EYELESS *in* GAZA

ALDOUS HUXLEY

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by

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EYELESS IN GAZA

SIXTEENTH EDITION

B-N

Chapter One

AUGUST 30, 1933

THE snapshots had become almost as dim as memories. This young woman who had stood in a garden at the turn of the century was like a ghost at cock-crow. His mother, Anthony Beavis recognized. A year or two, perhaps only a month or two, before she died. But fashion, as he peered at the brown phantom, fashion is a topiary art. Those swan-like loins! That long slanting cascade of bosom—without any apparent relation to the naked body beneath! And all that hair, like an ornamental deformity on the skull! Oddly hideous and repellent it seemed in 1933. And yet, if he shut his eyes (as he could not resist doing), he could see his mother languidly beautiful on her *chaise-longue*; or, agile, playing tennis; or swooping like a bird across the ice of a far-off winter.

It was the same with these snapshots of Mary Amberley, taken ten years later. The skirt was as long as ever, and within her narrower bell of drapery woman still glided footless, as though on castors. The breasts, it was true, had been pushed up a bit, the redundant posterior pulled in. But the general shape of the clothed body was still strangely improbable. A crab shelled in whalebone. And this huge plumed hat of 1911 was simply a French funeral of the first class. How could any man in his senses have been attracted by so profoundly anti-aphrodisiac an appearance? And yet, in spite of the snapshots, he could remember her as the very embodiment of desirability. At the sight of that feathered crab on wheels his hasty heart had beaten faster, his breathing had become oppressed.

Twenty years, thirty years after the event, the snapshots revealed only things remote and unfamiliar. But the un-

familiar (dismal automatism!) is always the absurd. What he remembered, on the contrary, was the emotion felt when the unfamiliar was still the familiar, when the absurd, being taken for granted, had nothing absurd about it. The dramas of memory are always Hamlet in modern dress.

How beautiful his mother had been—beautiful under the convoluted wens of hair and in spite of the jutting posterior, the long slant of bosom. And Mary, how maddeningly desirable even in a carapace, even beneath funereal plumes! And in his little fawn-coloured covert coat and scarlet tam-o'-shanter; as Bubbles, in grass-green velveteen and ruffles; at school in his Norfolk suit with the knickerbockers that ended below the knees in two tight tubes of box-cloth; in his starched collar and his bowler, if it were Sunday, his red-and-black school cap on other days—he too, in his own memory, was always in modern dress, never the absurd little figure of fun these snapshots revealed. No worse off, so far as inner feeling was concerned, than the little boys of thirty years later in their jerseys and shorts. A proof, Anthony found himself reflecting impersonally, as he examined the top-hatted and tail-coated image of himself at Eton, a proof that progress can only be recorded, never experienced. He reached out for his note-book, opened it and wrote: "Progress may, perhaps, be perceived by historians; it can never be felt by those actually involved in the supposed advance. The young are born into the advancing circumstances, the old take them for granted within a few months or years. Advances aren't *felt* as advances. There is no gratitude—only irritation if, for any reason, the newly invented conveniences break down. Men don't spend their time thanking God for cars; they only curse when the carburettor is choked."

He closed the book and returned to the top-hat of 1907.

There was a sound of footsteps and, looking up, he saw Helen Ledwidge approaching with those long springing strides of hers across the terrace. Under the wide hat her face was bright with the reflection from her flame-coloured

beach pyjamas. As though she were in hell. And in fact, he went on to think, she *was* there. The mind is its own place; she carried her hell about with her. The hell of her grotesque marriage; other hells too, perhaps. But he had always refrained from enquiring too closely into their nature, had always pretended not to notice when she herself offered to be his guide through their intricacies. Enquiry and exploration would land him in heaven knew what quagmire of emotion, what sense of responsibility. And he had no time, no energy for emotions and responsibilities. His work came first. Suppressing his curiosity, he went on stubbornly playing the part he had long since assigned himself—the part of the detached philosopher, of the preoccupied man of science who doesn't see the things that to everyone else are obvious. He acted as if he could detect in her face nothing but its external beauties of form and texture. Whereas, of course, flesh is never wholly opaque; the soul shows through the walls of its receptacle. Those clear grey eyes of hers, that mouth with its delicately lifted upper lip, were hard and almost ugly with a resentful sadness.

The hell-flush was quenched as she stepped out of the sunlight into the shadow of the house; but the sudden pallor of her face served only to intensify the embittered melancholy of its expression. Anthony looked at her, but did not rise, did not call a greeting. There was a convention between them that there should never be any fuss; not even the fuss of saying good-morning. No fuss at all. As Helen stepped through the open glass doors into the room, he turned back to the study of his photographs.

"Well, here I am," she said without smiling. She pulled off her hat and with a beautiful impatient movement of the head shook back the ruddy-brown curls of her hair. "Hideously hot!" She threw the hat on to the sofa and crossed the room to where Anthony was sitting at his writing-table. "Not working?" she asked in surprise. It was so rare to find him otherwise than immersed in books and papers.

He shook his head. "No sociology to-day."

"What are you looking at?" Standing by his chair, she bent over the scattered snapshots.

"At my old corpses." He handed her the ghost of the dead Etonian.

After studying it for a moment in silence, "You looked nice then," she commented.

"*Merci, mon vieux!*" He gave her an ironically affectionate pat on the back of the thigh. "At my private school they used to call me Benger." Between his finger-tips and the rounded resilience of her flesh the silk interposed a dry sliding smoothness, strangely disagreeable to the touch. "Short for Benger's Food. Because I looked so babyish."

"Sweet," she went on, ignoring his interruption. "You looked really sweet then. Touching."

"But I still am," Anthony protested, smiling up at her.

She looked at him for a moment in silence. Under the thick dark hair the forehead was beautifully smooth and serene, like the forehead of a meditative child. Childish too, in a more comical way, was the short, slightly tilted nose. Between their narrowed lids the eyes were alive with inner laughter, and there was a smile also about the corners of the lips—a faint ironic smile that in some sort contradicted what the lips seemed in their form to express. They were full lips, finely cut; voluptuous and at the same time grave, sad, almost tremulously sensitive. Lips as though naked in their brooding sensuality; without defence of their own and abandoned to their helplessness by the small, unaggressive chin beneath.

"The worst of it is," Helen said at last, "that you're right. You *are* sweet, you *are* touching. God knows why. Because you oughtn't to be. It's all a swindle really, a trick for getting people to like you on false pretences."

"Come!" he protested.

"You make them give you something for nothing."

"But at least I'm always perfectly frank about its being nothing. I never pretend it's a Grand Passion." He rolled

the *r* and opened the *a*'s grotesquely. "Not even a *Wahlverwandschaft*," he added, dropping into German, so as to make all this romantic business of affinities and violent emotions sound particularly ridiculous. "Just a bit of fun."

"Just a bit of fun," Helen echoed ironically, thinking, as she spoke, of that period at the beginning of the affair, when she had stood, so to speak, on the threshold of being in love with him—on the threshold, waiting to be called in. But how firmly (for all his silence and studied gentleness), how definitely and decidedly he had shut the door against her! He didn't want to be loved. For a moment she had been on the verge of rebellion; then, in that spirit of embittered and sarcastic resignation with which she had learned to face the world, she accepted his conditions. They were the more acceptable since there was no better alternative in sight; since, after all, he was a remarkable man and, after all, she was very fond of him; since, also, he knew how to give her at least a physical satisfaction. "Just a bit of fun," she repeated, and gave a little snort of laughter.

Anthony shot a glance at her, wondering uncomfortably whether she meant to break the tacitly accepted agreement between them and refer to some forbidden topic. But his fears were unjustified.

"Yes, I admit it," she went on after a little silence. "You're honest all right. But that doesn't alter the fact that you're always getting something for nothing. Call it an unintentional swindle. Your face is your fortune, I suppose. Handsome is as handsome doesn't, in your case." She bent down once more over the photographs. "Who's that?"

He hesitated a moment before replying; then, with a smile, but feeling at the same time rather uncomfortable, "One of the not-grand passions," he answered. "Her name was Gladys."

"It would have been!" Helen wrinkled up her nose contemptuously. "Why did you throw her over?"

"I didn't. She preferred some one else. Not that I very much minded," he was adding, when she interrupted him.

"Perhaps the other man sometimes talked to her when they were in bed."

Anthony flushed. "What do you mean?"

"Some women, oddly enough, like being talked to in bed. And seeing that you didn't . . . You never do, after all." She threw Gladys aside and picked up the woman in the clothes of 1900. "Is that your mother?"

Anthony nodded. "And that's yours," he said, pushing across the picture of Mary Amberley in her funereal plumes. Then, in a tone of disgust, "All this burden of past experience one trails about with one!" he added. "There ought to be some way of getting rid of one's superfluous memories. How I hate old Proust! Really detest him." And with a richly comic eloquence he proceeded to evoke the vision of that asthmatic seeker of lost time squatting, horribly white and flabby, with breasts almost female but fledged with long black hairs, for ever squatting in the tepid bath of his remembered past. And all the stale soap suds of countless previous washings floated around him, all the accumulated dirt of years lay crusty on the sides of the tub or hung in dark suspension in the water. And there he sat, a pale repellent invalid, taking up spongefuls of his own thick soup and squeezing it over his face, scooping up cupfuls of it and appreciatively rolling the grey and gritty liquor round his mouth, gargling, rinsing his nostrils with it, like a pious Hindu in the Ganges. . . .

"You talk about him," said Helen, "as if he were a personal enemy."

Anthony only laughed.

In the silence that followed, Helen picked up the faded snapshot of her mother and began to pore over it intently, as though it were some mysterious hieroglyph which, if interpreted, might provide a clue, unriddle an enigma.

Anthony watched her for a little; then, rousing himself to activity, dipped into the heap of photographs and brought out his Uncle James in the tennis clothes of 1906. Dead now —of cancer, poor old wretch, and with all the consolations

of the catholic religion. He dropped that snapshot and picked up another. It showed a group in front of dim Swiss mountains—his father, his stepmother, his two half-sisters. "Grindelwald, 1912" was written on the back in Mr. Beavis's neat hand. All four of them, he noticed, were carrying alpenstocks.

"And I would wish," he said aloud, as he put the picture down, "I would wish my days to be separated each from each by unnatural impiety."

Helen looked up from her undecipherable hieroglyph. "Then why do you spend your time looking at old photographs?"

"I was tidying my cupboard," he explained. "They came to light. Like Tutankhamen. I couldn't resist the temptation to look at them. Besides, it's my birthday," he added.

"Your birthday?"

"Forty-two to-day." Anthony shook his head. "Too depressing! And since one always likes to deepen the gloom . . ." He picked up a handful of the snapshots and let them fall again. "The corpses turned up very opportunely. One detects the finger of Providence. The hoof of chance, if you prefer it."

"You liked her a lot, didn't you?" Helen asked after another silence, holding out the ghostly image of her mother for him to see.

He nodded and, to divert the conversation, "She civilized me," he explained. "I was half a savage when she took me in hand." He didn't want to discuss his feelings for Mary Amberley—particularly (though this, no doubt, was a stupid relic of barbarism) with Helen. "The white woman's burden," he added with a laugh. Then, picking up the alpenstock group once again, "And this is one of the things she delivered me from," he said. "Darkest Switzerland. I can never be sufficiently grateful."

"It's a pity she couldn't deliver herself," said Helen, when she had looked at the alpenstocks.

"How is she, by the way?"

Helen shrugged her shoulders. "She was better when she came out of the nursing home this spring. But she's begun again, of course. The same old business. Morphia; and drink in the intervals. I saw her in Paris on the way here. It was awful!" She shuddered.

Ironically affectionate, the hand that still pressed her thigh seemed all of a sudden extremely out of place. He let it fall.

"I don't know which is worse," Helen went on after a pause. "The dirt—you've no idea of the state she lives in! —or that malice, that awful lying." She sighed profoundly.

With a gesture that had nothing ironical about it, Anthony took her hand and pressed it. "Poor Helen!"

She stood for a few seconds, motionless and without speech, averted; then suddenly shook herself as though out of sleep. He felt her limp hand tighten on his; and when she turned round on him, her face was alive with a reckless and deliberate gaiety. "Poor Anthony, on the contrary!" she said, and from deep in her throat produced a queer unexpected little sound of swallowed laughter. "Talk of false pretences!"

He was protesting that, in her case, they were true, when she bent down and, with a kind of angry violence, set her mouth against his.

Chapter Two

APRIL 4, 1934

From A. B.'s diary.

FIVE words sum up every biography. *Video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor.* Like all other human beings, I know what I ought to do, but continue to do what I know I oughtn't to do. This afternoon, for example, I went to see poor Beppo, miserably convalescent from 'flu. I knew I ought to have sat with him and let him pour out his complaints about youth's ingratitude and cruelty, his terror of advancing old age and loneliness, his awful suspicions that people are beginning to find him a bore, no longer *à la page*. The Bolinskys had given a party without inviting him, Hagworm hadn't asked him to a week-end since November. . . . I knew I ought to have listened sympathetically, and proffered good advice, implored him not to make himself miserable over inevitabilities and trifles. The advice, no doubt, wouldn't have been accepted—as usual; but still, one never knows, therefore ought never to fail to give it. Instead of which I squared conscience in advance by buying him a pound of expensive grapes and told a lie about some committee I had to run off to, almost immediately. The truth being that I simply couldn't face a repetition of poor B's self-commiserations. I justified my behaviour, as well as by five bobs' worth of fruit, by righteous thoughts: at fifty, the man ought to know better than continue to attach importance to love affairs and invitations to dinner and meeting the right people. He oughtn't to be such an ass; therefore (impeccable logic) it wasn't incumbent upon me to do what I knew I should do. And so I hurried off after only a quarter of an hour with him—leav-

ing the poor wretch to solitude and his festering self-pity. Shall go to him to-morrow for at least two hours.

"Besetting sin"—can one still use the term? No. It has too many unsatisfactory overtones and implications—blood of lamb, terrible thing to fall into hands of living God, hell fire, obsession with sex, offences, chastity instead of charity. (Note that poor old Beppo, turned inside out = Comstock or St. Paul.) Also "besetting sin" has generally implied that incessant, egotistic brooding on self which mars so much piety. See in this context the diary of Prince, that zealous evangelical who subsequently founded the Abode of Love —under Guidance, as the Buchmanites would say; for his long-repressed wish for promiscuous copulation at last emerged into consciousness as a command from the Holy Ghost (with whom in the end he came to identify himself) to "reconcile flesh with God." And he proceeded to reconcile it—in public, apparently, and on the drawing-room sofa.

No, one can't use the phrase, nor think in the terms it implies. But that doesn't mean, of course, that persistent tendencies to behave badly don't exist, or that it isn't one's business to examine them, objectively, and try to do something about them. That remark of old Miller's, as we were riding to see one of his Indian patients in the mountains: "Really and by nature every man's a unity; but you've artificially transformed the unity into a trinity. One clever man and two idiots—that's what you've made yourself. An admirable manipulator of ideas, linked with a person who, so far as self-knowledge and feeling are concerned, is just a moron; and the pair of you associated with a half-witted body. A body that's hopelessly unaware of all it does and feels, that has no accomplishments, that doesn't know how to use itself or anything else. Two imbeciles and one intellectual. But man is a democracy, where the majority rules. You've got to do something about that majority." This journal is a first step. Self-knowledge an essential preliminary to self-change. (Pure science and then applied.)

That which besets me is indifference. I can't be bothered about people. Or rather, won't. For I avoid, carefully, all occasions for being bothered. A necessary part of the treatment is to embrace all the bothersome occasions one can, to go out of one's way to create them. Indifference is a form of sloth. For one can work hard, as I've always done, and yet wallow in sloth; be industrious about one's job, but scandalously lazy about all that isn't the job. Because, of course, the job is fun. Whereas the non-job—personal relations, in my case—is disagreeable and laborious. More and more disagreeable as the habit of avoiding personal relations ingrains itself with the passage of time. Indifference is a form of sloth, and sloth in its turn is one of the symptoms of lovelessness. One isn't lazy about what one loves. The problem is: how to love? (Once more the word is suspect—greasy from being fingered by generations of Stigginses. There ought to be some way of dry-cleaning and disinfecting words. Love, purity, goodness, spirit—a pile of dirty linen waiting for the laundress. How, then, to—not "love," since it's an unwashed handkerchief—feel, say, persistent affectionate interest in people? How make the anthropological approach to them, as old Miller would say? Not easy to answer.

April 5th.

Worked all morning. For it would be silly not to put my materials into shape. Into a new shape, of course. My original conception was of a vast *Bouvard et Pécuchet,* constructed of historical facts. A picture of futility, apparently objective, scientific, but composed, I realize, in order to justify my own way of life. If men had always behaved either like half-wits or baboons, if they couldn't behave otherwise, then I was justified in sitting comfortably in the stalls with my opera-glasses. Whereas if there were something to be done, if the behaviour could be modified . . . Meanwhile a description of the behaviour and an account of the ways of modifying it will be valuable. Though not so