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# **A Flower That's Free**

Written by Sarah Harrison

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*A Flower That's Free*

SARAH HARRISON



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*PART ONE*

1936

## *Chapter One*

At one minute to six on the morning of 14 June, 1936, the black chicken on Kate Kingsley's alarm clock nodded up and down, in time with the ticking of the second hand, as it had done for the past fifteen years with only brief intervals for running repairs. The hour hand had already settled on the six, the minute hand was almost in the centre of the twelve.

The clock had a face painted like a chubby, smiling sun, with broad, wedge-shaped rays fanning out against a blue sky dotted with clouds like white cottage loaves. At the bottom of the clock face, above and on either side of the six, were the black chicken, forever pecking at an invisible grain of corn, and a haughty red and green cockerel with one foot imperiously raised.

The minute hand reached the middle of the twelve and the clock emitted a brief, tinny squawk before Kate's hand came down on top of it, sentencing it to another twenty-four hours of beaming, pecking silence. This is my last ordinary day here, thought Kate. Tomorrow, everything else begins. She wanted to go, but she didn't want to leave, and she was quite capable of accommodating these two apparently conflicting impulses. She knew very well that once she was on her way, the second would fade and the first predominate: Kate Kingsley, at twenty, was a very positive young woman.

Now she hitched herself up in bed and stretched her arms above her head. The brilliant East African sun was already sending long, inquisitive darts of golden light round the edges of the curtain on the verandah door. Kate linked her fingers behind her head and looked at her room, her things, beginning the conscious process of separation which would be

complete this time tomorrow. There was her gramophone, and all her records piled on the table beside it, along with the box of needles; her bookcase, reflecting her taste from Kate Greenaway to Huxley; her cabinet of horses, beginning with the patchwork pony with purple wool mane and ending with the prancing glass stallion; her chest of drawers and wardrobe, containing the few bits and pieces in which she felt truly at home, and a vast quantity of clothes that she actively disliked; her desk, and the chair with the removable seat and the bedside table which her brother Joe had made in carpentry class – it needed a wad of paper under one leg – with the clock sitting on top of it. The clock, of course, she would take with her.

With detachment, she considered her room and the arrangement of it childish. It hadn't changed much in all the years it had been hers. She looked forward to a new room in a new place, in which to express the person she now was, with no purple-maned ponies and nursery-rhyme books.

Decisively, Kate pushed back the sheet and swung her feet out of bed on to the rush-matted floor. From the verandah she could hear the rhythmic swish of the houseboy sweeping. Somewhere in the not-so-distant bush a bird whose name she still did not know gave his sad, repetitive *oo-oo-oo*, with a dying fall.

She pulled her nightgown – a cut-down striped shirt of her father's – over her head, and walked naked to the chest of drawers. Her straight, thin white figure and fuzz of amber hair were caught briefly in the long mirror on the wardrobe door. Without deliberation, she selected a pair of faded cotton drill trousers and a white blouse from which she had long since removed the Peter Pan collar. To these she added: a striped elastic belt with a metal snake-clasp, a necklace of small coloured wooden beads, and a red and white bandanna which she folded lengthways and tied round her forehead and hair. Finally, she put on a pair of tennis shoes and, without glancing in the mirror, opened the door and stepped out on to the verandah.

Meru was at the far end, just completing the sweeping. He nodded and grinned gappily, his discoloured teeth jutting randomly and at odd angles from his pink gums like rocks in some ancient stone circle.

*'Jambo, Miss Kate.'*

*'Jambo, Meru.'*

He disappeared round the corner of the house, his once-white Chilprufe singlet flapping. Kate walked along the verandah in the opposite direction. The early morning air smelt of dryness, dust and tinder-brittle grass and foliage, everything scorched but for the moment still cool after the night. Flowering shrubs and herbaceous borders edged the expanse of desiccated yellow lawn. On the far side stood Joe's cricket stumps, a little drunkenly, since the holes had been re-used too often and were now over-large.

Kate thought she would go and see the puppies, the bastard offspring born to Thea's cross-bred bitch Dora just four days ago. Jack had made mother and pups an enclosed run under the verandah on the sheltered west side of the house. There were five dogs altogether on the Kingsley farm. In the pen near the driveway gate lived the guard dogs, two Rhodesian ridgebacks and an alsatian. Allowed in the house (on sufferance only, by Jack) were Thea's two dogs – her Staffordshire bull terrier, Cornet, and Dora, a more recent acquisition. Dora was a yellow and white labrador-spaniel cross, with a melting expression and an uncontrollable sex drive.

The puppies were quiet this morning as Kate jumped down the two wooden steps on to the grass. She saw the first little body lying in the sunshine about a foot from the chain-link wire that Jack had nailed up. She thought at first the puppy was asleep, but then she saw that the wire had been ripped back from its nail at one corner, revealing a dark, gaping hole. The puppies' silence was suddenly sinister. She bent over the puppy on the grass. It was dead, its tiny, blunt head almost severed from its body. It was so small and lifeless it looked like a little beanbag that someone had thrown down.

Kate pulled back the remaining wire. The massacre was

total. The killer had been not just thorough, but frenzied. The bodies of Dora and her remaining three pups lay scattered about in the gloom. The hard-packed earth was sticky with blood. Dora herself lay on her back, nearest the wire. Her murderer must have called some hours ago, for she was stiff, her legs jutting from her body, flies humming round her open mouth. Down the length of her white stomach was a rent from which her guts spilled in a gleaming, serpentine pile. She looked as if she had been thrown forcibly backwards before the *coup de grâce* had been administered, and Kate silently saluted her for the brave fight she had undoubtedly put up. Kate did not cry: she had seen worse things, but rarely one which made her so angry. There was simply nothing left of all the life and warmth that had been there the day before.

She ducked her head back out, picked up the flaccid little corpse and placed it with the others, and hooked back the chain-link wire. She sat there on her heels for a second, the early morning sun beating with gathering strength on her back.

It was then that she had the powerful sensation of being watched. Along with the sun there was another beam being directed at her, as unmistakable as a tap on the shoulder. Without rising, she glanced behind her. There was no one there, but she caught a movement, no more than a ripple, amongst the shrubs behind the cricket stumps.

She rose, smoothly: nothing too sudden, not too much curiosity or bravado, wait and see. She concentrated on that little patch of green, fifty yards away from where, she had no doubt, another pair of eyes was fixed on her with equal intensity.

She did not have to wait long. Halfway along the flower-bed, where the shrubs gave way to Thea's lovingly tended delphiniums and michaelmas daisies, the visitor appeared. He emerged from amongst the flowers like a dictator from a group of sycophants, his front feet planted knuckles-down on the dried-out grass.

He was a huge, old, ugly baboon, standing over three feet



at the shoulder. His wedge-shaped face with its broad, creased snout, and fierce little eyes set piercingly close together, wore an expression of disdainful hostility. A thick mane of grizzled hair hung almost to the ground from his powerful shoulders. As Kate watched, he stretched his neck and drew back his lips over yellow teeth in a silent laugh.

Kate's brain raced. Baboons were social animals, usually moving in large, structured groups with carefully observed hierarchies. But this one was on his own. So he was a rogue and an outcast, probably a former group leader nearing the end of his life. She had no doubt he was the killer.

He sat back on his haunches and picked at some parasite among the paler hair on his chest, studying it and then transferring it to his mouth with one surprisingly delicate front paw. Then he turned and began to slow-march away from Kate, tail aloft, the single beady eye of his narrow arse staring back at her.

'Murderer!' Kate's scream cut a slash through the sunny silence. 'Damn cowardly murderer!'

The baboon half-turned with a coughing sound, showing his yellow teeth again, afraid but fierce. Kate was halfway across the grass. She knew what to do, they'd had trouble with baboons stealing things from camp on safari. They didn't like noise, or direct attack. She pulled up one of the cricket stumps as she ran and hurled it at him like a javelin. It glanced off his back and he sprang into the air, landing straight-legged. He looked terrifying at close quarters, but Kate thought of his yellow teeth tearing the puppies, and his skinny paws clutching Dora by the throat, and ripping open her stomach.

'Bloody murderer!' Kate had not been reared in an environment where delicacy of speech counted for much.

She pulled up another stump, and then the third, scoring a direct hit with each one. He began to back off, chattering, his eyes cold and angry. Behind Kate others appeared, alerted by the noise, but she paid them no attention. She picked up a stone from the edge of the flowerbed and threw it at the

retreating animal with the whippy wrist action that had caused many a run-out. It caught the baboon on the back of the head and he yelped and began to canter away. She pelted stones after him in a vengeful ecstasy.

‘Bastard! Bastard, ugly brute!’

Grinning and breathless, she turned to see the rest of the family dotted about like participants in a game of grandmother’s footsteps. Immediately behind her was her twelve-year-old brother, Joe, looking at her with amused astonishment. Advancing behind him was Jack Kingsley, brisk and inquisitorial. On the verandah stood Thea, in a towelling robe and fluffy slippers. At the corner of the house, peering round anxiously, were Meru and the Kikuyu cook Jela, with a couple of goggle-eyed *totos*.

‘What in heaven’s name was all that about?’ asked Jack. He was dressed and freshly shaved, and had probably been having breakfast.

‘It was a great big nasty baboon,’ said Kate. ‘Didn’t you see?’

‘No, I didn’t. Where did he go?’

‘There.’ She pointed. ‘I hit him with a stone.’

‘Good girl. What, enough to hurt him?’

‘Absolutely.’

‘He’ll be back.’ Jack looked his foster-daughter up and down with dour admiration. ‘Is it all right with you if I finish my breakfast?’

‘Of course.’

‘Thank you.’ He began to walk back towards the house.

Joe came up to Kate. ‘Kate Kingsley, white hunter,’ he murmured, then rode the push she gave him and added: ‘I say, where are my stumps?’

‘Oh, sorry, I chucked them at the baboon. They’re somewhere over there.’

‘Decent of you to tell me ...’ Joe waded in among the delphiniums to retrieve the stumps. The servants drifted back to work, the drama over. Thea was in the middle of the lawn now, idly pulling at some spindly weed at her feet. The

bull terrier Cornet had waddled after her and was standing bandy-legged at her side, his tongue lolling from his mouth, his eyes slits in his smooth bullet-head. Suddenly he began to sniff, and then to make his way over to the run beneath the verandah.

‘Cornet!’ Kate called him, but he was inflexible. Idly, Thea began to follow him. Kate ran over to her. ‘Thea, don’t.’

‘Hallo, darling. Heavens, what a start to the day.’

‘Don’t go over there for a minute.’

‘But I want to see the puppies.’ Ahead of them, Cornet whined and scratched at the earth beneath the wire.

‘That baboon got Dora and the puppies.’ Circumlocution was not one of Kate’s faults. Thea whitened.

‘What?’

‘I found them about half an hour ago. He must have done it during the night. That’s why I made such a din when I saw him.’

‘Oh my God.’ Thea began to hurry towards the run. Kate caught her sleeve.

‘I wouldn’t, honestly.’

‘Nonsense, they’ll attract flies,’ said Thea, pulling away, but Kate could guess at the tears in her eyes.

She let go and went to sit on the steps. It was hot now. Two tiny brilliant firefinches were dust-bathing not three yards away. Kate watched the bright glitter of their wings and listened to the rustling and scraping of Thea seeing for herself.

Cornet came back first and settled down with a little groan at Kate’s feet, his head on his paws. Then Thea sat down on the step by Kate. She smelt of talcum powder, but there was a bloodstain on the blue, fluffy edge of her slipper. Kate didn’t look at her, but put out a hand and squeezed her knee.

Thea covered the hand briefly with her own. ‘Poor, poor Dora,’ she said. And then: ‘I must go and get one of the *totos* to dispose of all that mess.’

‘I’ll do it,’ said Kate. ‘You’re not dressed.’

‘I know, it’s disgraceful, isn’t it, and I’ve been awake for ages, too.’ She ran her hands backwards through her tangle

of black hair. Eighteen years' hard labour in East Africa had altered, but not extinguished, Thea Kingsley's beauty. The tanned skin of her arms, and of her ankles beneath the dressing-gown, was patterned with small scars from bites and scratches and everyday accidents, and a web of little lines had appeared round her eyes. But at forty-four her hair was still gypsy-black, her tall figure straight and slim, her manner one of unforced gaiety and optimism. Though she seldom wore make-up, and her clothes were mostly old and unfashionable, she would have drawn admiring glances in any smart European city. And her trump card was that she couldn't have cared less. Kate was suddenly, piercingly aware of how much she would miss her, and it made her brusque.

'Who shall I tell to do the clearing up?' Kate stood up briskly.

Thea shielded her eyes with one hand. 'Oh Lor', I don't know ... what on earth's Joe doing in my flowers? Joe!

'Fetching his cricket stumps. Who?'

'Um ...' Thea re-addressed herself to the problem. 'Not Meru, he's terribly squeamish. Ask Jim, why don't you?' Jim was the gardener. 'Get him to bury them somewhere out of the way where this one won't dig them up.'

'Rightie-o.'

Thea smiled up at her foster-daughter. Against the sun, Kate's shock of hair sprang out from her bandanna like some wild, glowing halo, though she made an eccentric angel. 'Bless you, Kate,' said Thea. 'What am I going to do without you?'

'Plenty, I expect. Go and get dressed, I'll see to it.'

Kate went round the corner of the house to the kitchen door. Meru and Jela were standing there, gossiping. 'Where's Jim?' asked Kate. 'Meru, go and get on, please.'

'Watering,' volunteered Jela. The mouthwatering aroma of frying bacon wafted from the kitchen behind him. Jela was a first-class exponent of every classic English dish from bacon and egg to summer pudding, though he himself lived exclusively on maize *posho*.

'*Asante*.' Kate sought out Jim, by means of following the

hosepipe attached to the kitchen tap. Thea had constantly told Jim that watering plants in the morning was a waste of time since all the moisture was sucked up by the sun in a matter of minutes. But it was an operation which held a magical fascination for Jim. The turning on of the tap, the invisible flow of the water along the pipe, the sense of power to be enjoyed by placing one's finger over the mouth of the pipe so that the water jetted wherever you wanted it – all these were an endless source of pleasure to him.

Now his tall, stork-like figure was to be seen in the vegetable patch, directing the arc of water from the hose on to a row of already saturated lettuces. Apart from the watering, it was Jim's special talent to care for the garden while never actually being seen to do so. Kate's enduring picture of him was that of a lanky black statue standing motionless and laconic in his horticultural setting, usually accompanied by one or more of his insignia of office – spade, rake, edging shears – but rarely using any of them. He was a Masai, with that tribe's characteristic up-tilted profile, and an expression of unassailable hauteur which was probably, in Kate's view, just sloth and indifference. He had originally attached himself to the household by simply maintaining a presence until work was found for him to do, but why he had done so remained a mystery. For one thing, the Masai were not traditionally cultivators of the land, but shepherds, and nomadic. Secondly, it was considered sufficient for a young man, a *moran*, to bask in his maleness while others worked. A side-effect of this cult of the male was that Jim, when he had first arrived, had been all-too-visibly masculine, with parts that swung like an elephant's trunk and could be clearly seen from behind as he walked. In the interests of visitors whose sensibilities might be more refined than the Kingsleys', the problem of Jim's 'wedding tackle', as Jack called it, had to be faced. Thea had at last persuaded him to go at least partially clad, and now he wore his usual daytime uniform of a pair of cast-off khaki shorts of Jack's. They sat precariously on Jim's narrow hips, the wide legs flapping round his knees.

Now Kate unleashed a brisk volley of kitchen Swahili in his direction, killing several birds with one stone, chastising him for the indiscriminate watering, telling him to turn off the tap and not simply leave the hose trickling on the ground, and issuing orders concerning the dead dogs. He listened with an expression of ineffable disdain, but Kate wasn't fooled. She knew that Jim was almost pathologically idle, and only the sharpest and most direct approach would spur him to action. 'Yes?' she concluded, making a hurry-up motion with her hand. 'Get on with it.'

She literally stood over him as he strolled, with a studiedly *degagé* air, back to the kitchen door, and stood two feet from the tap telling the hard-pressed Jela, who was cutting bread at the table, to do it for him. A heated exchange began, which Kate cut short.

'Jim! The tap – off! Get on with the job now.' It was never clear how much English Jim understood, but he responded to her tone of voice. Sulkily, he twisted the tap, smarting under Jela's delighted, face-splitting grin. He then came to stand before Kate, like an attenuated ebony marionette, his long hands and arms dangling at his sides. His hooded eyes gave nothing away.

'Come with me.' She led him round to the other side of the house and showed him the run, the broken wire, and the corpses of the dogs, which were now beginning to smell strong.

'Aaaah ...' Suddenly animated he crouched down, nodding and peering at the horrible mess. He didn't like dogs, so he was probably delighted, reflected Kate.

'You'll need a sack – wheelbarrow–' She made a putting-in gesture. 'All right?'

He rose and ambled off. Now his interest was engaged, she knew he would get on with it.

Joe had been driving his stumps into the rock-hard ground in a new place. He ran towards Kate, bringing his arm over in a fast bowling action as he did so.

'Bringing the *watu* to heel, are we?'

‘Shut up.’

‘This place will fall apart when you’ve gone.’

‘What nonsense.’

‘Honestly. You’re so much more effective than Mum, they do things for you.’

‘She’s too nice, that’s all.’

But Kate flashed him her quick, devilish grin. It pleased her to be thought of as effective, even a little fearsome. In sharp contrast to her foster-mother, whose main object was to establish good relations with her staff, Kate wished only to establish the kind of relations that got things done.

Jim ambled by, carrying a sack and a spade.

Brother and sister looked at each other and giggled.

‘The phantom reaper himself,’ said Joe. ‘Poor Dora.’

Kate went back into the house and into the dining-room. Bacon and eggs were on the side, over a night-light. As she helped herself, Jela appeared softly and removed the empty toast-rack. While she ate he returned with fresh toast, and a pot of coffee which he placed on a coaster on the table, having first filled her cup. He hovered, shifting restlessly from one long, purplish foot to the other.

‘*Musuri*, Jela.’

He left the room, closing the door quietly behind him. Kate ate hungrily. She saw Thea pass the window, dressed now, and arm in arm with Joe, and then heard her voice in the kitchen, lilting and conversational, and Jela’s chattering reply.

She finished breakfast and went along to her room to change and complete her packing. Meru was in the drawing-room, polishing the top of the piano, and wiping over the glass on the front of the family photographs which stood there. The first duty he performed with a duster, the second with the hem of his singlet, both with extreme thoroughness. The room was sunny, shiny with polish, bright and leafy with roses. In the grey stone fireplace stood a hand-painted china jug full of tall grasses, flanked by a copper scuttle and irons, and a huge African log basket. Cornet lay in the doorway.

Now Meru saw Kate watching him and made a face at Cornet, shaking his head. 'Kali.'

Cornet rumbled menacingly.

'Be quiet.' Kate gave the dog a nudge with the toe of her tennis shoe. Meru applied the singlet to a miniature of Thea's mother, still muttering mutinously.

Kate went into her room. She poured some water from the pitcher into the flowery bowl, peeled off her shirt and washed. Then she put on underclothes and clean trousers and shirt, dropping the dirty ones by the door. Finally she removed the bandanna and looked at herself in the mirror for the first time that day as she brushed her hair.

'Carrots' Kingsley they'd called her at the boarding school in Nairobi, and Kate had no pretensions to beauty. On the other hand she paid only scant attention to her appearance and when she did she was quite satisfied with it. She was tall and slender (thin was the word she herself would have used); her hair, in her view, justified her nickname, though an impartial observer would have called it red and would have given its fiery brightness a second glance in any crowd; she had been spared the redhead's typical sandy lashes and her eyes were vivid and compelling in her pale face – narrow, upward-slanting hazel eyes. When she looked at herself in the mirror she met a stare that was watchful, alert and appraising. Hers was not a soothing or a restful presence, nor did she intend it to be. The impression she conveyed was one of intense and challenging self-knowledge, defying anyone to catch her out in vanity, complacency or self-delusion.

Kate's upbringing had been solitary by design as much as by circumstance. In spite of Thea's repeated invitations she had not brought school friends home in the holidays, preferring to walk and ride and drive out with Jack in the truck than be obliged to engage in more girlish pursuits with any of her contemporaries. At school she was industrious in class, excellent at games, and wholly self-possessed. She had not shown the least interest in running with the herd. In her early teens, when most of her peers played tennis for its social



advantages, she did so to win. While they strove to be in fashion she remained resolutely outside it and apparently impervious to its allure: she dressed for comfort and to suit herself and the result was often strikingly idiosyncratic, so that girls who had lavished care and cash on their appearance suffered the uncomfortable sensation of having been effortlessly (and, even more galling, unintentionally) upstaged.

Luckily for her, Kate was sufficiently formidable to be neither ostracized nor derided for her individuality, but admired for it. She made no close friends because she didn't seem to need any, but she was popular in her way, and respected for her unshowy ability to stick up for herself and for others.

As regards the opposite sex, Kate was that perverse creature, a woman not endowed with conventional beauty, but who nonetheless held strong views on men. Thea, anxious for her foster-daughter's popularity, could at times have wished her less critical and aloof, especially since it took a brave young man to breach the wall of chilling indifference she had set around herself. Suitors of sufficient temerity were scarce enough, yet Kate had not the least intention of feigning interest in the eager, bumptious youths who occasionally put themselves forward, and they in their turn were soon discomforted by this acerbic girl with her sharp eyes and funny clothes.

Yet Thea knew Kate was far from cold. Apart from the naturally practical attitude to matters biological common to children raised in the country, there was in the young Kate an awareness of the physical and its power, an assertive sexuality of which only Thea knew the mainspring. Every so often that quality would burst through like a hardy, exotically flowering weed forcing its way between the stems of more genteel plants, thrusting itself towards the light, demanding attention: and Thea feared it.

One image in particular haunted her, a picture of Kate at sixteen after they had brought her back from a disastrous dance at a neighbour's. The girl in the back of the truck had

been sulky, gawky, rebellious, awkward in her taffeta dress and court shoes. When they had got back to the farm Kate had simply jumped out, discarding the hated shoes and nylon stockings, and run off towards the paddock, a rustling, shimmering green wraith in the night. Thea had made to follow her, but Jack had put his hand on her arm.

‘Don’t. Leave her to it. She’s only gone to visit Sailor.’

Thea demurred. ‘She’s in her best dress.’

‘She loathes it. Give up the unequal struggle.’

‘It’s pitch dark—’

‘That worries you, not her.’ He put his arm round Thea and kissed her warmly, turning her face to his and kissing her again on the mouth. ‘Stay here with me, Mrs Kingsley, I’ll go after her in a little while.’

In a little while he did, while Thea sat anxiously on the verandah with Cornet. She did not bother to light the lamp. Joe was away at school. Only a faint light from the passage beyond the drawing-room crept across the verandah and spilled wanly on the grey, night-time grass.

She wished that she could, as Jack recommended, give up the unequal struggle. She wished she had not made Kate attend the dreaded dance or that, having done so, she had not made her wear the taffeta dress. Of course you couldn’t force Kate to do anything. Thea had won what now seemed a Pyrrhic victory by gentle persuasion and a direct appeal to Kate’s better nature. ‘Do it for me,’ she’d said, and much good it had done her. She could not understand herself. She knew Kate better than anyone, perhaps loved her better too, and understood her, and yet perversely sought to change her. Perhaps it was that exotic, voracious flower she sought to eradicate, that ineluctable growth which could only be Dulcie’s.

Immersed in these gloomy reflections Thea sat in the near-dark, waiting, staring, not really seeing. So that when her husband and daughter did reappear they had, for her, an almost hallucinatory quality.

Kate was riding the pony, bareback. The green taffeta dress that suited her so ill now gave her the look of a female centaur,

cast in bronze. Her pale, pointed face framed by wild red hair was impassive, almost haughty, though her eyes, as she drew closer, Thea could see, were fiercely bright. On either side of the pony's barrel-hard flanks the girl's long, white, tapering bare legs hung loose, but commanding. And beside the pony's head, one hand on its mane, walked Jack, slow and erect, courtier-like.

For that moment, as they advanced silently across the grass to bid her good-night, Thea saw them not as father and daughter, but for what they were – man and woman, not linked by blood or kinship but part of a primitive, atavistic pattern. She could change nothing. She was powerless. Like the *belle dame sans merci* and her helpless, ensnared knight these two whom Thea loved so much moved towards her. And when they stopped in front of the verandah they were silent for a moment, each thinking the other would speak first. Thea raised her eyes from her daughter's languidly drooping feet and looked into her face, and there it was, that challenge – unintended, she knew, but there nonetheless – that she remembered so well and which invaded her dreams and made her sleep restless.

'Here she is,' said Jack. 'I brought her to you.'

'Yes,' replied Thea. 'Good-night, my darling.'

If Kate replied she did not hear her. The girl turned the pony's head and rode him away into the dark in the direction of the paddock, leaving the two of them on the verandah. Her departure seemed to trail a wake of foreboding, so that Thea shivered, and went indoors.

For Kate the distant past was a blur. Of the first five years of her life, in Paris, certain images remained, though most had been wiped out by the memory's selective process. She recalled the small flat where she had been brought up by a woman she knew as Tanty – a corruption of the French *tante* though somehow Kate had always known she was no relation. Tanty had been strict, and conscientious. She had looked after Kate without evincing the least interest or affection for her as an