

THE WAVE

“An Egyptian Aftermath”

BY

Algernon Blackwood

LONDON

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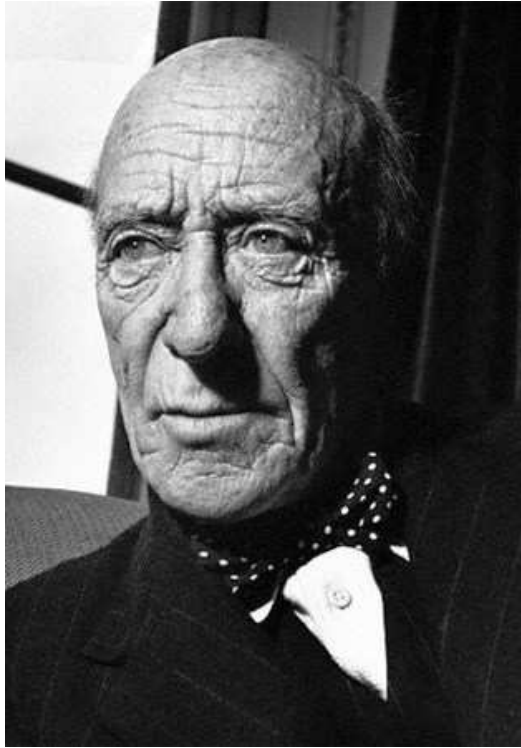
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Table of Contents

ABOUT AUTHOR.....	5
PREFACE.....	9
 PART I.....	 11
CHAPTER I.....	11
CHAPTER II.	24
CHAPTER III.....	34
CHAPTER IV.....	43
CHAPTER V.....	53
CHAPTER VI.....	61
CHAPTER VII.	68
 PART II	 90
CHAPTER VIII.....	90
CHAPTER IX.....	104
CHAPTER X.....	119
CHAPTER XI.....	134
CHAPTER XII.	159

PART III	170
CHAPTER XIII.	170
CHAPTER XIV.	181
CHAPTER XV.	192
CHAPTER XVI.	204
CHAPTER XVII.	223
CHAPTER XVIII.	238
CHAPTER XIX.	250
CHAPTER XX.	265
CHAPTER XXI.	285
CHAPTER XXII.	307
CHAPTER XXIII.	321
CHAPTER XXIV.	329
CHAPTER XXV.	344
CHAPTER XXVI.	352
CHAPTER XXVII.	363
 PART IV	 374
CHAPTER XXVIII.	374
CHAPTER XXIX.	383
CHAPTER XXX.	396
CHAPTER XXXI.	413
CHAPTER XXXII.	430
CHAPTER XXXIII.	438

ABOUT AUTHOR



Algernon Blackwood (1869 – 1951) was one of the most prolific and pioneering English authors of weird fiction and ghost stories. He developed a unique style exploring the uncanny powers of nature, mysticism, and the dark boundaries of human psychology.

If you enjoy horror / thriller in the style of Stephen King or H. P. Lovecraft, the true father of the genre is Algernon Blackwood. Even Lovecraft said, "*He is the greatest master of supernatural horror ever.*"

Life and Personality

- **Strict Upbringing:** Raised in a highly conservative Calvinist household, which triggered his lifelong pursuit of alternative mysticism.
- **Adventurous Youth:** Spent years in Canada and the United States working diverse jobs, including milk farming, journalism, and bartending.
- **Occult Interests:** Joined the famous **Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn** due to his deep fascination with the supernatural.
- **Media Career:** Became a popular broadcaster for the BBC in his later years, narration-style reading his own ghost stories on radio and television.

Major Works

Blackwood excelled at transforming natural elements into sources of terror. His most notable works include:

- **The Willows:** Follows two friends canoeing down the Danube River who encounter sinister, non-human

forces. H. P. Lovecraft praised it as the greatest weird fiction story ever written.

- **The Wendigo:** A classic horror tale set in the Canadian wilderness, based on the Native American myth of a cannibalistic forest spirit.

- **John Silence Series:** A collection of stories featuring a "psychic detective" who uses occult knowledge to solve supernatural mysteries.

👁️ Literary Style

- **Cosmic Horror:** Focuses on the insignificance of humanity and the terrifying scale of the universe, rather than typical monsters.

- **Atmospheric Nature:** Forests, rivers, and desolate landscapes are not just settings, but active, living, and threatening characters.

TO

M. S.=K.

*EGYPT'S FORGETFUL AND
UNWILLING CHILD.*

PREFACE

A Haunted Childhood.

An Ancient Love Triangle.

The Echoes of a Forgotten Past.

Since his earliest childhood in England, young

Tommy Keverdon has been tormented by a singular, bizarre nightmare: a massive, towering wave that rises directly behind him but never crashes, leaving him in a permanent state of psychological anxiety. It is not a fear of physical drowning, but a profound spiritual premonition that shapes his entire view of reality. As Tommy grows into adulthood, the enigmatic wave begins to reveal its true meaning, serving as a metaphysical bridge that connects his modern existence to a tragic, long-forgotten history buried beneath the sands of Egypt.

Through cryptic dreams, mystical symbols, and sudden telepathic awakenings, Tommy discovers a mind-shattering truth: he, along with two other souls in his present life, are the literal reincarnations of an ancient Egyptian love triangle. Centuries ago, a Theban General, his wife, and a Syrian slave became entangled in a devastating web of passion, betrayal, and dark magic that resulted in absolute tragedy. Now, brought together once again by the cosmic currents of fate, the three players are forced to confront their past. Will they succumb to the same destructive patterns, or can they break the cycle before the ancient wave finally crashes down to destroy them all?

Experience one of Algernon Blackwood's most sophisticated, poetic, and atmospheric explorations of the subconscious mind. Moving away from visceral horror to deliver a breathtaking masterpiece of psychological suspense and esoteric romance, this definitive classic offers a haunting study of karma, human destiny, and the timeless nature of love across the boundaries of death.

PART I

CHAPTER I.

Since childhood days he had been haunted by a Wave.

It appeared with the very dawn of thought, and was his earliest recollection of any vividness. It was also his first experience of nightmare: a wave of an odd, dun colour, almost tawny, that rose behind him, advanced, curled over in the act of toppling, and then stood still. It threatened, but it did not fall. It paused, hovering in a position contrary to nature; it waited.

Something prevented; it was not meant to fall; the right moment had not yet arrived.

If only it would fall! It swept across the skyline in a huge, long curve far overhead, hanging dreadfully suspended. Beneath his feet he felt the roots of it withdrawing; he shuffled furiously and made violent efforts; but the suction undermined him where he stood. The ground yielded and dropped away. He only sank in deeper. His entire weight became that of a feather against the gigantic tension of the mass that any moment, it

seemed, must lift him in its rising curve, bend, break, and twist him, then fling him crashing forward to his smothering fate.

Yet the moment never came. The Wave hung balanced between him and the sky, poised in mid-air. It did not fall. And the torture of that infinite pause contained the essence of the nightmare.

The Wave invariably came up behind him, stealthily, from what seemed interminable distance. He never met it. It overtook him from the rear. The horizon hid it till it rose.

There were stages in its history, moreover, and in the effect it produced upon his early mind. Usually he woke up the moment he realised it was there. For it invariably announced its presence. He heard no sound, but knew that it was coming—there was a feeling in the atmosphere not unlike the heavy brooding that precedes a thunderstorm, only so different from anything he had yet known in life that his heart sank into his boots. He looked up. There, above his head was the huge, curved monster, hanging in mid-air. The mood had justified itself. He called it the 'wavy feeling.' He was never wrong about it.

The second stage was reached when, instead of trying to escape shorewards, where there were tufts of coarse grass upon a sandy bank, he turned and faced the thing. He looked straight into the main under-body of the poised billow. He saw the opaque mass out of which this line rose up and curved. He stared against the dull, dun-coloured parent body whence it came—the sea. Terrified yet fascinated, he examined it in detail, as a man about to be executed might examine the grain

of the wooden block close against his eyes. A little higher, some dozen feet above the level of his head, it became transparent; sunlight shot through the glassy curve. He saw what appeared to be streaks and bubbles and transverse lines of foam that yet did not shine quite as water shines. It moved suddenly; it curled a little towards the crest; it was about to topple over, to break—yet did not break.

About this time he noticed another thing: there was a curious faint sweetness in the air beneath the bend of it, a delicate and indescribable odour that was almost perfume. It was sweet; it choked him. He called it, in his boyish way, a whiff. The 'whiff' and the 'wavy feeling' impressed themselves so vividly upon his mind that if ever he met them in his ordinary life—out of dream, that is—he was sure that he would know them. In another sense he felt he knew them already. They were familiar.

But another stage went further than all the others put together. It amounted to a discovery. He was perhaps ten years old at this time, for he was still addressed as 'Tommy,' and it was not till the age of fifteen that his solid type of character made 'Tom' seem more appropriate. He had just told the dream to his mother for the hundredth time, and she, after listening with sympathy, had made her ever-green suggestion—'If you dream of water, Tommy, it means you're thirsty in your sleep,'—when he turned and stared straight into her eyes with such intentness that she gave an involuntary start.

'But, mother, it *isn't* water!'

'Well, darling, if it isn't water, what is it, then?' She asked the question quietly enough, but she felt, apparently, something of the queer dismay that her boy felt too. It seemed the mother-sense was touched. The instinct to protect her offspring stirred uneasily in her heart. She repeated the question, interested in the old, familiar dream for the first time since she heard it several years before: 'If it isn't water, Tommy, what is it? What can it be?' His eyes, his voice, his manner— something she could not properly name—had startled her.

But Tommy noticed her slight perturbation, and knowing that a boy of his age did not frighten his mother without reason, or even with it, turned his eyes aside and answered:

'I couldn't tell. There wasn't time. You see, I woke up then.'

'How curious, Tommy,' she rejoined. 'A wave is a wave, isn't it?'

And he answered thoughtfully: 'Yes, mother; but there are lots of things besides water, aren't there?'

She assented with a nod, and a searching look at him which he purposely avoided. The subject dropped; no more was said; yet somehow from that moment his mother knew that this idea of a wave, whether it was nightmare or only dream, had to do with her boy's life in a way that touched the protective thing in her, almost to the point of positive defence. She could not explain it; she did not like it; instinct warned her—that was all she knew. And Tommy said no more. The truth was, indeed, that he did not know himself of what the Wave was composed. He could not have told his mother even had he considered it

permissible. He would have loved to speculate and talk about it with her, but, having divined her nervousness, he knew he must not feed it. No boy should do such a thing.

Moreover, the interest he felt in the Wave was of such a deep, enormous character—the adjectives were his own—that he could not talk about it lightly. Unless to some one who showed genuine interest, he could not even mention it. To his brothers and sister, both older and younger than himself, he never spoke of it at all. It had to do with something so fundamental in him that it was sacred. The realisation of it, moreover, came and went, and often remained buried for weeks together; months passed without a hint of it; the nightmare disappeared. Then, suddenly, the feeling would surge over him, perhaps just as he was getting into bed, or saying his prayers, or thinking of quite other things. In the middle of a discussion with his brother about their air-guns and the water-rat they hadn't hit—up would steal the 'wavy' feeling with its dim, familiar menace. It stole in across his brother's excited words about the size and speed of the rat; interest in sport entirely vanished; he stared at Tim, not hearing a word he said; he dived into bed; he had to be alone with the great mood of wonder and terror that was rising. The approach was unmistakable; he cuddled beneath the sheets, fighting-angry if Tim tried to win him back to the original interest. The dream was coming; and, sure enough, a little later in his sleep, it came.

For even at this stage of his development he recognised instinctively this special quality about it—that it could not, was not meant to be avoided. It was inevitable and right. It hurt, yet

he must face it. It was as necessary to his well-being as having a tooth out. Nor did he ever seek to dodge it. His character was not the kind that flinched. The one thing he did ask was—to understand. Some day, he felt, this full understanding would come.

There arrived then a new and startling development in this curious obsession, the very night, Tommy claims, that there had been the fuss about the gun and water-rat, on the day before the conversation with his mother. His brother had plagued him to come out from beneath the sheets and go on with the discussion, and Tommy, furious at being disturbed in the 'wavy' mood he both loved and dreaded, had felt himself roused uncommonly. He silenced Tim easily enough with a smashing blow from a pillow, then, with a more determined effort than usual, buried himself to face the advent of the Wave. He fell asleep in the attempt, but the attempt bore fruit. He felt the great thing coming up behind him; he turned; he saw it with greater distinctness than ever before; almost he discovered of what it was composed.

That it was *not* water established itself finally in his mind; but more—he got very close to deciding its exact composition. He stared hard into the threatening mass of it; there was a certain transparency about the substance, yet this transparency was not clear enough for water: there were particles, and these particles went drifting by the thousand, by the million, through the mass of it. They rose and fell, they swept along, they were very minute indeed, they whirled. They glistened, shimmered, flashed. He made a guess; he was just on the point of guessing

right, in fact, when he saw another thing that for the moment obliterated all his faculties. There was both cold and heat in the sensation, fear and delight. It transfixed him. He saw eyes.

Steady, behind the millions of minute particles that whirled and drifted, he distinctly saw a pair of eyes of light-blue colour, and hardly had he registered this new discovery, when another pair, but of quite different kind, became visible beyond the first pair—dark, with a fringe of long, thick lashes. They were—he decided afterwards—what is called Eastern eyes, and they smiled into his own through half-closed lids. He thinks he made out a face that was dimly sketched behind them, but the whirling particles glinted and shimmered in such a confusing way that he could not swear to this. Of one thing only, or rather of two, did he feel quite positive: that the dark eyes were those of a woman, and that they were kind and beautiful and true: but that the pale-blue eyes were false, unkind, and treacherous, and that the face to which they belonged, although he could not see it, was a man's. Dimly his boyish heart was aware of happiness and suffering. The heat and cold he felt, the joy and terror, were half explained. He stared. The whirling particles drifted past and hid them. He woke.

That day, however, the 'wavy' feeling hovered over him more or less continuously. The impression of the night held sway over all he did and thought. There was a kind of guidance in it somewhere. He obeyed this guidance as by an instinct he could not, dared not disregard, and towards dusk it led him into the quiet room overlooking the small Gardens at the back of the house, his father's study. The room was empty; he approached

the big mahogany cupboard; he opened one of the deep drawers where he knew his father kept gold and private things, and birthday or Christmas presents. But there was no dishonourable intention in him anywhere; indeed, he hardly knew exactly why he did this thing. The drawer, though moving easily, was heavy; he pulled hard; it slid out with a rush; and at that moment a stern voice sounded in the room behind him: 'What are you doing at my Eastern drawer?'

Tommy, one hand still on the knob, turned as if he had been struck. He gazed at his father, but without a trace of guilt upon his face.

'I wanted to see, Daddy.'

'I'll show you,' said the stern-faced man, yet with kindness and humour in the tone. 'It's full of wonderful things. I've nothing secret from you; but another time you'd better ask first—Tommy.'

'I wanted to see,' faltered the boy. 'I don't know why I did it. I just had a feeling. It's the first time—*really*.'

The man watched him searchingly a moment, but without appearing to do so. A look of interest and understanding, wholly missed by the culprit, stole into his fine grey eyes. He smiled, then drew Tommy towards him, and gave him a kiss on the top of his curly head. He also smacked him playfully. 'Curiosity,' he said with pretended disapproval, 'is divine, and at your age it is right that you should feel curiosity about everything in the world. But another time just ask me—and I'll show you all I possess.' He lifted his son in his arms, so that for

the first time the boy could overlook the contents of the opened drawer. 'So you just had a feeling, eh——?' he continued, when Tommy wriggled in his arms, uttered a curious exclamation, and half collapsed. He seemed upon the verge of tears. An ordinary father must have held him guilty there and then. The boy cried out excitedly:

'The whiff! Oh, Daddy, it's my whiff!'

The tears, no longer to be denied, came freely then; after them came confession too, and confused though it was, the man made something approaching sense out of the jumbled utterance. It was not mere patient kindness on his part, for an older person would have seen that genuine interest lay behind the half-playful, half-serious cross-examination. He watched the boy's eager, excited face out of the corner of his eyes; he put discerning questions to him, he assisted his faltering replies, and he obtained in the end the entire story of the dream—the eyes, the wavy feeling, and the whiff. How much coherent meaning he discovered in it all is hard to say, or whether the story he managed to disentangle held together. There was this strange deep feeling in the boy, this strong emotion, this odd conviction amounting to an obsession; and so far as could be discovered, it was not traceable to any definite cause that Tommy could name—a fright, a shock, a vivid impression of one kind or another upon a sensitive young imagination. It lay so deeply in his being that its roots were utterly concealed; but it was real.

Dr. Kolverdon established the existence in his second boy of an unalterable premonition, and, being a famous nerve

specialist, and a disciple of Freud into the bargain, he believed that a premonition has a cause, however primitive, however carefully concealed that cause may be. He put the boy to bed himself and tucked him up, told Tim that if he teased his brother too much he would smack him with his best Burmese slipper which had tiny nails in it, and then whispered into Tommy's ear as he cuddled down, happy and comforted, among the blankets: 'Don't make a special effort to dream, my boy; but if you do dream, try to remember it next morning, and tell me exactly what you see and feel.' He used the Freudian method.

Then, going down to his study again, he looked at the open drawer and sniffed the faint perfume of things—chiefly from Egypt—that lay inside it. But there was nothing of special interest in the drawer; indeed, it was one he had not touched for years.

He went over one by one a few of the articles, collected from various points of travel long ago. There were bead necklaces from Memphis, some trash from a mummy of doubtful authenticity, including several amulets and a crumbling fragment of old papyrus, and, among all this, a tiny packet of incense mixed from a recipe said to have been found in a Theban tomb. All these, jumbled together in pieces of tissue-paper, had lain undisturbed since the day he wrapped them up some dozen years before—indeed he heard the dry rattle of the falling sand as he undid the tissue-paper. But a strong perfume rose from the parcel to his nostrils. 'That's what Tommy means by his whiff,' he said to himself. 'That's

Tommy's whiff beyond all question. I wonder how he got it first?"

He remembered, then, that he had made a note of the story connected with the incense, and after some rummaging he found the envelope and read the account jotted down at the time. He had meant to hand it over to a literary friend—the tale was so poignantly human—then had forgotten all about it. The papyrus, dating over 3000 B.C., had many gaps. The Egyptologist had admittedly filled in considerable blanks in the afflicting story:—

A victorious Theban General, Prince of the blood, brought back a Syrian youth from one of his foreign conquests and presented him to his young wife who, first mothering him for his beauty, then made him her personal slave, and ended by caring deeply for him. The slave, in return, loved her with passionate adoration he was unable to conceal. As a Lady of the Court, her quasi-adoption of the youth caused comment. Her husband ordered his dismissal. But she still made his welfare her especial object, finding frequent reasons for their meeting. One day, however, her husband caught them together, though their meeting was in innocence. He half strangled the youth, till the blood poured down upon his own hands, then had him flogged and sent away to On, the City of the Sun.

The Syrian found his way back again, vengeance in his fiery blood. The clandestine yet innocent meetings were renewed. Rank was forgotten. They met among the sand-dunes in the desert behind the city where a pleasure tent among a grove of palms provided shelter, and the slave losing his head, urged the

Princess to fly with him. Yet the wife, true to her profligate and brutal husband, refused his plea, saying she could only give a mother's love, a mother's care. This he rejected bitterly, accusing her of trifling with him. He grew bolder and more insistent. To divert her husband's violent suspicions she became purposely cruel, even ordering him punishments. But the slave misinterpreted. Finally, warning him that if caught he would be killed, she devised a plan to convince him of her sincerity. Hiding him behind the curtains of her tent, she pleaded with her husband for the youth's recall, swearing that she meant no wrong. But the soldier, in his fury, abused and struck her, and the slave, unable to contain himself, rushed out of his hiding-place and stabbed him, though not mortally. He was condemned to death by torture. She was to be chief witness against him.

Meanwhile, having extracted a promise from her husband that the torture should not be carried to the point of death, she conveyed word to the victim that he should endure bravely, knowing that he would not die. She now realised that she loved. She promised to fly with him.

The sentence was duly carried out, the slave only half believing in her truth. It was a public holiday in Thebes. She was compelled to see the punishment inflicted before the crowd. There were a thousand drums. A sand-storm hid the sun.

Seated beside her husband on a terrace above the Nile, she watched the torture—then knew she had been tricked. But the Syrian did not know; he believed her false. As he expired, casting his last glance of anguish and reproach at her, she rose, leaped the parapet, flung herself into the river, and was

drowned. The husband had their bodies thrown into the sea, unburied. The same wave took them both. Later, however, they were recovered by influential friends; they were embalmed, and secretly laid to rest in his ancestral Tomb in the Valley of the Kings among the Theban Hills. In due course the husband, unwittingly, was buried with them.

Nearly five thousand years later all three mummies were discovered lying side by side, their story inscribed upon a papyrus inside the great sarcophagus.

Dr. Kolverdon glanced through the story he had forgotten, then tore it into little pieces and threw them into the fireplace. For a moment longer, however, he stood beside the open drawer reflectingly. Had he ever told the tale to Tommy? No; it was hardly likely; indeed it was impossible. The boy was not born even when first he heard it. To his wife, then? Less likely still. He could not remember, anyhow. The faint suggestion in his mind—a story communicated pre-natally—was not worth following up. He dismissed the matter from his thoughts. He closed the drawer and turned away. The little packet of incense, however, taken from the Tomb, he did not destroy. 'I'll give it to Tommy,' he decided. 'Its whiff may possibly stimulate him into explanation!'

CHAPTER II.

As a result of having told everything to his father, Tommy's nightmare, however, largely ceased to trouble him. He had found the relief of expression, which is confession, and had laid upon the older mind the burden of his terror. Once a month, once a week, or even daily if he wanted to, he could repeat the expression as the need for it accumulated, and the load which decency forbade being laid upon his mother, the stern-faced man could carry easily for him.

The comfortable sensation that forgiveness is the completion of confession invaded his awakening mind, and had he been older this thin end of a religious wedge might have persuaded him to join what his mother called that 'vast conspiracy.' But even at this early stage there was something stalwart and self-reliant in his cast of character that resisted the cunning sophistry; vicarious relief woke resentment in him; he meant to face his troubles alone. So far as he knew, he had not sinned, yet the Wave, the Whiff, the Eyes were symptoms of some fate that threatened him, a premonition of something coming that he must meet with his own strength, something that he could only deal with effectively alone, since it was deserved and just. One day the Wave would fall; his father could not help him then. This instinct in him remained unassailable. He even began to look forward to the time when it should come—to have done with it and get it over, conquering or conquered.

The premonition, that is, while remaining an obsession as before, transferred itself from his inner to his outer life. The nightmare, therefore, ceased. The menacing interest, however,

held unchanged. Though the name had not hitherto occurred to him, he became a fatalist. 'It's got to come; I've got to meet it. I will.'

'Well, Tommy,' his father would ask from time to time, 'been dreaming anything lately?'

'Nothing, Daddy. It's all stopped.'

'Wave, eyes, and whiff all forgotten, eh?'

Tommy shook his head. 'They're still there,' he answered slowly, 'but——' He seemed unable to complete the sentence. His father helped him at a venture.

'But they can't catch you—is that it?'

The boy looked up with a dogged expression in his big grey eyes. 'I'm ready for them,' he replied. And his father laughed and said, 'Of course. That's half the battle.'

He gave him a present then—one of the packets of tissue-paper—and Tommy took it in triumph to his room. He opened it in private, but the contents seemed to him without especial interest. Only the Whiff was, somehow, sweet and precious; and he kept the packet in a drawer apart where the fossils and catapult and air-gun ammunition could not interfere with it, hiding the key so that Tim and the servants could not find it. And on rare occasions, when the rest of the household was asleep, he performed a little ritual of his own that, for a boy of his years, was distinctly singular.

When the room was dark, lit in winter by the dying fire, or in summer by the stars, he would creep out of bed, make quite

sure that Tim was asleep, stand on a chair to reach the key from the top of the big cupboard, and carefully unlock the drawer. He had oiled the wood with butter, so that it was silent. The tissue-paper gleamed dimly pink; the Whiff came out to meet him. He lifted the packet, soft and crackling, and set it on the window-sill; he did not open it; its contents had no interest for him, it was the perfume he was after. And the moment the perfume reached his nostrils there came a trembling over him that he could not understand. He both loved and dreaded it. This manly, wholesome-minded, plucky little boy, the basis of whose steady character was common sense, became the prey of a strange, unreasonable fantasy. A faintness stole upon him; he lost the sense of kneeling on a solid chair; something immense and irresistible came piling up behind him; there was nothing firm he could push against to save himself; he began shuffling with his bare feet, struggling to escape from something that was coming, something that would probably overwhelm him yet must positively be faced and battled with. The Wave was rising. It was the wavy feeling.

He did not turn to look, because he knew quite well there was nothing in the room but beds, a fender, furniture, vague shadows and his brother Tim. That kind of childish fear had no place in what he felt. But the Wave was piled and curving over none the less; it hung between him and the shadowed ceiling, above the roof of the house; it came from beyond the world, far overhead against the crowding stars. It would not break, for the time had not yet come. But it was there. It waited. He knelt beneath its mighty shadow of advance; it was still arrested, poised above his eager life, competent to engulf him when the

time arrived. The sweep of its curved mass was mountainous. He knelt inside this curve, small, helpless, but not too afraid to fight. The perfume stole about him. The Whiff was in his nostrils. There was a strange, rich pain—oddly remote, yet oddly poignant....

And it was with this perfume that the ritual chiefly had to do. He loved the extraordinary sensations that came with it, and tried to probe their meaning in his boyish way. Meaning there was, but it escaped him. The sweetness clouded something in his brain, and made his muscles weak; it robbed him of that resistance which is fighting strength. It was this battle that he loved, this sense of shoving against something that might so easily crush and finish him. There *was* a way to beat it, a way to win—could he but discover it. As yet he could not. Victory, he felt, lay more in yielding and going-with than in violent resistance.

And, meanwhile, in an ecstasy of this half yielding, half resisting, he lent himself fully to the overmastering tide. He was conscious of attraction and repulsion, something that enticed, yet thrust him backwards. Some final test of manhood, character, value, lay in the way he faced it. The strange, rich pain stole marvellously into his blood and nerves. His heart beat faster. There was this exquisite seduction that contained delicious danger. It rose upon him out of some inner depth he could not possibly get at. He trembled with mingled terror and delight. And it invariably ended with a kind of inexpressible yearning that choked him, crumpled him inwardly, as he described it, brought the moisture, hot and smarting, into his

burning eyes, and—each time to his bitter shame— left his cheeks wet with scalding tears.

He cried silently; there was no heaving, gulping, audible sobbing, just a relieving gush of heartfelt tears that took away the strange, rich pain and brought the singular ritual to a finish. He replaced the tissue-paper, blotted with his tears; locked the drawer carefully; hid the key on the top of the cupboard again, and tumbled back into bed.

Downstairs, meanwhile, a conversation was in progress concerning the welfare of the growing hero.

'I'm glad that dream has left him anyhow. It used to frighten me rather. I did *not* like it,' observed his mother.

'He doesn't speak to you about it any more?' the father asked.

For months, she told him, Tommy had not mentioned it. They went on to discuss his future together. The other children presented fewer problems, but Tommy, apparently, felt no particular call to any profession.

'It will come with a jump,' the doctor inclined to think. 'He's been on the level for some time now. Suddenly he'll grow up and declare his mighty mind.'

Father liked humour in the gravest talk; indeed the weightier the subject, the more he valued a humorous light upon it. The best judgment, he held, was shaped by humour, sense of proportion lost without it. His wife, however, thought 'it a pity.' Grave things she liked grave.

'There's something very deep in Tommy,' she observed, as though he were developing a hidden malady.

'Hum,' agreed her husband. 'His subconscious content is unusual, both in kind and quantity.' His eyes twinkled. 'It's possible he may turn out an artist, or a preacher. If the former, I'll bet his output will be original; and, as for the latter,'—he paused a second—'he's too logical and too fearless to be orthodox. Already he thinks things out for himself.'

'I should like to see him in the Church, though,' said Mother. 'He would do a lot of good. But he *is* uncompromising, rather.'

'His honesty certainly is against him,' sighed his father. 'What do you think he asked me the other day?'

'I'm sure I don't know, John.' The answer completed itself with the unspoken 'He never asks *me* anything now.'

'He came straight up to me and said, 'Father, is it good to feel pain? To let it come, I mean, or try to dodge it?''

'Had he hurt himself?' the woman asked quickly. It seemed she winced.

'Not physically. He had been feeling something inside. He wanted to know how 'a man' should meet the case.'

'And what did you tell him, dear?'

'That pain was usually a sign of growth, to be understood, accepted, faced. That most pain was cured in that way——'

'He didn't tell you what had hurt him?' she interrupted.

'Oh, I didn't ask him. He'd have shut up like a clam. Tommy likes to deal with things alone in his own way. He just wanted to know if his way was—well, *my* way.'

There fell a pause between them; then Mother, without looking up, enquired: 'Have you noticed Lettice lately? She's here a good deal now.'

But her husband only smiled, making no direct reply. 'Tommy will have a hard time of it when he falls in love,' he remarked presently. 'He'll know the real thing and won't stand any nonsense—just as I did.' Whereupon his wife informed him that if he was not careful he would simply ruin the boy—and the brief conversation died away of its own accord. As she was leaving the room a little later, unsatisfied but unaggressive, he asked her: 'Have you left the picture books, my dear?' and she pointed to an ominous heap upon the table in the window, with the remark that Jane had 'unearthed every book that Tommy had set eyes upon since he was three. You'll find everything that's ever interested him,' she added as she went out, 'every picture, that is—and I suppose it is the pictures that you want.'

For an hour and a half the great specialist turned pages without ceasing—well-thumbed pages; torn, crumpled, blotted, painted pages. It was easy to discover the boy's favourite pictures; and all were commonplace enough, the sort that any normal, adventure-loving boy would find delightful. But nothing of special significance resulted from the search; nothing that might account for the recurrent nightmare, nothing in the way of eyes or wave. He had already questioned Jane as to what stories she told him, and which among them he liked

best. 'Hunting or travel or collecting,' Jane had answered, and it was about 'collecting that he asks most questions. What kind of collecting, sir? Oh, treasure or rare beetles mostly, and sometimes—just bones.'

'Bones! What kind of bones?'

'The villin's, sir,' explained the frightened Jane. 'He always likes the villin to get lost, and for the jackals to pick his bones in the desert——'

'Any particular desert?'

'No, sir; just desert.'

'Ah—just desert! Any old desert, eh?'

'I think so, sir—as long as it *is* desert.'

Dr. Keverdon put the woman at her ease with the humorous smile that made all the household love—and respect—him; then asked another question, as if casually: Had she ever told him a story in which a wave or a pair of eyes were in any way conspicuous?

'No, never, sir,' replied the honest Jane, after careful reflection. 'Nor I wouldn't,' she added, 'because my father he was drowned in a tidal wave; and as for eyes, I know that's wrong for children, and I wouldn't tell Master Tommy such a thing for all the world——'

'Because?' enquired the doctor kindly, seeing her hesitation.

'I'd be frightening myself, sir, and he'd make such fun of me,' she finally confessed.

No, it was clear that the nurse was not responsible for the vivid impression in Tommy's mind which bore fruit in so strange a complex of emotions. Nor were other lines of enquiry more successful. There was a cause, of course, but it would remain unascertainable unless some clue offered itself by chance. Both the doctor and the father in him were pledged to a persistent search that was prolonged over several months, but without result. The most perplexing element in the problem seemed to him the whiff. The association of terror with a wave needed little explanation; the introduction of the eyes, however, was puzzling, unless some story of a drowning man was possibly the clue; but the addition of a definite odour, an Eastern odour, moreover, with which the boy could hardly have become yet acquainted,—this combination of the three accounted for the peculiar interest in the doctor's mind.

Of one thing alone did he feel reasonably certain: the impression had been printed upon the deepest part of Tommy's being, the very deepest; it arose from those unplumbed profundities—though a scientist, he considered them unfathomable—of character and temperament whence emerge the most primitive of instincts,—the generative and creative instinct, choice of a mate, natural likes and dislikes,—the bed-rock of the nature. A girl was in it somewhere, somehow....

Midnight had sounded from the stable clock in the mews when he stole up into the boys' room and cautiously approached the yellow iron bed where Tommy lay. The reflection of a street electric light just edged his face. He was sound asleep—with tear-stains marked clearly on the cheek not pressed into the

pillow. Dr. Keverdon paused a moment, looked round the room, shading the candle with one hand. He saw no photograph, no pictures anywhere. Then he sniffed. There was a faint and delicate perfume in the air. He recognised it. He stood there, thinking deeply.

'Lettice Aylmer,' he said to himself presently as he went softly out again to seek his own bed; 'I'll try Lettice. It's just possible.... Next time I see her I'll have a little talk.' For he suddenly remembered that Lettice Aylmer, his daughter's friend and playmate, had very large and beautiful dark eyes.

CHAPTER III.

Lettice Aylmer, daughter of the Irish Member of Parliament, did not provide the little talk that he anticipated, however, because she went back to her Finishing School abroad. Dr. Keverdon was sorry when he heard it. So was Tommy. She was to be away a year at least. 'I must remember to have a word with her when she comes back,' thought the father, and made a note of it in his diary twelve months ahead. 'Three hundred and sixty-five days,' thought Tommy, and made a private calendar of his own.

It seemed an endless, zodiacal kind of period; he counted the days, a sheet of foolscap paper for each month, and at the bottom of each sheet two columns showing the balance of days gone and days to come. Tuesday, when he had first seen her, was underlined, and each Tuesday had a number attached to it, giving the total number of weeks since that wonderful occasion. But Saturdays were printed. On Saturday Lettice had spoken to him; she had smiled, and the words were, 'Don't forget me, Tommy!' And Tommy, looking straight into her great dark eyes, that seemed to him more tender even than his mother's, had stammered a reply that he meant with literal honesty: 'I won't—never...'; and she was gone... to France... across the sea.

She took his soul away with her, leaving him behind to pore over his father's big atlas and learn French sentences by heart. It seemed the only way. Life had begun, and he must be prepared. Also, his career was chosen. For Lettice had said another thing—one other thing. When Mary, his sister, introduced him,

'This is Tommy,' Lettice looked down and asked: 'Are you going to be an engineer?' adding proudly, 'My brother is.' Before he could answer she was scampering away with Mary, the dark hair flying in a cloud, the bright bow upon it twinkling like a star in heaven—and Tommy, hating his ridiculous boyish name with an intense hatred, stood there trembling, but aware that the die was cast—he was going to be an engineer.

Trembling, yes; for he felt dazed and helpless, caught in a mist of fire and gold, the furniture whirling round him, and something singing wildly in his heart. Two things, each containing in them the essence of genuine shock, had fallen upon him: shock, because there was impetus in them as of a blow. They had been coming; they had reached him. There was no doubt or question possible. He staggered from the impact. Joy and terror touched him; at one and the same moment he felt the enticement and the shrinking of his dream.... He longed to seize her and prevent her ever going away, yet also he wanted to push her from him as though she somehow caused him pain.

For, on the two occasions when speech had taken place between himself and Lettice, the dream had transferred itself boldly into his objective life— yet not entirely. Two characteristics only had been thus transferred. When his sister first came into the hall with 'This is Tommy,' the wavy feeling had already preceded her by a definite interval that was perhaps a second by the watch. He was aware of it behind him, curved and risen—not curving, rising—from the open fireplace, but also from the woods behind the house, from the whole of the country right back to the coast, from across the world, it

seemed, towering overhead against the wintry sky. And when Lettice smiled and asked that question of childish admiration about being an engineer, he was already shuffling furiously with his feet upon the Indian rug. She was gone again, luckily, he hoped, before the ridiculous pantomime was noticeable.

He saw her once or twice. He was invariably speechless when she came into his presence, and his silence and awkwardness made him appear at great disadvantage. He seemed intentionally rude. Nervous self-consciousness caused him to bridle over nothing. Even to answer her was a torture. He dreaded a snub appallingly, and bridled in anticipation. Furious with himself for his inability to use each precious opportunity, he pretended he didn't care. The consequence was that when she once spoke to him sweetly, he was too overpowered to respond as he might have done. That she had not even noticed his anguished attitude never occurred to him.

'We're always friends, aren't we, Tommy?'

'Rather,' he blurted, before he could regain his composure for a longer sentence.

'And always will be, won't we?'

'Rather,' he repeated, cursing himself later for thinking of nothing better to say. Then, just as she flew off in that dancing way of hers, he found his tongue. Out of the jumbled mass of phrases in his head three words got loose and offered themselves: 'We'll always be!' he flung at her retreating figure of intolerable beauty. And she turned her head over her

shoulder, waved her hand without stopping her career, and shouted 'Rather!'

That was the Tuesday in his calendar. But on Saturday, the printed Saturday following it, the second characteristic of his dream announced itself: he recognised the Eyes. Why he had not recognised them on the Tuesday lay beyond explanation; he only knew it was so. And afterwards, when he tried to think it over, it struck him that she had scampered out of the hall with peculiar speed and hurry; had made her escape without the extra word or two the occasion naturally demanded—almost as though she, too, felt something that uneasily surprised her.

Tommy wondered about it till his head spun round. She, too, had received an impact that was shock. He was as thorough about it as an instinctive scientist. He also registered this further fact—that the dream-details had not entirely reproduced themselves in the affair. There was no trace of the Whiff or of the other pair of Eyes. Some day the three would come together; but then....

The main thing, however, undoubtedly was this: Lettice felt something too: she was aware of feelings similar to his own. He was too honest to assume that she felt exactly what he felt; he only knew that her eyes betrayed familiar intimacy when she said 'Don't forget me, Tommy,' and that when she rushed out of the hall with that unnecessary abruptness it was because—well, he could only transfer to her some degree of the 'wavy' feeling in himself.

And he fell in love with abandonment and a delicious, infinite yearning. From that moment he thought of himself as Tom instead of Tommy.

It was an entire, sweeping love that left no atom or corner of his being untouched. Lettice was real; she hid below the horizon of distant France, yet could not, did not, hide from him. She also waited.

He knew the difference between real and unreal people. The latter wavered about his life and were uncertain; sometimes he liked them, sometimes he did not; but the former—remained fixed quantities: he could not alter towards them. Even at this stage he knew when a person came into his life to stay, or merely to pass out again. Lettice, though seen but twice, belonged to this first category. His feeling for her had the Wave in it; it gathered weight and mass, it was irresistible. From the dim, invisible foundations of his life it came, out of the foundations of the world, out of that inexhaustible sea-foundation that lay below everything. It was real; it was not to be avoided. He knew. He persuaded himself that she knew too.

And it was then, realising for the first time the searching pain of being separated from something that seemed part of his being by natural right, he spoke to his father and asked if pain should be avoided. This conversation has been already sufficiently recorded; but he asked other things as well. From being so long on the level he had made a sudden jump that his father had foretold; he grew up; his mind began to think; he had peered into certain books; he analysed. Out of the nonsense of his speculative reflections the doctor pounced on certain points

that puzzled him completely. Probing for the repressed elements in the boy's psychic life that caused the triple complex of Wave and Eyes and Whiff, he only saw the cause receding further and further from his grasp until it finally lost itself in ultimate obscurity. The disciple of Freud was baffled hopelessly....

Tom, meanwhile, bathed in a sea of new sensations. Distance held meaning for him, separation was a kind of keen starvation. He made discoveries— watched the moon rise, heard the wind, and knew the stars shone over the meadows below the house, things that before had been merely commonplace. He pictured these details as they might occur in France, and once when he saw a Swallow Tail butterfly, knowing that the few English specimens were said to have crossed the Channel, he had a touch of ecstasy, as though the proud insect brought him a message from the fields below the Finishing School. Also he read French books and found the language difficult but exquisite. All sweet and lovely things came from France, and at school he attempted violent friendships with three French boys and the Foreign Language masters, friendships that were not appreciated because they were not understood. But he made progress with the language, and it stood him in good stead in his examinations. He was aiming now at an Engineering College. He passed in— eventually—brilliantly enough.

Before that satisfactory moment, however, he knew difficult times. His inner life was in a splendid tumult. From the books he purloined he read a good many facts concerning waves and

wave-formation. He learned, among other things, that all sensory impressions reached the nerves by impact of force in various wave-lengths; heat, light and sound broke upon the skin and eyes and ears in vibrations of æther or air that advanced in steady series of wavy formations which, though not quite similar to his dream-wave, were akin to it. Sensation, which is life, was thus linked on to his deepest, earliest memory.

A wave, however, instantly rejoined the parent stock and formed again. And perhaps it was the repetition of the wave—its forming again and breaking again—that impressed him most. For he imagined his impulses, emotions, tendencies all taking this wave-form, sweeping his moods up to a certain point, then dropping back into his centre—the Sea, he called it— which held steady below all temporary fluctuations—only to form once more and happen all over again.

With his moral and spiritual life it was similar: a wind came, wind of desire, wind of yearning, wind of hope, and he felt his strength accumulating, rising, bending with power upon the object that he had in view. To take that object exactly at the top of the wave was to achieve success; to miss that moment was to act with a receding and diminishing power, to dissipate himself in foam and spray before he could retire for a second rise. He saw existence as a wave. Life itself was a wave that rose, swept, curved, and finally—must break.

He merely visualised these feelings into pictures; he did not think them out, nor get them into words. The wave became symbolic to him of all life's energies. It was the way in which all sensation expressed itself. Lettice was the high-water mark

on shore he longed to reach and sweep back into his own tumultuous being. In that great underneath, the Sea, they belonged eternally together....

One thing, however, troubled him exceedingly: he read that a wave was a segment of a circle, the perfect form, yet that it never completed itself. The ground on which it broke prevented the achievement of the circle. That, he felt, was a pity, and might be serious; there was always that sinister retirement for another effort that yet never did, and never could, result in complete achievement. He watched the waves a good deal on the shore, when occasion offered in the holidays—they came from France!—and made a discovery on his own account that was not mentioned in any of the books. And it was this: that the top of the wave, owing to its curve, was reflected in the under part. Its end, that is, was foretold in its beginning.

There was a want of scientific accuracy here, a confusion of time and space, perhaps, yet he noticed the idea and registered the thrill. At the moment when the wave was poised to fall its crest shone reflected in the base from which it rose.

But the more he watched the waves on the shore, the more puzzled he became. They seemed merely a movement of the sea itself. They endlessly repeated themselves. They had no true, separate existence until they— broke. Nor could he determine whether the crest or the base was the beginning, for the two ran along together, and what was above one minute was below the minute after. Which part started first he never could decide. The head kept chasing the tail in an effort to join up. Only when a

wave broke and fell was it really—a wave. It had to 'happen' to earn its name.

There were ripples too. These indicated the direction of the parent wave upon whose side they happened, but not its purpose. Moods were ripples: they varied the surface of life but did not influence its general direction.

His own life followed a similar behaviour; he was full of ripples that were for ever trying to complete themselves by happening in acts. But the main Wave was the thing—end and beginning sweeping along together, both at the same time somehow. That is, he knew the end and could foretell it. It rose from the great 'beneath' which was the sea in him. It must topple over in the end and complete itself. He knew it would; he knew it would hurt; he knew also that he would not shirk it when it came. For it was a repetition somehow.

'I jolly well mean to enjoy the smash,' he felt. 'I know one pair of Eyes already; there's only the Whiff and the other Eyes to come. The moment I find them, I'll go bang into it.' He experienced a delicious shiver at the prospect.

One thing, however, remained uncertain: the stuff the Wave was made of. Once he discovered that, he would discover also—*where* the smash would come.

CHAPTER IV.

'Can a chap feel things coming?' he asked his father. He was perhaps fifteen or sixteen then. 'I mean, when you feel them coming, does that mean they *must* come?'

His father listened warily. There had been many similar questions lately.

'You can feel ordinary things coming,' he replied; 'things due to association of ideas.'

Tom looked up. 'Association?' he queried uncertainly.

'If you feel hungry,' explained the doctor, 'you know that dinner's coming; you associate the hunger with the idea of eating. You recognise them because you've felt them both together before.'

'They *ought* to come, then?'

'Dinner does come—ordinarily speaking. You've learned to expect it from the hunger. You could, of course, prevent it coming,' he added dryly, 'only that would be bad for you. You need it.'

Tom reflected a moment with a puckered face. His father waited for him to ask more, hoping he would. The boy felt the sympathy and invitation.

'*Before*,' he repeated, picking out the word with sudden emphasis, his mind evidently breaking against a problem. 'But if I felt hungry for something I *hadn't* had before——?'

'In that case you wouldn't call it hunger. You wouldn't know what to call it. You'd feel a longing of some kind and would wonder what it meant.'

Tom's next words surprised him considerably. They came promptly, but with slow and thoughtful emphasis.

'So that if I know what I want, and call it dinner, or pain, or—love, or something,' he exclaimed, 'it means that I've had it *before*? And that's why I know it.' The last five words were not a question but a statement of fact apparently.

The doctor pretended not to notice the variants of dinner. At least he did not draw attention to them.

'Not necessarily,' he answered. 'The things you feel you want may be the things that everybody wants—things common to the race. Such wants are naturally in your blood; you feel them because your parents, your grandparents, and all humanity in turn behind your own particular family have always wanted them.'

'They come out of the sea, you mean?'

'That's very well expressed, Tom. They come out of the sea of human nature, which is everywhere the same, yes.'

The compliment seemed to annoy the boy.

'Of course,' he said bluntly. 'But—if it hurts?' The words were sharply emphasised.

'Association of ideas again. Toothache suggests the pincers. You want to get rid of the pain, but the pain has to get worse

before it can get better. You know that, so you face it gladly—to get it over.'

'You face it, yes,' said Tom. 'It makes you better in the end.'

It suddenly dawned upon him that his learned father knew nothing, nothing at least that could help him. He knew only what other people knew. He turned then, and asked the ridiculous question that lay at the back of his mind all the time. It cost him an effort, for his father would certainly deem it foolish.

'Can a thing happen before it really happens?'

Dr. Kolverdon may or may not have thought the question foolish; his face was hidden a moment as he bent down to put the Indian rug straight with his hand. There was no impatience in the movement, nor was there mockery in his expression, when he resumed his normal position. He had gained an appreciable interval of time—some fifteen seconds. 'Tom, you've got good ideas in that head of yours,' he said calmly; 'but what is it that you mean exactly?'

Tom was quite ready to amplify. He knew what he meant:

'If I *know* something is going to happen, doesn't that mean that it has already happened—and that I remember it?'

'You're a psychologist as well as engineer, Tom,' was the approving reply. 'It's like this, you see: In emotion, with desire in it, can predict the fulfilment of that desire. In great hunger you imagine you're eating all sorts of good things.'