

one town more. From her dressing case Elena took out a bottle of eau de cologne, shook some on to her handkerchief, and raising her veil slightly she held the handkerchief to her lips and nostrils. She did not really want the eau de cologne. She was not really exhausted but her perfect sense of the dramatic fitness of things prompted the action. She could not bear that even so small an audience—half a dozen people in a railway carriage—should go away indifferent or unsatisfied. She felt bound to play exquisitely for them. Why she even took the trouble to play exquisitely for Peter when he and she were alone together. Sometimes in front of her mirror she played most exquisitely of all. She quite realised it, she would have acknowledged the fact frankly. You see, as a singer I am more or less a public woman, and I find it really frightfully difficult to keep my private and my public life apart. Also, I feel so much myself on the stage that perhaps I only act when I am off. Yes, well, there was some truth in that. It was sunset. They were going through fields of tall gleaming flowers. In the deep bright light they looked more silver and gold than white and yellow. There were blue flowers like lapis lazuli and a tall red plant with flowers like plumes. In the distance the horizon was banked by forests of fir and pine black against a glittering golden sky. The sun sets to a fanfare of trumpets, thought Elena, and she longed to compose a hymn to the departing sun—in French. *Soleil*—it was lovely—it has a wonderful caressing sound. Suddenly she felt a soft pressure on her arm. Peter was leaning against her, his head lying on his chest. There was hardly anything to be seen of him but the charming back of his white neck and the faint V of hair between the two neck bones. She bent over him—and just for a moment she caught the tender glance and smile of the old woman opposite. He has gone to sleep I know. I have had them too. Many many children this old lap has carried, said the glance and the smile. ‘Asleep darling?’ asked Elena. Peter looked up, his wonderful grey eyes blind, hidden by the curly lashes. She said ‘Come. Come on to my lap.’ With a very graceful supple movement she gathered up her little son and held him in her arms. Like all children he was not merely asleep—he was drowned in sleep. Helpless, his arms and legs dangling, his head jerking to the train. She put his head in the hollow of her neck and rested her own on his silky black hair. ‘That’s better, isn’t it,’ she whispered. Peter gave a sigh, and again Elena caught the glance of the old woman opposite—kindly, envious. The old woman looked sadly at her hands as though she asked in remembrance.

Again she looked out of the window. A breeze flew among the daisies, ruffling their petals—she fancied she could smell their bitter scent. And suddenly she remembered a year in her childhood when the hills and the valleys of her home had been smothered under these same flowers,