancy said brokenly. "I--I ran away fromhim--when I knew."

"Did he want you to--run away?" Sybil asked slowly.

"I don't know--no," Nancy said. "But I couldn't stop. He'd been doingthat awful thing--and I was terrified and ran away--and I love him. Ican't live if I don't find him--and now I never shall."

"But, darling, that's not loving him," Sybil gently protested. "That'sonly preferring to live, isn't it?"

"I don't care what it is," Nancy sobbed again. "If I could do anything,I would, but I can't. Don't you understand--he tried to kill father?There's just Death between them, and I'm in the middle of it."

"Then," Sybil said, "there's something that isn't death, at least. Andyou might be more important than Death, mightn't you? In fact, you mightbe life perhaps."

"I don't know what you mean," Nancy said, wresting herself freesuddenly. "O, go away, Aunt Sybil. I'm going mad. Do go away."

Sybil sat back on the bed. "Stand still and listen," she said. "Nancy,you said it yourself, there's death and there's you. Are you going to bepart of death against Henry and against your father? or are you going tobe the life between them? You'll be power one way or another, don'tdoubt that; you've got to be. You've got to live in them or let them diein you. Make up your mind quickly, for the time's almost gone."

"I can't do anything," Nancy cried out.

Sybil stood up and went over to her. "Your father came back with me,"she said. "Go and see if Henry still has any idea of going anywhere withyou. Go and see what he wants, and if you can give it to him, do. I'llsee to your father and you see to Henry. Do let's get on to importantthings."

"Give it to him!" Nancy exclaimed. "But..."

"Dearest," Sybil said, "he may not want now what he wanted two hoursago. People change their minds, you know. Yes, honestly. Go and live, goand love. Get farther, get farther now, with Henry if you can. Ifnot--listen, Nancy--if not, and if you loved him, then go and agonize toadore the truth of Love. Now." She gave the girl a little gentle shake,and moved away to the door, where she stopped, looked over her shoulder,said, "I should be as quick as I could, darling," and went.

Nancy stared after her. "Go to Henry"? "Go and live"? "Go and love"? Tobe life or death between her lover and her father? Her hands to hercheeks, she stood, brooding over the dark riddle, seeing dimly some sortof meaning in it. Something had kept her father alive; something heldher father and herself--if that something were waiting for her to move?to go to Henry? She couldn't think what she could do there, or of what,divided and united at once by a terrible truth, they could possibly evenspeak. Life wasn't all speaking. Love was being something, in some way.Was she now to be driven to be that, in the way that--who knows what?--chose? Slowly she began to move. Henry probably wouldn't want her, but...She went gradually and uncertainly towards his room.

He was sitting, as she had been lying, in darkness. When she had knockedand got no answer, she had taken the risk of annoying him and had gonein, switching on the light. She saw him sitting by his table andswitched it off again. Then she went delicately across the room, kneeledby him, touched him lightly, and said, "Henry!"

He did not answer. In a little she said again, "Darling," and as stillhe made no sound she said no more, only went on kneeling by his chair.After many minutes he said, "Go. Go away."

"I will," she answered sincerely, "if you want me to, if I can't help.Can I help?"

"How can you help?" he said. "There's nothing for any of us but to waitfor death. We shall all be with your father soon."

"He's back, quite safe," she said. "Aunt Sybil met him and brought himback."

"It was a pity; the storm will have to find him out again," he answered."Go and be with him till that happens."

"Must it happen?" she asked, and he laughed.

"Unless you have a trick to lure back the chalices and the staffs," hesaid. "If you can, you can put them in their order and seal up thestorm. But since they are rushing and dancing about the sky I can't tellhow you'll do it. Perhaps if you talked to those that are left--"

"Mightn't we?" she asked, but he did not understand her.

"Try it," he mocked her again. "Here are the four princes; take them andtalk to them. Perhaps, since you struck all the rest loose, these willtell you where they are. O, to be so near, so near--!"

"I should have done it all the same if I'd known," she said, "but Ididn't know--not that I should do that. I only wanted to hold your handsstill."

"They'll be still enough soon," he mocked, "and so will yours;" andsuddenly his hand felt for and caught hers. "They're beautiful hands,"he said; "though they've ruined the world, they're beautiful hands. Doyou know, Nancy, that you've done what thousands of priests andscientists have talked about? This is the end of the world. You'vekilled it--you and your beautiful hands. They've sent the snow and thewind over the whole world, and it'll die. The dance is ending: thejuggler's finished with one ball."

"Love them a little then," she said, "if you're sure. If you're quitesure."

"Can you bring back the staffs?" he asked, "from the one to the ten?Shall I open the window for you to call or catch them? Maybe one's onthe window-sill now."

"Can't the images help?" she asked. "I don't know, but you should. Isn'tthere any way in which they could command the Tarots?"

She felt him stiffen in the darkness. "Who told you that?" he said. "Ican't tell. I don't know anything of what can be done from within.If..."

"If--" she answered, and paused. "I will do anything with you that Ican. What would you like me to do?"

His figure turned and leaned towards her. "You?" he said. "But you hatedwhat I was doing, you wanted to save your father--of course you did; I'mnot blaming you--but how can you help me now?"

She broke unexpectedly into a laugh, the sound of which surprised somesolemn part of her nature, but seemed to bring freedom at once intoherself and into the dark room, so that she felt relieved of herlingering fear. "O, Henry darling," she said, "must those dancers ofyours concentrate on my father? Haven't they any way of doing thingswithout bothering the poor dear? Don't you think they might manage tosave the world and yet leave him alone? Henry sweetest, how serious youare about it all!"

"You can laugh," he said uncertainly, not as a question nor yet inanger, but as if he were feeling after some strange fact. "You canlaugh...but I tell you it is the end of the world."

She scrambled to her feet. "I begin to agree with Aunt Sybil," she said;"it isn't quite decent to break into the poor thing's secrets when it'sgone to such trouble to keep them quiet. But since you and I togetherdrove things wrong, shall you and I together see--only see, darling--ifwe can put them straight?"

"You're afraid of the Tarots," he said; "you always have been."

"Never again," she said, "or yes--perhaps again. I'll be afraid again,I'll fall again, I'll hate and be angry again. But just for a momentthere's something that runs and laughs and all your Tarots are flyingalong with it, and why shouldn't it catch them for us if we ask it verynicely? Only we won't hurt anyone, will we, if we can help it? Nothing'simportant enough for that."

He got to his feet heavily. "There's no way anywhere without hurtingsomeone," he said.

"Darling, how gloomy you are," she said. "Is this what comes of makingblizzards and trying to kill your own Nancy's own father? Perhapsthere's a way everywhere without hurting anyone--unless," she added,with a touch of sadness clouding the full gaiety that had seized her,"unless they insist on being hurt. But let's suppose they won't, andlet's pretend they don't, and let's be glad that my father's safe, andlet's see if the golden dancers can call back the staffs and the cups. Ithink perhaps we owe the world that." She kissed him lightly. "It wassweet of you to pick out a nice soothing way of doing what you wanted,"she said. "Some magicians would have put him in a barn and set it onfire, or forced him into a river and let him drown. You've a nicenature, Henry, only a little perverted here and there. All greatgeniuses are like it, they say. I think you must be a genius, darling;you take your job so solemnly. Like Milton and Michael Angelo and Moses.Do you know, I don't believe there's a joke in all the Five Books ofMoses. I can't see very well, Henry, but I think you're frowning. AndI'm talking. And talking and frowning won't do anything, will they? O,hark at it! Come along, my genius, or we shan't save the world beforeyour own pet blizzard has spoilt it."

"There's no other way," he said, "but I warn you that you don't knowwhat may happen. Perhaps even this isn't a way."

"Well, perhaps it isn't," she answered. "But they are dancing, aren'tthey, dearest? And perhaps, if we mean to love--"

"Do you love me still then?" he asked.

"I never loved you more and yet I never loved you less," she told him."O, don't let's stop to ask riddles. And, anyhow, I wasn't thinking ofyou, so there! Come, darling, or your aunt will be doing somethingcurious. Yours is a remarkable family, Henry; you get all het up overyour hobbies. And so you shall if you like, bless you! only not justnow."

"Joanna--" he exclaimed, unconsciously following her as she drew himtowards the door. "Is she here?"

"She is," Nancy said, "but we won't worry about her now. Take me tothem, darling, for the dance is in my ears and the light's in my eyes,and this is why I was born, and there was glory in the beginning and isnow and ever shall be, and let's run, let's run, for the world's goingquickly and we must be in front of it to-night."

## Chapter Eleven - JOANNA

In the hall below, the kitten stretched itself and yawned. Sybil hadput it down when she was once well inside and asked one of the maids tolook after it. But there had been not time yet; Mr. Coningsby, Ralph,Sybil herself, had to be seen to. And now there were still Joanna andStephen. Aaron Lee, looking at his sister with something very much likewatchful hatred, said: "Now you're here, Joanna, you'd better get intobed. And so," he added, jerking his head at Stephen, "had he."

"Yes, Aaron," said Joanna docilely, with a little giggle. "It's a badnight to be out in, isn't it?"

Aaron glanced round him; the three, except for the kitten, were alone inthe hall.

"Why have you come?" he asked.

"To see you, dear," the old woman said. "So's Stephen. He's very fond ofyou, Stephen is. Aren't you, Stephen?"

"Yes, grandmother," Stephen answered obediently.

"He's very big, isn't he?" Joanna ran on. "Much bigger than you, dearAaron." She hopped off her chair and began to prowl round the hall,sniffing. Presently she came to the kitten and stood staring at it. Thekitten rubbed itself against her leg, felt the wet, and sprang aside.The old woman, bending, scratched its head, and began muttering to it inwords which the others couldn't hear.

The kitten jumped up, fell down, twisted over itself, dashed off, anddashed back. Joanna gesticulated at it, and it crouched watching her.

"You'd better get to bed, Joanna," Aaron exclaimed to her. "Get thosethings off and get between the blankets. You'll be ill if you don't."

"You fool, Aaron," Joanna said. "Illness can't touch me any more thandeath. I shall never be ill. I shall be transformed when the body that'slost is made whole." She turned her face towards him. "And where'll yoube then, Aaron? Screeching among the tormentors."

"You're mad," Aaron answered. "You're a mad old woman hobbling about ina dream."

She left the kitten and almost ran back to him. "Dream, hey?" shesnarled. "Little dream, Aaron Lee, for you that help to hide my baby."

"Your baby's dead," Aaron snarled back, as the two small old creaturesfaced each other fiercely and despitefully. "Don't you know that bynow?"

She caught at his coat, and at the movement of her arm the water thatstill ran from her was flung wide-spattering around. "My baby neverdies," she cried, "and you know it. That's why you hate me." Her wholemanner changed. "But you're right, dear Aaron," she mumbled, "yes,you're right. Give me your bed to sleep in and your plate to eat fromand I'll give you a plate and a bed one day in a finer house than this.Give me a kiss first, Aaron, and I'll never set Stephen on to you totwist the news of the grave where you've hidden him out of your throat.Kiss me, Aaron."

She was up against him, and he stepped sharply back to face her. Hisfoot came down on the tail of the kitten, which was smelling at hisshoes. It yelped; Aaron tottered and lost his footing, staggering a paceor two away. He turned fiercely on the kitten, which had dashed wildlyacross the hall.

"Put it out," he cried, "put it back in the snow. Who brought it in?Stephen, catch it and put it out."

The young man, who all this while had been leaning dully against thewall, the snow melting from him, his eyes following Joanna wherever shewent, moved uncertainly. Joanna made no sign, and he, with movementsthat seemed clumsy but were exact, first attracted the kitten and thencaught it up in his great hands.

"What shall I do with it, grandmother?" he said.

"Put it out," Aaron called to him.

"Ah, no, don't put it back in the snow," Joanna said. "Ah, it's acunning little cat; it's very small, but everything's small at first.It'll grow; it'll grow. Let it sleep in my blankets, Aaron; the catsknow where the blood fell, and they sit in a circle round the hiddenplace watching for God. Have you ever found their eyes looking at you,Aaron, when you were shuffling the cards? little green eyes looking upat you? little claws that scratched? Give it to me, and it'll sleep tillthe right time comes."

"No cat'll come to you in those drenched clothes," Aaron said, with acurious flat effort at common sense. But, unhearing, she beckoned toStephen, and, when he came, took the kitten from him. It wriggled alittle in her hands and mewed once, but it did not make any seriouseffort to escape. She held it near her face, peering and muttering atit, and it stared back at her. The colloquy of their eyes lasted somedozen seconds; then Joanna said: "Show me where I'm to rest, Aaron." Amaid returned at the moment. Aaron conferred with her and then saidabruptly to Joanna, "Go along with Amabel; she'll show you." Then toStephen, "And you--come with me. You can rub yourself down and have somefood."

"Ah, let Stephen sleep in the same room with me," Joanna cried, "forwe're used to it and we're uneasy apart. Haystack or lych-gate or king'shouse or quarry, it's all one to us so long as there's Stephen to watchwhile I'm dreaming and me to wake while Stephen sleeps. Only he can'tsee my dreams, and though I see his they're only water and wind andfire, and it's in earth that the other's hidden till Horus comes."

With the word a quietness fell on her; she brought the kitten againsther cheek and crooned to it, as she followed the bothered and dubiousAmabel away.

Stephen presumably "had some food", but he was not at the late andbewildered dinner to which, soon after, Aaron sat down with Sybil andRalph. Aaron muttered something about Henry's probably being busy, andseemed to take it for granted that Nancy, after her experience of thestorm, was also in bed. Sybil, when she grasped this, thought that Nancymight have been annoyed to have it thought so, but then even Sybil hadnot quite grasped the true history of the afternoon. She knew that Nancybelieved that Henry had loosed the storm on Mr. Coningsby, by means ofthe magical operation of the power-infused Tarots. But she was not awareof the short meeting of Henry and Aaron, when the younger man hadrecovered consciousness to find his grandfather, summoned by an agitatedmind, bending over him. In a few sentences, as he came to himself, hetold Aaron what had happened. Aaron stepped back, appalled.

"But then," he faltered, "we can't stop the winds," and his face paled."We shall all be killed."

"Yes," Henry said. "That's the end of all our dreams."

As he spoke he had gone away to his own room, to sit in darknessbrooding over his hope and his defeat, waiting for the crash that mustcome when the force of the released elements broke in on the house, andhad sat so till Nancy came to him. But Aaron had refused, in his ownmind, to believe it; it couldn't be so. Something might happen, somewild chance might save them. He had never cared much for Henry'sintrusion into the place of the powers, and Henry might easily be wrong.The manuscripts told them this and that, but the manuscripts might bewrong. In the belief that they were true, Henry and he had plotted todestroy his guest--but the storm might be a coincidence; Coningsby mightbe safe; in an ordinary storm he would be; it wasn't as if, all puttogether, it was a long distance or a great danger, unless--unless thesnow and wind had been aimed at him. If they were not, if it was chance,if indeed the Tarots and the images had no power in themselves and werebut passive reflections of more universal things, if the mystery of bothwas but a mystery of knowledge and prophecy and not of creation anddirection--why then--the stranger would come back safely, and, if hedid, why then they would all be safe. That some of the paintings shouldbe lost was indeed a catastrophe; no one now could justly divine themovement of the images and their meaning. The telling of fortunes wouldbe for ever but a childish game, and never the science of wisdom. But hewould be alive. The long study in which he had spent his years mightpartly fail. But he would be alive. On the very verge of destruction, hecried out against destruction; he demanded a sign, and the sign wasgiven him. Lothair Coningsby came stumbling into the hall, and whenAaron saw him he drew great breaths of relief. The storm was butnatural; it would cease.

In this recovered quiet of mind he was able to deal with immediatepractical questions; he was even able to confront Joanna with his oldjealousy and hatred. Since, many years before, the images had come intohis possession, since his father and he had--O, away in hisboyhood--taken them (with what awful and breathless care! what almosteye-shutting reverence!) from the great round old silver case--only somesix inches high, but marvellously huge in diameter--in which forcenturies, so his father had told him, his hidden secret of the gipsieshad been borne about the world, covered by wrappings and disguises,carried in waggons and carts, unknown even to most of their ownwandering bands, who went straying on and did not know that one band ofall those restless companies possessed the mystery which long since somewise adept of philosophical truths had made in the lands of the east orthe secret houses of Europe: Egyptian or Jew or Christian heretic--Paulician, Bogophil, or Nestorian--or perhaps still farther off in thedesert-circled empire of Abyssinia, for there were hints of all in thestrange medley of the sign-bearing images, and the symbols wore noaccepted or traditional aspect; their familiarity was foreign, they hadbeen before the building of churches and sects, aboriginal, infinite;but, from wherever they came, he who had made them, and the papyruspaintings with them, up to seventy-eight degrees of knowledge, had casedand hidden them, and sent them out on everlasting wanderings without asthey kept among themselves the everlasting dance within. But at thatmaking and hiding the Tarot cards had lain in due mysterious order onand about the golden base of the Tarot images, each subtly vibrating tothe movements of its mightier golden original, as that in turn moved incorrespondence to the movement of that full and separate centre of thecreated dance which it microcosmically symbolized. There was to be atime, the legends said, when one should arise who should understand themystery of the cards and the images, and by due subjection in victoryand victory in subjection should come to a secret beyond all, whichsecret--it had always been supposed by those few who had looked on theshapes, and few they had been even over the centuries--had itself to dowith the rigid figure of the Fool. But the dark fate that falls on allmystical presentations, perhaps because they are not presentations only,had fallen on this; the doom which struck Osiris in the secular memoryof Egypt, and hushed the holy, sweet, and terrible Tetragrammaton in theritual of Judah, and wounded the Keeper of the Grail in the Castle ofthe Grail, and by the hand of the blind Hoder pierced the loveliest ofall the Northern gods, and after all those still everywhere smote anddivided and wounded and overthrew and destroyed; by the sin of man andyet by more and other than the sin of man, for the myth of gods andrebellious angels had been invoked--by reason, no doubt, to explain, butby something deeper than reason to frame the sense of a dreadfulnecessity in things: the need that was and yet must not be allowed tobe, the inevitability that must be denied, the fate that must berejected, so only and only by such contradictions of mortal thought didthe nature of the universe make itself felt by man. Prophesied itselfwithin itself by the Tower that fell continually or by the fearful shapeof Set who was the worker of iniquity ruling over his blinded victims,prophesied thus within itself, the doom came to pass on the mystery ofthe images, none knew when, for some said as long since as the son ofthe first maker, who fell from his father's wisdom, and others but inthe very generation that preceded the speaker's. But, whenever the sinwas done, it chanced upon a night that one opened the silver case,sealed with zodiacal signs, and, daring the illustrious beauty thatshone forth, thrust in his hands and tore out the translucent paintedleaves, thinking that by them alone he might tell the fortunes of menand grow rich by his fellows' yearning to know what was to be, orwantonly please an idle woman in the low chambers of Kieff or Paris. Theimages he dared not touch, and the golden base that carried them hecould not. So he fled, completing the sacrilege, and died wretchedly,the tale said, but rather because it was thought proper that the sinnershould suffer than because anything certain was known. Thus the leavesof the presentation were carried one way, and the golden shapes another,and the people of the secret waited in hope and despair, as Israellanguishes till the Return, and the Keeper till the coming of the HautPrince, and Osiris the slain till Horus overcome his foes, and Balder inthe place of shades till after Ragnarok, and all mankind till theconfusions of substance be abolished and the unity of person beproclaimed. But, even when the paintings had been found by chance andfate and high direction in the house of Lothair Coningsby, yet the willsof the finders had been set on their own purposes, on experiment ofhuman creation or knowledge of human futurity, and again the mysticalseverance had manifested in action the exile of the will from its end.

To that last conclusion, as his thoughts recalled the myth, Aaron,sitting at the dinner-table, did not permit himself to reach. In hisfather's time it had been determined, by a few among the wanderers, thatthe far-borne images would be carried no farther, since it was yearlybecoming more difficult to evade the curiosity and power of themagistrates; enough money, from some rich and many poor, had beengathered, a solitary house had been found, and the treasure had beengiven into the charge of the oldest of the Lees. The room had beenprepared and the silver chest carried in, and, that the influence of thedance might more quickly draw to itself its lesser instruments, theimages had been set upon the new-shaped table. But upon their father'sdeath the knowledge of the charge had been, as it were, separatedbetween Aaron and Joanna, and both again misunderstood the requirementsof devotion, Joanna in hot dreams of her child, Aaron in cold study ofthe continuous maze. Her madness drove her wide, his folly kept himstill; and when she came to him he forbade her even a sight of thesacred thing. So through years their anger grew between them, and nowshe lay in his home.

He hated and feared her, yet he did not well know what in her he fearedand hated. He did not much think she would dare to touch the images,and, anyhow, without Henry's aid or his own she could not find themthrough the outer and inner chambers. It was perhaps no more than theintensity of her desire, and the mad energy which for her turned thenames of Egypt to living and invocable deities, and within that her ownidentification of herself with the Divine Mother and Seeker. It wasstrange and absurd, but it was also rather terrifying--she was so muchone with her dream that at times her dream invaded like the mists of theNile his own knowledge of her as Joanna. But she was here, and nothingcould be done. Perhaps Miss Coningsby, who seemed from Henry's accountto have been remarkably successful with her on the road, would be ableto quieten her if she fell into one of her fits.

Sybil, while she ate and drank, and maintained the conversation as wellas could be, considering the spoiled dinner, their preoccupied minds,and the increasing hurricane without, contemplated at the same time thehouse and its occupants. She saw it, against the background of a darksky filled with tumultuous snow, part of it yet its opposite, itsradiance of enclosed beauty against a devastation of wilder beauty, andin the house she saw the lovely forms of humanity each alive with somehigh virtue, each to its degree manifesting the glory of universalsalvation. Her brother, industrious, as generous as he knew how to be,hungry for peace, assured, therefore, of finding peace; Henry andNancy--Henry, she thought, had been a little mistaken if he imaginedthat violence of that kind would bring him to the kingdom; stillnessrather, attention, discipline--but Henry and Nancy--she ardently hopedthey were together and moving into peace; Ralph with his young freshnessand innocence; Aaron with his patient study and courtesy--even if thecourtesy had hidden some other intention, as, if Nancy were right, itprobably had, still courtesy in itself was good and to be enjoyed: yes,certainly good was not to be denied in itself because motives were alittle mixed. Her own motives were frequently mixed; the differencebetween delighting in...well, in the outrageous folly of mankind(including her own) and provoking it grew sometimes a little blurred.She was uneasily conscious that she sometimes lured her brother inLondon into showing off his pomposity, his masterful attitude towardshis employees, because it seemed to her so wonderful that he should beable to behave so. "My fault," Sybil sighed to herself, and offeredherself once more as a means whereby Love could more completely love thebutcher. Not, of course, that Love didn't completely love the butcheralready, but through her perhaps...however, that argument was for thetheologians. Anyhow, with that sin in her mind it was not for her torebuke Aaron or Nancy. Before perfect Love there wasn't much to choosebetween them. At the same time, without excusing herself, it was up tothe butcher to see that he wasn't drawn, if he didn't want to be, evenas subtly as she knew she did it; and in the same way it was up to herto see that the charm of Aaron's manners didn't any further involve herbrother in disagreeable experiences. The courtesy was one thing; thepurpose of the courtesy was another thing; there need be no confusion ofsubstance. She smiled back at Aaron. "And where," she asked, "is mykitten?"

"In my sister's room, as a matter of fact," Aaron answered. "If you wantit--"

She sighed a negative. "Why, no," she said, "of course not. Did I tellyou that I found it in the snow? I thought it must belong to the house."

Aaron shook his head. "Not here," he answered. "We never have anyanimals here, especially not cats."

"Really?" Sybil said. "Don't you like them, Mr. Lee? Or doesn't the airsuit them? Or do they all refuse to live in the country and want to getto London, to the theatres and the tubes? Are the animals also forsakingthe countryside?"

He smiled, saying, "It isn't a social law, Miss Coningsby, but it's arather curious fact. They--the cats we've had from time to time, for onereason or another--they spend all their time round my study door,miaowing to get into the room of the images."

Ralph looked up; this was the first he had heard of a room with images.

"Dogs too," Aaron went on, "they do the same thing. In fact, we've had amighty business sometimes, getting them away--when we've had one. It'dsnarl and bite and go almost mad with rage before it'd be taken back toits kennel. And there was a parrot Henry had when he was a boy--a cousinof mine gave it to him, a magnificent bird--Henry left the door of itscage unfastened by accident one night, and we found it the next morningdead. It had gone on dashing itself against the door of the room till itkilled itself."

There was a moment's silence; then Ralph said: "Parrots are jolly usefulthings. I know a man--he's at Scotland Yard, as a matter of fact, and hehas to see all sorts of cranks and people who think other people areconspiring or fancy they're on the track of dope-gangs...of course notthe very silliest kind, but those that there just might be somethingin--well, he got so fed up that he had a parrot in his room, put it awayin the window opposite his table so that it was at the back of anyoneelse, and he taught it, whenever he stroked his nose several times, tosay 'And what about last-Tuesday-week?' It had an awfully sinister kindof croak in its voice, if you know what I mean, and he swore that abouthalf his people just cleared out of the room without stopping to askwhat it meant, and even most of those that didn't were a bit nervy mostof the rest of the time. He got a shock once though, because there was afellow who'd lost a lot of money racing on the Tuesday week, and when hewas reminded of it suddenly like that, he just leapt up and cursed forabout twenty minutes straight off before getting down to his businessagain."

"That," said Sybil with conviction, "was an admirable idea. Simple,harmless, and apparently effective. What happened to the parrot, Ralph?"

"O, well, it got all out of hand and a bit above itself," Ralphanswered. "It kept on all the time asking 'What about last Tuesdayweek?' till my friend got sick of it. Especially after some fellow triedto do him in one Tuesday with a hammer. So he had to get rid of it. Buthe always thought it'd be a brainy notion for solicitors and businessmen and vicars and anybody who had a lot of callers."

"Beautiful!" Sybil said. "The means perfectly adapted to the end--and nofuss. Would you jump, Mr. Lee, if someone asked you what you were doinglast Tuesday week?"

"Alas, I am always leading the same life," Aaron said. "There hasn'tbeen a day for years--until this Christmas--that I've had cause toremember more than any other. No, I shouldn't jump."

"And you, Ralph?" Sybil asked.

"Well--no," Ralph said, "I should have just to think for a minute...Imean, in Scotland Yard and all. But--no, not after a second."

"How innocent the old are," Sybil said, smiling to Aaron. "I shouldn'tjump either."

"No, but then you never do jump, do you, Aunt Sybil?" Ralph protested."When that girl we had smashed a whole trayful of china in the hall,you just said, 'O poor dear, how worried she'll be,' and dipped outthere like a homing-pigeon."

"Well, so she was worried," Sybil answered. "Frightfully worried. Butabout your animals, Mr. Lee. What's the explanation, do you think?"

Aaron shrugged delicately and moved his hands. "Who knows?" he answered."It sounds fantastic to say the images draw them, but what other causecan there be? Some mesmeric power--in the balance, in the magneticsympathies."

"Magnetic sympathy over cats?" Sybil said, a little dubiously. "Catsnever struck me like that. But you won't let my kitten bang itselfagainst the door, will you? Or not till we've tried to amuse it in otherways first."

"I'll see to its safety myself," Aaron said. "I shall be looking in onJoanna, and I'll either bring it away or warn her to keep it safe.She'll treat it carefully enough, with her unfortunate delusions aboutEgypt. Isn't Ra the Sun God shown in a cat's form?"

"I haven't an idea," Sybil answered, smiling. "Perhaps the kitten is Ra,and I carried the Sun God home this afternoon. It doesn't, if one mightsay so, seem exactly the Sun God's best day."

They listened to the blizzard for a minute or two; then Sybil looked ather watch. "I think, if you'll pardon me, Mr. Lee," she said, "I'll justrun and look in on my brother. He might be glad of a word." The three ofthem rose together.

"Present my regrets again," Aaron bowed. "It was an entirely unexpectedaccident and a most regrettable result."

Sybil curtsied back. "Thank you so much," she murmured. "Lothairwill--or will not--think so. But I can't altogether think so myself, if(you don't mind me being frank?), if Henry did arrange for the storm."

He stepped back, startled. "The storm," he cried more loudly, "thestorm's only winter snow."

"But is all winter snow the same storm?" she asked. "That is, if I'vegot it right. But isn't it divinely lovely? Do excuse me; I must justsee Lothair." She turned and went.

"Aunt Sybil," Ralph said in the pause after her departure, "would find atorture-chamber divinely lovely, so long as she was the one on the rack.Or a broken-down Ford. Or draughts. Or an anaconda."

## Chapter Twelve - THE FALLING TOWER

In Aaron's workroom the noise of the blizzard was very high. The two whocrossed the room heard it, and heard it roaring still higher as Henryunlocked the inner door. But when they had entered that other room, justas they passed through the curtains, there was a change. The highscreech of the wind altered by an infinitely small but completevariation. Nancy heard it no longer screaming, but singing. Her hand inHenry's, she paused between the hangings.

"Do you hear? My dear, do you hear?" she exclaimed. Holding the hangingsfor her, and listening, he looked back. "I hear," he said. "It'scatching us up, Nancy."

"No, but that's gone," she protested. "It sounds different here. Hark!"

As he dropped the curtain, the habitual faint music of the room greetedthem. It seemed to the girl that the roar of the wind was removed to aninfinite distance, where it mingled with other sounds, and was receivedinto the feet of the dancers, and by them beaten into fresh sound. Shestood; she looked; she said to Henry: "Have you the Tarots, darling?"

He held them out, the suit of sceptres, the suit of deniers, theprincely cards of cups and staves.

"I wonder," she said, "if we shall be able to find our way in by themalone."

He looked at her fully for the first time since on the terrace theireyes had beheld each other in the snow.

"I can't tell; this has never happened before," he said. "What I triedto do has failed; perhaps it was better that it failed. I did whatseemed wise--"

"I know you did," she said. "Dearest Henry, I know you did. I dounderstand that, though I understand so little. There's nothing betweenus at all. You did--and I did--and now here we are. But you've alwaystalked as if there was a way to--what do you call them?--the GreaterTrumps, and as if the Greater ruled the Lesser."

"Certainly they do," he answered, "and therefore the suits are less thanthe Trumps. But it may be a very dangerous thing to thrust among them aswe are, so--half-prepared."

"Still, we can't wait, can we?" she said. "And if time would let us, myheart won't--it's beating too hard. Kiss me, Henry, and, in case we aredivided, remember that I always wanted to love. And now for the cards.Look, will you hold them or shall I? and what's the best thing to do?"

"Do as you did the other night," he said, "and I will put my hands roundyours, and hold the eight high cards that are left to us; and then let'smove towards the table as you did, but this time we will not stop tillwe are compelled. And God help us now--if there be a God--for I do notknow what we can do or say if we come knowingly into the measure of thedance."

"All is well; all is most well," she murmured, and they put themselvesin the order he had proposed, but he more fearfully than she. Then, theTarots pointed towards the dancers, they took the first slow stepforward together.

As they did so, the golden mist flowed out again to meet them, andflowed round them as it had compassed her but two nights before. Thistime, so intent was her will upon its work, she did not look up to himat all, and it was he who was startled by the apparent distortion of herface below his, by the huge enlargement of their hands, by the giganticleaves that shook and quivered in their clasp, trembling till the verycolours upon them seemed to live and move, and the painted figuresfloated as if of their own volition from the mortal grasp that heldthem. He did not dare pause, nor could he feel a trace of faltering inthe girl who stepped forward, foot by foot, so close to him; only therepassed through his mind a despairing ironic consciousness that not thus,certainly not thus, had he purposed to attempt the entrance into thesecret dance. He had meant to go victoriously, governing the fourelemental powers, governing the twin but obedient heart and mind thatshould beat and work in time with his, lover and friend but servant alsoand instrument. By her devotion to his will he had hoped to discover thesecret of domination, and of more--of the house of life whereconquerors, heroes, and messiahs were sent out to bear among men thesigns of their great parentage.

And now he was drawn after her. It had been she who had pointed the way,the thought of which had been driven from his mind by the catastrophethat had overwhelmed it. It was she who went first, not by his will butby her own--nor could he then guess how much, to Nancy's own heart, herpurpose and courage seemed to derive from him. His power was uselesstill she drew it forth; it worked through her, but it was from him thatit still obscurely rose. Though she ruled instead of him in the place ofthe mist, it was he who had given her that sovereignty, and it seemed toher then that, though all dominions of heaven and earth denied it, shewould acknowledge that profound suzerainty while her being had anyknowledge of itself at all.

She pressed on. The great leaves shook and parted and drifted upon thewind, which, as before, seemed to stir in the golden cloud. As one byone they were carried off they took on the appearance of living forms;the transparency which was illumined with the crimson and azure tints ofthe Queen of Chalices floated before her, farther and farther away, andwas indeed a crowned and robed woman bearing the crimson cup; the blackand purple of the Esquire of Deniers showed for a moment before it wasswallowed up in the cloud as a negro youth in an outlandish garmentholding aloft a shining bronze coin, and all surrounded by a halo oflight which had once been the papyrus where had been figured thenow-living shape. Her hands below her were lucent and fiery in the mist;the golden cloud above those pale shapes, infused with crimson fire ofblood, dazzled and dazed her; they were more splendid and terrific eventhan the visions that rose from them and fled upon the wind. Aroundthem, closing them in, supporting them, were other mighty hands--his. Ofhis presence otherwise she was by now unaware; she might, but for thoseother hands, have been alone. But those four hands that by mischance hadloosed the winds and the waters on earth were stretched out to recoverthe power they had inadvertently cast away. The power within her, theoffspring of her transmuted love, longed in itself, beating down her ownconsciousness, for some discovery beyond where mightier power shouldanswer it. She pressed on.

It was at the fourth step that Henry lost her. Still aware of the ironyof their movement, still aware of himself as against her, and of both ofthem as against the mystery of paintings and images, he lost himself forless than a moment in a regret that things should have turned to thisresult. This was not what he had meant to be; his mind added that thiswas not what should have been, and almost before his reproach had grownfrom his pulse into his thought she was gone. His hands were empty; thecloud swirled about him, but he had now no companion. He took a singlesolitary step; then he ceased to move. He hesitated in the mist; thewind struck him as if it had swept the girl away and was minded to flinghim into ruin. He pressed back and fought against it, but not for hisown sake then so much as for hers. It pressed him, not in sudden blasts,but with a steady force, so that he could, by leaning against it, justmaintain himself. As if he were still on the terrace fighting the storm,he set himself against this oppression, as if indeed all that hadchanced since had never been, but for one unrealized change. On theterrace his danger and hers had been known to him with equal urgency.But in fact, since then much had happened. His own schemes had beenscattered; her love for him, her love for something greater than him,had shone in his darkness; her laughter had stirred it, her voice hadcalled him from it. Following her, he had come so far; he filled hismind now with desire for her salvation. Let himself go, let the worldperish, so only that she walked safely among the perils of thissupernatural world. He had mocked at her fear, and now fear for her wasin his heart. The mist was in his throat and nostrils; he was choking init. His eyes were blind, his head swam, in that terrible golden cloud.But, more than that, he knew chiefly that her hands were gone, and thatshe also was alone.

It was then that the hands took him. At first he did not realize, he didnot even notice, what was happening. Filled with a sense of Nancy'spossible danger, himself choking and groping in that intolerable shiningcloud, and fighting all the time to keep securely upright in thepersistent wind, he hardly felt the light clasp that took hold of oneankle. But as he began to move his foot he found it fixed, and fixed bywhat felt like a hand. He looked hastily down; nothing could be seenthrough the floating gold. He tried to pull his foot up from the ground;he could not do it. On the point of bending to free his ankle, hehesitated; the mist was so thick down there. He jerked it sharply; thegrasp of whatever held it grew tighter, and something slid round theother ankle and held fast. Certainly they were hands; he felt thefingers and thumbs. On the realization he stood still; against theseadversaries it was no use battling like a frightened child. Perhaps ifsomething hostile indeed lived in this world he could overcome it--solong as his will held. But what was his will to do?

His feet were being drawn together. He set his will against it, butcompulsion moved them. He swept an arm round him, and as it came to hisrear his wrist also was seized, and the arm was drawn against his backand held there. The grasp was not harsh, it was even gentle, but it wasabsolute. It, or another like it, caught his other wrist and drew thatalso back. The wind ceased; it might have been blowing merely to delayhim until the imprisonment was complete.

For what seemed hours nothing more happened, only he was held. Hisstrong and angry imagination strove in vain to find some method ofrelease, and miserably failed. There came to him out of the mist, whichhad receded a little from him, the sound of music, now increasing, nowdiminishing, as if something went past him and again returned. He could,once or twice, have believed that he heard voices calling, but they alsodied away. A faint light shone at intervals; the mist shook as iftrembling with a quick passage. But more than these hints of existenceshe could not catch. He stood there, seeing nothing else. His heart beganto faint; this perhaps was the end. Motionless in the place of theTarots, as motionless as the Fool that stood in the centre--he himself,indeed, a fool of the Tarots. And Nancy--was she also held--her youngdelight, her immortal courage, her desire for love, in this unchanginggolden mist? "If we are divided, remember that I always wanted to love."There was nothing here to love but himself--if indeed he wanted to love.

The hours grew into days, into years. Imperceptibly the grasp hadtightened; that round his ankles had drawn them together, and that alsoround his wrists. He was still incapable of movement, but his incapacitywas more closely constrained; he was forced more tightly into the merestraight shape of his enclosed body, for the mist closed again round himand moulded itself to his form. He was defined as himself, a basreliefof him was shaped on that cloud, now almost plastic in its consistence;he could breathe and that was all. His thoughts began to fail withinhim; he was aware only of his senses, and they were now limited to thesight and feel of the mist. If it had not been for the slight tinglingeverywhere which the golden vagueness seemed to cause as it pressed onhim, and the strong grasp upon his limbs, he would not have beenconscious of anything at all--there would have been nothing of which tobe conscious. He could no longer even strive to free himself, for thevery idea of freedom was passing from him. There was no freedom forthere was no knowledge; he was separated from all that he had been,except that dimly, within or without, in that aeonian solitude, thereoccasionally loomed something of a memory of one or other of the GreaterTrumps of the Tarots. Somewhere, very vaguely, he would think that hesaw in front of him, fashioned of the mist, yet thrown up against themist, the hierophantic Woman or the Lovers, or the great Tower whichreached almost out of sight, so loftily it grew up and then always justas his dimmed eyes strained to see the rising walls--tottered and swayedand began in a horrible silence to fall apart, but never quite apart. Itwas raised by hands which, from within the rising walls, came climbingover, building themselves into a tower, thrusting those below them intoplace, fists hammering them down, so that the whole Tower was made up oflayers of hands. But as it grew upward they changed; masonry below,thinner levels of masonry above, and, still above, masonry changing intohands, a few levels of moving hands, and (topmost of all) the busyworking fists and fingers. And then a sudden spark of sunlight wouldfall on it from above and the fists would fall back out of sight, andthe hands would disjoin, swiftly but reluctantly, holding on to eachother till the ruin tore them apart, and the apparent masonry, as it wasrent by some invisible force, would again change back into clutching andseparating hands. They clung together fantastically; they shivered andwrithed to avoid some principle of destruction that lurked within them,and as he felt that ugly living twist and evasion they would altogetherfade back into the mist from which they grew. The years went by, andevery now and then, once in every four or five, the Tower was againshown, and each time it was a little closer than before.

The years grew into centuries. He was no longer looking at anything;sight also had departed. Very slowly the Tower had moved right upagainst him; he could see it no more, for he was one with it. A quiverbegan at the bottom of his spine, spreading through his loins, and thenit ceased, and he felt rigidity within him--up, up, till he waspetrified from loins to head, himself a tower of stone. Even so, hemeant to do something, to lift a great marble arm and reach up and pickthe stars from heaven and tangle them into a crown--a hard sharp goldencrown--for a head such as Nimrod's, perhaps his own. He was setting up agigantic image of himself for heaven and earth to adore. He was strongand great enough to do what no man had done before, and to stand on thetop of some high place which would be stable among the circling lightsof the celestial world. And then always, just as he felt his willbecoming fixed and strong enough to raise his arm and break the clasp ofthose cold hands, just as he dreamed of the premonitory prick of thestarry spikes upon his head, something within him began to fall. Hetrembled with giddiness; he would have swayed but could not. There ran adownward rippling through his flesh; his lower jaw dropped; his kneesshook; his loins quivered; he was dragged at from within in everydirection; he was on the edge of being torn into destruction. Then againslowly he was steadied, and again his long petrifaction proceeded, andso through cycle after cycle of years the making and breaking of hiswill went on, and slowly after many repetitions his heart failed withinhim and he assented to the impossibility of success. The stars werebeyond his reach; Babel was for ever doomed to fall--at the last minute,when the plains of heaven lay but a few yards beyond its risingstructure, confusion invaded it, and spread, and the incoherent workersfled, and the elements of the world roared out each upon its ownpassage, and came together again in wars and tumults, conflicts andcatastrophes. But now, each time that he felt the dreadful ruin gofalling through him, he heard also one voice rising among that strangeand shattering chorus and saying: "Remember I wanted to love." Out ofeach overthrow it sounded, and at every overthrow more clearly. Thisalone of all his past was urgent; this alone had meaning in the void towhich his purpose crashed.

It came more quickly; it was repeated again and again; it grew shorter,words dropping away from it. The centuries ended; a quicker rush ofyears began; vehemently the call reached him, and as he strove to answerit with some single willingness of intention, the hands of thesupernatural powers released their hold. He moved and stumbled; timesrushed round him; something brushed against his legs; the mist swirledand broke, and as he stepped uncertainly forward he found himselflooking into the face of Joanna, and then the golden cloud again sweptbetween them, and parted once more the two most passionate seekers ofthe Tarots.

## Chapter Thirteen - THE CHAPTER OF THE GOING FORTH BY NIGHT

Mr. Coningsby had been lying in bed for some time, but he was notasleep. He was restless; his mind was restless. It was all very well,this going to bed, this being put to bed in case he got a bad cold,but--but--he had a continual vision of Sybil before his eyes. Sybil, hehad rather dimly gathered, wasn't in bed, and wasn't in the leastproposing to go: and if she was up, why was he where he was? Of course,it showed a very nice spirit, no more than he would have expected of theold man, who didn't seem to know anything about Henry's indescribablefatuous insolence in hoping, in rather more than hoping, even expecting,or something like it, that he should be given a set of cards which werepart of the only memory he himself possessed of an old and dear friend,a friendship the value of which a young pigeon-stealer like Henrycouldn't possibly know; gipsies never made friends, or only of their ownkind, vagrants and beggars, the kind of person Nancy had nevermet--though certainly the grandfather seemed different: probably themother--the daughter--had run away, only the name was identical, so itmust have been the father, but then the family would be the same--however, Aaron Lee was a very different kind of creature, and hadbehaved very properly. Still, though in the first shock of getting backhe had allowed himself to be looked after and waited on and almostcosseted--still, the fact remained that after an hour or so of solitudehe didn't like the idea. He wasn't so old that he couldn't be out in asnowstorm and laugh at it. He did a kind of mocking laugh at theblizzard swirling about the curtained windows, to which the blizzardresponded by making such a frantic attack on the house that Mr.Coningsby unintentionally abandoned his laughter and looked uneasily atthe curtains. If the infernal thing broke the glass and burst in, a nicesight he'd look, dancing round the room and trying to get dressed in ahurry. He had a momentary glimpse of himself feeling for a stud on asnowy dressing-table and trying to fix a tie which continually, "tornbut flying", streamed away upon the wind. Really, there was a lot to besaid for getting up. Besides, Sybil was up, and Sybil wasn't a girl anylonger, and, though he'd been out in the storm longer than she had, yethe was a man and he had been rather underlining his own active habits,in an only half-conscious comparison of himself with the rest. Aaron,Sybil--he supposed Nancy and Henry were up too--while he was tucked upwith a hot-water bottle. A hot-water bottle! That was all that the youngthought their parents wanted. "And when," thought Mr. Coningsby, led onby the metaphor, "when they get into hot water, with their jumpings andtheir jazzings, and their nigger-minstrels and their night-clubs, who dothey go to to get them out? To the old fellow tucked up with thebottle." Nothing less likely than any appeal in a crisis by Nancy orRalph to their father could well have been imagined, but that actualdivision was hidden from him in his view of the sentimental. They wereall up--dining probably. No one so far had brought him any dinner:however, perhaps they weren't dining yet. "I'm a fair-minded man," Mr.Coningsby thought; "I dare say dinner's a bit late. So much the better.I shall get up. If my sister can be about, so can I."

The feeling under the last sentence was, in fact, not so simple as itseemed--and he knew it. There floated in his mind, though he avoided it,a horrible wonder whether in effect he had really saved Sybil quite asmuch as he thought. Lothair Coningsby was in many things fantastic, buthe was not merely stupid. He never insisted on seeing facts wrongly,though he did a busy best to persuade the facts to arrange themselvesaccording to his personal preference. But sometimes a fact refused--Nancy's arrangement with Henry, Ralph's determined departure forChristmas--and then there was nothing to do but to condole with himselfover it or to look at it and send it away. The afternoon's experiencehad been a fact of such a kind. He had meant to be saving Sybil, he hadthought he was saving her, he had been very anxious about her, but now,in his warm comfort of repose, he couldn't help seeing that she had beenvery active about it all; her voice had been very fresh, and she had...she certainly had...been gently singing to herself while they waitedfor the door to open. He himself had not been singing, but then hedidn't generally sing; he believed in opening his mouth at the propertimes, and outside a shut door in a howling snowstorm wasn't one ofthem. She'd come out to meet him--yes, of course; but which of them--O,good heavens, which of them--had really been thankful for the other'spresence? Perhaps it didn't matter; perhaps they'd both been thankful?Reciprocal help. Sybil rather believed in reciprocity, so that all wasright. So did he, only, in the way the world went, he always seemedhaving to be more reciprocal than anybody else. But this afternoon?

This was becoming intolerable. The wind banged at the window again andstartled him into decision. He would get up. It was Christmas Day--byheaven, so it was! He had never spent Christmas evening in bed. Healways took a good-natured part in any fun that there was. Fun perhapswas too much to expect in this house, but there'd be talk, no doubt, andperhaps--Aaron had hinted as much--a rather unusual wine; perhaps alittle music or what not. Anyhow, what not or no what not, he wasn'tgoing to lie here like an abandoned log while the other logs were...well, were downstairs. Sybil should see that if she had helped him, itwas only momentary: and if he'd helped her, then it was silly for her tobe up and him not. And then, if the storm did burst his window, he'd beable to move to another room more easily. So any way and every way itwas better to get up. Especially as everyone seemed to have forgottenhim: his host, Henry, Nancy, Sybil--everyone. Well, he would go down: hewouldn't complain, but if anyone expressed surprise he might just say aword--"O, well, lying by oneself--"; "Unless one's really ill, one likesto see something of people--"; perhaps, even better, "I thought I'drather be among you," with just the faintest stress on the "amongyou"--not enough for them to treat him as an invalid, but just enough tocause a flicker of regret in Sybil's and perhaps Aaron's heart; hedidn't much expect to cause even a flicker in Nancy's, and he ratherhoped that Henry would be a little annoyed.

While he was dressing, he went on trying over various words to say.Every now and then the English language appeared to Mr. Coningsby almostincapable of expressing his more delicate shades of emotion. But thenlife--getting other people to understand exactly what you meant andwanted and thought and felt--was a very complex business, and, as henever wanted to push himself on others, he was usually satisfied if hecould lightly indicate what he was feeling. One mustn't beselfish--especially on Christmas Day. He abandoned a plaintive, "Ithought perhaps you wouldn't mind me coming down," in favour of ajocund, "Ha, ha! Well, you see, I didn't need much putting right. Ah,Sybil, you...your...you don't..." Rather peevishly he gave that up.He simply could not think of anything at all jocund to say to Sybil. Hefinished dressing and went to the door. His hand on it, he switched offthe light, opened it, and stepped out. His room was near the top of thestaircase, next to Aaron's bedroom. The corridor into which he came ranto his right and left, at each end turning into a short concludingcorridor. In the extreme corner to his right was the door of Aaron'sstudy, within which lay that curious inner room, exposed to the wind onalmost all sides, where were the absurd little marionettes. He had beenrather pleased when he used the word to Henry, and it recurred to him ashe stared towards it. For, much to his surprise, he saw a smallprocession going stealthily along the corridor. It had only just passedhis door when he opened it, quietly, as it happened, and had not heardhim. Indeed, the tall young masculine back at which he found himselfgazing was what had startled him. It wasn't Henry; it wasn't anybody'sthat he knew. It was wearing a chauffeur's outdoor coat, but as its armsstuck inches out beyond the sleeves and its neck rose high and thickover the collar it probably wasn't the chauffeur. Besides the chauffeurwouldn't be wandering about like that in his master's house. Mr.Coningsby's eyes passed it as he wondered, and lit on someone whom hevividly remembered. There, her eyes on the ground, a blanket clutchedround her--"extraordinary dress!" the astonished and already indignantvisitor thought--was the old madwoman they had encountered on theirjourney down. O, it was she undoubtedly: the tangled white hair broughtthat other evening back in full recognition, and the bent form, and theclutching hand holding the blanket round its neck. She was followingsomething; her head was thrust forward and downwards. Mr. Coningsbyinstinctively leaned sideways and craned to see what it was, and saw, ayard or so in front of her, a kitten. He stared blankly, as the curioustrain went on--first the kitten, going gently, pausing now and then witha sudden kittenish crouch, then getting up and going on again, its headturning from side to side; and after it the old woman, with that amazingblanket; and after her the young man in the coat three sizes and moretoo small for him.

Mr. Coningsby's flesh crept at the mere sight of them. Why a kitten? Whyshould even a mad old hag go so softly and carefully after a kitten?Perhaps it was her kitten and she was trying to catch it; she wasn'thurrying it or hurrying after it; if it stopped, she stopped; when itwent on, she went on. And so with the third member of the procession,who copied her in all things--moving or staying as she did. It wasuncanny; it was rather horrible. His hand still on the door-handle, Mr.Coningsby for a few moments stood gaping after them.

Aaron presumably knew about it--but did he? This wretched woman hadseemed to dislike Aaron; supposing he didn't know! It didn't seem verylikely he'd let her meander round the house in a blanket after a kitten,nor a young ruffian covered only by a coat that didn't fit him--notanyhow with Nancy and Sybil about. Sybil, it was true, had seemed to geton with them remarkably well, but even so... Suppose Nancy had metthem...what on earth would a--for all her faults--ordinary nice younggirl do? Suppose the old devil dropped the blanket by accident--orpurposely? Mr. Coningsby revolted at the idea--revolted against thewhole mad fact. He let go of the handle and said in a surprisingly firmvoice, "Hallo, there!"

No one took the smallest notice of him. By now he couldn't see thekitten, but the procession was nearing the end of the corridor. At leasthe ought to see where they went. It was possible that they'd been havingbaths or something, like himself--no, not like himself. The notion thathe and the old woman had shared a bath, that they could have anything atall in common--even the very idea of a bath--was extraordinarilyoffensive. Besides, the kitten? The kitten might, from the way it wasgoing, have been a maid showing a visitor to her room, but of course itwasn't. Unless it was a new kind of marionette. If any kitten started toshow him to his room--

Well, he was going after them, he was going to make quite certain thatthey didn't run into Nancy. It'd be enough to give her a shock. And hewasn't going to have Sybil kneeling down as if she were in church; she'dbeen to church once to-day already. Blessing, indeed! Mr. Coningsby wentdown the corridor after the others with a firm determination to allow nosort of blessing whatever within any reasonable distance of him while hewas alive and sane. Except, of course, in a church.

They were outside the door of Aaron's study; he heard the kitten mewingat it. Joanna--if that was her name--opened it. Mr. Coningsby called outagain, quite loudly this time, "Hallo, you there!" But the "you there"took no notice; they were going in. Mr. Coningsby broke into a run andthen checked--after all, his host might have given Joanna the use of theroom. He considered the possibility and rejected it; Aaron hadapparently had a quite different view of Joanna. No, there was somehanky-panky about.

An awful thought for a moment occurred to him that she might be merelygoing to let the kitten out into the garden or somewhere; people did letkittens out into gardens, and a nice fool he'd look if that were so. Butsurely on a night like this--and anyhow not on the first floor--and notinto a study. He became shocked at himself; he was almost vulgar. Verymuch more angry, he reached the study door.

The others, including the kitten, were inside. As Mr. Coningsby cameinto the room he heard the mewing again, plaintive and insistent; he sawthe little beast on its hind legs against the inner door--not that itwas so little; it struck him that it was within an inch or so of being aproper cat, and the noise it was making was much louder than felineinfancy produces. Joanna was almost beside it, but she had had to goround Aaron's great table while the cat had dashed below it. And alittle behind her, just turning the table-corner, was Stephen. Mr.Coningsby remembered that behind that other door were the images ofgold. Those were what she was after, of course--gipsies--goldenstatues--theft. He said loudly, "Now then, now then, what are you doingthere?"

She stopped, for this time she heard him, and looked over at him. Hereyes blinked at him from the tanned wrinkled old face under the mattedhair, over the blanket fastened together (he now saw) by a strap roundher. She said, "Keep away; you're too late."

"I fancy you'll find I'm just in time," Mr. Coningsby answered, andwalked into the room, going round the table on the opposite side toStephen. "Does Mr. Lee know you're here?"

She chuckled unpleasantly, then nodded at him. "He'll know," she said,"he'll soon know. Wait till I bring him out."

"Out?" Mr. Coningsby said. "What do you mean--out?"

She pointed to the door, and her voice sank to a whisper as she said,"What he has there."

"What he has there," Mr. Coningsby said, "is his business. I thoughtthat was what you were after, and it's a good thing for you I happenedto be about. I suppose you were going to rob him? Well, you won't thistime. Now you get away, and take your damned kitten with you--if it isyours."

She clutched the handle of the door and began to speak, but Mr.Coningsby, in the full tide of satisfaction, swept on.

"Leave go of that door. Come on; we'll go downstairs together. A nicepiece of work, upon my word! You ought to know better, at your age."

The cat yowled at the door. Joanna glowered, and then said, "You'llstop me finding my baby?"

"Your what?" Mr. Coningsby exclaimed. "O, don't be silly; there's nobaby there. There's only a set of marionettes--pretty things, butnothing like a baby. And don't try and put me off with that kind oftalk. Get you away."

"Ah! ah!" the old creature cried out with extraordinary force, "you'reone of them, you're one of the sons of Set."

The cat yowled louder than ever. For a moment Mr. Coningsby feltstrangely alone, as the sound went through the room, and he heard andsaw the claws tearing at the door. He thought of that continuousmovement behind it; he saw the straining beast and the snarling woman;he saw the dull face of the idiot behind her; he heard the noise of thestorm without--and he wished very much that someone else was by hisside. There was something wrong about the images, the house, the verywind; cat and storm howled together, and the old woman suddenlyshrieked, "He's over you, he's over you. Get away before he strikes. Allhis enemies are close to death. The cats are up; the god's coming."

"Nothing is over me," Mr. Coningsby said in a voice that became high andshrill in spite of himself. "Let that door alone."

"It isn't you that'll stop it," she screeched back, "nor a million likeyou. They'll take you and cut you in a thousand pieces, they'll embalmyou alive in the pyramids of hell, they'll drown you among thecrocodiles that are tearing your father, they'll flay you with theburning knives of Anubis, and your heart shall be eaten in the place ofjustice." She turned towards the door and turned the handle. Mr.Coningsby was on her in a moment, pressing it shut, and incidentallykicking the cat away. As he jumped he almost wished that he'd left heralone; it was all horrible, and he loathed the old voice screamingcurses at him. It was of course absolute nonsense, but some minute atomof his mind dragged on the words "embalmed alive". Embalmed alive--he ofall people!

"No, you don't!" he said. "Leave the door alone. Ah! ow!"

The cat had leapt back at him and was madly clawing at his legs. Mr.Coningsby kicked at it and missed. It hung on to his trousers, then itfell off and flung itself at his ankles. It was in a state of raginglunacy, almost as wild as Joanna, who dropped the blanket so that itfell back from her shoulders, and herself clutched at him with clawingfingers. Mr. Coningsby avoided her, kicked again at the cat, anddesperately held on to the door. But he was suddenly torn from it.Joanna, as she clawed at his throat, had shrieked out a call to hercompanion, and Stephen, leaping past her, caught Coningsby round thewaist, and with a great heave wrenched him away from the door and heldhim high in the air. Head and feet downwards, he hung, jerking, kicking,choking out anathemas.

"What shall I do with him, grandmother?" Stephen said. "Shall I throwhim out into the storm?"

The old woman turned her eyes to the window, but, alert in hatred, sawthat it was too small; to push a struggling full sized body through itwould not easily be done even by Stephen. "Throw him there," she said,pointing across the room, and at once Stephen obeyed. Mr. Coningsby wassent hurtling through the air into the extreme corner of the room, wherehe hit the walls first and then crashed to the floor. By mere chance hishead escaped; he fell bruised, shocked, and dazed, but still in somesort of consciousness. For one fratricidal second fear and pride warredin his heart, and pride won. He lay for some minutes where he had beenflung, till rage so bubbled in him that he began painfully to wriggleover, obstinately determined to see what those creatures were doing. Hecould not see, for the inner door was open and they had disappeared.They were busy then--he had been right--about the golden images;robbery--robbery with violence. A long, long, long sentence for Stephen,and Joanna--Mr. Coningsby's professional knowledge supplied him with aclear view of Joanna's future. But that couldn't happen if they gotaway, and unless he did something they might get away. He was tooconfused by his fall to think of the extreme unlikelihood of Joanna'sgoing out into the storm clothed only in a blanket, and carrying in afold of it a collection of little golden figures; had he thought of ithe would have believed Joanna capable of it, and perhaps he would havebeen right. For when she stood on the threshold of that inner room andpeered into the cloud that filled it, when she beheld the rich mysterythat enveloped the symbols of our origins, she had cried out once uponthe name of the god, and from that moment she lost touch with theactualities of this world. She pressed on: Stephen behind her, madeviolent movements and noises as if to hold her back, but over hershoulder she turned on him a face of such destructive malignity that heshrank back, and crouched defensively down by the door, only whisperingfrom there, "Don't go, don't go."

All this was hidden from Mr. Coningsby, who, with a growingdetermination to stop it, was getting, slowly and gruntingly, to hisfeet. "Fortunate," he thought as he did so, "fortunate I brought myother glasses with me! Losing one pair in the storm--shouldn't have seenanything of this--didn't someone say Ralph had called? Get hold ofRalph--not always thoughtful--couldn't stand seeing his father thrownabout the room, like a...like a quoit. Just as well he didn't see--soonsettle this nonsense. Ugh! What's that?"

As he came finally to his feet, and adjusted the extra pair of glasses,the gold chain of which had kept them attached if not in position, hesaw the first wraiths of mist faintly exuding from the inner room. "Whatthe devil is it?" he thought, staring. "'Tisn't snow; 'tisn't smoke...or is it? Has that infernal old woman set the place on fire?" He wentforward a little, keeping the big table between himself and the otherdoor, just in case Joanna and Stephen dashed out at him again, and thenhe saw the whole doorway filling with it. He had an impression thatthere were a great many people before his eyes, a crowd of them, justthere in the doorway, but that could hardly be so, unless of courseother wanderers had taken refuge in this house from the storm, but thenthey wouldn't be here, they'd be in the kitchen or somewhere. It wasn'tpeople; it was mist or smoke or something. He remembered suddenly thatsuch a faint vapour had seemed to enwrap Nancy and the table when shehad her fortune told, but he hadn't taken much notice, because he hadthen been, as ostentatiously as possible, looking another way. If theold woman was asking about her fortune, Mr. Coningsby felt he could tellher exactly what it would be, only she wasn't there to be told. Nothingwas there but the cloud and...again...an indefinable sensation oflots of people, all moving and turning.

"It's those damned figures," Mr. Coningsby thought. "I expect they shakeeverything, all that gyrating nonsense. Good God, it's getting thicker."He turned, ran through the outer door, and shouted as loudly as hecould, "Fire! Fire!"

As he opened his mouth for the third shout, he stopped on the "I-". Forthere came from below a sudden crash, a crash that was answered fromdifferent parts of the house by a noise of smashing and splintering, andthen the wind was howling louder and nearer than before. "Great Christ!"Mr. Coningsby cried out, in mere ingenuity of perplexed anxiety, "whatthe devil's that?" He had guessed even as he spoke; the doors andwindows were giving way before the blizzard. "The snow's getting in andthe fire's getting out," he thought, distractedly staring back over hisshoulder. "O, my Father in heaven, what a Christmas!"

Downstairs, Aaron and Ralph were still gazing at one another in thedining-room when the crash came. At the noise of it they both exclaimed,but Ralph was the first in the hall. He saw there how the front door hadgiven way under the tireless assaults of the storm, which, as if imbuedwith a conscious knowledge of its aim, had been driving like abattering-ram at the house since the return of Sybil and her brother. Itmight have been pursuing and hunting him down; the loosened leaves ofinvocation might have been infused--beyond any intention--with Henry'spurpose, and the vague shapes whom Lothair Coningsby had thought he sawin the snow-swept roads might have been hammering with a more terribleintensity at the door which had closed behind him. At last thosecrashing buffets had torn lock and bolt from the doorpost; the door wasflung back, and the invading masses of snow and wind swept in. The floorof the hall was covered before anyone could speak; the wind--if it werenot rather the dance of searching shapes--swept into every corner. Apicture or two on the walls were torn off and flung down lest theyconcealed the fugitive; tables were tossed about; an umbrella-stand waskicked to the extreme end of the hall. A howl of disappointment went up,and the snow drove over the first few stairs, as if the pursuit wasdetermined never to stop until its prey had been discovered.

Ralph gaped for a moment, then plunged for the door. "Come on!" heyelled. "Call everyone! Come and shut it." He pulled it a little forwardand was thrown back again along with it. "Come on!" he criedstentorianly to Aaron. "No time to waste! Call the others!"

But Aaron was stupefied. The comfortable reassurances in which he hadclothed himself were torn away by the same giant hands that werewrecking his house. This was no unexpected winter storm, butsupernaturally contrived death, and, whatever scope it had, this placewas its centre. If it were to sweep, eschatological and ultimate, overthe world, that destruction was but an accident. The elementals,summoned from their symbols, were still half-obedient to the will thathad called them. His brain called to him to give them their desire, totake the stranger and throw him out beyond the threshold, that he mightthere be beaten and stunned and crushed and stifled and buried, asacrifice now not to magical knowledge but to the very hope of life. Andagain his brain answered and told him that he could not, that the stormitself had brought to the stranger a friend and to himself two enemies.There was no one in the house but Henry who would do his bidding, andeven if Henry could be found in the darkness where he had hiddenhimself, what could he and Henry do against Coningsby and his son? Amore sinister thought leapt in his mind--what if Henry himself could bemade the offering? Might not these raging powers be satisfied with thebody of the sorcerer who had invoked them? Might not Coningsby and hisson and he himself manage to make that offering? At least then Aaron Leewould be alive, and now nothing in the whole universe mattered but thesafety of Aaron Lee. He looked wildly round, and then Ralph left thedoor and ran back to him, seizing his arm, and crying, "Call someone!We've got to shut the door and barricade it--then the windows! Hallo,everybody! Hallo! Come here! You're wanted! Come here everyone!"

The servants--which meant two maids and the cook--had come already,bursting into the hall from their own quarters, and screaming that theback doors were broken down. One of the maids was hysterical with thecontinued roar of the blizzard, and was screaming and howlingcontinuously. The other, almost equally alarmed, was quieter, and it wason her that Ralph fixed.

"Hallo!" he said, "Come along! Look here, we've got to try and get thedoor held. We'll get a good big table and barge it to with that behindit, and someone else can get some rope or something. The dining-roomtable's best, don't you think? It's the biggest thing I've seen." He hadher by the arm and was rushing her to the dining-room. "O lor', won'tanything keep that gramophoning misery behind us quiet? No, don't goback, for God's sake. Here--now smash everything off it--that's right!O, don't stop to pick them up, girl--what's your name? what?Amabel?--all right, Amabel, just pitch them off, so! Now thisway--that's it! careful! careful! blast that leg!--sideways, Ithink--so; yes, so--gently; don't get flustered. Hark at the polish!"as the table-top screeched against the doorpost. They tottered out withit.

"Can I help, Ralph?" his aunt's voice said behind him. Sybil had beenhalf-upstairs when the door had given way, and she had come quickly backto the hall, but her arrival had been unnoticed in the feminine rushthat had preceded it.

"Hallo!" said Ralph breathlessly, as they fought to get the table longside on to the storm; it was only the accident of a recess that hadenabled them to get it out of the dining-room at all, and at the momentit was being driven steadily towards the stairs, with Ralph and Amabelholding on to it at each end, like the two victims who were draggedprisoners to the power of Set in the Tarot paintings. Sybil caughtAmabel's end, and her extra weight brought the other round; Ralph wassuddenly spun round in a quarter of a circle, and then they were allpushing towards the door. Ralph, over his shoulder, yelled at Aaron, thecook, and the hysterical maid, "Cord! Miles of cord!"

"Wouldn't it be easier to close the door first, Ralph?" Sybil said,looking back at him.

"Be better," Ralph said, "but easier? You try it."

Sybil looked at Amabel. "Can you hold it?" she said. "I think if we shutthe wind out first..." She let go of the table, went down the hall,took hold of the door, and pushed it gradually shut. "There," she said,"that's what I meant. Don't you think that's simpler, Ralph?"

"Much," said Ralph, a little astonished either at his aunt's suggestionor at her expert dealing with the door, he wasn't sure which: but heassumed there must have been a momentary lull. He and Amabel rushed theheavy table up, and were just setting it with its broad top against thedoor as Ralph said, "Now we've only got to fix--" when another voicejoined in. From high above them--"Fire!" called Mr. Coningsby. "Fire!"

The hall broke into chaos. Amabel, startled, let go her end of thetable, which crashed to the ground only an inch from Sybil's foot. Thehysterical maid broke into a noise like a whole zoological garden atonce. The cook, who had been going steadily, and rather heavily, towardsthe stairs, stopped, turned to Aaron, and said, "Mr. Lee, sir, did youhear that?" Aaron ran to the stairs, and, checking at the bottom, criedout some incoherent question. Ralph said, in a penetrating shout: "What?What?" then in a much quieter voice he added, "Well, if it's fire, it'snot much use barricading the door, is it? Look here, let's wedge it withthat chair just for a moment till--"

"Fire!" Mr. Coningsby called out again.

"Go and see, Ralph," Sybil said. "It may be a mistake."

"Probably is," Ralph answered. "Right ho, but let's just push that chairin here. Amabel bright-eyes, give it over here, will you? and then goand smother that fog-horn. There, so; another shove, aunt; so!"

Somehow the table and the heavy hall chair were wedged across the door.Ralph, letting go, looked at his barricade doubtfully. "It won't holdfor more than a second," he said, "but--I'll pop up and see what'sbiting him now. If there's really anything, I'll tell you."

He shot off, and, overtaking Aaron half up the stairs, arrived with himon the landing where his father was restlessly awaiting them.

"It's that old woman," Mr. Coningsby broke out at once to Aaron. "She'sgot into your private room, where the marionettes are, and there's a lotof smoke coming out. I don't suppose she's done much damage yet, butyou'd better stop her. Come on, Ralph my boy, we may need you; there's anasty violent ruffian with her, and I'm not strong enough to tackle himalone."

As they ran down the corridor, Ralph heard another splintering crashfrom one of the rooms. "Window!" he thought. "This is looking nasty!Lord send it isn't a fire! Eh?"

The last syllable was a bewildered question. They had reached the doorof Aaron's room, and there the strange apparition billowed--the goldenmist swirled and surged before them. Its movement was not rapid, but ithad already completely hidden from their sight the opposite wall, withits inner door, and was rolling gently over the large writing-table. Itwas exquisitely beautiful, and, though Ralph's first thought was that itcertainly wasn't smoke, he couldn't think what it really was. He gapedat it; then he heard Aaron at his side give a piteous little squeal ofdespair. His father at the same time said, "I can't think why shedoesn't come out. It's such a funny colour."

"Well," Ralph said, "no good staring at it, is it? Look here, this ismore important than the door; we'd better have a line of people tothe--damn it, father, it can't be smoke!"

Mr. Coningsby only said, "Then what is it?"

"Well, if she's inside," Ralph exclaimed, "I'm going in too. Look here,Mr. Lee..."

But Aaron was past speech or attention. He was staring in a paralysedhorror, giving little moans, and occasionally putting up his hands as ifto ward off the approaching cloud. From within and from without thedangers surrounded him, and Henry was nowhere about, and he was alone.Within that cloud was Joanna--Joanna alone with the golden images ofthe dance, Joanna who thought he had kept them from her, who knewherself for the Mother of a mystical vengeance, who went calling day andnight on her Divine Son to restore the unity of the god. What washappening? What was coming on him? What threat and fulfilment of threatwas at hand?

Ralph thought, "The poor old chap's thoroughly upset; no wonder--it's ahectic day," and went forward, turning to go round the table.

"Take care, my boy," Mr. Coningsby said. "I'll come with you--I don'tthink it can be fire. Only then--What's the matter?"

Ralph, with an expression of increasing amazement, was moving his armsand legs about in front of the mist, rather as if he were posturing fora dance in front of a mirror. He said in a puzzled tone, "I can't getthrough. It's too thick."

"Don't be absurd," his father said. "It's quite obviously not thick.It's hardly more than a thin veil--of sorts." He added the last twowords because, as the rolling wonder approached them, it seemed here andthere to open into vast depths of itself. Abysses and mountainousheights revealed themselves--masses of clouds were sweeping up. "Veil"perhaps was hardly the word.

Ralph was being driven back before it; he tried to force his handthrough it, and he seemed to be feeling a thick treacle--only it wasn'tsticky. It wasn't unpleasant; only it was unpierceable. He gave way astep or two more. "Damned if I understand it," he said.

Mr. Coningsby put up his own hand rather gingerly. He stretched itout--farther; it seemed to touch the mist, but he felt nothing. Farther;he couldn't see his hand or his wrist, still he felt something. Farther,something that felt exactly like another hand took hold of his lightly.He exclaimed, jerked his hand away, and sprang back. "What was that?" hesaid sharply.

Aaron was watching with growing horror the steady approach of the mist.But it was not merely the approach that troubled him; it was the changein it. The cloud was taking on form--he could not at first distinguishwhat the form was, and then at one point he suddenly realized he waslooking at a moving hand, blocked out of the golden mist, working atsomething. It was the size of an ordinary man's hand, and then, while helooked, he missed it somehow, as a stain on a wall will be one minute acat's head and the next but an irregular mark. But as he lifted his eyeshe saw another--more like a slender woman's hand--from the wristgrasping upward at...at yet another hand that reached downward to it;and then those joining fingers had twisted together and became yet athird that moved up and down as if hammering, and as it moved, wascovered and hidden by the back of a fourth. His gaze swept the gatheringcloud; everywhere it was made up of hands, whose shape was formed by it,and yet it was not the mist that formed them, for they were the mist.Everywhere those restless hands billowed forward; of all sizes, in allmanner of movement, clasping, holding, striking, fighting, smoothing,climbing, thrusting out, drawing back, joining and disjoining, heavingupward, dragging down, appearing and disappearing, a curtain of activityfalling over other activity, hands, and everywhere hands. Here and therethe golden shimmer dulled into tints of ordinary flesh, then that waslost again, and the aureate splendour everywhere shone. The hands wereworking in the stuff, yet the stuff which they wrought was also hands,so that their purpose was foiled and thwarted and the workers became apart of that which was worked upon. Over and below and about the tablethe swelling and sinking curtain of mystery swept--if it were not ratherthrough it, for it did not seem to divide or separate the movement, andthe cloud seemed to break from it on the side nearest Aaron, just as itfilled all the air around. The room was hidden behind it, nearer andnearer to the door it came, and the three were driven back before it.

Or, rather, Ralph and his father were. Aaron had not moved from thedoorway, and now, as he understood the composition of that mist, hecried out in terror. "It's alive!" he shrieked, "It's alive! It's theliving cloud! Run, run!" and himself turned and went pattering as fastas he could towards the stairs, sending out an agonized call to Henry ashe fled. The cloud of the beginning of things was upon him; in adesperate effort to escape he rushed down the staircase towards thehall. But his limbs were failing him; he went down half a dozen stepsand clung to the balustrade, pale, trembling, and overwhelmed.

Mr. Coningsby looked after him, looked back at the mist, which had nowalmost filled the room, retreated a little farther, and said to Ralph,with more doubt than usual in his voice, "Living cloud? D'you seeanything living about it?"

"Damn sight too solid," Ralph said, "at least it's not quite thateither--it's more like...mortar or thick custard or something. Wheredoes it come from?"

On the point of answering, Mr. Coningsby was again distracted. There wasa noise of scampering from within the mist, and out of it suddenlydashed the kitten, or cat, or whatever it was, which tore between themand half-way down the corridor, where it stopped abruptly, looked allround it, mewed wildly, tore back, and hurled itself into the cloud.Before either Mr. Coningsby or Ralph could utter a word, it shot outagain more frenziedly than before, and this time rushed to the head ofthe stairs, where it broke into a fit of mad miauling, ran, jumped, orfell half down them past the step where Aaron clung, and in full sightof the front door crouched for the spring.

Sybil had been doing her best to soothe the hysterical maid, not withoutsome result. Her back being to the stairs, she did not at first see whatwas happening there, though she heard--as everyone in the house did--thecries of Aaron and the yowling of the cat. She gave the maid a last wordof tender encouragement, a last pat of heartening sympathy, and swunground. As she did so, the cat and Aaron both moved. The cat took oneterrific leap from the stairs right across the hall, landed on Ralph'sbarricade, dropped on to the floor, slithered, snarled, and beganscratching at the table. Aaron at the same time took another step or twodown, slipped, lost his footing, and crashed down. Sybil ran to him. "O,my dear," she cried, but he answered her frantically, "My feet won'ttake me away. They won't let me escape."

"Are you hurt?" she asked, and would have helped him up, but he shookhis head, moaning, "My ankle, my ankle." She kneeled to look at it,soothing him a little, even then, by the mere presence of unterrifiedand dominating serenity. Equanimity in her was not a compromise but aunion, and the elements of that union, which existed separately inothers, in her recognized themselves, and something other thanthemselves, which satisfied them. That round which her brother,exasperated and comforted at once, was always prowling; that to whichNancy had instinctively turned for instruction; that which Henry hadseen towering afar over his own urgencies and desires--that made itselffelt by Aaron now. In the same moment, by chance a silence fell in thehouse; the wind sank without, and all things seemed about to be orderedin calm. It was but for a moment. There was, for that second, peace;then again the cat howled by the door, and, as if in answer to thesummons, the blizzard struck at it again, and the feeble barriers gave.The chair and table were tossed aside, the door was flung back, the snowpoured again into the house, this time with double strength. It sweptthrough the hall; it drove up the stairs; in its vanguard the cat alsoraced back. And from above, itself rushing forward with increased speed,the cloud of the mysteries drove down to meet it. The two powersintermingled--golden mist with wind and snow; the flakes were aureoled,the mist was whitened. Confusion filled the house; the mortal lives thatmoved in it were separated each from the rest, and each, blinded andstumbling, ran for what shelter, of whatever kind, it thought it couldfind. Voices sounded in cries of terror and despair and anger; and theyowling of the cat and the yelling of the storm overbore them; andanother sound, the music of the room of the images--but now grown highand loud and passionate--dominated and united all. Dancing feet went by;golden hands were stretched out and withdrawn. The invasion of theTarots was fulfilled.

Only Sybil, contemplating Aaron's swelling ankle, said, "I think, Mr.Lee, if you could manage to hobble up just these few stairs to a roomsomewhere, perhaps we could deal with it better."

## Chapter Fourteen - THE MOON OF THE TAROTS

Nancy found herself alone. The mist round her was thinning; she couldsee a clear darkness beyond. She had known one pang when she feltHenry's hands slip from around hers; then she had concentrated her willmore entirely on doing whatever might be done to save whatever had to besaved from the storm, which now she no longer heard. But the fantasticmission on which she was apparently moving did not weigh upon her; herheart kept its lightness. There had come into her life with the mysteryof the Tarots a new sense of delighted amazement; the Tarots themselveswere not more marvellous than the ordinary people she had so longunintelligently known. By the slightest vibration of the light in whichshe saw the world she saw it all differently; holy and beautiful, ifsometimes perplexing and bewildering, went the figures of her knowledge.They were all "posters of the sea and land", and she too, in a dancethat was happy if it was frightening. Nothing was certain, buteverything was safe--that was part of the mystery of Love. She was upona mission, but whether she succeeded or not didn't matter. Nothingmattered beyond the full moment in which she could live to her utmost inthe power and according to the laws of the dance. The dance of theTarots, the dance of her blood, the dance of her mind, and whateverother measure it was in which Sybil Coningsby trod so high and disposeda movement. Hers couldn't be that yet, couldn't ever perhaps, but shecould understand and answer it. Her father, Henry, Ralph, they were allstepping their parts, and she also--now, now, as the last shreds of thegolden mist faded, and, throbbing and glad, she came into the darkstillness which awaited her.

On the edge of it she paused. The room of the images had been vaguely inher expectation, but if that indeed were where she stood then she couldsee nothing of it. Complete and cool night was about her. She glanceddown; her hands were empty of the cards, but lifted as if she were stillholding them, and she was aware that her palms were gently throbbing andtingling. It was something like neuralgia--only it wasn't in the leastlike neuralgia. But if there could be a happy neuralgia, if some nervecould send to her brain the news of power and joy continually vibrant,then that was how her hands felt. It might so easily have beendisagreeable, but it was not disagreeable; it was exquisite. Part of itsvery exquisiteness, indeed, was the knowledge that if this delight hadbeen overstressed or uncontrolled then it would have been disagreeable.But the energy that thrilled there was exactly right; its tinglingmessages announced to her a state of easy health as the throbbingmessages of diseased mankind proclaim so often a state of suffering. Joyitself was sensuous; she received its communication through the earth ofwhich she was made.

She kept her hands very still, wondering at them. They had been so busy,with one thing and another, in the world, continually shaping something.What many objects had rested against those palms--chair-backs, cups,tennis-rackets, the hands of her friends, birds, books, bag-handles,umbrellas, clothes, bed-clothes, door-handles, ropes, straps, knives andforks, bowls, pictures, shoes, cushions--O, everything! and always shehad had some purpose, her hands had been doing something, makingsomething, that had never been before--not just so. They were alwaysadvancing on the void of the future, shaping her future. InHenry's--exchanging beauty and truth; in her father's--exchanging...the warm blood took her cheeks as she thought ashamedly of him. InSybil's not long since, receiving strength, imparting the tidings of herown feebleness. Full of the earth of the Tarots; holding on to Henry'sto stay the winds and waters of the Tarots. She stretched them out toeither side of her; what could she do now to redeem the misfortune thatthreatened? What in this moment were her hands meant to shape by themystical power which was hidden in them? She remembered the old woman'shands waving above Sybil's head; she remembered the priest's hand thatvery morning raised for the ritual blessing; she remembered hands thatshe had seen in painting, the Praying Hands of Durer, the hands ofChrist on the cross or holding off Saint Mary in some drawing of thegarden tryst, the hands of the Divine Mother lifting the Child, thesmall hand of the Child Himself raised in benediction; she rememberedthe stretched hand of the Emperor directing the tumults of the world;the hands of the juggler who tossed the balls, the hand of the Fool ashe summoned the last danger from its tomb, the lifted hands of thejuggler and of the Fool as they came together, before the rain of goldhad hidden them that evening from her sight.

It was no doubt a thing to wonder at, the significant power of man'shands. She thought of the unknown philosopher who had wrought the Tarotimages; his hands had been filled with spiritual knowledge; they perhapshad guided his mind as much as his mind his hands. What would thefortune-telling palmistry with which she had played have discovered inthose passive and active palms? The centres of wisdom and energy, whichhad communicated elemental strength to the images and the paintings, sothat other hands could release at their will earth and air and water andfire to go about the world? Release and direct. She stretched out herarms, instinctively passionate to control the storm which she believed,outside her present sense, to be raging over earth; and, as the back ofher hands shone lucidly before her in the dark, she felt against themfrom beyond the first cold touches of the snow.

At the touch she became rigidly attentive. It was time then; somethingwas about to happen. The darkness round her was changing. She could seebelow her again a gleam of gold; at first she thought it was the baseupon which the images had danced, but it was not that, it was not clearand definite enough. It was rather the golden mist, but it was shakennow by an intrusion of white flakes. The confusion was at first farbelow her, but presently it was rushing upward, and as it came nearerand became larger she realized that she was indeed still standing in thesecret room, in the darkness that had once been curtains; below herexpanded the wide open spaces of the Downs. They too were covered withsnow, but the tumult was less, and unmingled with that other strangeglow: they lay, a winter vision, such as she had seen before in fieldsor towns. She saw them, white and silent, and then there swept up fromthe turmoil in the house a giant figure, a dimly defined form waving ahuge club from which the snow poured in a continuous torrent. It rose,rushing towards her, and she thrust out her hands towards it, and itstruck its club against them--they felt the blow, the blast of an icywind, and were numbed, but life tingled in them again at once, and theghostly shape was turned from his course, and sent plunging back intothe turmoil from which it came. Others rushed up after it; the invokedelementals were seeking a larger scope. From raging about and in thehouse they were bursting abroad over the Downs, over the world where menkept Christmas, one way or another, and did not know that everlastingdestruction was near. Between that threat and its fulfilment stood thegirl's slender figure, and the warm hands of humanity in hers met theinvasion and turned it. They moved gently over the storm; they moved asif in dancing ritual they answered the dancing monstrosities thatopposed them. It was not a struggle but a harmony, yet a harmony thatmight at any moment have become a chaos. The column of whirling shapesarose and struck, and were beaten abroad under the influence of thoseextended palms, and fell in other whirling columns; and so the whole ofthe magical storm was sent pouring back into the place of its origin;and out on the Downs, over villages and roads, over the counties andcities of England, over rivers and mountains, there fell but the naturalflakes of a snowy Christmas.

The carols of Christmas, wherever they were sung that night, were sungin ignorance of the salvation which endured among them, or in ignoranceat least of the temporal salvation which the maiden-mother of Lovepreserved. But the snow ceased to fall as the night drew on, and beforemidnight the moon rode in a clear sky. Yet another moon shone over thehouse on the Downs, like that which was among the one and twentyilluminations of the Greater Trumps. For there, high between two towers,the moon shines, clear and perfect, and the towers are no longer Babelsever rising and falling, but complete in their degree. Below them again,on either side of a long and lonely road, two handless beasts--two dogs,or perhaps a wolf and a dog--sit howling, as if something which desiredattainment but had not entered into the means of attainment cried outunprofitably to the gentle light disseminated from above; and againbelow, in the painting of mysterious depths, some other creature movesin the sea, in a coat of shell, clawed and armed, shut up in itself, buteven itself crawling darkly towards a land which it does not comprehend.The sun is not yet risen, and if the Fool moves there he comesinvisibly, or perhaps in widespread union with the light of the moonwhich is the reflection of the sun. But if the Tarots hold, as has beendreamed, the message which all things in all places and times have alsobeen dreamed to hold, then perhaps there was meaning in the order as inthe paintings; the tale of the cards being completed when the mystery ofthe sun has opened in the place of the moon, and after that the trumpetscry in the design which is called the judgement, and the tombs arebroken, and then in the last mystery of all the single figure of what iscalled the world goes joyously dancing in a state beyond moon and sun,and the number of the Trumps is done. Save only for that which has nonumber and is called the Fool, because mankind finds it folly till it isknown. It is sovereign or it is nothing, and if it is nothing then manwas born dead.

She stood above the world, and her outstretched and downturned palmsfelt the shocks, and she laughed aloud to see the confusion of clubsstriking upward and failing to break past the small shields that weredefending the world from them. She laughed to feel the blows as once shehad laughed and mocked at Henry when his fingers struck her palm; dangeritself was turned into some delight of love. As if her laughter were aspiritual sword, the last great rush of spectral giants fell back fromit: the two-edged weapon of laughter sprang from her mouth, as some suchconquering power springs from the mouth of the mystical hero of theApocalypse. The laughter and the protection that are beyond the worldentered her to preserve the world, and, still laughing for mere joy ofcontact and conflict, she moved forward. The ghostly elementals brokeand fled in chaos; a grey swirl of snow received them, and then thegolden mist was around her again and she was sinking and moving forwardthrough it. It swirled and shook and condensed; darkness sprang throughit. She stood by the golden base, empty of images, in the room where thedark hangings enclosed her; and then she saw across the table,confronting her, the wild face of Joanna, and her clutching hands, andher mouth gnashing itself together upon incoherent words.

Nancy's hands dropped to her side; the joy that possessed her quietened;she became still. All then was not yet done. The storm had been turnedback, but she did not know if it was quenched, and this madepersonification of storm raged at her a few feet off. Joanna had come tothe inner room, when the mist already drawn from its hiding-place amongor in the dancing figures by the operation of the lovers had filled thewhole chamber; she had entered through the breach which they had made inthe constraining power that localized the images, or, to put it anotherway, she had been received into the vapour which they had loosed fromthe expanding dance. As Henry had seen her for a moment, so she had seenhim; she entering, he returning. His mortal purpose had been overthrown,and his mind had accepted that and submitted. But hers, thwarted longsince, had overthrown the mind itself in its collapse. Babel hadoverwhelmed her being; she walked among the imagined Tarots seeking forthe love which she held to be her right, her possession, her livingsubject. Wild, yet not more wild than most men, she sought to nourishthe god in her own way, and that way was by the dream of Horus andvengeance and torments. Full of that hope, tenderness mingled withcruelty, devotion with pride, government with tyranny, maternity withlust, she raged among the symbols of the everlasting dance, and madlybelieved that, by virtue of her godhead, she ruled it and was more thana part of it. Henry and she had seen each other, then she had rushed on.She rushed into the centre of the room, where now the mist blew inwidening circles round the empty base, and saw the void. There, whereall restoration should have lain was nothing; there, where the slain godshould have lived, the very traces of his blood had vanished; for shehad passed the fallen Tarot paintings in her haste, and they lay behindher, hidden and neglected, upon the floor. But she saw Nancy, and atNancy she now gazed and gibbered. The silence for some seconds was yetunbroken; the old woman mouthed across the empty pedestal, but no soundcame from her. Nancy, unafraid but aware of her ignorance before thisquesting anger, after the pause said, half-faltering: "You're--stilllooking?"

The old woman's face lit up with a ghastly certainty. She noddedvehemently. "Ah," she said, "still looking, kind lady. Kind lady, tohide him there!"

Nancy moved her hands a little. "Indeed," she said, "I haven't hiddenhim. Tell me what you want and I'll help look."

Joanna went off into a fit of ironical chuckling. "O, yes, you'll help,"she said. "O, you'll help! You've helped all this long time, haven'tyou? But it was you who ran about the tent and peeped underneath to seeif the child was there! Peeping here and peeping there! and wrigglingthrough at last to take him away!"

"What have I taken?" Nancy said, knowing the madness, half-convinced byit, and half-placating it. "What could I take from you? I'll give itback, if you'll tell me, or I'll look for it everywhere with you."

Joanna, up against the table of the Tarots, leaned across it suddenlyand caught Nancy's hand in her own. The girl felt the old fingers clutchher and squeeze into her with a numbing strength, so that the freeactivity in which she had moved during her conflict with visions was nowimprisoned and passive. She resisted the impulse to struggle and let herhand lie still.

"I'll look for it," Joanna said. "I know where you keep him. The bloodin the blood and the body in the body. I'll let him out of you." Shewrenched the girl nearer, and sprawled over the table, leaning her headtowards Nancy's breast. "I hear him," she breathed. "It's he that'sbeating in you. I'll let him out."

Nancy shook suddenly. The laughter that had been in her had died away; afantastic wonder possessed her whether she might now be paying for hermastery of the storm. Better perhaps to have died with Henry in the snowthan...but this was nonsense: she wasn't going to die. She was goingto live and find Henry, and show him the palms that had taken the snow,and make him kiss them for reward, and lay hers against his, his thathad begun and sent the clubbed elementals right into hers, and all waysadore the mystery of Love. The mystery of Love couldn't be that sheshould die here...with only the old woman near. Aunt Sybil would come,or Mr. Lee, or her father... Meanwhile, she must try and love this oldwoman.

She was jerked forward again. Joanna scrambled upright and dragged Nancyin turn across the table; then, holding her tight-stretched, she benther head down towards her, and gabbled swiftly: "The hand you took himwith, the hand of power, the hand of magic--there, there, that's wherewe let him out. The middle of the hand--didn't you know? That's wherethe god goes in and out." She twisted the girl's hand upward andscratched at the palm with the nails of her other hand. "I shall seehim," she ran on, "in the first drop of blood, the blood that the catssmell out; that's why the cat brought me here, the cat that lives in thestorm, the tiger that runs by the Fool. It'll come"--her nails tore atthe hand--"and he'll come out of it. My own, my little one, my sweetchuck! come, come along, come."

The pain struck Nancy as being quite sufficient; it suggested to herthat she might scream--scream out--call out. There wouldn't, shethought, be much harm in calling out. But also she must love this oldwoman--wish her well--understand her--see her goodness. But the oldwoman was one and she was one--and she couldn't see any clear reason whythe old woman should spoil hands that Henry had said were beautiful. Shemade a final effort to break away, and didn't succeed; almost upsidedown as she felt she was, that was hardly surprising. So she called, inas steady a voice as possible: "Aunt! Henry! Father! Aunt! Aunt Sybil!"

Her voice ceased abruptly. Instead of any of these appearing out of thegolden mist that hid the doorway from her, there was a sudden soft thud,and on the table close up to her stretched arm appeared a cat. Nancy inthe few minutes she had spent with Sybil in the hall had heard and seennothing of the cat, and had had no opportunity since. And she had neverheard or seen one in the house. But there it crouched, mewing, turningits head from her to Joanna and back again, unsheathing and sheathingits claws, moving its restless tail. Nancy's first thought as she saw itwas, "It's got no hands," and this seemed to her so horrible that shenearly lost control. It had no hands, it had no spiritual instruments ofintention, only paws that patted or scratched, soft padded cushions ortearing iron nails--all four, all four, and no hands. The cat put onepaw suddenly on her arm, and she almost shrieked at that soft dab. Ittried to lift its paw, but its claws were entangled in the light stuffof the afternoon frock she had on, and were caught. After a moment'sstruggle it ripped them out, and Nancy seemed to hear the sound of thelight stuff tearing--absurd, of course, but if it should tear it rightaway, and her arm lay bare like her wrist and hand, and the cat andJoanna both tore and scratched...Love...She must love Joanna. Joannawanted something, and, though she was afraid Joanna wouldn't find it,she herself must try and love.

Never since the child had died had Joanna been nearer than then tofinding the power of whom she told herself fantastic tales, than whenthe girl's struggling will fixed itself again on that centre. In theplace of the images the god offered himself to his seekers, through theeffort of his creature. In the depth of Nancy's eyes as she turned themon Joanna, in the sound of her voice as she spoke, he allowed hismystery to expand, as she said, "Indeed, it isn't here. I'd help you ifI could. It'll do it if we let it."

The old woman did not meet her eyes; she was looking at the cat. "Thecat that lives in the storm," she said. "Go, my dear; go and show me.You brought me here--show me; show me. She's got it in her, hasn't she?Go and get it out."

The cat stared at her; then it turned its eyes to Nancy's face, and,keeping them fixed there, seemed to swivel its body slowly round. Nancyhad an awful thought, "It's going to spring! It's got no hands and it'sgoing to spring! It'll tear me because it's got no hands!" In the lastof the Tarot cards, in the unnumbered illumination, she had seensomething like that--a beast rearing against the Fool: in the midst ofthe images, rigid in the centre of the base, she had seen it, a beastrearing against the Fool. It had not then seemed to be attackingexactly; rather it had seemed as if poised in the very act of a secretmeasure trodden with its controlling partner among the more generalmeasure trodden by all the shapes. The Fool and the tiger, the combinedand single mystery--but it was going to spring. She brought up her otherhand from where it had held the edge of the table, to help her keep herfooting against Joanna's strong pull; and she slipped a little moreforward as she did so, bringing her face too near to that crouchedenergy that was gathering itself...too near, too near. Her hand cameup, clutched, missed, for the cat slithered aside snarling, and then, asher hand came down on the golden table, crouched again, and wasunexpectedly caught by its neck. A high, peevish voice said, "Good God!What is all this? Let go at once, you wretched creature! Do you hear me?Let my daughter alone. Damn, you, woman, let my daughter alone!"

## Chapter Fifteen - THE WANDERERS IN THE BEGINNING

The descent of the golden mist separated the inhabitants of the housefrom the sight of each other, with the single exception of Sybil andAaron. The servants, caught in the hall, clung together, not daring tomove yet frightened to remain where they were. They felt in thecloseness of hands and bodies the only suggestion of safety, as, longsince, our scarcely human ancestors crowded together against night andthe perils of the night. The cook gasped continuously; her hystericalcompanion was reduced to a shaking misery of moans; even the silentAmabel quivered spasmodically as she clutched the arms of her unseencolleagues. Between them the mist rolled and stayed.

In the corridor above, ignoring social divisions, reducing humanity toan equality of bewildered atoms, it had swept between Ralph and hisfather. Ralph, frankly defeated by this inexplicable amazement, fellback against the wall in a similar stupor to the cook's. A world uponwhich he had all his life relied had simply ceased to exist. Mist onmountains, fogs in towns, he had heard of; sea-fogs and river-mists.But here was neither sea nor river, neither mountain nor town. Existenceas he knew it had just gone out. In a minute or two he would pullhimself together and do something. But this stuff, as he leaned againstthe wall, was damned unpleasant: the wall gave to his back, and he camehastily upright, feeling gingerly for it. He couldn't feel it; hecouldn't feel any difference between anything.

He brought his hand towards his thigh, trying to touch himself, andcouldn't: where he ought to be was nothing but this thick consistence.He closed his hand upon itself, and what felt like fingers pressed moredeeply into the same shifting and resisting matter. He could feelhimself all right, so long as he didn't definitely try to find himself.But when he did, he wasn't there. That was silly: he was there. He putup both hands to his head--at least to where his head ought to havebeen, and still, if his head was there, he couldn't get it. Thisporridge-like substance oozed between his fingers and clung tothem--porridge or thin mud. He had had a tooth out once, and afterwardsfelt as if the tooth was still there. Suppose his whole body had beenpulled out, and he were only feeling as if it were there. But the restof the world? That was gone too. Suppose everything had just been pulledout--leaving only the place where it had been, and himself feeling theplace, seeming sometimes full and sometimes empty? For a moment hevisualized a hole in the air, out of which the round world had beenneatly and painlessly extracted, but his mind, unused to metaphysicalvisions, refused to pursue this thought, and restored him to the simpleview that he was feeling very funny, probably a bit overtired with allthis snow. Nevertheless, he couldn't forget that never in his life,fresh, tired, or overtired, had he searched for himself and not foundhimself. His hold on sanity depended on the fact that the fingers ofeither hand did sometimes rub together as he moved them, though the twohands never quite met each other. If they only could, he would begetting back to normal; something would have joined. There would havebeen a kind of shape, a point of new beginning, a definite fixture, inthis horrible mess, where at present were only two wandering feelers,antennae moving about in a muddy mass. He wondered abruptly what hisfather was feeling like, but no sound--yes, but there was a sound, foursounds. Four separate notes of music, in an ascending scale, came tohim, faint and monotonously repeated--la, la, la, la; la, la, la, la;la, la, la, la. Well, sooner or later perhaps this incredible nightmarewould stop.

Mr. Coningsby had found himself cut off from Ralph with as much suddenexpedition as Ralph had experienced. But, unlike his son, he did notfeel the cloud that so surrounded and deprived him as being thicklymaterial. It was an offence, certainly, but an offence of shockedbewilderment. It removed his world from him as it had removed Ralph'sand, like Ralph and the servants, he instinctively put out his hand tofind companionship. He found--not companionship certainly, but what hehad found before, another hand that laid hold of his, a strong, gentle,cold, strange hand. He pulled his own hastily back, and the other let itgo. It had rather invited than constrained him, and it did not attemptto control. He rubbed his fingers together distastefully, and pretendedthat it might have been Joanna's hand or Stephen's. Anything else--itcouldn't be anything else. It might be Henry's or Aaron's--it might evenhave been Ralph's. Only he was, in spite of himself, certain that ithadn't been Ralph's or Aaron's or Henry's, and, in spite of himself, hedidn't believe it to be Stephen's or Joanna's; it had been too cold andstrong for any mortal hand. It was then--it wasn't; certainly it wasn't.Or if it was, then the only thing to be done was to keep out of the wayof these released marionettes. "Robots!" Mr. Coningsby indignantlythought, though how the Robots had got from their table to the corridorhe didn't attempt to explain. He would get right out of the house--butthe storm was outside. It cut him off from his home, from London, fromtrains and taxis; it shut him in and he must stay in. And within was themist. There was, Mr. Coningsby realized, absolutely nowhere in theuniverse he could get to. He was there, and there he was going to stop.

Blundering along what he supposed to be the corridor, he exclaimedaloud, "Lunacy!" At the word all sorts of dim memories of his workawoke, only he seemed to be on the wrong side of them. He had neverheard of a lunatic whose delusion was that a whirling snowstorm shut himup in a golden cloud, where cold hands touched his. Some lunatics wereviolent and had to be held down by others' hands. What if he, strugglingin his horror, became violent, and those hands held him? Suppose hismind was, by their judgements, mad? Lunacy--lunacy--what was lunacy?What was the mad mind wrestling with contemptuous and powerful enemies?What was he doing at the moment? If he should be caught and carried awayfor ever into the depths and distances which opened now and then beforehim--the mist falling away on either side and making a league-longvalley of itself, or heaving up and leaving a great abyss round which itswirled and then covered it again. Borne into it...taking precedence,O, for ever and ever taking desolate and lunatic preference of the eldersons of younger sons of peers. They would always be behind him; theycould never catch him up. As if bound upon a great wheel, spinninground, with lives bound to it--no wonder he was giddy; the mist or thewheel had made him so. That was why he saw the depths--as the wheelturned; it didn't go quickly, but it was always revolving, and he hadbeen on it for so long, so many years, and now he was old and sinkingdeeper and deeper down. But the elder sons would never catch him up;they were tied to it too.

His head was aching with the dizziness of the revolutions all the same;wheels within wheels--he had heard that phrase before. The mists wererevolving round him or he in them: which--what--was it? Wheels withinwheels--there had been some phrase of glory, angels or something, wheelsfull of eyes, cycles in cycles all vigilant and intelligent, revolving.These weren't eyes; these were hands. Perhaps hands were eyes; if theeye of the body was dark, if the hand had no power--a vague wheel ofinnumerable hands all intertwined and clasped and turning, turningfaster and faster, turning out of mud and into the mist, hands fallingfrom it, helplessly clutching...

It was at this moment that Mr. Coningsby, blindly edging along thecorridor, his own hands feeling nervously along the wall, touched adoor-handle; he turned it, went in, found himself in his own room, stillmiraculously and mercifully free from mist, and slammed the door behindhim. It was at the same moment that a voice within him said in tones ofstartled concern, "Nancy? Sybil?" If they were out there, as of coursethey were--he had seen Sybil in the hall when he was calling "Fire!"down the stairs. But Sybil--he knew it and admitted it at last--didn'tmatter. In any unusual variation of normal things--snowstorms orshipwrecks or burning houses--he could have regarded himself as Sybil'ssuperior. But this was entire subversion of normal things, a new world,a world of lunacy, and he was not superior to her there. Confronted withany utterly new experience, he was her inferior, for he existed only inhis relationships, and she--she existed in herself. There was certainlyno point in his looking for Sybil.

All this he understood in a swift revelation; but he understood alsothat Nancy was different. Nancy was not merely his daughter--she wasmuch more likely to find him useful than Sybil was. And he didn't trustHenry to look after her; he had always thought that Henry was moreconcerned with himself than with Nancy. Poised three steps within theroom, Mr. Coningsby turned round and looked unhappily at the closeddoor. Must he really go back into that mist on the chance of beinguseful to her? It seemed he must. "Blast!" Mr. Coningsby said aloud, ina rare explosion of disgust. Sybil, Ralph, Henry--any of these might belooking after her; yes, but he didn't know they were. Besides, there wasJoanna. His altruism excited into action by this opportune dislike (asso often happens: even love often owing more to hate than perfection oflove could altogether approve), he went back to the door, and observeddisagreeably that the golden cloud was beginning to ooze through it. Hewas past surprise by now; he didn't even try to see that it was comingthrough the keyhole or anywhere except straight through the wood. Thereit was, growing thicker. In that case it was just as well that he'dalready determined to leave the room, since things would soon be as badwithin as without. Very well; only this time he must keep his head; hewouldn't be any use to Nancy if he lost it. No nonsense about wheels orhands that were eyes or distances. This was a house; it had a fog in it;he was Lothair Coningsby, and he was going to find his daughter in caseshe was frightened by an ugly old woman. Very well. He opened the door.

Actually, when he had gone a little distance down the corridor, hethought the mist wasn't too bad. He even ventured to open his mouth, andsay in a curiously subdued voice, "Nancy!" He didn't quite admit that hedidn't want any--anybody--anybody with inhuman hands to hear him, but heknew it would be very inconvenient if they did. But nothing at allhappened, blessedly. So he took a few more steps and said "Nancy" again.This time another form stepped against his own--very nearly crashed intohim--and a voice said, "She hasn't come back then?"

Mr. Coningsby, recovering from a spasmodic fear that the new appearancemight be one of the presences of the cloud, peering closer, saw that itwas Henry, and his fear spoke angrily: "What d'ye mean--come back? Whyaren't you with her?"

"Because I can't get there," Henry said. "God only knows where she is,and if He does He knows why I'm not there."

"Don't stand there talking about God," Mr. Coningsby snapped. "Tell mewhat devil's trick you've played on her."

"When I tried to kill you," Henry began in a low, monotonous voice, asif he had often said it over to himself, "because I thought you stood inthe way of the entrance into the--"

"When you what?" Mr. Coningsby cried out, "Tried to kill me? Are youmad? When did you try to kill me?" The nightmare was getting worse; hecouldn't really be standing in this accursed welter of golden cloudtalking to his daughter's lover of his own plotted murder. Had therebeen any trying to kill him? or had he been killed? and was this mistthe ghostly consequence of death? He checked in time to hear Henry say:

"When I brought the storm out of the Tarots. I poured the waters on youout of their vessels and I beat the winds against you with the staffsbecause you wouldn't give up the cards. But she went away to stop it."

"Stop it!" Mr. Coningsby said, clutching at the first words he reallyunderstood. "I should think she would stop it! What under heaven are youtalking about?" He peered closely at Henry's face, and was struck silentby what he saw in eyes of which the brightness had been dulled. Pallidand fixed, the face looked back at him; mild and awful, the voiceanswered him, "I meant to use her, and now I can't find her. She's gonebeyond me, and I can't catch her up. You may."

"I certainly will," Mr. Coningsby said. "I--I--Where is she?"

"She's gone into the dance," Henry said, "and I don't know whether evenshe can hold her post there. I was a fool once and dreamed, and I triedto kill you because you were in the way of my dreams."

"You were a fool all right," Mr. Coningsby said, "and if this utterlydetestable nonsense you're talking means anything, you were a great dealworse than a fool. Pull yourself..."

Henry looked at him, and he stopped. No man with a face of that colourand of that agony would be talking nonsense--not if he knew it. If thestorm had been--but storms weren't! Nor, of course, was mist. Nancy wastrying to stop the storm--he'd got that much--and she'd gone into thedance. That, whatever else it meant, meant those damned sillymarionettes in their infernal black magic of a room--where Joanna hadbeen going. He had known all the time that Joanna would be in itsomehow.

He pushed past Henry, rather thankful even in his angry distraction tofeel Henry's undoubted body as he shoved it away, and said, "I'll dealwith you after. If you can't find her, I will."

Unexpectedly docile, Henry said: "You may. That may be the judgement. Doit; do it, if only you can."

Mr. Coningsby had gone on several paces when he, without quite knowingwhy, looked back over his shoulder. It was a silly thing to do, he knew,with this God-forsaken mist all round him and when he had done it heknew it all the more. For looking back was like seeing things reversed;he was looking back in two ways at once. He saw Henry, but he saw himupside down--a horrible idea. Nevertheless, there it was: Henry was, inthe ridiculous reflections of the mist, hanging in the void, his headdownwards; his hands out of sight behind him somewhere, his leg--oneleg--drawn up across the other--it was the other he was hanging by. Fora full minute Mr. Coningsby stood gaping over his shoulder at thatvision seen in one of the opening hollows of the cloud, then a drivinggold as of storm swept across it, and he could see no more. He turnedhis head again, but now he stood still. He was feeling sick and ill; hewas feeling very old; he wished Sybil were with him. But she wasn't, andhowever sick and ill and old he was, still Nancy was somewhere about, indanger of being frightened, if nothing worse, by that loathsome hag of aJoanna. He went on, and for the first time since his childhood prayed,prayed that he mightn't look round again, prayed that Nancy at leastwhen he found her might be whole and sane, prayed that if Sybil was anygood, Sybil might pretty soon turn up, prayed that he might keep hismind steady and do for the best whatever he had to do. The mist openedin front of him in one of its sweeping unfoldings, and he was aware offigures moving in it, tall figures emerging and disappearing, and itcovered them again, and again those cold fingers closed round his own.Mr. Coningsby said, in a voice that shook despite his efforts, "Who areyou?" The fingers warmed suddenly to his, and became a grasp; a voice inanswer to his exclaimed, "Hallo, father!" and he realized that it wasRalph's, though he would have sworn that the touch hadn't been Ralph'swhen it first caught him. But he must have been mistaken. He said inenormous relief: "Hallo, my boy! Glad to find you."

"I'm damned glad," Ralph answered, and his head appeared close to hisfather's. "You're solid, anyhow."

"Whereabouts are we?" Mr. Coningsby asked.

"Where we were, I suppose," Ralph said. "By that doorway into the studyor whatever it was. I've not done much moving since, I can tell you.Funny business this."

"It's a wicked and dangerous business," Mr. Coningsby cried out. "I'mlooking for Nancy. That fiend's left her alone, after trying to killme."

"What fiend?" Ralph asked, even more bewildered. "Who's been trying tokill you?"

"That devil's bastard Henry," Mr. Coningsby said, unwontedly moved as hecame to speak of it. "He said so. He said he raised the storm so as tokill me."

"Henry!" Ralph exclaimed. "Raised a storm. But I mean--O, come, astorm!"

"He said so," Mr. Coningsby repeated. "And he's left Nancy in that roomthere with that gibbering hag of an aunt of his. Come on with me; we'vegot to get her out."

"I see," said Ralph. "Yes; O, well, let's. I don't mind anything so longas it's firm. But raised a storm, you know! He must be a bit touched. Ialways thought he was a trifle gibbery himself."

"O, everyone's mad in this damned house," Mr. Coningsby said. "I supposewe're going right?"

"Well, I can't see much," Ralph answered, "but perhaps we are. Imean--if we're not we shall find out. What's that?"

They had both bumped into something. Mr. Coningsby, his languagebecoming less restrained every time he spoke, cursed and felt for it.But it was Ralph's less maddened brain which found the explanation."It's the table," he said suddenly. "The big table we saw from thedoorway."

"Then we'd better get round it," Mr. Coningsby said. "The room wherethose gargoyles are is on the other side. I wish I could smash every oneof them into fragments and cram them down his gulping throat."

Hand still in hand, they groped round the table, and, when they judgedthey were almost opposite the inner door, struck out towards it. Aftertwo or three cautious steps, "It's getting thinner," Mr. Coningsby said.

Ralph was more doubtful, but, dutifully encouraging, he had justanswered, "Perhaps you're right," when he was startled by his fathernearly falling. Mr. Coningsby's raised foot had come down on somethingthat jerked and heaved under it. He cried out, staggered, recoveredhimself, and came to a halt as the thing rose in their pathway. It wasin the shape of a man; it was a man; it was the fellow that had beenwith the witch; it was Stephen. He must have been lying across thethreshold of the inner room. He looked at them with dull hostility.

"Get back," he said. "You can't come here. She's there."

"She is, is she?" Mr. Coningsby said. "Here, Ralph, move him."

Ralph started to obey. He put a hand on Stephen and began to say, "Lookhere, you must let us by," when Stephen leapt at him, and the two werelocked in a wild struggle. Mr. Coningsby just avoided their firstcollision, and slipped past them as they swayed. Both of them, clutchingand wrestling, went, under the impulse of Stephen's rush, back into theouter room; all the emotions of fear and anger that had been restrainedin their separate solitudes now broke into activity through the means ofthat hostile embrace. In the mysterious liquefaction of everything whichhad distressed Ralph, in the outbreak of the mysteries of the vagrantgoddess which had terrified Stephen, each of them found somethingrecognizable, natural, and human, and attacked it. The beings whopossessed the cloud were veiled by it from both of them; like primevalmen of undeveloped capacities, they strove with whatever was near. Sohad dim tribe battled with tribe--and earlier yet, before tribes were,before the beasts that grew into tribes, when the stuff that is theorigin of all of us had brought forth only half-conscious shapes, suchstruggles had gone on. The nature of the battles of all the world was inthem; to pass or not to pass--neither knowing clearly why, except thatgreat command intensely swayed their spirits--was the centre of theirconflicting wills. The gateway was taboo, for the goddess had entered;mystical age, nourishing wisdom, had gone into the sanctuary and must beinviolate. The gateway must be forced, for kinship was in danger;mystical womanhood, unprotected helplessness, was abandoned within andmust be saved. Religion had commanded, and the household: the unknowingchampions of either domination panted and fought in the outer courts ofthe mystery. The mist rolled into and over them; it possessed andmaddened them. Life strove with life, and life poured itself into themto maintain the struggle. In such unseeing obedience, at that verymoment, in the wider world, armies poured to battle, for causes asobscurely known. They battered and struck; they had no hope butdestruction and no place but war. Ignorant of all but simple laws, theyclosed and broke and struck and closed again, and the strength of earthfought in them for mastery.

But of that manifestation of primitive violence Mr. Coningsby sawnothing: he had glimpsed the inner doorway and went hurriedly throughit. Within, all was clear: clear so that he could know, unknowing,another mystery of mankind. For there, in the room with the darkhangings, through or in which had appeared to the initiate the vision.of the painted world, he saw the solemn intention of sacrifice, theattempted immolation of the victim to the god. Fate had fallen on deity,and only by bursting the doors of human life could deity be relieved.Humanity, caught up into dooms and agonies greater even than its own,was madly attempting to relieve them, and itself with them. Over thegolden altar of blood the body of the girl lay stretched; on one sidethe hierophant clutched her wrist and tore at the mystery of the hand,which means so much in its gentle and terrible power; and on the altaritself, as if some god had descended to aid and quicken the sacrifice,the cat lay crouched in a beautiful and horrible suspense before itsspring. As far as the struggling bodies without from the holy strivingof joyous imaginations, so far within was the grotesque group from thesacred and necessary offering which (the testimony of the mythsdeclares) releases, after some spiritual manner, the energies of thegods. But it was not wholly alien; and that which is common to all wasthe purpose of death.

Mr. Coningsby, as he broke into the charmed circle, saw the priestess,the cat, and the body of the sacrifice. It was on the last that hisattention was concentrated, and he cried out in a voice rather ofobjection than of protest, but that was the result of fifty years ofobjection to life rather than of protest against it. He ran forward,grabbed the cat, lifted it, and flung it with violence at the doorway,much as Stephen had flung him away not long before. Joanna screeched athim, and he swore back at her. Dominant for the first time in his life,moved for the first time by those two great virtues, strength andjustice, he commanded her, and for a moment she flinched. She wasdistracted from the hand she held by the hand that gripped hershoulder--before its owner had time to realize how offensive to hisnormal habits such a grip was. Nancy at the same moment twisted herwrist and jerked her own scratched hand away, standing once more uprighton the other side of the table. Mr. Coningsby ran round the table toher. She put her arm round him and realized suddenly how much she owedto him--owed because she was a blundering servant of Love to this otherblundering servant of Love, owed from her struggling goodwill to hisstruggling goodwill: and how full of goodwill his labouring spirit was.He was a companion upon the Way, and how difficult she had made the Wayto him! She hugged his arm, not so much in gratitude for this singleservice as in remorse for her impatient past.

"0, thank you, darling," she said. "You did come just at the righttime."

"Are you all right?" Mr. Coningsby said. "Are you all right? Has shehurt you? What was she doing?"

"She was looking for something," Nancy said, "and she thought I'd gotit. But I haven't. If I only knew exactly what it was! Perhaps AuntSybil could find out if we could get them together. Ask her to comedownstairs, won't you, father?"

"I'll ask her to come downstairs," Mr. Coningsby said. "I'll ask her tocome down into the cellars, and I'll ask her if she minds the doorsbeing locked on her, and if she'd very much mind if we tied her up forthe dancing, raving monstrosity of ugly hell that she is. Looking forsomething!"

At any rate, Nancy thought, that would give them a chance of findingSybil on the way, and perhaps something more satisfactory than cellarswould open. She couldn't feel, for all her smarting hand, that lockingJoanna in a cellar would do any real good. Nothing but giving Joannawhat she wanted or getting Joanna to change her wants would be any realgood. She pressed her hand to her heart; it was smarting dreadfully; theblood stood along the scratches. She didn't want to show it in case herfather became more annoyed with Joanna, but the sooner she could findHenry or (if needs must) bathe it herself the better. She began gentlyto edge Mr. Coningsby round the table. She said, "Let's go with her atleast. I'm sure Aunt Sybil could help. She knows what the lost thingis."

Mr. Coningsby felt a shock of truth. Sybil did seem to know--Sybil hadquietened this old hag--the lost thing--he took an automatic step or twoforward. Joanna had already retreated a little, and was darting angryeyes round the room. She went back yet farther, and, as Nancy alsomoved, the golden cloud which hung behind the old woman rolled back,disclosing on the ground at her feet the paintings of the Tarots whichhad fallen from the hands of the lovers that evening. They lay there,throbbing and vibrating. With a scream of rage and delight she droppedto her knees and scraped them together in her hands.

"What--" Mr. Coningsby began, surprised, and ended in a different voice."Are those my cards? What under heaven are my cards doing there?" Herushed round the table, and Nancy ran with him. But they were too late.Joanna was on her feet again, had turned, was running off into the mist,clutching the paintings. The other two ran also, and, as if theirmovement was itself a wind, the mist rolled back from before them,driven to either side and about their feet and floating over theirheads. But, as Joanna ran, her hands fingered the cards, and she criedout in ecstasy.

They broke into the outer room, and at the sound of that shrillrapturous voice the two combatants ceased to struggle. She was uponthem, and both of them, startled at the coming of such a hierophant insuch exaltation, released the other and fell back. But Stephen sent aword to her, and she answered: "I'm finding him, I'm finding him. I'llburn them first and then he'll come. He'll come in the fire: the fire isfor Horus, Horus in the fire."

She was by him and out of the room, and still she worked the magic inher hands, and by now, so swift and effective was her insanity, she hadseparated the suit of the swords from the rest, and was setting them insome strange order. She made of them a mass of little pointed triangles,three living symbols to each triangle, and the King of the Swords, whoseweapon quivered and glowed as if in flame, she thrust on top of themall, and laid her own hand over it, warming it into life. And as shecame into the longer corridor, already the sparks went about her, andshe was calling, "Little one, little one! I'm coming. They shan't hurtyou any more. I'll drive them away--your mother'll save you. I can hearyou--I'm coming."

Behind her those who pressed were parted. At the door of the outer roomMr. Coningsby's strength went from him. He staggered, and would havefallen had not Nancy held him, and Ralph, by whom they paused, sprang toher help. Nancy gave her brother one swift, delightful smile andexclaimed to him, "Look after him, there's a dear. I must go."

"Right ho!" Ralph said, and took his father's arm as Nancy released it.Stephen uncertainly looked at them, then he left them and followedNancy. She came into the longer corridor and saw before her Henryleaning on the balustrade at the top of the stairs. Joanna, checking asshe went, had lifted the swords that were beginning to shoot frombetween her hands in little flames, and was thrusting them continuallyforward towards him in sharp spasms of motion. And about them the cloudgathered into shapes and forms, and through all the translucent houseNancy was aware of golden figures unceasingly intertwining in the stepsof the fatal dance.

## Chapter Sixteen - "SUN, STAND THOU STILL UPON GIBEON"

Sybil, with a great deal of difficulty, although it did not occur to herto call it that, had managed to get Aaron downstairs and into thedrawing-room. She had wanted him to be helped to his bedroom, but thishe had altogether refused. He wouldn't go up those stairs; he wouldn'tgo back into the thicker mist; he would go down; he would get away if hecould. She wasn't to leave him--everyone else had left him--and theywould be on him.

"They?" Sybil asked as she helped him cautiously along. "Splendid, Mr.Lee. You could get upstairs almost as well, you know. Easier, in fact.No, all right--if you'd rather. They?"

"They," Aaron babbled. "They're all round us. They always are, but weshall see them. I daren't see them. I daren't. I can't see anything:it's too bright."

"It is very bright," Sybil said. "If it wasn't so late, I should thinkthe sun was shining. But I never heard of the sun shining at ten o'clockon Christmas night. Gently; that's perfect."

"The sun!" Aaron said. "The sun's gone out for ever; we're all blind.Lame and blind, so that we can't escape them."

Sybil smiled at him. "Well, then," she said, "I wouldn't worry aboutescaping. Leave that to Nancy and Henry, unless they're sensible enoughnot to worry either. I wasn't at their age. I tried to insist onescaping; fortunately, I didn't. That's the bottom."

"How can you tell?" Aaron exclaimed. "Can you see? Can you see throughthe mist and the snow?"

"Fairly well," Sybil said. "I wonder if Amabel--Amabel, could you giveMr. Lee your arm on the other side?"

The words reached Amabel where she was clasped with her companions. Theyreached her out of the bright cloud; she raised her head, felt itagainst her eyes, and promptly shut them again. Sybil looking across thehall at them--the hall that in this curiously golden-tinted snow lookedmore lovely, though more ruinous, than she had thought any mortal thingcould look--considered a moment, and then in a firmer voice calledagain, "Amabel!" Snowstorms were all very well, but it was silly to getinto a state of crouching hysterics over a snowstorm; Amabel's immediatejob was to be of use. Normally one wouldn't order other people'sservants about, and she said to Aaron between two calls: "Will youforgive me, Mr. Lee? Perhaps if you called her...?"

Aaron, however, it was clear, had no notion of doing anything of thesort; the words didn't seem to mean anything to him. Sybil called forthe third time, with an imperious certainty: "Amabel! Will you comehere?"

Amabel heard the voice and looked up again. In the awful vagueness ofthe hall, tumultuous with cloud and storm, she saw figures moving. Amingled sense of her duty and of wild adventure filled her. She releasedthe cook and the other maid; she said, faintly but definitely, "I'mcoming."

"Well, come, then," Sybil said, still slightly imperious. "My dear girl,do hurry. I know it's very unusual, but we may as well be useful."

Amabel dashed through the mist, terrified but exultant. It swirled roundher; it carried her along; she was swept, deliriously panting, to theside of the strange lady who walked in the cloud as others did by day,and laughed at the storm as others did at spring, and closed doors thatthe whole power of the world dashed open, and carried an old man safelythrough chaos to--

"Where to, madam?" she asked, an attentive executant once more.

Serenely Miss Coningsby smiled at her--a smile that Amabel felt to beeven brighter than the golden glow about them: so much brighter that fora moment the glow was only the reflection of the smile.

"How dear of you!" Miss Coningsby said. "So--yes. I thought thedrawing-room. You and my nephew made rather a mess of the drawing-room,didn't you?"

Amabel smiled back, a thing she didn't much believe in doing as a rule,having been for some months with a lady who held that if you smiled atyour servants they would do everything for you, and also held that youhad a right to see that they did. The company proceeded slowly to thedrawing-room, and Aaron was made as comfortable as possible on a divan.Sybil, kneeling by him, bared his ankle and looked at it.

"It doesn't," she said, "seem very bad." She laid her hand over it,thinking how charming Aaron Lee's courtesy had been, very willing to becourteous in her turn. He looked up at her and met her eyes, and hisanxious babblings stopped.

Her hand closed round the ankle; her mind went inwards into theconsciousness of the Power which contained them both; she loved it andadored it: with her own thought of Aaron in his immediate need, hisfear, his pain, she adored. Her own ankle ached and throbbed insympathy, not the sympathy of an easy proffer of mild regret, but thatof a life habituated to such intercession. She interceded; she in himand he in her, they grew acquainted; the republican element of allcreated things welled up in them both. Their eyes exchanged news. Shethrobbed for an instant not with pain but with fear as his own fearpassed through her being. It did but pass through; it was dispelledwithin her, dying away in the unnourishing atmosphere of her soul, andwith the fear went the pain. Her hand had fastened on him; she smiled athim, and then with the passing of that smile before her recoveredserenity her hand was released. She sank back on to her heels, and said,her voice full of a deep delight: "O, no, not very bad."

Of what exactly she spoke she hardly knew, but he answered her in thegreater sense. "Let them come then," he said. "I was a fool ever tothink I knew."

"Why, no," she said. "Only perhaps you sprained your ankle--hurrying."

Negligent of his supposed hurt, he put his feet to the floor and stoodup; then, as if from the weight he put on them, he flinched. "But thecloud! the living cloud!" he cried. "And Joanna's there!"

She came, in a complex movement of harmony, to her feet. "Yes," she saidthoughtfully, "Joanna might perhaps be a little carried away. Ought weto go and see if we can find her?"

"Must we find her?" he said irresolutely. "Let her fight them if shewants to. Must we go back into the mist?"

"What is this mist you see?" Sybil asked. "Why do you call it a livingcloud?"

"It's the cloud from which the images were first made," he said, almostwhispering. "It hides in everything; it's the golden hands that shape usand our lives. It's death to see them; no one can bear it."

"Are our hands so different?" Sybil said.

"So many degrees less," he answered, "in life and power. There have beenthose whose palms were touched, when they were born, by figures leaningover the cradles: some by one and some by another." His words camefaster, as if he would keep her where she stood, keep her by his talk inforgetfulness of the dangers without. "Napoleon...Caesar. There wasone who came to Olympias on the night when Alexander was conceived, andto the mother of Samson. Great priests--the hierophant touched theirhands when they were tiny. Death sometimes. Joanna's child--and theinnocents of Bethlehem. And others that we can't see, others beyond theseventy-eight degrees."

"Yet all this time," Sybil said, "Joanna cries for her child."

He caught her arm. "Leave her alone," he cried. "Perhaps she'll turn themagic against the princes, then she'll die, she'll be blasted. Keep yourhands from her."

"Why, she blessed me once with hers," Sybil answered. "And I can't seethis mist of yours, though I agree there's a new loveliness in things.Let's go."

"If you enter the cloud, you'll never come out," he cried again. "Thehands'll drag you down, the hands of the beginning."

"Let's go and see," she said. "There are the others, and there's alwaysa way through all mists." She looked at Amabel, who was listening inpuzzled and fearful silence. "Thank you, my dear," she said. "Shall wego back now?"

She moved forward and out into the hall. Aaron, half willing,half-unwilling, followed her, hobbling either from his hurt or his fear,if indeed the two were separate. Amabel, in the mere growing certaintythat to be near Miss Coningsby was to be as near safety as possible,followed; but she took care to follow her master. Somehow she didn'tthink Miss Coningsby, if she should look round, would like to see herpushing on out of her place. So, biting her lips a trifle nervously, andas nervously settling her sleeves at her wrists, she controlled herimpulse to thrust right up against the strange lady and contentedherself with keeping her eyes fixed on the tall assured figure whichpassed through the drawing-room door and came out among...

Among the powers and princes of the dance. For Amabel, as she in turncame into the hall, had the most bewildering vision of a multitude ofinvaders. She couldn't at once grasp it, but as she gazed and panted shesaw that the whole house had changed. The walls, the stairs, the doors,the ceiling, were all alive. They were formed--all that she could see ofthem through snow and mist--of innumerable shapes, continuouslyshifting, sliding over and between each other. They were in masses ofcolour--black mostly, she seemed to see, but with ripples of grey andsilver and fiery-red passing over them. Dark pillars of earth stood inthe walls, and through them burning swords pierced, and huge old cups ofpouring waters were emptied, and grey clubs were beaten. She screamedonce despairingly, and Miss Coningsby looked round over her shoulder.But the very movement, though in a way reassuring, was immediately moreterrifying; for it seemed to divide even that solitary figure ofcomfort, and there were two shapes before her: one was the strange ladyand one was a man, in a great white cloak and a golden helmet with acrown round it. As if treading a dance together, the two wentforward--and the king or emperor or whatever he was also looked backover his shoulder. Amabel was near fainting, but as she met the awfuleyes that shone at her she was gathered together and strengthened. Shehad her duty to do, she reminded herself; if the storm stopped, they'dwant the hall tidied up. She must be there in case the hall wantedtidying up. She forgot, in that necessity, the eyes that called to her,and the lord of secular labour vanished from her sight, for she washerself part of the hierarchy that is he. She stood still, concentratedon that thought: "If the storm stops, they'll want the hall tidiedup--tidied up--tidied." She wished spasmodically that those suddenshining figures wouldn't come between her and Miss Coningsby, anddetermined, early in the New Year, to have her eyes seen to. Meanwhile,if the storm stopped...

High above them, at the top of the stairs, Nancy looked down. She sawbelow her Sybil standing in the middle of the hall: she saw the storm inits elemental shapes of wind and water dancing about her. The sight kepther gaze momentarily even from Joanna in front of her, and in thatmoment she saw Sybil imperiously put out her left hand.

She remembered that movement: once, not so long ago, her father had comehome tired and with a bad chill, and she and Ralph had been makingrather a row dancing to the gramophone or something--she remembered theexact gesture with which Sybil had flung a hand out towards them whilegoing on some errand. She hadn't needed to speak; the hand had somehowtossed them into subjection. Ralph and she had rather awkwardly brokenoff and begun chatting--quite quietly chatting--instead. Nancy smiled asthe memory touched her in the recognition of the gesture, and smiledagain to see the flagging of the white whirlwind. Sybil stood there, onehand flung out, looking up, and Nancy's eyes went back to the two infront of her, to Henry and Joanna facing each other now.

They went back to meet Henry's. He was looking past Joanna and theburning threat which was leaping and darting from the agile, hatefulhands; he was looking, as he had never looked before, at the girl whohad come again from among the mystery of the images. She looked back athim and laughed, and beckoned him by throwing out her hands towards him;and in simultaneous movement both she and Henry took a few running stepsand came together on Joanna's left.

"You're safe," he said abruptly, holding her.

"And you, darling?" she breathed anxiously.

"I?" he said. "O, yes, I'm safe;" and then, as if realizing the newdanger. "But run, run quickly; she's got the magic in her hands and shemay do anything. Get away, dearest and best; leave me to deal with her."

"You do it so well, don't you, sweetheart?" she mocked. "O darling, younever ought to be let deal with anyone but me."

The throbbing voice caught him away from the danger near them. He said:"And you then?"

"Ah! me," she said, "that was given to you alone: that's your only gift.Do you want more?"

"Haven't you that also--you who have all the rest?" he said.

She answered, smiling, "If you give it me. But don't give it me toosoon. Love isn't all that easy--even with you. Darling, your aunt'svery angry: let's talk to her together."

Obedient to her initiative, he turned with her. Between them and the topof the stairs the half-naked creature stood, sparks flying off fromthose spasmodically thrusting hands and little flames breaking fromthem. The paintings between those hands were thrusting of their ownvolition as nights before they had slid and rubbed in Nancy's. But theold woman was not facing them; she did not seem even to have noticedHenry's movement. She glared round her, unseeing, or rather seeingeverywhere hostility; she cried out accusing and cursing the whole worldof things that had caught away her victim, who was also the casket ofthe hidden god, and had left her but this solitary weapon of magicalfire. At the top of that height, between the lovers on one side andSybil below her on the other, she broke into a paroxysm of despair anddesire, supplicating and reassuring the lost child, denouncing theenemies that held him apart. Between the young lovers hand in hand onone side, and on the other the solitary figure of Sybil, whose hand wasstill stretched out over shapes that might, as Nancy saw them, have beenblown heaps of snow or might have been such forms as had come rioting upfrom the centre of the storm but were now still and crouching--betweenthose reconciled minds the distracted voice of Joanna pealed on. Nancyhad meant to speak, to try to soothe or satisfy, but she dared not. Ifshe did, if she asked and was answered, it would not be an answer thatshe could comprehend. Witches at the stake, with the fire already aboutthem, might have been shrieking so, with as little chance that thestricken hearers would know the names they adjured. But it was not ofwitches that Nancy thought, for all the screams and the flames; sheheard a more human cry. She heard the wail that rang through the curses,and it was a wail that went up from the depths of the world.

Her hand clasped Henry's passionately, for the sound of that universaldistress terrified her young soul. On the edge of a descent an antiquemisery was poised, and from the descent, from the house, from the earth,misery beyond telling lamented and complained--to men who could not aid,to gods who made no signs, for it was the gods themselves that had beenlost. "Ah! ah! ah!"--something final was gone, something beyonddescription precious: "Ah! all! ah!"--the little child was dead. Theywere weeping for it everywhere, as they had been always. She who stoodthere screamed and stabbed for torment of hate and loss, and frommarshes and cities all desire that had not learnt its own futility roseand swelled in hers. The litany of anguish poured out as if it were thesound of the earth itself rushing through space, and comfortless forever the spinning globe swept on, turning upon itself, crying to itself;and space was the echo of its lament, and time was the measure of itssobs. But more than mere awe of such unavailing grief and desire awokein Nancy then: cold at her heart, a personal fear touched her andstayed. It was a fear of that actual moment, but futurity lived in it.One hand was in Henry's, but the other was torn by Joanna's nails.Joanna stood in the way; beyond her the way led on to Sybil. She couldsee Sybil--ever so far off, in that descent upon which the great stairsopened. But Joanna stood in her way, overarching the way, pouring outher voice like the way itself. She wanted to go to Sybil, and that voicewas in the way--O folly of cowardice! that voice was the way. Why didn'tSybil move? Why didn't Sybil come? Around her, before her, glimmering inthe red glow that was uncertainly breaking from those ever-busy hands,she saw the mighty golden shapes looming. They were looming out of thecloud which was at once their background and yet they. It was difficultto see, but she caught the form of the designs she had studied--the oneand twenty revelations of the Greater Trumps. The red glow leapt andfaded; but the crown of the Emperor, but the front of the sphinx-drawnChariot, but the stretched sickle of the image of Death, but the sandalsof the two children playing together under an unshaped sun, themselvesshedding the light by which they played, but the girdle of the woman whodanced alone--all these and other fragmentary visions struck on herstraining eyes. The glow faded; her dazzled eyes refused to see moredistinction in those walls of mist. But as she shut them she heard Sybilcall, and then she heard a sudden rush close by her. She opened her eyeshastily, in time to see--of all mad things--the cat that had crouched onthe altar dash down the stairs towards Sybil. That wild and alien thingwhich Sybil had found in the magical storm, which had followed Joanna toher room and led her thence to the room of the images, which had almostmade a way for the snow to break into the house, which had dashed fromsnow to mist and from mist to snow as if it were the living secret ofuncontrolled power, which had instinctively assisted at the attemptedsacrifice to uncontrolled desire, itself unshaping since lacking theinstruments of shape, now rushed to the foot of the stairs, and absurdlychecked itself, and then with high feline grace stepped across the hallto Sybil's feet.

Sybil dropped her hand towards it and dropped it a soft word; it jumpeddelicately towards her hand and played round her foot, and jumped again.As it rushed, as it stayed, Joanna's cry also ceased. The power of itwas withdrawn; all power, all utterance, was withdrawn. The unexpectedsilence was more awful than even the wailing, for it was not a silenceof relief but of impotence. The cry of the world was choked; the ball,tossed from the juggler's hand, revolved in unspoken anguish. Themad-woman reeled once, as if she had been struck on the mouth; then,recovering, turned darting eyes to Sybil in the hall below. Through thesilence Sybil called to her: "The child's found, Joanna; the child'salive and lovely. All's well; the child's found." Joanna tried to speakand could not. She shuffled towards the stair; she turned her pointinghands, bearing their fiery weapon, as if she herself carried the swordof the crowned chieftain of fire, downward towards that otherconfronting form. Sybil took a step forward, the cat leaping up againsther, and called again: "He's here. Come and adore."

In a forced and horrible croak, as if speech broke through againstcommandment and against control, Joanna said: "It's you all the time. Ishall see him when you're dead. When you're dead and the world'sdestroyed, I'll see my desire."

Amabel, crouching by the drawing-room door, saw the strange lady, herleft hand rising and falling in a dance with the leaping cat, stretchout the right as if in invitation. The open palm, the curved fingers,the arching thumb, took on a reflection of the cloud that hung over allthings: it seemed to Amabel that Miss Coningsby held out a golden handtowards the staircase down which Joanna was beginning to creep. The handwhich had helped Lothair and comforted Nancy and healed Aaron, which hadpicked up the kitten and closed the door and controlled the storm, wasstretched to gather in this last reverted madness of man. It lay there,very still, the centre of all things, the power and the glory, the palmglowing with a ruddy passion veiled by the aureate flesh--the hand ofall martyrs, enduring; of all lovers, welcoming; of all rulers,summoning. And, as if indeed it summoned, the cloud of gold rushed downtowards it, but it moved in shapes and figures, the hands of all thesymbols stretched towards the hand that, being human, was so much morethan symbol. Nancy and Henry from above beheld them, hands imperial andsacerdotal, single and joined, the working hands that built the Tower,the helpless hands that formed the Wheel, white hands stretching, fromthe snow, fiery hands thrusting from between Joanna's that burneddownwards and vanished, all activities rushing towards that reposethrough which activity beat in the blood that infused it. So the hand ofthe juggler had been stretched to cast and catch the tossed balls ofexistence; so the hand of the Fool had at last fulfilled the everlastingpromise and yielded its secrets to the expected hour. The cloud swirledonce around that open palm, as the intermingling shapes trod out a lastcircling measure, hiding all other forms, so that the hand itself wasall that could be seen as the rapturous powers wheeled inwards to it.For an infinitesimal fraction of time the immortal dance stood still toreceive the recollection of that ever-moving and never-broken repose ofsovereign being. Then suddenly they were gone, and the cloud was gone,and everywhere, breaking from Sybil's erect figure, shone a goldenlight, as of the fullness of the sun in his glory, expanding in a richfruition. Over the snow spread and heaped around, over Aaron and theothers by him, over the stairs and the landing and those who were on it,and so over and through the whole house, the light shone, exquisite andfull of promise, radiant and full of perfection. The chaos of the hallwas a marvel of new shape and colour; the faces of those who stoodaround were illumined from within. It was Christmas night, but in thesunlight, between Sybil and Joanna, seriously engrossed, two smallstrange children played. The mystery which that ancient seer had workedin the Greater Trumps had fulfilled itself, at that time and in thatplace, to so high a point of knowledge. Sybil stood there, and from herthe sun of the Tarots ruled, and the holy children of the sun, thecompany of the blessed, were seen at least by some of the eyes thatwatched. For Amabel saw them and was ignorantly at peace; and Aaron sawthem and was ashamed; and Nancy and Henry saw them, and Nancy laughedfor mere joy of seeing, and when he heard it Henry felt his heart labouras it had never done before with the summons and the power; and Sybilsaw them and adored, and saw beyond them, running down the stairsbetween herself and Nancy as if he were their union, and poised behindJoanna as if he supported and protected her, the vivid figure of theFool. He had come from all sides at once, yet he was but one.All-reconciling and perfect, he was there, running down the stairs as hehad run down the storm. And as he passed, receiving and bestowing light,Nancy, on an impulse, turned and kissed Henry--before the light shouldvanish, so that she might have done it, might have done it if in days tocome she should ever find herself a part of that dreadful cry which hadgone up from the world. But even in the kiss she felt her smarting handthrobbing an answer, an answer and an oath that years should seevaliantly kept. When she looked back, the figure of the Fool was gone;she heard Joanna cry out in a natural voice, and she saw the childrencease from their play and look up, and then Joanna ran down the rest ofthe stairs, and, as she reached the bottom, cried out once more as if inpain, and stumbled and fell.

The cry shook the golden light; it vanished. Amabel, gazing, saw MissConingsby in the hall and the old woman lying in a heap at the foot ofthe stairs, and before she had time to move she saw the other visitorscoming flying down them. They came very swiftly, but as if they alsocame in order; the lovers first, still hand in hand, and after them Mr.Coningsby, still anxiously watching Nancy, and thinking as fast as hecould that he must keep in touch with her, whatever happened. And afterhim again came Ralph and Stephen, distracted from their mutualhostility, but with all their strength ready and vigilant. The threegreat orders of grace and intellect and corporeal strength, in thoseimmature servants of their separate degrees, gathered round the placewhere Sybil kneeled by Joanna, and the search within and the searchwithout were joined.

Mr. Coningsby peered over Henry's shoulder. "Has she collapsed?" he saidhopefully.

Nancy kneeled down also, and Sybil's hands and hers were busy witheasing and helping. Amabel, released at last from what she felt musthave been a deliciously thrilling nightmare, ran of her own accord toget some water. Aaron came over to the rest. Joanna opened her eyes, andthey fell on Nancy. She looked, uncertainly and then eagerly, at thegrave young face bending over her, then a great gladness shone in herown. She put out a trembling hand, and Nancy clasped it. She murmuredsomething, and Nancy in similar indistinguishable words answered. Sybilstood up, and Mr. Coningsby edged round to her.

"What's she doing?" he asked, not quite knowing why he was speaking in awhisper. "Is she apologizing or what?"

Sybil did not immediately answer. She looked at him with a smile; thenwith the same smile she looked round the hall, and her eyes lingered ona little heap that lay where she had been standing just before, a littleheap of golden dust, strewn with charred and flimsy scraps, so lightthat already one or two were floating away in the mere stir of the air.The presentation of the dance was for ever done. She looked at themtenderly; then she turned back to her brother, and said, "She has foundher child."

"Has she?" Mr. Coningsby said. "Where?" And he also looked round thehall, as if he suspected that Joanna's child was likely to be a freshnuisance.

"She thinks Nancy is her child," Sybil said.

Mr. Coningsby stared, tried to grasp it, moved a little, was gentlypushed out of the way by Amabel with an "Excuse me, sir," glowered afterher, and said: "Nancy?"

"She thinks so," Sybil answered.

"But...but, I mean...what about the age?" her brother protested. "Shecan't think a girl of twenty--forty, perhaps, if she thought she'd grownup, or four if she hadn't. But not twenty."

"She's looking at something immortal," Sybil said. "Age..." Shedelicately shrugged it away.

Mr. Coningsby stared at her, and then realized that he was a littlefrightened of her, though he couldn't think why. "But," he began again,and suddenly remembered a single simple fact, "but I thought her childwas a boy. I'm sure someone told me it was a boy. She doesn't thinkNancy's a boy, does she? Don't you mean Henry?"

"No," Sybil said, "I mean Nancy. I don't think it much matters aboutgirl or boy. She thought her child was Messias."

"O!" Mr. Coningsby said. "And is Nancy Messias?"

"Near enough," Sybil answered. "There'll be pain and heart-burning yet,but, for the moment, near enough."

THE END