



D. H. Lawrence

Women in love



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Chapter I

SISTERS

Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen sat one morning in the window-bay of their father's house in Beldover, working and talking. Ursula was stitching a piece of brightly coloured embroidery, and Gudrun was drawing upon a board, which she held on her knee. They were mostly silent, talking as their thoughts strayed through their minds.

"Ursula," said Gudrun, "don't you *really want* to get married?" Ursula laid her embroidery in her lap and looked up. Her face was calm and considerate.

"I don't know," she replied. "It depends how you mean."

Gudrun was slightly taken aback. She watched her sister for some moments.

"Well," she said, ironically, "it usually means one thing! But don't you think anyhow, you'd be—" she darkened slightly—"in a better position than you are in now."

A shadow came over Ursula's face.

"I might," she said. "But I'm not sure."

Again Gudrun paused, slightly irritated. She wanted to be quite definite.

"You don't think one needs the *experience* of having been married?" she asked.

"Do you think it need *be* an experience?" replied Ursula.

"Bound to be, in some way or other," said Gudrun, coolly. "Possibly undesirable, but bound to be an experience of some sort."

“Not really,” said Ursula. “More likely to be the end of experience.”

Gudrun sat very still, to attend to this.

“Of course,” she said, “there’s *that* to consider.” This brought the conversation to a close. Gudrun, almost angrily, took up her rubber and began to rub out part of her drawing. Ursula stitched absorbedly.

“You wouldn’t consider a good offer?” asked Gudrun.

“I think I’ve rejected several,” said Ursula.

“*Really!*” Gudrun flushed dark—“But anything really worthwhile? Have you *really?*”

“A thousand a year, and an awfully nice man. I liked him awfully,” said Ursula.

“Really! But weren’t you fearfully tempted?”

“In the abstract but not in the concrete,” said Ursula. “When it comes to the point, one isn’t even tempted—oh, if I were tempted, I’d marry like a shot. I’m only tempted *not* to.” The faces of both sisters suddenly lit up with amusement.

“Isn’t it an amazing thing,” cried Gudrun, “how strong the temptation is, not to!” They both laughed, looking at each other. In their hearts, they were frightened.

There was a long pause, whilst Ursula stitched and Gudrun went on with her sketch. The sisters were women, Ursula twenty-six, and Gudrun twenty-five. But both had the remote, virgin look of modern girls, sisters of Artemis rather than of Hebe. Gudrun was very beautiful, passive, soft-skinned, and soft-limbed. She wore a dress of dark-blue silky stuff, with ruches of blue and green linen lace in the neck and sleeves; and she had emerald-green stockings. Her look of confidence and diffidence contrasted with Ursula’s sensitive expectancy. The provincial people, intimidated by Gudrun’s perfect *sang-froid* and exclusive bareness of manner, said of her, “She is a smart woman.” She had just come back from London, where she had spent several years, working at an art-school, as a student, and living a studio life.

"I was hoping now for a man to come along," Gudrun said, suddenly catching her underlip between her teeth, and making a strange grimace, half-sly smiling, half-anguish. Ursula was afraid.

"So you have come home, expecting him here?" she laughed.

"Oh my dear," cried Gudrun, strident, "I wouldn't go out of my way to look for him. But if there did happen to come along a highly attractive individual of sufficient means—well—" she tailed off ironically. Then she looked searchingly at Ursula, as if to probe her. "Don't you find yourself getting bored?" she asked of her sister. "Don't you find, that things fail to materialize? *Nothing materializes!* Everything withers in the bud."

"What withers in the bud?" asked Ursula.

"Oh, everything—oneself—things in general." There was a pause, whilst each sister vaguely considered her fate.

"It does frighten one," said Ursula, and again there was a pause. "But do you hope to get anywhere by just marrying?"

"It seems to be the inevitable next step," said Gudrun. Ursula pondered this, with a little bitterness. She was a class mistress herself, in Willey Green Grammar School, as she had been for some years.

"I know," she said, "it seems like that when one thinks in the abstract. But really imagine it: imagine any man one knows, imagine him coming home to one every evening, and saying 'Hello,' and giving one a kiss—"

There was a blank pause.

"Yes," said Gudrun, in a narrowed voice. "It's just impossible. The man makes it impossible."

"Of course, there's children—" said Ursula doubtfully.

Gudrun's face hardened.

"Do you *really* want children, Ursula?" she asked coldly. A dazzled, baffled look came on Ursula's face.

"One feels it is still beyond one," she said.

"Do you feel like that?" asked Gudrun. "I get no feeling whatever from the thought of bearing children."

Gudrun looked at Ursula with a masklike, expressionless face. Ursula knitted her brows.

"Perhaps it isn't genuine," she faltered. "Perhaps one doesn't really want them, in one's soul—only superficially." A hardness came over Gudrun's face. She did not want to be too definite.

"When one thinks of other people's children—" said Ursula. Again, Gudrun looked at her sister, almost hostile.

"Exactly," she said, to close the conversation.

The two sisters worked on in silence, Ursula having always that strange brightness of an essential flame that is caught, meshed, contravened. She lived a good deal by herself, to herself, working, passing on from day to day, and always thinking, trying to lay hold on life, to grasp it in her own understanding. Her active living was suspended, but underneath, in the darkness, something was coming to pass. If only she could break through the last integuments! She seemed to try and put her hands out, like an infant in the womb, and she could not, not yet. Still she had a strange prescience, an intimation of something yet to come.

She laid down her work and looked at her sister. She thought Gudrun so *charming*, so infinitely charming, in her softness and her fine, exquisite richness of texture and delicacy of line. There was a certain playfulness about her too, such a piquancy or ironic suggestion, such an untouched reserve. Ursula admired her with all her soul.

"Why did you come home, Prune?" she asked.

Gudrun knew she was being admired. She sat back from her drawing and looked at Ursula, from under her finely curved lashes.

"Why did I come back, Ursula?" she repeated. "I have asked myself a thousand times."

"And don't you know?"

"Yes, I think I do. I think my coming back home was just *reculer pour mieux sauter*."

And she looked with a long, slow look of knowledge at Ursula.

"I know!" cried Ursula, looking slightly dazzled and falsified, and as if she did *not* know. "But where can one jump to?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Gudrun, somewhat superbly. "If one jumps over the edge, one is bound to land somewhere."

"But isn't it very risky?" asked Ursula.

A slow mocking smile dawned on Gudrun's face.

"Ah!" she said laughing. "What is it all but words!" And so again she closed the conversation. But Ursula was still brooding.

"And how do you find home, now you have come back to it?" she asked.

Gudrun paused for some moments, coldly, before answering. Then, in a cold truthful voice, she said:

"I find myself completely out of it."

"And father?"

Gudrun looked at Ursula, almost with resentment, as if brought to bay.

"I haven't thought about him: I've refrained," she said coldly.

"Yes," wavered Ursula; and the conversation was really at an end. The sisters found themselves confronted by a void, a terrifying chasm, as if they had looked over the edge.

They worked on in silence for some time; Gudrun's cheek was flushed with repressed emotion. She resented its having been called into being.

"Shall we go out and look at that wedding?" she asked at length, in a voice that was too casual.

"Yes!" cried Ursula, too eagerly, throwing aside her sewing and leaping up, as if to escape something, thus betraying the tension of the situation and causing a friction of dislike to go over Gudrun's nerves.

As she went upstairs, Ursula was aware of the house, of her home round about her. And she loathed it, the sordid, too-familiar place! She was afraid at the depth of her feeling against

the home, the milieu, the whole atmosphere and condition of this obsolete life. Her feeling frightened her.

The two girls were soon walking swiftly down the main road of Beldover, a wide street, part shops, and part dwelling houses, utterly formless and sordid, without poverty. Gudrun, new from her life in Chelsea and Sussex, shrank cruelly from this amorphous ugliness of a small colliery town in the Midlands. Yet forward she went, through the whole sordid gamut of pettiness, the long amorphous, gritty street. She was exposed to every stare; she passed on through a stretch of torment. It was strange that she should have chosen to come back and test the full effect of this shapeless, barren ugliness upon herself. Why had she wanted to submit herself to it, did she still want to submit herself to it, the insufferable torture of these ugly, meaningless people, this defaced countryside? She felt like a beetle toiling in the dust. She was filled with repulsion.

They turned off the main road, past a black patch of common-garden, where sooty cabbage stumps stood shameless. No one thought to be ashamed. No one was ashamed of it all.

“It is like a country in an underworld,” said Gudrun. “The colliers bring it above-ground with them, shovel it up. Ursula, it’s marvellous, it’s really marvellous—it’s really wonderful, another world. The people are all ghouls, and everything is ghostly. Everything is a ghoulish replica of the real world, a replica, a ghoul, all soiled, everything sordid. It’s like being mad, Ursula.”

The sisters were crossing a black path through a dark, soiled field. On the left was a large landscape, a valley with collieries, and opposite hills with cornfields and woods, all blackened with distance, as if seen through a veil of crape. White and black smoke rose up in steady columns, magic within the dark air. Near at hand came the long rows of dwellings, approaching curved up the hill-slope, in straight lines along the brow of the hill. They were of darkened red brick, brittle, with dark slate roofs. The path, on which the sisters walked was black, trodden-in by

the feet of the recurrent colliers, and bounded from the field by iron fences; the stile that led again into the road was rubbed shiny by the moleskins of the passing miners. Now the two girls were going between some rows of dwellings, of the poorer sort. Women, their arms folded over their coarse aprons, standing gossiping at the end of their block, stared after the Brangwen sisters with that long, unwearying stare of aborigines; children called out names.

Gudrun went on her way half-dazed. If this were human life, if these were human beings, living in a complete world, then what was her own world, outside? She was aware of her grass-green stockings, her large grass-green velour hat, her full soft coat, of a strong blue colour. And she felt as if she were treading in the air, quite unstable, her heart was contracted, as if at any minute she might be precipitated to the ground. She was afraid.

She clung to Ursula, who, through long usage was inured to this violation of a dark, uncreated, hostile world. But all the time her heart was crying, as if in the midst of some ordeal, "I want to go back, I want to go away, I want not to know it, not to know that this exists." Yet she must go forward.

Ursula could feel her suffering.

"You hate this, don't you?" she asked.

"It bewilders me," stammered Gudrun.

"You won't stay long," replied Ursula.

And Gudrun went along, grasping at release.

They drew away from the colliery region, over the curve of the hill, into the purer country of the other side, towards Willey Green. Still the faint glamour of blackness persisted over the fields and the wooded hills, and seemed darkly to gleam in the air. It was a spring day, chill, with snatches of sunshine. Yellow celandines showed out from the hedge-bottoms, and in the cottage gardens of Willey Green, currant-bushes were breaking into leaf, and little flowers were coming white on the grey alyssum that hung over the stonewalls.

Turning, they passed down the high road that went between high banks towards the church. There, in the lowest bend of the road, low under the trees, stood a little group of expectant people, waiting to see the wedding. The daughter of the chief mine-owner of the district, Thomas Crich, was getting married to a naval officer.

“Let us go back,” said Gudrun, swerving away. “There are all those people.”

And she hung wavering in the road.

“Never mind them,” said Ursula, “they’re all right. They all know me, they don’t matter.”

“But must we go through them?” asked Gudrun.

“They’re quite all right, really,” said Ursula, going forward. And together the two sisters approached the group of uneasy, watchful common people. They were chiefly women, colliers’ wives of the more shiftless sort. They had watchful, underworld faces.

The two sisters held themselves tense, and went straight towards the gate. The women made way for them, but barely sufficient, as if grudging to yield ground. The sisters passed in silence through the stone gateway and up the steps, on the red carpet, a policeman estimating their progress.

“What price the stockings!” said a voice at the back of Gudrun. A sudden fierce anger swept over the girl, violent and murderous. She would have liked them all annihilated, cleared away, so that the world was left clear for her. How she hated walking up the churchyard path, along the red carpet, continuing in motion, in their sight.

“I won’t go into the church,” she said suddenly, with such final decision that Ursula immediately halted, turned round, and branched off up a small side path, which led to the little private gate of the Grammar School, whose grounds adjoined those of the church.

Just inside the gate of the school shrubbery, outside the churchyard, Ursula sat down for a moment on the low

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