THE WHITE PEACOCK

D. H. LAWRENCE

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Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide,
In thy most need to go by thy side.

DAVID HERBERT LAWRENCE, born on 11th September 1885 at Eastwood, Notts, the son of a coal miner. Educated at Nottingham High School and Nottingham University College, he became a teacher and settled in London. Much of his later life spent abroad. Died at Nice on 2nd March 1930.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The White Peacock is one of the most straightforward of D. H. Lawrence's novels, and was written just before the better known *Sons and Lovers*. It is an excellent example of his genius, written in an uncompromisingly simple style, and has that intensity and vitality which are characteristic of him at his best.

In it is foreshadowed the philosophy of life which is developed more fully and more esoterically in his later work; in it, too, are those qualities which he has displayed most brilliantly later—the extraordinarily subtle and satisfying insight into family relationships which is so memorable in *Sons and Lovers*, the understanding of the desperate element of conflict in the attraction between male and female that is the subject of *Women in Love*, and the instinctive, passionate love of nature, of the flowers, fields, and woods which are to form a background to so many of his books.

E. F. B.

The following is a list of Lawrence's chief works with the date of their first appearance in book form:

Novels: *The White Peacock*, 1911; *The Trespasser*, 1912; *Sons and Lovers*, 1913; *The Rainbow*, 1915; *Women in Love*, 1920; *The Lost Girl*, 1920; *Aaron's Rod*, 1922; *Kangaroo*, 1923; *The Boy in the Bush* (with M. L. Skinner), 1924; *The Plumed Serpent*, 1926; *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 1928; *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, 1930.

Shorter fiction: *The Prussian Officer*, 1914; *England, my England*, 1922; *The Ladybird*, 1923; *St. Mawr (and The Princess)*, 1925; *Sun*, 1926 (unexpurgated edition, 1928); *Glad Ghosts*, 1926; *Rawdon's Roof*, 1928; *The Woman who rode away*, 1928; *The Escaped Cock*, 1929; *Love among the Haystacks*, 1930; *The Man who died*, 1931; *The Tales of D. H. Lawrence* (his collected shorter fiction), 1934.

Poetry: *Love Poems and Others*, 1913; *Amores*, 1916; *Look! We have come through*, 1917; *New Poems*, 1918; *Bay*, 1919; *Tortoises*, 1922; *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers*, 1923; *Collected Poems*, 1928 and 1932; *Pansies*, 1929; *Nettles*, 1930; *The Triumph of the Machine*, 1930; *Last Poems*, 1933.

Drama: *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*, 1914; *Touch and Go*, 1920; *David*, 1926; *Plays*, 1933; *A Collier's Friday Night*, 1934.

Essays, and other miscellaneous prose works: *Twilight in Italy*, 1916;

Sea and Sardinia, 1921; *Psycho-analysis and the Unconscious*, 1921; *Movements in European History*, 1921; *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, 1923; *Studies in Classical American Literature*, 1923; *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine*, 1925; *Mornings in Mexico*, 1927; *Sex locked out*, 1928; *My Skirmish with Jolly Roger*, 1929; *Pornography and Obscenity*, 1929; *Assorted Articles*, 1930; *Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 1930; *Apocalypse*, 1931; *Letters*, 1932; *Etruscan Places*, 1932.

Lawrence also translated three volumes of Giovanni Verga (1923, 1925, and 1928) and *The Story of Dr. Manente* by A. F. Grazzini, 1929. A volume of his paintings was published in 1929.

Lives and studies of Lawrence include those by H. J. Seligmann, 1924; Richard Aldington, 1927 and 1930; Rebecca West, 1930; Stephen Potter, 1930; J. M. Murry (*Son of Woman*), 1931; Ada Lawrence and G. Stuart Gelder (*Early Life of D. H. Lawrence*), 1932; C. Carswell (*The Savage Pilgrimage*), 1932; E. and A. Brewster (*Reminiscences and Correspondence*), 1934; Frieda Lawrence—Lawrence's wife—(*Not I but the Wind . . .*), 1935. A bibliography was compiled by Edward D. McDonald in 1925 and a supplement was issued in 1931.

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PART I

CHAPTER I

THE PEOPLE OF NETHERMERE

I STOOD watching the shadowy fish slide through the gloom of the mill-pond. They were grey, descendants of the silvery things that had darted away from the monks, in the young days when the valley was lusty. The whole place was gathered in the musing of old age. The thick-piled trees on the far shore were too dark and sober to dally with the sun; the weeds stood crowded and motionless. Not even a little wind flickered the willows of the islets. The water lay softly, intensely still. Only the thin stream falling through the mill-race murmured to itself of the tumult of life which had once quickened the valley.

I was almost startled into the water from my perch on the alder roots by a voice saying:

'Well, what is there to look at?' My friend was a young farmer, stoutly built, brown eyed, with a naturally fair skin burned dark and freckled in patches. He laughed, seeing me start, and looked down at me with lazy curiosity.

'I was thinking the place seemed old, brooding over its past.'

He looked at me with a lazy indulgent smile, and lay down on his back on the bank, saying:

'It 's all right for a doss—here.'

'Your life is nothing else but a doss. I shall laugh when somebody jerks you awake,' I replied.

He smiled comfortably and put his hands over his eyes because of the light.

'Why shall you laugh?' he drawled.

'Because you 'll be amusing,' said I.

We were silent for a long time, when he rolled over and began to poke with his finger in the bank.

'I thought,' he said in his leisurely fashion, 'there was some cause for all this buzzing.'

I looked, and saw that he had poked out an old, papery nest of those pretty field bees which seem to have dipped their tails into bright amber dust. Some agitated insects ran round the cluster of eggs, most of which were empty now, the crowns gone; a few young bees staggered about in uncertain flight before they could gather power to wing away in a strong course. He watched the little ones that ran in and out among the shadows of the grass, hither and thither in consternation.

'Come here—come here!' he said, imprisoning one poor little bee under a grass stalk, while with another stalk he loosened the folded blue wings.

'Don't tease the little beggar,' I said.

'It doesn't hurt him—I wanted to see if it was because he couldn't spread his wings that he couldn't fly. There he goes—no, he doesn't. Let 's try another.'

'Leave them alone,' said I. 'Let them run in the sun. They 're only just out of the shells. Don't torment them into flight.'

He persisted, however, and broke the wing of the next.

'Oh, dear—pity!' said he, and he crushed the little thing between his fingers. Then he examined the eggs, and pulled out some silk from round the dead larva, and investigated it all in a desultory manner, asking of me all I knew about the insects. When he had finished he flung the clustered eggs into the water and rose, pulling out his watch from the depth of his breeches pocket.

'I thought it was about dinner-time,' said he, smiling at me. 'I always know when it 's about twelve. Are you coming in?'

'I 'm coming down at any rate,' said I as we passed along the pond bank, and over the plank bridge that crossed the brow of the falling sluice. The bankside where the grey orchard twisted its trees, was a steep declivity, long and sharp, dropping down to the garden.

The stones of the large house were burdened with ivy and honeysuckle, and the great lilac-bush that had once guarded the porch now almost blocked the doorway. We passed out of the front garden into the farmyard, and walked along the brick path to the back door.

'Shut the gate, will you?' he said to me over his shoulder, as he passed on first.

We went through the large scullery into the kitchen. The servant-girl was just hurriedly snatching the table-cloth out of the table drawer, and his mother, a quaint little woman with big, brown eyes, was hovering round the wide fire-place with a fork.

'Dinner not ready?' said he with a shade of resentment.

'No, George,' replied his mother apologetically, 'it isn't. The fire wouldn't burn a bit. You shall have it in a few minutes, though.'

He dropped on the sofa and began to read a novel. I wanted to go, but his mother insisted on my staying.

'Don't go,' she pleaded. 'Emily will be so glad if you stay—and father will, I 'm sure. Sit down, now.'

I sat down on a rush chair by the long window that looked out into the yard. As he was reading, and as it took all his mother's powers to watch the potatoes boil and the meat roast, I was left to my thoughts. George, indifferent to all claims, continued to read. It was very annoying to watch him pulling his brown moustache, and reading indolently while the dog rubbed against his leggings and against the knee of his old riding-breeches. He would not even be at the trouble to play with Trip's ears, he was so content with his novel and his moustache. Round and round twirled his thick fingers, and the muscles of his bare arm moved slightly under the red-brown skin. The little square window above him filtered a green light from the foliage of the great horse-chestnut outside and the glimmer fell on his dark hair, and trembled across the plates which Annie was reaching down from the rack, and across the face of the tall clock. The kitchen was very big; the table looked lonely, and the chairs mourned darkly for the lost companionship of the sofa; the chimney was a black cavern away at the back, and the inglenook seats shut in another little compartment ruddy with firelight, where the mother hovered. It was rather a desolate kitchen, such a bare expanse of uneven grey flagstones, such far-away dark corners and sober furniture. The only gay things were the chintz coverings of the sofa and the arm-chair cushions, bright red in the bare sombre room; some might

smile at the old clock, adorned as it was with remarkable and vivid poultry; in me it only provoked wonder and contemplation.

In a little while we heard the scraping of heavy boots outside, and the father entered. He was a big burly farmer, with his half-bald head sprinkled with crisp little curls.

'Hallo, Cyril,' he said cheerfully. 'You 've not forsaken us then,' and turning to his son:

'Have you many more rows in the coppice close?'

'Finished!' replied George, continuing to read.

'That 's all right—you 've got on with 'em. The rabbits has bitten them turnips down, mother.'

'I expect so,' replied his wife, whose soul was in the saucepans. At last she deemed the potatoes cooked and went out with the steaming pan.

The dinner was set on the table and the father began to carve. George looked over his book to survey the fare, then read until his plate was handed him. The maid sat at her little table near the window, and we began the meal. There came the treading of four feet along the brick path, and a little girl entered, followed by her grown-up sister. The child's long brown hair was tossed wildly back beneath her sailor hat. She flung aside this article of her attire and sat down to dinner, talking endlessly to her mother. The elder sister, a girl of about twenty-one, gave me a smile and a bright look from her brown eyes, and went to wash her hands. Then she came and sat down, and looked disconsolately at the underdone beef on her plate.

'I do hate this raw meat,' she said.

'Good for you,' replied her brother, who was eating industriously. 'Give you some muscle to wallop the nippers.'

She pushed it aside, and began to eat the vegetables. Her brother recharged his plate and continued to eat.

'Well, our George, I do think you might pass a body that gravy,' said Mollie, the younger sister, in injured tones.

'Certainly,' he replied. 'Won't you have the joint as well?'

'No!' retorted the young lady of twelve, 'I don't expect you 've done with it yet.'

'Clever!' he exclaimed across a mouthful.

'Do you think so?' said the elder sister Emily, sarcastically.

'Yes,' he replied complacently, 'you 've made her as sharp as yourself, I see, since you 've had her in Standard Six. I 'll try a potato, mother, if you can find one that 's done.'

'Well, George, they seem mixed, I 'm sure that was done that I tried. There—they are mixed—look at this one, it's soft enough. I 'm sure they were boiling long enough.'

'Don't explain and apologize to him,' said Emily irritably.

'Perhaps the kids were too much for her this morning,' he said calmly, to nobody in particular.

'No,' chimed in Mollie, 'she knocked a lad across his nose and made it bleed.'

'Little wretch,' said Emily, swallowing with difficulty. 'I 'm glad I did! Some of my lads belong to—to——'

'To the devil,' suggested George, but she would not accept it from him.

Her father sat laughing; her mother, with distress in her eyes, looked at her daughter, who hung her head and made patterns on the table-cloth with her finger.

'Are they worse than the last lot?' asked the mother, softly, fearfully.

'No—nothing extra,' was the curt answer.

'She merely felt like bashing 'em,' said George, calling, as he looked at the sugar-bowl and at his pudding:

'Fetch some more sugar, Annie.'

The maid rose from her little table in the corner, and the mother also hurried to the cupboard. Emily trifled with her dinner and said bitterly to him:

'I only wish you had a taste of teaching, it would cure your self-satisfaction.'

'Pf!' he replied contemptuously, 'I could easily bleed the noses of a handful of kids.'

'You wouldn't sit there bleating like a fatted calf,' she continued.

This speech so tickled Mollie that she went off into a burst of laughter, much to the terror of her mother, who stood up in trembling apprehension lest she should choke.

'You made a joke, Emily,' he said, looking at his younger sister's contortions.

Emily was too impatient to speak to him further, and left the table. Soon the two men went back to the fallow to the turnips, and I walked along the path with the girls as they were going to school.

'He irritates me in everything he does and says,' burst out Emily with much heat.

'He 's a pig sometimes,' said I.

'He is!' she insisted. 'He irritates me past bearing, with his grand know-all way, and his heavy smartness—I can't bear it. And the way mother humbles herself to him——!'

'It makes you wild,' said I.

'Wild!' she echoed, her voice vibrating with nervous passion. We walked on in silence, till she asked:

'Have you brought me those verses of yours?'

'No—I 'm so sorry—I 've forgotten them again. As a matter of fact, I 've sent them away.'

'But you promised me.'

'You know what my promises are. I 'm as irresponsible as a puff of wind.'

She frowned with impatience and her disappointment was greater than necessary. When I left her at the corner of the lane I felt a sting of her deep reproach in my mind. I always felt the reproach when she had gone.

I ran over the little bright brook that came from the weedy, bottom pond. The stepping-stones were white in the sun, and the water slid sleepily among them. One or two butterflies, indistinguishable against the blue sky, trifled from flower to flower and led me up the hill, across the field where the hot sunshine stood as in a bowl, and I was entering the caverns of the wood, where the oaks bowed over and saved us a grateful shade. Within, everything was so still and cool that my steps hung heavily along the path. The bracken held out arms to me, and the bosom of the wood was full of sweetness, but I journeyed on, spurred by the attacks of an army of flies which kept up a guerrilla warfare round my head till I had passed the black rhododendron bushes in the garden, where they left me, scenting, no doubt, Rebecca's pots of vinegar and sugar.

The low red house, with its roof discoloured and sunken,

dozed in sunlight, and slept profoundly in the shade thrown by the massive maples encroaching from the wood.

There was no one in the dining-room, but I could hear the whirr of a sewing-machine coming from the little study, a sound as of some great, vindictive insect buzzing about, now louder, now softer, now settling. Then came a jingling of four or five keys at the bottom of the keyboard of the drawing-room piano, continuing till the whole range had been covered in little leaps, as if some very fat frog had jumped from end to end.

'That must be mother dusting the drawing-room,' I thought. The unaccustomed sound of the old piano startled me. The vocal chords behind the green silk bosom—you only discovered it was not a bronze silk bosom by poking a fold aside—had become as thin and tuneless as a dried old woman's. Age had yellowed the teeth of my mother's little piano, and shrunken its spindle legs. Poor old thing, it could but screech in answer to Lettie's fingers flying across it in scorn, so the prim, brown lips were always closed save to admit the duster.

Now, however, the little old-maidish piano began to sing a tinkling Victorian melody, and I fancied it must be some demure little woman with curls like bunches of hops on either side of her face, who was touching it. The coy little tune teased me with old sensations, but my memory would give me no assistance. As I stood trying to fix my vague feelings, Rebecca came in to remove the cloth from the table.

'Who is playing, Beck?' I asked.

'Your mother, Cyril.'

'But she never plays. I thought she couldn't.'

'Ah,' replied Rebecca, 'you forget when you was a little thing sitting playing against her frock with the prayer-book, and she singing to you. *You* can't remember her when her curls was long like a piece of brown silk. *You* can't remember her when she used to play and sing, before Lettie came and your father was——'

Rebecca turned and left the room. I went and peeped in the drawing-room. Mother sat before the little brown piano, with her plump, rather stiff fingers moving across the keys, a faint smile on her lips. At that moment Lettie

came flying past me, and flung her arms round mother's neck, kissing her and saying:

'Oh, my dear, fancy my dear playing the piano! Oh, little woman, we never knew you could!'

'Nor can I,' replied mother laughing, disengaging herself. 'I only wondered if I could just strum out this old tune; I learned it when I was quite a girl, on this piano. It was a cracked one then; the only one I had.'

'But play again, dearie, do play again. It was like the clinking of lustre glasses, and you look so quaint at the piano. Do play, my dear!' pleaded Lettie.

'Nay,' said my mother, 'the touch of the old keys on my fingers is making me sentimental—you wouldn't like to see me reduced to the tears of old age?'

'Old age!' scolded Lettie, kissing her again. 'You are young enough to play little romances. Tell us about it, mother.'

'About what, child?'

'When you used to play.'

'Before my fingers were stiff with fifty odd years? Where have you been, Cyril, that you weren't in to dinner?'

'Only down to Strelley Mill,' said I.

'Of course,' said mother coldly.

'Why "of course"?' I asked.

'And you came away as soon as Em went to school?' said Lettie.

'I did,' said I.

They were cross with me, these two women. After I had swallowed my little resentment I said:

'They would have me stay to dinner.'

My mother vouchsafed no reply.

'And has the great George found a girl yet?' asked Lettie.

'No,' I replied, 'he never will at this rate. Nobody will ever be good enough for him.'

'I 'm sure I don't know what you can find in any of them to take you there so much,' said my mother.

'Don't be so mean, mater,' I answered, nettled. 'You know I like them.'

'I know you like *her*,' said my mother sarcastically. 'As for him—he's an unlicked cub. What can you expect when