

## I

The sun rose on a landscape still pale with the heat of the day before. There was no haze, but a sort of coppery burnish out of the air lit on flowing fields, rocks, the face of the one house and the cliff of limestone overhanging the river. The river gorge cut deep through the uplands. This light at this hour, so unfamiliar, brought into being a new world – painted, expectant, empty, intense. The month was June, of a summer almost unknown; for this was a country accustomed to late wakenings, to daybreaks humid and overcast. At all times open and great with distance, the land this morning seemed to enlarge again, throwing the mountains back almost out of view in the south of Ireland's amazement at being cloudless.

Out in front of the house, on a rise of rough grass, somewhat surprisingly stood an obelisk; which, now outlined by the risen sun, cast towards Montefort its long shadow – only this connected the lordly monument with the dwelling. For the small mansion had an air of having gone down: for one thing, trees had been felled around it, leaving space impoverished and the long low roofline framed by too much sky. The door no longer knew hospitality; moss obliterated the sweep for the turning carriage; the avenue lived on as a rutted track, and a poor fence, close up to the house, served to keep back wandering grazing cattle. Had the façade not carried a ghost of style, Montefort would have looked, as it almost did, like nothing more than the annexe of its farm buildings – whose slipshod gables and leaning sheds, flaking whitewash and sagging rusty doors made a patchwork for some way out behind. A stone archway, leading through to the stables and nobly canopied by a chestnut tree, sprang from the side of the house and was still imposing.

Montefort stood at a right-angle to the nearby gorge, towards which it presented a blind end – though in this the vestige of a sealed-up Venetian window was to be traced. In its day the window had overlooked the garden which, broken-walled, still projected over the river view. A way zigzagged steeply down through thickets and undergrowth to the water's edge: the cliff arose from the water, opposite.

*A World of Love*

The half-asleep face of Montefort was at this hour drowned in early light.

A girl came out of the house, and let herself through the gate in the fence. Wearing a trailing Edwardian muslin dress, she stepped out slowly towards the obelisk, shading her eyes. She walked first up the shadow then round the base of the monument: this bore no inscription and had been polished only by rubbing cattle, whose hoofs had left a bald-trodden circle in the grass. Having come to a stand-still, she drew a breath, propped an elbow on a convenient ledge of the stone and, leaning, began to re-read a letter; or, rather, ponder over what she seemed more than half to know by heart. Afterwards, refolding the letter, she took a long look round at all the country, as though following one deep draught up with one of another kind. Kindled by summer though cool in nature, she was a beauty. The cut of her easy golden hair was anachronistic over the dress she wore: this, her height and something half naive half studied about her management of the sleeves and skirts made her like a boy actor in woman's clothes, while what was classical in her grace made her appear to belong to some other time. Her brows were wide, her eyes an unshadowed blue, her mouth more inclined to smile than in any other way to say very much — it was a face perfectly ready to be a woman's, but not yet so, even in its transcendency this morning. She was called Jane and was twenty years old. All at once, stepping clear of the obelisk, she looked intently back at the house behind her, and in particular at two adjoining windows in the top storey. Across those, however, curtains were still drawn.

Inside the room, in the mantled claret-red dusk, nothing was in movement except the bluebottle now bumping buzzing against the ceiling. Here or there, sun spattered the carpet, rents in the curtains let through what were to be when the sleeper woke shafts of a brightness quite insupportable. The fourposter, of a frame immense, was overdraped with more of the damask stuff: at one side the hangings were tucked back to allow access to things on the bedside table — a packet of Gold Flake, a Bible, a glass with dregs, matches, sunglasses, sleeping pills, a nail file and a candlestick caked with wax into which the finished wick had subsided. A damaged Crown Derby saucer held strawberry