

Truth lies in dungeons, from which drifts no whisper . . .

The city builds its horror in my brain,
This writing is my only wings away.

They also discussed in their letters to each other the problems of life; not really discussed; they each made their respective statements.

I don't believe in God, she wrote to him, and I can't see any proof of his existence. The Church is full of hypocrites. They do what they like all week and think that if they go to Church on Sundays, that's enough. I think people should be more concerned with how they live on earth than with any rewards they might get in heaven. That's why I'm an atheist.

Writing 'I'm an atheist' was a splendid declaration of defiance. None of the people that Lucia knew were confessed atheists.

Raymond wrote in reply: I would call myself an agnostic. If there's no proof that there is a God, neither is there proof that God doesn't exist. I won't set myself up as judge. That's why I prefer to call myself an agnostic, to say I don't know.

He was always more cautious than she.

Another time he asked: Do you believe in platonic friendships? Do you believe there can be lasting friendship between a man and woman without love (he meant sex) just as there can be between two men or two women?

She replied with indignation: Of course platonic friendship is possible, and there can be a close relationship between two people of different sexes without the objective of an affair or marriage.

As time went by, Raymond's letters dealt more and more with their personal relationship, weaving the ideas they had expressed in their verses and the dream of new horizons into the possibility of a joint venture. Such fantasies could be tolerated as long as he lived in a place that was physically removed from Lucia, but the day came when he wrote with excitement that he was to be transferred back to London - and then the two of us can really talk together for days and days, he said, and make our plans . . .

But by this time the interlude was over. Writing to Raymond had been wonderful, but he was so personally unattractive. It was platonic, she decided. Their souls might match, but she could not love him.

And while he had been away, apart from the intermittent attentions of Ronnie, there was the additional complication of Ernest.

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They had been sitting perched on stool at a lunch counter one day, Lucia and another girl from her office, Agnes, when Lucia glanced at her watch and said - I've got to hurry back. I haven't finished typing Mr Rossiter's report, and he wants it early this afternoon.

Agnes said casually - That man's crazy about you.

She felt the familiar unstoppable warmth climb up her neck and redden her face. - Don't be ridiculous! How can you say that?

- Of course he is, Agnes persisted, - you can't not have noticed.

- Noticed? What's there to notice?

Well, he's got this thing of always making excuses to go to your desk - now she said this, Lucia realised it was true; he came to her much more frequently than to any of the other girls; - and he hangs around you, and besides, I've seen the way he looks at you.

-How does he look at me?

- Intense. Sort of moony. He's a quiet one, I bet that covers a deep, passionate nature. The quiet ones usually turn out to be reckless beasts inside.

- But he's old, Agnes. I mean, even if you're right - and I don't know that you are - he's a lot older than I am. Isn't he a widower, or something? Hasn't he been married already?

- He's not all that old. Thirty-one, or two or three, or something like that. He was married but his wife died. He hasn't any children. He's ~~probably~~ lonely, and I know he fancies you. He's crazy about you, she repeated, honestly he is.

That afternoon Lucia was uncomfortably aware of Ernest Rossiter when she went into his office after knocking on the door. When he summoned her in she was afraid of blushing if she looked at him, so she looked down at the desk, and noticed for the first time that there were a number of reddish hairs on the backs of his hands.

They were white, rather bony hands, which was not surprising, because he was a sandy man with a very white skin. The hairs, the colour, even the knuckles seemed to stir something in her memory and suddenly she was no longer embarrassed. She looked at him and thought, he isn't all that old, he just looks tired sometimes, and he's quite good-looking. And she found that she could smile at him quite naturally.

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- Have you ever stood somewhere, on a street corner, say, waiting and waiting for someone you have an appointment with, who doesn't come? asked Lucia.

- You mean, being stood up? said Freda. - Of course. What an awful, humiliating, miserable experience.

- Do you think males get stood up by females?

- Without doubt. Why should you think men are any different in that respect?

- Only because it's always the male who asks the female out, not the other way around.

- That's why, Freda said wisely - it's even more humiliating for them, it's so hard for them to believe that any woman they fancied would treat them in such a way.

- Well, I've only had the female experience, Lucia said, so I will give you my version.

It starts this way. Someone has asked you out, someone you do not know very well; and because you have not yet explored him, because he is still largely unknown territory, you have a feeling of pleasurable excitement: something new, something nice, is going to happen.

The doubt begins almost immediately. You have arrived at the specified place five or ten minutes before the specified time, and he is not there yet, but that's all right, you're early - but. But. The slightest anticipation of disappointment to come creeps into your mind. If he had felt the way you felt, he would have been early too.

You saunter casually away from the exact place of the assignment (maybe outside Leicester Square Underground, or at the booking office; or Tottenham Court Road, on the corner of Oxford Street, or Charing Cross Road, outside Lyons). And you keep your back turned to the direction from which he is most likely to come.

You examine your reflection in the plate glass, rub your lips together, push some hairs into place; the anxious hollows of your eyes recede into the outlines of men's jackets or gloves or ties; and the full-length reflection - there isn't any full-length mirror at home - gives you a chance to see yourself all in one piece; straighten your skirt; turn slightly to see the hemline at the back, the seam of your stockings is straight. Pull on a glove, take another furtive look at the time - it is the right time now, the time that he should be here.

So you turn around with a rather fixed expression on your face of anticipation or surprise - oh, there you are - have you been waiting long? - No, I just arrived.

He's late now, the louse, it's four or five minutes after the time. This is the right day, isn't it, it is Tuesday, he did say Tuesday - yes, it's the third, Tuesday the third; the right day. Is it the right place?

He did say downstairs at the booking office (or upstairs outside Lyons); but just to make sure, you take a quick walk around to the other entrance; not too far, because if he comes, and now it's ten past, and he doesn't see you there, he might go away thinking you had not bothered to wait.

At fifteen minutes past the time, you say to yourself firmly: I will wait for exactly another five minutes, that's all, and if he is not here in five minutes, then to hell with him. And walk around again because two other men have already tried to accost you and there is a third who is standing on the kerb eyeing you furtively. If you hang around a place in town like this, someone is bound to think you are waiting to be picked up. This heightens your annoyance and tension - you're not that kind of girl.

The worst thing is that you actually wait longer than twenty minutes - perhaps for half an hour or even a little more - and it has become obvious he is not coming, he has stood you up. If there were no others involved, just the two of you, it would not be so important; but there are always others involved. Even if, like me, there is only one other member of your family.

- Think of me, said Freda. - I had to handle not only my mother, and my father, but two nosy brothers, one older than me, Sam, he used to patronise me so much, and the other one younger who was such a spoilt brat and a tease.

- Family has been told not to leave you any supper, Lucia continued, because you won't be home until half-past ten or eleven, you are going out tonight. Family will express great surprise when you walk in at eight - oh, we thought you were going out, you were going to be late, we haven't any dinner for you - what happened. Didn't he come?

And there is no answer except the truth, the actual, humbling truth.

Next day at the office someone asks: how was your new date last night? Have a good time? Maybe some girls know how to lie their way out of that one, but some do not, so there is the simple answer: he stood me up.

Freda said - Then you console yourself, nevver mind, he wasn't worth it, obviously, if he could behave like that. So you're glad, really, you don't want to know him. But you're not glad, you're deeply hurt.

- It's something to do with being female, said Lucia, - always waiting for the advances to come from the other side, never being able to be frank and open yourself, to initiate things.

- Well, that's how it all started with me and Ernest Rossiter, Lucia continued. - No, he didn't stand me up, it was someone else. I went to

a café just around the corner to have a cup of coffee, only to delay the return home and my mother's kind, concerned enquiries. It's the principle that counts. The person himself was really of no great importance to me, even if I had thought there was the potential of some future arrangement. It hadn't happened yet, he had not really taken any shape in my mind, and now if you asked me, I could not even tell you his name or what he looked like; only the incident itself. Nothing was lost except one evening of my life, which at that age, I could spare. And self-respect.

The café I went to was not far from the office where I worked, and as I sat stirring my coffee and reading the evening paper, Mr Rossiter entered and went to the counter to buy some cigarettes. Then he noticed me sitting at the table, he greeted me.

I said - Don't tell me you've only just left the office? Been working so late?

- Yes, he replied, and drew out a chair. - May I join you?

- Please do . . . I was going out with a friend of mine, but at the last minute she couldn't come, she had to go home - that was a very small, a really white, lie - so I thought I'd have a cup of coffee before going home.

(He's crazy about you . . . I've seen the way he looks at you.)

We had one of those ritual conversations in which, step by step, he moved towards the request of my company for the evening, and step by step I assisted him. No, my mother's not expecting me home yet because I told her I was going out with my friend . . . No, nothing else, really. Why, I'd love to!

We went to dinner together in a stuffy small restaurant with pink-shaded lamps and a cosy dimness about everything. I enjoyed the pleasures of a more self-assured partner, the courtesy and simple anticipation of needs. I was grateful to him for rescuing my evening for me, for saving me the necessity of explanations to my mother. As soon as I entered the house she would ask - Did you enjoy yourself, dear? And I would be able to answer truthfully - Yes, thanks, very much. - Is he a nice young man? - Quite nice. Even if he was very nice it was not wise to show too much enthusiasm because any undue warmth of tone would set my mother's mind jangling to the sound of wedding bells.

- But you were lucky, said Freda. - With me the main concern was that I might take up with a goy. As long as it was a nice, Jewish boy it was O.K.

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Ernest Rossiter was gentle and quiet, but he could be amusing, and Lucia soon lost the awkwardness that she had first felt with him. It was a shift in relationship. He was her senior, not just in years, but in position in the office; generally he called her by her first name, and she called him Mr Rossiter. She could not easily discard this sense of formality and found it difficult to start calling him Ernest.

The evening began a continuing friendship. In the office they both kept strictly to a formal footing and avoided any familiar exchange of words or looks. This they did without discussing it, because they both preferred it that way. Outside they established a warm relationship. Lucia felt protected and admired. She liked getting up in a restaurant and having him hold her coat for her, even if she always seemed to dive four times for the second sleeve. He took her arm across roads, he eased her off buses. She knew he enjoyed the contact of his protective arm around her. She felt if necessary she could curl up next to him, close and comforted, and perhaps feel the curve of his arm all night long.

Clearly he was in love with her, as she understood being in love. Clearly she was deeply flattered by his attention. Inevitably it reached that point of no return; as usual she had allowed herself to drift into a position from which it would prove difficult to extricate herself.

She brought him home to meet her mother, because he more or less requested it. He was particularly charming to Rose - he was no fool, her Mr Rossiter - and on two or three occasions he would invite Rose to accompany them to the pictures. And he always promised her he would take great care of her daughter, the precious plant she had reared, which he was ready to take over for ever. Both Rose and Mr Rossiter regarded Lucia as being vulnerable, in danger from the wild world around, to be looked after and protected.

Sometimes she felt that she was like a set of spiritual mirrors that reflected what others saw in her. She became what they thought she was. If they did not think, she would not become.

With Ernest Rossiter she was pure and innocent, an untouched virgin becoming woman, and lovely with the accepted virtues of young womanhood. Like Ronnie, doubtless he saw her in a domestic setting, but whereas in Ronnie's picture she would be washing the dinner dishes while he sat with his feet up reading the paper, in Ernest's image he would stand beside her and carefully dry each plate and cup while she washed.

There was promise in it, promise to cherish, to buy flowers on their anniversary, to earn enough to live decently, to put a tidy sum aside for their old age. When the time came for him to propose - and it was

inevitable, she did not know to prevent it - she knew she would see her whole destiny in his eyes, the long boring years in which she would be the good wife he desired her to be.

And suddenly she wanted to flee from him, to jump up and pull the emergency cord, to dash through the door and project herself into the night, and to run, run, run until she was far from him and his smothering hopes, until she was in sight of home; run through the streets of night with running footsteps echoing behind her, echoing in her head; as once she had run as a child, hearing the echo of her own footsteps down the empty street, stopping and listening with constricting heart, starting to run and hearing the footsteps once again, and gathering speed, going faster, afraid to look back into the darkness, afraid to stop because when she stopped the sound of the footsteps stopped - were they her own, or was there someone running behind her? And which did she fear most - that there was someone there, or that there was no other source of her terror except herself?

Rose remarked one day - You know, there's something about your Mr Rossiter - - He's not my Mr Rossiter! - something that reminds me of your father. I don't know what it is. He doesn't actually look like him. It must be his expression, or something. Or his colouring. Your father had the same colouring, exactly.

This was one of her very rare references to the man who had gone out of their lives so long ago. Perhaps this was why she had encouraged Lucia to go out with him, and why she had continued to do so, even when she knew the time had come to stop.

So now she had to control her panic and say quietly and with reason - I must tell you Ernest - for at last he had persuaded her to call him by his first name, even though she still thought of him as Mr Rossiter, - I must tell you, I'm not in love with you. I do like you, you know I do, but . . . I do respect you tremendously . . . she drifted to a stop and then tried again - I must be honest with you. I don't want to think about getting married yet.

He accepted this almost as though it was what he had expected, and expressed the hope that she could grow to love him in the way that he loved her; and offered, meanwhile, the security of marriage. And told her that he had already spoken to her mother who had said she would be very happy if - and that there would always be a place for Rose in their home -

And at that a fountain of resentment sprang up, partly from her own sense of guilt at having let the relationship go so far, and turned her embarrassment to anger. How dare he, she thought, how could he, speak to

her mother before he spoke to her? They were in a conspiracy together. Now she saw how Rose had constantly put him in front of her, served him up like a dinner. She did not voice these thoughts, but it was the one act on his part that dissolved any slight uncertainty on hers. The only thing that remained was how to end it all with as little pain to him as possible.

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Ronnie, Raymond and Mr Rossiter. Two of them were waiting for her to make up her mind and arrive at a favourable decision, and the third would be arriving any day and descend on her with demands she was not willing to meet. She would have to, somehow, make it plain to all three that she did not wish to go out with them again, that she did not wish to see them again. But that was difficult, too. Ronnie and Raymond went around with all the same crowd that was the centre of her social life, and unless she found another job, she would go on seeing Ernest Rossiter every day. And the less practical problem of inflicting pain on them, and the pain to herself of relinquishing their company and their attentions. There was no way to understand the contradiction in which she was caught: that she was constantly seeking love, but when it approached she ~~wished~~^{wanted} to turn and flee in panic.

She wished herself away, out of town, out of the country. She wanted to escape from the web woven around her. Run away, leave it all behind, the old relationships, the old friends, the old situations. Start again in some new and unknown place, with new unknown people. Break with the past; the old illusion that a shift of scenery will allow a new character to emerge; the old longing for a new formula, a new beginning; the old romantic dreams of a more perfect love.

She wanted so much to travel, she toyed with the idea of emigrating to the colonies, but there was the problem of her mother. She could not take her on an undetermined adventure, nor could she leave her. Though her dependency on Rose had now disappeared, though she often felt irritation instead of affection, she knew she could not leave her alone.

But sometimes fate is kind, and there are coincidences in life as well as in fiction.

The firm Lucia worked for were opening a new branch in the Midlands, and they circula^{re}~~d~~ the staff inviting those who wished to do so to join the team at the new office. When she read the circular, her heart gave a leap - this was for her! - but could she persuade her mother to pull up her roots and go to live in a strange town, where they would have no

friends? When she told Rose about it, and said she would like to apply, Rose exclaimed - Whatever for? You don't know a soul in Bradford. What on earth would you do up there? You'd never want to leave London, would you?

- The salary's fantastic. They're putting out baits to attract staff.
- Money isn't everything. You're earning well in your job.
- How would you like a change, ~~that~~ ^{Mum?}

- Like it? I'd hate it, she said vehemently. - Bury myself in a place like that! Whatever for?

- Just for a change.

- Well, I don't call that a change for the better, a change for the worse more likely. And you wouldn't like it all, you know. I mean, you'd miss all your friends. Let me tell you, if you've lived all your life in London you can't settle down easily in some small place.

Two days later a letter came from Rose's sister to say that her husband had suffered a stroke which had left him badly paralysed and unable to speak. Hettie wanted Rose to come and stay with her for a while, to keep her company and help look after the invalid.

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All those long years since Lucia's father had walked out of the house, Uncle Robert had helped to provide for them. He paid the rent on the small house, and he supplemented their income. The money her father sent, even in the early years, was scarcely enough to live on, and arrived intermittently.

Rose had no particular skills, nor any training, and she knew nothing of the business world and how it operated. She persisted in the belief that she would be able to make money if she only had the chance. For many years her main dream was centred on the idea of running a little shop, and she was convinced that it was only the obstinate stinginess of her brother-in-law Robert that stood in the way. He refused to lend her the money for this purpose. As she said many times to Lucia, she only wanted to borrow the money, she did not expect him to give it to her. She would pay it all back in full when the shop was running profitably, as it surely would. But Robert felt differently, and not only was his refusal a disinclination to lose money, but also he was permitting her to retain her dream of what she might be able to do. He knew she lacked not only experience but also a sense of precision and the driving energy needed for a venture of this kind. Her whole life's experience centred around the domestic, and the miniature domestic.

From time to time, Rose would make forays into the material world,

persuaded by a friend, or inveigled by an advertisement: Make Money in your Spare Time. Mrs L furnished her whole house with money she made in her spare time. Mrs M, wearing the beautiful fur coat she bought with money she made in her spare time. The schemes always involved selling things.

So she would set out, wearing her five-year old winter coat and a brown felt hat that she went on wearing all her life because it so lacked any style or determinable shape that there was nothing to make it look old-fashioned; and a shopping-bag made of oilcloth, in which she had packed the sample underwear, the shiny stockinette slips trimmed with beige lace, the wide-legged lace-trimmed panties to match, mauve, pink or blue; with her order book and pencil tucked into her handbag; pulling on her gloves as she walked down the short path and out of the gate that clicked behind her; turning to give a last wave to Lucia as she trudged down the street.

And two or three hours later the gate clicked again as she came home. She sold nothing.

She tried. For a weeks she would go out and knock on strange doors. She knew nothing about selling, she had no technique. Most women did not even ask to see her wares. A shake of the head was sufficient for her timid smile and - Well, good day to you, then. Resting her tired feet on the footstool she told Lucia - It's a waste of time. I don't think this is going to work. The samples and order book were returned, and she contented herself for a while with the bits of sewing she undertook for people she knew. The only way she ever earned any money was by alterations, letting down hems for growing daughters and letting out seams for widening Mums; sometimes sewing new curtains. She made all Lucia's clothes until Lucia was earning enough to buy her own things. From time to time she would put a small advertisement in a local paper: Simple Sewing, reasonable prices.

Some time would pass, and then she began talking about a new scheme. She made very nice jams and marmalade. The fruit season arrived, the fruit was cheap. She was going into the mass-production of home-made jams. Or it was seville orange time, and making her own marmalade made her think how easy it would be to make extra supplies and sell them. Friends were always happy to receive a gift of a pot of Rose's jam. She began to calculate what profit could be made. - Suppose we start with a small amount, about twenty pounds of jam, that would be ten pounds of oranges - say five shillings for the fruit, another two shillings for the sugar, about a shilling for the gas and twopence for the paper tops -

- What about the jars? asked Lucia

- I've got lots of jars, lots of them. And so she had, boxes full in cupboards under the stairs because she never threw away an empty jar or a piece of string. - And if I needed more, I could always ask my friends.

- Yes, said Lucia, - I remember whenever the rag and bone man came you would always find a jam-jar to give him - we used to run out into the street as he pushed his cart and shouted, all the children gathering around, and then he would give us a sweet or a balloon for each jar, or for old clothes.

- Where do you think you can sell the jam, Mum?

Rose said thoughtfully, - Well, there's that little shop round the corner, you know, the cake shop. I could ask them perhaps they'd like to take some home-made marmalade. Once I get known, once I've established myself, people will come to me.

But they never did come to her. The shop would agree to take a few jars 'on trial', but of course they also required a percentage of the profit, and although the marmalade was much nicer than the factory-made kind, she had to keep the prices of hers low to compete with them. Soon she could see quite plainly that there was miniscule return for much work; and it only needed a small accident in the kitchen - an arm injured by scalding jam or a finger cut on a broken jar - and the scheme would be abandoned.

So Rose went on managing to keep going, rather poor, rather patched, always lacking the extra money for books or small entertainments, always calculating whether they could afford the fare to visit someone or to go up to town to see the shops at Christmas time. Nor did it seem strange to Lucia that her mother did not have any regular job but simply stayed at home, shopped, cleaned, cooked and did some sewing. All the mothers stayed at home. It did not occur to Lucia that her own mother, virtually a widow for all those years and with only one child had less to do than all the other Mums who had husbands and two or three children. And until she was grown up, she never bothered to think where the money came from on which they lived.

Bit by bit she understood that it was Uncle Robert who supplemented the erratic postal orders; and as she grew older, Rose would complain to Lucia about Uncle Robert's stinginess. She suffered from her dependency and from her inability to earn a proper living. Uncle Robert put her in the position of owing an irrefundable debt; he became the focus of her animosity. Without him the two of them could scarcely have lived - she would have

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been reduced to doing the one job that she knew how to do, but that was socially unacceptable to her - charring. Liza's mother went out charring, although she had such a big family to care for. But there was, after all, that social divide between Liza and her family who lived in a council flat and who dropped their h's, and Lucia and Rose, who spoke nicely.

- He's too mean, Rose would grumble about Uncle Robert, - if he'd only lend me two hundred pounds I could establish a little business for myself, and I'd pay him back, every penny, every last penny, and interest on the loan as well, if he wanted it which I bet he would - not that he would need it. But he's too mean, he won't do it.

She thought that not only was he a tight-fisted man, but that he was afraid that she might succeed and then he would be jealous of her success, and that this was the reason why he would not advance the money for whatever little business she had in mind at any particular time.

Only when Lucia had left school and had started working, when her relationship to Rose was undergoing a certain shift in perspective, she did wonder why Rose had never gone out to find a job, any job. After all, there were jobs that unskilled women could do, other than charring, more genteel jobs like house-keeping, or even work in a shop or factory.

When Lucia started to earn, the situation was eased. Rose's eyesight was not good, and she found it more and more difficult to carry on with her bits of sewing. Soon Lucia, an efficient worker, was earning quite well. With promotion and an increase in salary she came home one day happy with the realisation that she now earned enough for the two of them to live quite decently without Uncle Robert's supplementary assistance.

Excited with the news of her promotion, she told Rose - And now you can write to Uncle Robert and tell him he doesn't need to send us any more money.

A familiar, obstinate expression came on Rose's face. - I won't do anything of the kind, she said.

- But Mum, why not? Really, we don't need it, we're . . .

- He can afford it, said Rose. - He has plenty of money, tons of it. There's only the two of them. There aren't any children to provide for. He can afford it.

- I don't see why we should go on taking his money -

- You don't see why? Rose retorted angrily, - you don't see why? Well, I do, I see every reason why. What's wrong with his money? If he was poor, if he needed it - which he doesn't - you know yourself how they live, they live very well indeed. What's he to do with it, then, if not to give some of it to us? Is it helping him if it lies rotting in the bank?

Use your sense, girl, who're we robbing?

- It's not a case of robbing anyone, Lucia began, then stopped. She did not quite know how to articulate her instinctive need for economic independence. She recognised that women lacked status and the equality that she felt they merited. And that the love she wanted had to possess this feeling of an essential equality, without which there would be no self-respect. But she had not been able to discuss these attitudes, so they remained half-formed, a little uncertain. Nor could she find words to counter her mother's arguments about Uncle Robert's money, nor to articulate the feelings she had of the need to escape from both Ronnie and Ernest. The bonds with which they sought to bind her were called 'love' and 'marriage', but among those bonds were strands that would strangle her feeling towards them, and ultimately destroy what tender emotions existed between them.

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But Rose was not indifferent to the moral debt she owed her sister and brother-in-law. She wanted to go to Hettie because she was needed, but she worried about Lucia. When they discussed it, and Lucia said she would accept the firm's offer and move to Bradford, Rose reluctantly agreed that this would be a solution. - It wouldn't be for too long, she said, - and you could always get a transfer back to London. We could let the house until Uncle Robert is better.

Hettie had written that she should sell the house, and suggested that the two of them could move permanently to live with them. Rose needed to leave the door open, she wanted her own little place, a nice home to which she could return. She looked on her move, and Lucia's, as an interlude.

Once the decision was taken, she began to organise Lucia's life.

- Bradford . . . I used to have a friend who went to live there, Jane Williams, I can't remember her married name; I wonder if she's still there, I was at school with her. She married some man from Bradford and they went to live there. I could try and trace her, find out if she's still there - Edna Elliott lived next door to her mother. I could get hold of Edna, she might still be in touch with old Mrs Williams, then if she gives me Jane's address, I will write to her and perhaps she will arrange somewhere for you to stay. You'll need to know someone if you're going to a strange town. What about uour friends? You'll be all on your own, you know, you'll miss them. They'll miss you too, I daresay. I think I know more than one young man who's going to be very upset at your going . . .

And on, and on, a rambling monologue punctured here and there with Lucia's impatient protests. She was twenty. She wanted to run her own life. - I can find a place for myself, I don't need your friend's help. - It will only embarrass me to do that, I would prefer to do things my own way. - I'm not

a child - I can look after myself!

- Oh yes, Rose retorted knowingly to that last remark, - that's what they all say. You young people don't really know anything about the world, but you think you know everything.

The pitfalls. The traps. The evil men waiting to seduce young girls. Of course she knew. Not only had she read all about them, but she knew that you did not have to go out into the world to encounter them. They could come to you wherever you were.

Eventually Rose arranged for Lucia to be installed in a suitable boarding-house with a suitable landlady to whom she wrote, and who replied that she would 'look after' Lucia. Rose could not restrain a few tears when she saw her off, her clothes in a large suitcase; and stood at the window of the train until it left, with last-minute instructions and injunctions. Lucia felt no sadness at the parting. Bradford? It was like taking the road to Timbuctu.

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For a short period Lucia tolerated the depressing brown boarding-house with its indifferent food. When she had become familiar with her new work, and felt at ease with her co-workers, she walked around the town for a while, then found a room of her own, and moved out.

For the first time, in that small northern town with its ugly terraced houses, row after row, street after street, with its blackened bricks and chimneys pouring sootladen smoke into the sodden sky, with its wastelands of city spaces, gashes among the buildings where no trees grew and a rare weed struggle for survival among the rubble; all ugly, grey, uncoordinated, deteriorating; streets leading nowhere, vistas always blocked by brick walls; railway lines like the eternal end of every destination; in that most anonymous of urban areas with all the disadvantages of a town and none of its assets, where the local with its sour-smelling, beer-swilled tables and bare yellow electric lights was the social focus, and the cinema with its Wurlitzer and double bill the cultural centre; in that place depressed by economic breakdown, waiting for the magic wand of war to wake it from its sleep of neglect; there it was for the first time, and in a way she had never known before and would not know again, the happiness of freedom.

The day she came home from work and went to her own room, opening the front door of the house, passing the other closed doors, climbing the stairs, supporting her handbag and paper parcels on one raised knee while she wrestled with the unfamiliar key; the first time she entered that room,

empty of anyone else, her room, no voice to call out to her; put her parcels on the table, looked at the gas ring on which she would make her meals; thought: I'm not hungry yet, I'll eat later; went to the window and looked out to a sunny evening and decided to go out again for a walk; that evening she savoured to the full the sweet pleasures of freedom.

Freedom was like a flavour on her lips. Freedom from the protection of her mother, the security of their home was simply the final separation of herself from the stem from which she had grown. If she wanted to delay coming home in the evening she could do so; or stop on the way and have tea with a friend, or go to the pictures; or dawdle around shop windows - whatever small diversions existed she could choose the one she wanted without thinking of someone waiting for her, a meal prepared, of a clock ticking away (the glance at it when she came in - You're late, dear, aren't you? I was beginning to get worried) . . . worried about what? That the shrivelling food denigrated the effort of preparation?)

She was beholden to no one, she had wriggled free at last from the restraining bonds of her mother's tenderness and escaped the tendrils of her mother's domesticity which had threatened to entwine her. She was free as only the young and uninvolved can be free, only at that time in life when you are old enough to be economically independent and young enough to be unaware of the insecurity and ^eisolation and the loneliness that can come once you separate yourself from all others. She was free of responsibility to anyone else, free of the necessity of consideration, free of the obligation of deferring a decision to another, free of clinging or being clung to. She felt she was holding her life like a great opal ball in her two hands and looking into the changing clouds and colours; and closed her eyes with the delight of the cool promise of the future.

There would be other times, true, that were the inverse side, when going home to a silent room where nothing had changed, no single thing had been moved and the cup ringed with a dark stain still sat on the table, could be a little frightening, the silence oppressive; and then there was a need for the presence of another.

So she remained for some months, emancipated and privileged, writing cheerful letters to her mother every week, and more infrequently to the suitors left behind. And moving from an interim area of life, the resting place between two different kinds of living, to a new realm where she would find at last the great adventure of love which she had dreamed about for so many years. She was ready now for it to be revealed.

The shadow of impending war spread slightly over that provincial town in the brief summer, bringing a chill that blew up the streets, momentarily stirring the papers and the grit. Flights of bombers drummed over the roofs, the menace of that roar in the echoing sky compelling faces to be raised, eyes to follow the force of the sound. With them came, too, a sense of urgency, of time irrevocably passing, of time to be grabbed and held from the wavering future. Although the world for Lucia was still divided into separate compartments: love, politics, international affairs, history, religion, foreign countries, work, recreation, each moving and changing on its one ~~with~~ without impinging on others; yet even so, she was overtaken with this feeling of accelerating life, so that vague discontent came to replace the unruffled pleasures of her first few months of freedom.

There had been no real difficulties. She joined the local operatic society and occupied evenings and weekends in rehearsals of *The Pirate of Penzance*. She had two weeks' leave in the summer, and went to the sea with a friend for one week, where they paraded and exposed themselves in the then accepted ways and places, but formed no lasting attachments. And spent the other week with her mother and Aunt Hettie and Uncle Robert, who sat monumental in a wheelchair facing out of the French windows into the long, narrow garden. When she placed her hand over his, he looked at her with his face frozen in the rigid grimace of his one-sided paralysis, and his lips trembled as though he was trying to speak to her; but he made sounds, and could not speak.

- Wheel him out in the garden, said Aunt Hattie. - He likes to be in the garden.

- Wait! cried Rose, -it's too cool outside, I'll bring another blanket.

- He's quite warm enough, he doesn't need it.

- Oh yes he does! If you were sitting still in one place all day instead of running around you'd feel the chill as well. There's quite a cold breeze outside today, isn't there, Lucia? Didn't you feel it when you were picking the roses?

They argued constantly, bickering and contradicting each other and appealing to Lucia to come on one side or the other, their voices a sort of song, a duet of words in contrapuntal harmony washing over Lucia and her mute uncle, absolving Lucia of the necessity of saying very much.

- Hammer the stems of the roses, dear, before you put them in water. They'll last much longer that way.

- It's far better to slit them with a knife than to hammer them. Just make a slit like this -

- Well, I've always crushed them with a hammer and I must say, my roses always seem to last a long time in a vase . . .

In this way, Rose had replaced the loss of Lucia.

Lucia felt guilty that she had not missed Rose at all. This was not right- she should miss her; after all, she was her daughter, the only child for whom, possibly she had turned her back on her own marriage and deprived herself of a husband, and to whom she had devoted twenty years of her life. What had happened to all those years in which the two of them were so intimate together? The meals Rose planned and prepared to her special tastes and needs, the domestic tasks Rose fulfilled to make her life comfortable; why did it all seem to amount to so little? She shared nothing with her any more. When she returned to Bradford, she continued to write her dutiful weekly letter. She had mastered the art of cataloguing a list of unrevealing activities, while concealing anything that might arouse real interest. Rose would be waiting for the slightest hint that Mr Right had come along, she would lift her spectacles to look more closely with her short-sighted eyes at what Lucia had written, to find some suggestion that one of the male names she mentioned was someone special.

Something stood between them that made it impossible to confide in her mother any of the really important things in her life. Surely the power of her love should have been enough to overcome the barriers; they had been so close. Yet seeing her together with Aunt Hettie, she felt little difference in her feelings for each of them, while Hettie was a relative to whom she paid respects in recognition of duty and of the relationship, not for reasons of choice, not for any really deep feelings of love.

Love, she thought, I must love my mother. Every child loves its mother, every mother loves her child. Raymond was just a horrid exception who did not invalidate the ^general rule. My mother has demonstrated to me throughout our lives together how much she loves me. Her care and sacrifice has scoured off me like rain, leaving me dampened but indifferent. I must be unnatural to be so lacking in gratitude and true feelings.

But now she was ~~throwing~~ rejecting so many of the moralities that Rose had quietly fed to her, that she had silently imbibed. Slowly, with difficulty, she was unwinding the obscuring sentiments in which she had been wrapped; not breaking out and emerging as a new person with new and vital ideas, but unwinding a lengthy and seemingly endless tangle.

Some of the threads of the skeins she was discarding were these:

- . that men are different. They have sex impulses and need that must be satisfied. Women do not, except some abandoned women. Men cannot control their desires in the way that women can;
- . that sex before marriage is wrong for a woman, but right for a man. A man wants his wife to be a virgin, he does not want damaged or second-hand goods. Men should have some sex experience before marriage. But it's up to

the girl to see he doesn't get it from her when they become engaged. She must ensure that things never go too far;

- . that marriage is the ultimate and only sanction for sex. Sex is wrong until you are married, then it is permitted - not too much;

- . that once you start letting a man go too far, there's no stopping it. Then you get a bad name and end up by going to bed with anyone;

- . that a man should be faithful to his wife - in general; straying slightly is not encouraged, but can be condoned a few times. But the wife is the property of her husband, therefore she must not be used by other men; she must always be faithful;

- . that marriage is for life; divorce is for film stars.

In snapping these threads she was not by any means breaking those that still tied her to the concept of romantic love. Rather, she was uncovering the spool on which they had been wound to reveal its central core: love, pure love, unadulterated by the materialism of a commercial world. She still did not doubt that such a love existed, that it was changeless and eternal. It followed, therefore, that it did not depend on the trappings and institutions that sanctified it: engagements, diamond rings, the pledge they were supposed to signify; marriages, white gowns, bouquets, bridesmaids and veils; but that it could survive as a thing in itself, invariant in the world moving and changing around it.

Perhaps this central core of a belief in such a pure and eternal love was still entwined with the filaments of the morality with which she had been reared. She could argue very forcibly with her friends about what was termed 'free love' - meaning living with someone to whom you were not legally married. They seemed to think love should not be free in a society where everything was bought and paid for: rings and contracts and saucepans.

But when it came, the practice did not match up to the theory.

* * * *

CHRIS

What Chris disliked most about his job was being stuck overnight in a small provincial town, and particularly in the Midlands or the North. He did not mind being on his own; in many ways it was a pleasure for him to be away from home. But the dreariness of the hotels, the inevitable Royals and Grands, their musty smells and heavy furnishings, the brass pots with dusty ferns, the commercial travellers who sat at the bar all evening; most of all the awful food - these depressed his spirits. He would take work up to his bedroom, and he always brought along something to read. But too often he ended up reading in bed and falling asleep too early, and then he would wake in the early hours, sleepless, and hate being where he was. It was all an intolerable bore.

When he could, he sought out off-beat hotels, perhaps a small place run by a family where decent cooking compensated for the lack of originality in the meal. He searched out restaurants that had a good reputation. A prolonged meal, even if he was alone, helped pass the evening.

He was thinking now about a place he knew on the outskirts of Bradford, while he watched that nice little Miss Campbell assemble for him the papers for which he had been waiting, pack them into a large envelope, and -

Two shiny dark fans of hair swung across her face as she bent over her desk. When she looked up and handed him the envelope, he spoke on impulse. - You had to stay late because of me, he said. - Won't you let me take you for a drink and give you a lift home? Or is there someone waiting for you?

Lucia had not been unaware of this attractive man, so much more urbane than the boys of her own age; older, but with a very youthful look, a boyish smile. He was tall, always smartly dressed, but unconventional in the way she understood: he did not wear dark pin-striped suits and black shoes. Now he was dressed in a grey tweed suit, and his shoes were calf-skin brogues. True, his shirt was the acceptable white and his tie striped with some collegiate colours; but he also wore a light yellow pull-over; the whole effect was casual and unconventional.

She looked up into smiling blue eyes, his face genial and good-humoured, topped with a cap of very thick blond hair that slanted low across his forehead.

- No, there's no one waiting for me, she said. - Thank you, I think that ~~would~~^{it} be nice.

- My car's parked just outside.

He helped her into her coat; she picked up her gloves and handbag. She felt pleasurable anticipation at this interesting end to what had been

A dull day. She had thought of taking herself off to the cinema, but the company of this attractive man was a better proposition.

And then there was the car. Her friends did not own cars, unless you considered Ronnie, who had the use of his firm's car from time to time. Having a car put a man into a different category, financially for sure, socially perhaps. When he held the car door open for her and waited until she had settled before he closed it and went around to the driver's seat, she felt important.

As he started up and they drove away from the factory he asked - What's your name? I can't go on calling you Miss Campbell all the time. Oh, by the way, I'm Chris, Chris Mattheson.

- I'm Lucia, she replied.

- That's a pretty name. I've never heard it before. Is it a variation of Lucy?

- No. L-u-c-i-a. It's Italian for 'light' I believe.

- Oh, Loochia! he exclaimed; then seeing the crimson rush of embarrassment on her face he sought to put her at her ease. - At least, it's Loochia in Italian - but your pronunciation must be an English variant. It's really charming, and most unusual.

Then he smiled. - Well, little English light, let's drive out of this mouldy old town and find a nice quiet pub somewhere.

Soon they had discarded the mean streets and found a pub in a village, where she ordered a beer shandy. She had not tried drinking what she and her friends thought of as real alcohol - whisky, gin or brandy; and she really disliked the bitter taste of beer. But to ask for a lemonade, which she would have preferred, sounded so childish, so this was her compromise.

Chris drank a gin and it; then ordered another.

The evening progressed quite naturally and easily from the pub to dinner. Chris spoke pleasantly and asked her many questions about herself: where did she live; with whom; about her previous life in London. - Why did you choose to come to Bradford?

- I just wanted a change, she said. - I wanted to travel --

- To Bradford?

They both laughed. - Well, you have to start somewhere. But no, no, I was going to say how much I wanted to go abroad, to see the world, and taking this job was a way of lifting myself out of just continuing to do things as they came my way, almost not by choice but by chance. I was testing myself out, to see what it would be like to leave home and to live alone. And it meant I was earning more money, too, and so I would be able to start saving for whatever I wanted to do next.

He encouraged her to speak about herself. - And where are you going to go when you have saved enough money to travel?

- Where do I want to go? Oh, everywhere, everywhere! India, Ceylon, Nepal, Indo-China; Europe - Spain, Italy, France, Greece - I've never been anywhere further than the Isle of Wight. All those marvellous-sounding South American countries: Mexico, Brazil, Paraguay, Peru, Chile; and then there's Africa -

- The whole of it?

- The whole of it. If it's on the map, that's where I want to go.

- That's a tall order. Where do you propose to start? #

- In one of the colonies, I think, because it would be easier to get a job, and from the language point of view. I thought maybe I'd try to get to India. Next time I go to London I want to get some information about it.

He said - I know India quite well, at least some parts. I lived and worked in Delhi for a few years, but I did travel around quite a bit. I spent some time in Kashmir - we were working on a big irrigation scheme in the mountains.

- Is it as beautiful as I think it is?

- More beautiful. So beautiful, it takes your breath away. Apart from the cold in the mountains - that also takes your breath away. I've a lovely book with pictures of Kashmir in it. I'll bring it to show you next time I'm coming your way.

Her eyes were shining, the gleaming dark hair swung with the quick movements of her head. She had beautiful slightly slanting eyes. She reminded him of a film star called Myrna Loy. And she's more than just a pretty thing, he thought, she has guts, and thinks for herself; independent.

The evening had changed from a bore, a Bradford disaster, into a bright and stimulating encounter.

When he took her home, she did not invite him to come up to her bed-sitter, nor did he expect it. He had no wish to go beyond the pleasure of their evening together. Although when they parted he held both her hands and thanked her for the lovely evening. - I don't know when I'll be . . . well, let's hope it will be soon, he said.

Inside her room Lucia flung herself down on her divan, still wearing her coat, lying with flushed cheeks - she had drunk wine with her dinner for the first time in her life, and it had brought a flush to her face - and she thought about the evening, and Chris, and how lovely it had all been, and how he had made her talk - so many questions about herself; but she still scarcely knew anything about him. He seemed to have travelled a lot, but he had spoken about places, not about himself. Well, never mind. Next time.

At first he had not really thought about seeing Lucia again. Yet Somehow she had lodged in his mind; the way she moved her head, her thick hair gleaming with copper lights and swinging over that smooth and unmarked face, the desirable bloom on her flawless skin; no frown lines between her brows, cheeks unmarred by lines from nose to chin, like . . . Her shyness, her expressive hands, her enthusiasms, as yet so marvellous and unspoil by experience. A capacity for life, he thought, just for living.

A week went by. His day had finished early. He decided to drive over to Bradford.

He reached the place where she worked just as the staff was leaving; parked near the bus stop, waiting for her to emerge.

- I was near here, he told her, - so I thought I would just drive by and see if you would like a lift home.

They went to another restaurant, and sat talking until it was late. Chris knew so much about food. He talked about exotic food in different places - part of the joy of travel, he said, and of wonderful little restaurants, and he knew about cooking, too. But his personal life still eluded her. It was not that he seemed evasive, it was just that he did not supply any substantial information. Where did he live? - I used to live at Twickenham, he said, - right on the river. Then I got this job in Birmingham, and had to leave it. Couldn't stand the idea of living in Birmingham, so I found a place in a little village - it's south of the big town, between Worcester and Stratford - convenient for going to Stratford-on-Avon from time to time. But it doesn't offer the delights of Twickenham.

- What were those?

- The wonderful river, he replied. - Boats. I always had a boat. He launched into a description of boats he had known, and how much he had enjoyed them, and where he had been in them. Sometimes he spoke of 'we', which included friends, and sometimes it was 'I'.

- Tell me about your family.

- Not much to tell, he replied. - I'm an only child, like you, and my father was an engineer, like me. He's retired now. My mother's totally absorbed in her gardening, she spends all her time in her garden. She has the proverbial green fingers. Everything she touches grows.

It was not long before he came again. This time they ate early and in the warm and pleasant evening, Chris said, - We'll go for a drive.

They drove through darkening lanes, the roof of his car down, the air blowing her silky hair. He glanced at her several times. Then he parked the car at the top of a hill, and for a while they watched the last pale light on the horizon, and the swoop of the birds.

His arm, resting along the seat of the car behind her head, slipped quite easily, almost casually, onto her shoulders. and when she did not

draw away he put his other hand under her chin and turned her face up towards his, and kissed her.

She had been waiting for this. She had willed him to kiss her before, but he had not. Now it was here, at first gentle, then passionate. He kissed not only her mouth, as others had done, but every curve to which he could mould his lips, as no one else had done: her eyes, her ears, the hollow of her neck. He put his hand for a moment on her breast, but even as with fear and delight she felt the frisson of a sexual response, he stopped abruptly, and released her and turned away. He took out two cigarettes, lit them both, gave her one.

He said - Lucia, will you come away with me?

- Away? Where?

- For a weekend. Somewhere. The two of us. Anywhere we can be together for a couple of days, not just a snatched hour or two like this. I know a marvellous little hotel right off the beaten track. Would you come with me? Would you be prepared to come?

She did not know what to say. What sort of proposition was this?. She was bewildered, not sure of all the implications - yes, some implications were evident. But he had not been just one of those men who start making sexual advances the moment you meet them. He was different, he used none of the usual tricks, continual physical contact, denying any further intention while obviously going as far as they could; the full frontal attack. What did he want?

She was trying to be enlightened. She believed that if you loved someone then you should live together, whether or not you were formally married; what difference could a marriage certificate make to the bonds between two people? She did not believe in engagements, diamond rings, white weddings and veils and all that stuff. But she also thought the actual act of sex was so - so -- she did not know how to describe it -- so rather extreme and so intimate - to do that you had to be in love, really in love, otherwise it was just promiscuity. Somehow indecent. The bonds with which her mother had tied her had not all been uncut.

At first she did not answer Chris. He just watched her, and when she glanced at him she saw his expression was, perhaps quizzical, certainly questioning. At last he said - Have I shocked you?

- Not shocked, no.

- Then - ?

- I'm not sure what you want of me.

It sounded feeble to say - I think people should be in love before

they have intimate relations.

- I simply want to have you to myself for a whole weekend. I want us to be together. Some with me.

- How can I? she replied. I don't know whether I'm in love with you. And she added, thinking perhaps that this might provoke him into some sort of declaration - I don't know whether you love me.

- Does this help you find the answer? And he began to kiss her, a long, searching lover's kiss. She drew away. - It's not an answer, Chris, and went on with that open kind of honesty that he so admired in her - no coyness, no pretense at indignation - You stir me up. You know I am very much attracted to you. But I just don't believe in casual relationships like the one you propose. If I were to go away with you for a weekend, it would be in the nature of a pledge. I would be very serious about it.

- I am very serious about you, Lucia. Do you think I make a habit of asking girls to come away with me for weekends?

- How do I know what you do? I don't know enough about you anyway.

- What more do you want to know?

She was silent then. She had told him about her home life, about her mother, even about some of the men in her life - though not Karl; and certainly he must have had, by then, a picture of her background. But he? What did she want to know? There were no questions she could formulate now that would not sound too prying, too formal.

Then he said - You see, it would be a way that we can find out about each other. I'm not asking you to take a lifetime's decision now. I'm not saying one should experiment or sleep around all over the place. But we - two people like ourselves, who feel the kind of attraction for each other that we do feel - you do, don't you, Lucia, feel something for me? It could be love, I could be in love with you. How can I tell after three meetings? I want to find out. I want us to have time together, time . . . if we went away on Friday evening we could spend two nights and two days together. If it doesn't work, what will you have lost?

She could not honestly say her virginity, so she said - My self-respect.

- Oh no! Never that. I would not, could not, take that from you.

And if it does work out . . .

- If it does?

He put his head back and laughed with uninhibited joy. - Then it's our world. isn't it? he said.

At that moment she felt, rather than heard, the throb of distant planes. They started far-off like a sonorous roll of thunder, reverberating round the sky as though they had no beginning and no destination. They came in rumbling waves, powerfully, deafeningly, over their heads. They brought with them, while the over-powering pressure of their sound lasted, their own sense of urgency, of war coming, of time going by, of love not waiting, of Europe going down into darkness. Never again an uncontaminated Spring. Take what there is.

Words became nothing in the clamour above them and long after they had passed she felt their reverberations inside her like the silent drumming of her heart.

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They leave straight from the factory on Friday evening. She has her clothes for the weekend with her in a case, which Chris puts in the boot of his car. She is in a state of nervous excitement.

He drives for perhaps an hour and a half, and they arrive late at a country hotel, an old, beautiful, beamed house set in park-like grounds. Before they arrive, he takes something from his pocket and hands it to her. - Put it on, he says. It is a plain gold wedding ring.

- You must wear it, because it will only attract unpleasant attention if you don't. And you look so young - they'll accuse me of child-stealing if you are not wearing a ring.

He even knows the right size to buy. Or does he have several rings ready, different sizes - oh no, what a disloyal thought.

Chris signs the hotel register and their cases are taken up to their room. A big double bed, and its own bathroom. Hotels, like cars, are a luxury for Lucia. She stands looking at the big bed, curved and soft-looking as a cloud, with a white embossed and tasselled cover. She thinks it is very grand to have one's own private bathroom. The boarding-houses where she and her mother had stayed when they went on a seaside holiday were not like this. There was a bathroom shared by all residents - you put your name down for when you intended to take a bath. /#

A fire burns in the huge grate in the hotel lounge.

- This place is four hundred years old, Chris says. - Well, parts of it, it's been added to, of course, but some parts date back to the 16th century. Beautiful, isn't it?

After they have had their dinner they linger near the fire for only a short while. They keep looking at each other. She is so nervous, she can feel herself beginning to tremble each time he smiles at her. She has to control herself. Be still, she whispers to herself, be calm.

They go upstairs to their room, where the tasselled white cover has been taken off the bed and the sheets turned back to invite them in. She does not know what to do, but she has something she must say first.

- I must say something to you, Chris.

He takes both her hands and smiles to calm her.

- Chris, will you - you know, take precautions, because I don't want . . . I'd be frightened of . . . we don't want any unpleasant consequences, do we?

She is trying to make a joke of it, because it is so embarrassing to her.

He reassures her, and promises her that the consequences will only be good.

She goes into the bathroom, and there she undresses and puts on her nightgown. She has never undressed in front of a man. In fact, she was shy

of undressing even with females of her own age. Whenever she had been to some communal place such as those large huts where girls undress to go swimming in summer, she would wriggle out of her clothes, getting her swimming costume on before she took off her skirt or dress, turning her back before slipping off her brassiere and pulling the costume up. The other girls did the same.

When she is ready she comes back into the bedroom, and Chris goes into the bathroom. Then she takes off her dressing gown and climbs into the big, yielding bed.

Chris has hung up his jacket and is taking off his collar and tie. He comes over to the bed and leans over to kiss her. Then he continues undressing. She does not watch. After a while he is standing next to her. She has heard all his movements around the room, the wardrobe door closing, the tinkle of cufflinks on the glass of the dressing table. She knows he is standing next to the bed, and she must turn her head to look at him. He is wearing an elegant robe made of some dark, patterned brocade, and he sits on the bed and kisses her again. It was one of those long kisses, forcing her mouth open, searching with his tongue. She closes her eyes and waits for him to switch off the light and get on with it.

He stops kissing her and says - Why do you close your eyes every time I kiss you?

She is astonished. Her eyes open - they fly open; his face is close to hers, relaxed, smiling. - Well, why?

- I don't know. But I thought everyone closed their eyes when they made love.

He laughs.

- Well, what's so funny about that?

- Do you know what you do when you close your eyes? he asks. She shakes her head. - You shut me out. You shut yourself in. You shut yourself into a nice, warm, secure, intimate little room of your own.

- But you enter it.

- Only in an unperceived and anonymous fashion. Who am I? A pair of lips and a body in the dark? I might be the Archbishop of Canterbury or King George himself for all you know. What are you afraid of? Why do you want to hide from me? People should make love openly, with all the lights blazing, looking at each other. There's more to it than a quick impersonal sexual impulse.

- Oh Chris, I know that! I never wanted it to be reduced to that. It's just that . . . I didn't know . . .

He asks her - Lucia, are you a virgin?

And then she tells him about Karl.

- And that was your only experience? The only time?

ti - The only time. I knew it wasn't the way it should be. It wasn't so much that I was rel^lely put off or too frightened by it, but I thought it was all wrong. I know it was. I wanted so much to find out about love. But now I think it's all wrong to go to bed with just anyone.

He says - You are frightened of it now, though, aren't you?

- I think I am, she replied in a low voice. - It wasn't very pleasant.

He folds back the bedclothes. - Come, he says, - get up.

- Get up?

He takes her hands and pulls her up. - I am going to make love to you - don't look so startled. But first do what I say.

She stands in front of him in her nightgown. - Take it off, he says.

The trembling returns, and she does not know how to stop it. But she obeys. She is naked before a man. She can see her own reflection in the mirror on the wardrobe door. Yellow light from the bedside lamp glows down one side of her body. She is intensely self-conscious. Chris gazes and gazes at her. He is utterly enchanted. He is thinking of ways to describe this beautiful nubile nude - not Ingres, his women were too buxom, although their skins were pearly like hers, the same light and tenderness of the flesh . . . perhaps Goya's Maya Unclothed; the upright breasts and wonderful curve of the hips, and then that little beguiling dark thicket half-hidden behind her clasped hands.

- You're beautiful, he tells her. - Your body is beautiful. Don't be ashamed of it. He parts the hands.

Then he takes off his robe, and he is naked beneath it, he stands in front of her. She keeps her eyes on his face.

- Touch me, he says.

She puts out a tentative hand and touches his arm.

His eyes shine at her. - Oh Lucia! But it was an exclamation of affection, not impatience, - you are so full of inhibitions! We must destroy them, one by one. Come, put your hand here -

She feels him throbbing and moving beneath her hand.

He says, husky-voiced, - It's not wrong, it's not indecent. It's my body, I'm a man, this is the way men are made. And that's your body, you must be proud of it, not ashamed to show it. I wish we could walk around naked all the time.

- Too cold, she says, shivering and shivering, but she was not cold.

- Lucia, he whispers, and desire sears her. His informed fingers seek

her gently. When he feels she is moist and ready, he eases himself into her, gently. He pauses between kisses to whisper - Does it hurt? Am I hurting you? His words embrace her as he does.

She thinks that never before has she known a sensation so simply pleasing as the feel of their two naked bodies when all the excitement has passed, and a sense of complete harmony remains. She touches his body with gratitude and joy, she feels she is breathing him into herself with each breath.

Next day they make love outside, lying in the grass, in the sunlight, with birdsong as their accom^apaniment, and with her eyes wide open. The birds twittered and chattered. - They're peeping Toms says Chris, and they laugh~~s~~ with happiness. - Aren't you enjoying it? he asked once, lifting his mouth from hers and looking at her face, and when she says - Yes, Chris, he demands to know - Why are you so tense, then? Let yourself go, relax, be happy!

And later he says - I can't make love to a woman unless I know it is her pleasure too. Otherwise it's just animal; me satisfying myself on someone who submits to me. I don't want that.

- I did enjoy it, she says, - you know I did. It's just that I'm still shy.

- Shy of me? We're lovers now, you can't be shy of your lover.

- Well, inhibited then. All those ideas -

- What ideas?

- About women, about sex. Immorality. Loose women enjoy it, nice ones don't. That sort of thing.

But some things are easily learned. By Sunday night, when he takes her back to her room in Bradford, she has learned quite a lot about love-making. And she confuses this with the idea that she has also learned about love.

* * * *

The first day, she waits for his phone call. She expects it all day. Phones ring around her, but none of the calls are for her. Perhaps he is very busy; but just to phone and say - Hi there, my love - how are you? Then she thinks, he will be waiting for me after work, outside the factory. She wants to see him so much.

He is not there. She hangs around for a while. There are two buses that take the staff into the centre of town. The first fills and drives off; she waits for the second one. From the bus window she peers at any car that may be travelling towards them . . . just in case he is coming, in case they might miss each other.

She thinks, he's been busy at work, he'll come to my room in the evening. If he has gone south this week, travelling . . . but then he would have told

me. He did not say anything about going away. Perhaps he had just had a very busy time and could not get away until late.

So she prepares herself for his coming. She examines herself in the mirror. My hair needs washing, she thinks, but it takes such a long time to dry . . . she does not want him to arrive while it is still hanging lank and wet. Better leave it for another time.

She changes, washes herself, then brushes her hair. First one way, then another. Looks at herself over and over again. Does she look different? Does it show on my face? They said you could always tell when a girl started having relations with men. They lost the fresh bloom of their virginity. Was it true? Those girls - the ones who slept around - they did look different, harder, sophisticated. Was she going to start looking like them?

As yet, there does not seem to be any visible change. If anything, her face seems softer, glowing with remembered happiness. Perhaps it was too early to detect any change.

A close and minute examination of the skin of her face follows, searching for any spot, blackhead, blemish. Her skin is smooth and clear; she is rarely troubled with spots now, as she had been a couple of years ago, when she used to go to dances.

With a hand mirror, she examines the back of her head, smooths down errant hairs; turns her head back and forth so that her hair swings from side to side and catches the light. Since she has stopped torturing it with the crimping perms, it had responded, and ~~was~~^{is} flowing and shiny. A final few strokes of the brush, and there ~~was~~ nothing more to do to it.

All the time she is listening. Her ears alerted to sounds; car sounds; feet sounds; door sounds.

The street is very quiet. Occasionally she hears the sound of a car in the distance, and goes to the window and watches.

This is silly, she thinks, you will come, Chris, when you will come, and moving restlessly around the room will not bring you nearer any more speedily. She takes a book and settles down to read. She reads, and turns a page, and tries to think what she had been reading about, and turns back to read the same page because she has not absorbed a word of it, and she reads it again; and lifts her head and listens. Footsteps down the street. Steps that become louder as they come nearer, approaching out of the night; and then, without pausing, already they are less distinct, receding.

She sits very still, the book resting on the arm of the chair. Silence now, except for the soft ticking of the travelling clock that had been a gift from her mother. She picks up the book again, but the light is going.

In the fading light, once more that anxious face peers out, the less-defined reflection, the ordered hair, merging with the shadows in the room. As though the reflection itself was receding, becoming blurred, rubbed out.

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