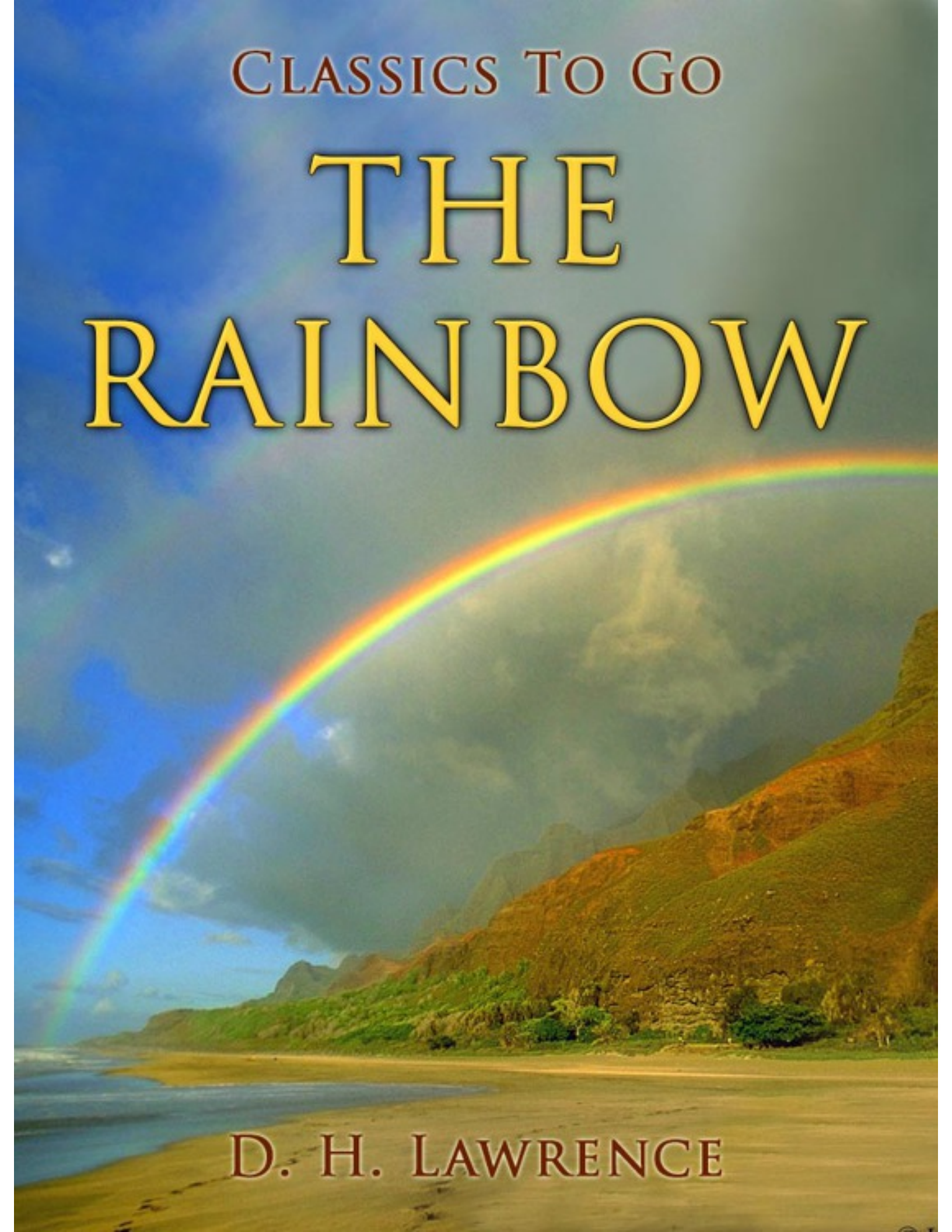


CLASSICS TO GO

THE RAINBOW

D. H. LAWRENCE



The child beside her watched everything with wide, black eyes. She had an odd little defiant look, her little red mouth was pinched shut. She seemed to be jealously guarding something, to be always on the alert for defence. She met Brangwen's near, vacant, intimate gaze, and a palpitating hostility, almost like a flame of pain, came into the wide, over-conscious dark eyes.

The old clergyman droned on, Cossethay sat unmoved as usual. And there was the foreign woman with a foreign air about her, inviolate, and the strange child, also foreign, jealously guarding something.

When the service was over, he walked in the way of another existence out of the church. As he went down the church-path with his sister, behind the woman and child, the little girl suddenly broke from her mother's hand, and slipped back with quick, almost invisible movement, and was picking at something almost under Brangwen's feet. Her tiny fingers were fine and quick, but they missed the red button.

"Have you found something?" said Brangwen to her.

And he also stooped for the button. But she had got it, and she stood back with it pressed against her little coat, her black eyes flaring at him, as if to forbid him to notice her. Then, having silenced him, she turned with a swift "Mother——," and was gone down the path.

The mother had stood watching impassive, looking not at the child, but at Brangwen. He became aware of the woman looking at him, standing there isolated yet for him dominant in her foreign existence.

He did not know what to do, and turned to his sister. But the wide grey eyes, almost vacant yet so moving, held him beyond himself.

"Mother, I may have it, mayn't I?" came the child's proud, silvery tones. "Mother"-she seemed always to be calling her mother to remember her-"mother"-and she had nothing to continue now her mother had replied "Yes, my child." But, with ready invention, the child stumbled and ran on, "What are those people's names?"

Brangwen heard the abstract:

"I don't know, dear."

He went on down the road as if he were not living inside himself, but somewhere outside.

"Who *was* that person?" his sister Effie asked.

"I couldn't tell you," he answered unknowing.

"She's *somebody* very funny," said Effie, almost in condemnation. "That child's like one bewitched."

"Bewitched—how bewitched?" he repeated.

"You can see for yourself. The mother's plain, I must say—but the child is like a changeling. She'd be about thirty-five."

But he took no notice. His sister talked on.

"There's your woman for you," she continued. "You'd better marry *her*." But still he took no notice. Things were as they were.

Another day, at tea-time, as he sat alone at table, there came a knock at the front door. It startled him like a portent. No one ever knocked at the front door. He rose and began slotting back the bolts, turning the big key. When he had opened the door, the strange woman stood on the threshold.

"Can you give me a pound of butter?" she asked, in a curious detached way of one speaking a foreign language.

He tried to attend to her question. She was looking at him questioningly. But underneath the question, what was there, in her very standing motionless, which affected him?

He stepped aside and she at once entered the house, as if the door had been opened to admit her. That startled him. It was the custom for everybody to wait on the doorstep till asked inside. He went into the kitchen and she followed.

His tea-things were spread on the scrubbed deal table, a big fire was burning, a dog rose from the hearth and went to her. She stood motionless just inside the kitchen.

"Tilly," he called loudly, "have we got any butter?"

The stranger stood there like a silence in her black cloak.

"Eh?" came the shrill cry from the distance.

He shouted his question again.

"We've got what's on t' table," answered Tilly's shrill voice out of the dairy.

Brangwen looked at the table. There was a large pat of butter on a plate, almost a pound. It was round, and stamped with acorns and oak-leaves.

"Can't you come when you're wanted?" he shouted.

"Why, what d'you want?" Tilly protested, as she came peeking inquisitively through the other door.

She saw the strange woman, stared at her with cross-eyes, but said nothing.

"*Haven't* we any butter?" asked Brangwen again, impatiently, as if he could command some by his question.

"I tell you there's what's on t' table," said Tilly, impatient that she was unable to create any to his demand. "We haven't a morsel besides."

There was a moment's silence.

The stranger spoke, in her curiously distinct, detached manner of one who must think her speech first.

"Oh, then thank you very much. I am sorry that I have come to trouble you."

She could not understand the entire lack of manners, was slightly puzzled. Any politeness would have made the situation quite impersonal. But here it was a case of wills in confusion. Brangwen flushed at her polite speech. Still he did not let her go.

"Get summat an' wrap *that* up for her," he said to Tilly, looking at the butter on the table.

And taking a clean knife, he cut off that side of the butter where it was touched.

His speech, the "for her", penetrated slowly into the foreign woman and angered Tilly.

"Vicar has his butter fra Brown's by rights," said the insuppressible servant-woman. "We s'll be churnin' to-morrow mornin' first thing."

"Yes"—the long-drawn foreign yes—"yes," said the Polish woman, "I went to Mrs. Brown's. She hasn't any more."

Tilly bridled her head, bursting to say that, according to the etiquette of people who bought butter, it was no sort of manners whatever coming to a place cool as you like and knocking at the front door asking for a pound as a stop-gap while your other people were short. If you go to Brown's you go to Brown's, an' my butter isn't just to make shift when Brown's has got none.

Brangwen understood perfectly this unspoken speech of Tilly's. The Polish lady did not. And as she wanted butter for the vicar, and as Tilly was churning in the morning, she waited.

"Sluther up now," said Brangwen loudly after this silence had resolved itself out; and Tilly disappeared through the inner door.

"I am afraid that I should not come, so," said the stranger, looking at him enquiringly, as if referring to him for what it was usual to do.

He felt confused.

"How's that?" he said, trying to be genial and being only protective.

"Do you——?" she began deliberately. But she was not sure of her ground, and the conversation came to an end. Her eyes looked at him all the while, because she could not speak the language.

They stood facing each other. The dog walked away from her to him. He bent down to it.

"And how's your little girl?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you, she is very well," was the reply, a phrase of polite speech in a foreign language merely.

"Sit you down," he said.

And she sat in a chair, her slim arms, coming through the slits of her cloak, resting on her lap.

"You're not used to these parts," he said, still standing on the hearthrug with his back to the fire, coatless, looking with curious directness at the woman. Her self-possession pleased him and inspired him, set him curiously free. It seemed to him almost brutal to feel so master of himself and of the situation.

Her eyes rested on him for a moment, questioning, as she thought of the meaning of his speech.

"No," she said, understanding. "No—it is strange."

"You find it middlin' rough?" he said.

Her eyes waited on him, so that he should say it again.

"Our ways are rough to you," he repeated.

"Yes—yes, I understand. Yes, it is different, it is strange. But I was in Yorkshire——"

"Oh, well then," he said, "it's no worse here than what they are up there."

She did not quite understand. His protective manner, and his sureness, and his intimacy, puzzled her. What did he mean? If he was her equal, why did he behave so without formality?

"No——" she said, vaguely, her eyes resting on him.

She saw him fresh and naïve, uncouth, almost entirely beyond relationship with her. Yet he was good-looking, with his fair hair and blue eyes full of energy, and with his healthy body that seemed to take equality with her. She watched him steadily. He was difficult for her to understand, warm, uncouth, and confident as he was, sure on his feet as if he did not know what it was to be unsure. What then was it that gave him this curious stability?

She did not know. She wondered. She looked round the room he lived in. It had a close intimacy that fascinated and almost frightened her. The furniture was old and familiar as old people, the whole place seemed so kin to him, as if it partook of his being, that she was uneasy.

"It is already a long time that you have lived in this house—yes?" she asked.

"I've always lived here," he said.

"Yes—but your people—your family?"

"We've been here above two hundred years," he said. Her eyes were on him all the time, wide-open and trying to grasp him. He felt that he was there for her.

"It is your own place, the house, the farm——?"

"Yes," he said. He looked down at her and met her look. It disturbed her. She did not know him. He was a foreigner, they had nothing to do with each other. Yet his look disturbed her to knowledge of him. He was so strangely confident and direct.

"You live quite alone?"

"Yes—if you call it alone?"

She did not understand. It seemed unusual to her. What was the meaning of it?

And whenever her eyes, after watching him for some time, inevitably met his, she was aware of a heat beating up over her consciousness. She sat motionless and in conflict. Who was this strange man who was at once so near to her? What was happening to her? Something in his young, warm-twinkling eyes seemed to assume a right to her, to speak to her, to extend her his protection. But how? Why did he speak to her? Why were his eyes so certain, so full of light and confident, waiting for no permission nor signal?