

Collins English Library Level 4

THE LOVELY LADY

AND OTHER STORIES

ID H LAWRENCE

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THE LOVELY LADY 39

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D H LAWRENCE

Abridged and simplified by Margery Morris

Illustrations by Maureen and Gordon Gray

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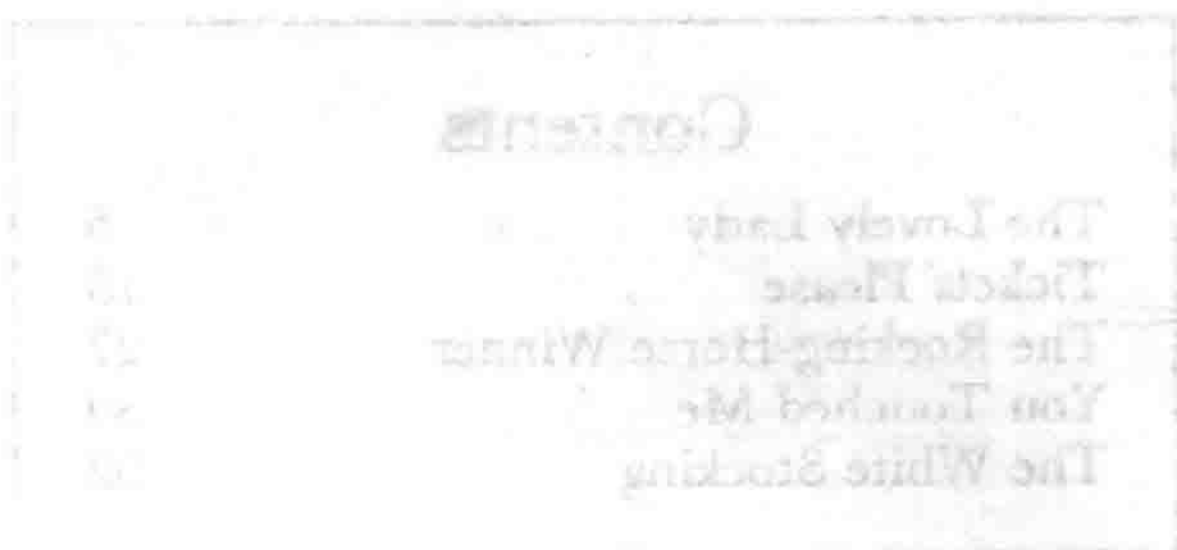
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Collins English Library

Series editors: K R Cripwell and Lewis Jones

A library of graded readers for students of English as a second or foreign language, and for reluctant native readers. The books are graded in six levels of difficulty. Structure, vocabulary, idiom and sentence length are all controlled according to principles laid down in detail in *A Guide to Collins English Library*. A list of the books follows. Numbers after each title indicate the level at which the book is written: 1 has a basic vocabulary of 300 words and appropriate structures, 2 : 600 words, 3 : 1000 words, 4 : 1500 words, 5 : 2000 words and 6 : 2500 words.

<i>Inspector Holt and the Fur Van</i>	John Tully	1
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The Lovely Lady

Pauline Attenborough was seventy-two, but sometimes, in the half-light, she seemed thirty. She really was a wonderful woman. Her clothes were always fashionable, and she had a good figure. She had pretty curved cheeks, a well-shaped nose, and good teeth. Her skin was smooth, and only her eyes showed her age. When she was tired, there were little lines at the corners.

Her niece Cecilia was perhaps the only person in the world who knew that Pauline could make those lines disappear. When Pauline's son Robert came home, her eyes became young and bright and shining. Then she really was a lovely lady; she was a picture painted by Leonardo, a Mona Lisa.

Pauline didn't always look young, of course. She was too clever. When she was with Cecilia, Pauline didn't try. Cecilia, said Pauline, didn't notice things. Cecilia wasn't pretty. Cecilia was thirty; she had no money; and she was in love with Robert. Cecilia didn't matter.

Cecilia, called by her aunt and cousin just 'Ciss', was a big, dark, rather silent young woman. Her father and mother and uncle were all dead. And Aunt Pauline had been in charge of Ciss for five years.

They lived in a very pretty old house, about thirty kilometres from the town. There was a small but pleasant garden.

Robert, who was two years older than Ciss, went to town every day. He was a lawyer. He earned only a hundred pounds a year, and he was secretly ashamed of this. But it didn't matter. Pauline had money. Sometimes she gave him quite a lot, but he always had to thank her for the lovely present.

Like Cecilia, Robert was not good-looking, and he was very silent. He was not very tall, and his face was rather fat. He had grey eyes like his mother, but they were not bright like hers.

Perhaps Ciss was the only person who knew that Robert was shy, and that he always felt he was in the wrong place. But he never did anything about it. He was very interested in the laws of old Mexico, and had a lot of strange old papers about them.

Pauline and Robert had wonderful evenings with these papers. The lovely lady knew a little Spanish. She used to look Spanish, sitting at the table, in her dark brown silk dress, with pearls in her ears, and a high Spanish comb in her hair. In the candle-light – and she placed the candles very carefully – she looked – yes – like a Spanish beauty of thirty-two or three.

Cecilia watched her, and thought she was beautiful. But all the time, in the bottom of her mind, were all the things she knew about her aunt and cousin. And though Robert turned to his mother like a flower in the sun, yet all the time he knew Cecilia was there. He knew that something wasn't quite right. He knew Cecilia was shut out



of things.

Every evening after dinner Robert had coffee with his mother and Ciss in the pretty sitting-room. They talked; Pauline was friendly and smiling, and it was very nice. Until there was a little pause. And then Ciss always said goodnight, and took the coffee things out.

And then! Oh, then, the happy talk between mother and son, while they translated the old papers. Pauline was like a girl; Robert seemed older than she was; almost like a teacher with a young pupil. That was how he felt.

Ciss had her own flat, outside the house, over an old coach-house, where Robert kept his car. Ciss had three very nice rooms up there.

But sometimes she did not go to her rooms. In summer, she used to sit on the grass under the sitting-room window. She could hear Pauline's wonderful laugh. And in winter, Ciss used to put on a thick coat, and walk to the end of the garden, and look back at the lighted windows of the room. That room where mother and son were happy together.

Ciss loved Robert, and she believed that Pauline wanted them to marry – after her death. But poor Robert was very shy, shy with men as well as women.

There was a secret, silent feeling between Robert and Ciss, the feeling of two young people who are over-shadowed by the old.

There was another feeling, but Ciss didn't know how to use it. She didn't know how to bring Robert close to her. But she did know that Robert was really a very warm, loving person. And Pauline too knew this! He could not move, could not escape. And he was ashamed that he was not a man.

Sometimes Ciss wanted to say, "Oh Robert, it's all wrong!" But she couldn't.

Aunt Pauline always rested in the afternoon. When the sun shone, she took a sun-bath if possible. There was a little square garden behind the coach-house, with thick bushes all round it. When the sun shone warmly, Ciss used to put a long chair there. There the lovely lady came with her book. Ciss had to stay in her flat, to guard her. Someone might come.

One summer day, Ciss thought she too might take a sun-bath. The roof of the coach-house was flat. So she climbed up there, looked at the sky, and the tree-tops, and the sun, and took off her clothes, and lay down.

It was lovely to lie in the warm sun and air. Some of the cold feeling in her heart seemed to melt away. She had no other lover, but she had the sun! Then suddenly, her heart stood still. She heard a very soft, thoughtful voice, the voice of an old woman; and it seemed to whisper in her ear.

"No, Henry dear! It was not my fault that you died, instead of marrying that Claudia. No, darling. I wanted you to marry her. Though she was not a suitable girl for you."

Ciss was afraid. There must be someone on the roof!

She lifted her head. Nobody! Then there must be someone in the trees. Either that, or – a ghost?

The voice came again.

"No, Henry – no, darling! I told you that you would become tired of her in six months. And it was true, dear, true, true. I only warned you. So when you felt weak, and ill, wanting Claudia and not wanting her – it wasn't my fault. And then you lost courage and went away from me, and died – oh, it was hard for me, hard . . ."

The whispering voice was silent. Cecilia felt cold and afraid. And then she heard it again. Was it a human voice?

"Ah, my heart was wounded. Bleeding! But not broken. I was sad, sad. But it wasn't my fault, dear. And Robert could marry Ciss tomorrow, if he wanted her. But I don't think he cares for marriage."

Then Cecilia knew. It was Aunt Pauline's voice. But where was she? She must be lying down there. But was she really speaking? Or had Cecilia heard her thoughts?

Cecilia knew that Pauline had killed her other son, Henry. He was twelve years older than Robert. He died suddenly, when he was twenty-two. He was deeply in love with a young actress. But his mother laughed at him. So he became ill, and died. Because, helpless between his mother and the girl, he could not live.

"I must get up," whispered the voice. "Too much sun is bad."

Cecilia lay on her back, staring at the low wall round the flat roof. She was staring without seeing. There was a hole, a hole in the corner of the wall. Then Cecilia heard the voice again.

"Get up, Pauline. Get up. That's enough for today!"

Cecilia sat up. The voice came from the hole in the wall. There was a pipe there, a rain-water pipe. It went from the roof, down the wall, to the ground. She was not hearing Aunt Pauline's thoughts! Aunt Pauline was talking to herself. And she was worried about Robert.

Aunt Pauline was indeed a strange woman. She had left her husband when Henry was a small child, before Robert was born. She saw her husband sometimes. She even gave him money. Because Pauline had her own money. Her father had lived in the East and in Italy. He had loved beautiful things, and bought them. When he died, Pauline had all his treasures. She went on buying things – paintings, old wooden African figures, things like that, and often she sold them. She

made a fortune.

When her husband died she did not marry again. She did not even have any more lovers. Or if she did, no-one knew. No-one knew that Robert was not her husband's child.

Cecilia put on her clothes and picked up her blanket, and went downstairs. As she did, she heard Pauline's call. "All right, Ciss!" Her voice was young again, and rang like a bell.

Cecilia went to take away her aunt's chair. She saw the end of the rain-pipe, in the corner, near the chair. Her aunt had talked into it.

That evening, after coffee, Pauline said, "I'm sleepy. It's all that sun. I'm going to bed. You two stay here and talk." She went out.

Cecilia looked at her cousin. "Would you rather be alone?" she said.

"Oh no," he said. "Do stay."

The windows were open. Robert smoked in a heavy silence. He seemed to carry a weight on his shoulders.

"Do you remember your brother Henry?" said Cecilia suddenly.

He looked up in surprise. "Yes, very well."

"What was he like?"

"Tall, good-looking. Women admired him very much. He was quick and clever, like mother. And very nice, very kind and friendly."

"And did he love your mother?"

"Oh, very much. She loved him too. More than she loved me. I'm not like him at all. I'm dull, and my life is dull."

"And do you mind?"

He didn't answer. Her heart sank.

"You see," she said, "my life is dull and empty too. And I mind very much. I want – oh, I want everything!"

His hand was shaking.

"Robert," she said. "Do you like me at all?"

"I like you," he said. His face was white.

"Won't you kiss me? No-one ever kisses me," she said.

He looked at her. He seemed afraid. Then he got up and came over to her and kissed her gently on the cheek.

"What a shame, Ciss," he said softly.

She took his hand.

"And will you sit with me sometimes in the garden?"

He looked at her.

"What about mother?"

Ciss smiled, and looked into his eyes. His face was a painful red.

"I know," he said. "I am no lover of women."

"You don't try," she said.

"Do I have to try?"

"Yes!"

His face was white again. "Perhaps you're right," he said.

After a few minutes, she left him and went to her room.

The weather continued sunny. At night, under the stars, Cecilia sat and waited in silence. She watched the sitting-room window. She saw the lights go out. And she waited. But he did not come. She stayed in the darkness half the night, but she stayed alone.

And then, a few nights later, he did come out.

She rose, and went quickly over the grass to him.

"Don't speak," he said softly.

In silence, in the dark, they walked down the garden and out into a field, and there they stood, under the stars.

"You see," he said. "How can I ask for love, if I don't feel any love in myself?"

"You mean, how can you feel love, when you have no feeling of any kind?"

"Yes. And how can I marry? I've failed. I can't make money, and I can't ask mother for money."

"Then don't think about marriage," she said. "Only love me a little, won't you?"

He gave a short laugh.

"It's difficult to begin," he said.

"Let's sit down," she said. Then, as they sat on the dry grass, she added. "May I touch you? Do you mind?"

"Yes, I do mind. But do as you wish."

He was both shy and honest; but there was murder in his heart.

She touched his black hair with her fingers.

"I suppose I shall turn against mother some day," he said suddenly.

They sat for a while, until it grew cold. Then he held her hand tightly. But he didn't put his arms round her. At last Ciss said goodnight, and went indoors.

The next day, as she lay on the roof taking her sun-bath, and feeling angry, she heard the voice again.

"No, Robert dear. You'll never be like your father. Oh, he was so wonderful. He loved me, he

loved me so much." The voice began to speak softly in Italian. Then Cecilia knew that Robert was not the son of Pauline's husband.

The voice continued, "I'm disappointed, Robert. Your father was perfect. But you're like a fish in a tank. And that Ciss is like a cat, fishing for you."

Suddenly Cecilia bent down and put her mouth to the pipe. She said in a deep voice, "Leave Robert alone! Don't kill him too!"

There was dead silence in the hot July afternoon.

Cecilia lay and listened. Her heart was beating hard. At last she heard the whisper.

"Did someone speak?"

Ciss leaned over again.

"Don't kill Robert as you killed me," she said in a deep but small voice.

"Ah! Who is it?" came a sharp little cry.

"Henry!" said the deep voice.

There was dead silence again. At last came the whisper, "I didn't kill Henry. No, no! I loved you, Henry. I only wanted to help you."

"You killed me," said the deep voice. "Now let Robert live. Let him marry!"

Cecilia lay and listened and listened. There was no sound. She put on her clothes and went down to the square garden. Clouds covered the sky and there was thunder in the distance.

"Aunt Pauline!" she called. "Did you hear the thunder?"

"Yes, I'm going in. Don't wait for me," said a weak voice.

The sky grew dark and the storm broke. That night Cecilia dressed for dinner carefully. She



pinned some white flowers on her dress.

Robert was in the sitting room, listening to the rain. Cecilia came in and he watched her with a new look on his face.

The door opened. It was Aunt Pauline. As she came in, Cecilia suddenly put on the light.

Her aunt, in a black dress, stood in the doorway. She looked like an angry old woman.

"Why mother!" said Robert. "You look like a little old lady." He spoke like a child.

"Have you only just discovered that?" she said sharply. "Come down to dinner."

At the table she looked old, very old. Ciss was watching Robert. He was surprised and shocked. He seemed a different man.

His mother ate her food like a hungry animal. As soon as dinner was over she ran upstairs. Robert and Cecilia followed her, silent with surprise.

"I don't want coffee," shouted the old woman. "I'm going. Goodnight." Her voice barked like a dog and she went out, banging the door.

After a while, Robert said, "Mother isn't well. She must see a doctor."

"Yes," said Cecilia.

The evening passed in silence. Robert and Cecilia stayed in the sitting room. They lit a fire. Outside was the cold rain. Each tried to read.

At about ten o'clock the door suddenly opened and Pauline appeared. She went to the fire, and looked at the two young people in hate, real hate.

"You two must get married quickly," she said, "since you are a pair of lovers."

She really was a strange sight. She looked like a piece of lovely Venetian glass, broken into sharp-edged pieces. She left the room again, suddenly.

For a week it went on. Pauline didn't get better. The doctor came and gave her sleeping medicine. She would not look at her son or her niece. When either of them came to her room, she asked, "Well? When's the wedding? Aren't you married yet?"

At first Cecilia was frightened. She understood that her aunt was mad. Nothing like that had ever happened to Pauline before and now, she had