30 March 1944

The Last Flight

Naseby

He walked as far as the hedge that signalled the end of the airfield.

The beating of the bounds. The men referred to it as his 'daily constitutional' and fretted when he didn't take it. They were superstitious. Everyone was superstitious.

Beyond the hedge there were bare fields, ploughed over last autumn. He didn't expect to see the alchemy of spring, to see the dull brown earth change to bright green and then pale gold. A man could count his life in harvests reaped. He had seen enough.

They were surrounded by flat farmland. The farmhouse itself stood square and immoveable over to the left. At night a red light shone from its roof to stop them crashing into it. If they flew over it when they were coming in to land they knew they had overshot and were in trouble.

From here he could see the farmer's daughter in the yard, feeding the geese. Wasn't there a nursery rhyme in

there somewhere? No, he was thinking of the farmer's wife, wasn't he? – cutting off tails with a carving knife. A horrid image. Poor mice, he had thought when he was a boy. Still thought the same now that he was a man. Nursery rhymes were brutal affairs.

He had never met the farmer's daughter nor did he know her name, but he was disproportionately fond of her. She always waved them off. Sometimes she was joined by her father, once or twice by her mother, but the girl's presence in the farmyard was a constant for every raid.

She caught sight of him now and waved. Rather than return the wave, he saluted her. He imagined she would like that. Of course, from this distance he was just a uniform. She had no idea who he was. Teddy was just one of the many.

He whistled for the dog.

1925

Alouette

'See!' he said. 'There – a lark. A skylark.' He glanced up at her and saw that she was looking in the wrong place. 'No, over there,' he said, pointing. She was completely hopeless.

'Oh,' she said at last. 'There, I *see* it! How queer – what's it doing?'

'Hovering, and then it'll go up again probably.' The skylark soared on its transcendental thread of song. The quivering flight of the bird and the beauty of its music triggered an unexpectedly deep emotion in him. 'Can you hear it?'

His aunt cupped a hand to an ear in a theatrical way. She was as out of place as a peacock, wearing an odd hat, red like a pillar-box and stuck with two large pheasant tail-feathers that bobbed around with the slightest movement of her head. He wouldn't be surprised if someone took a shot at her. *If only*, he thought. Teddy was allowed

– allowed himself – barbaric thoughts as long as they remained unvoiced. ('Good manners,' his mother counselled, were 'the armour that one must don anew every morning.')

'Hear what?' his aunt said eventually.

'The *song*,' he said, mustering patience. 'The skylark's song. It's stopped now,' he added as she continued to make a show of listening.

'It might begin again.'

'No, it won't. It can't, it's gone. Flown away.' He flapped his arms to demonstrate. Despite the feathers in her hat, she clearly knew nothing about birds. Or any animals, for that matter. She didn't even possess a cat. She was indifferent to Trixie, their lurcher, currently nosing her way enthusiastically through the dried-up ditch at the side of the road. Trixie was his most stalwart companion and had been by his side since she was a puppy, when she had been so small that she could squeeze through the front door of his sisters' dolls' house.

Was he supposed to be educating his aunt, he wondered? Was that why they were here? 'The lark's known for its song,' he said instructively. 'It's beautiful.' It was impossible to instruct on the subject of beauty, of course. It simply *was*. You were either moved by it or you weren't. His sisters, Pamela and Ursula, were. His elder brother, Maurice, wasn't. His brother Jimmy was too young for beauty, his father possibly too old. His father, Hugh, had a gramophone recording of 'The Lark Ascending' which they sometimes listened to on wet Sunday afternoons. It was lovely but not as lovely as the lark itself. 'The purpose of Art,' his mother, Sylvie, said – instructed even – 'is to

convey the truth of a thing, not to *be* the truth itself.' Her own father, Teddy's grandfather, had been a famous artist, dead long ago, a relationship that gave his mother authority on the subject of art. And beauty too, Teddy supposed. All these things – Art, Truth, Beauty – had capital letters when his mother spoke about them.

'When the skylark flies high,' he continued rather hopelessly to Izzie, 'it means it's fine weather.'

'Well, one doesn't need a bird to tell one if it's good weather or not, one simply looks about,' Izzie said. 'And this afternoon is glorious. I adore the sun,' she added, closing her eyes and raising her painted face to the skies.

Who didn't, Teddy thought? Not his grandmother perhaps, who led a gloomy drawing-room life in Hampstead, with heavy cotton nets drawn to prevent the light entering the house. Or perhaps to stop the dark escaping.

'The Knights' Code', which he had learned by heart from *Scouting for Boys*, a book he frequently turned to in times of uncertainty, even now in his self-exile from the movement, demanded that 'Chivalry requireth that youth should be trained to perform the most laborious and humble offices with cheerfulness and grace.' He supposed entertaining Izzie was one of those occasions. It was certainly laborious.

He shaded his eyes against the sun and scanned the skies for the skylark. It failed to make a reappearance and he had to make do with the aerial manoeuvres of the swallows. He thought of Icarus and wondered what he would have looked like from the ground. Quite big, he supposed. But Icarus was a myth, wasn't he? Teddy was going to boarding

school after the summer holidays and he really must start getting his facts in order. 'You will need to be a stoic, old chap,' his father advised. 'It will be a trial, that's the point of it really, I suppose. Best to keep your head below the parapet,' he added. 'Neither sink nor float, just sort of paddle about in the middle.'

'All the men in the family' went to the school, his Hampstead grandmother said (his only grandmother, Sylvie's mother having died long ago), as if it were a law, written down in ancient times. Teddy supposed his own son would have to go there too, although this boy existed in a future that Teddy couldn't even begin to imagine. He didn't need to, of course, for in that future he had no sons, only a daughter, Viola, something which would be a sadness for him although he never spoke of it, certainly not to Viola, who would have been volubly affronted.

Teddy was taken aback when Izzie unexpectedly started to sing and – more startling – do a little dance. '*Alouette, gentille alouette.*' He knew no French to speak of yet and thought she was singing not '*gentille*' but 'jaunty', a word he rather liked. 'Do you know that song?' she asked him.

'No.'

'It's from the war. The French soldiers sang it.' The fleeting shadow of something – sorrow, perhaps – passed across her features, but then just as suddenly she said gleefully, 'The lyrics are *quite* horrible. All about plucking the poor lark. Its eyes and feathers and legs and so on.'

In that inconceivable yet inevitable war still to come – Teddy's war – *Alouette* was the name of 425 Squadron, the French Canadians. In the February of '44, not long before

his last flight, Teddy made an emergency landing at their base at Tholthorpe, two engines on fire, shot up as they crossed the Channel. The Quebecers gave his crew brandy, rough stuff that they were nonetheless grateful for. Their squadron badges showed a lark above the motto *Je te plumerai* and he had thought about this day with Izzie. It was a memory that seemed to belong to someone else.

Izzie did a pirouette. 'What larks!' she said, laughing. Was this, he wondered, what his father meant when he said Izzie was 'ludicrously unstable'?

'Pardon me?'

'What larks,' Izzie repeated. '*Great Expectations*. Haven't you read it?' For a surprising moment she sounded like his mother. 'But, of course, I was making a joke. Because there isn't one any longer. The lark, I mean. Flown orf. Gorn,' she said in a silly cockney accent. 'I've eaten lark,' she added in an offhand way. 'In Italy. They're considered a delicacy over there. There's not much eating on a lark, of course. No more than a mouthful really.'

Teddy shuddered. The idea of the sublime little bird being plucked from the sky, of its exquisite song being interrupted in full flight, was horrible to him. Many, many years later, in the early Seventies, Viola discovered Emily Dickinson on an American Studies course that was part of her degree. In her scrawly, untamed hand she copied down the first verse of a poem she thought her father would like (too lazy to transcribe the whole of the short poem). 'Split the Lark – and you'll find the Music, Bulb after Bulb, in Silver rolled.' He was surprised she had thought of him. She rarely did. He supposed literature was one of the few things they held in common even

though they rarely, if ever, discussed it. He considered sending her something in return – a poem, even a few choice lines – as a means of communicating with her. 'Hail to thee, blithe spirit! Bird thou never wert' or 'Hark, how the cheerful birds do chaunt their lays, and carol of love's praise' or 'Ethereal Minstrel! Pilgrim of the sky! Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?' (Was there a poet who *hadn't* written about skylarks?) He supposed his daughter would think he was patronizing her in some way. She had an aversion to learning anything from him, possibly from anyone, and so in the end he simply wrote back, 'Thank you, very thoughtful of you.'

Before he could stop himself – the armour of good manners falling away – he said, 'It's *disgusting* to eat a lark, Aunt Izzie.'

'Why is it disgusting? You eat chicken and so on, don't you? What's the difference, after all?' Izzie had driven an ambulance in the Great War. Dead poultry could do little to ruffle her emotions.

A world of difference, Teddy thought, although he couldn't help but wonder what a lark would taste like. Thankfully, he was distracted from this thought by Trixie barking extravagantly at something. He bent down to investigate. 'Oh, look, a slow worm,' he said appreciatively to himself, the lark temporarily forgotten. He picked it up gently in both hands and displayed it to Izzie.

'A snake?' she said, grimacing, snakes apparently having no charms for her.

'No, a slow worm,' Teddy said. 'Not a snake. Not a worm either. It's a lizard actually.' Its bronze-gold-lustred

scales gleamed in the sun. This was beauty too. Was there anything in nature that wasn't? Even a slug demanded a certain salutation, although not from his mother.

'What a funny little boy you are,' Izzie said.

Teddy didn't consider himself to be a 'little' boy. He supposed his aunt – his father's youngest sister – knew less about children than she did about animals. He had no idea why she had kidnapped him. It was a Saturday, after lunch, and he had been mooching around in the garden, making paper planes with Jimmy, when Izzie had swooped on him and cajoled him into going for a walk with her in 'the countryside', by which she seemed to mean the lane that ran from Fox Corner to the railway station, hardly nature wild in rock and river. 'A little adventure. And a chat. Wouldn't that be fun?' Now he found himself hostage to her whims as she wandered along, asking him strange questions – 'Have you ever eaten a worm? Do you play at cowboys and Indians? What do you want to be when you grow up?' (No. Yes. A train driver.)

Carefully, he placed the slow worm back in the grass and to make up for her failure with the skylark he offered Izzie the bluebells. 'We have to cross the field to get to the wood,' he said, looking doubtfully at her shoes. They appeared to be made of alligator skin and were dyed a rather lurid green that no self-respecting alligator would have admitted to. They were brand new and clearly not meant for tramping across fields. It was late afternoon and the dairy herd, whose field it was, was mercifully absent. The cows, huge baggy things with soft inquisitive eyes, would not have known what to make of Izzie.

She ripped a sleeve climbing over the stile and then managed to plunge one of her alligator-clad feet into a cow pat that would have been quite obvious to anyone else. She redeemed herself a little in Teddy's eyes by being admirably and carelessly cheerful about both mishaps. ('I expect,' his mother said later, 'that she will simply throw the offending articles away.')

She was, however, disappointingly unimpressed by the bluebells. At Fox Corner the annual exhibition was greeted with the same reverence that others accorded the Great Masters. Visitors were trooped proudly out to the wood to admire the seemingly endless blur of blue. 'Wordsworth had his daffodils,' Sylvie said, 'we have our bluebells.' They weren't *their* bluebells, not at all, but his mother's character was inclined to ownership.

Walking back along the lane Teddy felt a sudden unexpected tremor in his breast, a kind of exaltation of the heart. The memory of the lark's song and the sharp green smell of the great bouquet of bluebells that he had picked for his mother combined to make a pure moment of intoxication, a euphoria that seemed to indicate that all the mysteries were about to be revealed. ('There's a world of light,' his sister Ursula said. 'But we can't see it for the darkness.' 'Our little Manichean,' Hugh said fondly.)

The school was not, of course, unknown to him. Teddy's brother Maurice was up at Oxford now, but when he had been at the school Teddy had often accompanied his mother ('my little chaperone') to prize-givings and Founder's Days and occasionally something called

'Visitation' when one day each term parents were allowed – although not particularly encouraged – to visit their children. 'More like a penal system than a school,' his mother scoffed. Sylvie was not as enthusiastic about the benefits of education as one might have expected her to be.

Considering his allegiance to his old school, his father showed a marked reluctance for any kind of 'visitation' to his old haunts. Hugh's absences were explained variously by being tied up with affairs at the bank, important meetings, fretful shareholders. 'And so on, and so on,' Sylvie muttered. 'Going back is usually more painful than going forward,' she added as the chapel organ whined its way into the introduction to 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind'.

This was two years ago, the prize-giving for Maurice's final term. Maurice had been deputy head boy, the 'deputy' in his title making him choleric. 'Second in command,' he had fumed when he had been appointed at the beginning of his final year. 'I see myself as a commander, not a deputy.' Maurice believed himself to be made of the stuff of heroes, a man who should lead other men into battle, although he would literally sit out the next war, behind an important desk in Whitehall where the dead were simply inconvenient tables of figures to him. No one in the school chapel on that hot July day in 1923 would have believed that another war could follow so swiftly on the heels of the last. The gilding was still fresh on the names of old boys ('the Honoured Dead') displayed on oak plaques around the chapel. 'Much good may "honour" do them when they're dead,'

Sylvie whispered crossly in Teddy's ear. The Great War had made Sylvie into a pacifist, albeit a rather belligerent one.

The school chapel had been stifling, drowsiness settling on the pews like a film of dust as the headmaster's voice droned on and on. The sun filtering through the stained-glass windows was transformed into lozenges of jewel-like colours, an artifice that was no substitute for the real thing outside. And now this would soon be Teddy's appointed lot too. A dull prospect of endurance.

When it came to it, school life was not so bad as he had feared. He had friends and was athletic, which always led to a degree of popularity. And he was a kind boy who gave bullies no quarter and that made him popular too, but nonetheless by the time he left and went up to Oxford he had concluded that the school was a brutal and uncivilized place and he would not keep up the callous tradition with his own sons. He expected many – cheerful, loyal and strong – and received instead the distillation (or perhaps reduction) of hope that was Viola.

'Tell me more about yourself,' Izzie said, wrenching a stalk of cow parsley from the hedgerow and spoiling the moment.

'What about myself?' he puzzled, the euphoria gone, the mysteries once more veiled from view. Later, in school, he would learn Brooke's poem 'The Voice' – 'The spell was broken, the key denied me' a fitting description of this moment, but by then – these sensations being ephemeral by their nature – he would have forgotten it.

'Anything,' Izzie said.

'Well, I'm eleven years old.'

'I know *that*, silly.' (Somehow he doubted that she did.)

'What makes you *you*? What do you like doing? Who are your friends? Do you have a thingamajig, you know –' she said, struggling for alien vocabulary, 'David and Goliath – a slingshot thingy?'

'A catapult?'

'Yes! For going around hitting people and killing things and so on.'

'Killing things? No! I would never do that. (His brother Maurice, yes.) I don't even know where it is. I used to use it to get conkers down from the tree.'

She looked disappointed by his pacifism but was not to be diverted from the catechism. 'What about scrapes? You must get into those, all boys do, don't they? Scrapes and japes.'

'Scrapes?' He remembered with a certain horror the incident with the green paint.

'Are you a Boy Scout?' she said, standing to mock attention and giving a smart salute. 'I *bet* you're a Scout. Dyb, dyb, dob and all that.'

'Used to be,' he muttered. 'Used to be a Cub.' It was not a topic he wished to explore with her but it was actually impossible for him to lie, as if a spell had been put on him at birth. Both his sisters – and even Nancy – could lie beautifully if necessary, and Maurice and truth (or Truth) were poorly acquainted, but Teddy was deplorably honest.

'Did you get kicked out of the Scouts?' Izzie asked eagerly. 'Cashiered? Was there some terrible scandal?'

'Of course not.'

'Do tell. What happened?'

The Kinship of the Kibbo Kift happened, Teddy thought.

He would probably have to spend hours explaining to Izzie if he so much as mentioned the words.

'Kibbo Kift?' she said. 'It sounds like the name of a clown.'

'How about sweets? Are you very fond of them, for example, and if so, what kind?' A little notebook appeared, alarming Teddy. 'Oh, don't mind this,' she said. 'Everyone takes notes these days. So . . . sweets?'

'Sweets?'

'Sweets,' she affirmed and then sighed and said, 'You know, dear Teddy, it's just that I don't *know* any little boys, apart from you. I have often wondered what goes into the making of a boy, apart from the usual slugs and snails and puppy dogs' tails, of course. And a boy,' she continued, 'is a man in the making. The boy in the man, the man in the boy, and so on.' This last said rather absently while considering the cow parsley. 'I wonder if you will be like your father when you grow up, for example?'

'I hope so.'

'Oh, you mustn't settle for ordinariness, I'm sure *I* never shall. You must grow up to be quite piratical!' She started to shred the cow parsley to pieces. 'Men say that women are mysterious creatures, but I think that's a ruse to deflect us from seeing their *absolute incomprehensibility*.' These last two words said rather loudly and very irritably as if she had a particular person in mind. ('She always has some man or other on the go,' he had heard his mother say.) 'And what about little girls?' Izzie said.

'What about them?' he puzzled.

'Well, do you have a "special friend" – you know, a girl

you particularly like?' She made a silly, smirking face which he supposed was her attempt (a very poor one) at miming romance or some such other nonsense.

He blushed.

'A little bird tells me,' she continued relentlessly, 'that you have a bit of a pash on one of the next-door girls.'

What little bird, he wondered? Nancy and her clutch of sisters – Winnie, Gertie, Millie and Bea – lived next to Fox Corner in a house called Jackdaws. A great many of these birds roosted in the woods and showed a preference for the Shawcross lawn, on to which Mrs Shawcross tossed cold toast every morning.

Teddy would *not* give Izzie Nancy, not under any circumstances, not under torture – which this was. He would not say her name to have it sullied on Izzie's lips and be made fun of. Nancy was his *friend*, his boon companion, not the stupid soppy sweetheart that Izzie was implying. Of course he would marry Nancy one day and he would love her, yes, but it would be the pure chivalrous love of a knight. Not that he really understood any other kind. He had seen the bull with the cows and Maurice said that was what people did too, including their mother and father, he sniggered. Teddy was pretty sure he was lying. Hugh and Sylvie were far too dignified for such acrobatics.

'Oh, my, are you blushing?' Izzie crowed. 'I do believe I've ferreted out your secret!'

'Pear drops,' Teddy said in an effort to put an end to this inquisition.

'What about them?' Izzie said. (She was easily distracted.) The ruined cow parsley was tossed on to the

ground. She cared nothing for nature. In her heedlessness she would have trampled through the meadow, kicked over lapwings' nests, terrorized the field mice. She belonged in the city, in a world of machines.

'They're my favourite sweets,' he said.

Turning a corner they came across the dairy herd, nudging and bumping their way along the lane as they returned from milking. It must be late, Teddy thought. He hoped he hadn't missed tea.

'Oh, bluebells, how lovely,' his mother said when they walked through the front door. She was dressed in evening clothes and looked rather lovely herself. At the school he was about to start his mother had many admirers, according to Maurice. Teddy felt rather proud of his mother's status as a beauty. 'What on earth have you been doing all this time?' Sylvie asked. A question aimed at Teddy but intended for Izzie.

Sylvie in furs, contemplating her reflection in the bedroom mirror. Holding up the collar of a short evening cape to frame her face. A critical examination. The mirror was once her friend, but now she felt that it regarded her with indifference.

She put a hand up to her hair, her 'crowning glory', a nest of combs and pins. Old-fashioned hair now, the mark of a matron being left behind by the times. Should she have it cut? Hugh would be bereft. She had a sudden memory – a portrait in charcoal, sketched by her father not long before he died. *Sylvie Posing as an Angel*, he called it. She was sixteen years old, demure in a long white dress

– a nightdress actually, rather flimsy – and was half turned away from her father in order to show off her lovely waterfall of hair. 'Look mournful,' her father instructed. 'Think of the Fall of Man.' Sylvie, the whole of a lovely unknown life before her, found it hard to care very much for the subject but nonetheless pouted prettily and gazed absently at the far wall of her father's enormous studio.

It had been an awkward pose to hold and she remembered how her ribs had ached, suffering for her father's art. The great Llewellyn Beresford, portraitist to the rich and famous, a man who left nothing but debts upon his death. Sylvie still felt the loss, not of her father but of the life he had built on what had unfortunately turned out to be baseless fabric.

'As you sow,' her mother wailed quietly, 'so shall you reap. Yet it is *he* who has sown and *we* who have reaped nothing.'

A humiliating bankruptcy auction had followed his death and Sylvie's mother had insisted that they attend, as if she needed to witness every item they had lost pass in front of their eyes. They sat anonymously (one hoped) in the back row and watched their worldly goods being paraded for all to see. Somewhere towards the end of this mortification the sketch of Sylvie came up for sale. 'Lot 182. Charcoal portrait of the artist's daughter' was announced, Sylvie's angelic nature now lost apparently. Her father should have given her a halo and wings and then his purpose would have been clear. As it was she merely looked like a sullen, pretty girl in a nightdress.

A fat man with a rather seedy air had raised his cigar at each round of bidding and Sylvie was finally sold to him

for three pounds, ten shillings and sixpence. 'Cheap,' her mother muttered. Cheaper now probably, Sylvie thought. Her father's paintings had gone quite out of fashion after the war. Where was it now, she wondered? She would like it back. The thought made her cross, a frown in the mirror. When the auction had finally limped to an end ('One job lot comprising a pair of brass fire-dogs, a silver chafing dish, tarnished, a large copper jug') they had bustled out of the room with the rest of the crowd and had chanced to overhear the sleazy man saying loudly to his companion, 'I'll enjoy myself looking at that ripe young peach.' Sylvie's mother shrieked – discreetly, she was not one to make a fuss – and pulled her innocent angel out of earshot.

Tainted, everything tainted, Sylvie thought. From the very beginning, from the Fall. She rearranged the collar of the cape. It was far too hot for it but she believed that she looked her best in furs. The cape was Arctic fox, which made her rather sad as Sylvie was fond of the foxes that visited their garden – she had named the house for them. How many foxes would it take to make a cape, she wondered? Not as many as for a coat, at least. She had a mink hanging in her wardrobe, a tenth-anniversary present from Hugh. She must send it to the furriers, it needed to be remodelled into something more modern. 'As do I,' she said to the mirror.

Izzie had a new cocoon-shaped coat. Sable. How had Izzie come by her furs when she had no money? 'A gift,' she said. From a man, of course, and no man gave you a fur coat without expecting to receive something in return. Except for one's husband, of course, who expected nothing beyond modest gratitude.

Sylvie could have swooned from the amount of perfume that she was wearing, spilt by a jittery hand, although she was not usually given to nerves. She was going up to London for the evening. It would be hot and stuffy on the train, even worse in town, she would have to sacrifice her fur. As the foxes had been sacrificed for her. There was a joke – of sorts – lodged in there somewhere, the kind that Teddy might make, not Sylvie. Sylvie had no sense of humour. It was a blight on her character.

Her eye was caught unwillingly by the photograph on her dressing-table, a studio portrait taken after the birth of Jimmy. Sylvie was seated. The new baby in his christening gown – a vast affair, worn by every Todd – seemed to overflow from her arms while the rest of her brood were arranged artfully around her in a semblance of adoration. Sylvie ran a finger over the silver frame, intending fondness but finding dust. She must have a word with Bridget. The girl had grown sluttish. ('All servants turn on their masters eventually,' her mother-in-law had advised when Sylvie was first married to Hugh.)

A commotion downstairs could only indicate the return of Izzie. Reluctantly, Sylvie removed her fur and put on her light evening duster for which only hard-working silkworms had been sacrificed. She placed her hat on her head. Her unfashionable hair didn't suit the neat skull caps and berets of the day and she was still wearing a *chapeau*. She accidentally jabbed herself with her long silver hat pin. (Could you kill someone with a hat pin? Or merely injure them?) She muttered an imprecation to the gods that caused the scrubbed

innocent faces of her children to look reproachfully at her from the photograph. As well they might, she thought. She would soon be forty years old and the prospect had made her dissatisfied with herself. ('*More* dissatisfied,' Hugh offered.) She could feel impatience at her back and recklessness before her.

She gave herself one last appraisal. Good enough, she supposed, which was not necessarily a judgement that she liked to settle for. It was two years since she had seen him. Would he still think her a beauty? That was what he had called her. Was there a woman on earth who could resist being called a beauty? But Sylvie had resisted and had remained chaste. 'I am a married woman,' she had repeated primly. 'Then you shouldn't be indulging in this game, my dear,' he said. 'The consequences might be awful for you – for us.' He laughed at this idea as if it were appealing. It was true, she had led him on and then found there was nowhere to go.

He had gone abroad, to the colonies, doing important work for the Empire, but now he was back and Sylvie's life was running through her hands like water and she no longer felt inclined to be prim.

She was greeted by an enormous bunch of bluebells. 'Oh, bluebells, how lovely,' she said to Teddy. Her boy. She had two others but sometimes they hardly seemed to count. Her daughters weren't necessarily objects of affection, more like problems to be solved. Only one child held her heart in his rather grubby fist. 'Do wash before tea, dear,' she said to Teddy. 'What on earth have you been doing all this time?'

'Getting to know each other,' Izzie said. 'Such a darling boy. I say, aren't you looking glamorous, Sylvie. And I could smell you from a hundred yards away. Quite the *femme séduisante*. Do you have plans? Do tell.'

Sylvie glared at her but was diverted from a response when she saw the mucky green alligators on the Voysey hall runner. '*Out*,' she said, shooing Izzie towards the front door, and again, '*Out*.'

'Damned spot,' Hugh murmured, wandering into the hall from the growlery as Izzie flounced down the path. He turned to Sylvie and said, 'You look lovely, darling.'

They listened to the engine of Izzie's Sunbeam kicking into life and the unnerving sound of her accelerating away. She drove in the manner of Toad, much tooting and little braking. 'She'll kill someone sooner or later,' Hugh, a stately driver, said. 'And I thought she was penniless. What did she do to get the wherewithal for another car?'

'Nothing decent, of that you can be sure,' Sylvie said.

Teddy was free at last of Izzie's awful ramblings, but still had to suffer the usual interrogation from his mother before she was satisfied that one of her children hadn't been corrupted in some way by contact with Izzie. 'She's never without motive,' she said darkly. He was eventually freed to search out his tea, a somewhat put-up affair of sardines on toast as it was Mrs Glover's evening off.

'She's eaten a lark,' Teddy said to his sisters over the tea table. 'In Italy. Not that it makes a difference *where*.'

'"A skylark wounded in the wing,"' Ursula said, and when Teddy looked at her blankly she said, 'Blake. "A skylark wounded in the wing, a cherubim does cease to sing."'

'Let's hope that something eats *her* one day,' the more down-to-earth Pamela added cheerfully.

Pamela was going to Leeds University to study science. She was looking forward to the 'bracing north', the 'real' people. 'Aren't we real enough?' Teddy grumbled to Ursula, who laughed and said, 'What is real?' which seemed a silly question to Teddy who had no occasion to question the phenomenal world. Real was what you could see and taste and touch. 'You're missing at least two senses there,' Ursula pointed out. Real was the wood and the bluebells, the owl and the fox, a Hornby train trundling around his bedroom floor, the smell of a cake baking in the oven. The skylark ascending on his thread of song.

The evening's account for Fox Corner: after Hugh had driven Sylvie to the station he retired to his growlery again with a small glass of whisky and the stub of a half-smoked cigar. He was a man of moderate habits, more by instinct than conscious choice. It was unusual for Sylvie to go up to town. 'The theatre and supper with friends,' she said. 'I shall stay over.' She had a restless spirit, an unfortunate thing in a wife, but he must trust her in everything or the whole edifice of marriage would fall and crumble.

Pamela was in the morning room, her nose in a chemistry textbook. She had failed her Girton entrance exam and didn't really want to venture into the 'bracing north', but 'needs must' as Sylvie was wont – irritatingly – to say. Pamela had (quietly) hoped for glittering prizes and a brilliant career and now feared that she would not be the bold woman she had hoped to be.

Ursula, sprawled on the carpet at Pamela's feet, was

conjugating irregular Latin verbs. 'Oh, joy,' she said to Pamela. 'Life can surely only improve from here,' and Pamela laughed and said, 'Don't be so sure.'

Jimmy was sitting at the kitchen table in his pyjamas, enjoying his milk and biscuits before bedtime. Mrs Glover, their cook, was a woman who would brook no myth or fable and so, in the absence of her oversight, Bridget was taking the opportunity to entertain Jimmy with a garbled yet still remarkably bloodcurdling tale about 'the Pooka' while she scrubbed the pots. Mrs Glover herself was at home, dozing lightly, her feet propped up on the fender, a small glass of stout to hand.

Izzie, meanwhile, was on the open road, singing '*Alouette*' to herself. The tune was now lodged firmly in her brain. *Je te plumerai*, she bellowed unmusically, *je te plumerai*. I will pluck you. The war had been a dreadful thing, she wished she hadn't reminded herself of it. She had been a FANY. A rather silly acronym, in Izzie's opinion. First Aid Nursing Yeomanry. She had gone out to drive ambulances, although she had never even driven a car, but in the end she was doing all kinds of horrible things. She remembered cleaning out the ambulances at the end of the day, blood and fluids and waste. Remembered, too, the mutilations, the charred skeletons, the ruined villages, limbs poking through mud and earth. Buckets of filthy swabs and pus-soaked bandages and the terrible oozing wounds of the poor boys. No wonder people wanted to forget all about it. Have a bit of fun, for heaven's sake. She was awarded a Croix de Guerre. Never told anyone at home about it. Put it away in a drawer when she came home. It

meant nothing when you thought about what those poor boys had gone through.

She had been engaged twice during the war, both men dying within days of proposing to her and long before Izzie herself had got round to writing a letter home with her happy news. She had been with one of them, the second one, when he died. By chance she had found him in a field hospital that her ambulance was delivering the wounded to. She hadn't recognized him at first, he had been so mangled by artillery fire. The matron, short of nurses and orderlies, encouraged her to stay with him. 'There, there,' Izzie soothed, keeping watch at his deathbed by the oily yellow light of a Tilley lamp. He called out for his mother at the end, they all did. Izzie couldn't imagine calling for Adelaide on her deathbed.

She smoothed her fiancé's sheets, kissed his hand as there was not much face left to kiss and let an orderly know that he was dead. No euphemisms here. Then she returned to her ambulance and went foraging for more casualties.

She ducked out when a third, a rather shy boy, a captain called Tristan, offered to tie a piece of string around her finger. ('Sorry, it's all I've got. There'll be a gorgeous diamond for you when this is all over. No? Are you sure? You'd be doing a chap an awfully big favour.') She had bad luck and would spare him it, Izzie thought – uncharacteristically selfless – which was ridiculous of her given that all those lovely subalterns were pretty much doomed with or without her assistance.

Izzie never saw Tristan again after her refusal and presumed him dead (she presumed them all dead), but a

year after the war ended she was riffling through the society pages when she came across a photo of him emerging from St Mary Undercroft. He was a member of parliament now and, it turned out, filthy rich with family money. He was beaming at the ridiculously young bride on his arm, a bride who was wearing on her finger, if one looked with a magnifying glass, a diamond that did indeed look gorgeous. Izzie had saved him, she supposed, but, sadly, she had not saved herself. She was twenty-four years old when the Great War ended and realized that she'd used up all her chances.

The first of her fiancés had been called Richard. She had known very little about him beyond that. Rode with the Beaufort Hunt, she seemed to recall. She had said 'yes' to him on a whim, but she had been madly in love with the second of her betrotheds, the one whose death she had been a witness to in the field hospital. She had cared for him and, even better, he had cared for her. They had spent their brief moments together imagining a charming future – boating, riding, dancing. Food, laughter, sunshine. Champagne to toast their good fortune. No mud, no endless awful slaughter. He was called Augustus. Gussie, his friends called him. A few years later she discovered that fiction could be both a means of resurrection and of preservation. 'When all else has gone, art remains,' she said to Sylvie during the next war. '*The Adventures of Augustus* is art?' Sylvie said, raising an elitist eyebrow. No capital letter for Augustus. Izzie's definition of art was broader than Sylvie's definition, of course. 'Art is anything created by one person and enjoyed by another.'

'Even Augustus?' Sylvie said and laughed.
'Even Augustus,' Izzie said.

Those poor dead boys in the Great War were not so very much older than Teddy. There had been a moment with her nephew today when she had been almost overcome by the tenderness of her feelings for him. If only she could protect him from harm, from the pain that the world would (inevitably) bring him. Of course, she had a child of her own, born when she was sixteen and hastily adopted, an excision so clean and so swift that she never thought about the boy. It was perhaps just as well, then, that at the moment when she felt moved to reach out to stroke Teddy's hair he had suddenly bobbed down and said, 'Oh, look, a slow worm,' and Izzie was left touching empty air. 'What a funny little boy you are,' she said and for a moment saw the shattered face of Gussie as he lay dying on his camp bed. And then the faces of all of those poor dead boys, rank upon rank, stretching away further and further into the distance. The dead.

She accelerated away from this memory as fast as she could, swerving just in time to miss a cyclist, sending him wobbling into the verge from where he yelled insults at the retreating back bumper of the heedless Sunbeam. *Arduis invictus*, that had been the FANY's motto. Unconquered in hardship. Terrifically boring. Izzie had had quite enough of hardship, thank you.

The car flew along the roads. The germ of Augustus in Izzie's mind already sprouted.

Maurice, absent from this roll-call, was currently trussing

himself up in white tie and tails in preparation for a Bullingdon Club dinner in Oxford. Before the evening was out, the restaurant, as Bullingdon Club tradition demanded, would be wrecked. Inside this starched carapace it would have surprised people to know there was a soft writhing creature full of doubt and hurt. Maurice was determined that this creature would never see the light of day and that in the not-too-distant future he would become fused with the carapace itself, a snail who could never escape his shell.

An 'assignation'. The very word sounded sinful. He had booked two rooms in the Savoy. They had met there before he had gone away, but innocently (relatively) in public spaces.

'Adjoining rooms,' he said. The hotel staff would know the purpose of the word 'adjoining', surely? How shaming. Sylvie's heart was thundering in her chest as she took a cab from the station to the hotel. She was a woman about to fall.

The Temptation of Hugh.

'The sun whose rays are all ablaze with ever-living glory.' Hugh was singing to himself in the garden. He had emerged from the growlery to take a little after-dinner (if you could call it dinner) stroll. From the other side of the holly hedge that divided Fox Corner from Jackdaws he heard an answering lilt. 'Observe his flame, that placid dame, the moon's Celestial Highness.' Which seemed to be how he had found himself in the Shawcrosses' conservatory with his arms around Roberta Shawcross, having

slipped through the gap in the hedge that the children had created through years of use. (Both he and Mrs Shawcross had recently taken part in a local amateur production of *The Mikado*. They had surprised both themselves and each other with the vigour of their unlikely performances as Ko-Ko and Katisha.)

Sun and moon, Hugh thought, the masculine and feminine elements. What would he have thought if he had known that one day these would be the names of his great-grandchildren? 'Mrs Shawcross,' he had said when he reached the other side of the hedge, rather scratched by the holly. The children who used this short cut were considerably smaller than he was, he realized.

'Oh, please, it's Roberta, Hugh.' How unnervingly intimate his name sounded on her lips. Moist, cushiony lips, accustomed to giving praise and encouragement to all and sundry.

She was warm to the touch. And without corsetry. She dressed in a rather bohemian fashion, but then she was a vegetarian and a pacifist, and, of course, there was the whole issue of the suffrage. The woman was a terrific idealist. You couldn't help but admire her. (Up to a point, anyway.) She had beliefs and passions outside of herself. Sylvie's passions were storms that raged within.

He tightened his hold on Mrs Shawcross slightly and felt her respond in kind.

'Oh dear,' she said.

'I know . . .' Hugh said.

The thing about Mrs Shawcross – Roberta – was that she *understood* about the war. It wasn't that he wanted to talk about it – God, no – but it was comforting to be in

the company of someone who *knew*. A little, anyway. Major Shawcross had had some problems when he came back from the front and his wife had been very sympathetic. One had seen some awful things, none of them fit topics of conversation at home, and, of course, Sylvie had no intention of discussing the war. It had been a rip in the fabric of their lives and she had sewn it up neatly.

'Oh, that's a very good way of putting it, Hugh,' Mrs Shawcross – Roberta – said. 'But, you know, unless you can do very good invisible stitching there'll always be a scar, won't there?'

He regretted introducing the needlework metaphors. The overheated conservatory was full of scented geraniums, a rather oppressive smell in Hugh's opinion. Mrs Shawcross held the palm of her hand against his cheek, gently, as if he was breakable. He moved his lips nearer to hers. Here's a how-de-do, he thought. He was in uncharted territory.

'It's just that Neville,' she began shyly. (Who was Neville, Hugh wondered?) 'Neville can't . . . any more. Since the war, you know?'

'Major Shawcross?'

'Yes, Neville. And one doesn't want to be . . .' She was blushing.

'Oh, I see,' Hugh said. The geraniums were beginning to make him feel slightly sick. He needed some fresh air. He began to feel panicked. He took his marriage vows seriously, unlike some men he knew. He believed in the compromise of marriage, he acknowledged its circumscription. And Mrs Shawcross – Roberta – lived next door, for heaven's sake. They had ten children between them

– hardly a foundation for adulterous passion. No, he must extricate himself from this situation, he thought, his lips moving ever nearer.

'Oh, lord!' she exclaimed, taking a sudden step back from him. 'Is that the time?'

He looked around for a clock and couldn't see one.

'It's Kibbo Kift night,' she said.

'Kibbo Kift?' Hugh repeated, confused.

'Yes, I must go, the children will be waiting.'

'Yes, of course,' he said. 'The children.' He began to make his retreat. 'Well, if ever you need to talk, you know where I am. Just next door,' he added, rather pointlessly.

'Yes, of course.'

He escaped, taking the circuitous route of path and door rather than the vicious gap in the hedge.

It would have been wrong, he thought, retiring to the chaste safety of the growlery, but nonetheless he couldn't help but preen a little. He began to whistle 'Three Little Maids From School'. He felt rather jaunty.

And what of Teddy?

Teddy was standing in a circle in a nearby field, kindly provided by Lady Daunt at the Hall. The members of the circle, mainly children, were moving clockwise, performing a peculiar caper based on Mrs Shawcross's fancy of what a Saxon dance might have seemed like. ('Did Saxons dance?' Pamela asked. 'You never think of them dancing.') They held wooden staffs – branches they had foraged from the wood – and every so often stopped and thumped the ground with these sticks. Teddy was dressed in the 'uniform' – a jerkin, shorts and hood – so that he

looked like a cross between an elf and one of Robin Hood's (not very) Merry Men. The hood was a misshapen thing because he had been forced to sew it himself. Handicrafts were one of the things Kibbo Kift was keen on. Mrs Shawcross, Nancy's mother, was forever getting them to embroider badges and armbands and banners. It was humiliating. 'Sailors sew,' Pamela said, in an effort to encourage him. 'And fishermen knit,' Ursula added. 'Thanks,' he said grimly.

Mrs Shawcross was in the middle of the circle, leading her little dancers. ('Now hop on your left foot and give a little bow to the person on your right.') It had been Mrs Shawcross's idea for him to join Kibbo Kift. At the very moment when he had started looking forward to graduating from Cubs to Scouts proper, she had seduced him away with the lure of Nancy. ('Boys and girls together?' a suspicious Sylvie said.)

Mrs Shawcross was a great enthusiast for the Kinship. Kibbo Kift, Mrs Shawcross explained, was an egalitarian, pacifist alternative to the militaristic Scouts from which its leader had broken away. ('Renegades?' Sylvie said.) Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, one of Mrs Shawcross's heroines, was a member. Mrs Shawcross had been a suffragette. ('Very brave,' Major Shawcross said fondly.) One still learned woodcraft, Mrs Shawcross explained, went camping and hiking and so on, but it was underpinned by an emphasis on 'the spiritual regeneration of England's youth'. This appealed to Sylvie, if not to Teddy. Although she was generally hostile to any idea that had Mrs Shawcross as its origin, Sylvie nonetheless decided it would be 'a good thing' for Teddy. 'Anything that doesn't

encourage war,' she said. Teddy hardly thought that the Scouts encouraged war but his protests were in vain.

It was not just the sewing Mrs Shawcross had failed to mention, there was also the dancing, the folk singing, the prancing around in the woods and the endless talking. They were in clans and tribes and lodges, for there were a good deal of (supposed) Red Indian customs mixed up with the (supposed) Saxon ritual, making an unlikely hotchpotch. 'Perhaps Mrs Shawcross has found one of the lost tribes of Israel,' Pamela laughed.

They all chose Indian names for themselves. Teddy was Little Fox ('Naturally,' Ursula said). Nancy was Little Wolf ('Honiahaka' in Cheyenne, Mrs Shawcross said. She had a book she referred to). Mrs Shawcross herself was Great White Eagle ('Oh, for heaven's sake,' Sylvie said, 'talk about hubris').

There were some good things – being with Nancy, for one. And they learned archery with real bows and arrows, not things that they had to make themselves from branches or such like. Teddy liked archery, which he thought might come in useful one day – if he became an outlaw, for example. Would he have the heart to shoot a deer? Rabbits, badgers, foxes, even squirrels occupied a tender place in that heart. He supposed if it were a matter of survival, if starvation were the only option. He would draw the line somewhere though. Dogs, larks.

'It all sounds rather pagan,' Hugh said doubtfully to Mrs Shawcross. ('Roberta, please.') This was in an earlier conversation, before their 'incident' in the conservatory, before he had thought of her as a woman.

'Well, "utopian" might be a better description,' she said.

'Ah, Utopia,' Hugh said wearily. 'What an unhelpful idea that is.'

'Isn't it Wilde,' Mrs Shawcross said, 'who writes that "progress is the realization of Utopias"?'

'I would hardly look to *that* man for my moral creed,' Hugh said, rather disappointed in Mrs Shawcross – a deterrent he would remind himself of later when his thoughts returned to the scent of geraniums and the lack of corsetry.

Teddy's idea of Utopia would not have included the Kibbo Kift. What would it have included? A dog, certainly. Preferably more than one. Nancy and his sisters would be there – his mother too, he supposed – and they would all live in a lovely house set in the green countryside of the Home Counties and eat cake every day. His real life, in fact.

In turn, the Kibbo Kift produced their own breakaway movement, the less eccentric Woodcraft Folk, by which time Teddy had managed to weasel his way out of the lot of them. At school he joined the OTC and enjoyed the concerted lack of pacifism. He was a boy, after all. He would have been surprised to know that in his sixties, when his grandchildren came to live with him in York, he would spend several months trailing backwards and forwards to a chilly church hall so that Bertie and Sunny could attend a weekly meeting of the Woodcraft Folk group that they were members of. Teddy thought that continuity would probably be a good thing for them, seeing as Viola, their mother, seemed to have provided so little. He gazed at his grandchildren's innocent faces while they intoned the hopeful words of the 'creed' at the

beginning of the meeting – 'We shall go singing to the fashioning of a new world.'

He even went on a camping trip with them and was complimented on his 'woodcraft skills' by the group leader, who, despite being large, young and black, reminded him a little of Mrs Shawcross. 'Learned in the Scouts,' he said, even all those years later unwilling to admit that he had taken anything from the Kibbo Kift.

Sylvie paid the cab driver and the hotel doorman opened the door of the cab and murmured, 'Madam.' She hesitated on the pavement. Another doorman was already holding open the door of the hotel. 'Madam.' Again.

She moved closer, inch by slow inch, edging her way towards adultery. 'Madam?' the doorman said again, still holding the door, perplexed by this slow progress.

The hotel beckoned. She could see the lush tones of the foyer, the promise of luxury. Imagined champagne sparkling in engraved Bohemian glass, foie gras, pheasant. The dimmed lighting in the room, the bed with its starched hotel sheets. Her cheeks flamed. He would be waiting inside, just beyond the door. Perhaps he had glimpsed her, was already rising to his feet to greet her. She hesitated again, balancing what she was about to be given against what she was about to give away. Or – perhaps a worse outcome – everything would simply remain the same. And then she thought of her children, thought of Teddy, her best boy. Would she risk her life as his mother? For an adventure? A cold thrill of horror quenched the flames of sin. For sin it was,

she thought, make no mistake. You did not need a God (Sylvie was an unconfessed atheist) to believe in sin.

She composed herself (difficult) and said to the doorman, rather haughtily, 'Oh, I'm so sorry. I've just remembered another appointment elsewhere.'

She fled, walking quickly, head held high, a purposeful woman with a decent, civilized destination beckoning her – a charitable committee, even a political meeting, anything but a rendezvous with a lover.

A concert! The lighted entrance of Wigmore Hall appeared ahead of her – a warm beacon, a safe harbour. The music struck up almost at once, one of Mozart's Haydn Quartets, *The Hunt*. Appropriate, she thought. She had been the hind, he had been the hunter. But now the hind had bounded free. Not quite bounded, perhaps, as she was in a rather poor seat at the back of the hall, squashed between a somewhat shabby young man and an elderly lady. But then one always paid a price for freedom, didn't one?

She had been a frequent attender of concerts with her father and knew the Haydn Quartets well, but still felt too flummoxed by her narrow escape to hear the Mozart. Sylvie was a pianist herself but she avoided attending recitals these days, they reminded her too painfully of a life that might have been. She had been told by her teacher when she was young that she could go on to 'play at concert level' if she took her studies seriously, but then of course the bankruptcy, the great fall from grace, had occurred and the Bechstein had been hauled unceremoniously away and sold to a private buyer. The first thing she had done on moving into Fox Corner was

to acquire a Bösendorfer, her wedding present from Hugh. A great solace for marriage.

The *Dissonant* came after the interval. As the almost inaudible opening bars struck up she found herself weeping soundlessly. The elderly lady passed her a handkerchief (clean and pressed, thank goodness) to staunch her tears. Sylvie mouthed a thank-you to her. This mute exchange lifted her spirits a little. At the end of the concert the woman insisted that she keep the handkerchief. The shabby young man offered to escort her to a cab. How kind strangers were, she thought. She politely declined her would-be escort, a refusal she later regretted because in her disturbed state she took a wrong turn on Wigmore Street and then another and found herself in a far from salubrious area, armed with only a hat pin with which to defend herself.

She had once been at home in London, yet now it was a foreign city to her. A dirty, lurid nightmare of a place and yet she had willingly descended into this circle of hell. She must have been mad. All she wanted to do was to get home, yet here she was wandering the streets like a mad woman. When she eventually found her way back to a gleamingly busy Oxford Street she cried out in relief. A cab ride later and she was sitting demurely on a bench on the station platform as if she were returning from a day of shopping and lunch with friends.

'Goodness,' Hugh said. 'I thought you must be a burglar. You said you were staying up in town.'

'Oh, it was all deathly tedious,' Sylvie said. 'I decided I

would rather come straight back. Mr Wilson, the station-master, gave me a lift in his pony and trap.'

Hugh regarded his wife's high complexion, the slightly wild look in her eye of an overused racehorse. Mrs Shawcross, in contrast, was less of a thoroughbred and more of a good-natured Dobbin. Which, in Hugh's opinion, could be preferable sometimes. He kissed Sylvie lightly on the cheek and said, 'I'm sorry that your plans for the evening didn't work out, but it's very nice to have you home.'

Sitting in front of her mirror, unpinning her mound of hair, a fresh despair fell on Sylvie. She had been a coward and now she was chained to this life for ever. Hugh came up behind her and rested his hands on her shoulders. 'Beautiful,' he murmured, running his hands through her hair. She had to suppress the desire to flinch away from him. 'Bed?' he said, looking hopeful.

'Bed,' she agreed brightly.

But it wasn't just the bird, was it, Teddy thought as he lay in bed waiting for sleep to find him, the nightly oblivion kept at bay by meandering thought. It wasn't just the one lark that had been silenced by Izzie. (*A mouthful.*) It was the generations of birds that would have come after it and now would never be born. All those beautiful songs that would never be sung. Later in his life he learned the word 'exponential', and later still the word 'fractal', but for now it was a flock that grew larger and larger as it disappeared into a future that would never be.

Ursula, looking in on him on her way to bed, found

him awake and reading *Scouting for Boys*. 'Can't sleep?' she said with the offhand sympathy of a fellow insomniac. Teddy's feelings for his sister were almost as straightforward and uncomplicated as those he had for Trixie, who was lying at the foot of the bed, whining softly in her sleep. 'Rabbits, I suppose,' Ursula said.

Ursula sighed. She was fifteen and prone to pessimism. Although their mother would have vigorously denied it, this was her character too. His sister perched on his bed and read out loud, 'Be always ready with your armour on, except when you are taking your rest at night.' (Perhaps this was his mother's 'armour of good manners', Teddy thought.) 'A metaphor, I expect,' Ursula said. 'Knights can hardly have been expected to clank around all day long in a suit of armour. I'm always reminded of the Tin Man from *The Wizard of Oz* when I think of knights.' It was a book they were all fond of but Teddy wished that she hadn't put that image in his mind, the *Idylls of the King* and *Morte d'Arthur* dissolving into thin air in an instant.

An owl hooted, a loud, almost aggressive sound. 'On the roof, by the sound of it,' Teddy said. They listened together for a while.

'Well, night-night,' Ursula said eventually. She kissed him on the forehead.

'Night-night,' he said, stowing *Scouting for Boys* beneath his pillow. Despite the owl, which continued to hoot its unholy lullaby, he fell almost immediately into the deep and innocent sleep of the hopeful.