



Extract 3

Skating

Hatty and Tom skated on and on. The skaters they met now were mostly men. There were few girls, that Tom could see, and none without escort. They came to a lonely river-side alehouse: its signboard said: 'The Five Miles from Anywhere—No Hurry'. Here there were skaters, labourers from the Fen farms, resting on the bank. They called out jovially to Hatty, asking if she would like any of them to skate with her for company. They went on calling, until she called back that she had a companion with her, even if they could not see him. The skaters thought this a good hoax and laughed, taking no offence; and Hatty laughed; and Tom laughed too, but no one except Hatty heard him.

They skated on, and the thin, brilliant sun was beginning to set, and Hatty's black shadow flitted along at their right hand, across the dazzle of the ice. Sometimes they skated on the main river; sometimes they skated along the flooded washes. Only the willows along the bank watched them; and the ice hissed with their passage.

They had stopped talking or thinking—their legs and arms and bodies seemed to throw from side to side with the precise, untiring regularity of clock-pendulums—long before Hatty cried: 'Look, Tom—the tower of Ely cathedral!'

From the river, however, Ely's tower plays a game with the traveller. Hatty and Tom skated and skated, and for a long time the tower seemed to let them come no nearer, but performed a mysterious movement instead, now to one side, now to the other, now ahead, according to the windings of the river. At last, however, they were certainly getting nearer, and now the cathedral tower began to disappear behind the nearer rooftops; and here they were where the river curves in to the town of Ely.

