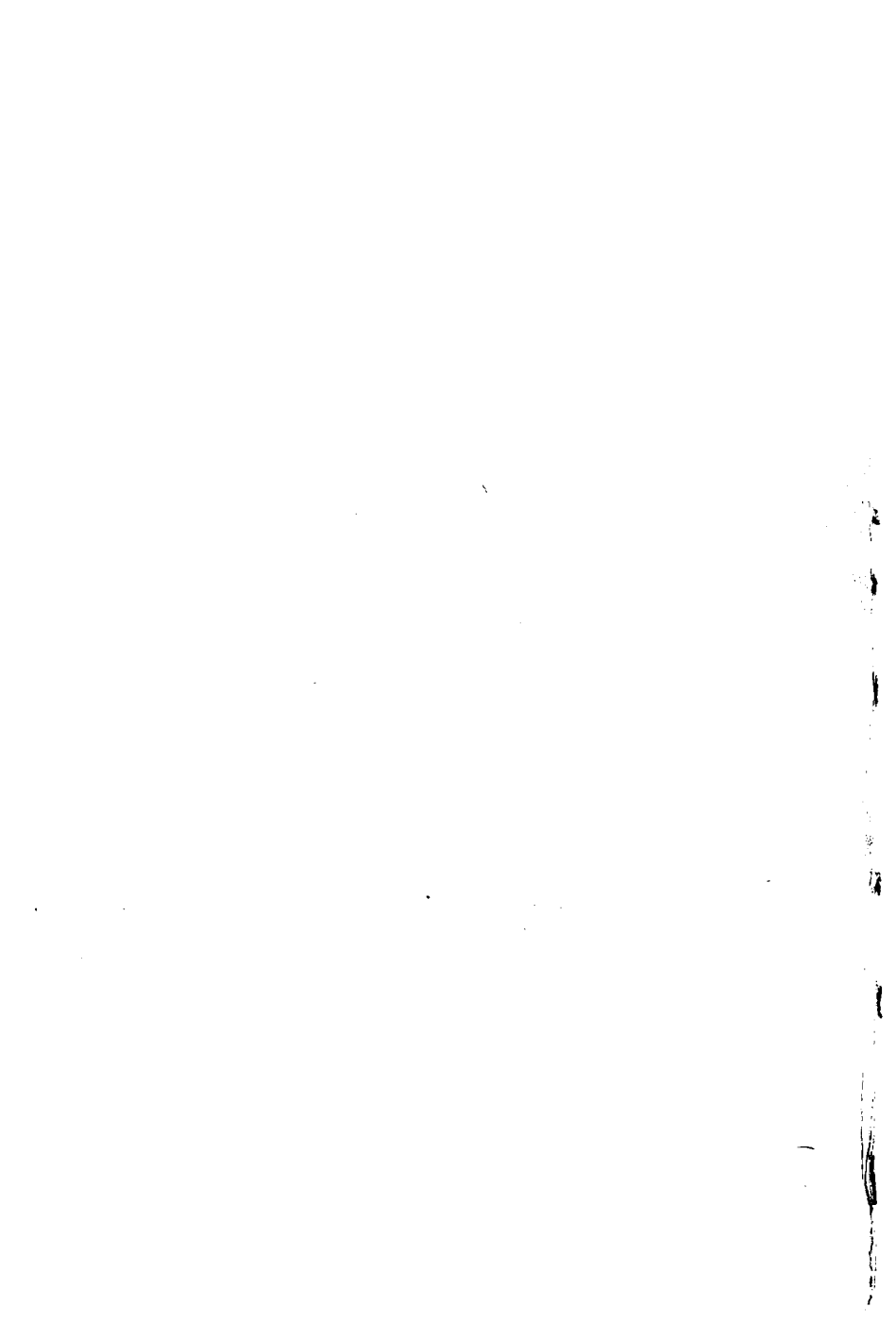


EARTH AND HIGH HEAVEN

GWETHALYN GRAHAM

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*BY*  
GWETHALYN GRAHAM



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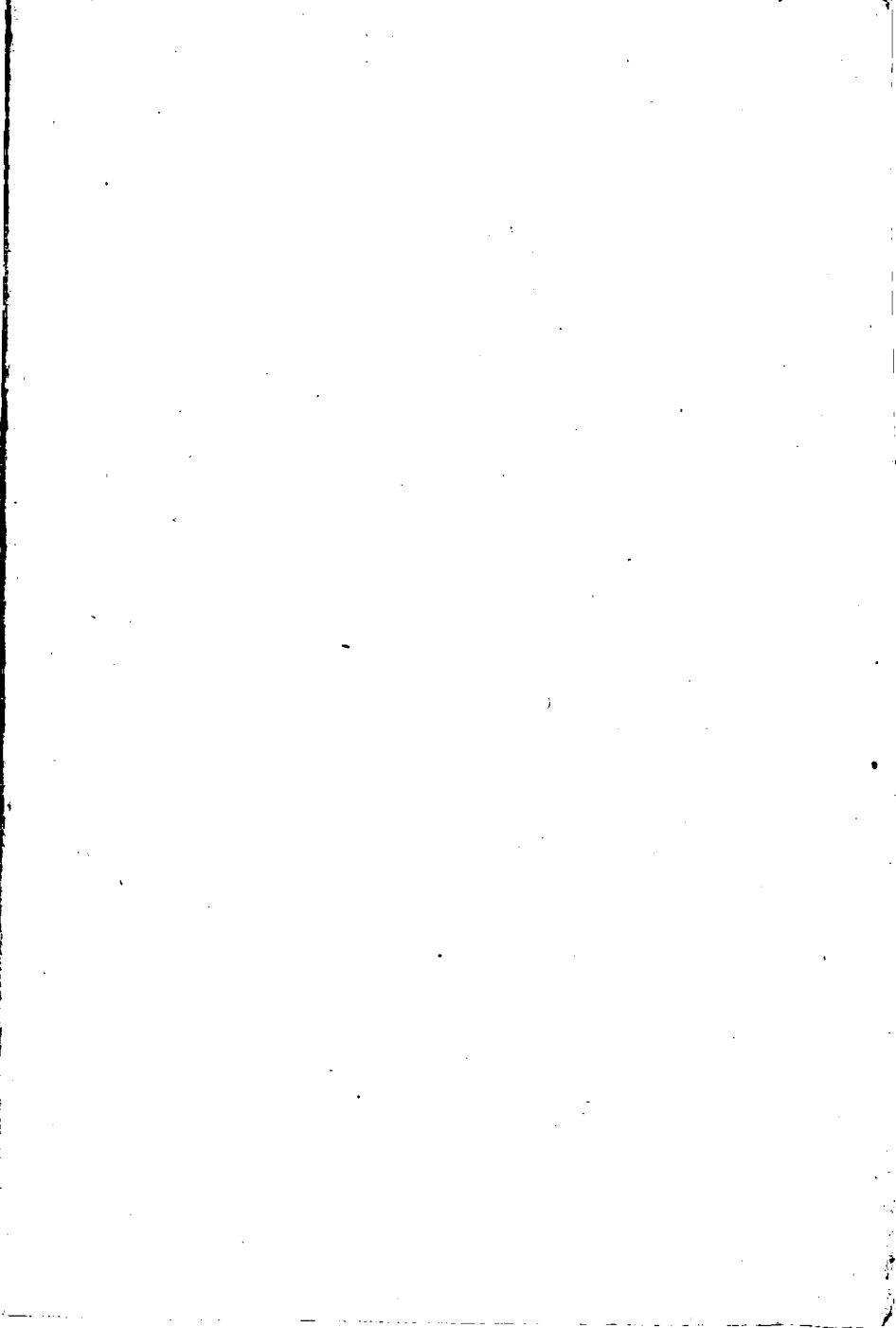
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Eighth Impression

Under Government regulations for saving paper during the war, the size and thickness of this book have been reduced below the customary peacetime standards. Only the format has been affected. The text is complete and unabridged.

For  
Joyce Tedman



Be still, my soul, be still; the arms you bear are brittle,  
Earth and high heaven are fixed of old and founded strong,  
Think rather,—call to thought, if now you grieve a little,  
The days when we had rest, O soul, for they were long.

Men loved unkindness then, but lightless in the quarry  
I slept and saw not; tears fell down, I did not mourn;  
Sweat ran and blood sprang out and I was never sorry:  
Then it was well with me, in days ere I was born.

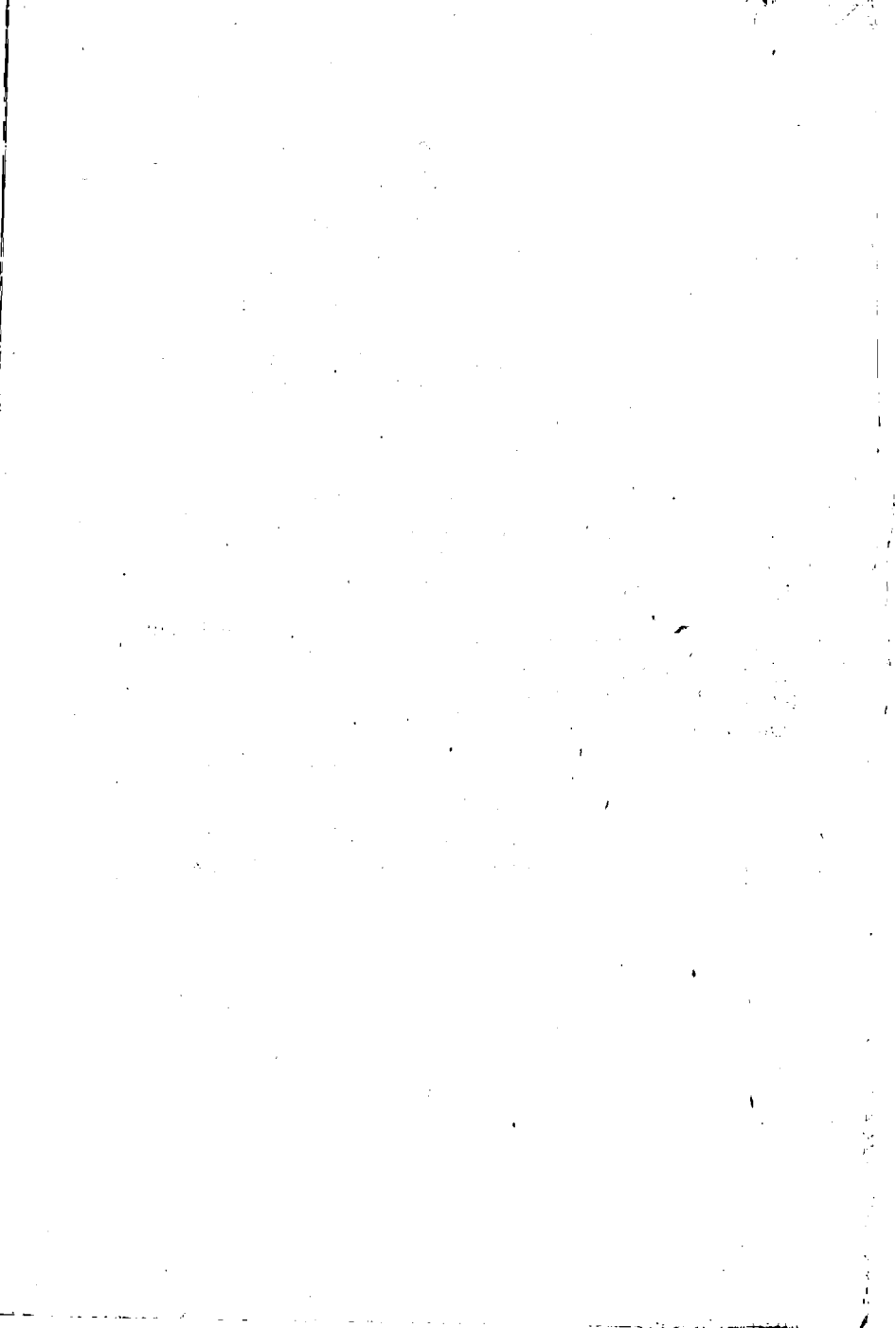
Now, and I muse for why and never find the reason,  
I pace the earth, and drink the air, and feel the sun.  
Be still, be still, my soul; it is but for a season:  
Let us endure an hour and see injustice done.

Ay, look: high heaven and earth ail from the prime foundation;  
All thoughts to rive the heart are here, and all are vain:  
Horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation—  
Oh why did I awake? when shall I sleep again?

—A. E. HOUSMAN

*From "A Shropshire Lad"*  
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ONE of the questions they were sometimes asked was where and how they had met, for Marc Reiser was a Jew, originally from a small town in northern Ontario, and from 1933 until he went overseas in September, 1942, a junior partner in the law firm of Maresch and Aaronson in Montreal, and Erica Drake was a Gentile, one of the Westmount Drakes. Montreal society is divided roughly into three categories labeled "French," "English," and "Jewish," and there is not much coming and going between them, particularly between the Jews and either of the other two groups; for although, as a last resort, French and English can be united under the heading "Gentile," such an alliance merely serves to isolate the Jews more than ever.

Hampered by racial-religious distinctions to start with, relations between the French, English and Jews of Montreal are still further complicated by the fact that all three groups suffer from an inferiority complex—the French because they are a minority in Canada, the English because they are a minority in Quebec, and the Jews because they are a minority everywhere.

Thus it was improbable that Marc Reiser and Erica Drake should meet, and still more improbable that, if by some coincidence they did, that meeting should in any way affect the course of their lives.

Leopold Reiser, Marc's father, had emigrated from Austria to Canada in 1907 and owned a small planing mill in Manchester, Ontario, on the fringe of the mining country five hundred miles away; Charles Sickert Drake, Erica's father, was president of the Drake Importing Company, a business founded by his great-grandfather which dealt principally in sugar, rum and molasses from the West Indies. Marc was five years older than Erica; when she was beginning her

first term at Miss Maxwell's School for Girls in Montreal, he was starting his freshman year at a university in a town about halfway between Manchester and Montreal. When he entered law school four years later, the original distance of five hundred miles had shortened to nothing; on the night of her coming-out party at the Ritz, he was within three blocks of her, sitting in his room in a bleak boarding-house for Jewish students hunting down the case of Carmichael vs. Smith, *English Law Reports*, 1905. They must have passed in the street or sat in the same theatre or the same concert hall more than once, yet the chances of their ever really knowing each other were as remote as ever, and it was not until ten years later when Erica was twenty-eight and Marc thirty-three, that they finally met at a cocktail party given by the Drakes in their house up in Westmount.

During those ten years their lives had ceased to run parallel; some time or other, Erica had jumped the track on which most people she knew traveled from birth to death, and was following a line of her own which curved steadily nearer his. When she was twenty-one, her fiancé had been killed in a motor accident, two weeks before she was to be married; not long after, she awoke to the realization that her father's income had greatly shrunk as a result of the depression and that it would probably be a long time before she would fall in love again. She got a job as a reporter on the society page of the *Montreal Post* and dropped, overnight, from the class which is written about to the class which does the writing. It took people quite a while to get used to the change. In the beginning, there was no way of knowing whether she had been invited to a social affair in the ordinary way, or whether she was merely there on business, but as time went on, it was more often for the second reason, less and less often for the first. When, at the end of three years, she became Editor of the Woman's Section, she had ceased to be one of the Drakes of Westmount and was simply Erica Drake of the *Post*, not only in the minds of others, but in her own mind as well. She had no desire to get back on the track again, but it was not until the war broke out that she realized how far it lay behind her.

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In June, 1942, she met Marc Reiser.

None of the Drakes had ever seen him before; he was brought to their cocktail party by René de Sevigny, whose sister had married Anthony Drake, Erica's older brother, two months before he had gone overseas with the R.C.A.F.

Almost everyone else had arrived by the time René and Marc got there. Having caught Erica's mother on her way to the kitchen, where the Drakes' one remaining servant was having trouble with the hot canapés, René had introduced Marc, then got him a drink and went off in search of Erica, leaving Marc with no one to talk to.

He found himself all alone out in the middle of the Drakes' long, light-walled drawing-room, surrounded by twenty or thirty men and women none of whom he knew and all of whom appeared to know each other, with René's empty cocktail glass in one hand and his own, still half full, in the other. At thirty-three he was still self-conscious and rather shy, and he had no idea what to do or how to do it without attracting attention, so he stayed where he was, first making an effort to appear as though he was expecting René back at any moment, and when that failed, trying to look as though he enjoyed being by himself.

He finished his drink, having made it last as long as he could, and then attempted to get his mind off himself by watching the other guests gathered in small groups all around him. When you look at people, however, they are likely to look back at you. Marc hastily shifted his eyes to the plain, neutral-colored rug which ran the full length of the room, transferred one of the glasses to the other hand so that he could get at his cigarettes, and then realized that he needed both hands to strike a match. He put the package of cigarettes back in his pocket and went on standing, feeling more lost and out of place than ever.

He had had an idea that something like this would happen, and when René had phoned to ask him to the Drakes' he had first refused, and then finally agreed to go, only because René said that he had already told Mrs. Drake that he was bringing him. Marc dis-

liked cocktail parties, in fact all social affairs at which most of the people were likely to be strangers; if the Drakes had been Jews he would have stayed home regardless of the fact that they were expecting him, but the Drakes were not Jews and that made it more complicated.

A dark girl of about twenty suddenly turned up in front of him asking "Aren't you George . . . ?" then broke off, smiled and murmured, "Sorry," and disappeared just as Marc had thought up something to say in order to keep her there a little longer. There was another blank pause of indefinite duration, then a naval officer swerved, avoiding someone else and jarring Marc's arm so that he nearly dropped one of the glasses, apologized and went on.

The scene was beginning to assume the timeless and futile quality of a nightmare. He glanced at his watch and found to his amazement that it was only six minutes since René had left him, which meant that, adding the ten minutes spent in catching up with their hostess on her way to the kitchen and finding their way to this particularly ill-chosen spot in the middle of the room, they had arrived approximately a quarter of an hour ago.

What is the minimum length of time you must stay, in order not to appear rude, at a party to which, strictly speaking, you were not invited, and where it is only too obvious that no one cares in the least whether you stay or not?

"Excuse me," said Marc, backing up and bumping into an artillery lieutenant in an effort to avoid someone who had bumped into him. He turned and said, "Excuse me" again, and then identifying the lieutenant as a former lawyer who had been at Brockville on his O.T.C. in the same class as himself, although Marc could not remember ever having spoken to him, he said with sudden hope, "Oh, hello, how are you?"

The lieutenant looked surprised, said "Hello," without interest or recognition and went on talking to his friends. It did not occur to Marc until later that if, like himself, the lieutenant had happened to be out of uniform, Marc would not have recognized him either. Hav-

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ing been pressed down cold by the only human being in the room who was even vaguely familiar, Marc abruptly made up his mind to go, only to find when he was halfway to the door that René had vanished completely and that Mrs. Drake was blocking his exit, standing in the middle of the hall talking to an elderly man in a morning coat. He would either have to wait until she moved, or until the hall filled up again so that he could get by her without being noticed. To return to the middle of the room and the lieutenant's back was unthinkable.

"... glasses, sir?"

"What?" asked Marc, jumping.

"Would you like me to take those glasses, sir?" asked the maid again.

"Yes, thanks. Thanks very much." He put the two glasses on her tray, lit a cigarette at last, and having worked his way around the edge of the crowd, he finally reached the windows which ran almost the full length of the Drakes' drawing-room, overlooking Montreal.

The whole city lay spread out below him, enchanting in the sunlight of a late afternoon in June, mile upon mile of flat gray roofs half hidden by the light, new green of the trees; a few scattered skyscrapers, beyond the skyscrapers the long straight lines of the grain elevators down by the harbor, further up to the right the Lachine Canal, and everywhere the gray spires of churches, monasteries and convents. Somehow, even from here, you could tell that Montreal was predominantly French, and Catholic.

"Hello, Marc," said René's sister, Madeleine Drake. "What are you doing here all by yourself?"

"I don't know, you'd better ask your brother. How are you, Madeleine?"

"I'm fine, thanks," she said, but she looked tired, and sat down on the window-seat with a sigh of relief. She was twelve years younger than René, with fair hair and a quiet, self-contained manner; her husband had been overseas since late in January and she was expecting a baby in August.



"Where is René?"

"Out in the dining-room."

"Oh, so that's where they all went," said Marc. "I was wondering. Can't I get you a chair?"

"No, thanks, don't bother. I can't stay long. Have you had anything to drink?"

"I had a cocktail when I came in. It's all right," he added quickly as she made a move to get up again. "I don't drink much anyhow, and I'd much rather you stayed and talked to me."

"You must be having an awful time," said Madeleine sympathetically. "These things are not amusing when you don't know anyone." Her parents had died when she was a small child and she had grown up in a convent, so that her English was more precise and less easy than her brother's. She smiled up at Marc and said, "It's a long time since you've been to see us—could you come to dinner on Tuesday next week?"

"Yes, thanks, I'd love to."

"About seven?" He nodded and she asked, "Have you met any of my husband's family?"

"Just Mrs. Drake. That's a Van Gogh over the fireplace, isn't it?"

"Yes, 'L'Arlésienne.'"

"It must be one of those German prints, it's so clear."

From the *Arlésienne* his eyes moved along the line of bookcases reaching halfway up the wall, across the door, past more bookcases and around the corner to a modern oil painting of a Quebec village in winter, all sunlight and color and with a radiance which made him think of his own Algoma Hills in Ontario. Walls, furniture and rug were all light and neutral in tone; Marc liked their room so much that he knew he would like the Drakes when he got to know them. Apart from all the strangers clustered in groups which were constantly breaking up and re-forming as some of them drifted out into the hall and the dining-room beyond, and others drifted back again, and apart from the fact that he would be stranded again with no one to talk to as soon as Madeleine left, he was beginning to feel