

LXVIII

L AURA PROTHERO was sitting with Jane in the garden at Wendover one day in that spring. It was a day of sudden warmth and stillness that brought back vividly to both of them the hour of Owen's death.

They were touched by the beauty and the peace of this place where Nicky lived his perfect little life. They had just agreed that it was Nicky's life, Nicky's character, that had given to his garden its lucent, exquisite tranquillity. You associated that quality so indivisibly with Nicky that it was as if he flowered there, he came up every spring, flaming purely, in the crocuses on the lawn. Every spring Nicky and a book of poems appeared with the crocuses; the poems as Nicky made them, but Nicky heaven-born, in an immortal innocence and charm.

It was incredible, they said, how heaven sheltered and protected Nicky.

He, with his infallible instinct for the perfect thing, had left them together, alone in the little green chamber on the lawn shut in by its walls of yew. He was glad that he had this heavenly peace to give them for a moment.

He passed before them now and then, pacing the green path of the lawn with Nina.

"No, Jinny, I am *not* going on any more," Laura said, returning to the subject of that intimate communion to which they had been left. "You see, it ended as a sort of joke, his and mine — nobody else saw the point of it. Why should I keep it up?"

"Would n't he have liked you to keep it up?"

"He would have liked me to please myself — to be happy. How can I be happy going on — giving myself to the people who rejected *him*? I'm not going to keep *that* up."

"What will you do?"