The Longest Journey

E. M. Forster

E. M. Forster

The Longest Journey

PUBLISHER NOTES:

Take our Free
Quick Quiz and Find Out Which
Best Side Hustle is ✓**Best for You**.

✓ **VISIT OUR WEBSITE**:

→ ***LYFREEDOM.COM*** ← ← ***CLICK HERE*** ←

Part 1
Cambridge

Chapter 1

"The cow is there," said Ansell, lighting a match and holding it out over the carpet. No one spoke. He waited till the end of the match fell off. Then he said again, "She is there, the cow. There, now."

"You have not proved it," said a voice.

"I have proved it to myself."

"I have proved to myself that she isn't," said the voice. "The cow is not there." Ansell frowned and lit another match.

"She's there for me," he declared. "I don't care whether she's there for you or not. Whether I'm in Cambridge or Iceland or dead, the cow will be there."

It was philosophy. They were discussing the existence of objects. Do they exist only when there is some one to look at them? Or have they a real existence of their own? It is all very interesting, but at the same time it is difficult. Hence the cow. She seemed to make things easier. She was so familiar, so solid, that surely the truths that she illustrated would in time become familiar and solid also. Is the cow there or not? This was better than deciding between objectivity and subjectivity. So at Oxford, just at the same time, one was asking, "What do our rooms look like in the vac.?"

"Look here, Ansell. I'm there—in the meadow—the cow's there. You're there—the cow's there. Do you agree so far?" "Well?"

"Well, if you go, the cow stops; but if I go, the cow goes. Then what will happen if you stop and I go?"

Several voices cried out that this was quibbling.

"I know it is," said the speaker brightly, and silence descended again, while they tried honestly to think the matter out.

Rickie, on whose carpet the matches were being dropped, did not like to join in the discussion. It was too difficult for him. He could not even quibble. If he spoke, he should simply make himself a fool. He preferred to listen, and to watch the tobacco-smoke stealing out past the window-seat into the tranquil October air. He could see the court too, and the college cat teasing the college tortoise, and the kitchen-men with supper-trays upon their heads. Hot food for one—that must be for the geographical don, who never came in for Hall; cold food for three, apparently at half-a-crown a head, for some one he did not know; hot food, a la carte—obviously for the ladies haunting the next staircase; cold food for two, at two shillings—going to Ansell's rooms for himself and Ansell, and as it passed under the lamp he saw that it was meringues again. Then the bedmakers began to arrive, chatting to each other pleasantly, and he could hear Ansell's bedmaker say, "Oh dang!" when she found she had to lay Ansell's tablecloth; for there was not a breath

stirring. The great elms were motionless, and seemed still in the glory of midsummer, for the darkness hid the yellow blotches on their leaves, and their outlines were still rounded against the tender sky. Those elms were Dryads—so Rickie believed or pretended, and the line between the two is subtler than we admit. At all events they were lady trees, and had for generations fooled the college statutes by their residence in the haunts of youth.

But what about the cow? He returned to her with a start, for this would never do. He also would try to think the matter out. Was she there or not? The cow. There or not. He strained his eyes into the night.

Either way it was attractive. If she was there, other cows were there too. The darkness of Europe was dotted with them, and in the far East their flanks were shining in the rising sun. Great herds of them stood browsing in pastures where no man came nor need ever come, or plashed knee-deep by the brink of impassable rivers. And this, moreover, was the view of Ansell. Yet Tilliard's view had a good deal in it. One might do worse than follow Tilliard, and suppose the cow not to be there unless oneself was there to see her. A cowless world, then, stretched round him on every side. Yet he had only to peep into a field, and, click! it would at once become radiant with bovine life.

Suddenly he realized that this, again, would never do. As usual, he had missed the whole point, and was overlaying philosophy with gross and senseless details. For if the cow was not there, the world and the fields were not there either. And what would Ansell care about sunlit flanks or impassable streams? Rickie rebuked his own groveling soul, and turned his eyes away from the night, which had led him to such absurd conclusions.

The fire was dancing, and the shadow of Ansell, who stood close up to it, seemed to dominate the little room. He was still talking, or rather jerking, and he was still lighting matches and dropping their ends upon the carpet. Now and then he would make a motion with his feet as if he were running quickly backward upstairs, and would tread on the edge of the fender, so that the fire-irons went flying and the buttered-bun dishes crashed against each other in the hearth. The other philosophers were crouched in odd shapes on the sofa and table and chairs, and one, who was a little bored, had crawled to the piano and was timidly trying the Prelude to Rhinegold with his knee upon the soft pedal. The air was heavy with good tobacco-smoke and the pleasant warmth of tea, and as Rickie became more sleepy the events of the day seemed to float one by one before his acquiescent eyes. In the morning he had read Theocritus, whom he believed to be the greatest of Greek poets; he had lunched with a merry don and had tasted Zwieback biscuits; then he had walked with people he liked, and had walked just long enough; and now his room was full of other people whom he liked, and when they left he would go and have supper with Ansell, whom he liked as well as any one. A year ago

he had known none of these joys. He had crept cold and friendless and ignorant out of a great public school, preparing for a silent and solitary journey, and praying as a highest favour that he might be left alone. Cambridge had not answered his prayer. She had taken and soothed him, and warmed him, and had laughed at him a little, saying that he must not be so tragic yet awhile, for his boyhood had been but a dusty corridor that led to the spacious halls of youth. In one year he had made many friends and learnt much, and he might learn even more if he could but concentrate his attention on that cow.

The fire had died down, and in the gloom the man by the piano ventured to ask what would happen if an objective cow had a subjective calf. Ansell gave an angry sigh, and at that moment there was a tap on the door.

"Come in!" said Rickie.

The door opened. A tall young woman stood framed in the light that fell from the passage.

"Ladies!" whispered every-one in great agitation.

"Yes?" he said nervously, limping towards the door (he was rather lame). "Yes? Please come in. Can I be any good—"

"Wicked boy!" exclaimed the young lady, advancing a gloved finger into the room. "Wicked, wicked boy!"

He clasped his head with his hands.

"Agnes! Oh how perfectly awful!"

"Wicked, intolerable boy!" She turned on the electric light. The philosophers were revealed with unpleasing suddenness. "My goodness, a tea-party! Oh really, Rickie, you are too bad! I say again: wicked, abominable, intolerable boy! I'll have you horsewhipped. If you please"—she turned to the symposium, which had now risen to its feet "If you please, he asks me and my brother for the week-end. We accept. At the station, no Rickie. We drive to where his old lodgings were—Trumpery Road or some such name—and he's left them. I'm furious, and before I can stop my brother, he's paid off the cab and there we are stranded. I've walked—walked for miles. Pray can you tell me what is to be done with Rickie?"

"He must indeed be horsewhipped," said Tilliard pleasantly. Then he made a bolt for the door.

"Tilliard—do stop—let me introduce Miss Pembroke—don't all go!" For his friends were flying from his visitor like mists before the sun. "Oh, Agnes, I am so sorry; I've nothing to say. I simply forgot you were coming, and everything about you."

"Thank you, thank you! And how soon will you remember to ask where Herbert is?"

"Where is he, then?"

"I shall not tell you."

"But didn't he walk with you?"

"I shall not tell, Rickie. It's part of your punishment. You are not really sorry yet. I shall punish you again later."

She was quite right. Rickie was not as much upset as he ought to have been. He was sorry that he had forgotten, and that he had caused his visitors inconvenience. But he did not feel profoundly degraded, as a young man should who has acted discourteously to a young lady. Had he acted discourteously to his bedmaker or his gyp, he would have minded just as much, which was not polite of him.

"First, I'll go and get food. Do sit down and rest. Oh, let me introduce —"

Ansell was now the sole remnant of the discussion party. He still stood on the hearthrug with a burnt match in his hand. Miss Pembroke's arrival had never disturbed him.

"Let me introduce Mr. Ansell—Miss Pembroke."

There came an awful moment—a moment when he almost regretted that he had a clever friend. Ansell remained absolutely motionless, moving neither hand nor head. Such behaviour is so unknown that Miss Pembroke did not realize what had happened, and kept her own hand stretched out longer than is maidenly.

"Coming to supper?" asked Ansell in low, grave tones.

"I don't think so," said Rickie helplessly.

Ansell departed without another word.

"Don't mind us," said Miss Pembroke pleasantly. "Why shouldn't you keep your engagement with your friend? Herbert's finding lodgings,—that's why he's not here,—and they're sure to be able to give us some dinner. What jolly rooms you've got!"

"Oh no—not a bit. I say, I am sorry. I am sorry. I am most awfully sorry."

"What about?"

"Ansell" Then he burst forth. "Ansell isn't a gentleman. His father's a draper. His uncles are farmers. He's here because he's so clever—just on account of his brains. Now, sit down. He isn't a gentleman at all." And he hurried off to order some dinner.

"What a snob the boy is getting!" thought Agnes, a good deal mollified. It never struck her that those could be the words of affection—that Rickie would never have spoken them about a person whom he disliked. Nor did it strike her that Ansell's humble birth scarcely explained the quality of his rudeness. She was willing to find life full of trivialities. Six months ago and she might have minded; but now—she cared not what men might do unto her, for she had her own splendid lover, who could have knocked all these unhealthy undergraduates into a cocked-hat. She dared not tell Gerald a word of what had happened: he might have come up from wherever he was and half killed Ansell. And she determined not to tell her brother either, for her nature was kindly, and it pleased her to pass things over.

She took off her gloves, and then she took off her ear-rings and began to admire them. These ear-rings were a freak of hers—her only freak. She had always wanted some, and the day Gerald asked her to marry him she went to a shop and had her ears pierced. In some wonderful way she knew that it was right. And he had given her the rings—little gold knobs, copied, the jeweller told them, from something prehistoric and he had kissed the spots of blood on her handkerchief. Herbert, as usual, had been shocked.

"I can't help it," she cried, springing up. "I'm not like other girls." She began to pace about Rickie's room, for she hated to keep quiet. There was nothing much to see in it. The pictures were not attractive, nor did they attract her—school groups, Watts' "Sir Percival," a dog running after a rabbit, a man running after a maid, a cheap brown Madonna in a cheap green frame—in short, a collection where one mediocrity was generally cancelled by another. Over the door there hung a long photograph of a city with waterways, which Agnes, who had never been to Venice, took to be Venice, but which people who had been to Stockholm knew to be Stockholm. Rickie's mother, looking rather sweet, was standing on the mantelpiece. Some more pictures had just arrived from the framers and were leaning with their faces to the wall, but she did not bother to turn them round. On the table were dirty teacups, a flat chocolate cake, and Omar Khayyam, with an Oswego biscuit between his pages. Also a vase filled with the crimson leaves of autumn. This made her smile.

Then she saw her host's shoes: he had left them lying on the sofa. Rickie was slightly deformed, and so the shoes were not the same size, and one of them had a thick heel to help him towards an even walk. "Ugh!" she exclaimed, and removed them gingerly to the bedroom. There she saw other shoes and boots and pumps, a whole row of them, all deformed. "Ugh! Poor boy! It is too bad. Why shouldn't he be like other people? This hereditary business is too awful." She shut the door with a sigh. Then she recalled the perfect form of Gerald, his athletic walk, the poise of his shoulders, his arms stretched forward to receive her. Gradually she was comforted.

"I beg your pardon, miss, but might I ask how many to lay?" It was the bedmaker, Mrs. Aberdeen.

"Three, I think," said Agnes, smiling pleasantly. "Mr. Elliot'll be back in a minute. He has gone to order dinner.

"Thank you, miss."

"Plenty of teacups to wash up!"

"But teacups is easy washing, particularly Mr. Elliot's."

"Why are his so easy?"

"Because no nasty corners in them to hold the dirt. Mr. Anderson—he's below-has crinkly noctagons, and one wouldn't believe the difference. It was I bought these for Mr. Elliot. His one thought is to save

one trouble. I never seed such a thoughtful gentleman. The world, I say, will be the better for him." She took the teacups into the gyp room, and then returned with the tablecloth, and added, "if he's spared."

"I'm afraid he isn't strong," said Agnes.

"Oh, miss, his nose! I don't know what he'd say if he knew I mentioned his nose, but really I must speak to someone, and he has neither father nor mother. His nose! It poured twice with blood in the Long."

"Yes?"

"It's a thing that ought to be known. I assure you, that little room!... And in any case, Mr. Elliot's a gentleman that can ill afford to lose it. Luckily his friends were up; and I always say they're more like brothers than anything else."

"Nice for him. He has no real brothers."

"Oh, Mr. Hornblower, he is a merry gentleman, and Mr. Tilliard too! And Mr. Elliot himself likes his romp at times. Why, it's the merriest staircase in the buildings! Last night the bedmaker from W said to me,'What are you doing to my gentlemen? Here's Mr. Ansell come back 'ot with his collar flopping.' I said, 'And a good thing.' Some bedders keep their gentlemen just so; but surely, miss, the world being what it is, the longer one is able to laugh in it the better."

Bedmakers have to be comic and dishonest. It is expected of them. In a picture of university life it is their only function. So when we meet one who has the face of a lady, and feelings of which a lady might be proud, we pass her by.

"Yes?" said Miss Pembroke, and then their talk was stopped by the arrival of her brother.

"It is too bad!" he exclaimed. "It is really too bad."

"Now, Bertie boy, Bertie boy! I'll have no peevishness."

"I am not peevish, Agnes, but I have a full right to be. Pray, why did he not meet us? Why did he not provide rooms? And pray, why did you leave me to do all the settling? All the lodgings I knew are full, and our bedrooms look into a mews. I cannot help it. And then—look here! It really is too bad." He held up his foot like a wounded dog. It was dripping with water.

"Oho! This explains the peevishness. Off with it at once. It'll be another of your colds."

"I really think I had better." He sat down by the fire and daintily unlaced his boot. "I notice a great change in university tone. I can never remember swaggering three abreast along the pavement and charging inoffensive visitors into a gutter when I was an undergraduate. One of the men, too, wore an Eton tie. But the others, I should say, came from very queer schools, if they came from any schools at all."

Mr. Pembroke was nearly twenty years older than his sister, and had never been as handsome. But he was not at all the person to knock into a gutter, for though not in orders, he had the air of being on the verge of

them, and his features, as well as his clothes, had the clerical cut. In his presence conversation became pure and colourless and full of understatements, and—just as if he was a real clergyman—neither men nor boys ever forgot that he was there. He had observed this, and it pleased him very much. His conscience permitted him to enter the Church whenever his profession, which was the scholastic, should demand it.

"No gutter in the world's as wet as this," said Agnes, who had peeled off her brother's sock, and was now toasting it at the embers on a pair of tongs.

"Surely you know the running water by the edge of the Trumpington road? It's turned on occasionally to clear away the refuse—a most primitive idea. When I was up we had a joke about it, and called it the 'Pem.'"

"How complimentary!"

"You foolish girl,—not after me, of course. We called it the 'Pem' because it is close to Pembroke College. I remember—" He smiled a little, and twiddled his toes. Then he remembered the bedmaker, and said, "My sock is now dry. My sock, please."

"Your sock is sopping. No, you don't!" She twitched the tongs away from him. Mrs. Aberdeen, without speaking, fetched a pair of Rickie's socks and a pair of Rickie's shoes.

"Thank you; ah, thank you. I am sure Mr. Elliot would allow it."

Then he said in French to his sister, "Has there been the slightest sign of Frederick?"

"Now, do call him Rickie, and talk English. I found him here. He had forgotten about us, and was very sorry. Now he's gone to get some dinner, and I can't think why he isn't back."

Mrs. Aberdeen left them.

"He wants pulling up sharply. There is nothing original in absent-mindedness. True originality lies elsewhere. Really, the lower classes have no nous. However can I wear such deformities?" For he had been madly trying to cram a right-hand foot into a left-hand shoe.

"Don't!" said Agnes hastily. "Don't touch the poor fellow's things." The sight of the smart, stubby patent leather made her almost feel faint. She had known Rickie for many years, but it seemed so dreadful and so different now that he was a man. It was her first great contact with the abnormal, and unknown fibres of her being rose in revolt against it. She frowned when she heard his uneven tread upon the stairs.

"Agnes—before he arrives—you ought never to have left me and gone to his rooms alone. A most elementary transgression. Imagine the unpleasantness if you had found him with friends. If Gerald—"

Rickie by now had got into a fluster. At the kitchens he had lost his head, and when his turn came—he had had to wait—he had yielded his place to those behind, saying that he didn't matter. And he had wasted

more precious time buying bananas, though he knew that the Pembrokes were not partial to fruit. Amid much tardy and chaotic hospitality the meal got under way. All the spoons and forks were anyhow, for Mrs. Aberdeen's virtues were not practical. The fish seemed never to have been alive, the meat had no kick, and the cork of the college claret slid forth silently, as if ashamed of the contents. Agnes was particularly pleasant. But her brother could not recover himself. He still remembered their desolate arrival, and he could feel the waters of the Pem eating into his instep.

"Rickie," cried the lady, "are you aware that you haven't congratulated me on my engagement?"

Rickie laughed nervously, and said, "Why no! No more I have."

"Say something pretty, then."

"I hope you'll be very happy," he mumbled. "But I don't know anything about marriage."

"Oh, you awful boy! Herbert, isn't he just the same? But you do know something about Gerald, so don't be so chilly and cautious. I've just realized, looking at those groups, that you must have been at school together. Did you come much across him?"

"Very little," he answered, and sounded shy. He got up hastily, and began to muddle with the coffee.

"But he was in the same house. Surely that's a house group?"

"He was a prefect." He made his coffee on the simple system. One had a brown pot, into which the boiling stuff was poured. Just before serving one put in a drop of cold water, and the idea was that the grounds fell to the bottom.

"Wasn't he a kind of athletic marvel? Couldn't he knock any boy or master down?"

"Yes."

"If he had wanted to," said Mr. Pembroke, who had not spoken for some time.

"If he had wanted to," echoed Rickie. "I do hope, Agnes, you'll be most awfully happy. I don't know anything about the army, but I should think it must be most awfully interesting."

Mr. Pembroke laughed faintly.

"Yes, Rickie. The army is a most interesting profession,—the profession of Wellington and Marlborough and Lord Roberts; a most interesting profession, as you observe. A profession that may mean death—death, rather than dishonour."

"That's nice," said Rickie, speaking to himself. "Any profession may mean dishonour, but one isn't allowed to die instead. The army's different. If a soldier makes a mess, it's thought rather decent of him, isn't it, if he blows out his brains? In the other professions it somehow seems cowardly."

"I am not competent to pronounce," said Mr. Pembroke, who was not accustomed to have his schoolroom satire commented on. "I merely know that the army is the finest profession in the world. Which reminds me, Rickie—have you been thinking about yours?"

"No."

"Not at all?"

"No."

"Now, Herbert, don't bother him. Have another meringue."

"But, Rickie, my dear boy, you're twenty. It's time you thought. The Tripos is the beginning of life, not the end. In less than two years you will have got your B.A. What are you going to do with it?"

"I don't know."

"You're M.A., aren't you?" asked Agnes; but her brother proceeded—

"I have seen so many promising, brilliant lives wrecked simply on account of this—not settling soon enough. My dear boy, you must think. Consult your tastes if possible—but think. You have not a moment to lose. The Bar, like your father?"

"Oh, I wouldn't like that at all."

"I don't mention the Church."

"Oh, Rickie, do be a clergyman!" said Miss Pembroke. "You'd be simply killing in a wide-awake."

He looked at his guests hopelessly. Their kindness and competence overwhelmed him. "I wish I could talk to them as I talk to myself," he thought. "I'm not such an ass when I talk to myself. I don't believe, for instance, that quite all I thought about the cow was rot." Aloud he said, "I've sometimes wondered about writing."

"Writing?" said Mr. Pembroke, with the tone of one who gives everything its trial. "Well, what about writing? What kind of writing?"

"I rather like,"—he suppressed something in his throat,—"I rather like trying to write little stories."

"Why, I made sure it was poetry!" said Agnes. "You're just the boy for poetry."

"I had no idea you wrote. Would you let me see something? Then I could judge."

The author shook his head. "I don't show it to any one. It isn't anything. I just try because it amuses me."

"What is it about?"

"Silly nonsense."

"Are you ever going to show it to any one?"

"I don't think so."

Mr. Pembroke did not reply, firstly, because the meringue he was eating was, after all, Rickie's; secondly, because it was gluey and stuck his jaws together. Agnes observed that the writing was really a very good idea: there was Rickie's aunt,—she could push him.

"Aunt Emily never pushes any one; she says they always rebound and crush her."

"I only had the pleasure of seeing your aunt once. I should have thought her a quite uncrushable person. But she would be sure to help you."

"I couldn't show her anything. She'd think them even sillier than they are."

"Always running yourself down! There speaks the artist!"

"I'm not modest," he said anxiously. "I just know they're bad."

Mr. Pembroke's teeth were clear of meringue, and he could refrain no longer. "My dear Rickie, your father and mother are dead, and you often say your aunt takes no interest in you. Therefore your life depends on yourself. Think it over carefully, but settle, and having once settled, stick. If you think that this writing is practicable, and that you could make your living by it—that you could, if needs be, support a wife—then by all means write. But you must work. Work and drudge. Begin at the bottom of the ladder and work upwards."

Rickie's head drooped. Any metaphor silenced him. He never thought of replying that art is not a ladder—with a curate, as it were, on the first rung, a rector on the second, and a bishop, still nearer heaven, at the top. He never retorted that the artist is not a bricklayer at all, but a horseman, whose business it is to catch Pegasus at once, not to practise for him by mounting tamer colts. This is hard, hot, and generally ungraceful work, but it is not drudgery. For drudgery is not art, and cannot lead to it.

"Of course I don't really think about writing," he said, as he poured the cold water into the coffee. "Even if my things ever were decent, I don't think the magazines would take them, and the magazines are one's only chance. I read somewhere, too, that Marie Corelli's about the only person who makes a thing out of literature. I'm certain it wouldn't pay me."

"I never mentioned the word 'pay,'" said Mr. Pembroke uneasily.

"You must not consider money. There are ideals too."

"I have no ideals."

Rickie!" she exclaimed. "Horrible boy!"

"No, Agnes, I have no ideals." Then he got very red, for it was a phrase he had caught from Ansell, and he could not remember what came next.

"The person who has no ideals," she exclaimed, "is to be pitied."

"I think so too," said Mr. Pembroke, sipping his coffee. "Life without an ideal would be like the sky without the sun."

Rickie looked towards the night, wherein there now twinkled innumerable stars—gods and heroes, virgins and brides, to whom the Greeks have given their names.

"Life without an ideal—" repeated Mr. Pembroke, and then stopped, for his mouth was full of coffee grounds. The same affliction had

overtaken Agnes. After a little jocose laughter they departed to their lodgings, and Rickie, having seen them as far as the porter's lodge, hurried, singing as he went, to Ansell's room, burst open the door, and said, "Look here! Whatever do you mean by it?"

"By what?" Ansell was sitting alone with a piece of paper in front of him. On it was a diagram—a circle inside a square, inside which was again a square.

"By being so rude. You're no gentleman, and I told her so." He slammed him on the head with a sofa cushion. "I'm certain one ought to be polite, even to people who aren't saved." ("Not saved" was a phrase they applied just then to those whom they did not like or intimately know.) "And I believe she is saved. I never knew any one so always good-tempered and kind. She's been kind to me ever since I knew her. I wish you'd heard her trying to stop her brother: you'd have certainly come round. Not but what he was only being nice as well. But she is really nice. And I thought she came into the room so beautifully. Do you know—oh, of course, you despise music—but Anderson was playing Wagner, and he'd just got to the part where they sing

'Rheingold! 'Rheingold!

and the sun strikes into the waters, and the music, which up to then has so often been in E flat—"

"Goes into D sharp. I have not understood a single word, partly because you talk as if your mouth was full of plums, partly because I don't know whom you're talking about." "Miss Pembroke—whom you saw."

"I saw no one."

"Who came in?"

"No one came in."

"You're an ass!" shrieked Rickie. "She came in. You saw her come in. She and her brother have been to dinner."

"You only think so. They were not really there."

"But they stop till Monday."

"You only think that they are stopping."

"But—oh, look here, shut up! The girl like an empress—"

"I saw no empress, nor any girl, nor have you seen them."

"Ansell, don't rag."

"Elliot, I never rag, and you know it. She was not really there."

There was a moment's silence. Then Rickie exclaimed, "I've got you. You say—or was it Tilliard?—no, YOU say that the cow's there. Well—there these people are, then. Got you. Yah!"

"Did it never strike you that phenomena may be of two kinds: ONE, those which have a real existence, such as the cow; TWO, those which are the subjective product of a diseased imagination, and which, to our destruction, we invest with the semblance of reality? If this never struck you, let it strike you now."

Rickie spoke again, but received no answer. He paced a little up and down the sombre roam. Then he sat on the edge of the table and watched his clever friend draw within the square a circle, and within the circle a square, and inside that another circle, and inside that another square.

"Whv will you do that?"

No answer.

"Are they real?"

"The inside one is—the one in the middle of everything, that there's never room enough to draw."

Chapter 2

A little this side of Madingley, to the left of the road, there is a secluded dell, paved with grass and planted with fir-trees. It could not have been worth a visit twenty years ago, for then it was only a scar of chalk, and it is not worth a visit at the present day, for the trees have grown too thick and choked it. But when Rickie was up, it chanced to be the brief season of its romance, a season as brief for a chalk-pit as a man—its divine interval between the bareness of boyhood and the stuffiness of age. Rickie had discovered it in his second term, when the January snows had melted and left fiords and lagoons of clearest water between the inequalities of the floor. The place looked as big as Switzerland or Norway—as indeed for the moment it was— and he came upon it at a time when his life too was beginning to expand. Accordingly the dell became for him a kind of church—a church where indeed you could do anything you liked, but where anything you did would be transfigured. Like the ancient Greeks, he could even laugh at his holy place and leave it no less holy. He chatted gaily about it, and about the pleasant thoughts with which it inspired him; he took his friends there; he even took people whom he did not like. "Procul este, profani!" exclaimed a delighted aesthete on being introduced to it. But this was never to be the attitude of Rickie. He did not love the vulgar herd, but he knew that his own vulgarity would be greater if he forbade it ingress, and that it was not by preciosity that he would attain to the intimate spirit of the dell. Indeed, if he had agreed with the aesthete, he would possibly not have introduced him. If the dell was to bear any inscription, he would have liked it to be "This way to Heaven," painted on a sign-post by the high-road, and he did not realize till later years that the number of visitors would not thereby have sensibly increased.

On the blessed Monday that the Pembrokes left, he walked out here with three friends. It was a day when the sky seemed enormous. One cloud, as large as a continent, was voyaging near the sun, whilst other clouds seemed anchored to the horizon, too lazy or too happy to move. The sky itself was of the palest blue, paling to white where it approached the earth; and the earth, brown, wet, and odorous, was engaged beneath it on its yearly duty of decay. Rickie was open to the complexities of autumn; he felt extremely tiny—extremely tiny and extremely important; and perhaps the combination is as fair as any that exists. He hoped that all his life he would never be peevish or unkind.

"Elliot is in a dangerous state," said Ansell. They had reached the dell, and had stood for some time in silence, each leaning against a tree. It was too wet to sit down.

"How's that?" asked Rickie, who had not known he was in any state at all. He shut up Keats, whom he thought he had been reading, and slipped him back into his coat-pocket. Scarcely ever was he without a book.

"He's trying to like people."

"Then he's done for," said Widdrington. "He's dead."

"He's trying to like Hornblower."

The others gave shrill agonized cries.

"He wants to bind the college together. He wants to link us to the beefy set."

"I do like Hornblower," he protested. "I don't try."

"And Hornblower tries to like you."

"That part doesn't matter."

"But he does try to like you. He tries not to despise you. It is altogether a most public-spirited affair."

"Tilliard started them," said Widdrington. "Tilliard thinks it such a pity the college should be split into sets."

"Oh, Tilliard!" said Ansell, with much irritation. "But what can you expect from a person who's eternally beautiful? The other night we had been discussing a long time, and suddenly the light was turned on. Every one else looked a sight, as they ought. But there was Tilliard, sitting neatly on a little chair, like an undersized god, with not a curl crooked. I should say he will get into the Foreign Office."

"Why are most of us so ugly?" laughed Rickie.

"It's merely a sign of our salvation—merely another sign that the college is split."

"The college isn't split," cried Rickie, who got excited on this subject with unfailing regularity. "The college is, and has been, and always will be, one. What you call the beefy set aren't a set at all. They're just the rowing people, and naturally they chiefly see each other; but they're always nice to me or to any one. Of course, they think us rather asses, but it's quite in a pleasant way."

"That's my whole objection," said Ansell. "What right have they to think us asses in a pleasant way? Why don't they hate us? What right has Hornblower to smack me on the back when I've been rude to him?"

"Well, what right have you to be rude to him?"

"Because I hate him. You think it is so splendid to hate no one. I tell you it is a crime. You want to love every one equally, and that's worse than impossible it's wrong. When you denounce sets, you're really trying to destroy friendship."

"I maintain," said Rickie—it was a verb he clung to, in the hope that it would lend stability to what followed—"I maintain that one can like many more people than one supposes."

"And I maintain that you hate many more people than you pretend."

"I hate no one," he exclaimed with extraordinary vehemence, and the dell re-echoed that it hated no one.

"We are obliged to believe you," said Widdrington, smiling a little "but we are sorry about it."

"Not even your father?" asked Ansell.

Rickie was silent.

"Not even your father?"

The cloud above extended a great promontory across the sun. It only lay there for a moment, yet that was enough to summon the lurking coldness from the earth.

"Does he hate his father?" said Widdrington, who had not known. "Oh, good!"

"But his father's dead. He will say it doesn't count."

"Still, it's something. Do you hate yours?"

Ansell did not reply. Rickie said: "I say, I wonder whether one ought to talk like this?"

"About hating dead people?"

"Yes—"

"Did you hate your mother?" asked Widdrington.

Rickie turned crimson.

"I don't see Hornblower's such a rotter," remarked the other man, whose name was James.

"James, you are diplomatic," said Ansell. "You are trying to tide over an awkward moment. You can go."

Widdrington was crimson too. In his wish to be sprightly he had used words without thinking of their meanings. Suddenly he realized that "father" and "mother" really meant father and mother—people whom he had himself at home. He was very uncomfortable, and thought Rickie had been rather queer. He too tried to revert to Hornblower, but Ansell would not let him. The sun came out, and struck on the white ramparts of the dell. Rickie looked straight at it. Then he said abruptly—

"I think I want to talk."

"I think you do," replied Ansell.

"Shouldn't I be rather a fool if I went through Cambridge without talking? It's said never to come so easy again. All the people are dead too. I can't see why I shouldn't tell you most things about my birth and parentage and education."

"Talk away. If you bore us, we have books."

With this invitation Rickie began to relate his history. The reader who has no book will be obliged to listen to it.

Some people spend their lives in a suburb, and not for any urgent reason. This had been the fate of Rickie. He had opened his eyes to filmy heavens, and taken his first walk on asphalt. He had seen civilization as a row of semi-detached villas, and society as a state in which men do not know the men who live next door. He had himself become part of the

grey monotony that surrounds all cities. There was no necessity for this—it was only rather convenient to his father.

Mr. Elliot was a barrister. In appearance he resembled his son, being weakly and lame, with hollow little cheeks, a broad white band of forehead, and stiff impoverished hair. His voice, which he did not transmit, was very suave, with a fine command of cynical intonation. By altering it ever so little he could make people wince, especially if they were simple or poor. Nor did he transmit his eyes. Their peculiar flatness, as if the soul looked through dirty window-panes, the unkindness of them, the cowardice, the fear in them, were to trouble the world no longer.

He married a girl whose voice was beautiful. There was no caress in it yet all who heard it were soothed, as though the world held some unexpected blessing. She called to her dogs one night over invisible waters, and he, a tourist up on the bridge, thought "that is extraordinarily adequate." In time he discovered that her figure, face, and thoughts were adequate also, and as she was not impossible socially, he married her. "I have taken a plunge," he told his family. The family, hostile at first, had not a word to say when the woman was introduced to them; and his sister declared that the plunge had been taken from the opposite bank.

Things only went right for a little time. Though beautiful without and within, Mrs. Elliot had not the gift of making her home beautiful; and one day, when she bought a carpet for the dining-room that clashed, he laughed gently, said he "really couldn't," and departed. Departure is perhaps too strong a word. In Mrs. Elliot's mouth it became, "My husband has to sleep more in town." He often came down to see them, nearly always unexpectedly, and occasionally they went to see him. "Father's house," as Rickie called it, only had three rooms, but these were full of books and pictures and flowers; and the flowers, instead of being squashed down into the vases as they were in mummy's house, rose gracefully from frames of lead which lay coiled at the bottom, as doubtless the sea serpent has to lie, coiled at the bottom of the sea. Once he was let to lift a frame out—only once, for he dropped some water on a creton. "I think he's going to have taste," said Mr. Elliot languidly. "It is quite possible," his wife replied. She had not taken off her hat and gloves, nor even pulled up her veil. Mr. Elliot laughed, and soon afterwards another lady came in, and they—went away.

"Why does father always laugh?" asked Rickie in the evening when he and his mother were sitting in the nursery.

"It is a way of your father's."

"Why does he always laugh at me? Am I so funny?" Then after a pause, "You have no sense of humour, have you, mummy?"

Mrs. Elliot, who was raising a thread of cotton to her lips, held it suspended in amazement.

"You told him so this afternoon. But I have seen you laugh." He nodded wisely. "I have seen you laugh ever so often. One day you were laughing alone all down in the sweet peas."

"Was I?"

"Yes. Were you laughing at me?"

"I was not thinking about you. Cotton, please—a reel of No. 50 white from my chest of drawers. Left hand drawer. Now which is your left hand?"

"The side my pocket is."

"And if you had no pocket?"

"The side my bad foot is."

"I meant you to say, 'the side my heart is,' " said Mrs. Elliot, holding up the duster between them. "Most of us—I mean all of us—can feel on one side a little watch, that never stops ticking. So even if you had no bad foot you would still know which is the left. No. 50 white, please. No; I'll get it myself." For she had remembered that the dark passage frightened him.

These were the outlines. Rickie filled them in with the slowness and the accuracy of a child. He was never told anything, but he discovered for himself that his father and mother did not love each other, and that his mother was lovable. He discovered that Mr. Elliot had dubbed him Rickie because he was rickety, that he took pleasure in alluding to his son's deformity, and was sorry that it was not more serious than his own. Mr. Elliot had not one scrap of genius. He gathered the pictures and the books and the flower-supports mechanically, not in any impulse of love. He passed for a cultured man because he knew how to select, and he passed for an unconventional man because he did not select quite like other people. In reality he never did or said or thought one single thing that had the slightest beauty or value. And in time Rickie discovered this as well.

The boy grew up in great loneliness. He worshipped his mother, and she was fond of him. But she was dignified and reticent, and pathos, like tattle, was disgusting to her. She was afraid of intimacy, in case it led to confidences and tears, and so all her life she held her son at a little distance. Her kindness and unselfishness knew no limits, but if he tried to be dramatic and thank her, she told him not to be a little goose. And so the only person he came to know at all was himself. He would play Halma against himself. He would conduct solitary conversations, in which one part of him asked and another part answered. It was an exciting game, and concluded with the formula: "Good-bye. Thank you. I am glad to have met you. I hope before long we shall enjoy another chat." And then perhaps he would sob for loneliness, for he would see real people—real brothers, real friends—doing in warm life the things he had pretended. "Shall I ever have a friend?" he demanded at the age of

twelve. "I don't see how. They walk too fast. And a brother I shall never have."

("No loss," interrupted Widdrington.

"But I shall never have one, and so I quite want one, even now.")

When he was thirteen Mr. Elliot entered on his illness. The pretty rooms in town would not do for an invalid, and so he came back to his home. One of the first consequences was that Rickie was sent to a public school. Mrs. Elliot did what she could, but she had no hold whatever over her husband.

"He worries me," he declared. "He's a joke of which I have got tired."

"Would it be possible to send him to a private tutor's?"

"No," said Mr. Elliot, who had all the money. "Coddling."

"I agree that boys ought to rough it; but when a boy is lame and very delicate, he roughs it sufficiently if he leaves home. Rickie can't play games. He doesn't make friends. He isn't brilliant. Thinking it over, I feel that as it's like this, we can't ever hope to give him the ordinary education. Perhaps you could think it over too." No.

"I am sure that things are best for him as they are. The day-school knocks quite as many corners off him as he can stand. He hates it, but it is good for him. A public school will not be good for him. It is too rough. Instead of getting manly and hard, he will—"

"My head, please."

Rickie departed in a state of bewildered misery, which was scarcely ever to grow clearer.

Each holiday he found his father more irritable, and a little weaker. Mrs. Elliot was quickly growing old. She had to manage the servants, to hush the neighbouring children, to answer the correspondence, to paper and re-paper the rooms—and all for the sake of a man whom she did not like, and who did not conceal his dislike for her. One day she found Rickie tearful, and said rather crossly, "Well, what is it this time?"

He replied, "Oh, mummy, I've seen your wrinkles your grey hair— I'm unhappy."

Sudden tenderness overcame her, and she cried, "My darling, what does it matter? Whatever does it matter now?"

He had never known her so emotional. Yet even better did he remember another incident. Hearing high voices from his father's room, he went upstairs in the hope that the sound of his tread might stop them. Mrs. Elliot burst open the door, and seeing him, exclaimed, "My dear! If you please, he's hit me." She tried to laugh it off, but a few hours later he saw the bruise which the stick of the invalid had raised upon his mother's hand.

God alone knows how far we are in the grip of our bodies. He alone can judge how far the cruelty of Mr. Elliot was the outcome of extenuating circumstances. But Mrs. Elliot could accurately judge of its extent.