

She cannot see herself clearly any more; she is not sure of herself; she is not sure of anything.

Return to the book, forget about the time, forget about the man, forget about the lateness, the loom of night. And read a sentence fifty times, till burning with deep suspense, wait, listen, listen . . . nothing.

It is reasonable to suppose that you have gone away, Chris; you often go travelling. Then why had you not said so? You had kissed me so gently, so lovingly when we parted; held my chin and looked at me intensely for a long time, a look of love. You thanked me for the weekend. - I'll never forget it, not a moment of it, you said, - for as long as I live. Then you were gone.

Will you come now? It's getting on for ten o'clock. Probably not. Probably you are too far away. If you had gone somewhere, wherever it was, you would try to come, even though it's so late. If you felt the way I felt, you would come, you would drive along night roads without stopping for food or drink, no matter what the time, you would come.

Then it is completely dark in the room. She switches on the table lamp and puts water on to make some coffee; enough for two people. And drinks it; and waits; and rinses the cup out in the basin.

And goes back to the armchair again, curling herself right into it, taking the book determinedly, head on arm, eyes fixed on the printed page. Behind the dividing walls that contain their separate lives she hears the sound of the woman in the room next to hers, the sound of coughing. It always starts slowly, the first expellation of air, double syllable, then a pause before the second, single, lower-key sounds complete it; then again and again, until it becomes a muffled patter of tortured sounds beating against the wall. Why doesn't she do something about it? Sometimes she would wake in the night to hear that er-her, er-her, er-her, going on for what seemed like hours. How can I read when she's coughing like that?

For a little while, she sleeps, her head on folded arms on the arm of the chair. When she wakes it is midnight and she knows he will not come that night. She undresses in the dark and lies in bed sleepless and still - against her will, still listening. She wants him so much. Several times she takes the little clock into her hands and turns it towards the faint light from the street lamp outside, to see the time. The last time she remembers it is 2 o'clock in the morning, and she hears the sounds of the first milk carts from the depot in the next street, moving slowly up the hill. After that, she sleeps.

She sleeps, but the evening can not be slept away. She loves Chris just as much - perhaps more - because of the anxiety. He is not to blame, she tells herself, because she had been so convinced that he would come the next day. He had not said that he would come. Yet somehow, the purity of her love is adulterated; not that he seems any different, but there is a change in herself, the beginning of a new tension, an internal change, as women everywhere who wait for lovers who do not come, listening at windows and seeing the dark mists

obscure the view, change and die a little as doubt distorts and corrupts the love that had flowed so unsullied from their hearts.

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He had not said - I'll see you tomorrow. It is her fault, not his, that she expected to hear from him all day. He has a responsible job, he doesn't sit in an office, he can't always get to a phone. And there is no phone in the house where she lives. There is a call-box outside - she could hear it if anyone rang, but how is he to know the number?

On Tuesday she is sure that he will phone. But he does not. Perhaps it is too difficult for him during office hours. Perhaps he is miles away, on the road somewhere, unable to communicate with her.

On Wednesday she convinces herself that this is the case, and that he will, therefore, write to her. Now she is surprised she has not yet received his letter. But there could be a letter, there would be one, she is positive, when she reaches her room in the evening.

All day she anticipates going home to read the letter that is waiting for her.

Letters for tenants in the house are slipped into tapes pinned across a green baize board in the entrance hall. A first glance - there is not one for her. Then a careful examination of each one, lifting those that partially conceal others behind them, as though if she looks long enough the names on the envelopes will change. . . there is no letter.

On Thursday, after much thought and hesitation, she puts through a call to Chris's firm and asks for him, her heart thumping madly with nervous anticipation. - Mr Mattheson? says the cool female voice at the other end, - I'm afraid he's not in. Can I take a message?

- Is he out of town?

- No, he's just out for an hour or two. He'll be in later. Who is calling, please?

- It's all right, I'll phone again. She replaces the receiver, feeling as though she had been humiliated by the unknown woman at the other end of the phone.

On Friday the impulse to communicate in some way is so strong that she decides to write him a letter. She cannot bring herself to phone again, having to overcome the barrier of that impersonal voice, and then to hear him on the phone - what can she say to him that will in any way convey her longing, and anxiety and her disappointment? You always were supposed to wait for him to make all the moves towards her. She is still inculcated with the idea that in some way a girl makes herself 'cheap' if she phones, if she is the one to make the moves. And what can she say - Chris, what's happened to you? Why didn't you come? I was expecting you! how awful it would

sound. And in office hours, too. He would be stiff and embarrassed.

So she decides to write. She thinks about it all Friday, and she has the letter composed in her head by the time evening comes. She is even more silent than she has been all week, because of the concentration on the mental composition of the letter. She thinks she must have lost quite a bit of weight during the week; she has not been eating properly. - What's the matter? the girls at work ask her, - you're looking pale. Don't you feel well? And she answers - No, I'm fine, really. Too many late nights, I expect. A little laugh. I'm fine, except that I'm ill with love, sick, wounded and bleeding, dying a little more every minute, every hour.

My darling, the letter will begin, I missed you so much this week that I decided I had better write to you and tell you how I felt. Perhaps it is easier for you; perhaps it is always easier for the man. It was not your first real experience of love-making, as it was mine. Please understand I'm not saying this in reproach because actually I'm terribly grateful that I met someone like you, experienced, able to teach me. It would have been hell otherwise.

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But what I mean is, that it was very much more important to me than it was to you - it must have been, and perhaps that is why I've been so impatient to see you all this week, and so miserable that you did not come.

Chris, you must be honest with me. I'm afraid I take it all very seriously, I do believe in marriage, in the real sense, that is, in two people deciding to make their lives together. I don't believe in a girl having sexual relations unless she is serious about it. I thought I had better explain this to you so that we don't have any illusions.

That is, I don't want to have any illusions. I want to ask you through this letter what I might find too difficult to ask to your face: are you serious about me? If not, let's break it up now, immediately, before it goes any further, before I get too deeply involved. If you decide to do this, please believe me that I will understand and bear no grudge, only gratitude for what you have taught me and a memory I will consider worthwhile all my life. All my love, Lucia.

It is a strange kind of self-deception. She thinks it is an honest statement of her feelings, but it is not that. It is more like throwing a dice convinced that it could only come down one way. A six. If she really believes that he will accede to her request for absolute honesty and, unable to match her long-term intentions, decide to end the affair, immediately, before it goes any further, she would not have wanted him to get the letter. She is going to write it to him because she has to know, because she cannot endure another week like this one, because she wants to precipitate a decision on his part, but mostly because she cherishes the belief that this will be a positive decision which will bind them more permanently

than the love affair of one weekend.

The letter is composed, but not yet committed to paper. Having taken the decision to write it she feels lighter and eased a little of the awful burden of pain of the past few days. She is so eager to get home and write it and send it off, that she does not even look around when she comes out of the office, but walks straight across to join the queue getting onto the bus.

- There's someone over there - I think he's trying to attract your attention, says the girl next to her. And she looks up, and there he is, sitting in his car parked not far from the entrance and waving to her.

She has to hold her emotions in check. He leans forward to open the car door for her, and she makes her face smile as she greets him; but she sits tense and silent as they drive away. He, too, does not speak, and soon they are in country lanes and he turns off to a side road and parks beneath the trees. Then he turns towards her and says - Lucia, and he lifts her hand from her lap and holds it against his cheek; so that her control is breached and she bursts out - Oh, Chris, I missed you so much. and she starts to cry.

- But I'm here now, my darling, don't be upset; oh Lucia, please, please don't cry, I can't bear it. She takes the handkerchief he offers her, and mops her face. She says - I'm all right now, really I am - and turns an incipient sob into a laugh to prove it. - I'm so sorry, Chris, it's not that I'm sad, really, it's because I'm so happy to see you again.

- Happy? And you're crying? Did you think I didn't want to come? I've spent the whole week wrestling with myself, telling myself it was better to keep away -

- But why? Why do you say that? Why should it be better to keep away?

- Because somehow I never intended it to go so far. I never expected - I didn't want either of us to get so deeply involved. At least, not yet.

Momentarily she thinks of reasons why he would not want to be 'involved'. Money troubles? A wish not to be tied down? Whatever it was, we can overcome it. What is important is that he had come, he is here.

He sighs and continues in a low voice - There are so many things I had to tell you first.

Still unsuspecting, and nestled against him with his protective arm around her, she says lightly - What sort of things?

- Different things.

- Such as - ?

- Such as that I'm married, he says abruptly.

Now she has nothing left to salvage except her pride.

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Of course, of course. It is all so obvious now. An attractive man of his age - he would be married. They always are. How incredibly stupid she is! It all fits together; the things she could not quite get hold of, the way he never really filled in how he lived, with whom, what his life was like. The weekend. The week of waiting. Of course.

She now has one objective above all others - to prevent him knowing at all costs how cruelly and deeply he has cut into her. Therefore she responds in what she hopes is a flippant, inconsequential sort of way.

- Oh? I suppose you don't have six children as well?

He replies gravely, - No, not six children.

They are both silent for a while. Then: - You and your wife, she asks him, - do you live together?

- Yes . . . well, not really, but we do.

- What do you mean by that?

- I mean, we live in the same house, but actually we don't live as man and wife.

- But last weekend, what excuse did you make? Her anger is mounting despite her attempts to appear indifferent. - What did you tell her? Did you say, I won't be home for supper tonight, I'm spending the weekend with my mistress?

- Lucia - please! You know I am often away on business. There wasn't any elaborate deception necessary. What does it matter, Lucia, he continued, - it has nothing to do with our relationship, nothing at all.

She does not know how to answer him. She has no words to convey to him the turmoil and confusion he has stirred up in her. She thinks it is outrageous of him to say that his marriage has nothing to do with their relationship. At the same time she is determined to hold herself in, not to rave, not to protest. Let him think what he wants.

She says, lightly, - without a trace of a tremor in her voice - I'd like to go home.

They drive silently, her hands clasped tightly in her lap, his concentration wholly on the road. When he slows down in her street he says at last, - Lucia, I'll come tomorrow morning.

- No, I won't be here. I've made arrangements with a girl in the office, we're going out for the day.

- The evening, then?

- Leave it, Chris, she tells him.

- You must at least give me a hearing. I have to have a chance to talk to you, to explain myself. Let me come up --

- Some other time, she replies. - Maybe. Not now.

She could not wait for him to go, so that she could get into bed, to be concealed and covered by blankets and by the dark. She lay in her protective coat of night and said over and over to herself, like an incantation to stop her thinking about it - Well, that's over, that's all over, that's all over, it's finished, that's all there is to it, it's over. In this way she kept her mind from turning over how close they had been that weekend (and all the time there was a wife sitting at home in Inkberrow, even if estranged, thinking he was away on business and waiting for him to return.) She did not want to think about him as her lover, nor of the terrible deception of which he had been guilty; nor of the implications to his character. If she felt any indignation or disgust it was not so much directed against him as against herself for being so naive. The clues had been there all along. She should have realised . . . So she kept her incantation going to plug any dangerous overflow of emotion: It's over now, that's all there is to it, it's over -

- the words themselves became meaningless; in a way, even their intent was lost. She could have used any words, any phrase, a chant, that would stop her from thinking, feeling, examining what had taken place and her own deep reactions to it.

The impulse to run away again, to remove herself physically from an intolerable situation was very strong. She wanted some way to bring an end to the circumstances of living that had led to this particular finale, and to have the chance to start again in new surroundings, where nothing would remind her of Chris, where she could not expect him to appear at her place of work. The thought of going into the office each day, speaking to the girls there, even although they knew nothing of her personal affairs - and carrying on as though nothing had happened, nothing had changed - this was intolerable. Bradford, the symbol of freedom, had now become the epitome of
 ← misery; the most depressing town, physically depressing, that one could
 ← conceive, with its tiers of smoke-blackened terraced houses running down the labyrinth of streets, the repetition of chimneys imprinted against the sky - she thought of their pattern being made by a giant industrialist, a wool-merchant, with a monstrous potato-cut, with which he stamped out the monotony of angled roofs and black chimneys, one after the other, in descending order; the dark houses with stained and pitted bricks and sooty curtains. How deeply the industrial greed and Victorian hypocrisy had branded these once-green Yorkshire hills! She, too, would be branded, become grimed and drab, brown, run-down. She would go to the pictures once a week; sing in the chorus of Gilbert and Sullivan productions at the local operatic society; drive out to the factory daily on the bus; visit the library to find good books to read;

books to read; home again to a silent room. She would become old, old in Bradford.

She would go back to London; no point in staying on. On Monday she would give the required month's notice. She would get the daily papers and start looking for jobs.

On Saturday she did her week's washing and shopping. Although she had told him not to come, that she would not be home, and although she had told herself that she did not wish to see him, yet at the same time she was half expecting him, wondering if he would come while she was away at the shops; and why was she disappointed when she returned and did not see his car parked in her street?

And in the middle of the week, lying in bed already half asleep, she heard footsteps on the stairs and a knock on her door. He was waiting. He knocked again, and called her name, softly. She was afraid that the pounding of her heart could be heard beyond the closed door; she lay without moving and willed him to go away. And when she heard him going, longed for him to return. She felt the pain of letting him go. She wanted so much to see him, to let him talk to her, to let him persuade her that what he had done was not wrong . . . then she hoped she had made him suffer a little as he had made her suffer. And she hoped he would come back the next night, and then she would open the door.

But he did not come and when the week-end arrived once more she decided that if she was going to leave Bradford, she could not go without a visit to the Bronte village at Haworth, and the moors.

She packed sandwiches for her lunch, and set out wearing walking shoes and a raincoat.

She climbed the steep street to the museum that had once been the home of the Brontes. Rooks cried raucously in the trees of the churchyard. The grass was clipped into a neat lawn in front of the parsonage. Then she left it and walked across the moors.

The wind tore at her scarf, ballooned her raincoat and drove needles of rain onto her face. The clouds rolled up in purple splendour, then blew over, the sun came and went. The ghosts of the sisters walked with her. She understood the words Charlotte had written about Emily, when she had to leave her home to teach at a school. 'Every morning when she awoke, the vision of home and the moors rushed on her and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her.' That strange, internalised life! How had she achieved the magical blending of experience, observation and imagination that made her novel and her poems immortal? Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish How could I seek the empty world again?

But the world was no longer empty. The moors rolled forward beneath her, the great clouds, now white, now grey, piled up in the sky; shadows

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raced before her, wind and air purified her. I am mad Meg striding across the moors . . . A poem pulsed inside her as the wind came in gusts and pushed her on. Yes, it was a poem about love, but for the first time about love related to the changing world, transcending the narcissism of her previous love poems.

She had to get back and start writing, to see the words on a page, to read out loud, to change and shape her thoughts.

Back in Bradford, she hurried so fast, so totally absorbed, so filled with the liberating emotions of the afternoon on the moors, that she was totally unaware of anything around her. She ran up the stairs to her room, unlocked the door, and leaving it open, flung her bag and raincoat on the table.

There was a knock on the open door. She turned; before she could register his presence or say a word, Chris was in the room.

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- I've never been in love, said Freda morosely. - I mean really in love; of course I've had crushes on people - schoolgirl crushes they call it, but some of them seemed to last an awful long time.

- Me too, Lucia replied. - It was usually someone hopelessly out of reach.

That's right. I was mad about our physics master, his name was Mr Rush, Mr D. Rush. I never knew what the D stood for - Denis? David? I decided it was David, dear, darling David, I used to say to myself. He was at least twice as old as I was, that was part of it, wasn't it?

- You mean, being out of reach, so that we didn't really have to face up to the facts of life?

- Yes, and the other part was you couldn't really be mad about boys of your own age, they were such weeds, so unformed, so awkward . . .

- I know, said Lucia, - spotty and lanky.

- Lanky! You were lucky. Small males seem to be fatally attracted to tall girls. At social functions - we had lots of those, there were always engagements and weddings and anniversaries and barmitzvahs - I always knew that that little chap, the one whose head hardly reached my chin, was the one who was going to ask me to dance as soon as the dancing began, and that he would fasten himself to me for the rest of the evening. And all the mothers and aunts and grannies were sitting around eating and talking and keeping one indulgent eye on you, weighing up future prospects - would it be a suitable match?

- But later on, didn't you meet anybody? . . .

- Not really. But I haven't given up hope. I always think that one of these days I will meet up with a lovely tall man, someone at least as intelligent

as I am - even more intelligent I think - I wouldn't mind that. We'll both take one look at each other and we'll know - he's the one, she's the one. Or maybe we won't be so sure at first, but it will grow swiftly.

- - But it hardly seems likely, she continued gloomily, - especially now, with all the eligible men away.

- What was so extraordinary, looking back, said Lucia, - was how unaware I was all the time about the war, about everything that was going on. No, I was aware, but I was uninvolved, I wasn't really concerned. If I thought about it at all, it was just an unwanted intervention in my life. Everything revolved around Chris, around being in love.

- Ah, we were - we are - such a political family! All these immigrants from Eastern Europe, it was all politics. What had brought them all to England in the first place? And when Hitler came in 1933, it was all the old fears and memories of pogroms . . . Then the Spanish war. Two of my cousins joined the International Brigade and went to fight. One was wounded.

- In the Spanish Civil War?

- We didn't call it a 'civil war'. It wasn't that. It was a fascist over-turning of the first really democratic government they had ever had - elected in by a large majority. It was Hitler rehearsing this war, trying out his bombardments and his weapons.

- Yes, there was Guernica, said Lucia. - Even I was aware of that. The pictures in the papers, the newsreels.

- There was a woman, Sagittarius, she called herself, who wrote amusing political verse in a weekly paper, but after Guernica she wrote a poem called Pajaros Negros - that's Spanish for black birds, it's what they called the great Junker bombers that came over.

- Do you remember it?

- Some of it. Something about black birds over Guernica ~~referring~~ ^{referring} and wheeling, and then a description of the devastation of the bombs, and their leaving

Leaving the place of their feasting blackened and burning,
leaving the ruins for omen, the dead for a sign,
blackbirds voided of death to their eyries returning
honoured over the Rhine.

Who shall avenge Guernica? None will avenge her,
It is not the blood of our children that cries from the ground.
Death has no summons to call from the sky the revenger,
the murdered make no sound.

Over our shifts and surrenders, connivance unending,
hover the smoke and the reek of that smouldering pyre,
We will remember Guernica when black birds descending
Our cities set on fire.

Lucia was silent as Freda finished reciting. After a while she said
- You said you envied me, but I envy you, your awareness. It was happening.
It happened, they did , they do, set our cities on fire.

- Don't look so tragic - I wasn't all that concerned at the time, I just
knew it was going on, but I was very much like you. I didn't think about
it much, I thought about boys. What were all those tennis games and hikes
in the country? Just ways of getting near the other sex. You just got
nearer than I did because you're prettier - oh Lucia, I always remember
you blushing - to think that you still blush after all these years!

- I never could conceal my feelings. I couldn't pretend with Chris, either.

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He had never intended this; he had not intended any of it. He had not
been seeking a diversion from his unsatisfactory marriage, he was not
contemplating an affair. Work was his diversion, and he was grateful that
so often it took him away from home.

He had acted on impulse. It was impulse that had made him ask Lucia
to join him for a drink. Because, unexpectedly, he found her interesting
as well as attractive, on impulse he asked her to dinner. He had wanted no
more than a pleasant evening and a means of delaying his return home.

Yes, he was impulsive and it was always the seemingly unattainable, or
difficult to reach, that seemed to be the most desirable. He had wooed his
wife not only because she was very pretty, but because she was pursued
by all the young bachelors in their Delhi set. She had played them off,
one against the other, a flirt, a tease. He would stand on one side, would
not join the circle of admirers around her, but he knew when she was becoming
aware of him. To pluck her from under their noses - that was success. At
what stage it had begun to fall apart, he did not know. They had been popular
and socially busy in Delhi. In Twickenham, life became mundane. She was
neat and diligent and a good housewife - and dull. But he worked hard,
and filled his leisure time with the river: the boat, its planning, its
upkeep, its excursions. Gradually they had moved apart, she locked into
a domestic life that bored him, he recharging himself at work, using his
skills, making contact with so many people outside his home.

After the dinner with Lucia, he had no further intentions. But her
vitality, her shining enthusiasms, remained in his mind. The whole week
his memories of her obtruded into whatever he was doing. And so he was
incapable of keeping away from her; he had to get to know her better;

perhaps then he would find that she was a bore, and he could forget her.

But he could not forget her, and then he knew he had to get close, really close.

The invitation to a week-end was unpremeditated, and he had been thinking only of himself, of his own drives and desires, and even so he had not seen it as the beginning of an on-going affair. But when it was over, he was lost. He could not play around with Lucia. Wither he had to keep totally away, never even see her again - ask someone else on the staff to visit the firm in Bradford - or else he had to be with her, all the time. He was infatuated, and he knew it.

Reason told him one way to act. His passionate desire, another.

But the final push was when he could not get back to her. Unattainable? It was more than a challenge to his emotions. He felt that his whole person, to the depths of his soul, depended on winning the love of Lucia.

He said - Lucia, don't send me away. I must talk to you.

He sat down, and Lucia closed the door. They lit cigarettes.

- Lucia, he said, you must listen to me.

- I am listening, Chris, what do you want to say?

- Lucia, I had to see you - I tried during the week, it was the only time I could get up here, I was busy at the other end of the world. You were out, there was no reply. I went away and thought perhaps you'd gone away, that I would never see you again. I came early this morning, I've been waiting around the whole day . . .

He was silent for a while. Then he said - I never knew how much I wanted you ^{until} ~~when~~ I thought perhaps I would never see you again. Oh, it's not that you weren't important before, but I hadn't thought enough . . .

Lucia said - I don't really know what you want of me. I don't know where we go from here.

- Where we go? That's what I must talk to you about. In the first place I want you to know that whatever you decide, my marriage is finished. I want you to understand my real intentions.

- Oh, what does intention matter, anyway! she exclaimed. - I'm not setting myself up to judge your intentions. I don't think your intentions are any baser or nobler than my own. We were both seeking our own fulfilment - well, love, if you like. But you had obligations - not to me, but to your wife. And I don't want to be the catalyst that will destroy someone else's marriage.

- You are not the catalyst. We no longer have any relationship. Our marriage was definitely on the rocks long before I met you.

She said, wondering in her own mind how she could even formulate such a question on behalf of this other woman, his wife, a shadowy person she

had not met and could not picture - But does she still love you, Chris - your wife?

And he replied, as though he was absolutely sure of the answer, - Perhaps she thinks she does, but it's the security of being married that she really loves, not me as a person. She wants to be married. We have nothing to say to each other. We can't even hold an intelligent conversation.

- But you did love her, didn't you?

- Oh yes, I suppose so, I thought I did. You know, she was attractive, she offered me what I needed at the time, a base, a home, something to come back to. That was really it. It was what she symbolised for me. But we don't share anything, not a single interest or idea. In fact, we never did, really. I don't think we have a single thing in common.

He went on - There's no excitement in our relationship - nothing! When I walk in at night, I could be any man for her. She bores me, she drives me crazy with boredom. The domestic details of her day . . . the trivial things she does . . . she wants me to sit and listen. I could suffocate with it, I stay away all the time, I only go home when I have to. Even our sex-life - she wants me to make fond gestures, but she doesn't really care . . . Besides --

- Besides what?

- I've already made up my mind. Whatever you decide, whether you send me away or not, I'm leaving her. Your decision doesn't affect that any more.

They both sat for a while without speaking. She said - I'll make some coffee, and as she rose - When did you make that decision. ?

- I know you want me to be honest with you. There was that half-smile, a rueful, little boy look. - I made that decision after I met you. We're not really married any more - we haven't been for the past year. We share a house, not a marriage. I could have drifted on like this for a long time, half living, being only half a person. Now I know I must bring it to an end. It is you, Lucia, yes, you are the reason I've been able to decide but you couldn't help it. It wasn't anything you did - it was just you, as you are, being yourself. Because I came to realise how deeply I am in love with you.

It seemed as though she had been waiting all her life to hear those words.

Again there was silence. Then he came to her, held her. He said - I'll be free, soon I'll be free. You love me, don't you? We'll make our lives together. I'm leaving her, but I only want to know you won't reject me.

He said - You are so young, Lucia, so full of life. You are a vital spark, a light. When it's all over, this mess, this war, we'll have a marvellous life. We'll travel, we'll go to all those places you so much want to see. We'll do it all.

He said - This is for always, darling. I'll never change. Even if you leave me . . . I'll never leave you.

She said - Let go of me,Chris. You can hear every sound through these walls.

- Lucia, all right! He was whispering, and this gave added urgency to his voice. - But promise me we'll be together, not just for these moments, but for always --

She broke in - How can you ask that? How can I promise for times not yet lived? How can I, Chris? I want to, Chris, but no, not like this. You must promise me, promise me you'll always be absolutely honest and truthful with me, and promise me if you ever change (No no, he protested, - why should I chage?) that you will tell me. Or if you fall in love with someone else - (- And how could I? he demanded passionately - when it's you I love so terribly much?) - that you will be honest with me. The worst thing you could do would be to deceive me, because that would hurt and humiliate me more than the truth.

She could talk like that, because in her heart she thought he would never change. His promise of the truth would never be turned to her disadvantage.

But she thought that she meant what she said.

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- The funny thing, said Lucia, was that knowing about his marriage actually improved our relationship. There had been this element of secrecy that troubled me, without knowing what it was about. It made it easier for Chris to co-ordinate the two of us --

- Manipulate, you mean, said Freda, - the two of you, his wife and his mistress.

- Well, yes, but it was easier for me to adapt. He could say - I just can't come this weekend, Delia's asked some friends, and especially asked me to be home.

- And you would accept that? You didn't mind?

- Well, mind - I minded whenever he was away from me. But I did accept it.

- He went on living with her?

- He told Delia he was going to leave her. He asked her for a divorce, but she refused to agree immediately, although, so he said, it wasn't an outright refusal. He said that she wanted him to wait a while, that she wasn't satisfied that he was really in love with someone else. She thought it could be just a passing infatuation.

- I think you were both daft, Freda exclaimed. He just did what he pleased with you, it was all right for him, wasn't it? A wife and a home to relax and be comfortable in, and you - fresh, young, lovely, sitting and waiting - being there - whenever he fancied to come. Crazy! They get away with murder.

- You make it sound rather sordid, but the truth was that I was very happy, deeply happy, I was ready to accept the difficulties and to believe in a future that would turn out all right. You seem to suggest we were both taken in by him, but Freda, I wanted to believe in him, in our future, in our love, in the permanency, the constancy of our love.

- He wasn't constant with his wife, was he?

- Oh, I suppose . . . I reasoned that one out. I decided he couldn't really have been in love with her in the first place. I wanted to believe that I possessed qualities that would make our love different, deeper, more permanent. The real thing.

She would not be like the unknown Delia who obviously had neither the power to inspire that kind of love in the first place. nor to possess the depth of response that Chris needed.

In the early Spring she moved into her own two-roomed flat, with a private entrance. Spring, 1939. Privacy in her home, in her personal relations, but outside a world on the brink of its most unprivate explosion. The British Prime Minister, Chamberlain, gave an unconditional undertaking that if Germany attacked Poland, Britain would go to Poland's defense. The mountain

of betrayals piled up in those past, lost years, now threatened to fall. Spain was history, Guernica a poem in an anthology, Garcia Lorca awaited to be brought back to after-life now that his voice had been silenced by Franco's fascists, Czechoslovakia was a blot on an old copy-book.

The small flat was to be nothing more than a temporary stopping place. Chris arrived one evening filled with excitement, picked her up, kissed her, swung her around. - Such wonderful news! he exclaimed.

- What is it? Tell me, tell me. (Delia has agreed to the divorce - what could be more wonderful than that?)

- My firm's switching to munitions. We'll be subject to the decisions of the War Ministry - our headquarters are to move to Oxford. They're making me service head. They want Oxford to be my base. Do you realise what that means?

-You're moving there ?

- We'll move there. I'll be living and working in an entirely new place - won't know a soul outside work. Darling, we can take a flat somewhere, set up house, who will know us? We can live together just as if we were married.

Her heart was beating fast. - When?

- Soon, soon. I'm going down with the director and a couple of department heads this weekend to look at some likely places. You'd better give notice at your job - tell them you'll be leaving in a month's time. We'll get the local paper. You shouldn't have any trouble getting a job. Lots of firms are moving out of London.

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The time had come to tell Rose that she was married.

She knew she had never been any good at lying, always troubled by the fear of being found out, and this led to a lack of conviction that tended to betray her. But now she had to lie convincingly to her mother. But was it a lie? Why should she think of it as a lie? She was married, really married, except for the formality of a ceremony, which did not mean anything to her. Why should a clerk mumbling some words in a registry office make her more married than she was?

But of course it would mean something to Rose, so now she had to make her believe that it was a marriage as she would understand it.

She wrote and told her mother that she would come and spend the weekend with her and Aunt Hettie, and that she had a surprise for them.

They kissed her in the hall and took her small case. AS they went into the front room, Lucia drew off her gloves and saw her mother watching her hands.

- Lucia! she cried, - You're engaged!

- Not engaged, Mummy, she said rather breathlessly, holding out her hand with its plain gold band, - I'm married.

Aunt Hettie gasped as though she had heard bad news, and put her hand to her mouth. Rose burst into tears and cried - Oh Lucia, oh Lucia, how could you?

She recovered herself quickly, and sniffing and trembling she embraced Lucia.

- Why didn't you - ? Oh, how could you do this without a word, not even a word. Who is it, then? Do I know him? That poor Mr Rossiter, he will be upset when he hears this. What made you do it in such a hurry? You couldn't even ask your own mother to your wedding! You must have known what it would mean to me. Why all the hurry?

They both looked at her, and she said quickly - I'm not pregnant - that's not the reason, if that's what you're thinking.

- I never thought such a thing! exclaimed Aunt Hettie indignantly, shaking her apricot curls. And Rose said again - Oh Lucia, how could you - ! But they had both looked at her almost instinctively, and of course it would seem to them the only logical reason for such precipitate behaviour.

- And where is your husband? Aunt Hettie demanded. - Why didn't you bring him with you?

- He's working this weekend. He often has to travel, that's why he couldn't come down with me. I wanted him to, but he will come as soon as we can both get away together. I decided I had better come without him and tell you the news.

She took out a snapshot of Chris. Two heads, very similar, both with curls that did not conceal their pink scalps, but one grey and the other

dyed, bent over the small photograph.

- He's very handsome, Rose said.

- Yes, he's goodlooking all right, said Aunt Hettie. - So he should be. Look what a lovely-looking girl he's got.

Rose said - And the name? Do you know, I don't even know my own daughter's name?

- Chris Mattheson. He's an engineer. I met him at work. I went out with him for a bit, then we decided we'd like to get married, so we did.

- And you couldn't have written us a letter first? Or even waited for a couple of weeks?

- Mum, I know it wasn't very fair of me, but you know how I feel about marriage, all the ceremony and fuss and everything. It's such a private thing between two people, such a personal thing, Chris and I wanted to keep it that way.

But Rose looked at her with reproachful eyes, and she felt a guilty flush warming her cheeks.

- All my life I've only wanted one thing for you, and that is your happiness. If you love him, if he will make you happy, this Mr Mattheson --

- Chris.

- Well, I haven't even met him, I haven't been introduced to him yet, I can hardly start calling him by his first name, can I?

She seemed on the verge of crying again, so Lucia put her arms round her.

- Mummy dear, I didn't want to upset you --

- But I'm not upset! she cried indignantly, - as long as you're happy. I just want you to be happy.

- I knew you would want to be there when I got married, but we just wanted it this way. Please! It's our marriage, after all, it's our lives, you'll meet him soon. I'm sorry I hurt you, Mum, I really am.

In a little while they had overcome their initial shock and started asking questions, and Lucia told them about the transfer to Oxford. -

- That's really why we got married quickly, as we'll be moving there soon.

Hettie pulled her glasses down on her nose and stared at Lucia. Rose said - Oxford, eh? And you're going there together?

- Of course we are. We'll find a place together. I wouldn't let him go off without me.

Hettie nodded. - You see, she said to Rose, - they don't make the same mistakes. The younger generation are not such fools.

- It's not the same thing! They're just starting. I had the child to think about. I had to consider her. How can you blame me, after all these years? How can you put me in the wrong? He didn't have to go. Nobody made him except himself.

They both looked at Lucia. - I'm going to make us all a nice cup of tea, said Hettie.

When she brought the tea in, she fetched a photograph album. They sat together on the couch and leafed through its pages.

A collection of amateur snapshots, taken with a box Brownie. Among them, some sepia studio portraits. One of Aunt Hettie and Uncle Robert in their wedding clothes. And one of Rose, and Lucia's ^ofather, Tom. Lucia gazed and gazed at them for a long time. Yes, it was Rose, but as she had never seen her, nor even thought of her, Rose as a young girl with a young, eager and pretty face.

- Yes, she was very pretty, Aunt Hettie said.

So she plucked up courage and sought answers to the problems posed by his departure, by the way Rose had behaved, by the letter she waited for that were not letters. But ^ebetween them, arguing and disputing, there did not seem to be much to be learned. Rose spoke a great deal, as always, of the love a mother feels for her child, and how a man could never feel or know or understand, a mother's love.

- I didn't refuse to go away with him, I didn't refuse anything. He wanted to sell up everything when we'd only really got things together for the first time. A small child needs security, one's first duty is towards the child.

- But he had to go to a job somewhere?

- He had a good job in London. There wasn't any need for him to change. But I don't want to discuss it any more. You'll understand one day, when you have children of your own.

- Don't you think I ought to understand now, when I'm just beginning my own married life?

Rose did not answer at first. Then she sighed, and said - It's terrible, war, coming again. Separation. Death. War changes things.

- Perhaps it won't last too long, said Hettie, - then you can settle down and build a nice family life.

It wasn't the time to say - I don't want to settle down! I want to travel the world, going everywhere, settling nowhere.

Our lives will be different from theirs, Lucia thought.

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A strange time to move into a new home and become a married woman.

Suddenly women are in demand. The young men, the 20 and 21-year-olds, have been grabbed by the Military Training Act, and women are needed as never before. They are needed to help form Invasion Committees, in the messenger services, as Fire Guards; wherever they can replace men who are called up for active service they are doing so. Those with special skills are in greatest demand - those who have nursing training, or can drive. The women are flooding in response to the calls; they are patriotic and want to help the war effort; they need the money the new jobs dispense.

What can I do best? Lucia thinks, and leafs through the many advertisements and appeals. She thinks she would like to write articles and leaflets, so she applies to the Ministry of Information, where she is promptly absorbed into their clerical and typing pool.

She and Chris occupy the first floor of a red-brick Victorian house with neo-Gothic bay windows and yellow bricks forming ornamental stripes across the front of the building. Three standard rose bushes border the short path to the front door, where an insipid-flowered hydrangea, pinkish-green, occupies a large urn. There is a small garden in the back as well, where a magnolia tree blossoms briefly and gloriously beneath their window.

The owner of the house, a widow, lives on the ground floor. The only bathroom is on the first floor, in their flat, so Lucia believes that she never bathes. But she has the advantage of a real kitchen, while she and Chris must manage with two gas-rings in the corner of the stair-landing.

The rooms are spacious, high-ceilinged, difficult to heat with their small gas fires; and filled with plush-covered furniture, heavy and dark. Chris gathers up the many ornaments that decorate the mantelpiece and all the flat surfaces, and packs them away in a box at the bottom of the wardrobe. From the home he has left he brings lengths of printed Indian cloth that they use to cover the bed, and a brightly-patterned khelim that he flings over the plush sofa (- Delia never liked these Indian things; she preferred chintz). And with some posters and mirrors, and their books in a home-made bookcase of bricks and planks, they imprint their own taste on the rented home.

They are Mr and Mrs Mattheson in their home, where Lucia wears her wedding ring. But only there. She had not anticipated that working in a government department meant filling in forms, and giving true information, and she is, therefore, Miss Campbell at work. At first she slips her ring off her finger when she goes to work, and back on again when she leaves the office. But after a while she does not bother to wear it at all.

Between them they have enough to support their life together, even though Chris sends a substantial sum to Delia each month. He has never told her how

much he earns, nor how much he sends away. They share what they have. When they go shopping, or if they eat out, whoever has money on them will pay. Lucia spends little on clothes, and almost nothing on make-up, and soon luxuries will start disappearing from the shops. They have enough for their rent and their joint needs, they can afford to buy books and records when they want to, and that is all that seems to matter at this time. But quite often Lucia takes small surplus amounts and puts them away in a little box. It is her travel fund. She is saving for both of them, for one day, for all the things they will do together. After the war, the coming war.

But her life, like that of so many others, is beginning to turn around. In Bradford it was really only one life: waiting for Chris, filling in the time until Chris could come, being with Chris. There she had worked to earn money to live on, but the work itself had no relevance to her life.

Now the city around her is changing every day with its accelerating life. The Under-graduates are thinning out as they are called up. She sees the change daily in the streets. She has begun to move out of her private space, her individual existence, and to meld with the chaotic times.

Yet even as she walks home past the hospital, where new signs are going up - Clearing Station, Casualties without Gas, Gas Casualties without Wounds - and where student nurses and doctors are piling mountains of heavy sandbags against outside walls; where patients are being sent home to empty the wards for the expected war victims, she is walking back into the private and enclosed world of her relationship with Chris. They retreat from the blacked-out streets, from the darkened town into which the trainees pour each evening from the nearby Abingdon RAF Station. They draw their black-out curtains against the crowds in the pubs, against the thunder of bombing planes ^{resonating} from iron grey skies, subduing them with the music they play.

She avoids slipping into a more than casual friendship with the people at work. Chris is uneasy about meeting other people, always thinking he might run into someone who ties him up with Delia. And after their long hours of work their leisure time is occupied with their own intimacies.

It cannot be a dull life with Chris, who knows so much, who teaches her so many things. He adores good food, and likes cooking. Rose's specialities never went beyond rissoles and shepherd's pie. Chris searches the shops for the herbs and spices he wants, and brings books home for Lucia: Dishes from the East, or 100 Ways of Cooking Potatoes. Rationing does not at first present any problems.

He teaches her the fundamentals of cooking, how to make a smooth roux as the basis for sauces and other dishes, how to prepare a curry with freshly-ground spices, so different from the powders that came out of tins; stews become casseroles, and soups part company with Heinz, the stockpot becoming not only the basis for meals but a patriotic gesture towards the

conservation of food materials.

- Where did you learn all these things? she asks him, and he replies - Oh, here and there, knocking around, you know.

She asks him - Will you be called up?

- I'm in a reserved occupation. I don't think I'd get released, even if I wanted to. But in any case, they won't get around to my age-group, not at present.

But he did not tell her what is age-group was. So areas of his life remained closed to her. She thought he was probably older than he seemed, but it did not matter. She knew he would have to be really old to lose that thick blonde hair, that boyish look, the impulsiveness and enthusiasms that belied his years.

Their life is partitioned off; the working life that encompasses the world, the intimate life that encompasses their need only of each other. The best moment of the day was when they enter their flat, and close out the other voices.

She sheds her inhibitions and ignorance about sex and learns to share the pleasures of their bodies. They bathe together, she is no longer embarrassed by nudity, neither hers nor his. She loves the touching of their wet limbs and skins, the rubbing together of unusual portions of their anatomy with the added dimension of the buoyancy of the water and the slipperiness of contact. This bathing is erotic and joyful, and part of that secret and secluded life.

And the love-making, with an intensity, a need, that is never satiated. Love in the evening, lounging around the flat and listening to music. Love in the deep night, made swifter by the passionate dark. Love in the morning, as light bathes the walls when the curtains are drawn back - and now with her eyes wide open.

Only occasionally a storm would blow up to spoil this serenity.

And most of all, there was love-making, week after week with a pleasure that did not pall. Love in the evening, lounging around the flat; love in the deep night, made swifter by the passionate dark; love in the early morning, with their eyes wide open.

Only sometimes a storm would blow up to destroy this serenity.

They were in the bar of a local hotel one night, where they had gone for a drink after an evening walk. Chris went to the counter to buy some cigarettes. Returning to the corner where Lucia was sitting, his eyes on the packet he was opening, he was accosted by two blue-suited middle-aged men. - Why, Chris Mattheson! What on earth are you doing here? Middle-class London voices, very loud and self-assured.

She saw Chris greet them and heard him explain about his firm's move.

- When did you arrive?

- Oh, a couple of months ago.

The usual questions and answers. Then - How's the family, Chris? Wife with you?

He was standing only a few feet away from Lucia. She looked up at his face in profile, and he turned slightly away so that his back was towards her. He dropped his voice a little. - No, there was no point in shifting house until we knew how permanent this will be - you know, with present conditions, everyone moving around . . . She'll follow if it's to be a long stay.

Together the three men walked to the bar. One of them gestured towards the barman; they were obviously ordering drinks.

Lucia paid for her drink, and for the one that Chris has left on the table. She walked past the men at the bar, feeling the mere flicker of a glance from Chris, the glance of a stranger, of any male momentarily interested in any female, young, who happened to walk past; before he turned back towards his friends.

Let the damp night air of Oxford cool the anger burning in her cheeks.

For more than two hours it simmered within her. She splashed her face with cold water, brushed her hair with furious, scalp-tingling strokes. She went to the front window and listened for him, as once before she had stood and listened for him to come. When finally he did arrive, flushed from drink but perfectly steady - she never saw him actually drunk, although he was capable of drinking quite heavily - she was in bed, and reading a book, and she kept her eyes carefully directed towards the page.

He came up and kissed her but she turned her face away and his lips only brushed her cheek. He smelt disgustingly of drink.

- You're angry! he said with a kind of wry smile, as though prepared to tolerate her little whims.

- What do you expect me to be?

- You walked out on me, didn't you? He bowed towards her with mock dignity, fair hair ruffled, face so young, so impudent.

For a moment she was speechless. Then she burst out - That's really not fair! You simply left me sitting at the table and walked off with you friends. What could I do?

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- You could have waited for me, perhaps?

- Chris! she cried, - how can you -- you walk off -- you go and order drinks with your friends -- you look at me as though I'm a stranger -- you turned your back on me! She mimicked his words - No point in shifting house until we know how permanent this will be. She'll follow me if it's a long stay.

Then he dropped his bantering manner and his face hardened, became older.

- Now look here, Lucia, let's be fair then. You lose your temper and shoot off at me - what could I have done after all?

- Tell the truth. Introduce me to your friends.

- My dear, they are not friends. They are business acquaintances. I could hardly turn around and say to them, well, you see, I've left my wife actually, but here's my new one --

- Why not? It's the truth, isn't it?

- It's not always wisest to come out with the bald truth.

- Why not? she demanded fiercely. - They'll have to know one of these days, won't they? Or do you intend to turn your back on me every time you meet someone you know?

- Oh, Lucia, for heaven's sake! Of course people will have to know. But it's not as easy as that. It wouldn't help either of us if I lost my job -

- Lost your job? Why should you --

- Yes, you may not realise it, but my firm expects a certain code of conduct, of personal behaviour from its representatives. Our private lives are not all that private. It would be nice for me, too, if I could ignore them all. You know it isn't quite so simple.

She felt stunned. She finally burst out - Chris, it made me feel so cheap, so - so - yes, I felt like your mistress, like your kept woman. And she began to cry.

All his hostility disappeared as though wiped away by the sight of her tears. He came and sat on the edge of the bed, and took her in his arms.

- Oh Lucia, dearest, no one can make you cheap. You can never be that. You are what you are, not what anyone else may think.

She went on crying because now she was thoroughly sick with herself, sick because of the tears, because she had been unable to control them, because it had ended with this crude woman's device, and because of the effect it had on him. It was as though the tears immediately changed his

feelings towards her. Now she was back in character again, the weak female who had to be comforted and thus the more he comforted her the more the tears streamed down and the more she hated herself and hated him for not understanding why she cried and cried.

But she did not want to quarrel. She wanted it to be patched up. She wanted him to make love to her, as he did that night with all the familiar care and passion. She wanted it to be as it was before. As it could not ever be again.

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The next time they quarrelled it was he who cried.

After a while, bearing in mind that such incidents would probably occur again, she asked him about the divorce. He said, rather impatiently, - I'll write to Delia again. I'll see what she has to say.

The morning the letter came, Chris had left for work. Lucia recognised the handwriting. She resisted as thoroughly dishonourable the stray thought that she could steam it open to see what she said. When he came home in the evening he read the letter hurriedly and put it in his pocket without saying a word. She kept quiet for a while, but she was bursting to know. She waited until they had had their supper, then asked - What did she say, Chris?

- Say? About what?

- Don't be like that, Chris. You know what I mean. About the divorce.

- She says no.

- But why, Chris? What good does it do her? You've promised to pay alimony, she knows she will get it. She knows you won't go back to her now, why shouldn't she --

And he said with that kind of brutal directness which he used when he was angry - It's because of the child.

The child. Your child. You never told me you had a child - you told me there were no children. You mean your child?

Her breath hurt her. It was painful to breath. But soon the words came tumbling out, the questions, the accusations.

He interrupted her. - I didn't say that, I didn't tell you there were no children.

- But you did, you did Chris! she cried at him, - that night when you told me you were married and I asked you --

- You said to me, if you remember, what you said was 'You haven't got six children as well, have you? and I said, and perfectly truthfully too, No, I haven't got six children.

She could not formulate a reply. Not only was she speechless with anger,

but at that moment she thoroughly hated and despised this man with whom she had been so deeply in love.

At last she burst out - But that's nothing but a trick! You can't hide behind that - it's just a trick!

- No one's hiding behind anything, Lucia. It's true I did refrain from finishing the sentence --

- Don't play with words! You knew the impression you left!

I didn't know how to tell you. And you seemed somehow . . . indifferent, as though you didn't care.

- It shouldn't have been difficult, she told him bitterly. - You could have just told the truth, you could simply have said - No, not six, but one. And she added as an afterthought - I suppose it is just one, isn't it? Not two, or three?

- Only one.

- How old?

- About fourteen months --

- So young! But you told me - you said you and your wife didn't live together as man and wife, you said you hadn't had sexual relations with her for more than a year --

- And it was true. Yes, it was! Just listen to me now. We were living together like strangers. But these things do happen. I came in late one night and as usual we had a quarrel, and she cried and asked me to try and give our marriage another chance.

- I felt terrible about our life together, how it was all mucked up, and I wanted to make her feel it wasn't anything to do with her, not her fault, I mean. So I told her she was just as nice as she had always been, just as attractive. It wasn't love. It was pity. I tried to comfort her. Then we made love. Just that one night. I did it out of pity. Afterwards I knew it was useless, that it wouldn't work. But she became pregnant . . .

His voice trailed off. Lucia remained silent; there was nothing for her to say. Then she got up and went into the bedroom. She put on her coat, and went to the drawer where she kept her box of money. She took out some notes and crammed them into her handbag. Chris came into the room. He said - Lucia, what are you doing?

- I'm going.

- Don't be silly. Where are you going?

- Where? I don't know where. I haven't thought about it. Anywhere.

He stood with his back against the door. - You can't leave me, Lucia he said.

She did not reply.

He came over and as she moved forward, he restrained her. - Don't be crazy, Lucia, he said, holding her arms. - Anyway, if you want to walk out

on me, you must wait until morning. You can't go out now, in the black-out.

She only wanted to be away from him. - Let me go, she said, - let me go.

- Lucia, I didn't want to lose you. It would have killed me. I meant to tell you the next night, then I kept putting it off, there never seemed to be a suitable time.

- And the child? she asked. - Don't you think about him? Her?

- Him. Not really. It's been very much hers from the beginning. I didn't want it in the first place, I thought she shouldn't have had it. She was quite content to keep it that way. I don't believe in bandying children about between parents. When the child was born I'd lost interest in her entirely. So it's better this way.

She had been standing with her head lowered while he talked. Finally he lifted her head and made her look at him, and he cried out - It doesn't make any difference really to the way we feel about each other? How can it? It doesn't, it can't, it's really got nothing at all to do with us, with our relationship. Lucia, dear heart, darling, if you leave me, I couldn't bear it, you'd kill everything worthwhile inside me - and he choked on the words, and let go of her, putting his hands to his face and she heard the harsh unnatural sound of his crying, of the crying of a man who was never supposed to cry.

It was more than she could bear. The tears sprang up in her own eyes as she put her arms around him. All she could think of was to comfort him, to stop that painful and terrible sound. All she could do was to repeat, with her own tears falling on him - Don't Chris, don't. I won't leave you. I won't leave if you want me to stay. It's all right, really it is, I'll not go.

Who am I reassuring, she thought - is it you, or is it myself? For now there is this doubt, this area of doubt that will not go away. When you first captured me through the joy and harmony of our physical relationship, through your understanding and intelligent approach to my timid and inhibited body, then I think I was completely yours. I had relinquished myself and I was no longer just myself, I had made at first the important leap over the gap between the virgin self (for Karl had not really changed that status), the self belonging entirely to self; and entered into a new relationship. But the doubt began the very next night, the night I waited for you and you did not come; that night I had already changed, shrivelled, withdrawn a little, I was less wholeheartedly a part of you. Nothing is permanent, nothing is real except the process of change - seed, leaf, flower, then death and the seed again. What makes anyone think human relationships are different? They are part of that cycle of life, the process of growth and change are integral components.

The sharper memories of the emotional storm passed away. Their life went on as before, but not quite as before. The pressures of his work made increasing demands on Chris; he was often away from Oxford, sometimes for three or four nights. Then her home, as once before, became an enclosing box. The heavy curtains that obliterated the city silenced the voices and footsteps of the ghosts in the street. If she turned off the lights and looked beyond the curtains, there were only the curtains of the blacked-out streets, the city subdued by the all encompassing darkness.

She would slip on her coat and walk to the centre of town, sometimes with trepidation, for on moonless, overcast nights the streets were full of unexpected dangers - kerbs, trees, lamp posts, brick walls - that materialised without warning. Soon there would be white paint on the kerbs and the wings of cars, and three white-painted rings on the trunk of every tree. But not before the hospitals, prepared for war casualties, found themselves dealing with hundreds of casualties of the black-out.

She would proceed cautiously towards the town centre, where the crowded pubs teemed with life; but would not enter them; an unaccompanied young woman was an invitation to be picked up. So the night expeditions were a way of reassuring herself that the life and the crowded activities of the day of which she was an integral part still existed, although at night it continued outside of herself. It was a compensation to be among people, to brush past them in the streets, to catch slivers of conversation, words, half-sentences, as she passed.

A split life. Or a life that was splitting . . . ?

In addition, his firm organised a sports club for the employees, and as Chris explained, he had to put in ^{an} appearance from time to time; it looked bad if the senior staff did not mingle with the rank and file. From time to time always seemed to be a Saturday night, and these seemed to come with increasing frequency, particularly when Chris was selected for their bowling team.

The Saturday sessions would get longer and longer, especially with drinks afterwards. - You can't just shoot off when the game's finished, he explained. And one night - We had such a terrific game this evening. Bill Green looked really green - his wife gave him a thorough beating. She knocked him out completely.

- His wife? Does she work for the firm?

- Well, no. But she came along --

- I thought you said it was just for employees.

- Oh well, just one or two of the younger ones - can't really expect them to sit at home by themselves on a Saturday night. The older ones . . .

- Yes? The others?

- Well, just a few, they come along sometimes to watch the game.

- Don't they ever ask you why your wife doesn't come?

- I told them she's staying down in Twickenham for the time being, until we can get a suitable house.

She would not tread over the same ground. She changed the subject and tried to ignore his short spell of discomfort and her own suppressed anger. She was determined not to face emptiness on Saturday nights, and she made them a special time for writing. But when he was away she did become intensely lonely, a feeling of solitariness relieved only partially from time to time by the walks to town. There were so many evenings of silence with a book, playing some records, and occasionally a resort to that last refuge of lonely people - going to the cinema by herself.

The poems she wrote when Chris was away, she presented to him shyly on his return; poems about the silence, the feeling that Spring and Summer would never come again without the shadow or reality of war; poems about love. He would read what she had written, and laugh, and tell her that she was an incurable romantic.

- But do you like it? Do you think it's any good? Be honest!

A shrug of his shoulders. A loving and indulgent look. - Darling, I'll be quite frank, I love it because you wrote it, but I'm no judge of poetry, you know I never read it, mostly it's meaningless to me, it doesn't do anything to me. You know, let's face it, if you just wrote: Chris I love you, over and over again, it would sound just as sweet to me.

So that when she wrote a poem she did not bother to show it to him. She accepted that they each had areas of life that excluded the other. Hers was an inner life, his was part of his work and the world outside. He liked his work; he enjoyed the prestige of his position, he liked meeting people, getting around. He needed that movement, that change of scene. Lucia was the base camp to which he returned for further sorties into his demanding world.

Lovemaking, work, dreams about the future. They spread a huge atlas on the floor and spent hours choosing the places they would go to, when the war was over, when they were married, because it would be awkward travelling together on separate passports. Because there was no possibility of their plans being realised for an foreseeable time, there was also no restraint on the plans themselves. South America, definitely: Bolivia, Columbia, Peru, Mexico; the east - first Egypt, then Turkey. And India, even if you have been there, Chris, Kashmir, then Nepal. Further, further, China, best of all Tibet. And what of the huge continent of Africa, where do you start? Nyasaland, Tanganyika, said Chris, I've been there - worked there for a while. Beautiful, beautiful places.

They discussed jobs, towns to live in, clothes to take. - India's marvellous, Chris said, - terribly poor, shattering, but fascinating; marvellous buildings and carvings everywhere. What an erotic lot! But you'll love it.

He went into the bedroom and came out with a handful of snapshots. He shuffled through them, and handed some to Lucia. - These were taken in the Punjab. If you go further north it's high up, beautiful, cooler; even very cold.

She felt drunk with longing for those far places; exotic birds with unfamiliar harsh cries; fan-shaped leaves; brilliant flowers; everything strange and different, buildings, clothes, food, languages.

He put some of the photos back in their packet. - What are those? she asked, - let me see them.

- They're not much good.

But as she reached for them, a few slipped out and fell to the floor. Chris and a young girl with a halo of far, fluffy hair; his arm about her; she smiling at the camera; he looking down at her.

- Who is she?

- That's Delia.

- She looks so young! I had pictured someone older.

- She is older now.

She was inquisitive then, as she had not been before. - She went to India with you?

No, I met her there. Her father's in the Indian army. Real pukka-sahib

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