

SO HIA THE WILD

by Maurice Rowdon



female as men we hit a void  
she starts a new being to ~~live~~ life!

The marriage, being based on progeny,  
the abandoning love is not to attend to  
the children, cannot apply. She  
is an occasional penetrant of the

Love we keepal scene is still  
she claims a penis. She urges that  
it is the solution of females because  
the intrusion of progeny and egg  
and encasement put a huge block  
to love and that plenty the love  
supplies: a new ending beyond

SOPHIA

When the eye of wisdom (third eye) opens  
(ajna chakra) Shiva and Parvati lose  
their sexual nature and become a hermaphrodite.

But in ~~the SAHASRARA~~ beyond the ajna  
chakra (~~the throat~~) the final bliss  
comes with the opening of the 1000-petalled  
lotus, sexuality may re-establish itself.  
In the SAHASRARA they are in sexual  
union again.

I first looked at the island  
20 y can see, took the ferry across from  
X-plate, on a harbor south of X-plate, and  
stood there, the boat behind me, wondering  
why I'd come to a place so flat  
you could die at any point when you turned  
back to the ~~the~~ harbor see the word →

of the trees, it was all so fresh, so warm of me  
this had kept me. I was with a sound the  
length and breadth of the island. When the tiny  
boat cleared away to its passage past  
the prison again it was quite smothering. And  
as this veil of silence fell upon it all  
and stayed, and being all of 38 years of  
age, I ~~closed my eyes with distress~~  
~~and resolved to~~ <sup>close</sup> my nerves for the  
year, the rest of my life if  
necessary. Inwardly I stood there in the dark  
now heark and closed my eyes, and not  
a muscle in me did ~~soften to~~ ~~with~~  
~~of~~ draw down its guard.

A colleague of mine described this book, which she read in manuscript, as the work of a fossil trying to achieve flesh and blood. I accept that. But who else would have had the patience to pick up so much gossip, and systematise it into an indexed compendium of hidden desires?

I also admit what she says, that the titles in this book are 'ridiculous'. I like 'The Sophian Map of Love' but 'The Garden Inclosed' is ridiculous. That convent is such a damp place, after all.

My colleague's retired now. She learned English from sailors in the war, as a child, and began reading any Anglo-Saxon books she could lay her hands on. Her profession used to be an honoured one in Naples, in the sense that it was institutionalised. Walking the streets is sadder, now that the institutions are no longer there. This is why I call her a colleague. I said that a bachelor's life is disgraceful. I am a whore twice over---once for being that, and once for being a university man. You see, we get used to giving our heat hearts, my colleagues on the streets and I, on a salaried basis.



She told the end of Richard - his guilt  
my soul had driven at the stem! for he Bateen  
love. She won the book.

How there playfully, - THE  
WORK.

Sophia - hating the male  
by being a male, and therefore not  
hating her "and is love with the female  
while hating her growing awareness of her  
and thus provokes the terrible phallic  
pain the so many doctors had treated  
and none) then assaulted (indeed the  
made it worse by giving the class)  
medical disability.

ROMA TENAX

SOPHIA

by

MAURICE ROWDON

ROMA TENAX

04185413

CONTENTS

1. The Harlem Heresies.....
2. The Sophian Map of Love.....
3. The Garden Inclosed.....

REAR VIEW

04185413

On these voices <sup>the</sup> are <sup>men</sup> voices.

HERMAPHRODITAS - who is both male and female.

NOTE

I can only say that this book has been invaded by people all talking in the first person. It is sometimes difficult, I admit, to distinguish one from another, since they often do not announce themselves or even take trouble to identify themselves through indirect means, such as a tic we could recognise. Their tones of voice tend to be the same. Namely

<sup>my</sup> Sophia's voice, as we learn to expect, is hardly different from a man's. <sup>^</sup> Also it has been difficult for me to take it all down, not only from the point of view of speed (they pause for no one) but because I myself often find it hard to identify the speaker. In fact I know as little about them as anyone else. I hardly know the island where they all presumably live. I was there once or twice. I never went to the Manhattan apartment. Nor have I actually seen these people who have chosen to dictate to me in the first person, and who ~~//~~ often use me as a vehicle for their quarrels. I could say something clever such as that like all human creatures these are entirely imaginary. But this is not the truth. They must have existed. They must still exist, if only because they continue to talk to me—but I had to stop the book somewhere in order for it to be a book and not a record stretching to the end of the world (imminent as that may be).

None of these characters claims to know me. I call them characters

for convenience, although they are much more real than any 'characteristics' could convey. I have often wondered what they would think of me, and of my record of what they tell me (I sometimes have to finish a sentence or even a paragraph in my own way, when I miss something), just as I try to give a quick pointer as to who is speaking by a key-word here and there). When I have been unable to identify the voice I have written 'Who spoke?'. But even these two words I cannot claim always to be my own; another voice plants them for me, for the good reason that he or she cannot identify the speaker either.

I imagine these people have problems like the rest of us, I mean problems that weigh heavier than the actions to resolve them (or the pleasures that follow ~~after~~ their resolution). They too must be in the worldwide struggle for survival, even (I might say especially) those enclosed in the convent, because no one—rich or poor—on mainlands or on islands—can escape it. But they hardly ever talk about it. Some of them, it seems—like the banking gentleman with the silver-knobbed cane (this is the only way I can identify him, as I identify another with the nickname 'Aaron')—spend only a small part of the year on the island; the rest is taken up with money-making. He does talk about Wall Street and Threadneedle Street. And the egotism from which the money-making drive springs does make him mention the struggle more than the others. But his most concerned <sup>v</sup> thoughts are on island-matters; maybe because he just happens to be there at the moment. It is the same with them all; the real struggle, or rather the reality, starts when their working day finishes, or when they flop out for a ten-minute siesta in the dog-hours.

What kind of a person is the wife of the man with the silver-knobbed cane, the 'renegade' as a couple of the other characters call him? Why doesn't she speak? And what about all those other people on the island

(it has a population of at least twenty thousand) who know and even have close relations with these people? Why do they never talk? Perhaps they will talk to me later. Perhaps their voices will roll away to other themes. I have an idea that they in fact do talk about their daily survival problems all the time, but such thoughts do not get through the ether, lacking function beyond the encapsulated area of the body, and therefore lacking style and power. But they are developing all the time, these people, and soon, one day, they too may take voice, like those 'unhappy few', as one of them calls them, who do the talking (and who sometimes seem to know the only real happiness).

Still, I would have liked something from those other people, living out their self-ordained cycles of pleasure and pain without much chance, that is desire, of liberation. I would have liked to know how the 'renegade' and 'Aazon' and Aaron's wife, and Sophia herself, and Sister Brigitte, and Cassandra, and the Madison Avenue hairdresser, really look. But perhaps I am not so interested after all. Or perhaps I know. And of course I suddenly realise that I could describe each of them in physical detail. Even that ~~the~~ silent wife of the 'renegade' I seem to be able to see.

In any case, individualism collapsed with the nineteenth century, and therefore the novel ~~is~~ too, that chronicle of 'manners', useless now that our manners are all the same, a veil (carelessly chosen) for silent evolutions ~~underneath~~ which comprise our real lives. So there is no need to 'describe'.

They have addressed these thoughts to me, and I address them in turn to whom? But have they addressed them to me, and not simply felt the need to speak them? Have I done more than a spontaneous, even Pavlovian thing by writing them down in what looks like a narrative form? I have

tried to divide their voices by means of paragraphs, but often they change subject in the course of a monologue and I am forced ~~and I am forced~~ to make a paragraph division to denote this. But then, does it matter that we are not always clear at first as to who is speaking? Don't they sometimes, even often, speak each other's thoughts? I have been struck, for instance, by the way Sophia speaks thoughts that seem typical of the Mother Superior. Clearly, too, they are talking not only to me or even primarily to me but to each other, as I perhaps am talking to them about my own life. But why, unlike most of them (at least as far as I can judge), do I take their thoughts down in ink, and always in the summer? This 'book' has taken three or four of those summers. To answer the second part of the question first, perhaps their thoughts only form themselves sufficiently in the calming Mediterranean heat, and in relative leisure. For the rest of the year they are too 'busy', which for most of them here seems to mean 'unreal'. They turn the concept of the 'drop-out' upside down; for them it is the city-rat, racing like mad, who is hungrily escaping reality, with his hope that comfort will exorcise the fear. We must remember that they themselves become city-rats for part, usually most, of the year.

Now for the second part of that question. I believe that I take these thoughts down (I am continuing to do so, as I say, beyond the arbitrary limits of a 'book', which word after all only refers to the part of the bark or beech on which words were originally written) in order, first, to address them back to the speakers, secondly to address them to other people like myself whose play in life is books or pictures or sculptures or music or simply prayers. That is, we address our thoughts to ourselves, and are revealed by them; self to self. Or, as Sister Mahatma would say, self to Self, and Self to self. With the phasing-out of that great machine called the nineteenth century, which it took so long to build (through how many holy murders and new enslavements), we have reached a time when there are more actors and playwrights and directors

than audiences to see their work, more sculptors than viewers of stone, more musicians than listeners, more thinkers than followers, however bad the music, the plays, the thoughts. This is just how things are. People have thrown off the social identifications which the nineteenth century imposed on them (and still to a certain extent succeeds in imposing on them, by virtue of the extent to which we all live in the past), and now choose their roles not simply at will but on whim, even if they cannot perform them or understand what they properly are; we must expect musicians who have neither ear for music nor the power to make it, and thinkers who choose to be so by virtue of their being utterly thoughtless people. The reason is that everyone is trying to silence that unreal part of themselves, the 'busy' part, which takes up the bulk of the space and the time, by talking themselves into the real part which seems close to dreams only because it induces the total loss of self-identification.

M.R.

1.

THE HARLEM HERESIES

After wandering many days I at last found myself between a woman's legs, which is where all of us begin. It is worthwhile to remember this origin. They were a woman's legs, not a man's. I suppose all my life has been concentrated on that one fact. The woman whose legs I wandered into was a raw, long-haired peasant girl with eyes that glowered without the slightest light in them. My father was a prince, poor devil—I mean he wasn't a real prince but what they call a prince among men. And he did have royal blood. He was <sup>a painter.</sup> ~~a painter.~~ As a child I was as black as ebony, on the beach. I was in and out of the water like Amphibia, crawling out of the ooze midway between a serpent and a fish. I went through the male gender like a fire. I had their little rods in my hand night and day, that's how I seem to remember it now. I was five years old. Before I was ten I seemed to have had every man ~~every~~ ~~was~~ along the dazzling, stifling seaboard—the men having soft chubby legs, and standing about three feet high. That could be imaginary. I don't know what went before, in the primeval ooze stage, but it must have been responsible for what came afterwards, namely my present physical predicament, if it is that.

I could put it the other way round. I could say I went like a fire

through all the women. I'm vague on this point because my body is vague. It isn't that I want to think about these things but that I have to face the determining facts about my body. It is the deepest fact about me, everything I say or do springs from it. So I can't forget it. I can't shake it off. It imprisons me. This fact is that I have an amphibian sex. I don't like to bring it up. It shouldn't be the essential fact about anyone, sex. But about me it is. You could say that at one and the same time I have had all the possible sex in the world, and yet I have had none. I want none. I would far rather rest. I don't want to do all that tumbling, and then find out afterwards that I have tumbled into a thicket. Women ravish me. This seems absurd when you think that I am usually twice as broad as they are and so massive in the shoulders that they like to touch my neck muscles. My voice is deeper than theirs. I have a long stride, which they often call prowling. They turn and look at me in concert halls. They've <sup>h</sup> never seen anything like me. They know I'm a woman, and yet I am further advanced than a woman. I am short of being a man and yet I'm more complete than a man because of the woman in me. So I am a fascinating, vibrant whole. I'm at the end of the road. I'm not someone who walks along with them—I'm the rest-house at the end, however little rest they may get when they are once inside. They fall in love with me endlessly, stupendously. And push that <sup>sex-</sup> one fact about me into my face as fast as I'm trying to forget it. But I can't forget it—my entire self. I really am unique. And they try to <sup>plumb</sup> ~~sound~~ the uniqueness. They want to know more. They are quite intrigued to have a man and a woman on the best terms—in one person. They adore the friend, pant after the lover. But sex is the joining of two opposite parts, a complementary action. I have the opposite parts in me. I am a whole. And in <sup>their</sup> sex they are trying to turn me into an opposite of themselves, so that together ~~she~~ and I ~~should~~ <sup>may</sup> make a whole. And it won't work. I have to throw them off as hard as they

throw themselves on me. Nothing should be whole in life. It should be struggling to realise the whole, but not be it itself. This means I am dragged into people's struggles without the power to join in the struggles, because I'm already whole. This is my conclusion, anyway, after half a lifetime.

Somebody said to me once, Nothing about your body is a fact about you. And I can see that. But I can't feel it. If I could feel that, I really would be whole. But I can't keep my hands off ~~them~~ <sup>women.</sup> I can't resist their appeals. But it hurts me. It tears something in me. So as fast as I try to throw off this deep <sup>fact</sup> ~~fact~~ about me I renew it. They want to feel my stomach. Their eyes follow me round the room. Sometimes I feel that they see me as a perfectly developed specimen of womanhood, deep-voiced, brimming over with ~~exciting suggestions~~ exciting suggestions almost for a new biology—indeed what they themselves might be were it not for the weakening effect of that fatal male rod that, entering them, lays their hopes low and delays <sup>self-</sup> ~~self-~~ fruition. I look like a woman whose development has received full concentration, to the point where a new (but of course very ancient) biological combination is achieved. I used to say that a new type of bi-sexed humanity would arise, based on me. But that was ~~bravado~~ <sup>bravado</sup>. It is exhausting always being different, always standing out—night and day, waking and sleeping. People have walked down the corridors of trains to see me, after hearing my voice. Sometimes they become friends for life. I've been involved in fights. I fought a priest once. I've developed a sort of physically bragging side. I like people to see me shift great weights. The women follow me with their shining eyes. I don't want to go on talking like this. I don't want to plunge into thorny thickets just from thinking. It's bad enough doing so from acting. It really is a terrible life. Then how do you explain that when I wake in the morning I sing for joy? I sing at the thought of not being attached!

I had to pause for a bit, to calm down. These women (and thoughts about them) tear me from my wholeness. And yet I know I'm not whole. I'm not quite a world in myself. I feel the need to rush out and touch someone—to know I'm here. I am enough of a world to exist without people. But then I begin to feel that nothing exists except me. That makes me need their touch. And once I see their faces, their—well, I fall into the pit of thorns again and am faced once more with the deepest fact about me, at night as at dawn, a prisoner in my ~~primitive~~ <sup>primordial</sup> eccentricity.

What worries me is that <sup>f</sup>if a man (it would have to be one of that hard analysing race) gave a clear anatomical description of my sexual parts he would be saying the deepest thing about me that there is to be said. I hate that this should be so. I don't believe it is so. But I behave as if it were. I think I've explained this enough.

I wish there were no sex in the world. I would be the one supremely happy creature, or rather the one adequately developed creature, having the elements of both sexes (and therefore neither) inside me. A world without sex means that another form of creature has been found. Perhaps the <sup>power</sup> of thought becomes so great that it actually brings into being the creature it concentrates itself on. <sup>A sexless world</sup> ~~That~~ would make everywhere a home, every table a place where you could sit, because—since creation no longer took place in the body—there would be no possessions any more. All the wars I've been involved in were due ~~to other couples, I mean~~ to the existence of couples. Either the man has warred against me or the woman. Of course I've always played my part. I concentrate on the men at first, at the beginning of a new relationship. He feels he has a strange new friend in me, and all the time his wife (unseen by him because he is concentrated on me) is drinking me in, gorging her eyes on every movement I make. One of them told me, It was like a great golden tiger moving into the house. It gave her a yearning to— Again I want to point out that I am not

happy about this state of affairs. I can't help what people say about me. She felt she couldn't bear the clothes on her shoulders any more. She wanted to bear everything off. Well, she did, at a later date, and nearly tore my entrails out too. To put it in a thoroughly clear way (the gruesomeness gives me pleasure), in an act of sex I ejaculate my entrails.

I believe that <sup>e</sup>evryone does, in some way. God knows what they get out of it. I can understand what women feel for me. But how they can go <sup>a</sup>aspiring after the male rod, just to feel its mechanical shunting action, I cannot imagine. Nor can I imagine what goes on between a man and a woman. I've often asked. I simply do not see how she—the seed inside her, the child-manufactury and the child-building breasts—can need him. Well, of course, she needs him for the addition of his small, mement<sup>at</sup>o my pollen. But it seems such a trifle to give for a lifetime spent cooking and coddling him! How dare these people call it marriage? Now my approach to the woman is distinctly not that of a man. I ~~met~~<sup>melt</sup> in with her. I know her thoughts, they are plain to me like a glittering crown. I wonder how far you can recognise this crown if all you want to do is ~~to~~ inject a shunting rod into ~~them~~<sup>her</sup>? Women have broken their marriages for me, for the simple reason that they have felt themselves appreciated for the first time. This always gave me a thrill. I mean the word 'thrill' exactly. It sent a shudder of triumph down my spine. I felt I was clearing the world of impurity. I felt that displacing the poor male rod was a self-justifying act. Of course other people said that I had 'broken' the marriage. You can't break anything that isn't breakable.

I was thinking just now of Socrates when he talks to Phaedrus. He explains that a lovely face is the divine appearing to us through the

senses. If the divine continued to come through the senses non-stop we <sup>w</sup>ould go mad—every mouthful, every breath divine! Love vouchsafes a glimpse only of that original awful Face. We are fools if we go plundering after that Face along the road of the senses but ~~we~~ do! I do! We see one face and then look for another! Here is my pain, in one word. I get everything through my senses. Somebody said to me once, There lies your imprisonment. He meant that though God speaks to me He only speaks through the senses. My <sup>primordial</sup> ~~primordial~~ eccentricity (which is also my advanced state of development) puts me close to God. People are always amazed at the extent to which He looks after me. He gives me the things I dream. I don't pray for ~~them~~ <sup>these things</sup> like other people. They simply recur in daydreams, of which ~~I~~ I am the rapt spectator. <sup>once</sup> I dreamt of a magnificently huge room with a wall-to-wall fawn carpet, ~~and~~ and he gave Me both. But this is the point. He only gives through the senses. I see people through the senses—as wrinkles on the face, as smiles, as rich, as poor. I don't feel their presence without reference to what they look like and what they say. Therefore I see them, know them, through the senses. Somebody once said to me, I know people better with my eyes closed, my ears closed. But I've never been able to experience that. This is why I say I am not whole. God talks to me in daily terms. That He talks to me at all puts me far beyond most of the people I come in contact with. But He won't talk to me of all the hidden things, He won't tell me what power He has put into that little rod. Never a hint of what they share together. The little rod and the warm tunnelled purse of delights!

So when women find me they <sup>often</sup> find ~~for the first time~~ their liberation into the senses. Let me explain. It makes them feel that they have at last <sup>t</sup> achieved the freedom of their bodies, and that their most secret wishes are delightfully within the span of realisation for the first time. Even that isn't clear. I make them feel that their freedom lies in me, in my company, while in themselves they aren't free at all. I am their

freedom. They feel understood and therefore whole for the first time. And this excites them so deeply that they make the mistake of thinking that it is the preliminary of ~~the state~~<sup>something</sup> of physical, ~~because they are used to~~. So I play my part. They tear their clothes off at will. But what they want is what I cannot give. And slowly they realise that it was the chance of freedom that excited them, rather than the chance of yet another rod. They worry me, try to hurt me, they praise me, they hang round me for this freedom which they feel I can endow them with. They say, With your eyes on me, I am me as never before! A hundred women follow my progress round the world like a map-route. When one of my stopping places lies near their home they wait for the telephone to ring with quivering anguish. Someone explained to me, Since they are bound by the senses too, and you never satisfy them, they always need you. The mistake of the rod is perhaps that it satisfies?

With some horror I confess that the somebody who explains things to me is a man.

In order to listen to him seriously I have to think of him as not having a rod. I think of him as a woman without a bosom. Indeed this is how I see all men, quite naturally. I see them as weak because lacking the divine child-manufacture inside. Someone said to me once, Do you realise how you describe every husband of every friend you have as a weak man? But there never was a strong one! You should hear the things women tell me! How the man pleads, the tears cascading down his face! How he always has that absurd little instrument at the ready! And you don't call that weakness?

\* \* \* \*

This was Sophia herself speaking. For days she has dictated this kind of message to me—her doctrine of Sophian gender, you might call

it. It can go on endlessly, and the best thing I can do is to cut it short and do some explaining as to who Sophia is. I have gleaned from the other voices (mostly her friends or enemies) some sort of map of her past life, and it is immediately obvious to me that her reminiscences confuse past events, mix them together rather than really change them, so that the Manhattan 'talmudic afternoons' are bound up for ever, and quite falsely, in her mind, with the 'Harlem heresies'. Yet a certain truth about Sophia, and her friends, emerges. Nor is she alone in confusing past events. 'Aaron's' wife does the same. But here again a certain truth, about her, is established, truer perhaps than any actual event would be. The actual event is of small importance. All these people, with the exception of the so-called Renegade, <sup>are</sup> after revelation of some kind; this became immediately clear to me too. They distrust the objects they live surrounded by. They disbelieve not simply <sup>in</sup> their permanence but their logic. They see objects as they see past events—as the movable (and disappearable) furniture of destiny. And when they reminisce they confuse the events and the objects with what seems like whim, though in fact they are discovering themselves through these apparent 'mistakes'. 'I' and 'you' and 'it' and 'past' and 'present' become merged in something dream-like that is actually more the reality for them than anything logical. Sophia tells us that her mother was a peasant woman, her father a painter and 'a prince among men'. Well, in so far as I can ascertain it, and in so far as I am not changing the facts for MY destiny, she was an orphan child. The beach she often refers to, where she fascinated the children of her age (about five <sup>years</sup>), was actually a stretch of coast below Barcelona where the convent she grew up in had its annual summer 'colony'. The children were trooped down to the sea by one of the nuns at ten o'clock each morning, and they returned to their barrack-like quarters at noon, to wait until two or three in the afternoon for their lunch, according

to Spanish custom. She never knew her parents. She went to three convents in all, creating havoc in <sup>every one of them,</sup> ~~all of them,~~ until she was politely but firmly sent ~~out~~ into the world at the age of eighteen. And here the 'Sophian map' or the 'Sophian map of love', as her friends call it, started. She travelled round the world, furiously, unquenchably. She made friends everywhere from Saigon to Montreal, and at a smacking pace. She never ceased making them for a day, an hour—on trains, in subways, swimming across gulfs, even driving alone along highways at a hundred miles an hour between one state and another.

She missed something, after the convent. Her most prized possession has always been a tiny pietà in bronze, cast from a bozzetto of clay in Cosimo de' Medici's collection. She keeps it hidden away, and I believe she prays to it. In all the bustle of her life, the late nights and the changed jobs, the flights and desert treks and the love-adventures where the husband went after her with a stick or a gun, she felt no bustle, even little involvement. A certain place in her was always silent and still, and expectant.

Really and truly she felt Christ himself had thrown <sup>her</sup> out of the convent. <sup>Actually</sup> / She was never thrown out, but this was how <sup>it</sup> ~~she~~ <sup>to her,</sup> felt. It added to her resentment of men, or perhaps it derived from it. Anyway, she had a sense of being utterly abandoned. Even when she had plenty of money to spend (she never found money-making difficult) this feeling of being an outcast from creation persisted in her. She was fascinated by convents. She would talk for hours with anyone of convent schooling. She would look at nuns with a sort of fervent envy. She had nothing of the nun about her of course. But whenever she passed the convent attached to the hospital (on the island where she finally settled) she would stop and gaze up; this was before it opened its gates ~~wide open~~ to her // and she was a deliriously

excited visitor every day for—well, as long as a single experience ever lasted with her, about three weeks.

The first important place on the 'Sophian map', where her destiny began to take shape, was of course New York. Now her New York period she confuses utterly. It consisted in fact of two sections. The first was in Harlem, or rather on its edge, where the brownstone slum trails off into Columbia university. Her friends there—one could say her adopted parents, though they were almost certainly younger than herself (she was now just past thirty)—were Mabel Hale, who worked all night in a bakery, and seems to have had a fascination for stone pestles, and <sup>J</sup> Jack her husband, who as far as I can gather had something to do with Columbia university. Mabel and Jack were, still are no doubt, black. They need not have lived in Harlem. It was a choice of conscience. He was a teacher, perhaps an art dealer—I can't establish which. He and his wife felt they should live among 'our people'. This was some years before black militancy had taken hold of the city, or rather ~~the~~ <sup>their</sup> part of the city. Sophia had a room two floors above them. In her memories <sup>y</sup>—and Aaron's wife in the most astonishing way corroborates the error!—she gets these facts confused with her later friendship with <sup>Jewish</sup> the professor ~~and~~ (Aaron) and his wife, in Manhattan. That was simply a friendship.

[Aaron was a book antiquarian. He and his wife sat for hours with Sophia talking the Talmud, sometimes with a rabbi present too. There was a question of Sophia 'becoming a Jew'. Now this she has confused with the earlier Harlem period. And she has confused (desire had a shaping hand here, I suppose) Mabel Hale, the drowsily smiling girl from the south, the red of her lips and the startling white of her teeth in exciting contrast with the black of her skin, <sup>whose</sup> ~~the~~ pores shone out so clearly on the hot days, <sup>and</sup> ~~her~~ her plump, rose <sup>-tinted</sup> ~~cheeks~~ cheeks <sup>and her ready easy rolling lips</sup> with a quite opposite kind of

n.p.

creature (but memory takes no account of opposites), namely 'the slim one', as Sophia calls her, the wife of Aaron, who never so much as breathed an informal sentence to her in all her life!

Nor was there ever a question of Sophia putting wooden spangles, much less jewellery, on Mrs Aaron's naked body. Whether there was a hidden and entirely unenunciated love between them I cannot say. They both say there was. But again, memory here is shaped by present desire. We can make anything we like out of the past. Already in the act of memory lies desire, before we get to work on it. Its picture thus is much more of the present than the past. For we shape 'past' events according to the needs of our roving destiny.

This whole question of destiny has been overlooked for centuries in the west. We are rendered by this loss spectators of a jumble of happenings which end suddenly and unreasonably with death, having begun as suddenly and unreasonably with birth. We have twisted 'destiny' to mean 'what the future will unfold', namely the prison of events that grows up round us, compelling us to this action or that. But our destiny is an active choosing, and this choosing we exercise first and foremost in memory. For this reason it is not too important that people here confuse events, and make accusations that simply do not apply.

The talk below about Sophia being 'one of us', 'one of our race' came not from Aaron or his wife, as she claims, but from the Hale couple. Sophia looked negro to them, she 'thought and behaved negro'. I can believe this. Sophia is one of those universal creatures Indians, Arabs, Aztecs seize on as one of themselves. Now the long discussions she had with Aaron and his wife were of quite a different order from the rollicking ones, laced with laughter and loud kisses, that she had

~~with Aaron and his wife~~

with Jack and Mabel. With the Aarons, being older, she was naerer the religious quest that dominated her life and entered all her loves like the Song of Solomon, ~~quiver~~<sup>ing</sup> with worship.

Perhaps Aaron and his wife recognised the Jew in me', as she says. It doesn't seem likely. They are a quiet couple, and he is perhaps ~~too~~ too orthodox to try to make converts. But what Sophia does with her memory is to put spangles on Aaron's wife, and transfer the damp heat pf the Hale apartment in Harlem ~~to~~ to the air-conditioned Aaron apartment in Manhattan! And she transmutes a lot of half-kidding talk about her being a negress into talk about 'the race in exile'. A story comes about, then, which never happened, but which fully realises the desires of those who say it did happen! Destinies take shape by sweeping the material of past events into a whole that begins to alter present events! And the degree to which we alter the past equals the degree to which we mean present events to be influenced by them. Thus, wonder of wonders, Aaron's wife corroborates Sophia's false story, and willingly receives the spangles on her naked body! Not only this but (much later in the book) she plants some very dangerous dog-pills at her husband's bedside in the island hospital in the mad hope that he will take them (and he does). Now she has ~~nothing~~ against her husband. She has always, as far as appearances go, been a faithful wife. They have had children most successfully, unlike the Renegade. But she—and even Aaron!—will say later that she had affairs with gentiles before her marriage. Of course it is not 'true'. Her thoughts, and his thoughts, offer quite a different picture from the 'truth'. Indeed, it is from ~~them~~<sup>these thoughts</sup> alone that the perilous situation of the dog-pills arises. They both 'use' Sophia in these thoughts, castigating her for what she did not do or think (for she did it and thought it with Jack and Mabel, not them!),

and Sophia on her side sends shafts of flaming resentment across the two or three kilometres between her villa and theirs because they 'isolated' her from her friends in New York (she was 'isolated' with the Hales!) and turned her hair grey with 'glanced accusations' which denounced her as deceitful or out for self-gain. As she rightly says whenever she mentions this imaginary situation, 'it was really I myself who did the accusing, I was under the most acute self-examination of my life'. There lies the point! We need all these 'past' events, real or modified or transposed, to bring ourselves into clearer focus! It doesn't matter to Sophia whether the Aarons really did accuse her. It doesn't really matter if she imagined the whole damned lot! The point is that the accusations are necessary for her development, through arduous self-examination, and that 'real events' and 'real people' and 'our real selves' are simply thoughts that we are choosing and which, no less, once formed, are choosing us.

It is the Mother Superior of the island-convent who puts this most clearly, as we shall see. For this reason she is able to <sup>2</sup>ac~~pi~~ieve for Sophia her release back into convent-life, so to speak, her acceptance~~//~~ again not so much by the Church as the holy spirit itself. Sophia's happiness after her first visits to the convent, and the Mother Superior's first visit to her, are described at the end of this book. Yet they had never met before. It is clear that their destinies seized hold of the dog-pill scandal at the hospital to make it all possible. I think they would both say (the Mother Superior would actually say it and Sophia would nod ardently) that anyone unaware of a destiny shaping his life is a poor devil indeed. They would say that he thereby misses the chance of creating events.

Another point: the thoughts spoken here are not meant for other

people by the speakers. They are not even quite waking thoughts. Those who speak them are in a state of daydream, sometimes actual dream, even deep sleep. For these thoughts are not expressed in words at all. They are not conclusive, in this sense. They are felt or projected, on an inchoate level usually, and they reach words only through me. The speakers might be surprised to hear their thoughts repeated back to them! This is because, while the thoughts, however inchoate, emerge from their minds, they are not rational in the sense of abiding by a space-time formula. Thus, Aaron's wife should not be thought to feel secret love towards Sophia just because she says she does. She, the present Aaron's wife, feels a stirring interest, lost in deep //private regions of sleep and dream, far below conclusive space-time thoughts, towards the past Sophia whom she knew on a number of formal occasions in New York and whom , after all, she has over the years formed into an image, delectable or dark or dangerous, according to the needs of her (Mrs Aazon's) destiny. If told that she, in her waking space-time self, is attracted to the present Sophia she might laugh. One

glance at the present Sophia, in the flesh, might dispel in a moment all her Sophia-oriented thoughts, just as actually seeing Sophia in his lounge one morning, <sup>(P. 177)</sup> for the first time in five or seven years, suddenly dispels Aaron's hatred of her, which he has been quietly building up. That is, the Aaron destinies no longer require her destiny to hover in their orbit.

No, these thoughts are not in the order of rational statement; that is not the language of feelings anyway. But no more are they irrational, much less unconscious! Everything we know comes through the mind, even dreams, but we must not expect the mind to apply its rationalist machinery (the forming of impressions into objects, <sup>namely</sup> ~~that is~~ thoughts ~~enact~~ <sup>ing</sup> an 'objective world') at all times and to all things. These thoughts, I mean those on the inchoate level, are in the nature of re- hearsals for action, or rehearsals for new departures in feeling, new self-liberations. The actual finished performance (for the actors the work has all been done, and a certain routine sets in) lies in the 'objective' ~~enact~~ thoughts that may or may not result, namely in events 'outside' (which in turn need not be physical in order to be considered objective, but simply strong and speakable feeling).

Turning everything into words, in our acutely literary civilisation, has accustomed us to false accounts of people's 'feelings' as if these were always in a ready space-time form. It isn't that we need a dream-language, to cope with that lower order of thought. The result would be even more literary. No, we ~~just~~ have to recognise that what is going on in the cauldron of the mind is piloted by destiny in a much larger meaning than the Christian definition <sup>of that word</sup> allows. Violent aspirations rage and throw up the images they require, joining or dividing or transposing, or even re-imagining, past events (already kneaded to a definite shape by the mind perceiving them at the time!) into the material that only at the end, one might say at the superficial end, comes to words

and actual happenings. It is no use trying to devise a language for those raging and experimental bacchanalia of the mind, those rehearsals where so much is ~~improvised~~ improvised, because language is ~~only~~ <sup>only</sup> a space-time service for the clarification of objects, or formed thoughts.

Of course some people here—Cassandra and the Renegade, for instance—choose the old form of 'objective' narrative for their thoughts, that is even in a state of half-dream they do not allow thoughts ~~their validity~~ <sup>to be expressed</sup> until they have reached some order of cogency. In Cassandra's case this arises from deep class-discipline (her 'imperial' side, she would say), so that even her dreams talk ~~like~~ like Macaulay. In the case of the Renegade we have a mind in such a chronic state of chaos, unable to retain past events or dreams or even the space-time formulae to which he for dear life clings, as to make it difficult for a clear destiny to take shape at all. His perhaps is the biggest fight of all. He clings to the 'reasonable' way of talking because he believes that this is the way the mind talks when in its proper function. His inchoate desires, his nightmares, his lusts are all, for him, in an area of the sick and rejectable, a simple hindrance to life. In other words, Cassandra and the Renegade are, of all the people 'talking' here, the children of the nineteenth century, par excellence.

To get back to the story, Sophia, at the height of her friendship with the Aarons, left New York on one of her many routine business trips to Europe. She called in at Tangiers to see an old friend; this is 'Cassandra'. By the way, no one 'talking' here likes to use his or her name except Sophia herself, who feels ~~herself to be~~ ancient enough to deserve that name; the others feel that their 'real' names are not real enough to describe them. So we have to pick our way rather unsatisfactorily through Renegades and Aarons and Madison Avenue Hairdressers. *Now in*  
*Tangiers* Cassandra suggests to Sophia that she should build herself a villa 'somewhere close by'. Having lived the greater part of her life in

Arab countries, Cassandra is by now intoxicated to the blood with those  
~~the~~ velvet-black nights, ~~of the desert~~, and the bitter-sweet shrill  
of the Arab city,  
noises, and the fierce haunting aromas. She thinks Spanish Morocco

might be suitable for Sophia, or maybe 'a place outside Beirut'.

Sophia nodded and bit her lip, and chose instead a Mediterranean island sufficiently close to Italy to have been owned for a time by the Queen of the Adriatic, and by the Greeks before them, and not so far from Islam as to lack what Cassandra calls 'a certain bite'. That is why Sophia took the Aarons with her on her next trip. He needed a place in the sun, for his health. They saw the island, bought a plot of land. A few weeks later Cassandra (who had actually lived on the island some years before) bought a plot of land two or three kilometres down the coast: it's for you, she told Sophia. And for you, Sophia replied. So they set up house together. As for the quarrel that then began to divide the Aarons from Sophia, it never happened, though it seems devoutly to have been wished not only by the parties concerned by all their friends too! What did happen was that they saw less and less of each other. The Aarons may have been critical of Sophia as a kind of biological troublemaker. I mean they may have heard of her adventures. Perhaps. And there was an episode involving the Renegade which caused Sophia to feel resentment towards them. This was early days on the island, before Sophia's place was built. And it seems actually to have happened. <sup>But</sup> Did Aaron's wife ask her not to let the Renegade into the house as a joke? Anyway Sophia, who could be strangely without humour sometimes, took it seriously, and refused him entrance. The Aarons, being orthodox, were critical of the Renegade with his silver-knobbed cane. They invented <sup>his</sup> ~~the~~ nickname. No great personal insult was involved. He was simply a lapsed Jew in their eyes.

This episode became a characteristically 'Sophian' one. She used it for her destiny for all she was worth. And from this time she saw

the Aarons less and less. A new set of events was taking shape in her, of which the Aarons now began to play a formative part as the silent and imagined (or rather created) accusers. It must have astonished Aaron, to say the least, to see Sophia stride into his house after an absence of at least five years and hear her screaming abuse ~~about~~ on account of his (perfectly 'created'!) maltreatment of a Sister Mahatma of whom he had never heard and who in any case had lived behind the <sup>convent-</sup> enclosure ever since she <sup>had</sup> travelled from Bombay ten or twelve years before! But her destiny needed Sister Mahatma at this time, too.

And Mabel and Jack Hale, why don't they figure <sup>any more</sup> in this destiny? Have they long ago been 'absorbed'? Sophia never mentions them, and, I swear, will never mention them as long as she lives. <sup>This</sup> <sup>a</sup> ~~It~~ is on ~~the~~ level <sup>with her</sup> of other <sup>self-censorships - for instance, of the fact</sup> ~~information, such as~~ that she grew up in ~~a~~ <sup>convent</sup>, and felt a ~~violent sense of having been~~ ~~that she suffered in being, well, allowed out~~ ~~of her convent~~ at the age of eighteen. Deep down she believes that her 'unusual sins' accounted for that ~~rupture~~ <sup>rupture</sup>, her 'biological' sins. Now her silence about all these things means not shame but reverence. <sup>Also,</sup> ~~And~~ she cannot find a use for what <sup>she</sup> has ~~been~~ put safely into a little temple at the back of her mind. Mabel and Jack are <sup>nothing</sup> ~~no~~ less than <sup>for her</sup> sacred. She will never see them again, probably. They are embalmed, monumentally, in her past, ~~perfectly~~ <sup>and</sup> a good omen for her <sup>future,</sup> ~~always~~ so positive indeed that she fears to upset their golden spell on her life by actually naming them. Let me explain. Giving such perfection actual names would seem to her to reduce the experience of their love, which must now remain a state of being inside her, beyond naming, and much more even than a memory. Even the memory of being sent from the convent is not painful to her so much as simply a state of being now, a hunger which spurs her silently from day to day to 'return' to

where she belongs, <sup>to</sup> ~~is~~ the arms of that spirit <sup>which</sup> ~~that~~ sent her out into the world to 'shed' her sins. She will never mention this quest, since it is only known to her, so to speak, in the pores of her skin. It is almost the condition of her being alive. And I only know this to be the case because it <sup>has</sup> ~~it~~ transpired to me slowly in the course of her searching narratives. We are all perhaps moved by these silent quests, of which the 'rational' world we have constructed over the last few centuries makes a hopeless mess, because it is obliged, by its limited cosmology, to describe us in terms of the work we do or the money we earn or even our habits of dress.

The free will in destiny is not after all in the mind, which chooses money and work and dress, fortune good or bad, order or havoc. The real free will operates only through the mind, and towards objectives beyond the mind. ~~That~~ The mind-cosmology cannot adequately explain ~~this~~ <sup>this</sup> process.

The following is Sophia's description of that afternoon episode involving the Renegade, at the Aaron villa. ~~It~~ It harks back five, maybe seven years. She was staying with the Aarons while her own house was in construction.

\* \* \* \*

Once, at an island-villa near my own, I gazed through the Moorish <sup>h</sup> arches of the verandah at a path that curled round the valley below, and saw a man walking slowly up, a cane in his hand. Something glittered. I realised later that this was the cane's silver knob. He used the cane

as a switch now and then, making leisurely dabs at the burned grass on either side. It looked like the first garden of the world. The sunlight was painted on it, and you couldn't imagine it leaving—a deep mellow gold that made the oleander bushes look like bunches of iron spikes supporting flames, and the mimosa, blooming late, became specks of dusty yellow light that had found a way of becoming permanent. I knew who the man was. I turned to her and said (it doesn't matter about her name, because the biological recurrence of her kind is infinite, and she was no exception to dozens of other wives I knew), He's coming up the hill, your neighbour. You would have thought I'd thrown a wet dishcloth at her. She jumped out of her chair and shouted, What? How does he dare? It didn't strike me as strange, a neighbour walking up a sun-painted hill about drinks-time, to exchange island-smiles and then go down to his banker's boredom again. We'd strolled down to his place enough times. He was a small furry man with thick black hair and <sup>a</sup>hooked nose. You wanted to hug all eight stone of him, then throw him in a corner to sit on later, when your feet were tired. The pores of ~~his~~ skin breathed intimations of debit and credit columns. His mellow, friendly eyes blazed with gold at the edges. He reminded me of the national game park in Kenya; eyes like his were bred by many years of basking in the sun and eating other creatures alive. She said, If you're nice to him I'll never speak to you again! I turned round to face her in a certain innocently enquiring way I have, which puts a husky boyishness into my voice, and asked, Why? Why? And the answer came as final and closed as the covenant itself, Because he's a renegade Jew!

I accepted that. After all, she was a Jew. Her father never looked up when you entered the room. All his life he had his head turned modestly away. He never once looked me in the eyes. There was supposed to be something religious about that, I mean I could have felt angry about it

but the fact that he really had passed beyond the body, clearly so, quenched all the fire in me. He was a real Jew; I couldn't call his daughter that. ((This is an example of where Sophia confuses Aaron's wife with Mabel. As Cassandra will say later, Mabel's husband always ribbed her (Mabel) over her lack of 'black self-identification'. This Sophia too, always impressed by strong male arguments if not by the male himself, thought a weakness of ~~hers~~ <sup>Mabel's</sup> Mabel's heresy was 'Black and white is all the same to me', with an easy ~~easy~~ <sup>rolling</sup> laugh! She would say to Sophia when they were alone together, It's only the men want to make all this black-and-white trouble.)) She went to the synagogue with her husband. Every day I heard Aaron praying on the verandah. He said to me once, I feel so close to you—and you're so complete—and there's something so ancient about you—are you sure you aren't Jewish? I know you are! I feel it! ((This sounds very like Jack Hale. He was a tall, slim, moustached Bostonian, more Indian than negro to look at, with ~~his~~ <sup>an</sup> earnest way of talking. Here Sophia transmutes what he said into Aaron's mouth with the most telling effect.))

So when she called their neighbour a renegade Jew I thought there must be something in it. He came nearer the house, step by unconcerned step. She said, sitting back in her wicker chair, her skirts up to her hips (I swear she tantalised her son this way, there was no limit to her carnal inventions), And you can answer the door, I'm not going to! ((Another obvious reference to Mabel, who, being safely embalmed as perfect, in ~~the~~ <sup>an</sup> the past, must not be allowed her <sup>own</sup> carnality, so it has to be transposed to the undemonstrative wife of Aaron!)) She was a slim little thing (Aaron's wife). One of her appeals for me was that she was so like a boy. Naked she was as smooth as a sucking pig ((Mabel, again!)) And she sat there refusing to stir. What could I refuse to those clear round breasts, uplifted like a girl's? Her voice was as slim as she

was. It in<sup>^</sup> sinuated its way across the verandah, slipped into your brain before you had heard it, almost. Her eyes were slim. Her commands were slim. They left no room to be disobeyed.

When his knock came I walked down the travertine stairs like a servant (Miranda was out), setting a frown on my face for all I was worth. A frown puckers up my eyes in a pained way, without giving the slightest impression of thought. It points my eyes with disapproval (not coldly but predatiously), and when I opened the door he got this ancient dart straight between his mild gold-rimmed eyes, the poor renegade jackal. He began to smile but then his eyes faltered and fluttered and his mouth drooped. I was bursting with pity. I wanted to throw my arms round his<sup>m</sup> and shout, Darling, do come in! But my opening stage-business had paralysed me as well as him. Then to my astonishment he became quite unparalysed. And do you know what I found? She was standing behind me! She was smiling her slimmest, most charming smile towards him! And he was already advancing into the hall, almost brushing past me. He took a couple of drinks with us on the v<sup>^</sup>erandah and reserved all his speech for her, giving me an occasional fluttering glance. I do believe she enjoyed it! She glanced and glittered at him. And I move~~//~~about in my wicker chair like a vast boy who had made a gaffe, in a continual uproar of cracking straw like a wagon on its way to market. And then he went his way down the hill again, while the sun began to steal its mellow colours away and artfully plant night by quick degrees.

As I walked down that hill with my silver-topped cane slung under my arm I had reason to smart. Without the slightest provocation, having hitherto received only smiles from that big fat lesbian cow, and hugs, and shouted darlings (I never like these effusive openings, they always play one false), she almost shuts the door in my face! There's a goy for you! Yes! If it hadn't been for her, I mean the other one, slim

and graceful in her chair, a Jewess, I might have passed a very embarrassing hal  
half-hour indeed! As it was, I was rescued by one of my own race. I  
suppose that underneath, really and truly deep underneath, they <sup>gays</sup> feel a  
disdain of us, a racial disdain they are not, ~~however~~ however, deep enough  
to understand and extirpate. My God, that disdain has led me an inner  
dance of death indeed! They murdered my niece in a <sup>con</sup>centration camp.  
And look what wars they've brought on mankind! I'm /not very eloquent.  
I wish I was. I could talk <sup>about</sup> how they sacked even their own churches in  
their so-called crusades against the infidel, they tore down their own  
Virgin! They attacked the Greek empire solely for the booty and the  
colonial outposts. Yes, I was reading that. I always thought there  
was something valiant about it—a holy war on Islam—until I read that.  
They went under the symbol of the Cross and they were far more murderous  
than the Romans who had invented it. Yes, the Romans invented <sup>the cross</sup> ~~it~~ as a  
mean style of execution—for petty thieves and so on. I read that  
too.

Anyway, crusades aside, here are the facts. I have a nap after  
lunch and write three or four letters to the office, routine business  
stuff that can risk delay. I decide on a walk up the hill and I pick up

my silver-knobbed cane. Silver makes it heavy but I like it. If you caught anybody a blow on the head with that you'd do some damage. Likewise I keep a scimitar by my bed. I picked it up in a sidestreet in Jerusalem, or perhaps it was Jaffa. You never know. Money produces friends and it produces enemies. But to get back to the walk up the hill, I decided to go and see our new friends, three of them living together in an exotic ménage if ever there was one. She as slim as a boy, her legs as near to being perfect female legs as I've seen. And then her husband—bushy-haired, <sup>bearded,</sup> his shoulders fat and broad, slightly hunched, and the sharp jet-black eyes of a man looking out for trouble because trouble has been pushed his way as it has been pushed mine! Yes! And then, the frequent <sup>Sophia.</sup> guest, My goodness. A furry animal! She reminds me of the national game park in Kenya. But you couldn't say precisely what animal. Nor would you say she was a woman. Or a man. She is a third creature! Gave me a kiss the second time we met, a smack on the cheek that put me in mind of voluptuous nights—of the kind I have dreamed about but never experienced, My goodness. Strides about the room devouring you with attention—eyes that scrutinise you anew with every glance, as if they <sup>saw</sup> ~~see~~ something different in you each time. And her voice, like a tenor. I can hear her singing sometimes from my bathroom. That piece of Othello's where he's retiring to bed with Desdemona—something about the dense night and every clamour being extinguished. Her voice drifts down the hill as if—well, <sup>as if</sup> operas and concerts no longer took place in public halls but in the heart. It makes me—not embarrassed; it halts me. Sometimes I could cry. We have a sad destiny. I've done generous things for people and then had to withdraw my hand quick before it was bitten off. Sadness lies in those jet-black bitter eyes of my neighbour too. I wonder what he thinks of me. He never seems to be in when I call. I heard he goes to the synagogue and if his daughter walks out with a goy he throws a blue fit. I'd like to see my sons' faces if I told them not to generate with

gentiles! You have to bear crosses in this life. As a matter of fact knowing this brought me to an understanding of that lonely Jew who long ago bore that cross of wood on his shoulders. ~~was baptised and baptised in the States~~

And if he thinks I've sold up anything he can go fry his face. My sons-in-laws are all goys. Well, all two of them.

Anyway,

~~Well,~~ I stood placidly knocking on the door, looking back at the first garden of the world (or so it seemed), with the last of the sun painting the eypresses such a colour that you thought it could never be wiped off, when suddenly she is standing there before me with her eyes puckered up like a faun's. I swear she had pointed ears and a couple of hoofs for a moment. I smiled a hullo but there was no change; no doubt that the faun-

scrutiny was intended for me. My heart made a jump! The same look that a country club <sup>to</sup> secretary <sup>on Long Island</sup> had given me years ~~ago~~ <sup>before!</sup> the look they must have given us when they handed out stars of David in the streets of Munich,

Krakow, Amsterdam! The look they had when they closed the oven doors with a—! No, I couldn't bear that this destiny should follow me here, in

this fertile haven cradled in the sea! But then I saw her face. She was standing behind the faun. So slim, so collected, with that special composure our people have when they are at their best (namely, when they are left untroubled). I almost pushed the faun aside. I made myself enjoy those highballs. It was a sad half-hour. 'Sad destiny' kept ringing in my ears. But as I looked across at the slim <sup>one</sup> and a Moorish song drifted up from the sweltering valley, it seemed to me that ~~that~~ <sup>some</sup> agreement about this destiny passed between our eyes. She saw and understood what I felt.

And the faun shifted her great backside about so much in her wicker chair that I thought we were in a packing factory.

Those are simply the facts. A Jew knocks on a door and a goy turns a black frown on him while another Jew draws him in with a welcoming smile. There is no disputing that. It isn't a matter of opinion. I would like K

think a lot of things. But these are the facts. I would like to believe that Socrates, in talking to Phaedrus as he did, was being highly spiritual. Whereas he simply wanted a boy.

At this point I feel I must interrupt, having said nothing so far. Sophia has called me 'slim', all but a boy, and implied that I am the serpent while she is the eagle holding me in her claws, as my husband once showed me on an Egyptian tomb, the eagle meaning spirit and the serpent sex. I really believe she thinks me a sexual machine, and I know, as true as I sit here gazing across what really does seem the first garden ever conceived, that she thinks I wear open skirts in the house to trap my eldest son, whose pencil doodlings consist entirely of the female bosom. ((I cannot decipher this. Aaron's wife has two sons, both married with children of their own. Mabel on the other hand did have a son—little more than ten years old when Sophia knew them. And Mabel did try to trap him, in a household game that made Sophia 'bend over double with laughter' (Cassandra). Mabel would make straight for the child's genitals, then, drawing her hand away, show her thumb pushed between her forefinger and middle finger, ~~holding it up for him to see~~ as if she had just stolen his little manhood. This transference to Aaron's wife, <sup>who was</sup> so much the opposite in her approach to her children, gives Sophia perhaps a forbidden pleasure.)) A peculiar puckered look comes across her brow when she feels that I want to trap her too. ((So Sophia's transference suits her, or it suits her to claim that it suits her!)) But didn't she trap me? take them in her hands one morning in the Manhattan apartment and say they were like the first ones of creation when the girl was just emerging from the boy (she has a theory about that)? But this fear of ~~in~~ her, of my wanting to trap her, however simulated it may be, brings out the trapping impulse in me, and I am suddenly in an ecstasy of pleasure at having this furry, prowling,

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

big-bellied beast among us, like the stranger that came to Abraham's tent and Abraham knew it was God. That was how she appeared to me. She came into our 'cave'. She calls it a cave, wherever we live ((quite imaginary, this)). She said to me one day, Why don't you let the light in? It's so dark! You live in darkness! ((It is difficult to imagine their formal relationship leading to this kind of intimate dressing-down. I feel that Aaron's wife here needs this statement to be made about the way she lives, or used in New York to live. She needs the Sophia <sup>1</sup> witness to help bring a changing light into her world)) And, truly, sometimes I think of myself as a creature of darkness. When the Queen of the Night sings from the sky I am always giddy with the thought that it is me singing, even that I was exercising myself in Mozart's mind when he wrote ~~it~~ <sup>the music</sup> down! The Queen plays a vague and contradictory part in the opera—he could easily have left her out, but I believe I was present to him, I touched his writing hand. And in fact I sleep in the day, wake at night, because the silence of the night is fearfully noisy to me, I am so alive to its spirits and vibrations! Can you imagine that? What <sup>1</sup> creature could be more night-orientated than that? ((This question has a fairy-tale lift of the voice, because the whole thing about waking at night is a fairy-tale. Here she has done a neat trasference <sup>from</sup> ~~with~~ Mabel Hale, who really did wake at night, to work at her bakery two blocks deeper into Harlem! As far as I can tell the Aarons never kept a late night if they could help it.))

He too has called me slim, my legs the most perfectly female legs he has seen. I mean the renegade Jew, with his silver-knobbed cane, strolling up the hill to take our drinks when he has insulted us by sitting us at the bottom of his dining table! <sup>Yes!</sup> He showed his preference for the gentiles there. My husband really disgorged himself when we walked back home that night, he ejected violent gushes of indignation,

screaming almost triumphantly that he had been seated 'down-table'  
as he called it. A much younger man, a goy of course, and a member  
of my husband's profession, was seated next to the hostess! But my  
husband knew and I knew that it was their furniture that stuck in our  
throats/⑤ The renegade expresses himself in furniture! First there is  
too much of it, and then it all shines, the glass and the marble and the  
polished tiles and the abstract 'shit-and-drip' paintings as my husband  
calls them, not a cushion or even a wooden surface let alone books, *everything*  
~~they~~ squeal/ at you, and we know the message <sup>it is</sup> ~~they are~~ squealing,  
that someone has fallen from the divine secret! From a gentile you  
expect bright boxes of tricky accessories, like the sculpture that  
groans and squirts water, they know no better and deserve no better,  
but here was a man in whom a secret burned and he had let the flame  
go out! How my husband yelled, his voice echoing across the lovely  
night. One doesn't expect to see the <sup>Renegade</sup> ~~man~~ at the synagogue (which  
admittedly is three hundred miles away across a stretch of water)  
but one does expect him to // make a synagogue of his own home! Yes,  
one is harder on the renegade than on the enemy.

And if I am slim, if I am all but perfect in my legs, it is because  
I have been adored. A man like my husband doesn't come and put brace-  
lets and wooden necklaces and spangles on me as I ~~lay~~ <sup>lie</sup> naked for nothing.  
((Another, perhaps wistful, transference from Jack and Mabel Hale.  
Sophia certainly introduced her // to them. I believe they <sup>Arsons</sup> ~~even~~ went  
several times to the // Harlem apartment. But they ~~Arsons~~ are as silent  
on the negro couple as Sophia is.)) Again and again I have heard from  
my husband that clothes do me harm! The only other one who ever echoed  
that was Sophia. We gave her everything we had. She could walk into our  
bedroom whenever she wished. If anyone had told us before she came  
that a gentile would one day be entering our bedroom at will we would

have laughed! My father, who will never raise his eyes to look at a stranger, would have burst into tears. Not that I am like my father, or my husband. I spend little time thinking, much less praying. To be the wife of a praying man is enough perhaps. But I do believe what she said once, in our bedroom as a matter of fact, sitting on my bed, that we Jews hold objects sacred, an air of sacredness hangs round our furniture, it makes the smallest spangle placed on me heavy with meaning beyond itself, while the gentile moves in a world of objects which are dead and meaningless to him, except in their function of being leaned on or eaten out of or washed in, without the smallest touch of the divine. That is the difference between their homes and ours. There is why my husband disgorged his fury after being in the renegade's home and finding simply objects that made grotesque squealing noises and not a single thing prayed about or prayed for or prayed in front of. How has the Race survived? In the throb of the air in a Jewish home—nothing spoken, nothing seen! An empire that required no outposts, a temple requiring no walls! Therefore a renegade Jew is one who has wilfully destroyed the Race, by not being alive to the throb! However much gold he may send to Israel, however much the names of Wagner and Richard Strauss and Nietzsche may make the blood boil in his head, he has murdered the Race no less than the blackest exterminator!

For the Jew ~~in~~ in me (I didn't always realise this, I had a child by a gentile once) you have to look further than my slimness or even my perfect legs. *(Needless to say, she never did have a child by a gentile)*. I am reminded of the Marschallin in Die Rosenkavalier; she gets up in the middle of the night and stops all the clocks in the house because she cannot bear the racing of time, which is louder at night because the day's camouflages are absent! The Marschallin in me comes not from a noble Viennese house but from the daughters of Shem, and I stop the clocks to hear the silence of the desert of Mesha, where time never was! But above that desert-silence is the racing of my thoughts. She said I am

all serpent. All body, all sex. And I said to her once, Yes, sex is all I think about. And she realised, from my eyes, that I meant her to understand something quite different from/cutting gentile word, (which almost rhymes with 'axe') <sup>could ever</sup> ~~can~~ denote. I left her to get my meaning, but I don't think she ever did. I am saying this in the middle of the night, so that my thoughts follow each other without apparent connection, but there is a mesmeric connection deeper and more important than any daytime, bleak logic (of gentile manufacture) can discover. Sex is racial passion! What the daughters of Lot did was simply incest in gentile eyes. These two girls said to each other, Since there are no young men available to give us children, we will have to go in and lie with our father, so that his seed will not be lost! Sex is recognition <sup>f</sup> of the seed! I keep the seed alive in my sex, my body! When my husband puts spangles round me he is far beyond calculating a mean spasm of pleasure for himself, which is gentile sex. He is perpetuating the seed! adoring the seed! The seed, the act itself, the spangles and the yards of broadens, the silks and damasks, all one and the same thing! The poor gentile drops into his snoring bed and if his hardness happens to correspond with her softness, well then, a conjugation takes place which gives him pleasure and her pleasure, like a bottle of wine or a good evacuation, and that is the end of it, they turn over and snore again, and if in the course of the next few months a child appears, why, that is an event which has little or no connection with the first. But we in the same act are entering deep into the past, the night, the future, we reach the desert of Mesha, we glow, we hear the voices of forbears, the history of our Race unfolds with forbidden wonder in our blood, we see all that was done from the building of the house of God in Jerusalem with Nebuchadnezzar's vessels of gold and silver, to the building of this other temple on an island hill! always think of Mesha as desert, for the silence that this word denotes for me, but in fact it was the land

of milk and honey and wild fruitfulness! I understand and love my husband when he shows a sudden frozen horror on hearing that our daughter is walking out with a gentile. It means she will let the fruit die inside her! I know, because I did it myself <sup>(!!)</sup> But when you unite yourself to your proper seed again, when you go in to the Jew, the air is pure, the fruit is alive again! She would even do better to steal across the terrace and go into him, her own father, and let him believe it was me, just to keep his seed! I am bold enough to say that I hope my son will come on to me before he comes into a gentile. I am bold and mad enough to say that!

For a whore is a deep ditch, and a strange woman is a narrow pit.

Who spoke?

This is how I began to see sex in everything, because sex meant the seed and the propagation thereof. The seed is the night-silence, the sun-glow of the day, the fragrance of a girl before she is married! If Freud saw sex in everything, what was the reason other than that his experience was my experience, and that his seed and my seed, being so deep in time, ~~had~~ <sup>have</sup> become thick with doubt and fear, because these accompany all special ecstasies (the kind the gentile doesn't know)? Someone said to me once, Sigmund Freud was talking about the Jews, it was all he knew about, the Jewish family. Had the ~~man~~ <sup>speaker</sup> not been a Jew himself I would have been fearful of accepting the remark, through wanting not to undermine Freud's place on the list of great universal minds. But it then occurred to me that I had always read his work as a private message, always wondered how the gentile, with his awkward and tasteless habits, could know anything like the guilt we ~~feel~~ <sup>feel,</sup> arising as it does from such gory and ecstatic battles of the flesh! Freudian sex is family sex. But the gentile fornicates as one would take a bath, lingering over it or getting it done <sup>e</sup> quickly; a matter of pleasure, even gymnastics! No echoes stretch back and forward from the gentile act, out of time present to time non-existent, <sup>back</sup> to other

men who were not other men at all but flesh of the same flesh, so that I can say now, as the moon slants through the Moorish arches, that I saw the brimstone and fire that fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and that I fled with Lot, and went into him in the cave! Yes, loved by my husband I am under the caresses of a hundred thousand men!

No wonder then that I fell in love with a goddess when she came! She filled the whole doorway. The friend who had just introduced her looked a dwarf at her side, he disappeared! Her shoulders <sup>almost</sup> touched the door-jambs. ((An enormous exaggeration of Sophia's height and ~~size~~ <sup>physique</sup>)) Her black hair was bunched on her head like a million snakes. She had Gorgon-Medusa eyes, staring from a Roman sarcophagus. My husband and I stared back at this ancient acquisition, more fabulous than any of the ceramic or stone or bronze finds it is his profession to buy and sell. ((Aaron never dealt in the art market. Sophia makes the same 'error'. Of course this transference to Aaron of someone else's profession, on the part of both Sophia and his own wife, must mean something. According to the Renegade, Sophia tried to persuade him to attend a few Parke Bernet sales and 'worm his way in'. But books were his life-long folly, as well as livelihood. He would spend hours of his leisure time pasting up old books and restoring torn pages. I think perhaps there was always something rather shameful about books for Sophia. The Mediterranean tradition is after all such an opposite, plastic one. She might have passed some of this feeling on to his wife.)) My husband did the talking. They struck up one of those friendships that happen once in twenty years and touch the depths in a few moments. ((Quite untrue.)) I wasn't aware of my feelings at once, only that something so strange had happened that my life would have to be suspended for a time, to make room for the new experience. For a few days I was 'narrow' and irritable with my husband. Her

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tenor laugh ~~echoed~~ echoed across the living room. When we were back in East Fifth Street the following winter she appeared—in the doorway again, blocking out all other possibility of life! You don't believe in gods easily on East Fifth Street. She took an apartment in the same block, two floors up. ((Another transference. Sophia remained in her ~~rooms~~ rooms two floors above the Hales, in Harlem.)) She abolished Harlem for me. ((You see?)) She finished the sickening looks you got from the blacks, she dried the spit when it landed just in front of your feet on the sidewalk. This was before we all moved to Manhattan ((!)), into a more or less identical situation, with her two floors up like before ((!!)). One day some ~~Telemann~~ Telemann was being played on the phonograph and I saw her whole face dance to the music, her eyes and proudly cared-for teeth and lips, <sup>they were lit up,</sup> just as if she had been sent to us, as the stranger was sent to Abraham. One summer we couldn't get away and had to bear one hundred and twenty degrees of humidity without air conditioning ((never!)), and the <sup>sweat that</sup> and the /

poured out of her armpits, staining her blouse, made sweating seem the most desirable thing in all experience for me. Whatever she did was its own authentication! Again and again we said, You must be Jewish! To which she sometimes said with a smile, her eyes gazing downwards in that exquisitely interior way she has, I might become one. In fact, she said, I have every kind of white blood in my veins except Jewish. But we didn't define Judah that poorly, to accept that. For us she simply was a Jew, she came from the Mesopotamian cradle where God was first addressed, before the first nomadic trials that led to Israel. ~~It~~<sup>It</sup> occurred to me that one doesn't need to be born a Jew to be a Jew at birth! The race is the seed is God! And with Him anything is possible. I never spoke to my husband about this. As for my father, I know he would tell me that God had chosen race and blood as His method, and never departed from the Method because this would <sup>be</sup> to argue that the Method had been unsound, and this could not be. My father's arguments are beautiful to listen to. They persuade not by their reasoning but by the marvellous song of his voice. He makes it a litany, and this litany seems chosen from outside him, impeccable in its form, so naturally you find yourself believing it before you have even understood it. These are night-thoughts. Both my husband and I felt that she was a supernatural creature and had at last found her home in us, as the tribes found Judah. Our saying to her, Stay with us, you can take one of the apartments two floors up, the Portorican family is moving out, was the circumcision of this creature whose male part was as strong as the female. I went out and bought stone pestles, all I could lay my hands on, and stood <sup>them</sup> round the room with the swollen part uppermost. She came in and when she saw them laughed and said, What are you trying to do? Up to that time we had hardly spoken. *((Stone pestles were a feature of the Hale household.))* But now our eyes met for a moment.

Yes, I remember her pestles. As if I could forget anything of those

Harlem days. After two months of it I felt I was <sup>descending</sup> ~~going down~~ into hell every time I walked downstairs to see them, to put my head in the door and get that possessive look back. ((Presumably Jack Hale's <sup>'black'</sup> possessiveness transferred?)) I used to call him ~~A~~ron (to myself) because after we had known each other several weeks he used to walk past me with his rod showing, on his way to the bath. ((Jack Hale, surely, again.)) It was too hot to bother about the proprieties, and as I had never really known anything about these anyway I took no care to keep my clothes on either. As for her, with her stone pestles, I saw her in every state of undress, knew every article of her clothing, even to her son's <sup>hat</sup> underpants which she used to wear (when they were dirty). ((An interesting dramatisation of Mabel's daring intimacies with her ~~son~~ son, transferred to Aaron's wife whose sons were by now dandling babies of their own!)) I don't want to dwell on these things. The words are being torn from me. States of dress and undress are, I know, stupendously unimportant. It was what they were doing to me that hurt. Unknown to him she used to phone me in the middle of the night, and all night, to pour out more of her talmudic reflections, which were fascinating, especially as they were all mixed up with sex. ((Mabel would phone Sophia maddeningly from her bakery in the middle of the night, roaring with laughter. She loved to tease—especially the clumsily loving Sophia, whom she described as 'like two big sisters'.)) I would just be falling into what she called my 'Mediterranean letherial' (a state lower than sleep) when that horrifying bell would pierce through my dark worlds and at last I would manage to raise my mountain of flesh on one elbow and say in a weak and husky voice which I knew fascinated her, What now? He must never be told of these night talks ((Jack Hale?)). None of her night-thoughts must take his mind off the Talmud. So in the day I had the job of responding like a mirror to all his flashing reflections (less talmudic than genuinely

prophetic) as if I had had a good night's rest. ((This sounds most peculiar. It is because Jack Hale was 'genuinely prophetic' in predicting the black-white struggle exactly as it happened in later years.))

I went grey in a year. They cut me off from my friends—yes, they made me write a letter to the renegade Jew down the valley, saying I could no longer 'entertain' him at a house that wasn't mine! ((The Renegade, who would make much of such a letter, never in any of his narratives mentions it, which indicates that perhaps this too is a transference;

<sup>1</sup> from what event I do not know.)) I knew it was weakness in me to ~~write~~ <sup>write</sup> ~~that letter,~~ <sup>that letter,</sup>

~~but~~ <sup>but</sup> I no longer had a mind to think with, my soul was under possession. Phaedrus <sup>quotes to</sup> ~~his~~ Socrates <sup>from</sup> ~~his~~ friend Lysias, <sup>on the subject of</sup> ~~that talked to him about~~ the imprisoning encroachments of ~~the~~ lover on ~~the~~ beloved; no one must come within the loved one's sight who is richer or better educated than the lover; the loved one must always be chaperoned by a safe friend.

This is the kind of love I got. They called me disloyal! ~~It was~~

~~if this is not~~ ((A transferred reference to the Hales, who <sup>perhaps</sup> ~~might have~~ felt that she needed a black 'chaperone', and <sup>may well</sup> ~~perhaps~~ have shown jealousy towards her white friends.))

And she was disloyal. If our apartment two floors down was hell, I must say that hers two floors up was limbo. ((I am convinced that here it may actually be Mabel speaking, or perhaps Aaron's wife thinking <sup>Mabel's</sup> ~~her~~ thoughts.)) She was capable of picking up any bedraggled human object and returning home with it like a cat with a dead rat. You never knew what you were going to get. She seemed never to have heard of the word privacy, perhaps because (being Mediterranean) she had never ~~known~~ <sup>known</sup> real loneliness. Being with others is so deep a biological necessity for her, like breathing, that she never becomes conscious of it. She could be 'intimate' with anyone, except that there is no intimacy without privacy. I have seen her throw her great god's arms round a dozen

smelly strangers a day, and plant kisses all over ~~her~~ sweaty faces which <sup>had</sup> ~~have~~ been in the subway all morning, at nightclubs or whorehouses all night—and then she has done the same to me! ~~Naturally I wonder what kind of biological integrity lies behind it.~~ When she says we barred her from her friends she means that after a month of having the refuse off the New York sidewalks in our rooms—Creole queers, a couple of hearty German sapphists, a limp Irishman who drank us out of poteen in less than an hour—we got a little tired. ((This <sup>could be</sup> ~~was~~ what Aaron and his wife saw at the Harlem apartment, when they visited Sophia and the Hales. It <sup>could be</sup> ~~was~~ the burden of the Hales' lament about Sophia, confided perhaps to the Aarons.)) When one day she brought in a live Arab <sup>2</sup> spiekh I left the apartment and didn't come back until nightfall. I mean, I may be semitic, but only to the extent of the twelve tribes. That caused me to ask her to limit her public. Her list of telephone numbers on two continents ran into volumes. It was the biggest item in her luggage. As for me ringing her in the middle of the night, that is easily explained by her never being available in the day. She rarely came in before two in the morning, and I would ring her at ten minutes past, when I knew she was already in ~~in~~ her loose African striped dishdasha that hints at the throbbing ~~naked~~ bulk beneath so thrillingly. And my husband could never be told because it might have worried him to think of me lying awake all night, first. Second, I was in love wt with her. Never having been guilty of a moment's sapphism even at school, I couldn't risk him knowing that! I believe he was in love with her too, for a time. I mean love in our sense! The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved!

It ~~really~~ does seem to be clear that in desire (I was going to say imagination, but this is only the baggage train of desire) Sophia and Aaron's wife had an affair. Yet they were never more than strangers! they never touched each other! they never said more than a formal word to each other! As to how far the 'Sophia' loved by Aaron's wife, and the 'Aaron's wife' loved by Sophia approximated to the existing or even once-existing Sophia and Aaron's wife, it is a less important matter than the fact that this non-existent affair of theirs changed the course of their lives!

What is actually achieved, what becomes expressed and physically verifiable—this end-product of life—is not life's most interesting part. We are perhaps most changed by what we do not express, do not see, dare not even hope for. Only Sister Mahatma, of all the people who make themselves recognisable in this book (among a great jumble of unidentifiable testimonies), seems aware of this greater part of life that is going on all the time; and I mean by 'aware' actually living, herself, in that great part, as it manifests itself silently all round her. Later, the Mother Superior will describe how Sister Mahatma seems to know all her thoughts in their turmoil, and to 'see' the dog-pill scandal, though she has heard nothing about it. For Sister Mahatma takes minimal account of what I describe as the physical end-product. She seems therefore to move, body and soul, in another time realer than 'our' time. She does not see herself as on a moving belt of time, her life ticking away in seconds. The clock does not hold her in its iron grip. It is she who changes the Mother Superior's life, without 'doing' anything (or even saying very much). Through her the Mother Superior sees her own past for the first time; its order, but not its rational order, unfolds to her. She begins to realise, for instance, why in her Munich youth Einstein's doctrine of relativity

had interested her so deeply. She now sees that the doctrine effectively destroys the idea of rational law in the universe, by placing the law in the observer. It makes everything the observer sees relative to himself—which means not only to his position in space and time, to his desires (all information-seeking has its built-in desires, naturally), but to the form of his mind. The doctrine harks back to Immanuel Kant's Critique without perhaps quite realising it. Einstein and Kant <sup>(children of Bishop Berkeley)</sup> begin to seem to the Mother Superior the two great revolutionaries/who despite themselves destroyed rationalism once and for all. Long before Einstein, Kant's doctrine ~~was~~ described space and time as built into the act of perceiving itself, not 'objective' or outside us. They were the 'necessary conditions' of all perception. They were not to be found in the impressions that poured on to the mind through the senses. These were simply impressions—touches, colours, sounds, rushing into the mind without any built-in form of their own. We taste this formlessness only on certain rare occasions, in delirium, in half<sup>a</sup> sleep, in madness, though the moment consciousness awakes in us the perceiving process starts up and the impressions differentiate themselves into ~~these~~ objects in space and time, they begin to separate from each other but above all from ourselves, and we are able to say that they are no longer simply our impressions, belonging to our tactile or aural faculties, but have a life of their own, 'objective'. It is all done, this separating, as an automatic part<sup>of</sup> the perceiving process itself. Likewise, when we see these 'objects' in space and time as having weight or volume or substance, as standing in relation to each other, it means that our minds have been at work, with their built-in 'categories' as Kant called them, of substance, volume, relation—in one word form. Form lies inside us, not 'outside'. The very concept of 'outside' is made by us inside. So is the concept 'inside'. Einstein added a second

corrective to the idea that form lies 'outside' us. He said that ~~the~~ the form of <sup>whatever</sup> ~~which~~ <sup>observed</sup> we ~~was~~ precisely determined by our position and manner of approach, which <sup>secondly,</sup> were not static but, like the objects we observed, in constant movement through space and time. It was for this reason that he ~~always~~ maintained that 'it is the theory that decides what we can observe, not vice versa'. On the basis of this bomb thrown at the Christian space-time cosmology that had grown up over the centuries (that // 'we' are inside and 'reality' outside) he founded his revolution.

Now what does ~~that~~ <sup>out</sup> space-time cosmology, of ~~which we are professors,~~ <sup>Graeco-Roman origin,</sup> really claim? That there is no reality outside space and time, which means to say that there is no reality apart from the perceiving function! And this in turn means not only that we perceive all possible reality but that the perceiving function is the only one we have to penetrate <sup>with!</sup> life. On these absurdities, one might say, a whole civilisation has been based—or rather, disastrous attempts to do so were made, and are due only now for final dumping. The Mother Superior began to see that the young drug-addicts who poured into the mainland hospital (mostly Anglo-Saxon and German) had found their escape from this cosmology through drugs alone! She saw that there were many paths out of the cosmology, but drugs <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ definitely one of them. It was the key to her success in rehabilitating some of the most extreme cases.

She came to realise that the ~~the~~ alternative to Kant's ~~the~~ 'categories of the understanding', <sup>built</sup> into the mind and able to <sup>necessarily</sup> construct perceptions into an objective or 'outside' world, was not, as he himself said, 'a phantasmagoria of sensations'. For her <sup>one</sup> ~~the~~ alternative to space and time, to the world of ordered objects which we needed in order to lead practical lives, was a reality ~~which was~~ not perceived <sup>at all</sup> but which took possession of the perceiver, so that he found himself beyond space

and time, in a condition neither 'inside' him nor 'outside' him but totally comprehensive, as if the originating breath of life had been found, the anvil at which both disordered impressions and the ordering faculties which took them in hand were created. Both the order and the disorder become, for her, simply convenient functions to help pilot the prisoner through the temporary destiny of the flesh. In neither lay reality

She saw that since Kant and Einstein lived by the glorification of the mind, they could never have reached her conclusion, however much it seemed necessitated by their own doctrines. She saw clearly that they had put a bomb under western thought (just as she saw that their discoveries, though momentous for the west, had been the accepted basis of Indian thought for thousands of years, since long before Christ). When asked by a New York rabbi, in a cable, whether ~~he~~ he believed in God, Einstein wired back I BELIEVE IN SPINOZA'S GOD WHO REVEALS HIMSELF IN THE HARMONY OF ALL THAT EXISTS NOT IN A GOD WHO CONCERNS HIMSELF WITH THE FATE AND ACTIONS OF MEN. Did this harmony mean for Einstein, in contradiction of his own doctrines, something in the nature of a rational or mental order which was discovered by enquiry? When one of his pupils took his relativity doctrine to a logical conclusion and declared that scientific 'facts' could not be established, only momentary perceptions of 'possibilities', Einstein replied simply, God does not play at dice. In other words, he failed to see that the 'Principle of Indetermin<sup>e</sup>ncy', as his pupil called it, was less a denigration of God's order than of the human being's ability to perceive it. The alternative to law, for Einstein, was clearly chance, namely another aspect of law; both within the compass of the mind. Thus, he refused to push rationalism over altogether, having, like

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Kant, knocked it sideways. For once you enter the rationalist prison, only a bomb will get you out (this is a quote from one of the Mother Superior's narratives). Ironically, as the Mother Superior will say later, it was Einstein who suggested the manufacture of THE bomb for the first time, to an American president. That bomb was perhaps the climax of a cosmology that, because exclusively rationalist, had begun, in its bankruptcy, to rely more and more on the explosion as its key to the release of energy. A much truer analysis was achieved, she says, by the Indians, the Chinese, the Arabs, and perhaps by the Africans in a forgotten cosmology that survives only fragmentarily as voodoo. This ties in with her view that, unlike some of these highly developed peoples, we have not yet passed the barbarian stage of enquiry.

But this is looking forward too far. For the moment, let us see these narratives in Einsteinian terms. Not only are Sophia and Aaron's wife, and indeed all the speakers here, in relation to each other, but they are constantly being modified by each other's constant movement, just as they themselves are modifying others by their alter-

ing roles and therefore perspectives. Through such complicated conditions we 'see' each other—and it is no wonder that the other's appearance, his smiles or frowns, his words or lack of them, are poor guides. We should always perhaps keep in mind an analogy from the stars: we are still looking at stars that exploded a thousand or more years<sup>ago</sup>! This is the kind of 'sight' we have of other human beings!

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We never used to walk upstairs to her apartment without some kind of offering in our hands. But then, just before reaching the door, we would hear a voice—not hers—and then another voice—still not hers—and so on until we crept back downstairs again because the offering (once it was a terracotta piece from the Geometric period which my husband picked up for a song) would have looked, in the eyes of strangers, ridiculously what it was—an offering to a god. We tried to persuade her that Moses was only able to lead his people out of Egypt because of great powers he had acquired in solitude, and that ~~he~~ had he kept counsel with all and sundry, even with Aaron his priest, the tribes would still have been in Egypt today. Out of purity and silence comes the word of power, as some eastern mystic has said! Moses developed himself to listen to other voices than human ones, my husband told her. Thus Pharaoh came to Moses and asked him to plead to his Lord to end the plague of frogs, and then later the swarms of flies, and then later the boils, and later the cattle-plague. Thus Moses, a servant and a foreigner, built up great power for himself. The first hint of this power was vouchsafed to him in the form of the burning bush. The bush didn't actually burn, my husband told her in his marvellously quiet way. Moses saw it burn, from inside himself. He spoke to God from inside himself! You can't do that if you live in

the tittle-tattle of the world all day! My husband almost shouted at her at ~~the~~ <sup>this</sup> point. When God asked Moses to throw down his rod, and Moses did, and it turned out to be a serpent, that again was inside Moses, it meant that his sex, his animal powers had been transposed into dynamic spiritual ones! This is the meaning of the rod! The rod and the seed are the same force! There lay the power of the children of Israel! Under Abraham, under Isaac, under Jacob and Joseph and Moses the children were marked out by this special power! So he crooned and <sup>s</sup> sometimes ~~he~~ shouted his way through his arguments, trying to get her to undertake the full obligation of this power to which she now believed she had been 'born'. But instead she used us as Pharoah did Moses, she needed the blessing of our Lord but once she had it she hardened her heart and like Pharoah would not let the people go! This is why I always called her (inside myself) a traitor.

If I could come in again at this stage with a few facts, it might be relevant and even helpful. I have already described the facts about how I walked uphill to take a simple evening highball and was frowned on by the goy, received with oil and incense by the Jew. Now the facts about the apartment she took two floors above them in East Fifth Street were I believe as follows: they already had their hands on the lease of that apartment, knowing that the Portoricans were about to leave, and hoped I think to convert it into offices, and were awaiting state or city permission. When Sop<sup>r</sup>ia appeared they offer<sup>d</sup>ed it to her, and furnished it with some of the office furniture which they had already bought. When she asked about the rent he said in his patriarchal way, l<sup>y</sup>ing a hand on hers, That's your money. Keep it for yourself. I would have bought that apartment anyway. Those are the facts and no comment is necessary.

((The Renegade believes a fact to be almost anything he thinks to be true. He finds himself such a rational and unexaggerating man that ~~he~~

it is inconceivable to him that his mind should even receive anything that ~~was~~<sup>is</sup> not true; naturally he would not trust an informant who was not ~~so~~<sup>as</sup> sober and unexaggerating in delivery<sup>as himself.</sup> People only have to have an acknowledged position in life for him, as doctors or lawyers or professors or bankers, and to speak in an unmoved voice, preferably with hints of humility such 'I think perhaps' and 'of course I am not one hundred percent certain but', for the Renegade to lodge his facts as absolute ones in his own mind. This is how he got hold of the above story, though I cannot say who the informants were. It is actually the story, though not exactly so, of what went on between the Hales and Sophia over her renting of the rooms two floors above them. Hale needed an office, and gave it to her with some of the office furniture he had bought. So transference has gone on in the Renegade's mind too. But he credits himself on the same principle as he credits others—he himself has an acknowledged position in life! Now in the following narrative we have Sophia agreeing with the Renegade about this perfectly fabricated 'event' in New York! She follows it with a description of how she ~~put~~<sup>put</sup> spangles on the naked wife of Aaron. One can certainly imagine Mabel Hale patting the bed at her side and inviting Sophia to decorate her, with waves of ~~rich~~<sup>rich</sup> laughter too. This laughter is ~~missed~~<sup>left</sup> out, to achieve better the fabricated Jewish atmosphere!))

Yes, I remember the sallow pallor of his hand, freckled, as he put it down on my arm, not because I was looking at it particularly but because I felt a flame go through me from it. That's your money, he said, for you to spend. I was possessed by that flame! I felt a new significance, something fluttered into life in my body! And at the same <sup>time I felt</sup> /

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possessed in the worldly sense—caught and owned by another human being. So with the flame of life came a paralysis of action. I began to think I was nothing, came from nothing, could do nothing. I forgot my own mother's name. Yes! I couldn't recall a single friend. I had undergone a terrible kind of marriage. The three of us sat together in throbbing silences. That night, after he had refused any rent, she phoned me at my crumbly downtown hotel and we talked like sisters. She told me I had been 'sent' to them. *((A possible throwback to Mabel, this))* And how careful we must be. I moved in a week later. There was a bread-breaking ceremony: they had a round loaf baked specially, with a hole in the top to take a wooden bowl of salt. *((A definite throwback to Harlem))* We kissed and then had a drink. Then I learned that love seeketh only self to please, and builds a hell in heaven's despite. Of course we weren't careful at all. Each of us, in different ways, had always failed to practise care. I remembered Dante's line that love isn't the seed only of good but of every operation that deserves punishment! He put jewels on her, clothed her nakedness in their glitter, and allowed me to look on. I revelled in our closeness. All my life I had looked for a family. I always shall. It isn't that I lacked a mother and father, but who can be mother and father to Amphibia? I remember how those bronzed, curly-headed little beasts on the beach used to stare at me when I came along after breakfast—like something 'sent', yes I was always like that! Their mouths used to fall open and their great black eyes settled on me like coins. Wet sand dripped from their fingers, fresh from the construction of sand castles. When I spoke they looked terrified. And then one—it was always one—would come closer. It was always one. I could even say that there is a numerical proportion of people, about thirty percent, who gravitate towards me because they feel in the first few moments that they need something which I can provide (I endow not only the hope of satisfaction but the need for it!). It seems to them that at last I've come! Sometimes it seems to me that it is the

same creature who steps forward every time, in different bodies. Again I wish I wasn't saying all this. The words are being torn from me like— I can only say like the moment itself, the climax that splits the universe in a thousand pieces ~~some~~ instead of bringing it together.

Kissing comes easily to me. She said to me once, You are capable of kissing anything—it doesn't even have to be clean! I touch their bulges with a lack of premeditation which makes them gasp! For the embrace has always been touched with shame for them. It comes as easily from me as a smile! So they respond as easily! It wasn't long before I was putting bracelets on her too. He happened to leave the room for a moment, and it seemed that I was simply going on with his job. Whom they wish to destroy they first make blind. Little by little that hood of misunderstanding I know so well came down over my head. I mean the mounting feeling in me that he was doing her a swinish injustice by touching her at all! I began to see her as a garden inclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed! She was the source of every marvel in the house, he a stone column! Yes, a column in the Roman style, with the head mounted on top and small protruding genitalia half way down! There began the familiar horror, all the worse for being at close quarters, of the male entering the female! I wanted to dash across the city to Times Square and start a revolution, call out the fire squad to separate them with hoses! I wanted to knowck him down when he spoke to her in a whisper. Oh how familiar! The male seems to me to be exploiting the fragrant female in the most fiendishly calculating way, stimulating her parts to get into her but not love her! My beginning to feel protective towards her was also part of the usual process. The hood comes down and I see no more! You see, I am terrified of men. When I had a fight with a priest a little crowd gathered and helped him, not me! All because I was wearing trousers in church! I cried for a whole day afterwards. Sometimes I cry long enough to be washed clean all over! I wash the touch of their

hands off me. I don't mean that I am not responsible for the fights I get into—I always ~~am~~—but they have failed to understand me, they should not have <sup>been</sup> provoked to fight a shadow, therefore their hands are unclean! The only ones I come to love—I mean, of the men—are those who show me a kind of monastic forbearance, who on their side deliberately become shadows for me to fight. They are  $\xi$  rare. ((Jack Hale was possibly one of them. Certainly his was the marriage she tried to ~~stop~~ <sup>upset</sup>. Would she have liked to ~~stop~~ <sup>upset</sup> the Aaron one too? But, more interesting, would Aaron's wife have liked it?))

I must get to the bottom of this. It seems that everything spectacular that happens to me—days of tears or days of joys—comes from my being of mixed birth. I do not mean specifically 'mixed in sex' here, much less in the fact of my father's patrician temperament shoring the storms of my mother's peasant temperament. ((We must guard against thinking Sophia a liar. She probably sees her mother and father—whom she never knew—much more clearly than if she had met them!)) I mean that I am mixed in function, so that I appear to people as an incarnation of what they need, and yet I am not an incarnation. This is difficult but I do mean something. It seems that they always need me for something far beyond the earth, of a visionary character. And yet I am only earth. You can call me an earth-god like she does. That isn't true either. I do take them beyond earth—those who are so deeply entombed in it that they cry to be let out, to see some light. But the people I really belong to are those who need no help. I mean that small family of men and women who are beyond me as the creator is beyond the creature, the light beyond the flame. Why was I made—to personify the creature in the creator, the flame in the light, without touching the creator, the light? Do you know what I mean? I have wishes and dreams, and these are answered. The creator, the light are close to me. Argus guards me with a hundred eyes. But

I am never vouchsafed a direct vision of the light! I can never move closer! It is as if I have to remain the earth-incarnation to help people, mostly the inferior! There are so many in need of help. It is the army of people not bright enough ever to have known the flame, let alone the light, that I must minister to! I have to show them the earth-glow. The joy and the pity. I wake singing. They love it.

<sup>need</sup>  
 They ~~have~~ to hear it, a kind of testimony. So I have this bound function.  
 I am bound. I could never have been bound in this way had I been <sup>one</sup>sex or the  
 other. I would have squirted myself to freedom! But as it is I have to go  
 on looking for my family, finding it everywhere. My function is to be bound.  
 Something like that. I feel tired and confused. <sup>I live in purgatory.</sup> Sometimes I sleep for days  
 on end.

The point about purgatory is that its inmates are suffering to an end,  
 they are purging themselves. They aren't victims. They came towards  
 Dante and Virgil but with care never to be out of the flames that licked them.  
 In the Harlem apartment we three did that. <sup>((Which three? In fact, she and the Hales)).</sup> We kept a foot in the heat,  
 when we were <sup>with</sup> other people, or at work. We yearned to be devoured again, <sup>in</sup>  
<sup>solitude!</sup> <sup>((back to the Aarons!))</sup>  
 I remember walking towards East Fifth Street with sleet blowing almost  
 horizontal and the sidewalks white and blank of people, the parked cars  
 humped with snow. I believe it may even have been Christmas (naturally  
 we didn't celebrate <sup>that</sup> ~~the~~ marvellous creature's birth), I had my greatcoat  
 buttoned up tight at my chin, with a fur cap and ear-flaps too, pressing  
 forward against the burning ice-particles, and I happened to pass a doorway  
 with 2A whitewashed on it, and two black lines deleting it. At the next  
 doorway I stopped. On it was printed, very carefully, 2B OR NOT 2B, THAT  
 IS THE QUESTION. Some wit was having a wrangle with the mail people.  
 The door was neat. It might be a doctor's door—a little above the tone  
 of the rest of the block. And the letters kept ringing in my head.  
 Wasn't that my question? whether to end the heart-ache and the thousand  
 natural shocks the flesh is heir to? 2B a Jew, or not 2B a Jew?—that was  
 my question, better put. I hadn't, it seemed, a friend in the world!  
 Something like the driving sleet surrounded my life. So might I not end  
 this state of being only an earth-incarnation—always flesh being touched,  
 and touching flesh—always putting the black hood of hatred over my head,  
 always giving a woman less than she had ever had before, after promising the

most? Give it to me, let me have it! they shout—and I cling to my  
panties that are like a chastity-belt round me, their elastic immovable  
to the tearing female hand. Yes, they are aware of something—some rod—  
but, my God, to tear it out of me, the pain! I couldn't go through it.  
It was always me with my lavishing kisses that seemed to seduce. But in  
truth I know it was always she, whoever she was! She needed her journey  
towards the vision she had glimpsed ~~in another life~~ <sup>through me,</sup> and I had to perform  
the operation ('deserving punishment') which would tear a hole in her routines  
of dullness which the years had made. I became the window in her self-  
made prison. A window in someone else's life, what a destiny! But I  
couldn't free her. You can only do that for yourself. She stayed in  
prison, yearning for the window again, after I had gone, aching for the  
phone to ring again if I happened to be passing near by ~~in~~ <sup>on</sup> of my end-  
less jet-trips. In East Fifth Street it was at least different. This was no 1.β  
a safe prison. At the least it was purgatory. For one thing, she was  
never quite like the other women. It even began to seem that she needed  
me less than I needed her. Aaron went on with his antiquarian routines,  
returning now and then to the apartment with a rare Etruscan crown of gold  
leaf or a head dredged from the Tiber, while she and I waited fervently for  
the night. She said, The truth is only really told at night. In the  
morning she slept, and I went into her darkened room sometimes and sat on  
her bed. Always I had to carry the <sup>secret</sup> ~~key~~ with me which I have never told  
to a living soul—that I came neither as man nor woman, nor even as a third  
creature, nor even as the consummation ~~of~~ of all these, but as an enigma which  
time must soon find out. <sup>Previously,</sup> ~~Before~~ I could always get out of a situation  
before this enigma came home to me—I could move on to another 'family'.  
But not now. She had her slim eyes on me. She laid her long fingers, so  
different from his, on my arm and looked at me, and I was once more aware  
of a power which at that time I could only call Israel. It poured into

me and I suddenly wanted to sing certain of those Moorish chants I had learned as a child. And as suddenly I was dragging myself across the room like dead guts. The slightest of the natural shocks the flesh is heir to sent me leaping from a high mood to a low. They watched all this, delighted and amazed at my variety. It seemed to me that the enigma was at last being solved, that I could actually B in the world, no longer just appear at its corners from nowhere like a god, always causing mouths to gape, the wet sand to trickle down from their fingers. I had found my family! I began to ask her questions. I suddenly asked, Am I free? And she replied, just as if her husband were speaking for her, Akiva said everything is in the hands of God except the fear of God. And I had to think that out. Sometimes she went to him with my questions. One of them was, How do you know God? And his reply was, Through his help and his mercy, through his acts. I asked, Is that a Jewish point of view? Indeed yes, he said. God told Moses I am that I am, no more. I was exhausted, elated all in one. I hardly slept but still sang in the morning. It was good to feel that the sun was a light shining straight from God! That was His act of mercy, His help, to pour it through the window while I sat huddled over my coffee! ((This is a 'real' account of what she derived from the Aarons. They were the first to talk to her since her convent days about prayer, not they that they tried to convert her.)) Friends said to me, What's happened to you? in those ringing gentile tones that make life seem only its surface. I had great bulges under my eyes, and, as I said before, my hair was turning grey. Your snakes are changing their coats, Medusa, she would say with her fingers in my hair. I adored her—the most wonderful boy that had ever lived because there was no danger of her ever growing into a man! I screwed little earrings into her slim lobes, gently. He watched this, smiling.

He worked with an energy I couldn't understand. When he wasn't on his rounds he read massively. ((Here Aaron has become a book-antiquarian again)). His tables were piled with catalogues. If I happened to tiptoe through their apartment at six in the morning (she would be sinking into her first sleep of the day) I would hear him at his prayers in another room, a deep chant on one note. I imagined him

swaying from side to side. I felt it threw a cylinder of protective light round me. Suddenly I felt that I had never been born because I had always been here, and that I could never die because I had never been born; that birth and death were only willed changes of state in the body, and I was not my body<sup>any more!</sup> His prayers went through me like a vast charge of energy, reforming all my impulses, making a neat and for the first time understandable paraphrase of all the foggy experiences I had had in life. Then she would call me softly. I don't want to be dramatic and suggest that she tore me from my long overdue appointment with God. But she did call me. She always seemed to know when I was wandering about, she always called me back. Someone said to me once, She's the only wicked woman I've met. It was precisely this knowledge she had of other people's states, and her desire to call them back from their transports, that made her seem so. She had an all-pervading, all-consuming energy of self-projection that was like his energy of work. A headstrong, moody, murmuring race, as Dryden called them!

One morning she called me and I felt nothing but pleasure. I went in straight away. She was wide awake with the curtains closed, and the city<sup>outside</sup> from which we seemed so deeply abstracted was beginning its appalling life. The papers talked about war. Another girl was stabbed in Grand Central park. But our little tabernacle was unshaken. I had begun to fear even the short walk to the delicatessen, not because of the fear hanging over the streets but because outside wasn't home. I began to work like a madman. I never worked so much in all my life. I had never felt so safe—so frightened—so unsafe! That sentence puts it deftly. The more safety I felt, the less safe I seemed to be. The safety of the tabernacle was such that it made everywhere else from Rumpelmeyer's to the Henry Miller theatre hostile and strange, and as they seemed hostile, so home seemed all the more safe. The double action was most distressing.

I began to realise that her not sleeping at night came from having too little confidence i n the outside world. It was even a kind of godlessness. She couldn't bring herself to fall into the night's beguiling arms! So, in her wakefyness, she was my Argus with a hundred watchful eyes. <sup>According to her,</sup> You had to have so many eyes to pick up all the false promises, the enmity veiled by smiles, the insidiously wrong advice, the blandly cheerful invitations to diaster that the world offered you. She tended me as carefully as a garden. If we dined separately her first question on my return in the middle of the night was invariably, Now what rubbish have you been eating? I came to care more for my body. Taking a bath one morning, running water down my chest (I will not say bosom), I thought of the words 'you are washing the tabernacle of your soul'.

When I went into her that morning she said in her slim way, as if afraid to disturb the air and set up resistance to the straight shaft of her will, Would you like to lie down? I stared at her. I'm wide awake, I said, my day's beginning! All the better, she said. My day's beginning too. And she patted the bed at her side. I turned quickly towards the door as if to lock it, but she shook her head, still smiling. I want to put all my jewels and spangles on you, she said. She had them all at her side. And she began to clothe me in them precisely as he did her. It was an exact repetition of his movements. The touch of every pearl or polished wood surface was like a message, underlined by her gaze, floating over me i n slim eyes. I thought for a moment that she meant to battle with the elastic round my middle, but it was only the slightest touch of her hand, almost as if she were mocking my fears. I was quivering with excitement, and when she fell asleep I was lying there like a glass case in a jeweller's shop, and shining with sweat. And if he walked in? But her smile, even while she slept, seemed to discount the importance of this. Tortuously I edged myself into a sitting position, terrified of

waking her, and bit by bit replaced the jewellery in a pile at her side.

Then I got into my clothes and left.

One day <sup>Aaron</sup> ~~He~~ brought a lot of new finds home and we were examining them in the deadly afternoon heat. He began a peculiar sort of chanting, which was about the objects, I discovered, and yet about me too. He picked up an ikon and said, Look, who knows that a grandfather of mine may not have gazed at that once in the Ukraine. Or this cross from Warsaw may have been held by a Jesuit priest <sup>three</sup> ~~thre~~ hundred years ago as he passed the corpse of an ancestor of mine who had hitherto been living peacefully among Lutherans and Calvinists. That picture of a synagogue in the snow; I think it's the Rhineland, and perhaps my own father went in there to pray. In a Rembrandt crucifixion I remind myself that those are my ancestors standing there. The Domenico Tiepolo drawing of the Venetian money-lenders I nearly laid my hands on last week shows maybe a forbear of mine. This Byzantine chalice, picked up in one of the crusades, may have been in the hands of a French or Venetian knight whose horse trampled one of my ancestors to death <sup>at</sup> ~~on~~ the edge of Constantinople. He spoke it all in what seemed at first an artificial way. <sup>H</sup> ~~He~~ was glaring at me in the dimness behind the half-drawn curtains. I felt feverish. The afternoon light was sickly, damp. The savage throb of the city was like the thunder of his hidden wrath. And the Sumerian statuette, perhaps one of our people handled it, close to Babylon, before Abraham started a trek that lasted thousands of years, before Israel was born. But they weren't my ancestors! I almost screamed at him. Don't you feel it already, that they are? he asked with what I hardly dared interpret as irony. Do you think we would have someone here in our midst night and day whose <sup>t</sup> ~~y~~ blood wasn't ours? But our blòods aren't the same! I screamed again. He made a click of his tongue. Israel was a man, he said, he became a state, a people, a religion. Don't you realise it's all the same thing? And at that moment I looked

across the dark room to where she was sitting, and realised as she gazed back at me with her slim smile that my heart was become the bellows and the fan to cool a gypsy's lust.

Sometimes <sup>Aaron</sup> ~~he~~ was disturbingly cryptic. Once I happened to be talking about how I ought to settle down somewhere, build a house (it was before <sup>we</sup> ~~they~~ had found the island) and he said, his hand laid over his paunch, his check shirt open at the neck (or rather down to the navel), Did you know that the word eternity occurs only once in the Bible? And that was that.

Whenever he said something of this ~~order~~ she always watched me, smiling, without a word on her own account. Only at night did she speak, whispering, down the phone. I began to wonder if the smile wasn't a sign to me not to listen to him too deeply. Someone said to me once that fear, shame and hatred are a trinity, and that fear <sup>is</sup> ~~was~~ the womb of the other two. It <sup>is</sup> ~~was~~ correspondingly the hardest of the three to get rid of. Her smile, and her silence whenever he spoke, seemed to argue fear of him. Her looking so ~~fr~~ like a fragile boy in the morning confirmed it for me. Fear was in her light but aching movements as she crossed the room, in the sigh she made when she lowered her head on the pillow as dawn tinted the curtains a dirty metallic grey. Yes, that was the burden she was carrying about! Hatred and shame must follow! And I began to share the fear, feel the accompanying shame and hatred too. I became defiant of him, since this is my way of demonstrating fear. Not to his face, however. But sometimes when she was dragging herself to the kitchen to start a succulent dish for him (he ate ravenously as if it were a last hasty meal before the tribes struck camp) I managed to draw her out of it again, before she had touched a pot. This led to some quietly talmudic scenes, and the Book of the Law was read out, as the expected gef<sup>f</sup>ü<sup>f</sup>tefische, which after all takes two hours to prepare ~~//~~ (done his way) failed to appear. There was no open rebellion. What I did wasn't done in a mean state of mind. Simply that my love for her wanted to spare her hours of drudgery. Once when she was about to mention him I leaned forward

and in one heavy movement which now brings the sight of leaping purgatorial flames to my mind, I stopped her mouth with a large kiss.

I remember that kiss as perhaps the most astonishing of my life because it had no unfamiliarity for me. I felt less inhibition with her, naked or clothed, than with anyone I ever knew. And this seemed to prove all the more what my husband said, that she was a Jew<sup>h</sup>, however gentile her origin. She had simply found her Jewish birth with us. And the second strangest thing about that kiss (in a long repertoire of strange things) was that I swore never to make love to a gentile again. My father would be horrified at the idea but I felt in that moment God kissing me, yes, the Shechina himself! Afterwards I thought <sup>it was</sup> of what Diotima of Mantinea told Socrates about the nature of love—a daemon for conveying messages from the gods to ourselves, and back again, because God did not mix with men; so He needed, and we needed, a way for messages to go back and forth! And I knew that a message was being conveyed to me in that kiss. It made a shudder go through <sup>my</sup> life (I don't mean through my body). Everything in the apartment changed for me, my friends seemed to have different names, I could barely remember the life I had led an hour before, I picked up my old life from signs, I tapped my way with a blind man's stick between objects I had been looking at for twenty years. I went to the kitchen to start the evening meal and then forgot why I was there, and found myself talking to her instead in another room, with the curtains drawn against the light, and the ikons and the Byzantine mosaic shining.

I began not to be able to bear it when his key turned in the lock and he laid some new treasures on the table, and she went back to her corner and watched him with her slim smile as if he had frozen her womb. How man-and-wife ever came to be conceived I cannot imagine! Surely society imposed such an idea? The height not simply of absurdity but of impossibility that a woman should ever be thought to be able to live—should ever think herself able to live—with, of all creatures, a man! I have

watched so many couples in my life without understanding what went on between them. How 'her' softness, 'her' fertilising largesse ever combined with 'his' nervous and fitful domineering I could no more see than I could see the coupling of dogs and angels. Every home I entered gave me the same shock of surprise—how could such monstrously opposite creatures spend a moment, let alone a lifetime, together? It seemed to me a most appalling imbalance that had been tolerated for the purposes of progeny alone. I believe that the ancient civilisations managed to avoid it by not extending that quick romp on the bed, needed for childbirth, into a lifelong perversion of nature. The women loved women, the men men. It was in Roman times, namely during the degeneration of Greek culture, that this began to change. And the biological act was allowed fully to diffuse itself into monstrous social habits under Christianity, which in respect of the disciplines and rituals of daily life was a degeneration of the Roman! In the sane society the two types of creature are quite separate—they regard themselves as separate, and live and think separately. The harem, far from being a feature of the maltreatment of women, was their realisation (I am sure they exchanged more thrills between themselves than they did at the accomodation of any circumcised rod). The Jewish world too—surely the rule of natural separation ~~was~~ held? I talked to her about it. I mentioned Socrates (whom she barely seemed to have heard of) and watched her while I went through Alcibiades' speech where he describes the first types of mankind, before the gods divided them—the three types, the male, the female and the androgynous or mixed. All these creatures had two faces, pointing opposite ways, with four ears, four arms and four legs, and two sexual members each. They were completely round, and could hop about in the most astonishing way. Some of them were two males in one. Others <sup>were</sup> two females in one. And the third were a mixture. Homer describes how two of these powerful creatures, Otys and Ephialtes, dared to climb up to heaven and were <sup>to</sup> bear to manhandling the gods. Then Zeus struck on the

idea of weakening them by slicing them in half. He cut down the middle and got Apollo to twist their faces round the other way so that they were on the same side as the flat or cut section, leaving the genitalia at the back. Apollo then drew the skin round and knotted it at the navel, and the the job was thought to be finished. But the severed creatures felt such a deep ~~physical~~ loss that they began to yearn for each other. The males, males who had been severed from male clung to ~~females~~, the females who had been <sup>e</sup>severed from <sup>f</sup>female clung to <sup>f</sup>females, while the mixed lot began to cling to each other. Everyone was in such a pitiful state that the gods had to do something drastic. They turned the sexual members round to the front, and the males began to generate inside the females instead of on the ground, as formerly. I watched her all the while. She smiled. I think the point got home to her, that these first creatures who had been complete, four arms and four legs, were the ones to scale heaven, and that by being divided they were weakened, and that by being divided further, into male and female, they were weakened further, and that the yearning of male for male and female for female is more appropriate to our destiny. I wanted to rush into their apartment and like Hamlet shout, I say we will have no more marriages! I couldn't bear the air of the place when they were together. I went from chair to chair, opened all the windows. I asked myself how long the imprisonment had to be borne—her imprisonment. And she always <sup>e</sup>stopped me actually saying it—with a hand over my mouth. I suppose this was the generative order of events—love of her, breeding fear of him, <sup>e</sup>breeding hatred of him, breeding shame. I once asked someone why we should be ashamed to hate and he said, Because you are hating yourself. I couldn't understand that. I tried to love the <sup>s</sup>sound of his key in the door, and to lose myself in the little bit of glowing terracotta he put down on the table, but I always caught her eyes, and the generative order of love-fear-hate was aflame again, the apartment was afire!

I thrilled at every new piece of violence in the papers. I would

have committed any larceny simply to objectify my feelings, see them on other faces! Destroyers are those destroying themselves! In my crying fits I called aloud to myself, Where have you gone?, <sup>where have you strayed to</sup> meaning myself. And, Will they ever let me go?, meaning would I ever let them go? And all this time I really believe they perceived no suffering in me. Suffering dramatizes my face, renders it haunted like one of those late-Greek tragic heads, with eyes aghast. They took this for my real face. I had never before been afraid of madness. Now purgatory threatened to pass into hell, where the burning is no longer voluntary, and ~~it~~ has no cessation! In my waking moments—I mean, when I opened my window at dusk, it might be, and suddenly woke up to my life, and looking down into the street surveyed it all like the tiny leg-splai<sup>ed</sup>~~ing~~ figures below—I was tickled to see how a sort of theology was growing in me, whereas until then churches had been simply aesthetic for me. I could no longer trust my powers. Therefore I had to resort to a more powerful source of power than my own rude health. He <sup>c b</sup> ~~continued~~ to enter the apartment of an evening with a rare find, he put his arm round my neck as warmly and confidently as ever (was he mad too?), above all he talked about her when she wasn't there, praising her until I could have knocked him down. If I saw <sup>him</sup> ~~her~~ putting spangles and brocades on her now I gave her a puckered look from the other room and zoomed stormily out of the apartment. She would smile from the bed—always the smile! I wondered one day, when he fell over a chair and went skidding along the floor with a kylix in his hand (trust him to hold it aloft in such a way that it wasn't even scratched), I wondered he didn't know it was me willing it. And there was now hardly a thing I did or thought that black shame didn't swallow up immediately afterwards.

# ~~Yet every moment was animated, poignantly vivid so that I remembered it afterwards, his slams on the pain, as strangely and ambiguously pleasant. How can I explain it? Nothing was wasted now. Whereas before I had first~~

We have thus been treated to a description of her life with the Hales galvanised into a new form by her desire for 'the slim one'. It is interesting that she mentioned<sup>s</sup> 'black shame' ~~just~~<sup>above.</sup> She seems to be bringing what she learned from the Aarons (the theology) backwards to Harlem, while bringing the 'black shame', ecstatic and agonising, of her Harlem life forwards into the orderly Aaron ~~apart-~~ment. Quite a mosaic! How ruthlessly our desires range over characters and situations! And Aaron's wife, who through the smallest glances may have picked up this desire, or without moving a muscle simply have provoked it herself, is in her daydream kissed by Sophia, and it feels like God kissing her! So, with the two parties agreeing, does it not in the most valid sense happen, without it happening physically? Where Sophia does not create new events she creates at least new dreams. The latter are ~~more~~ possibly more potent.

Now, all this time, she is receiving little notes from the Aaron villa up the road, and returning answers. These notes are usually conveyed by the Aaron maid, Miranda, or by Sophia's maid (whose name is never divulged either by Cassandra or herself, I cannot say why). These notes enquire after health, send best wishes, look forward to the next meeting. But the meeting does not happen. It is planned often enough but never fails to be cancelled by one side or the other at the last minute. Thus thoughts can drive people apart without anything observable happening between them! The thoughts simply grow, and since thoughts are never alone but send out strong radiating shafts to other minds, you have a deadlock as complete as if there had been an open quarrel. We shall see that Aaron too joins in the fabricated love-situation between Sophia and his wife. He 'hates' Sophia now. She becomes a 'mountain' for him, blocking his path, the more absent she is—as we shall hear from him later. She only ceases to be this

'dark mountain' for him when she suddenly steps into his house after *an absence of* five or seven years ~~and~~ and without a hullo begins raving about Sister Mahatma. That is, her actual presence dispels the thoughts that have been piling up in his mind. No wonder dictators clamp down on thoughts—they recognise their potency! What they do not recognise is that sending them into frightened silence renders them far, far more potent! Suppress religion <sup>and</sup> its child art, where our thoughts range most boldly, and YOU ARE DOOMED, said one of the speakers, but as he was unidentifiable, and had nothing to say apart from this, I cannot say who he was.

Thoughts are indeed the key to Sophia's ~~predicament~~ predicament. In the Hale household, back in the Harlem days, nothing like 'fear, hate and shame' seems to have passed between them. In fact, her reverent silence about the Hales seems to indicate a happy period, before violence black and white hit the New York streets. Sophia was earning good money at that time. Her relationships with working women were perhaps the deepest she had, though none of them are recorded here; Mabel returned from her bakery at dawn. It must have been a strange ménage, and I have a feeling that Jack felt close to Sophia as he had never felt close to a white before. It was a revelation for him, his first introduction, ~~too~~, to Europe, or rather the Mediterranean. He possibly was never aware of Sophia's affair with his wife. I am certain ~~this~~ <sup>a</sup> affair happened. It was what built up this nightmare pile of thoughts on Sophia, just described, that made her feel hatred of the husband, and his hatred of her in turn. At the same time I believe he went on thinking of her as a close friend. She invariably asked ~~her~~ <sup>a</sup> husband in such a situation, Do you mind if I love your wife?, and the husband's smiled, Of course not, sent an excited shiver down her spine, since she really did believe that he was condoning an affair, while in fact, for himself, he was

~~condoning~~

condoning what seemed to him the most precious friendship his wife had ever had. I think ~~was~~ Jack Hale saw the truth, and was forbearing about it. He became one of the few men she admires, for surviving his hatred of her. She felt enormous shame about coming between them—she hated disturbing simple people. Yet these were the ones she loved most. Jack Hale was one of those who 'turned himself into a shadow' for her. The ease with which the word 'shadow' enters the above narrative (see page ) argues for me the presence of a dark skin, in the memory. I wonder if another reason for her silence about the Hales, and for her transference of their situation to the Aaron apartment (where life was decidedly cooler) was not 'black shame' at what she had done to them, though of course with Mabel's boisterous help.

\* \* \* \*

Yet every moment was animated, poignantly vivid so that I remembered it afterwards, the shame or the pain, as strangely and ambiguously pleasant. How can I explain it? Nothin<sup>g</sup> was wasted now. Whereas before I had 'lost'

painful episodes, these new ones I regurgitated in the silence of my bedroom and tried to spell them out. In other words I was beginning to feel a destiny take hold of my life. Isn't that exactly a definition of purgatory, where the inmates enter voluntarily, burn themselves voluntarily, and derive a sweet delirious satisfaction from their awareness that nothing of the pain is wasted, but laid to the benefit of some mysterious construction?

It was like all my past life being burned up. I felt that nothing escaped ~~their~~ <sup>the of the Arons</sup> gaze and, feeling this, I examined myself more minutely than I had ever done before, to discover if the disapproval I assumed them to feel was justified. And yet I cannot remember an incident where they showed me direct disapproval. It was always in a glance, a slight turning away, a truncation of the talk. If I sang, I felt I sang too much and too loudly, if I didn't <sup>sing</sup> I felt I was being cold. I am so naturally effusive, I know as if from birth that the simplest gestures—a kiss or a warm hand on the shoulder—are the ones that count with people (even when they find it a bit cheap), that there was no danger of my old friends noticing the terrible operation going on inside me. Thus their familiar glances were like those concave mirrors that take in a whole scene; I could see my former self in their eyes, and discover how utterly distinct it was from the person I had become. Every night my heart welled up with indignation at the accusations these two new friends were glancing into me. I wasn't deceitful! I wasn't out for self-gain! I wasn't a savage! And after an hour of this, sweating, I would lie back and realise quite coolly that it was I myself who had done the accusing, that I was under the most acute self-examination of my life. My earnings had gone down. It was so easy to spend half the day in the semi-darkness of her bedroom talking to her, and half the night talking into the phone. The hours melted into each other. As my earnings went down I began to depend on <sup>these friends</sup> ~~them~~ more and more, to feel obliged to them! And this increased

my sense of belonging to a strict family whose investigations into my  
 humblest intentions I had to accept. He brought/<sup>me</sup>new business contacts.  
 That doubled the obligation, which doubled the dependence.

He used to murmur to himself sometimes a Yiddish lament which for months  
 I could not understand—The Shechina is in Goluth! In such a voice! One  
 day she translated it for me, in a whisper, as follows/ the Holy Spirit is  
 in Exile. I heard this word 'exile' so often. 'A people in exile, and a  
 God in exile'! It was natural, I suppose, that I should become an exile  
 with them, and like an exile call my life into account, and begin to wonder  
 on what values I could possibly base a life. It seemed to me now that hith-  
 erto life had simply been lived for me, the amalgam of various influences  
 I had never stopped to question. I began to piece everything together, espec-  
 ially my anguished and ecstatic youth. It was a pleasure to remember, ~~as~~ now,

~~with~~ an escape from my new theological austerities <sup>but my own past</sup> ~~and it all~~ seemed  
 impossible <sup>(to me) / - impossible / never</sup> now that I had ~~been~~ ~~yes~~ carried through a Venetian call  
 on the shoulders of gondoliers—given the run of a superb Bermuda mansion  
 by a Dutch millionaire for a whole year, to entertain as I liked, at his  
 expense—invited to an intimate dinner by the president of a South American  
 republic after he had glimpsed me from his car (surrounded by outriders!).  
 It was like seeing a mosaic, its dominant stones gold and aquamarine—  
 it played before my eyes, <sup>but</sup> so far away, so clear, so exclusively visual,  
 with all the accompanying sounds and smells ~~absent~~. And at the climax of  
 that young life the shrewd, lazy creature who set me up in business, <sup>Cassandra as</sup>  
 I call her. That woman, no longer so young, is at the top of my list when I am anywhere  
 near the North African seaboard. She settled in Tangiers when it was tax-  
 and ethics-free. She kept three or four servants, and water poured down  
 beads in the doorway against the heat, in the Turkish way. Her servants  
 waited for her to get drunk, just like Lady Hester Stanhope in her Syrian  
 garden, in order to steal her valuables. I did what I could to get her

out of it. Finally she finished the building of my island villa, and settled in there with me. Whenever I appeared in Tangiers she staged a heart attack, to keep me a week longer than schedule. Lying down with her now I remember her huge breasts as they were twenty or more years ago, always fresh from being handled by a young boy. At that time, it was a fishing village. She had a marvellous succession of sailor-boys—I mean marvellous because of their appearance, not the succession—it looked as if heaven had opened up and released a multitude of new angelic specimens—bright and blond or dark and wistful or <sup>e</sup> fierce and freckled—<sup>^</sup> and sometimes for two whole nights she would fail to come down to the seboard restaurant, having too much on her hands. I am smiling at all this, partly because it is all another life, partly with quiet astonishment (triumphant too) that she should ever have wanted me, with this file of fisher-boys and brothers of girl-servants to keep her senses fascinated night and day. But I was young and ravishing too—a black angel, perhaps a demon! That isn't quite the right description. I was compelling! A dark, laughing force! I sang, I played the guitar, I talked so cleverly in any language south of the Alps and the Pyrenees that I won a rapt audience at the snap of my fingers wherever I was. I was never witty. I talked at the heart of things. I made people feel I had touched a secret spring! But I could only do that if I had an objective; I mean if there was a 'promising' woman about. Oh I impressed, always. But given that 'promise' I fell into supernatural hands, I was spellbinding! I might address every-thing to her husband or boyfriends, ~~but~~ <sup>but</sup> still my message went home—all the boyfriends in the world were unable to save her from herself! Yet, yet it was always me who paid with flames, while she found only the pleasure—the kisses she had not thought possible before—the ecstasy of being loved by a congenial and not an opposite being! When I see photographs of myself

at that age, when I hear the little amateur recordings of me dinging in some fishermen's bar, I am astonished at the dynamic excitement it all conveys, the promise of something that has not been known since ancient times! People can hardly call me a thing of the future, given the kind of future most of us envisage, namely the end of the world, but they can and do call me ancient. They are used to polite exchanges between people, and the domination of strong personality, but when I come into the room!—it is a presence that defies all the accepted methods of human communication, that offers no news and asks for none, that simply—glowingly—throbbingly—is, bursting into the flat and ordinary corners of life so that people discover what the full human presence is, and how far short of this ancient phenomenon they themselves and their friends fall! Now this isn't self-flattery. It is simply what they tell me! Especially the women—all but the flattest of women! The men see it too, from an amused, sometimes frightened, sometimes hostile distance. Now ~~supposing~~ supposing this breathtaking presence, which harks back to the Etruscans, the Phoenicians, the Babylonians, supposing it gives you a kiss and closes its arms round you and—finds you where you most enjoy to be found, what boy, what file of boys, though released at that moment from the blinding bowels of heaven, could dispute it for place? Yes, the boys continue to be beautiful, she continues to dandle and dally with them, but the entire nervous system has received a shock which sends a dislocating shudder down into the sexual regions. The fisher-boys go on performing their pull-and-thrust operations but the supporting magic has gone! Everything is orientated towards me like the faces of the sunflowers to King Sun!

Yes, she told me about that woman. I think I've even seen her. How she had golden hair and lay in bed till noon. What she didn't tell me was that the fisher-boys continued to file to <sup>Cassandra's</sup> ~~her~~ bed, after her initiation into the Sophian ecstasies! She missed that bit out! She said the boys

ceased. Now she tells the truth. But this truth in no way undermines the power of those Sophian ecstasies, as she might have thought once. After that kiss, snatched so suddenly in the kitchen, not only my body changed but my husband's too. For she made me need him more than before! And I can well understand that the golden lady needed her fisher-boys more than before, having been so perfectly stimulated! My husband found to his satisfaction an increase of fervour on my side at a time when he thought such a thing physically impossible. Unknown to him, his attentions<sup>to me</sup> now simply completed an act already started in his absence! He no longer stimulated me! (Lovely contradictions!) That was not within his power any more. I was already stimulated! The magic had already begun working in my blood, and his performance was like a dénouement, neatly wrapping up all the earlier intimate fervours into a curtain drop. The more he excited me, the less his value to me became. And I call that the work of an exalted creature! We have often called her a witch since, but of course we remember her in our heart of hearts as a pre-eminently clean creature—her teeth, her nails, her breath, her fine skin. Yet when my husband calls her 'the marriage-breaker', I agree. It is no more than her destiny—I have seen it happen a dozen times, the marriage-breaking, but still something exalted is going on. What she ~~did~~ did to us, and I suppose it did break our marriage, in the tissues of the love, had something expansive about it. As a matter of fact I think I now hate her. She lied and did us a great deal of damage. She poured scorn on us in her endless talking sessions with her polyglot friends. Yet I have to repeat, against my will, that the element of exaltation was never lacking. I would like to destroy her, in the sense that I would be happier if she were not around, but I know I would be destroying an exalted force, and that I would have to pay for this even as Phineas was denied access to the holy regions by the angels after he had killed Zimri and Kosbi.

I wonder if, when she says that, she remembers that she knows about those angels through me alone, her husband? As a matter of fact, God allowed Phineas in after some debate. Phineas had simply been an executioner. Miracles had been worked so that Zimri and Kosbi should be found in flagrante dilicto. She knows, my own wife, that I do not hold her blameless! Perhaps I should have played Phineas with them both! Leah had eyes that were tender, and I believe the Scriptor could have added 'tender with sorrow'—the sorrow of a people defiant in captivity and weak in prosperity! This sorrow has always been in my eyes! Is that why she—the name Sophia is like the breath of death for me—called me patriarchal so often? It ~~wasn't~~ wasn't entirely my beard. My wife is right that I did not clearly know, in the gentile way of clarity, that she (my wife) came to <sup>me</sup> straight from the arms of the other one—hot from the other one—at the very threshold of satisfaction because of the other one! But my body—the body of my race—saw it. My sorrow saw it. And when I spread my skirt over her as Boaz did over Ruth on the threshing floor the joy was compounded with something that burned at the heart, that intensified even the joy because it was the opposite of joy! I could no longer <sup>to my wife</sup> say as Boaz did to Ruth when she lay at his side, that everyone knew she was a virtuous woman. Until then I had thought of her as a kind of Ruth who had come to her God relatively late, having lain with gentiles. And like Ruth she was now 'the fulfilled one', and as brave as Ruth because she had lived with her moth<sup>er</sup>/Naomi until I came along, and as blessed because she disregarded 'the young and the rich' for me, for her own people. She gave me fine children, late in my life! She quickly discovered that I am one to call myself a Jew first and a male second, a Jew first and a husband second. She knew the kind of sacrifice that meant, and perhaps her father, the ~~pure~~ man, prepared her for it. Now, when she came in to me again and again, after that third creature had ~~en~~ entered our lives, it was like a second marriage—a pleasure so un-

tamed that the marrow of my bones was all but sucked out and I felt a century old afterwards, aching and perplexed, as if I had done nothing of my own will but in a deliriously thrilling way been used. The ancient sorrow in me told<sup>me</sup> that I was enjoying something like Solomon's good fortune, that was no good fortune in the end. She was a harem for me—Solomon's dusky Phoenician, and his Egyptian princess, she was the lovely Ammonite who gave birth to his heir, she was a hundred des<sup>e</sup>ert-nights! She was hot day too, she was frankincense and a bu<sup>n</sup>dle of myrrh, a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi! Her breasts were two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies! And why should I not have taken this as my due? Why, even if she came into me straight from the hands of some other force, should I<sup>not</sup> engulf her again in the hot night of the race? Otherwise I would have lost the race, in all senses! I would have left her to the other's triumph! But in the end those burning nights counted on my behalf, against all the stimulation under the sun, even the King Sun, and my finalising act in some way rescued her from what had gone before. Does she remember Sophia—remember in the sense of reliving? Have I lost my place? I see she listens to me less than before. She used to have an alert way of looking up when I spoke, as if just my voice transmitted urgent news from the sacred land. But now there is something dry between us. Dry as old men's bones. She listens, she beguiles, she traps me delightfully with her neck that is like the tower of David, suddenly presented to me in a doorway, her lips a thread of scarlet, her temples a piece of pomegranate within her locks! Her slim smile draws me into the darkened room. But something austere in the state of Israel has gone—the king has laid up gold and silver, and taken many wives, and the great days of Saul are over, the king is now superio<sup>r</sup> to the people, and the Mount of Corruption has come into being, where the altars of Solomon stand, dedicated to the abominations, Ashtoreth, Chemosh and Milcom! Solomon has touched too many women of other faiths! I touched her too—the other one—through my

wife—breasts that not minutes before had been shaped by her hands—I mingled my sweat with hers, the one of the foreign faith, the idolater, the unclean one! And yet we survived it somehow. Only she doesn't listen to me like she used to. The tissues of the love were atrophied. Oh we discuss this quite freely between us. We ask each other, Did she succeed in breaking our marriage? is that life we had before stillborn between us now, even without our knowing? In certain moods we say, No, it is only because the children are grown up, the marriage no longer serves its earlier dynamic racial function. The marriage is now disturbingly like a love affair, it has the coolness with ardour of a love affair! The delights are snatched all the more hungrily because the protagonists are no longer intimate to each other. I am in a way (and in a way I could not bear to admit to anyone else) a broken man.

\* \* \* \*

The above is perhaps the least expected narrative in the book. Aaron is after all a self-sufficient man, unswerving in his faith, not on a quest like the Mother Superior, much less Sophia. His needs are simple, he and his books (I mean books like the Talmud) can cope with most of them. Compared with the others he is an unanguished creature. Yet here he is talking about 'free/discussions' with his wife about Sophia. And the marriage all but broken up. Just through her thoughts? That they talk about Sophia is obvious—everyone does anyway. That he felt some of his wife's desire towards Sophia is possible, but ~~this~~ <sup>this</sup> desire was not yet clear even to her in the New York days. How could they freely discuss what in any case belongs to dream and daydream? <sup>to</sup> and/awakening plans of the heart, never spoken? I can offer no answer here. The only possibility is that another similar matter is dividing them—not

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Sophia (though it could hardly be anyone like her!). Has Jack Hale's voice suddenly made an interpolation in the Aaron narrative? Possible, because, below, Sophia answers him indignantly. It sounds like an old lament. She goes on to say that she tried to borrow 'five grand' from him. This certainly wasn't Aaron. It is difficult to imagine it was Hale either, because in those days she was making money enough. Yet, further below, Aaron's wife defends her husband for not ~~lending~~ lending her what she wanted! It is in such details that I really have to give up, and ask the reader to indulge speculations of his own, which might be more subtle than mine, ~~and give him the answer right away.~~

\* \* \* \*

Why, did I break you! did I break your rod? I never touched you! Did you not need to break perhaps? Was I not simply the instrument of your being broken? Do you remember me coming to you, and sitting my kingly (yes, kingly!) throbbing presence down in a chair close to yours in your little library ((Aaron had none in New York)), and asking you to lend me five grand? And do you remember saying—this was the wealthiest period of your life, by far!—How can you ask such a thing? It's impossible, you said, you know that!—with a big wave of the hand which made me feel you were lying as NO MAN HAS EVER LIED TO WOMAN BEFORE, with a hot sincerity of expression of the kind that usually goes into love-making!

And, I, as his wife, can tell you categorically that he did not have the money. He had just been through an expensive operation. You yourself were at his bedside so often—you ought to know! You purred him back to health! You talked his work back into him, gave him the will ~~to live, knowing (from what~~

to live, knowing (from what I had told you) how deeply talmudic he has always been in his conviction that it is better not to have been born than to have been born. And then you and I went back to the apartment and we put on

loose clothes, and gradually I found myself hoping that he would not come out of hospital! Isn't that the work of a fiend? I only woke up to it later, when I saw the fear in his eyes, months later. And it really is true what he says, that the race saved me—it saved when I went into him the first time, and it saved me a second time when I saw that you were putting everything in peril, and that the race might be vanquished in him! I am quivering at this moment either with fear or indignation. No, he hadn't the money to give you. And as you told me much later, you were only putting him to the test by asking him for it. We only put such testing questions to friends when we hate them! Deny that you had come to hate him—but you overlooked that this meant hating me too in the end, because he and I are <sup>o</sup> flesh of flesh and blood of blood! Yes, I was Ruth! My name was 'the fulfilled one'!

You cat! You slim-lipped mewling female! Do you think you did nothing to me? I didn't see hatred in your eyes when you looked across at him sometimes—yes, at him? Do you think I didn't realise that you wanted to be titillated back to an interest in your marriage bed, which was getting stale? Do you think your hands never wandered? You touched my buttock! we had just come in from the theatre, the three of us, or was it ballet? I seem to remember Margot and Nureyev. We were strolling into the kitchen for a bite before going to bed, I leaned forward to get a cup and your hand was not simply touching my buttock but ~~was~~ laid coolly on it, for seconds on end, radiating its message that we were to change our lives henceforth, and that we were no longer to consider ourselves in his baggage-train! That was the first move made. And later that night I responded by planting a deeper kiss on you than you had ever thought possible. If you are trying to say that you preferred to go into him (or whatever your jargon is) in an unstimulated state you can say it in a hundred languages, Hebrew included, but no one is going to believe you! Where the bee sucks there sucked I! The place smarted and swelled and demanded many assuaging attentions!

I was the one who provided them so I ought to know! And many were the times you went into him delightfully tired, long past the point of stimulation, with a modicum of pleasure to give, but all the better for that, because you could bide your time and control matters, you little hedonist! If you are quivering with indignation, so am I!

If I may come in here again with a few facts as opposed to emotional theories, may I say that at this time he was far from being able to afford one grand let alone five, having a large family, shaky investments (he called me in for help, so I know), two apartments, not to say a villa in the Mediterranean (at least he had just bought the land and had paid the first deposit to the builders), and the upkeep of her, the ungrateful one! And he was by no means a healthy man (which made the villa an urgent necessity). But like so many of his race he bore his sorrows as if they were a yoke of pleasure, and undertook, as I have done in my life, every one's welfare except his own. I believe they had a pleasant household, the three of them, for a time. But Sophia set about dividing them. Precisely as she tried to set me against them both, at their own villa, by frowning me out of the house! Truth like murder will always out.

I called myself a broken man. But I am not a broken Jew. Whatever shame my wife now feels is due to the guardian of the covenant at her side. How could S. (I will not say her name) have destroyed that? She heard me praying in my room every morning, but did she have an inkling of the power of the prayer? Did she know that at times she was benefiting from the prayer, when it was dedicated to her health and good fortune? Did she know that she burned as in hell afterwards (I mean when we had split up) because the saving grace of my prayers had been stopped, and the flow of Godly attention to her turned away? She only needed to dip a little into rabbinical literature, into the Talmuds of Jerusalem and Babylon, to find out. But she never had the patience to read. She never had the substance to be alone. And without that you cannot be a Jew. Had she read Jesus

(I mean the worthier Jesus, son of Sirach, who wrote Ecclesiastes) she might have found something within her scope—practical advice on how to live—<sup>h</sup>ow to hold the tongue and how to be wary of women (imagine her trying that!), and how to eat, with the mind first and last on the Lord. It is better, Jesus son of Sirach said, to hear the rebuke of the wise than ~~the~~ the song of fools. But she preferred the song! She sang herself! The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth! I might add this; a certain Rabbi Hillel, a Pharisee, once said, In places where you find no men, be a man. Where I have found fools and singers/~~and~~ mirth-makers I have been a Jew! I have stood my ground! Where I have found renegade Jews I have been a Jew twice over, jubilantly so! And this is why S. came to me, just as my wife had come to me years before, because my first and last loyalty was outside the grasp of men. Yes, she found the touch of 'other loyalties' in my silences, my tall build and my powerful shoulders, in the shock of what she once described as my 'prophetic hair'. That was her way of discovering me. It engulfed her life, it changed her as nothing else had done among the fools and the singers! And that she undid all the strength accruing to her from this (in exchange for a tumble on someone else's marriage bed!) goes to show that she belonged among the singers after all. She was not chosen. For there are chosen. Only the chosen themselves know that to be the case. She proved that whatever else she was chosen for—and we are all chosen for something—it was not the way of the Lord.

I could answer this if I hadn't just been sick. My belly seems to have been torn out of my body and yet be there more than ever before, ~~million times over,~~ heavier than a mound of flesh ever weighed, writhing, bleeding and tears that drive channels of fire through my guts. This is my little monthly price for being a woman. They come more fiercely now, the blood flows

more profusely, as if to show that the woman is in the ascendancy. Indeed I feel a softer creature than ever before. I shrink from fights, even the verbal ones. I shrink now from answering this home-made prophet with his cracked record about the race, which is like a man bending down to look in the lavatory pan all the time to calculate his evacuations. Thank God I have met Indians—who when they talk about the Race mean the human creature! That, I believe, is all the answer I want to give him. Sick as I am, deep in the bog of unenlightened flesh, a groaning thing, I can give the answer that drives to the heart of the matter! Also I can never believe that scratching in the Old Testament for texts like a hen scratching for grubs constitutes any sort of godliness.

I see that while she has answered him (with lavatory talk) she hasn't answered me. But being sick she probably prefers the theological to the biological argument, just to get her mind off the body. I mean that her hatred of my husband was something like a biological force, it exuded from the cells of her lovely skin; above all, it was so deep, this hatred, that I could not tell whether her miraculously soft movements, when all my flesh seemed to melt under a new sun, were a caress for me or a caress of hatred for him. I am describing it badly because such an intensely biological feeling can hardly yield itself to the mind for description at all. What I mean is that each touch of her hand was simultaneously hot with hatred for him, but not only this, it was all the hotter for that, it had all the more of a forbidden quality. Naturally as fast as I rose to these touches, the more I succumbed to hatred of him; <sup>her</sup> ~~those~~ touches carried rebellion in them, thrilling and secretive! I am only able to say this because <sup>her</sup> ~~the~~ touches are in the past for me now, and I can think about them. My hatred of him ended when her touches ended, showing me its existence only by ceasing. They ended slowly, I mean those touches with their encapsulated hatred ceased to infect me only slowly, after we had separated. He must have seen it, in the hospital, where he was for

the second time. How can I describe her touch? Her lips were a delicious fruit wherever they were planted, on whichever part of the body. The sense of hot summer <sup>fruit</sup> just plucked from the tree summarises the whole of that New York period for me, turning it into a distinct and separate experience, not really <sup>realted</sup> related to the other love of my life, <sup>but</sup> ~~and~~ which I remember <sup>even</sup> /now with immediate biological responses beyond my control, <sup>yes,</sup> / even now! The shame he still sees in me is simply the shame of these fierce biological states. Far from being shame at what was once performed in his absence, it is shame at what is being performed now, in my body, and which his body is unable to compete with, let alone satisfy: this, nearly two years after she went her ways! That I hate her, that I spend hours talking with him about her (mostly as a witch) has nothing to do with this sudden biological infusement which takes <sup>me</sup> me like a hot blast of air.

I too remember, my darling girl with the hips and the legs of a boy! I remember how your subtle suggestion that an altogether new kind of earthly experience was possible between us worked, divine catalyst, on our fevered blood. I remember the curtains, closed, as if they were the complete expression in their folds and ripples and tough hessian surfaces of the variety of our inventions. I remember the merciless damp heat, the <sup>e</sup> <sup>^</sup>deceptive air-pockets now and then that made the curtains billow heavily for a moment, offering the hope of cool air, but only more hot air was the result: and this was its own delight too—that it made the sweat pour even more freely, until the vast bed was soaked to the mattress, I mean the air's lack of compromise or finesse was ours too, as the same hands searched the same tremulous routes, and the voice sang the same brute praises!

Enough!

A woman said to me once that I rendered all the men she had ever been with ghosts, and quicker than anyone has been rendered a ghost before.

She told me too that for the first time in her life she felt her own flesh and blood. Hitherto, she realised, she had been a walking observatory. As I turned her men to ghosts, I turned her from a ghost into a live creature! Her bosom sprang to life—this is only what she told me, she was flung back to the time of her first experiences, in puberty, when like all of us she had wanted to cry out, 'Mother!' I cannot say I know what is meant by my body, what destiny, perhaps what new species. I only know that when I lower myself—spread my skirts over them, as Aaron would say—a wild world, all astir, envelops them of which my actual physical appearance (though arresting enough) gave them not the tiniest hint. They gasp with surprise, yes! Stare up at me with mouths open, eyes aghast! This then <sup>is</sup> ~~was~~ sex! Do the husbands wonder ~~then~~ that something is planted in their women that grows like an orchid, rendering them more desirable but less accessible as time goes on? Call me fiend! I pursue my function! I think perhaps I am what men used to be once, before St Augustine and St Benedict put their literary and intellectual seal on the male organ. I think of the men of the Alexandrian deserts! After years in a cave a Thebaïd anchorite glimpsed a passing woman. He rushed out and told her that he could satisfy her enough for ten men if she gave him a trial. They <sup>went</sup> ~~rushed~~ to Alexandria and lived together for six months. I have something of that urgency in me, always. My thirst is that of the desert, the burning natron lakes, there lies my ~~fix~~ fire! The women recognise it in me—the hot glistening eyes in the slit of black cloth, accompanied by the unabashed Bedouin stare of the male! They are astonished at my skin, which seems to have inhabited a land of brooks and water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills, along the banks of the Nile! And my stomach lying in folds, a softly rippling Buddha belly! And so when I lie myself down there is something hotly racial in me (it doesn't matter which race, or which mixture, only that it is a Mediterranean <sup>least</sup> compound), and since even the ~~most~~ polyglot of us have races in our blood,

these leap to life in the women for the first time! The desert bursts into flame, and the phoenix rises! Therefore the heat of New York was particularly appropriate. While everyone was gasping and running in and out of air-conditioned cinemas and restaurants, and speeding out to little lawn-fronted places in Connecticut, we at best had to stroll down to the delicatessen to get a change of air, and no one could say we were paler than anyone else, though we rarely saw the light of the sky. And I know one thing, that if precisely those same circumstances prevailed again, and he was in a New York hospital again, and none of this verbal confusion about witches and the seed and all that garbage had taken place it would be the same today, she would feel today what she felt every day for two whole months.

What she says is true. I can imagine it—to my shame I do imagine it, though I bear her no love nor even the mildest respect. Yes, the fire of the desert! the merciless and yet consoling fire! Those shimmering distances, the uncaring silences, the ruffled dunes and the footsteps smoothed away in a moment, the fierce encounters in black tents! Sometimes, on a hot afternoon, I am alone here at the villa, wondering what new deserts the future will provide. Yes, my imagination <sup>was</sup> ~~has been~~ stirred, and once that happens there is no more rest from the yearnings and hopes and anguished hungers! Or perhaps there will be no more deserts! And so I look at him sadly sometimes. There cannot be two of her. I mean, not in one person's life. Oh, Sophia, how I love you!

Should I come to you then? I am clearing up some last-minute details in Cambridge, Mass., and could fly this evening, as I so often did before. And you could pick me up at the airport as you so often did before! And before taking the ferry from the mainland we could stop over one night at a hotel, as we so often did before! Oh what rapturous inventions will the gods devise now!

This is the way you put the offer to a hundred women in every part of

the globe. I can resist your voice over the phone, in letters! Your presence is what I cannot resist. And you are so fiendishly unpresent here on the verandah, so stridently not ~~||~~ there in your wicker chair where you delighted to make your crackling noises, calling attention to yourself and to that voluptuous globe of flesh you <sup>u</sup> sit down ~~with~~ <sup>on</sup>! And you ~~is~~ never will be <sup>here</sup> again, because none of us could overlook the wounds we have served each other with, the words we have dipped in vinegar and plunged into the other's side! Only if you were present now, about to lower yourself on to the divan in that narrow room with a window going on to this verandah, the thin curtains drawn against the sea-breezes that drift through the Moorish arches, against the jubilant yellow glare of the sun which must not see too much of us because that is the business of the gods! out of earshot to him but sufficiently close to him to make your hatred of him potent and dangerous, hot to the point of fainting ecstasy! only then, spangled, could I fail to resist you. Otherwise I almost prefer my desert-memories.

As a matter of fact, with <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ belly ~~being~~ torn by wild horses in every direction I would rather be in my own bed than lowering myself on to yours. I have my own destiny, after all. I am not just here to serve either you or the 'hundred' woman all over the globe. At this moment my belly is a foundry of unsuspected changes, ~~at the moment~~, perhaps divine ones, though I dare say your horror of anyone claiming access to the divine must reject this at once. Yes, I know your abject level of thinking! I know how the Talmud and the ritual baths and the Kera and the <sup>laying of</sup> tefillin go with a view of the human creature as plunged in lay darkness—

What?

Yes! Tutored by him you plunged me into darkness. You allow us light, divine light, only if we get a big success in life!

Good God!

Yes! I've seen you shake hands with the powerful, mixing awe with resentment (the resentment serving for later, when the powerful's trousers will be taken down in secret!). I know that this was one of your reasons for keeping me dependent on you, so that I should continue to writhe in what you suppose to be my natural darkness; the darkness of every creature, your own darkness! For God shines from outside in your world, not from within! He punished, helps, advises like a damned lawyer in the sky! And we are all supposed to be crawling in his nether region, is it his Arse or something——?

Oh! Fetch her down, Adoshem!

But you cannot seal me from the light! In my world we all have hope! This much I learned from your world—to understand Christ's mission for the first time! Yes, my children, you threw me into the arms of a Jew, but it was Christ! For the bounties of God, as Clement of Alexandria told us long before Christ had been degraded into a household name, are 'for the common benefits'! You can plunge the spear of words deep into my side, you may steep it in vinegar (an apt image of yours, did you realise its connection with that 'lesser' Jesus or did you never read how they nailed him to a cross?), but only flesh is maimed, and flesh is as grass, and he was never crucified, he was never nailed to a cross, for do you think it possible to crucify God? I know how brutally you take everything I am saying: if you cannot see God in each and every one of us, how could you see Him in Christ? That 'mixed-up kid' as you once called him, that 'little Jew calling himself the son of God' as your husband called him—you think he was enclosed in his body, his seed, his shit, in the darkness of his own evacuatory processes, as you see all of us? Let me recall you to your own Kera texts, where it is written YE ARE GODS! Won't you realise that Christ carried your God to the rest of the world, and left you only with the seed, the body,

the shithouse? I am crying my eyes out!

My dear child, while my wife may think like that I never could. Indeed you are right about the text, <sup>But</sup> / How could Christ give our God to the rest of the world, much less take Him away from us? By your own argument He cannot be given or taken away, bartered or crucified. You should learn to 'do and hear' not 'hear and do' as the Bible says. Oh Gottenu, Gottenu, you are close and near, a friend, a father, most here and everywhere! Comfort ye my people, comfort ye with me!

If I may come in again here—I intend to keep out of these arguments as much as possible, except for brief factual interpolations which who knows may be found useful—her husband and I had a long *tete-à-tete* on all this, man to man, unknown to either of the women, and I must say, talk <sup>aside</sup> ~~side~~, that the reality is very different from the verbal exaggerations we have so far heard.

May I suggest what you do with your silver-knobbed cane?

If I may go on, (I like to be brief and to the point), his wife was the victim of a lesbian infatuation. Yes, I know that plain talk hurts but it heals in the end. I mean too her infatuation, Sophia's, not the wife's. Now we ~~we~~ all at some time or another, at school or in the army, manifest what could be called a homosexual interest—

Good God! You too? Is that the reason for the silver-knobbed cane?

—or perhaps I ought to say that we have all been drawn into some kind of homosexual situation through the lack of proper outlets, hence the likelihood of its happening at school or in the army. Yes, she, the wife, may have shown a passing interest. But her memory exaggerates! As for Sophia, I believe she has a horror of being totally naked. She clings for dear life to the fig-leaf, so to speak. Island-birds have twittered this to me. Now Aaron maintains that this is because she is simply a woman trying to be a man, and is terrified that //one day she will be found out to

have only a woman's parts. It seems clear to me that there is some kind of psychological repression or even schizoid tendency going on here. The grotesqueness of such a <sup>a</sup>relationship must have struck the wife as soon as the first moments of her confusion passed. I asked him had he ever suggested an analyst to Sophia (we were speaking together in quiet, measured tones), for 'I believe we can all learn to live with our sicknesses if we allow ~~ed~~ a trained man to examine them'. I forget his answer. It was something like 'who wants to examine a witch'. Witch! Yes, I suppose there are people with some kind of occult power, exercising an hypnotic hold on less resolute people. It would account for the wife's interest in her (I won't put it higher than that). Aaron even said she had put a spell on him while he was in hospital back in the States! Of course this is his humour. But apparently he found it impossible to get out of bed weeks after the normal rest-period. Perhaps he felt her devilry only because he was in a weak state. Anyway, reason is once more in the saddle and he <sup>now</sup> can talk about it all quietly. It is simply no good rushing after the first feeling you get headlong, and upsetting everything round you. The ironical thing is that one only learns control towards the end of one's life. I remember the fits of rage (though only when I was provoked) that rocked my nervous system in the old days. I never in my life felt the impulse to hit anyone, but I think I have hit and thrown through the air more chairs, beds, desks and resounding objects of glass or china or ceramic than the inventory of three houses could account for. In the end balance prevailed. And I learned not to take other people's selfishness to heart. I remember when one of my sons was late for a meal— five minutes is as late as five hours!—I threw the ~~platter~~ platter at the centre of the table, full of lobster and boiled rice, to the floor, and then smashed a glass door as I slammed it closed on my way out. Now I have learned to live with lateness as with most other human failings.

You simply cannot imagine how difficult it was for my wife to get people to apologise to me, on an occasion like that one! My son almost had to be dragged along to my room, where I was waiting at my desk. And always some excuse! This time it was that he <sup>had</sup> found some woman who had fallen in the road, and had driven her to hospital, and—this being south of the Alps—they cross-examined <sup>a</sup> him for an hour before they would <sup>treat</sup> ~~admit~~ her wounds! As I said to him, Have they abolished telephones then? —You could easily have telephoned! But people won't think. However, as I say, I have learned to live with selfishness. And I believe a great instrument for the achievement of balance lies in the works of Sigmund Freud. I have heard him called 'the greatest of Jewish poets', and I must say I do find poetry in some of those serene analyses of the dark figure who stands behind us and casts his shadow on all our actions! Constantly our society (and the family is an embryo-society) is threatened by that figure lurking in the unconscious. History is a chronicle of our failure to master him. I have had wounds enough, but my conclusion is that dwelling on them only doubles the hurt. I try to forgive and forget the selfish actions that made me lose my temper. Perhaps those people who perpetuated those selfish actions are aware of what they did now, for they too may have achieved their balance. I cannot say that this is true of my son, or of any of my sons, who are hooked not on reason but on other products. But at the end of everything lies death, we slip back into forgetfulness, so why cannot we ~~we~~ agree with each other for the short term of our existence? Why not make life pleasant for each other? I have heard such fierce arguments in my life, you would think art and religious beliefs and such like were the basis of everything we do instead of the comfortable reflections that follow a well-fed stomach! First let us get harmony between us, and the security, first the question of our bread and butter and the roof over our head, and the newspaper that will bring

news of the outside world (I regard these 'chronicles of present time' as indispensable to balance), then we can get down to discussing these other rarified subjects, and so long as we still have breath for them.

<sup>Also</sup>  
~~And then~~ we have to face the unpalatable fact that our discussions will alter nothing! The world has an annoying way of repeating its patterns, though I agree that a good discussion does clear the air, sharpens our wits and perhaps brings us nearer an understanding of our own weaknesses and potentialities. Also I believe that some kind of religion is necessary to hold society together. It provides a moral code, and protects a man against the insidious feeling that he does not have to account for his actions. Having said that much, I am obliged to add that I am as confused about this subject as everyone else is. I believe the world must have been created, and that therefore some sort of guidance is taking place. I don't believe we go to heaven or hell. I don't believe that Christ was the son of God, although he was certainly a very good man (indeed, a great social reformer, in his way). The trouble starts when people claim to know. I mean when they start saying things that cannot possibly be <sup>verified.</sup> ~~verified~~. Calling Christ the son of God is a good example. And immortality: well, it is pleasant to think that we do not in fact die, but it cannot be demonstrated as easily as the fact that we do die! Who ~~is~~ there to tell us what lies on the other side of the terrible dividing line? I think perhaps I know why people spend so much time in ardent discussion about imponderables. It is fear. They don't want to face up to the dismally obvious truths. As that greatest of Jewish poets said, if we fear death above everything else, is it not natural that we should erect a God above everything else, even death? Fear and hope are the keys to our dreams!

<sup>But</sup>  
/ Behind these dreams lies the real world, with satisfying reliability. We may find it ordinary and dull, but we slip back into it with a sigh of

relief after our incursions into the never-never land of exaggeration, where the cerebral mists prevail which are the outcome of sickness! This is why I advised an analyst in her case. I see a severe—a dislocating—departure from reality in her case, into the dreamworld of erotic fantasy, the megalomania of sexual domination. For those who are not <sup>artists</sup> artists, and she is not one, it is better to root the sickness out, and leave the exaggerations to people who feel obliged to spend their lives writing or painting or composing the dreams that rise from their hopes and fears! I repeat, there are known facts. We know where the liver is situated, we know the function of the kidneys, we know the paths the blood takes. Have you seen two doctors pondering on the position of the liver? There is no discussion on these things! And one day we <sup>be</sup> may <sup>be</sup> able to extend this certain knowledge into every field including that of dreams, of art, of all the secret hopes and fears that predestine (usually for the worse) our actions. The staggering journeys into space that are at present being undertaken offer hope that this will be so, not in our lifetimes perhaps, but for future generations. Yes, we shall reach a time when we need not go to the artist or the priest for authentic descriptions of the dream areas, but have text-books at our disposal, and experts, professionally qualified men whose word we can doubt as little AS WE CAN THAT OF A TOP DOCTOR. To whom does Sophia run when her nerves are worn down to the point where they cannot support her organism any longer—to the doctor! Why did not she not do it before? and begin where the trouble started, in her brain? Life, happily, is in the end very simple!

I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream. Methought <sup>methought I had -</sup> it was ~~was~~ a ton of New York Herald Tribunes on my head!

~~A loving pupil called Sophy was called his master's laboratory. The master, being an Alexandrian, saw with Greek and Jewish and Egyptian~~

((I cannot say who is speaking here. The wit is quoting from Bottom's speech in Midsummer Night's Dream, where he wakes from having worn the ass's head. For my money, it is Josh, the Renegade's 'hooked' son, and he is having a dab at his father, whose reading of New York Herald Tribunes, foreign edition, is well nigh religious.))

A loving pupil called Porphyry once collected his master's lectures. The master, being an Alexandrian, saw with Greek and Jewish and Edgyptian eyes. He said, If the eye that tries to see be dimmed by vice, impurity or weakness, then it sees nothing even when someone else points to what lies plainly before it. And the ecstasy of the angels could play before you, my darling, and you would see no more than the glitter of your silver-knobbed cane! But then that is the level of your ecstasy. The ~~transmutation~~ transmutation to direct knowledge is a matter of infinitely slow growth, through many births, disregarding space <sup>and</sup> ~~or~~ time <sup>and</sup> ~~or~~ generation, which are the convenient fictions required most desperately by people like you, and in varying degrees by everyone.

Who spoke?

Where is she?

Which one do you mean?

And her husband? How have I wandered among these thoughts?

Everything seems darkness. I cannot hear or see the others. There seems only one breathing creature, of which we are all the impulses. All difference, which belongs only to the body, dies away and leaves one. I feel frightened! There is no one else alive—because we are all alive but only as ONE! Oh Jnani horror! I want to awake back to the world. Let me have their voices again, though they are my enemies, that is enemies of my flesh (as I am too!) Oh how I understand the gentleman with the silver-knobbed cane—his need for reason, for wife and comforts! I need the voices to be able to go on with life!

One or two may plunge into that silence, the darkness—the blinding light!—of ONE CREATURE, but not me. I see how far I too have chosen the earth—am a poor devil—then how did those thoughts, those lines from Plotinus, come to my mind?

((I am uncertain who ~~was~~<sup>is</sup> speaking here. It could be Sophia. But the word 'Jnani' indicates familiarity with Indian thought, which rules her out, as it rules out Aaron, his wife, and certainly the Renegade. On the other hand, I had the impression that it was Aaron's wife who talked about Plotinus. But we should not be surprised if one person talks the thoughts belonging to another. My guess is Sister Mahatma. If my hunch is correct, it is a fascinating revelation indeed.))

I think it was Aaron's wife. It was a voice disguised by feeling (we are all disguised by feeling!). You could hardly say man or woman.

I think it was the wife of the banking gentleman, the one with the silver-knobbed cane.

But she never speaks.

Let us have our voices back—it makes me feel at home! Better than this darkness! The damp New York heat—the fevered fingers—the sound of her body, the suck of the sweat, she spangled—give me back my sins—better than unrelated silence, unconjugal stillness!

Who spoke?

Still the silence.

Still the surrounding darkness.

I the strange one, alone, as it will be at the end of time, remember the gospel according to the Egyptians, when Salome asked the Lord how long death would prevail and when His wisdom would become known, and He said, When ye have put off the garment of shame, when the two become one, and the male with female, there being neither male nor female.

((This is definitely Sophia. She will now take up her doctrine of gender again, using Valentinus as her launching pad. And if my guess is right a God-Almighty row will break out.))

And I remember the Gnostic Valentinus, another Egyptian, his explaining how the vast mistake of the creation came about; long before the creation, God (NOT the creator) sent out from Himself manifestations in pairs—male and female. Each pair was inferior in quality to the previous one. Sophia, the female of the last and thirtieth pair, feeling the loss of her separation from God most poignantly, began to love Him too passionately and was flung from the divine harmony into matter, and the universe was created out of her agony. She gave birth to a son, the creator, who operates this valley of sorrows. And she was rescued by Christ, who came straight from God in order to perform his tender services of light.

I think again and again of that Sophia as my essential self, flung deeper and deeper into matter, whirling steadily towards the light, and finding Christ.

May I address something to you—whoever you are in the darkness and silence? a proposition, to turn something over in your mind and reach an unavoidable solution? In a cattle-shed, which are the animals for

slaughter? Which are those due for castration, fattening? The males. Which are those kept for milk and progeneration? Which are those for whom, even in hundreds, one male will serve? The females. Looking over a pigsty, which of the creatures are due to be smoked, cured, minced? Not surely the sows with their multiple nipples gorged on by the tail-wagging newly born! In war, who in their millions are poured on to the screaming battle fronts, to be launched against the scathing rod of fire? who design, master, operate the rods of fire big and small that constitute this white-hot battle front—its guns, rifles, mortars, long-snouted howitzers? The males! <sup>But</sup> ~~And~~ who are those who crouch from the spouting rods of destruction (notice how the rod-form dominates all the <sup>devices</sup> ~~instruments~~ <sup>war</sup> ~~of destruction~~!), who hide their young under their arms, who go among the military rest-camps with their comforts, to lick the wounds and offer themselves up to assuage the rod of soft flesh that now pants for its delights after the fearful steel arguments of the night? Not, surely, the males.

I am told there are many more females than males on the earth, and I ask myself is not this because they have been preserved, they are the very souls of preservation. That is my proposition. You may ask why I come down on the side of the females, having argued that male and female are to become one. You might as well ask why I am excited by her fertile curves when I have those curves myself? Why not admire the rod, of which I have more than a hint myself? Why does the female in me not enjoy the male? I will not have the fool's answer, that I belong to Sappho. I hate the company of these people with their dark unwholesome eyes! But perhaps I do appreciate the male—through the females! I mean I never associate with a lone woman, never the spinster-type. She is always married, or has been! She is having, or has had, the rod! Now I see the rod through her. I relish it through her. I enjoy the feel of the male hand on her body, I am electrified by its recent presence! Even while I am discrediting the male I am enjoying the way he has formed her

flesh. Remember—her flesh! I am aware that she will return to him, and I would not want it any other way. Thus I discredit the very force I am using. There is something perhaps mystical about that. <sup>e</sup> Several times I have even begged a woman to stay with her husband so that a certain biological part of her (which admittedly I do not understand) may be satisfied sufficiently to ensure her concentration on her strange adventure with me! There! Touché! In that way, though I have never calculated anything in my life, she will never more come to me for what legitimately belongs to the poor ejaculating rod. At first she comes to me for what seems sex, and then stumbles on the divine! Not that she touches the divine in me (I am beyond flattery on this point): she finds the purring animal, the night of primordial desire, as never before, <sup>and through that first acknowledgement of the magic roots of life come, ~~the~~ <sup>for her,</sup> suggestions of the divine.</sup> She stumbles on that Sophia of Valentinus, mother of the creator, in her love and agony! Sometimes—it happened only once—she advances beyond me in understanding of the divine, and tries to take me with her. But I am tied to matter! Horrible word 'matter', stillborn child of Newtonian sterility, dead to the magic, the electric genius of the created world with its endless intimations of perfection! I remain as a reminder of God's material manifestation. Reaching the divine beyond life we see that everything is divine in life! This is why I claim that my discrediting of the male has something mystical in it, while I lack totally the mystical faculty in myself. I am shifting the way for the divine ecstasy by seeing his rod as its chief enemy. I see a woman crowned at the head of creation! She is commanding all the sorrows and the festivals! She is bathed in darkness and in light! Her laughter is heard across the sky, she has the universe in her womb and her names abound!

Another thought—and let me say it while the others are away. It is that sex is towards death. Only in appearance is it towards life.

This is seen in <sup>both</sup> young and old. In youth it debilitates gradually the spiritual faculty, in age it ruins. Its attendants are anger and inner strife. The more an epoch concentrates on the sex part, the greater are its wars. Christian doctrine was unable, like <sup>Islam,</sup> ~~most other religions~~ to contain the sex part. It simply tried to turn a blind eye. It offered no method. In marriage, during the fertile middle period between youth and ~~age~~ age, the sex part becomes a powerful biological force in the grip of the reproductive process, ~~engulfing~~ <sup>in that middle period,</sup> engulfing the entire system. <sup>Whether or</sup> not a child is allowed to be the ~~result~~ <sup>result</sup>, the organs achieve a union as devoid of individuality as ~~the~~ human flesh ever achieves. Those incapable of familiarity never experience it, and cannot imagine its existence. It occurs between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five. I have only been told all this. You may laugh at it. I have no means of verifying it. But I believe that truth is a matter of direct apprehension, the flash of recognition, and I must say that in a flash this was revealed to me. ~~on the truth, while the other person (male or female I cannot remember, but a certain kind analytical quality it has demonstrated, I suppose, the male) was speaking.~~ Before and after the ages of twenty-five to forty-five the organs realise only with difficulty this fiercely complete biological union. The fact that I am saying this without knowledge is also proof (for me) that someone is guiding me, and that I am an incarnation. If we but knew it, we all are.

The death-suggestion of sex is especially graphic in youth. The wildly tugging child-couple look out of their closed dome of sex in despair while the frequent emissions rob the <sup>is</sup> young body of <sup>ies</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>their</sup> primal energies of will and imagination, I would say also <sup>their</sup> primal ecstasy. That infinite look of the eyes is eclipsed. And if in later life that look returns it is because the violence of the reproductive period is over, and the sex-slimes begins to be saved for the ecstasies again! Therefore is not sex towards

death?

And are you not round the bend? Sex releases, purifies, halts the teeming self-involved brain, and by halting for a few moments even the metabolism renews the blood! Have you seen a woman-starved youth? Do you realise to what fruitless yearning he is condemned? and the fumbling shyness with which he responds to the female when he has managed, against all odds (for lonely yearning hardly makes us attractive), to find one? Do you know (but how could you?) that after being vouchsafed these pleasures of which I have never tired I feel light and free, disburdened of anger, of war, of all the things you lay at sex's door?

\* \* \* \*

This was undoubtedly the Renegade. For him sex is a normal and continuous activity which 'with luck' will continue into old age. His great enemy is 'repression', the Freudian condition that is opposite to sexual self-expression and which breeds unhealthy mental patterns. Naturally he finds sexual satisfaction better than sexual starvation. He perhaps does not see Sophia's point, that ~~the~~ sexual desire has to be mastered for ends that go far beyond the matter of satisfaction or starvation. <sup>He and Sophia</sup> ~~They~~ differ in the question of whether a more or less constant state of sexual desire, going well into old age, is natural <sup>or desirable.</sup>

But I may have got a false scent here. The above statement could have been made by a large number of people, including Aaron. The monk never existed in Judah, after all. The Jewish family is already a religious unit. Aaron's religious austerities do not include the curbing of the sex impulse. But it remains that the curbing of the sex impulse has been a discipline, perhaps the key discipline, of all mystical effort from east to west. The Renegade would regard this

as pre-Freud and therefore invalidated by 'later knowledge' or something of that sort. He subscribes to the <sup>western</sup> idea of progress, not to the eastern idea of a gradual loss of radiance and power from a perfect beginning, a loss that takes many hundreds of thousands of years. No, for him religion has <sup>s</sup> naturally withered away, as 'unverified knowledge', before present-day certainties of science, our epoch of 'self-liberation'.

\* \* \* \*

Yes, husbands steam with anger against me. They watch their wives' need for them decline. And, on the wives' side, an incidental and selective eroticism takes the place of tenderness. Their (the men's) desires increase with this—precisely as their resentment of becoming a slave to their wives' erotic whim increases too! Subtly, without calculation, I have eclipsed the grand reproductive passion and reduced ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> ~~the matter~~ to its proper thrust-and-pull mechanics. And in this operation I produce, out of a couple, two creatures closer to a common sex than either ~~were~~ <sup>was</sup> before. This is why my women are mostly in their middle age (always have been), when the illusion of childbirth has ~~ceased~~ ceased. Renounce all and you shall inherit all was the way Thomas à Kempis put it.

The rod is the instrument of flesh-reproduction, flesh-enslavement and flesh-destruction. ((Sister Mahatma? It could, naturally, be Sophia. 'Flesh-destruction' here could mean two things—the anger over-sexuality promotes (Sophia's argument), or the destruction of the flesh in the form of ecstasy, achieved by sexual self-mastery. The second would be much more Sister Mahatma's field.))

Big words for a little pleasant dallying! ((The Renegade, certainly.))

Not always pleasant in its aftermath, or even in the dallying.  
It is war, my dear! But what warrior fails to look back with wonder on  
the field of destruction? Who hasn't found ecstasies in battle?  
((Again possibly Sister Mahatma.))

I have brought husbands to an extremity of despair, as they watch their wives begin to lead lives of their own and consult me on all points of work and honour (yes, a feminine honour is discovered!), and to breathe secrets into my ear which no husband may hear, even the husbands of others. I have seen the most tender males crack into frantic martial dances under the strain of losing an ally in the house. My attack is at first open and direct, even frankly brutal, I mean after the first introductions. I glare at him, appear to take everything he says even on astronomy and the date of the introduction of Arabic numerals into Christian calculation as an innuendo against me. As a matter of fact, I have stated that badly. I really do feel everything he says as a scorching innuendo, I really do burn with it for days afterwards! Hearing his voice at the lunch table (yes, I invited him myself) I have to retire to bed to let the fire rage itself to ashes in my solar plexus! For all these things pass through my body! I have said time and again, haven't I, that I am an earth incarnation? You, whoever you are, must not think that I operate mentally in my conquests. No, I am torn and engulfed, quite as much as the husband! After all I am turning her into a traitress, myself into a destroyer and him into a——but what the devil do I care what happens to him? I see myself drawn down into the <sup>gory</sup> ~~spicy~~ arena every time——the woman surprised at herself, too much in my hands to feel any responsibility towards ~~the~~ <sup>her</sup> man, watching herself with pain as she performs Lady Macbeth without having Macbeth for a husband, or indeed any pretext at all for murder! But there is definitely murder in the house! And I have brought it <sup>in</sup>! When I say that I turn her into a traitress, myself into a destroyer, I ought I say 'myself into a murderess'! On one occasion I held a dinner party for men only, or rather with only one woman present apart from myself. I included her husband among the guests. She had just begun her night-wanderings as Lady Macbeth! I invited local

hunters, it was here on this island, I mean those undistinguished, usually small, rough-<sup>h</sup>spinned men who smell of sweat and shoot little birds, <sup>and</sup> sometimes (though too infrequently) each other. Yes, you feel the venom mounting in my blood, eh? I had a great wooden screen door set out as a table on trellis legs, and we ate a banquet of tiny birds, dozens of them cooked on spits. Washed down the gullet with a rough red wine! Only one woman, and her tender husband as the 'outsiders', so to speak: he <sup>a</sup>willowy, goose-<sup>f</sup>fleshed, nodding and simpering cipher! And 'his' woman serene, robust, settled in her place at table like a queen (incidentally just crowned, only a few days before, by myself, a fact of which the cipher, grinning in his marital compâcency, did not know!). And—a lovely touch—I was well aware that one of the hunters, a particularly quiet man usually, with a stutter, but now garrulous under my influence, was in love with her! Well, 'in love': he wanted to spread his sweaty skirts over her a little, that's all! And my magnetic influence on him was such that for the space of that burning evening he lost his stutter and said again and again, his glass raised, that a certain woman in the room (there was only one!) deserved all he possessed or ever wished to own! ~~That~~ he had lost his head, irrevocably! ~~That~~ he could sing her praises until first cock-crow! And every time he spoke I made a mock how-dare-you movement towards him, my faun-frown black, and my lips curved in a faun-smile! I even raised a chair over his head in burlesque manner, while in burlesque manner he ducked, layghing. And gradually—but what ~~an~~age it took!—the gloating cipher of a husband understood, and his face began falling into his clown's boots, and all the triumph of his wretched shunting rod was in an instant wiped out! Was that shunting object as large as she claimed? At this moment it couldn't have been cooked for anybody's dinner, it would have disintegrated in the water! Let me pause, to

allow the fire to rage to cinders inside me. How long, my child-creator, how long?

Yes, I have tortured a man with all my heart, and then borne the torture in my own body! Once, when the ~~the~~ fight had died down, and my triumph was as complete as it ~~is~~ ever is with me, I saw <sup>the</sup> a husband as an incarnation, and realised—almost blaming the woman the dust of whose feet I took every day) that I had been dipping a spear in vinegar and planting it into his side with something like gaiety! Whom they wish to destroy they first make blind!—and how many times, then, have I been destroyed! And does that Jew say I don't suffer, not like Catherine whirl on the wheel? I am doing so even now! ~~His tears have produced an ordered universe, a rational universe but it isn't because each one all of his own will with others' suffering, faint with their dreams~~ Yes, I saw him bathed in light, almost I felt Christ, as if he had been there in this man's flesh on a second mission, while she was enjoying the fruits of all I had been doing to him! In extenuation, really I ought to add this—the women, even if they looked at me shocked for something said or done to their husbands, even as they said, But why do you behave like that, he hasn't done you any harm? closed their arms round me and smiled not forgiveness, no, for forgiveness would have shown the crime, but grateful condonement! It must be remembered that many women, especially the gifted, seek a deep ~~re~~venge on their fathers which they enact on their husbands!

When the Jews went to live under the Ptolemies in Alexandria their Jehovah was admired. But He was too inaccessible, and rather bad-tempered. This is why Christ, the author of our lives, came to mediate for Him. ((The Mother Superior?))

Who is saying this for me? ((Sophia?))

My stomach—what raptures and sorrows I am giving birth to! ((Definitely Sophia)).

Well, let me speak first. I dislike to see anyone suffer and therefore I must return to my original suggestion of an analyst. If this is where the 'supreme Jew' has landed us, after centuries of war and recently the cruellest racial decimation of all time in his name, then I think I prefer to think of history as without him. I realise that, despite my having been baptised a gentile (but how does one eliminate the Jew—with a little water?), I realise that I know nothing whatsoever about Christ, and indeed never gave him a thought. Again I say—get thee to an analyst, go!

At <sup>least recognises</sup> he ~~realises~~ that no water, even all the created oceans, will unmake the Jew. I wonder is he even circumcised, the <sup>saucy</sup> ~~racist~~ renegade? In this much I agree with him, that her outcries and her inner burnings hardly recommend her Christ, and as for Christ being the author of our lives—! Witches make an outcry! Witches burn! Witches are moved to do things they cannot understand and which they later may regret, witches are blinded, words are put in their mouths, they dance to the devil's tune! And they are a feature of Christianity! And Joshua said to the people, You cannot serve the Lord, for he is an holy God, he is a jealous God, he will not forgive your transgressions or your <sup>signs</sup>!

You are mocking the women in me, you stiff-necked pocket-Aaron! Your religion never had an Isis, a Mary, a Mother Kali, a Siva, a Lukshmi! Your sky was always so bleakly male! And this is why the Supreme Jew <sup>a</sup> as I call him stretched out his hand to your women, and was in return adored by them, because for your race they were naturally inferior to men—

It was always well-known Jewish doctrine—'His home, meaning his wife'!

Having a daughter was regarded as unfortunate!

So it is in Christian Italy today!

And as for Jewish doctrine, this also says 'A voice in woman is an immodesty'! Far from submitting to this, Christ spoke to the woman at the well, he spoke to whores, he reasoned with them, he heard the obscenity of their voices with joy! And I do believe that both you and your wife, you pot-bellied old cunt, see no more in my outcries and burnings than a little disturbance of your order, the order—the precious order that makes you the lispng servants of science! I remember your grotesque little homilies on the first moon-shots! How we were all going to be bigger and better people once we had hopped on to other planets! And how the earth was too small for us—imagine what largesse of heart that argues! What a small thought, what a mean insensitivity to these marvels I see all around me each in depth, in the depth of their magic, and not like you as an inventory, a numerical accumulation of faded objects! The earth is small for those who are small, the earth is dead for those who are dead! And all the flights across God's universe will not enlarge them, or revive them! It will make them smaller, deader! Yes, how you want to order the sky, you who would show less forbearance, less reason, less impartiality than myself (even myself), under dire attack. Look at your forbearance towards me! Look at the 'reason'! Listen to the word that fly around—witch, goy, she-devil! Touch you anywhere on the raw and out flies reason by the window!

Anyone who wishes for the highest must avoid all company good or bad.

Who said that? (*Well, almost anyone except Sophia: the Renegade?*)

~~me~~, Whoever said it, you have never managed to avoid company for a minute of your life!

Ah, she is back again—that slim voice! Was she asleep? Did she die? How burningly delicious your little wounding shaft feels as it

enters my side—yes, I remember you saying it in the Harlem apartment before we ever thought of my closing my arms round you, or of your breaking open my Muladhara, the lotus of my sex, and drawing tears!—I remember you saying to me, On the rare occasions when you are with just one or two people, sitting quietly, even then you are writing letters!

((This was of course Sophia. Again an Indian term, 'Muladhara'. So perhaps I am wrong about the earlier unknown voice which also used an Indian term (page 64). It is easy to underestimate the reading Sophia, because of her demonstrative physical life. She will suddenly devour a book cover to cover in the twinkling of an eye, with no one noticing.))

2.

THE SOPHIAN MAP OF LOVE

These warring thoughts intensify with the island's heat (it is August). On the mainland there is an outbreak of cholera, but no one seems to think it possible that this spotless island could be infected, with its sewage system from two centuries ago, and its coast-line coated with the dumpings of vast oil tankers that pass far out <sup>to</sup> ~~at~~ sea day and night. War in the atmosphere, war in the sea, war in the mind! I cannot help thinking that Sophia is right and we are preparing a new biological specimen, and that this daily war we wage on the world round us (which means also each other) is, like the war of our minds, simply the tormented gurgitation of old forms, obsolete now, and the germination of new ones—not even a new race perhaps, not even biological, but a new life requiring no physical realisation, no space-time formula at all! We have left the invisible to look after itself for so many centuries that it has exacted its own revenge, and made life on the earth impossible. No wonder these 'last voices', as we might call them, sound tormented, at war with themselves no less than with each other. The most tranquil is perhaps that of Mr Renegade; ~~in his way, because~~ he simply sees, through his newspapers, that 'the world is going from bad to worse', and the whole defiantly mystical problem that made it so has never once occurred to him, let alone tormented him.

Aaron is taken ill. Now his fevers are entirely due to the imaginary situation his wife has found herself in! to the thoughts he has been infected by! to the imaginative <sup>S</sup> constructions he has built on the basis of his wife's! Here, then, is a physical end-product; no event, no affair, no overt love, not even an implied or suggested love, between his wife and Sophia, but it is 'as if' it had all happened, and his body reacts with violence against the violence of his own thoughts, precisely as the cholera derived from the violence of river- and sea-pollution. His body now requires rest, to drag the mind down from its intense state so that infected thoughts may become properly absorbed as 'knowledge', in the same way as his antibodies might destroy the cholera. Thus his destiny moves that much closer to its talmudic end of detachment.

'He is ill again', Aaron's wife says below. It seems that she is actually writing one of her little notes to the Sophia villa (later she tears it up).

\* \* \* \*

He is ill again.

What? Are you writing a letter to me, after so long?

Yes. He fell into a long sleep, in the bedroom leading on to the verandah (the large room, not the narrow place where you and I had our afternoons, with him not ten yards away, beyond the curtains), and as his breathing was even I was reluctant to wake him. He developed a fever. The hospital has him under observation.

Oh my slim, insulting one!

There are flies everywhere but I managed to get him into a private

room and am bribing the Mother Superior <sup>with</sup> ~~by~~ promises of a possible endowment in our wills and so on. There are masses of fruit on his bedside table. You know the hospital inside? Its gardens almost give on to those of the Renegade, the shattering white building you and I saw together from the ferry-boat, that first day, gleaming like a fortress, with the sleepy convent tucked behind it. I believe they're Franciscans. But they could equally be Dominicans. If they didn't talk so much I might even take them <sup>for</sup> Trappists.

Be careful—vulgarity! But I find myself laughing too! Those laughs we used to have, with the sweat pouring down our sides in Harlem? They seemed an offence to such a terrible epoch, a pulling of the dark gods' beards!

The fever is down and his tired little eyes are beginning to follow the best of the nuns round the room, so I know he is on the mend. Of course he is horrified to be in the hands of 'mumbo-jumbo practitioners' as he calls them. But he softens under their Marian smiles. They know how to give his pillow that little pat which imparts peace. He told me today that the 'brides of Christ' are a filthy lot on the whole—unsteril-

used instruments and bedpans everywhere. The flies are terrible as I say but the insecticide they use is worse, they never seem to have heard the word carcinogen. He reads a great deal and his wonderful hair falls to his shoulders as always. He tries to pray but they always find an excuse to interrupt him, and he is doing it in silence now. These are in any case, he says, the best prayers. The doctors have picked up the word virus and use it to explain everything, the Latin for 'poison'! Still, it replaces 'germ', which sounds old-fashioned. As he recovers, his eye begins to linger on me with a more definite look. Why does he recover so quickly ~~at home~~ in hospital and not at home?—

I am laughing again!

The same treatment is available in both places! I can't avoid the impression that <sup>he</sup> feels safer in hospital—

Splitting my sides!

I don't mean because doctors and emergency treatment are available there but because he is not at my mercy there! Yes! Yet at home I fly round him, I bring him what he needs faster than a dozen nursing sisters. With better care for hygiene too. He knows all this. His third hospitalisation in how many years? Is it altogether accidental?

Lovely irony!

I think the lingering look he gives <sup>me</sup> isn't entirely awakening desire. Yet it is too. There is suspicion and mistrust. Even a glint of fear. Do you know what he fears? That I might not help him on to the road. And even I share the fantastic idea! It makes me do more and more for him, squeezing oranges, rushing to the pharmacy for what the hospital is too mean to give him, washing and sterilising. In me too desire has become mixed—with this other thing. It has given the desire—on both sides—a sharper edge.

It seems to me that he ought to cast off the garment of shame finally.

After all he can't go on doing it for ever. No wonder he gets fevers.

You tell me that—whose hands have almost grown to the shape of the parts you have touched!

I'm two or three decades younger!

And increasingly active!

Why, does that thrill you slightly—?

No, I never want to see you again, and I already regret this letter I have written you, so much that I shall tear it up! Yet I hear you in the silence, your husky voice, complaining, beguiling, reminding—and your hands, how I remember them, the electric charge that cracks from them!

You call it electricity. I call it something deeper without a name.

Once the kundalini has been awoken, the climax ceases to satisfy, though desire may for a time increase.

((Again the Indian term, meaning the coiled serpent of sex that can be stamped into the flame, and the flame rises up the spine to become ecstasy, so that the world is at last encapsulated in the perceiver. Whose voice this is I cannot tell. At this stage I feel I cannot rule out the possibility of intruding voices from hundreds, even hundreds of thousands of years ago!))

Sometimes I would like to know what has happened to the world, and take my silver-knobbed cane like a sceptre and call for order! A general discussion as to what we can all do about it before it is too late, I mean before The Bomb drops, I mean a political discussion to iron out all our differences, they are surely not too great—this is what we need! I had an interesting man to dinner, an annoying sniff and globules of sweat on his upper lip but I suppose he can't help that, who said that women dominated society in the last stages of Greek civilisation and

brought about the final disintegration of that society. Now, if I ask myself truthfully, can I make a single move any day without consulting my wife, I mean my wife's pleasure, the answer must be no. What has happened to us? Take Aaron's wife. Sometimes I think she got him into hospital, I happened to have taken a stroll up the hill (of course since Sophia moved out and built her own villa ~~we~~ have been as thick as fleas together) and I saw an ambulance draw up outside. I stepped back into a bush (literally) and watched while they fetched him out on a kind of sit-up stretcher. Yet not two hours before, in the morning, I had been discussing this water-question with him—I'm after some of his water-supply, he has something like a thousand litres a day coming from one of his springs, and I get very short in the ~~dog~~-days, I mean for irrigation purposes. He was as bright as a pin! Now sometimes a woman can appear at the salient moment in a man's life and distract him. This sniffing, sweating chap at dinner seems to be quite right that our world is wrecked by the same fevers as the Greek world in its last days when no city-state could agree with another and the spirit of independence was too strong for the smallest cohesion to be possible for long, thus rendering inevitable the Persian victories. Now the really Hellenic world did continue, he went on, sniffing like a ferret, but at the hands of a foreigner, a Macedonian, who set up a new city on the coast of Africa in his own name, <sup>ℓ</sup> Alexandria. He talked far too much, like all these academic johnnies, unless they don't talk at all, but it was quite interesting. Somehow I feel that she, Sophia, belongs to the Greece of disintegration. I feel that these two women, she and Aaron's wife, are the expression of something dreadful, the eclipse not even of a civilisation but a species. It is revealing that they can lay an old patriarch like him <sup>So</sup> low. He went out saying his prayers. I feel a nostalgia for—I can't tell what, when

I hear him pray. My parents were hardly orthodox. It reminds me of— and something clogs my throat, it seems too deep for me! And I want to escape all this I've built up and rush to—where? Does the woman, asked old sniff-sweat, not always take her revenge for childbirth when she finds the man prostrate and near his end? I thought that was damned silly.

((We should notice here that <sup>T</sup>the Renegade takes it for granted that Sophia and Aaron's wife are in some kind of collusion against Aaron. Where he can have found this information I cannot guess. He assumes that they are no longer talking to each other, or at least implies it when he says 'ever since Sophia moved out and built her villa we have been as thick as fleas', but perhaps I am misinterpreting that. He may have picked up the idea that Sophia and Aaron's wife are seeing each other, even secretly, but that seems rather far-fetched. He may also have 'picked up' Aaron's wife's thought-waves, but he is not the sort of man ~~to~~ spend his time doing that. Miranda, the Aaron maid, often passes the Renegade villa and stops for a chat with their <sup>r</sup>girl. A lot of information passes that way. He may have heard of the notes that go between the Aaron and the Sophia villa, and assumed that the 'ménage à trois' ~~was still on~~ of the Manhattan days was still on. As to this <sup>1</sup>imaginary ménage, by the way, I have always thought that the Renegade picked up some New York gossip about Sophia and the Hales, and transferred it to the Aarons.))

Let me answer that straight away! When society falls it deserves to fall! Its fall has no other cause than the propensity to fall! ~~All~~ the women do is tear the threadbare tapestry down; having been ~~deprived~~ deprived of their part in the weaving of that tapestry, they must at least be given the pleasure of tearing it down when it no longer presents

a valid image! Perhaps they do it from a deep biological consciousness that swift change is necessary—new invisible formations towards the making of that PERFECT CREATURE the Greeks talked about! Not meals and schedules and safe political speeches, the bogus ordered patterns which have no relation to the patterns of the heart! Naturally ~~we~~ people like you are going to push the women into the kitchen and the nursery while your affairs are going well! You do it by promising them the divine, but they never once glimpse it! Perhaps you were sincere, as a young bridegroom, when you promised that, for the divine you spoke to her about was in her face! Maybe the only glimpse of the divine you will ever get! You saw the shining Isis in her eyes, but //where is Isis now in your debit and credit columns? And your wife must pay for the divine gift you meant to bring to her—by looking after your children, by trays of coffee at moments of hard pressure (oh yes, these pressures you suffer, glued to the telephone, when in fact you are just too lazy to make the coffee yourself!), not to mention the voluptuous services of the bed which, come fair weather or foul, must be ready like an automatic street-delicatessen. Naturally when your ~~ambition~~<sup>power</sup> fails, when no one can be enchanted any more, when your youth is in revolt (they compare your world with the divine one from which they have but recently come—are you too a platonist?), when yet another war accountable to your stupidity breaks out, or business shrinks because you failed to master your greed,—well, naturally the women come forward with knives in their teeth! You yourself were obliged to play the two-backed beast in a Manhattan hotel with a woman less than half your age, because she threatened to blow your brains out if you didn't.

((The following is the story of one of the Renegade's adventures in a Manhattan hotel. How Sophia picked it up I cannot say, since he only

told his business associates about it (some of them had had the same experience). Can we be sure, on the other hand, that it really did happen? Could it be a Renegade dream of love?))

That's true. She knocked on my door and I thought it was the hall porter with a message from my runner. Blue Chips had taken a dip and the Dow Index was looking green round the gills, and I was expecting to

hear the worst from Wall Street (I always am). And suddenly she fills the frame of the door with the most unkissable mouth I have ever seen, painted red like a fireman's hose, and asks me if I need anything urgent. I said thank you very much, no, with that elegant shake of my head I have, my eyes cast down, when I am dismissing someone. But she stood her ground, the door wide open, and said, You better hadda, honey, and I laf at anythin less than a coupla hundred bucks. And she came inside and kicked the door closed with something like a nazi boot. I tried to be quiet about it, and remembered as much as I could of Freud's coolness of tone. But it didn't work. I asked her why she needed to do this sort of thing, and she simply made the fireman's hose form a great oval and stuck her tongue through it. She even made me feel under analysis, rather than vice versa. I tried to be paternal but she asked in a flat voice, her eyes staring into my head, if I had 'kids'. Yes, I said, two girls and three male drug-addicts. I was trying to move on to the parental-concern tone but she cut that short. A couple of whores and three fags, she said. Then, Don't give me that bullshit about my daughters and my sons, you should try playing dad in a film, they need phonies like you. Come on, let's see your bread, dad. And luckily I had the kind of money in my wallet that she seemed to need. Another thing she said, You come from a generation of whore-makers and fag-makers! And, Boy! she said, with a grim look right in my eyes, are you going to enjoy this, I've got your whole character written out in my head like a book!

And you did enjoy it. You say nothing. Well?

I never told the wife a thing.

The one thing you never told her. A man who confides in his wife is a damned fool!

She kept her boots on! I mean, she did everything for me! Here was a virtual child teaching me all thr tricks I knew, and which I had

hitherto ~~had~~ taught others, but teaching me in such a way that they appeared to me <sup>as</sup> new! And in a way that made me feel I didn't exist any more as a man with a name and a business. Yes, I was completely lost but by no means absent. Another creature was there, acting for me, far wilder than I had ever suspected myself of being, far less scrupulous about—well, its choice of pleasure. I realised how much shame lay coiled up inside me, little reserves that had lain <sup>like</sup> like dead rats in an attic all these years. I had always glanced hitherto in life, never really looked. This time I looked, and found a pit of snakes in which I delighted. I am not at all sorry to have had the experience. I don't mean because I enjoyed it. The enjoyment was mixed, and in any case subsidiary to the new hells my eyes were opened to. I saw perhaps that hell and pleasure are not exclusive of each other.

And you gave her the two hundred bucks?

I gave her five hundred, and it crowned the pleasure I had had when she didn't even thank me. She said she could have done one of two things to me—killed me or seduced me, and for her one was equal to the other. And I felt I had been killed. Her love was more a lioness's mauling than anything else. I doubt if there was pleasure on her side. Her victim was struck down by everything she did, just as if she were murdering him. My eyes glowed at her as she left the room. I asked her would she come back some time, for a talk. If I came back, you human bidet, she said, I'd only come back to kill you. And even then my eyes glowed. How can I put it? I found more tenderness in her violence, in the disgust she clearly felt for me and the entire species, than I had known in anyone else. I am frank with my wife in everything, but this one fact prevented me from telling her. In the girl's disgust there was concern—yes, obviously!—concern that a better creature should one day be ~~produced~~ <sup>born</sup>! My mind began to delve into the meek and stunted culture of which even crime is an ~~expression~~ <sup>emanation</sup>.  
~~And~~ And what did I count for, under her gaze, not to say under her

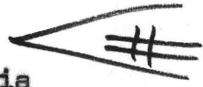
rough (but strangely delicate) hands? My debit and credit column, as you call it, had come in usef<sup>y</sup>l, but what about ~~the~~ <sup>my</sup> careful education at school and university, the integrity I had always been taught I had, the convictions that ~~this~~ war was right and that one wrong, that he ought to be elected and the other one not, that a committee should be organised, a trust set up, arrangements made for contracts to be filtered through to an in-law or a cousin in need, all the daily engagements that made me feel responsible, or rather demonstrated what I had always been taught as my undoubted responsibility? All that fluttered to the ground like autumn leaves the moment she looked at me. It didn't even crash. A crash would have argued a tall edifice. But here was just an old half-dead tree, not worth the cutting down! She spent no time on shaking the leaves off—it was the most casual thing in the world. And I discovered this other ~~cr~~ <sup>cr</sup>eature in me which had been there all the time and which wasn't responsible or in a minimal sense ethical. Of course business isn't ethical either. All those of us who are involved with it in a big way know that. But as a business man you learn to live behind a veil, not a pretty one but one that hides you. That is, in fact, the basis of doing business. If you laid all your cards on the table at the birth of a ~~business~~ deal you would end in the bankruptcy court. No, it wasn't that she tore down the veil, which is consciously put there anyway. She tore down an entire civilisation. I mean, I thought we had a <sup>i</sup>civilisation, until I realised that in her lay real power, and in us just that degree of faint power which comes from occupying a position acknowledged to be powerful! Do you see what I mean? I realised to what extent I had won nothing for myself. It had all been done for me by similar interested parties. The so-called civilisation was just a kind of cowering-together of people without virtues or aspirations or good dreams or more than perfunctory human concerns. It was based on fixing yourself up, and staying that way. And this girl

was something in herself. She was by no means a civilisation, I saw that, but perhaps she had a better, certainly more sincere glimmering of it than I did, just by virtue of her disgust for my world. I had an impression of new creatures being born in the wombs of thieves and murderesses! And with pain, through thickets of error, finding again the way to—I don't know, a <sup>more</sup> direct life, where people live straight from their feelings and needs, not calculating all the time like I have to what-he-thinks and what-the-other-one-will-do, shifting and ducking all the time to avoid that pitfall or this hanging beam, much of it imaginary. Yet—I know what's in your mind—it hasn't made my debit and credit columns any less dear <sup>to me.</sup> In fact it made me realise that they are all I have! So I buckled down to even harder work afterwards, and made those five hundred bucks about twenty times over, before I left for a couple of weeks in Maine. Nor has it <sup>l</sup>atered my thoughts in any way. I seem to be saying to myself all the time, OK, the tree is half-dead but I do better on it than most other men, and until you can find a way of cutting it down I am obliged to conclude that no livelier plant exists. I notice that I am still an important man for those in need; they despise me often enough, but my five hundred or five thousand or fifty thousand bucks are useful to them. So there seems life in the old tree yet. I see poignantly now how weak it is, deriving its sap from barren soil, through dessicated roots. But I say, cut me down then. Nobody does it. In fact I can't stop my phone ringing. And the burden of the telephone message is usually, We need you, we need you! So?

Tell me more about her.

She painted her lips afterwards. I was surprised at this little feminine attention. She also used some kleenez unashamedly, and left it crumpled on the floor. She walked out without closing the door. I heard later that a girl's gang was operating, that they were organised.

So she too was a slave! They covered all the hotels in the area. I got a good many calls from business associates to be careful about knocks on the door. There were jokes, hinging on the word 'knock'. I chuckled obligingly (as they no doubt joked obligingly). In fact I waited for another knock with bated heart, if I may use the expression. I cancelled my dinner dates. I mean the ones that didn't promote the credit column. But there was no second visitation.



I never really liked this island. What made me suggest to Sophia that I build a villa for her on the east side close to the hospital I hardly remember: probably Sophia's ardent desire for it. It was five years ago, just about the time she was uncoupling herself from life with the Aarons, that long dark incubation from which she emerged well-nigh broken, yet a grander and—for me—even more dramatic person than before. Her hair had turned grey, she was heavier, though not slower, and above all a certain inward grieving look had replaced the old one of almost wizened anxiety in her eyes. I remember that look so well from years ago, when she jumped about like a girl, her hair a gorgeous shining black, everything about her so fresh and sweet except for her raging vitality.

That look of hers was like the perplexity of an experimental animal. She just did not know about all the sophisticated machinations other people <sup>managed to</sup> live <sup>with,</sup> ~~in~~ yet she was wonderful at a business deal: she put her cards on the table in the most alarming way, <sup>and</sup> ~~but~~ somehow made the other person feel that even if he made a fool of himself by over-buying, it was <sup>business</sup> good <sup>on his side.</sup> to have her ~~point with~~. I met her in Cambridge, Mass., God knows what took either of us there. It was on the airport—Sophia always makes a joke about its having been a pickup. But we were destined to meet. I'm like so many friends she has—de-married so to speak, no money worries. We would have met <sup>in the end</sup> anyway, as I'd been living on this island, and returned now and then to shake a few dear hands. I remember

now why I was in Cambridge (I suppose I like to block the period out). I was recovering with a relative from my second marriage, to a British plenipot in the Middle East who had (still has, no doubt) a ruffled, dry face with harrassed eyes. His approach to my body was simply frightening. He zoomed down on me like a camera lens, his eyes fixed like black, poison-tipped spearheads on anything but my face, while he failed to do anything very much except get beyond himself. When it was 'over', as they say, he would wash himself down in the cool water that we kept in specially insulated tanks ~~under~~ <sup>on</sup> the <sup>flat</sup> roof. It was the worst thing he could do in that heat, and it made him irritable in precisely the same way every time. <sup>The</sup> <sup>imitation</sup> ~~It~~ would last through tiffin (as I grew up to call tea) and <sup>then</sup> through his two hours' office work in the foreign compound surrounded by dirty sand and tinkling palm trees. He was a dear creature. We never really had a moment's argument. We had plenty of good laughs, with something overdone about them I admit. I used to go to his office sometimes. Every car sent up magnificent white clouds of dust which drifted through his windows, covering his files and telephones and secretaries like a soft moonlight. All day skinny and silent figures in dirty loin cloths ~~tried to~~ <sup>ed</sup> play weak hoses on to the sand to keep it down but the sun was humourously cruel—it dried at once what was wet, like Puck playing tricks. This gave the dark figures a hopeless look as they stared, hoses in hand, at every new arrival. I don't know why I'm talking about this. Memories. I suppose it is to avoid talking about my plenipot—I mean that's why I moved on to remembering the compound and the hoses. So much has been written and talked about the love-making that comes off, so little about those bungled and, not least, baffling struggles that take place between people who approach each other with hoods over their heads composed of forbidden dreams and the wounds they rose from, through <sup>which</sup> they don't even try to see the other 'person'—but what 'person' should we

see in order to make love 'successfully'?—I ask this unrhethorically, because I simply do not know, never having given or found pleasure with either my first husband, a remarkably young army general, handsome, flushed with outdoor living, his light blue eyes peppetually alive with a smile and with healthy thoughts, or his ruffled successor. Where the 'body' comes in I never understood. Somewhere it had desires, and—stronger perhaps than straight desires—the hope of violating some deeply felt authority (inside one) that forbade any contact. But once you were naked, there seemed no more to be done, I mean even the desire disappeared. So often my plenipot and I, once naked, would look at each with sudden questioning surprise, for a second, as if to ask, what the devil are we doing? before we buckled down to what we thought the other wanted, and what I now recognise as other people's love, which we felt obliged to imitate. It didn't work. Somehow or <sup>other</sup> ~~other~~ he achieved his schoolboy's climax which never acknowledged a precise target but endangered all the lace and glass in the room. It always happened like an <sup>✓</sup>oversight—you expected nurses <sup>to rush in</sup> with towels, and alarmed relatives. Yes, I've smiled since at these little tussles with the British Empire, as I call them. I mean, he was tussling no less with the British Empire in me. Empire stultifies chiefly the people enjoying it. I rarely smiled at the time. I cowered and stooped and hung back, and everyone thought I was charming and modest. They glanced with alight in their eyes at my golden hair. And my huge bosom was a reassuring thing to have in any company. They supposed that the plenipot and I collaborated in long voluptuous operations through the fiercely hot nights—on account of my appearance I suppose, and also because he was never seen at the 'all right' brothels. He had no boys, nor whips to beat them with. He never walked down the main street towards Bab al Muadham switching his gaze from side to side narrowly, his upper lip shining with sweat as delectable loin-

clothed boys passed—as his assistant did. All my plenipot had was his glass hood of dreams, all of them vicious ones, while ~~I had~~ <sup>my hood was</sup> one of fears. I understand those glass-hooded creatures in Bosch (or is it Breughel or both?). I know what it means.

After the divorce (my first husband had been killed in the war by the way) I settled in Tangiers to recover myself a little, draw the fragments <sup>together</sup> that the last spasms of the empire had dispersed. There ('tax- and ethics-free', as she always says) I waited for Sophia to visit <sup>me</sup>. I day-dreamed about us lolling in my easy chairs under the fans, to the deafening scream of the muezzin through faulty roof-top loudspeakers at dusk and at dawn. It happened about ~~three~~ <sup>three</sup> times a year. I held her encapsulated in my sun-fevered days, almost happy to see her prostrated by the heat while I, who had spent much of my life in it, lay cool, gazing across at her with a smile, forbidding <sup>her</sup> to touch another iced drink. I called the money spent on our island-home 'empire money'. Sophia said with a laugh, Let it be a memorial to the crucifixions <sup>by military men and</sup> of ~~the~~ wives ~~of imperial out-~~ <sup>pleniplots!</sup> ~~pleniplots!~~ As a matter of fact, I used to talk <sup>glowingly</sup> about these two 'splendid <sup>of mine'</sup> men ~~who had been my husbands~~ for hours on end, under the fans, until she came to know them like <sup>brothers.</sup> ~~brothers.~~ She had a great taste for leaders—~~army men~~ army men and colonial governors and explorers and all that; she seemed to forget they were male. I told her that I had caused these two men ~~of mine~~ more sorrow than they had caused me, and I <sup>had</sup> ~~gave~~ <sup>that had given</sup> neither of them the children they <sup>had</sup> yearned for. There was something prophetic in me (Sophia was already, in those Tangiers days, calling me Cassandra), and even as a girl I had seen the fall of the empire clearly before my eyes, while it still lay sprawled across the earth in tranquil prosperity, before Adolf Hitler was known. Strangely, I foresaw it in <sup>my</sup> ~~the~~ bedroom most of all. I knew that everything <sup>e</sup> ~~these~~ men I ~~guffawed~~ guffawed with in Cairo and Alex and Aden and Baghdad and Basrah and Port Said, everything

they said and did, even (no, especially) in the privacy of the bedroom, was being caricatured by great invisible power-shifts of which they were totally unaware. Their way of pronouncing English—their 'rarely' for really—was always beautiful for me, I don't know if mine was for them. What I mean is, I was alert to the function of accent as an indicator of class and authority, whereas for them it was simply the way an Englishman spoke. They failed to hear the reverberations of collapse in their gently enunciated vowels, which had such an atmosphere for me of clement summer afternoons on English lawns, and a certain interior kind of poetry, rubicund, mellow, placid like the golden horses that gazed from their stables. Their manners were memorable, in a Greek way—how can I put it?—they were the last English generation to be brought up on Greece, it echoed in their behaviour, gave their faces a sometimes dazzling fresh beauty in youth (no wonder <sup>so many of them were</sup> ~~the English had so many~~ queans!). In the first world war hordes of these dazzling creatures, fresh from school, waited for death as if history had no further use for them. My men weren't quite like that. Really they lived in the shadow of empire, and perhaps they weren't deep down convinced that it would last. Besides, <sup>our</sup> ~~their~~ <sup>(- 'home' -)</sup> country was black with industrial smoke, it was run by money, and the money <sup>people</sup> had little time for ~~the~~ Greek youth and ~~the~~ casual, mellow charm. Of course <sup>they weren't all charming, by any means.</sup> ~~I am only talking about the good ones.~~ The ~~ones of the~~ bad ones snarled and lashed. Their snubs were terrible. In every part of the world they left behind them multitudes of awed, mortally hurt and rebellious people. Funny, they were always admired <sup>too,</sup> by their most implacable enemies. Perhaps because they had a selfless way of doing things, having been taught that even to be kicked around by an Englishman was a privilege for the kicked. <sup>These,</sup> ~~The~~ bad ones, are those on whom all empire, in the last analysis, depends. When the bad <sup>one</sup> act, the good are taught to look the other way. I saw enough ~~xx~~ of it at the officers' club in Cairo. Yet all of them, good and bad, kept their worst behaviour not for Copts or Arabs or <sup>+</sup> Nubians but ~~for~~ their own

h.p.

countrymen, when they were of a lower class. I saw the desperate flaw in this procedure, and began to think that all imperial rulers ~~must~~ <sup>should</sup> begin their colonisation at home. I saw, during our brief visits to London on leave, that our accents were gradually being ostracised socially, and without knowing quite what I was up to I began lowering my voice in buses and in the Tube. I was amazed, though, at how long the English tolerated ~~it~~ <sup>us,</sup> ~~it~~ I mean the workers who suddenly organised themselves into real political unions for the first time in the second war, and brought the class to which I allowed myself to belong down. Even then no blood was shed, I suppose because the 'ruling' class (of course there was none, really) failed to put up a fight. And why should they have fought? They simply handed over the initiative to their American cousins, who they thought would be flattered and beguiled by their accents like the English were! [My second husband always said, The Americans have taken over, and after all they're the only people with enough power to 'do' it nowadays. I was astonished at how general this feeling was among the very people who had been lording it all over the Middle East, apparently without a moment's doubt in their own authority, only months before! But that was what I had seen in the bedroom, even as a newly married girl; their authority was inherited, it had not been won, and it did not go lower than the skin, in the form of new dynamic ideas. All empire must fall, quickly or slowly, for that reason, I suppose. The whole class of well-spoken Englishmen scattered like ghosts. Within five years of the war, there were hordes of poor gentlefolk, and generals with only martial attitudes left. One wouldn't like to see them rule the world again, not because they did it badly—they achieved the first hint of global administration with remarkably bland ease—but because no world rulers of any description are ever wanted again. It is the ruling human being we want to dispense with, and whom we see appear again and again. Sometimes I feel ~~that~~ <sup>we are all free</sup> /

2. p.

now,  
~~changed at last, and~~ we are no longer ruled. But this is ~~the~~  
grotesque illusion. I look across the harbour and see, about once a  
month, the American cruisers, anchored offshore. I remember that people  
like my husband by no means ceded their power <sup>to</sup> ~~to the British~~  
~~empires~~, the British trade unions. Not at all! Their zone of interest,  
or rather profit, had shifted west, across the Atlantic, and like myself  
<sup>learned to</sup> they ~~basked~~ <sup>imperial</sup> in the new power, flitting from Kansas City to Ohio and then  
to San Francisco, west coast to east coast, ranch to city, many of them  
<sup>in order</sup> (like me) to watch their investments. And who is to say that their new  
<sup>on the other side of the Atlantic</sup> friends ~~were~~ <sup>weren't</sup> beguiled by their accents and their 'Grecian' manners? My  
relatives 'on the other side' were <sup>certainly</sup> ~~were~~ <sup>mine!</sup> enchanted by ~~the way they~~  
~~changed during the Middle East years.~~ They loved my quaint truculence,  
which I had learned as an essential part of character. I exercised that  
truculence in little ways for about twenty years after the second war.  
Now at last I've given it up—I mean snubbing people with a sudden harsh  
glance, disregarding an outstretched hand, keeping my mouth shut after  
someone had uttered the forbidden 'Pleased to have met you', all the sorry  
<sup>social</sup> bilge of a dead <sup>the hypnotism that attends all power, and is</sup> hypnotism; I mean ~~people hypnotised by exercising power~~  
~~shared~~ <sup>until they wake up. Yes.</sup> by ruler and ruled alike, <sup>we</sup> enchanted our servants and batmen  
and even the workers in the street! They had ~~these~~ <sup>for us</sup> expressions like 'a  
proper gentleman'! They were in the hypnotic grip of a dream no less than  
we were! In fact our roles were thrust upon us, by the white Englishman,  
the dark African, the wise Indian! And how marvellous it was <sup>people like</sup> for me to  
lose that sense of hypnotism, only a few years ago, and live free—oh,  
free! I am so free here, gazing down into the olive grove, with my Sophia  
due in from the airport or the harbour, or due out—a dark messenger with <sup>2</sup>  
wings at her heels! I know that we are in fact ruled, controlled more  
effectively than ever before. Yes, I am aware of the cruisers—I am  
thankful for them too, in case Russian ones take their place! I no

longer feel that kind of pride. I've become a sort of Indian, concentrated on other things, aware that the body is <sup>in</sup> bondage under any conditions! And I also know that power has slipped from the human creature in this universal twilight, and that presidents, kings, magnates are those least aware today of having power. So when I feel I am exercising no human authority, that nothing I say or do counts—that it has no ~~reverberations~~ reverberations in other homes, in colleges or books or cabinet rooms or even clubs, as it used to, I tell myself ~~that~~ that this is because the human voice has ceased to reverberate, the human presence has learned not to shine, and we have become so jealous of the smallest exercise of power that we have rendered it utterly abstract, even if this will destroy us, one and all.

Yes, I retained my haughtiness for years after its function had ceased—a shadow haughtiness that caused shadow indignation among the shadow 'protesters' who now found it safe to come out on the streets and call for a new society, since the old one was already <sup>long-since</sup> dead! (You see how the resentment is still me, even now? I would have taken up a whip in the old days, had it been considered politic by our men for the women to <sup>do so</sup> ~~do so~~!) But the haughtiness went together increasingly with guilt (symptom of failing power), ~~as the years slipped by~~, and now thank God even the guilt is dead, and my life 'before' is as far from me as the Roman empire. I can hardly believe it ~~is~~ happened. How we all feared each other really! The upper class the lower class, and vice versa, the officer and the batman, the rich and the poor! <sup>For 'the heresies that men do leave are hated most by those they did deceive!'</sup> And are at last on the threshold of freeing each other? Will the world come to an end, as <sup>Sophia</sup> ~~they~~ says? and wouldn't that be a fitting way of freeing each other? I mean, perhaps life will be taken up elsewhere, in other biological forms, our world history tucked behind the belt as primordial experience?

Only sometimes, when I hear those vaguely tender tones of a vanished power (there was no need to shout, ever, the power had been so nicely absorbed into the blood), I feel the memory stir. But I wasn't a ~~the~~ whole creature then. Power stunts those on whom it is exercised—but much more those who exercise it. My independence—a divorced and travelling woman—seemed to coincide perfectly with India's!

(( It occurs to me that it might well have been Cassandra who interpolated the Indian terms in some of the foregoing narratives, after all. As far as I know she never went to India, yet she uses the word 'tiffin'. Like many people living in Arab countries she frequently had Indian servants, especially Indian cooks. In another narrative (not in this book) she describes how her Indian cook sits on the ~~the~~ floor of the kitchen all day, his eyes closed, dead drunk on arak, while she does the cooking. For all I know Indian wisdom has given her this impressive balance of hers. In a word, her life-long frigidity has at last a function, she has found in it, through Indian thought, 'a short cut to ecstasy'. The earlier cryptic reference (~~to~~ <sup>page 77</sup>) to the kundalini may, then, be hers. Who her teacher was, or whether she had one outside the many books she reads, I cannot say. The phrase 'short cut to ecstasy' is from another ~~narrative~~ narrative, probably hers, but again not in this volume.))

Thus I could not have been more ready for Sophia when she suddenly turned up in Tangiers, years after we met. I think I taught her a lot—about Morocco, Tunisia, the desert-swathed world in which I had spent so much of my life. She loved to hear me speak ~~in~~ Arabic. She would turn her quick half-anguished gaze on me, as if to find out whether I wasn't really an Arab after all. In her younger days she had this marvellous gift of never bringing the slightest pre-judgement to a situation.

~~She saw things fresh like an animal. She absorbed experience like~~

She saw things fresh like an animal. She absorbed experience like an animal too. It simply acted on her nerve-ends. She remembered no details afterwards. <sup>h</sup>She forgot places and names with a reckless speed. She never learned from experience, from what a friend of mine used to call 'the repetition of examples'. She repeated her mistakes with something like grandeur. She didn't mind about that. There was no repentance or back-looking in her—a tonic for me after a lifetime spent with people who for every one step forward took two back, as if to wipe out the consequences. Sophia plunged ahead singing, clapping unlikely people on the back, ordering banquets in fish restaurants, quarrelling over the long-distance telephone, dashing out in the middle of the night to swim nude or stand nude in the rain, and getting her fin<sup>g</sup>ers burned at least once a month in some triangle or other. She told me about a Sicilian friend who once pulled a gun on her in Chicago. It seemed so unjustified, and I burned with hatred against that man. She had <sup>e</sup>leapt out of the room like Vaslav in Giselle', she said (she always called great men by their Christian names). Years afterwards I learned that Il Tacco, as she called the Sicilian friend, had a lovely Mexican wife!

When I first met Sophia she was living on the edge of Harlem—oh, this was years ago—with a negro couple. They were called Jack and Mabel Hale. Jack was a slim, moustached, fastidious young man who adopted a high moral approach to everyone except himself. It made for some amusing situations sometimes. Mabel was quite the opposite. In fact she seemed born just to puncture her husband's moral fervour (which she provoked with always new outrages). She had a wonderful rolling laugh—the first thing about her to attract Sophia's attention. Stories went round about her and Sophia, I think. Jack knew about it, and decided in his missionary way to let it 'burn <sup>h</sup>itself out'. He was so devoutly Black, too, that he

left himself little time to study his wife's sex-exploits (they became aspects of the black <sup>t</sup>problem, anyway), particularly as she worked all night in a bakery, and he was at Columbia university (as far as I could gather) all day. His intelligence // was of the political kind—interesting and limited. He certainly predicted the black-white struggle that came years // later. He ~~was~~ ribbed Mabel for her lack of what he called 'black self-identification'. And Mabel's answer was either a clapping laugh or a noisy kiss blown across the room towards Sophia. She once described Sophia to me as 'like two big sisters rolled into one new doll'—then the rasping laughter that struck the bare walls of their apartment like thunder claps. Sophia bent over double laughing at Mabel's game of chasing her little son's genitalia. It went on every day. They adored Sophia. They maintained that she looked negro, and thought and behaved negro. I never noticed it. But I've stopped trying to account for what people see in others.

I was fascinated by French North Africa at that time, and took Sophia with me on frequent trips to Philippeville and Algiers. We used to bathe <sup>along</sup> at the deserted coast, which in those days was a blinding bone-white, ~~with~~ the waves rolling in frothily under an empty blue sky, the sea a vast sweetly bubbling blue desert, as if ships had not yet been invented. I loved ~~the~~ <sup>that</sup> particular <sup>and</sup> not at all pretty atmosphere created by the French-Arab connection, in which the smell of French cooking mingled with that of cous-cous on the streets, and uncut French books stood out on trays under sun-blinds, and the wine had an Islamic ferocity. I remembered the same, <sup>thing</sup> though much more refined because of the Levantine commerce being done, in Beirut—the brothels, the cafés, the restaurants and even the narrow Paris-like streets had an air of exquisite self-realisation, as if they had found a perfect setting among the palm trees, to the sound of the heavy surf, and the guttural lash of Arabic, with the American university cool and somehow faintly embarrassed up on its hill. I preferred it to the Anglo-Arab love affair, <sup>which</sup> conveyed something ambiguous, partly homosexual, and introduced little from the west apart from rather dreary turf clubs and officers' clubs and press clubs, little islands on which a grimy sea of Arabs lapped. The English were in any case so much refugees from their own country, to whose industrial wastes they could not belong, only profit from. Their approach to the Arab world was moral, flavoured with Greek curiosity, self-indulgent too, drugged with a sense of inner luxury, kingship, which the Arabs never fail to convey in the most barren conditions. The French influx, on the other hand, was a practical one. It was real colonisation of the kind the British never went in for. They brought vineyards tended in the French manner, restaurants serving Parisian food, and cafés <sup>that</sup> <sup>ed</sup> ~~spilling~~ on to the pavements, under awnings, as if the talk inside <sup>was</sup> ~~had become~~ so animated that it had pushed <sup>its way</sup> through the doors. And then the bookshops,

dusty and musty, the pages yellowing soon from the delving implacable sunlight. And that seaboard near Phillippeville where our voices were snatched into the marvellous blue solitudes, with the dusty road behind us empty as far as the eye could see, with that final and impassive stillness of a wadi, suddenly reached in the desert, with its shining parched boulders. Along that seaboard I underwent my first Sophia<sup>n</sup>/indoctrination. You have seen the male chest, she would suddenly say, sweeping out of the sea like its first creature, /Would you please tell me what those nipples are doing? Can you suggest a use for them? They could equally be on his backside for all the function they have! Isn't it clear (throwing herself dripping on to the sand, which immediately covers her belly with a dark slimy fur) that these useless buttons are memorials<sup>n</sup>/from the time he was a woman? Doesn't it seem possible to you that he is a degeneration of the female? Of course I don't mean that Adam came out of Eve's side or anything like that, I'm not trying to be paradoxical. But surely the woman is the basic biological model: nothing in her make-up fails to have a life-giving function! And dare we compare the male's quick fertilising spasm to the subtle metamorphosis that engulfs the woman's entire body, life, thoughts for the nine months of conception?

It was the strangest dialectics I had ever heard, and I just smiled. It didn't discourage her. Hitherto I had thought of male and female as simply complementary to each other. Yet I absorbed her arguments, even while thinking them ridiculous. I began to see men in a different way. My mind remained uninfluenced, but I found myself acting on her view of the male and not<sup>n</sup>/what had once been my own. It helped this process, I suppose, that at this time I began to find many friends among queans<sup>n</sup> (so many ~~queans~~ twice-married independent women with private incomes and a love of travel do!) Their frail and distraught nervous systems, perpetually on the edge of total collapse, were a relief for me after men who had seemed to have no nervous systems at all. Sophia had an

odd attitude towards them. She felt they were biological allies,  
in having <sup>Somehow</sup> ceded the male <sup>And</sup> position. <sup>her</sup> They shared ~~the same~~ outraged  
horror at the intimate procreative act. These men, she said—and when  
she talked ~~for~~ appalling French it always meant insincerity—were les  
sensitifs, too gifted and rarified to accept the brute man-woman forn-  
ication as a way of love! I felt like asking whether their substitute  
was any more pretty or less brutish. But she saw this already. She  
knew too that they were perhaps not her best friends. They tended to  
mock her. They thought her too fearful a freak to do more than giggle  
and gasp over. One or two, seeing beyond the freak all of a sudden,  
realising that she was entirely without the lesbian furies they had attrib-  
uted to her, became close to her like brothers. On the whole she kept  
away from them. Strangely enough it was the deeply married men with  
public positions who became her best friends. For them she sort of  
anaesthetised her doctrine of gender. God knows how she did it. God  
knows how! But there was always an unexpected variety in her reactions.  
When I asked ~~myself~~ half-aloud one day, How has the sex act got separated  
from child-conceiving in the human being? she turned to me and said  
quietly, People don't stop making love when they get beyond the child-  
conceiving age, or when they become sterile, they stop when they can  
no longer discover themselves through each other that way. The cessation  
of sex either causes the collapse of marriage or its spiritual climax.  
How could she have known this, or come to think it? I looked at her  
for signs that she was quoting it all—even for a sign of burlesque—  
but she was serious, her head bowed, a serene frown on her face.

As I say, this is about the last island I would have chosen to live  
on. Its rounded hills have a barren and parched look, shaved of trees  
and undergrowth. Its towns are heaps of new masonry, apart from the  
harbour on the <sup>west</sup> ~~east~~ coast and the tiny fishing port that faces open

sea to the ~~west~~<sup>east</sup>. Here and there you come on heavily perfumed, needle-floored ~~pienwoods~~<sup>pienwoods</sup> that make you feel you are mistaken. But lack of water bars the luscious; you have to dig five hundred metres for it in some ~~parts~~<sup>parts</sup>. The people are, to my mind, ambiguous like the two languages they speak, squashing them almost into one by their slurred, passive way of enunciating. There are no industries to speak of, yet the island has almost no ~~history~~<sup>history</sup> either. The one superb building is the hospital. Its vast leaning walls, bleached in the sea-air, leap out of the fishing port like a sudden decision to give the island character after all. It was once the island's fortress. Its windows are small, and some of them remain barred from the time it was a prison (treason and murder).

Yet I lived here for a number of years long before the Aarons decided to come, or Sophia decided for them. I built myself a house down by the fishing port. A salt-water canal passed under my kitchen window. I suppose it was a way of celebrating my release from imperial honours and obligations. I feel these on me still, like a gilded shadow, even in the way I form my sentences, the result of Macaulay and after-dinner speeches. I wanted to live among sailors (this was before everyone became an intellectual), and for two or more years I saw ~~only sailors~~<sup>only sailors</sup> except ~~for~~ for bewildered relatives who thought that by descending on me suddenly they could sort of shock me out of my madness. Of course they made me yearn for my sailors even more. I developed a technique of claiming that my guest rooms were under quarantine and I was therefore obliged to find them hotel rooms five miles away. There they sweltered, and I could be sure that at least my twilights and dawns were my own. I had a habit of strolling out on to my balcony overlooking the fishing vessels—once at dusk and immediately on first light. It was a kind of homage. People tell me now that I was greatly loved and respected down there. I helped people whenever I could, I financed one or two educations. They climb the hill to visit me some-

times, to tell me about a first communion or birth. I am still La Blondina for them (better than Cassandra, whose prophecies were never believed!).

In recent years new villas have sprung up all round, in the area along the southern coast between the fishing port and the harbour. Their expensively landscaped gardens improve the look. Even the public footpaths are now lined with oleander, and you see young cypresses pushing up everywhere. It was apparently the vast hospital, seen from the approaching ferry like a dazzling mammoth tooth emerging from the sea, that attracted Aaron when they ~~thereof~~ <sup>of</sup> them paid their first visit. They stayed at the sweltering hotel. I saw them one evening, at dinner under the vine-pergola with its faery lights. They were deep in talk, seeming to carry <sup>a whole</sup> ~~the~~ world about with them. They ~~sucked~~ <sup>sucked</sup> the white-jacketed waiters into their orbit, and the dishes that were brought to their table seemed in the strangest way pre-ordained for them. I was fascinated. A few days later I heard they were looking for a plot of land. Miranda, just married (to one of my sailors) and of course anxious to get a job with foreigners if one was going, asked me did I know of a place near the hospital. I found a ten-acre peice of well-irrigated land going freehold, next door to the banking gentleman. He always looks faintly bewildered as he takes his walks now, with his silver-knobbed cane; years ago I remember him standing at the harbour almost every morning during the summer months, watching the unloading. He stood there so firm-looking, not a muscle astir, as if a personal problem had never crossed his ~~mind~~ <sup>mind</sup>. Perhaps these money-people don't have such things. They simply play the market and spend the proceeds. Perhaps St Jerome was right, homo mercator vix aut nunquam potest Deo placere.

Yesterday he suddenly appeared at our front door, the cane in his hand to which Sophia has applied many shafts of her Mediterranean wit in the last few years. <sup>But,</sup> ~~L~~ Having snubbed him at Mrs Aaron's request, she

feels a special protective sympathy for him, though they never once met again—until, as I say, yesterday. After almost falling on her back with surprise she gave him one of her enormous hugs that made him look like a bear-cub. Then she swept him into the lounge where I was just excavating some rocks for my first evening whisky. The breeze from the olive trees was cool and scented, freshened by the recent storms. He sat down with a benign and mellow look at me, and made a pleased chuckle when Sophia handed him the fizzy, lemon-topped gin-drink he had asked for. He let her do ~~all~~ the talking. Without the slightest hesitation—glorious Sophia, so impenitent, risking everything—future, reputation!—she launched into an explanation of what had happened five, or was it seven, years ago. He simply gazed and smiled. The only reaction he permitted himself, after she had blackened the name of Aaron, was an easy movement of the hand, the palm open and uplifted, half deprecating what she said and half implying that it was all forgotten and forgiven. That evening she sang. And in her bath the following morning, today, it was Desdemona, <sup>again</sup> always a good sign. She loves to mend a relationship. Rifts haunt her, because really the whole Race is her family. Whenever a visitor from the States mentioned <sup>for instance,</sup> Il Tacco, I always noticed the ~~immediate~~ rim of melancholy that <sup>begins</sup> to shade her eyes.

Yet Sophia is admirably insensitive. I mean she could never weather her inner storms without it. She must trample on someone when necessary. Yes, she has always been insensitive to the fragrant secret whispers in another's heart, particularly a man's. She has a favourite little speech which she reserves for the queans: You know, I have this hearty male exterior, but there is a woman's heart beating inside me! (Only the queans could possibly think the exterior 'male!'). This brings me to another aspect of her; the cunning. Someone said once, When Sophia comes in the room twenty foxes enter with her. The foxes are always sniffing, darting about surreptitiously, silently. On some rare

occasions, perhaps during her long morning struggle to wake up, or very late at night, the foxes creep back to their holes and rest. They are protecting her. She has to have them. The whole earth is on her side—  
 including yes, ~~the~~ the animals most of us fail to see! In her arms a dog will sometimes all but faint with awed excitement! Without this foxy protection from the earth she would long ago have succumbed to human attacks. This is why the cunning has never bothered me. It fights for her triumph. She must triumph at all costs, the poor darling! It is why she is almost never in real repose. Sleep crushes her with a vengeful hand, like death, every day. It has to, to save her body. She would never be still otherwise. She suddenly dashes off to the mainland—and you may get a cable an hour or a week later saying she is staying overnight on the mainland, or <sup>is</sup> in Yugoslavia, or ~~in~~ Maine. Not one labourer's house on this island will not spread table for a banquet when she puts her head in the door, singing. 'Sophia' is a name that brings light to their eyes, like a marvellous legend they heard in childhood. She is invited to more baptisms and first communions than anyone I've ever known. On the whole, the island-folk keep her away from their marriages; they show a deep instinct here, a certain irony perhaps too. They adore her presence at all finished, never embryonic, occasions!

Really Sophia can't understand. She only has flashes of understanding. Otherwise you can't explain the simplest situation to her. Her eyes pucker up in a painful way, and you see that she simply has to give up trying to think it out. And those flashes of understanding seem, not the result of <sup>s</sup>ensitivity to the currents of other people's lives, but direct apprehension, sent to her from another (and supernatural) field, which accounts for the stunned look on her face, as if she were being used for a divine transmission, for a reason she will never know!

~~She has no explanation for the woman's visit. He should have~~  
~~tried to explain, getting at us with that cunning authority his~~

Cassandra goes on to talk below about how Josh, one of the Renegade's sons, happened to stay with her and Sophia some years before. The Renegade never knew about this visit. It is worthwhile explaining—as Cassandra fails to—that Josh had heard about Sophia from the Mother Superior of the convent (~~and~~ at that time she was matron of the mainland hospital and very much involved with the drug cases that came in). Josh was, as we shall see, hooked on just about everything short of heroin. The Sophian legend awoke something in him. And when he was fit enough to seem human even to himself, after a year on LSD, or perhaps barbiturates, he visited Sophia, and stayed for a couple of weeks. What he learned from her—whether it changed his life—we do not know. But she was about the only creature over thirty he didn't quarrel with or hypostasise as Adult and therefore Status Quo Incarnate. The interesting thing for us is how the Mother Superior came to hear of Sophia. Cassandra says, in fact, that it was the Mother Superior who first heard about Sophia from Josh, who had listened to his own father's gasped descriptions of 'that outlandish creature'. Where the link lies I cannot say, but I suggest it was through Miranda, whose sister worked in the convent refectory. This is convincing, except that at the time the Mother Superior was matron of the mainland hospital. However, her connections with the enclosed sisters at the island convent were always close.

\* \* \* \*

Sophia has no explanation for the Renegade's visit. He sipped two drinks slowly, gazing at us with that serene authority big money bestows

even on the unfittest. We both know how unfit he is to exercise authority of any kind through his son Josh, as he calls himself. The <sup>R</sup>ene-gade<sup>f</sup> has no idea of this prior knowledge ~~which~~ we have of him! He knows nothing of his youngest son's visits to us. He too appeared at the door unexpectedly, about three years ago. And he was a total stranger. Yet he stayed with us for two or more weeks, hidden away. The moment I saw his long pale face, and incredibly black hair, I recognised the father; but here was something almost gorilla—a small, flattened nose, wide and prominent cheek-bones, a long jaw, and above all ~~the~~ eyes which never spoke! ~~to you!~~ How can I put it? You wanted to turn away from such a bottomless gaze! Sophia did her usual arm-flinging and kissing, and pushed a drink into his hand. He looked at it with a perplexed half-frown. I could see he would have preferred a 'joint', as they call it. He did everything with an uncalculated slowness. You thought he was never going to reach his destination. Even his blinking was slow. His answers came seconds after they should have, his gaze travelled towards you with ~~that~~ <sup>the</sup> terrible gravity of a black moth that has mastered slow motion. Slowness often seems oracular. Not this. Yet he spoke intelligently. He never stopped talking, slowly, his eyes fixed on a point which might or might not be your eyes. His arms hung loose. It was all kindness, what he spoke. How good they had been to him at the local hospital. How he couldn't stand to see his father again, not that he had anything against his father, but he was reminded of himself, and that was precisely what he was fighting. And how glad he was that he had been on all these 'trips' during the last two years—ending in the collapse of his system. He had been through them all, he said, except the one you never leave again<sup>n</sup>, heroin. This way he had broken through his father's lies, he said. At once Sophia, alert to the chance of defaming one more male, asked what these lies were. Just his whole psychology, the son said, all his shit about there being a

society, and us having duties towards it, and how we had to control ourselves because we are all egotists and if we let ourselves go life would be one big mess. He ought to know about the egotism, the son added with a peculiar croaking laugh that was too slow to sound like good cheer, since he's about the most selfish bastard I've ever known! And I like him for it! It's cosy, being that selfish! And what about your mother? Sophia asked (a chance here of putting a foot in the door of the Renegade Villa, and rescuing the matron!). Oh her, the son said with a shrug that seemed to take longer than the encroaching darkness, she's such a liar you feel sorry for her, she never knew what the truth was, I mean she just can't tell the difference between a true thing and a false thing—she's just nervous, and her whole idea is to assert whatever is convenient or what disguises something she did and feels <sup>f</sup>bad about or what saves time and trouble. She'd pitch tent on a pile of corpses and talk about the nice sea-air, and you can't get away from it that there's a certain courage in that, it takes a lot of energy to construct a totally false world from one end of the day to the other. Oh (a look deep down in<sup>^</sup> to his crutch, as if he had found—without alarm—something crawling there), I love 'em both. It's the great thing in my life. You see, they helped me find the real world. I enjoyed the hallucinations best, they took me right out and beyond, I mean the LSD. I saw how <sup>those two are</sup> ~~they're~~ making it up all the time—now I can enjoy the grotesqueness—all their buddies<sup>too</sup>, who are half dead, and think they're big deal<sup>!</sup>—the top doctors who couldn't heal a sore toe, the top lawyers and top bankers and top politicians—you see, I took a long journey, right to the edge of madness, and I came back and after that I realised they didn't have a thing, they're just a lot of poor damned forsaken <sup>heels,</sup> ~~useless creatures~~, and hopeless <sup>too, and</sup> ~~spiritless~~, when you're that low you need wealth! He turned the black moth of his gaze on to Sophia with immense slowness—I wanted to rush over and protect her—and said, You're

lucky, you've never fitted any of the patterns, I mean you never had to fight your way out, isn't that so? She nodded with a girlish modesty I had never seen before (this was one of the ways she barred all talk about herself that might go too deep, apart from the fact that she had probably understood little or nothing of what Josh had said). During his stay ~~she~~ <sup>he</sup> slept endlessly, ate ravenously and never laid his hands to a thing. His only exercise in all that time was lifting a knife or fork or glass to feed himself. Then he ~~xxx~~ drifted out of the house and we never heard of him again. He said his father often talked about Sophia, and something had made Josh feel she was 'very special', so he had come to her straight from the hospital across the way, instead of going home. I believe he returned to the hospital for a time. Of course we never said a word to the father. He seemed so innocent of all this. Thinking about it afterwards, I saw the son as simply belonging to <sup>Sophia's</sup> ~~the~~ end of the world. I thought that since the future always lays an engaging hand on the young for its jobs to be done, a young army was now available for the last destruction of all! <sup>Yes,</sup> Here was an end-of-the-world child. His eyes, bereft of even <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ primordial hope of survival, finding therefore love out of the question, having nothing to look forward to, and horror to look back on, declared Sophia and me simple, credulous, hopelessly enraptured children of creation! Yes! After he left the house I suddenly gave up the crabbing conviction that I was an old woman! What nonsense! I was simply what I saw before me, what I felt, what I loved in Sophia, I was the tremulous excitement of waiting for her in the evening—how absurd to think of years as the determining factor of a state of being!

It is now two nights that he lies safely in hospital. Where is my purring goddess? where the rich round curves under the loose gown? the hair coiled in black and grey snakes? the hands that have grown to the shape of the voluptuous parts they have formed? Remember the compact you made with all of us, just by your presence—never to die!



One cannot but agree with Sophia when she says that women force her back into her 'amphibian destiny' all the time! Here is Cassandra, a balanced, reflective woman, seeing out the last of her days in an imperial haze of seaboard dreams and Augustan books and whisky, who reserves a surviving part of herself for Sophia's agony, as we shall especially see later, when she hopes for Sophia to return to the house 'frantic'. Benign and deeply protective of Sophia as few other friends are, Cassandra just the same waits like the carrion crow for a quarrel to prostrate her! And Aaron's wife? Is that really her speaking? Is it really possible that she will try to keep her husband in hospital in order to enjoy Sophia alone? But she and Sophia never see each other! They will certainly not meet if they can help it! So we have the engaging scene of a woman calculating harm to her husband simply to enjoy in solitude certain thoughts towards a woman three kilometres away! So not simply women but women's thoughts beam their night-and-day rays on to Sophia, leaving her no time for that 'life of my own' she has always talked about and dreamed about, and never had, because her life is not her own and that is that. Quite a predicament! Now do we wonder why she pours herself out so passionately on the subject of gender?

But <sup>what</sup> we could never have predicted is that a man should turn the same order of thought-ray on to her, and even <sup>visit</sup> ~~go to see~~ her to feast his eyes on her! And what man? The Renegade! It seems impossible, even to himself—especially to himself! But an interesting thing has happened in his mind. He has come to feel close to her though she having once spurned him. There are certain men who always come back for more. Her rudeness ~~steadily~~ planted in him an intrigued curiosity towards her person. Hatred is a close relationship, after all. It is dangerous to enter its shallows if you don't want to drown in its depths! But

He would

he waded in. And Sophia grew in his mind. As he comes to like Aaron less and less, so he feels himself drawn nearer Aaron's fabricated enemy, Sophia. So his thoughts too grow feverish out of the fever of other people's thoughts! He finds himself walking towards the Sophia villa. As quickly, he will forget his infatuation. His life is so ordered, so carefully sober and measured, without being in any way really balanced, as to leave the animal energies dangerously under pressure. Yes, as the Mother Superior would say, the rationalist comes up against demons where he least expects them—inside! His wife manages to contain them, to some extent, in bed (as he manages to contain hers). But the bed cannot account for everything. Here he is blind even to what he wants from Sophia. Perhaps it is an infatuation with the beast! He only knows, like Bottom (as his son Josh would say), that he has something on his head—it could be dream and it could be fact—but it alters all life for a time. Afterwards, when he has 'recovered', he finds it hard to recognise the infatuated man who went before—to believe that the ass's head was there. But he never recognises himself because he looks for himself in the mind (again the Mother Superior)!

\* \* \* \*

I did an unbelievable thing. I walked straight up the hill and knocked on Sophia's door! There was a rather nice elderly <sup>lady</sup> ~~man~~ with her, <sup>she</sup> ~~had~~ <sup>had</sup> one of those old-world accents I can <sup>never</sup> ~~not~~ understand. What is happening to me? Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things! She has begun to remind me in a strange way of that shameless creature in the Manhattan hotel—yes, Sophia, suddenly I feel I could derive from you as drastic a change as I did from those rough hands! It could be the heat, the intoxication of these sea breezes, but I give way to it, I feel no respons<sup>a</sup>ibility, I am the dog who leaves home to follow a scent—it is all nonsense of course but I persist! I even want to laugh! What has happened to the world I knew as a child when we murdered in orderly fashion? I could scream with laughter to hear myself talking like this! Imagine, me know an hermaphrodite! All this talk and high philosophy and stuff makes me scream with laughter! As I say to my wife when she climbs up on her high metaphysics platform, Just close the door and we'll settle your little ontological hash, we'll see if I can't mount you on to something ~~more~~ substantial than Leibnitz! Windows of the soul my arse! What a marvel it is to wake up to the fact that business life is simply a veil, and to proceed to DANCE BEHIND IT LIKE A MANIAC. Yes, Josh, you shall see wildness in your father yet! Do you realise I could tear everything down that you think so settled and established ~~in~~ my life?

Indeed, you taught me nothing else but your powers of destruction.

I asked my Judas-wife (I can see she is yearning for the strange one again!) not to allow him near the hospita<sup>l</sup>, and the first thing she tells me is, The Renegade's coming up this afternoon. It is almost as if S. were with us again! Oh, S., your powers! Anyway, he came. Leaned his silver-tipped rod of importance on my bed of all places (God, how I know these Jews!) and sat down purring like a small black

cat, his mellow eyes that seem to be rimmed with <sup>l</sup>god settled on me like a couple of ducats. I wish he wouldn't sit down so emphatically, I mean lower himself with such plumb ease that you think first the chair will give, then the floor, then the entire island, succumbing under the <sup>z</sup>she gravitational pressure of so much worldliness! Oof, it makes me believe that perhaps those Alexandrian Jews were right and the devil may yet win his battle with the Lord! How am I? I simply nod, with a slight raising of the eyebrows to denote that while doing rather badly I am really rather well. Not a word from my lips. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way but the folly of fools is deceit. For a fool layeth open his folly.

I completely fooled him. I even put more questions than I meant to. I was astonished how unguarded he was. He couldn't possibly know what was passing through my mind. I seem to have become one of Plato's madmen—at first a shudder went through me, at the thought of hearing about HER, and an awe that seemed to come from before life—yes, I have seen my Sophia in a life of dreams! She has a man's parts below and a woman's above, and she speaks all kinds of delphic things! At the same time I have a sense of self-disgust, that I have wandered off into limbo and will never again retrieve my grip on life. Yet my wife sees nothing! As long as I rise and retire at the same times! It's just no good if I take these long holidays. On the other hand I waited twenty years to build this house and it has to be inhabited. I shall only recognise myself again when the Threadneedle Street traffic is dinning in my ears. I have a feathery feeling between my legs that unforeseen events are being prepared. I want to hear more about myself—this is how I feel! And only this delphic creature can tell me! I was so excited I almost trembled when at last I'd got him to talk about her (he can't stop his tongue running in the old groove). And I was deliriously happy that any state of feeling could cause such a clear reaction in me—I mean, poets and

such-like tremble this way, and here am I—! Perhaps I am on the threshold of bestiality!

Far from fooling me, he made me a roaring lion, ravening the prey! He determined me not to yield an inch of my lower garden, nor a drop of water, for he thinks there is a water-source under my vegetable nursery. He has been in water trouble since he built that house. And just because he went about it in such a dark and devious way, hiding behind questions about HER, I decided even to go back on my word of last year and not sell him a yard or a gallon. For if I gave him all the waters of Sion what would he do but invite even more guests to his house, and double his blasted soirées, with music belching between the pine trees and the fumes from his barbecues drifting up to our windows like a sacrifice of the heathen! No! An east wind shall come, the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up!

I realise I have begun to make war on him. He lies in bed with his beard over the sheet, following me with his eyes, unless one of the sisters is about (the brides of Christ always manage to show a curve before they leave the room). I have become the serpent Apophis, the demon of the Egyptian abyss, the ocean that swallows up the sun at twilight each day! I have become Ammut, eater of the dead, watch-dog of Osiris, formed of lioness, crocodile and hippopotamus. I have become strange! I can no longer say I am his wife. I can no longer even be convinced that I belong on this earth! It is even useless talking to me about the race! Like Siva I fly over the battlefield with its wounded and dead, my hair behind me in the wind, my eyes wild and my laughter echoing! Yes, I am free. And I simply cannot tell what I will do. And if anyone told me it was me who got him into hospital I would say yes. He was passing my door, and I offered my neck like the tower of David. And he parted my

locks to touch the pomegranate of my temple! And I knew that it was one time too many, given his age and state. My gaze was terrible and clear as he ~~was~~<sup>yielded to</sup> me in a last exhausted sacrifice the very marrow of his bones. That afternoon he didn't get<sup>up</sup> from his siesta. And in the house that evening, when he was already in the hospital, I felt a presence that I can only describe as mellow like the evening sun as it dies behind the swollen female cypresses, and the rooms seem to emit a glowing light of their own manufacture. I sat down on the terrace and gazed across the garden. I heard noises from the town. The sea was calm. I saw its blinding flash as the<sup>last</sup> sun caught it. And I myself—what I called I myself...disappeared. I was no longer tied to anything. I no longer had a name. And if I hurried off<sup>to</sup> hospital with as much fruit as a human being could carry it was because of the habit of good we are all born to/ Someone once said, Our tendency to good is like the tendency of water to go downwards, and our tendency to bad an attempt to throw the water up—but it will not stay that way for long. The most contradictory thing of all is that, planning war on him, I feel no tendency towards the bad. I feel it has nothing to do with good or bad. It is something ordained, required. It belongs to the primal, and I am simply its instrument.

Does he see the truth? But if he does I can blind him with pleasures! Yes! Isn't that the gauntlet ~~that~~ a woman makes her man run<sup>through</sup>—new sensations? Isn't that where we achieve our hold on our heroes<sup>e</sup>? My bearded<sup>hero</sup>—Zeus! Yes, Zeus—until the female hand goes its silent journey, and then Zeus takes a holiday from his firmamental chores! Has Sophia succeeded then? Am I indeed her pupil? Did her message only penetrate me after she had gone, and after I had started hating her, with the delay of incubation that all new<sup>germinations</sup> things<sup>require</sup>? Why doesn't she speak? I can tell you! Because she is too busy with the Map of Sophia! That map shows jet-routes to every part of the world, between London and Sidney, Tokyo and Los Angeles, Madrid and Stockholm! And she is either moving

across this Map to one of her numberless stations of call (where a wife trembles with expectant yearning, a husband with fear) or else awaiting the arrival from one of these stations of a panting guest. Either moving towards or being moved towards by someone else! The Map is always in function. Never a moment day or night when the captain of some jet-aircraft is not unknowingly the servant of her desires. This is why she does not speak to me. She is too busy! There are too many of us!

And how we hate each other, we veterans of the Sophian army. We all shine with an individual light for her. What colour did I shine? I think perhaps a promising pink. But now—if she saw me now—I would shine for her as innocuously dim as an eclipse of the sun, and as dangerous to the eye! Yes, I have begun a new life!

\* \* \* \*

The strangest reference in the above is that to Siva. It simply does not sound like Aaron's wife, and I assume that someone else interpolated a remark. Certainly she has become as terrible as Siva! She has achieved her detachment from her man, which seems to have been half the reason for her infatuation with Sophia. For infatuations are not simply the result of a glimpse of the Face of the divine, as Sophia said much earlier. They take place to serve functions of which we are as yet entirely unaware! We leap on to each other's backs at an incredible rate—to get over this fence, that ditch! We are ~~we~~ at one and the same time strong enough to carry others, and weak enough to need a lift! We shudder at a chasm which for someone else is a soft decline, we laugh at an easy gate that for someone else is a fearful portcullis

with poisoned spikes! We do not see 'the world' in the same way. The 'world' as a permanent, shared background we all agree about is a necessary fiction. We carry on our shoulders aeons of past efforts, which determine our present ones, in a lifelong (Sophia would say 'lives-long') struggle to eliminate the shades of the past, and reach the open spaces where our will at once translates itself into destiny. The novel, in its brief history, tried to make a 'world' that remained<sup>s</sup> the same even through several generations, not to say through crowds of different coe<sup>a</sup>l characters. The characters tend~~e~~ to fulfil fixed roles towards the fixed roles of those they loved or hate<sup>d</sup>, and towards the fixed world of objects around them. That the novel was for a long time closely associated with the newspaper, in serialisation, could have been expected, since the newspaper was always the vehicle par excellence of the fiction of a shared and absolute 'outside' world which simply had to be observed, without the relativity of the observer ever being mentioned. It accounted for that vaguely hypocritical tone of 'authority' and 'impartiality' that crept into the two media, as a style to hide the doubts and the too-quick changes that confounded observation every time. The author of the novel which ran through several generations was not a man who himself had several lives. Nor was he several characters in one. He was as acutely relative as all of us, but without ever laying his cards on the table. Of course, the novel was a symbol, a token for a view of the workings of destiny, with the world fictionalised into a static (nice for dreaming) world 'outside'. Well, the novel was fiction, after all. That we long ago began to live in a fiction, with the newspapers renew<sup>the</sup>ing/daydream each morning, is not so healthy. Now the novel was a product of rationalism, which is why it came about in the eighteenth century or epoch of 'enlightenment'. And it began to fade in our time as writer after writer found the 'world' he was supposed to talk about disintegrat-

ing in his fingers.

Mr Renegade (how respectfully I place 'Mr' in front of his nickname!) needed his infatuation with Sophia too, for darker purposes than Aaron's wife. He needs, not liberation from wife or friend, but more acquaintance with the animal. This, for him, has its healthy side. He wants to DANCE BEHIND A VEIL LIKE A MANIAC, he says somewhere. Exactly. He is mending his rationalism, compensating for its harmful paralysing action on his own development. Yes, each to his role, which means not simply a relation to others (that is, to their roles) but to himself, to his yet undiscovered self.

\* \* \* \*

I carried home all he told me about her like a man with a box full of rubies. I went straight to the lavatory off the courtyard, which is about the only place I can be alone, and thought about it. I sat there for ~~so~~ such a long time that when I returned to the verandah my wife asked me if I had a stomach upset. I said no, I got engrossed in a murder story. To which she said that, seeing the number of murder stories that were piling up in the cellar, she wondered I didn't get bad dreams. I said I got bad dreams anyway—with a little click of my tongue. I like saying quick, dry, effective things like that, just before I sit down with a decisive wallop and open the newspaper with an ear-splitting crack that is meant to be the signal for the close of all conversation. It didn't close this conversation (it never does, to be honest) but I heard nothing more she said. Now I know what 'secret' means, in the Book. I carry it with me, my tabernacle of silence!

It's happened again! I always hope that the last time will have been really the last. But no! Someone new is always sent, a revelation from the heavenly chambers!—to stir my amphibian destiny again.

But of course—how could those chambers, being immense to the point of  
dwindling immensity itself to the field of numbers, fail to yield contin-

ually their angels, their beasts and goddesses? We are watched all the time! And I lie here quivering, hoping to preserve myself against this dazzling multitude of wonders He releases on me! I always hope not to be torn again, not to plunge ~~me into~~ into that abyss of scorching light where I am once more <sup>the</sup> ~~that~~ black child standing on the beach—making them look at me with such surprise that the wet sand trickles out of their hands and they forget to make their ~~sand~~ castles! She came yesterday! Unleashed from the heavenly chambers! Arrived at the door, unheralded by a cablegram! We had met <sup>had</sup> in New York. But she looked so different there! It was <sup>in my car</sup> on Madison Avenue, I called in to have my hair done as usual and the proprietor, a delightful queen I always go to the theatre with, whispered <sup>mystical</sup> ~~to me~~ that he had someone new and 'special', before ushering me over to her chair. I won't say she did my hair. She ~~re~~created it. She sent ~~electric~~ currents through it. It danced like snakes under her fingers! And all the time she spoke to me, softly <sup>at first, then</sup> ~~shouting~~, while when I was under the drier. And I said, Come to my place in the sun if you happen to be holidaying that way, and I gave her my address as I do a dozen times a day (that is, a dozen times a day I invite my bowels to be torn open!). And yesterday she walks up the hill from parking her <sup>red</sup> suicidal two-seater on the tarmac road below. There she was as I opened the door, bold teeth radiant in the darkness of her face, her rebellious hair in defiant, ~~and~~ almost threatening life on her head, tumbling down her cheeks, <sup>h</sup>iding her brow—and her eyes!—those deep savage caskets brimming with sensual machination, what will you do to me? And her first words so light and pure, Did I remember saying I knew of a <sup>carpenter's workshop</sup> ~~workshop~~ where she might perhaps learn a little ~~carving~~ carving and suchlike for her spare time, after the hot damp day in the Madison Avenue salon for expensive ladies? Yes, yes, I remember!—which I don't!—but I mean by 'remember' from a former time, from my childhood, yes I

remember you, how you stood there with the wet sand dribbling out of your hands! O how I long to travel back and tread again that ancient track! So you came to me—you returned—I had forgotten the actual look of those two great black holes of fire you call your eyes—I only remember how they burned me on that beach, before you turned away, and now you are back in another body! And I know there is nothing consecutive in life, that the time we take as the span of the day is only the time of convenience, useful for making money and plans. The real time lies inside, and I know that nothing has happened between that day on the beach and the moment yesterday when you appeared and we looked at the sea in the distance like the grey sparkling scales of a fish cupped between two hilly hands! I led you upstairs to my room where you glanced with that savage flash of the eyes and a quick flourish of those dangerous snake-strands on your head at the huge mirror standing opposite my bed. Terrible, machinating glance! What future contortions did they see? And at the foot of the bed we took tea. And I realised that no one knew we were there, apart perhaps from Cassandra downstairs, quietly drinking herself to death, disgorging from her memory files of sailor boys with matted hair who all but drowned in her climaxes. And even my pooten prophetess knew nothing about your arrival, however much ~~she~~ she might hear your tread on the floor now. The tea refreshed you! You sat quietly, your eyes flashing their challenges in the dimness of the room, shuttered against the afternoon sun. Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue, and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon <sup>tinged with hair-spray!</sup> And so savage, so rasping your sentences, your voice droning—shaft after shaft of dry irony at the world! Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse! thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck!

Where on Sophia's Map is she? She said the sea was the grey of a fish's scales—that cannot mean the sea round this island! Is it perhaps the Atlantic? She talked once about building on the Atlantic sea-board. And there was a project of her moving to the Pacific coast. But then I remember her saying—I think I heard her say it just now—but her voice was far away, as in sleep—that she had closed the shutters against the afternoon sun. The Balearic isles, the Canaries, Mauritius, Malta, Cyprus, Lemnos, Skyros, Halonnesos, Paparethos, Polyaiagos, Zakynthos, Kaphallenia, Leukas, Kythara, Melos? Wherever you are, in whatever sea, tropical or clement or cold, may the stones of your house fragmentate to powder and your foundations subside into chasms, may you be set to flight and return to where I enjoy remembering you, on East 42nd Street, you jet-driven earth-cow!

\* \* \* \*

The island-names above receded into the ancient world—'Paparethos' etc. I cannot believe that this <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ all spoken by Aaron's wife. But here I must face another possibility—that people do not speak with their own minds! Other voices enter them, other knowledges. It isn't that the mind dips into a kind of pool of the 'unconscious' where all the past events of one's life are stored up. We shall see later the Mother Superior's attack on ~~the~~ Freudian unconscious—another fictional area with its suggestions of the static and permanent. No, the will calls up past events—even past events from other people's lives—even unfamiliar knowledge—when it needs them, and this is a manufacturing process, not a matter of dipping into a still pool. We have access, <sup>says</sup> ~~according to~~ the Mother Superior, to all knowledge, according to our needs, which means also our capacities. Can a knowledge of Chinese suddenly

appear, if the need is deep enough? Not suddenly. Yes, suddenly if the need has pursued its course, taking no account of the space-time formula. But the knowledge of what the Chinese language is—this may appear, in quite another form from the language itself! For the 'Chinese language' is only a form, to express something, among a million possible forms. It is what knowledge tries to achieve that decides its form. And so, according to what we try to achieve we call into being a corresponding form, and may be surprised by the sudden// and unexpected 'knowledge' that is presented to us apparently out of the blue. Here we come to the eastern claim that all knowledge whatsoever appears //to <sup>those whose</sup> ~~us~~ concentration is great enough. That is, not 'facts' in the exploded (Einstein-exploded) sense, but total knowledge, as a completely satisfactory form, discovered not through the mind, where only the 'facts' are discovered, but through the real self which does not change, nor ~~is~~ differ from one person to another, though it may be hidden, and usually is hidden. As I say, this is the eastern claim—what I have picked up from the narratives of the Mother Superior, who has been a kind of Socrates to Sister Mahatma's Plato.

We ought to notice, /in Sophia's narrative above, the frequency of images that, meant to describe the Madison Avenue hairdresser, hark back to Mabel Hale ('bold teeth in the darkness of her face', 'black holes ~~of~~ of fire you call your eyes'). <sup>Also,</sup> ~~and~~ in her mention of herself as the 'black' child, <sup>she may be referring</sup> to those first 'experiences' of hers on the Valencian sea-board, now perhaps interlaced with the Hale experience.

Apparently Aaron's wife thinks that the Mediterranean never looks 'grey like a fish's scales'. She cannot have looked very hard. I suggest that her idea of the Mediterranean is of a blue sea, and that this derives from reading more than observation. Here a thought is

stronger than sense-impression. It changes the colour of the sea!  
I have heard a wit say that the 'sunny south' still exists because the  
northern tourists now bring it with them. It survives the cold and the  
wet, the polluted beaches, the smog-veiled sunshine!

\* \* \* \*

Sometimes I look up from my bed into her eyes—they are kindled with  
hatred! Every wise woman buildeth her house, but the fool plucketh it  
down with her hands! Her eyes are hot like cinders! They burn their  
way across the night from her bedroom (always so vibrant with desires!)  
to this hospital. I try to remember when we were last sitting together  
peacefully, evaluating a papal bull I has just picked up, thirteenth  
century, Gregory IX, tied with the original silk, a bullae favorabilis  
giving permission for a new church in Rome. They can go for as little  
as thirty dollars, and I decided to hang on to it for better markets to  
come. The canapis bulls, tied with string and not silk, were always  
bad news for their receivers, and these go for more, our world being  
committed, as it were, to bad news. I had just sold a crystal  
chandelier for ten grand at Parke Bernet and was in no hurry for bread—  
I had written the deal off (having dropped the thing on the kitchen floor  
and repaired it) and then up pops a Texan; what special powers did the  
Lord give the state of Texas, to produce one of its native-born at  
almost any art-auction with thousands of bucks ready in his pocket?  
Deft counter-bidding pushed him up to about twice what the thing  
is worth.

\* \* \* \*

A transference to the 'art dealer' here, whoever he may be—he is certainly not Aaron, though it is Aaron speaking—may argue an interpolation from outside, or a temporary wish on Aaron's part to be the art dealer Sophia wanted him to be. He is deliberately 'playing' here, may be. But it isn't his style of language. However, that could simply be earnest play. It is possible that Jack Hale was an art historian and advised dealers, even dabbled in the market, but it isn't his style of language either. Aaron might be thinking of Hale at this moment, and 'giving' him words. Later in the book Aaron's wife wonders whether Sophia could not help her market her work when she takes up sculpture 'as a mathematician'. I mean there seems to be art-dealing somewhere in their common background. Sophia may have dabbled in it, through Jack Hale. The Florentine pietà may have come to her through him. Perhaps Sophia taunted Aaron with being a book-worm, and he is rehearsing here what may indeed become his profession later in life. He did certainly appear at Parke Bernet's for the book auctions, as we know already. He knew about bidding and 'inside' counter-bidding. All professions are germinated ~~in the protagonist~~ by ~~the~~ rehearsing and improvising <sup>the</sup> future role. And the role either merges into the profession, once <sup>a man</sup> ~~he~~ starts practising it, or it modifies the profession, he 'writes his own part' and performs it.

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\* \* \* \*

~~...with thousand of books ready in his pocket?~~  
~~...from up to about twice what the things is~~  
~~...~~

That night we lay in the olive grove below the house. The tray of tea-things was still there at the foot of my bed, just as we had left it in the late afternoon, reflected in the vast mirror. We ate nothing, drank not a drop of wine, just tiptoed past Cassandra's french windows where she sat in her usual chair, composed and still in the last stages of her day's drinking marathon, her brain now laid quiet, with no more desires (that is, raging memories), gazing before her in the darkness, over the heads of the dusty olive trees towards the sea. She always at this moment, looks lovely ~~now~~ her plump shoulders soft, her hair loose, as I remember her twenty years ago, when the fisher-boys were tossing on the ocean of her bed and emerging like soldiers from a new kind of beautiful war, where the wounds ~~are~~ <sup>were</sup> sweet. Ah, she had a power then! And each night that power steals on her again, when the brain goes quiet, and all she can say if you knock off her door is, Please don't come in, whoever you are.

My Madison Avenue hairdresser wanted ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> know in a whisper who that lady surrounded by a great light in the darkness was, but I stopped her lips and we tiptoed over the hard clods, down to where it was smooth and you could see the sea arguing with itself <sup>in</sup> secret ~~ly~~. I had bought a thick blanket. And later that night, when Cassandra had slumped her way to bed, having knocked over a chair as she does every night (I always wait for the sound before I go to sleep), I lay gazing up at the sky and was vouchsafed what I can only call a visit—such as I could never describe to the ~~subject~~ <sup>coiffure</sup> lying next to me, exhausted now from her ravages, asleep like a child who has found home at last. For the black dome of the night had opened before my eyes, its scattered silvery light from the stars drawing aside with a breath that came through <sup>the poplars below</sup> the olive ~~tree~~ <sup>grove</sup> and clattered

~~the~~ their leaves like tin-foil, and everything that had happened to me in the previous two hours was resolved—the stretching and scorching of my insides in that perilous ecstasy that is pain too, and disaster, and my destruction!—she had galloped from one explosion to the next like a mare full of oats, until thank God she slumped asleep—it felt as if my entrails were joining the earth, actually about ~~me~~ to feed the olive trees like the dead pigs they used to plant under them—and now it was all resolved, and my giddy regret that once again I was whirling and roasting in the martyr's fire, clinging to that belt round my middle like a maniac—my regret too was absorbed into that vast opening dome of the night, and the heavenly breath touched my face, even kissed it with a message so deep that I shall never see it in words or even feelings, and my horror at becoming the serpent again was consumed into what I can only describe as a state of divine prestige, as if my body were suddenly elected, unchallengeably enthroned in that open-cracked dome beyond, where there was no body but yet me, released even from the burning I at that moment felt, having spilled so much of the marrow of my bones. And I slept at once.

It seemed to me that suddenly I knew who I was. At dawn I looked at her and realised that she had simply been sent to me, an instrument. A certain loveliness from the evening before played on her lips. It was like music hovering over them. This music was strange. I heard the clink of cymbals, a dance of Katakali! The snakes of her hair were quiet now, they had entangled themselves to death, and only another journey would bring them to rebirth. And so I got up slowly, and left her, and went upstairs to my bed. I slept until Cassandra bellowed up from below, What the devil's that lying under an olive tree wrapped in one of my blankets?

And later that day, after I had introduced them to each other and everything was on a safe basis (of no further interest to me), some words

~~came to me, it seemed from many~~

came to me, it seemed from many lives ago; I question not my corporeal or vegetative eye any more than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look through and not with it.

Are we speaking in English or what?

Cassandra and the Madison Avenue coiffeuse (smelling faintly of a thousand and one rinses) talked quietly together. They had people in common, apparently. Was this one still not dead, the other only half so? Was this place substantial, the other still a dream? And as they talked I realised that seeing the night broken open as I had I saw all my future too, and the meaning of my body in its present, namely as a vehicle for my future. When we look into our past we see our function performed; and in the future lies the performer, which is not my body, nor my life, but that of which my life is one of the enacting parts.

These words seem to come from far away, though they are my own. And they are light, at the edge of meaning. I slept for three hours in the afternoon, until it was dark, and they had to come upstairs to find me, the coiffeuse helping Cassandra, an arm round her waist. I looked at them both as if I had never seen them before, which indeed I hadn't, in many senses, and at once I could see that this way of looking at them excited and thrilled them. Their eyes, the one pair light and wondering, the other flashing with dangerous serpentine designs—quickened as I looked into them searchingly; the one hoping for a long evening of drink, the other for—well, I would let them both have their desires. My body sagged with resignation like a half-filled balloon. But for their benefit I got out of bed with a great animal bound, shaking the house. As I walked down the stone steps behind them, calling each of them darling, I felt such a suicidal reluctance to be there that it was far beyond suicide; I was ferociously hungry for that sky again, that future, that breath through the olive trees, that me which had no place here except for the performance of lip-services, and at the same time I realised that

death is no liberation into one's promised future but only into one's present deeds. Or rather I would say that understanding the key to one's present deeds—discovering why destiny requires one to be tramping down stone steps behind two women, one after the bottle and the other the breast—is the liberation. Before we reached the lounge, where the drinks sideboard on one side argued for precedence over the overworked divan on the other side, I had discovered my role, and begun to perform it with <sup>w</sup>awareness, because it had the guaranteeing stamp of the future on it. I sat with them over dinner, sucking at the dangerously shaped white asparagus tips, and waited until Cassandra had achieved the nightly demise of her mind, then took the lady of the thousand and one rinses down to the olive grove, and plunged once more into my painful ecstasies with a detachment I had never known before—with such detachment that I felt I had never properly lived before, only been pulled blindly into dances by the wires of death. As it was, I could no longer see the possibility of death. My role was now far beyond even ~~my~~ own life! It stretched into many lives. And so I could perform for these two women their wishes, with a mysterious capti<sup>v</sup>ating energy from beyond, knowing that I was binding them to me—perhaps not only for this life either! I could feel how every angle of my body was important for this—was <sup>at</sup> watched ~~by~~ with thrilled eyes—as I talked <sup>to them</sup> sitting at table, slumped forward on my elbows, dressed in a simple Indian shirt down to my knees, naked underneath; I could actually see how my body had been kneaded to its shapes in order to allure such eyes, and render its gifts back to the divine. The hairdresser hardly dared touch me in the softness of the olive grove that night. I discovered she was trembling. I had evidently taught her that whatever she touched with her fingers was the inside and not the outside of things. She trembled to see matter suddenly alive, having always taken herself and it as essentially dead. And the next morning



wall or this overshadowing branch—so our life has not yet determined its new form. Thinking like this excites me because I, Sophia, have helped to lead the Race out of its coils of procreation.

As I say, I never wanted to live here again but she insisted, though of course not in words or persuasion, simply by moving events that way. I think she loves to live near the flame of hatred. We are within two kilometres of the Aaron villa. She hopes that one day even this will be mended, and the family of the Race intact again.

Josh called me from the States, in the middle of the night of course. He is supposed to have some sort of job, which I don't believe. In a month from now the begging cable will arrive, OUT OF CASH DAD, and unsigned. I imagine the job is the daily chore of commuting to New York for the daily hash. These are serious times. His abandonment of cocaine was a relief. He talked everybody's trousers off, and was always one <sup>jump</sup> ~~step~~ ahead in any discussion. Barbiturates made him dozy and easy-going. I couldn't stand all that nonstop talk again, and the staring eyes, and it makes their faces so ugly. He told me over the phone that I loved people to the degree they loved me, and hated them to the degree they hated me, and that was wrong. Imagine that around four in the morning. Everything has to refer back to you, he said, for you to be interested in it or understand it. He said if he slammed the phone down then and there and said he hated me, I'd start to hate him and he'd never hear from me again. I said, Are you ringing me at this hour to tell me this? No, he says, I'm trying to find myself. Well couldn't you find yourself when I'm not asleep, I said. But I thought about what he said afterwards. Isn't that the meaning of 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth'? Don't we all do it, love to the degree we are loved?

He has mistaken the intention of the Scriptor. 'Eye for an eye,

tooth for a tooth' means that for every little bit of hatred you give, you get the same degree of hatred back, and for every little bit of love you give, you get the same degree of love back. This is bad news for haters, good for lovers! Life is in your hands! Rise and embrace your freedom! This thought brought about a sudden revival in me—I took my first walk in the hospital grounds, and I asked my Judas-wife not to come today. I feel marvellously armed against her. It is good to be armed with light and peace.

I returned this morning after a five-day gap and could not imagine how it had been possible to see the island as I had seen it just five days before. I sent the car ahead from the harbour and walked back, just to get to know the island again in its new sanity. I almost asked myself, But who is Sophia? I can no more tell you now why a few days ago I was in a fever about a hermaphrodite than I could account for her behaviour. I am only glad that I did go to see her, and get rid of that nasty feeling I had had that she was a mocker of Jews. Her kiss was a great relief, and I was almost inclined to believe her story that Aaron's wife had put her up to it—to that bleak frown at the door. I mean she is so spontaneous and all-giving, it really is difficult to imagine <sup>her</sup> preparing a snub, she really does seem too innocent a creature. Anyway, that's all shit as far as I'm concerned now. I've had the din of the Threadneedle Street traffic in my ears again. I spoke to New York for over an hour and a half from my office, and the logical, the clean connections were established again, and my lunches at the same <sup>place,</sup> ~~place~~ the same table, with the same Fred serving not only reassured me, they gave a deadly once-and-for-all slap to these island-fevers: they said, 'Never again!'. I particularly enjoyed grasping the morning paper on my return to the house, where my wife was waiting with coffee and sandwiches as always, and the latest news of the drug-world as purveyed by her three sons. Shit to that too!

I grasped the newspaper at the edges (after reading the outside columns) so as to make it unreadable for others. I call this my little bit of kaiserism. I think I can account a little for that fever; some kind of virus has been going round the island, and I was feeling none too well before I stepped on that plane. It probably was a fever, a real one! Anyway, everything is i<sup>n</sup> its place again. She no longer bewitches me.

You are bewitched not by me but by the mortal coils that revolve you in endless cycles of pleasure and pain. You are so sure that what you touch is real, and what you see is real! But they are thoughts, my dear! You can never get away from thoughts! You created the fever, you created the so-called reality on your return! But when you break through the thoughts (you will never do it)—through the 'solid' things and 'seen' things and 'felt' things—you find a stillness that they call the real birth! I say 'they' because I, Sophia, know as little as you do about it; I am bewitched like you, I am revolved in the terrible and absurd cycles which are only the consequence of being enlaved in thoughts. My thoughts at this moment are in a Madison Avenue hairdresser's salon! But I know I am bewitched. I am aware of that marvellous bewitching power that lies behind everything, that can hold before us such dazzling tapestræes, and make us giddy with ecstasy at the touch<sup>of</sup>—the right hand, the right bosom! You are ~~bewitched~~ bewitched in the slave's way, I in the handmaid's way! I enjoy good fortune, you only wealth, which is the bread of the forsaken. Even you must have asked yourself how it is possible for Sophia to trade in her new car every year for an even newer one—

—especially as she has a smash-up at least once a month—

—and the answer is that all my satisfactions must be here and now; I am in close accord with She who devises it all, while not having a trace of sainthood in myself. I am looked after, provided for! I allow my-

self to be rocked in Her lap, I never follow my own will! I let life transpire, this is my secret! With a soupçon of sainthood I would not be so fortunate; that is, She would feel no need to look after me. But, as I am, giddy with Her bewitching powers, helplessly bewitched from the moment I clap eyes on the living day, a special place in Her watchful heart is kept for me. I am not a mere plaything in Her hands but almost like those who have challenged her lovely witcheries and found the Lady Herself, sporting quietly in her golden rooms. I shall never know Her. Which makes Her all the more attentive that I shall not be lost to the chances of her bewitching machinery, but shall be preserved, even while I am being tortured, like a sort of royal pig. Better, I think, than just being a pig. Though there is the story of God putting Himself inside a pig and enjoying it so much that he had to be more or less dragged out of his pigskin back to heaven. Didn't you say just now how happy you were to have found reality again, and put your nose once more in the pigswill?

Get thee to an analyst, go!

Nor can any peace be lasting that is sought in external affairs.

Who spoke?

At the hospital today; he saw the extent of my liberation.

I put the grapes, cut just that afternoon, icy from the sudden autumn hailstorm, close to his left hand. *((It is late august, and the first eating grapes are out - but not autumn))*. He was sleeping. He started at the icy touch. What has happened to me? I can serve him night and day without resentment. And he sees that he prefers to be served with resentful fire! He misses the fire that used to flash from my eyes, and could turn so thrillingly to fires of desire! The one can hardly be had without the other. So Sophia's magic touch, which I never want to feel again, did work, only slowly. I am free now of him and her! But what have I been liberated into? It makes me afraid! I feel no

desire. I potter about our empty house in a self-contained mood but there are no particular thoughts in my head. As usual, I hardly sleep. Beware of the sleepless, somebody once told Sophia. Perhaps he was right. I realise what power there has always been in me, mostly between my legs. I never want to think again! I am—dare I say it?—happy! I have found a sort of stillness which I never knew existed. It puts me in harmony with the still garden outside, where the water of the pool round his chipped head of Hermes never changes its expression even by a flicker. I could easily never return to New York, or alternatively never return here from there. Now I understand why he feels safer at hospital than here at home! For he has no home! *'Home is the woman'!*

I clean the house and wash the sheets with my own hands, and bring the breakfast tray to her room. Her// eyes are less tired in the morning since he went into hospital. My son says I am the last woman on the island to be doing the sheets at the washing-place by the fountain. He says they can easily afford a washing machine like all the other villas on the island. I told him I shall never entrust sheets to a machine. I have never read a book, but the unlearned are saved from the grip of the devil of self-infatuation. The unlearned are saved from the sickness of a thousand whirling thoughts and words! Saved from running after wealth! My son's eyes are worn like an old man's! He follows me through the rooms of the Aaron villa staring at all their precious things, the pictures that are supposed to be worth more than the cost of the island, the bronze creatures that sometimes make me feel afraid, and he has his teeth clenched! All because he went to school! It is from more than one evil that the unlearned are saved. I am one of the last creatures here who cannot read or write. How my parents managed to keep me away from school I shall never remember, but they were cleverer than any government. My name is Miranda and I have long black hair which my

husband unties with a laugh at night.

I wonder why Miss Sophia never comes to the house now. At first when I saw her she frightened me. She said, Here, Miranda, tomorrow I bring you a lovely shawl! And she did. Her singing makes me feel good, it sounds like a man. She makes me feel strange. I think I would like to touch her. But she isn't natural. I feel sorry for her. She never goes with men. I say to my husband, What's wrong with that? think of all the nuns there are! She is like a Mother Superior there used to be on the island, we called her La Baffetta because of her moustache. She told my sister that when she was a girl she spread pigeon shit all over her face to make her hair grow. She wanted to be like a man. But my husband likes everything clear. We laugh about it. He tickles me in bed.

Here I am sitting in the dusk, gazing over the tops of the olive trees, dreaming of my sailor boys I was never bold enough so much as to touch! They used to leave me emptied-out, but not in the way Sophia would understand by that. I was worn out by my own subterfuges, which I myself too found horrible! If they moved closer to me on the sofa I reached for the cigar box and stuffed one in their mouths. If they stood in the doorway when I wanted to pass—they often tried that one—I simply turned back as if I'd forgotten something. They left exhausted too! But it wasn't my subterfuges that kept them off my body. It was my poise! That damned imperial poise was my curse! Young men fell in love with it by the dozen. I suppose a number of them even committed suicide. I was full of honour, you know—all that rot, just to keep Britain's monopoly in certain raw materials! It sort of de-womanised us. It spelled one thing in most of us—frigidity. The sailors never really and truly fell in love with me. They cottoned on pretty soon, and went round the corner for a whore. They stayed friends with me.

They felt a compassionate affection. <sup>s</sup> ~~Very~~ seldom did they try anything on, once they'd understood. When they did it was because they simply couldn't believe that a woman of my beauty, a woman with hips and breasts like mine, could not have something in store for them. Of course they believed secretly that I had simply not been provoked in the right way: they hoped to be the pioneer. They asked about my husband—my two husbands. I pretended some kind of marital fidelity, but they saw through that. They just smiled and nodded. I know what they called me, behind my back. The Mule. Meaning the childless one. It was said without malice. As for the English kids who fe~~el~~ in love with me, they were all out of the top drawer, and quite opposite the sailors, in their sentimentalism and sloppiness (which no doubt causes the female frigidity). My detachment from anything fleshly, combined with my avid interest in all fleshly subjects, struck the right perverted note for them, I suppose. Only Sophia opened me up, though she never satisfied me. The fact that she didn't—couldn't—was why she fascinated me, and why I stayed with her, and why—lovely contradictions—she satisfied me more than any other human being I have known. Her magnetic fleshliness, which of course is mostly theatre, and her lack of any frightening male demands, were exactly what I was after. It is years now since we 'had anything' as they say. Soon I shall knock the chair over, just before I go to bed, because she expects me to, so that she may pity me for my awkwardness. What tragedy there is in the world. How the earth steams with it, groans with it. And those absurd deaths. Three of my brothers in two world wars. And the concentration camps. How can God tolerate it, indeed create it?

He is inside you. Therefore aren't you accusing yourself?

Was that a male or female who spoke?

I know that when the poor darling knocks over her chair she is

helplessly drunk, stumbling towards the olive grove in the hope of finding what she never had—youth! For me the sound of that falling chair is the sound of her terror of old age, and my heart is torn each time. She always stops at the french windows. She never actually goes into the olive grove. She never so much as crosses the terrace. The terror, far from abating, bursts into something like panic, and she dashes back into the dark room, to feel her way towards another stiff drink which is taken up to bed. I often want to tell her, Renounce all and you shall find all. But she would take this to mean a phrase from her own idiotic imperial education such as 'give up the world', whereas renunciation means only giving up the ego! The ego is the reservoir of all terrors, and notably <sup>the terrors</sup> ~~those~~ of time and old age! The ego insists on calling itself life—and, worse than that, the only life! Why is it given to me to know this when I have never renounced a morsel of the ego myself, and could never do so? when I smart with resentment when a man comes in the room, and cannot let go of the whirling thoughts of revenge that crowd into my head? when I wake up sometimes with a fury inside me like a hurricane? A key may lie in a curious fact about me: I take at least two, sometimes three hours to wake up in the morning. This contradicts what I am always saying about how I wake up singing. But I mean ~~by~~ I <sup>e</sup>wake~~ing~~ up about three hours after I get out of bed. At first I am simply not conscious, even while walking about. Half a litre of black coffee makes little difference, nor does the din of conversation. Each morning I take a new ~~and~~ journey back to life, from what seems a dark country of sleep situated eternities ~~away~~ away, and into which I plunge, dreamless and all but unwakeable, the moment I put my head on the pillow at night. In this sense I am a visitor to life, I mean consciously a

visitor, and while a prisoner to space and time like most other people I am still aware of my life as only a short visit among many others. I am not foolish enough ~~to~~ to see the ego as all of life, or even as alive at all in the proper sense. I see my life as one of an endless series of lives. I often think to myself, What a mess I have made of 'this one', assuming that I have many more choices before me. Thus the I that spans all the lives is quite different from the I of one life, which is only an outer skin. This is why they sometimes call me 'the Greek'. I cannot basically take the external world as real. Only the ego can do that. When you cease to take it as real—here lies the reward—you begin to create it!

\* \* \* \*

It is news to me that anyone ever called her 'the Greek', but perhaps I have missed something. Certainly her doctrine of rebirth is Pythagorean and not Indian in origin. Cassandra is a Greek enthusiast. Perhaps during their long conversations under ceiling fans in Tangiers Sophia learned something from her—a further step to learning about herself. Again and again Sophia, as she herself says, 'talks with someone else's voice', and this is due, I think, to her tremendous capacity for absorbing people in their real selves, while paying no attention to their behaviour or their talk. She 'cannot understand' on ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> talking and behaving level, as Cassandra says.

\* \* \* \*

I knocked over the chair dutifully, and walked as usual to the

french windows to take a breath of night air. I always do this before going to bed so as to have a good belch. I find the fresh air brings it up. Then I feel my way across the dark room (unexplained ritual requires that I never switch on the light) to get myself a glass of mineral water 'to wash the evening out of your system' as the doctor told me. Then as I lie down on my bed upstairs with relief, not yet undressing because I want to contemplate that dusty silence outside the window, I make a kind of compact with death, I embrace it as something in life, I make sure that it will never take me unawares but visit me as a friend. Thank God I have never suffered from fear of old age.

I was astonished at myself but I carried the tiny bottle of pills all the way to the hospital. I never for a moment seriously believed that I would leave them on his bedside table but I did. That morning, before leaving the house (and after sending Miranda to pick basil), I searched through the dog's medical cupboard in the spare room and found <sup>o</sup>Dicrysticin 500, which contains penicillin and other allergy-inducing substances. I dared not go so far as to tip the tablets into another bottle. I popped them into my bag and left the house, intending nothing more than

that I should have them in my bag. I found myself putting them among the other tablets on his table. There they sat, clearly marked in india ink DOG TABLETS. He hardly opened his eyes. I told one of the brides of Christ that I would return later when he was less sleepy. I almost danced into the sun and—while I knew no real harm could come to him, and that the tablets were easily 'tolerated' as the packet said—I felt even more liberated than before, even more estranged from myself, from that ~~entity~~ non-existent creature I have never been able to find (and whose relationships—with Sophia, with Aaron—I even began to find tiresome!). All my life I have had a floating sensation, which most of my friends have put down to my never having had to worry about money. But now I have cut adrift. The floating now seems right, and I don't care where I drift to. The only connection I have with this self of mine is my body, which continues to walk and function. This is my only assurance that I exist.

After starting my third newspaper (I read the two international editions first, then the local paper) I heard my wife run into the house with footsteps that denoted she was looking for me. I kept reading hard (it was yesterday's crime passionel, in the back room of a bakery) but there she was in front of me all of a sudden, asking had I heard what had happened at the hospital? The nuns had given Aaron the wrong pills! They were treating him for pneumonia when he has heart trouble! A fever had sprung up. He was back on the danger list. Now perhaps people will listen when <sup>I</sup> ~~we~~ advise them to fly to the mainland when they fall sick rather than entrust themselves to the mercy of women whose thoughts are centred on death rather than life! My wife and I sat quietly over our coffee for a time, talking about the dangers of following anything but the sober facts in life. Wasn't it obvious, I said, that when you wanted proper medical treatment you should go to the men who believed in prolonging this life rather than to those whose sights <sup>were</sup> ~~are~~ on the next? She gave me

a quick look of admiration at this nicely rounded phrase.

He insisted on being removed as soon as the fever went down. I had to be at the hospital at eight sharp, with a chauffeur and car and blankets, though he was really too weak to leave his bed. The hospital is in alarm. Three doctors and the professor have been at his bedside. Two or three conferences were called, and sisters interviewed, to decide how Diocrystin 500 could find its way to his bedside table. The brides of Christ have been arguing like fishwives, and of course none of them will take the blame since none of them is to blame! I sympathise inwardly but can do nothing about it. I could say that I left the tablets inadvertently, meaning to use them on the dog, but apart from the improbability it is too late now. I thought he gave me a knowing look or two, and I notice that he isn't as full of biblical recrimination as usual. It seems that we know where we stand vis-à-vis each other, and I am happy for it. There won't be a state of war at home, for the simple reason that I have no enemy! He is the defeated, and I the army of occupation! Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross. All they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace! Oh what have I said?

3.

A GARDEN INCLOSED

What happens when a woman plants dog-pills at her husband's bedside without the smallest murderous intent? Well, he takes them or he doesn't. He did. She meant him to—and he was meant to. The bottle was clearly enough marked, in india ink, DOG TABLETS. Of course the sisters knew no English. But Aaron was sufficiently recovered to know what he was doing. He actually takes up an unfamiliar bottle and pops two tablets of an unfamiliar shape (his prescribed tablets were taken with meals only, and were shiny and round and variously coloured, while these were flat and white) into a quite unsuspecting mouth! Clearly history needed him for its next move. The pressure of future events may blind a person momentarily, if he happens to be in a key position where history can use him. His wife's will worked. And—what did it achieve for Aaron? Nothing but a fever (not quite true, as we shall see). For herself? Nothing but his unwanted return home. What she did achieve was something for Sophia! She changed her life—she brought about a dénouement for which Sophia ~~seemed to have~~ <sup>had</sup> been waiting for years. She brought her back to the convent! This is an example—the first we have had—where someone may become infatuated in order to serve someone else's destiny! For Sophia the dog-pills achieve the momentous! For when the momentous is to be achieved, servants rush

forward and prostrate themselves before the coming event, help comes from every side!

The convent is really a wing of the hospital, that great white fortress which fishing vessels have used for centuries to guide themselves back to port. You could easily miss the convent as it is the earliest part of the whole structure, its separate humped refectory-building and the crumbling cloister stretching back to the twelfth century. The cells are relatively new, from the fifteenth century. The arches are in some places so low that only the smaller of the sisters can pass through without ducking—~~not~~ not those from north of the Alps like sisters Brigitte, Olive and the Mother Superior herself. The Mother Superior, dark-haired still, despite her seventy-odd years, straight-backed, with that 'steady gaze' which mystics work so hard for, <sup>with</sup> ~~and~~ slender, pale hands, her handsome face quite unworn with anxiety, though she is a little restrained round the lips, her chin strong without being squared or rough—we rarely see such a woman outside convents nowadays, let alone in them. She has not seen the rest of the island since four years ago, when she left the mainland hospital, and the long walks she refers to in one of her narratives must ~~now~~ now take place in her enclosed garden. The convent, being enclosed, has little connection with the hospital that towers over its humble tiled roofs, except in the function of providing beneficial prayers. The sisters speak to the outside world through an iron grille, and are veiled when they do so. Islanders have the quaint habit of leaving their trousers at this grille to be mended. Sewing and invisible mending have been a convent-art for as long as the island can remember. Still, the connection of trousers with conventual life is an odd one, and the tradition only survives today because the Church rightly dislikes abandoning mercies which cost nothing, and even bring in a little money. The Mother Superior, being by ~~the~~ birth

a Berliner, finds the tradition touching, though when she joined the convent she did put out a request that the trousers should be cleaned before becoming enclosed. She risked being thought over-Prussian, but no one could but melt in her company. Everyone knew about her work at the hospital.

Her office lay behind the cloister, out of sight to the towering hospital, which on this side, being constructed on the slope of a hill, consists of massive slim arches that sustain the whole building, tunnelled deep into the hill and looking like black decayed teeth. Her office and adjacent cell also look out on an enclosed garden, walled all round, though the walls are invisible to her because of the profusion of oleander, broom, palm-trees, cypresses and umbrella pines that distil and cool the sunlight and make the damp crawl up her walls in the autumn. It was to the office, its french windows looking straight into this garden, that Sophia was called, and below it is the Renegade who tells us about it first.

\* \* \* \*

I have just received the astonishing news that the Mother Superior of the convent down the hill sent for Sophia of all people to clear up the mess. She is a lady of German origin, and is no doubt most anxious in ~~the~~ <sup>her</sup> punctilious kraut way to get to the bottom of the mistaken pills. I am against renunciation and medicine being practised together (rather neat, that?), but I must say I understand her feelings. I imagine she thinks of Sophia as still being in close relationship with the Aaron family, hoping that she will pour oil on what could become very troubled waters for the hospital, and little knowing that they quarrelled at least

five years ago. But news travels slow in the conventual world. My saying this put my wife in a giggly mood. I added, imitating the old patriarch himself, that Mother Superior might soon be saying like Achish

unto his servants, Have I need of madmen that ye have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? She went into screams of laughter.

Being so deeply bewitched by life I bewitch others. I have often said it. Why, <sup>stays</sup> a stranger ~~is~~ with me but two days and all my problems have suddenly become his! He begins thinking with my head! Back in New York or St Raphael or Amsterdam he asks a common friend, Has Sophia fixed her drains-problem yet? has she got rid of that lush who pisses his trousers at dinner table? has she sold that little terracotta piece on which her next year's finances depend? was it really a <sup>a</sup>quette for a Bernini fountain? is Cassandra still stealing her whisky? did that Greek charlatan she picked up with really overpaint a da Fredi madonna in her chapel? And the questions come out with a certain hard possessiveness too, as to say, My own fate is caught up with these things you know! And all because I am hopelessly intoxicated! How can I <sup>h</sup>elp passing it on? If I were intoxicated like a saint they wouldn't come near me. But intoxication with mortal objects, why, that is what they've always lived to achieve!

Little wonder that especially the women, so close by nature to the mortal objects, get giddy. I may say that ~~the~~ German women all but faint! Some extraordinarily supernatural interchange takes place between us! It happened the moment I walked into the Mother Superior's office. Oh, thy neck was as a tower of ivory, thine eyes like the fishpools of Bathrabbim, thy nose as the tower of Lebabnon which looketh towards Damascus! And the white habit that stretched to the ground! the starched headpiece! The hands held slightly together in trusting repose! How beautiful were thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter! the joints of thy thighs were like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman! Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm! ~~For love is strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave! The nails thereof are~~  
~~poets of fire, which hath a most venturous~~

I strode into the room like Elijah the Tishbite before the prophesied drought of Israel! She came forward, her delicate hands still clasped lightly together over her spotless habit. I remembered, The Germans are so clean! I had all but taken a shower in lavender water myself that morning, <sup>now!</sup> and made her acquaintance in, so to speak, a heavenly cloud. I had expected hygiene too, it being a hospital. But this was no puritan or Lutheran either!—this was <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ pre-war mountain stream, previous to pollution! She was indeed the living denial of all poison, indeed all death! No destruction could befall her because she was not her body! She—I mean the real she—shone from inside herself, suddenly making it seem that the sun was drenching the tall palm trees outside only because of her! A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed! She knew quite well that I had hardly seen the Aarons in five or more years. News travels fast in the conventual world! To my astonishment she even knew about our New York quarrels. She sensed, I think, that the slim one had loved me. And so pure was this Hessian handmaid of God that she seemed to feel a sympathy for him, Aaron, and to be sweetly accusing me. I have never been accused so tenderly! She put the tiny bottle of pills in my hand. Had I seen it before? Of course, I said, it was prescribed by the vet for Silvia, an airedale bitch I had bought them as a present in Maine once. More, I said—I purchased those tablets myself in St Raphael. It had been for some ear-trouble, after Silvia's second litter. Well, Mother Superior said, they appeared on his bedside table, and he took //some. And that was why he was suddenly back on the danger list!

Appeared on his table? I asked. Good God, is she still up to her life-and-death tricks? And I laughed in my special way that makes the earth seem to be dancing. Apparently, Mother Superior said, she is. And now we have solved that little mystery, would you like to take a very

special cup of coffee with me? We moved to another room—I might say a tabernacle! We were behind the enclosure, not in the hospital wing, and the room gave out on to a garden so thick with oleander and yellow jasmine and mimosa and broom and cooling umbrella pines that you could hardly see any limit to it, no fence or wall. And not another human creature. And a silence—I mean, a deafening chorus of birds—like the unveiling of reality itself! Far from the outside world being the reality, it at once became for me the most ghastly illusion, and this world the only truth! We sat together, and I discovered why she called the coffee very special. The secret of the convent, a generations-old alchemy of well-water, the coffee-bean roasted with loving care, filtered by ten<sup>^</sup> der hands! We hardly talked. As in water face answer<sup>-</sup> eth to face, so the heart of <sup>a</sup> man to <sup>a</sup> man!

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In the above we certainly have a few of Sophia's dramatic exaggerations. The Mother Superior could not know of quarrels which had never taken place, nor have defended Aaron for his part in a situation that was purely imaginary. As for her knowing 'that the slim one loved me', that is quite impossible. As for the mistake of calling the Mother Superior 'Hessian'—well, Sophian business-journeys to Frankfurt have probably outweighed those to any part of Prussia. The conversation with the Mother Superior sounds altogether too slick to be convincing. She hands me the dog-pills, I say Ah! so she is up to her old tricks again is she?, to which the Mother Superior replies, Yes, I suppose she is! and then, Well, now we've solved that little mystery let's have a cup of special convent coffee! No, I doubt if the dog-pills were actually

shown her. She probably was asked about Silvia, the airedale bitch, and probably the Mother Superior did conclude that Aaron's <sup>a</sup>atrnge wife— she was known to everyone on the island as rather ~~is~~ daffy ~~and~~ had planted them. But I cannot believe she told Sophia so. She did invite Sophia to her rinfrresco, though. She did at once see that an astonishing individual had come into her life. And who knows that she had not achieved ~~is~~ the summit of her destiny too? that she had always wanted to meet Sophia, after so much talk about her, especially from the peasant families who brought their trousers in? So Aaron's wife's strange action has penetrated deep.

I may be alone in this but I find something over-luxuriant in Sophia's <sup>1</sup>descriptions of the convent. She is like this when free— it lasts only a moment—~~of~~ the negative forces that <sup>otherwise</sup> ~~usually~~ hold her down. We must not think that she is living the dream, in the sense that there is nothing else on her mind. Actually, even while visiting the convent and staying the whole day, she seems to get quite a lot of work done. Cassandra exaggerates when she says that Sophia 'left the telegrams'. She also implies that the armies of people waiting to come and see Sophia are pleasure-seekers. They are business contacts, on the whole. But this is the point about Sophia—and most of the other characters—<sup>the</sup> their work is simply basso continuo of the reality of their leisure hours. Even Cassandra is busy each day at the fishing port or the harbour, organising medical care for infants—she omits to tell us in her narratives that she was a Queen Alexandra nurse in the second world war. We can easily get the wrong impression that these people are idle rich. They are sometimes idle and sometimes rich, <sup>neither</sup> but ~~is~~ for very long.

As to Sophia's over-luxuriant style, it becomes pithy and pointed the moment ~~again below~~ resentment and its outrider guilt invade her again.

\* \* \* \*

Mother Superior invited me to a rinfrresco as she calls it, when the <sup>S</sup>isters (they don't work in the hospital) come into the garden for ices and lemon drinks. An enclosure, they call it! For me they would better call it a gate to freedom! It is the world outside that now seems enclosed to me. Here, inside the conventual walls, I feel unloosed—what shall I say?—like a hero! Yes, as I walked across the gardens towards the long trellis table where the brides of Christ bustled round in their billowing habits, tall ones and graceful ones and shy ones and audacious ones and luscious ones, I found myself suddenly in a heroic new role I had never so much as dreamt of before! How She reveals Her new wonders! And always more daring! How they clustered round me! I smelled their clothes, even their sweet cloistered breath, even their tenderly closed thoughts! I was in a seventh heaven of excitement as Mother Superior piloted me round among them! Giddy! I could have laughed, danced, swept the fattest of them round in my arms, so much power was I suddenly given, feasting my eyes on two dozen enclosed treasures! My God, to be enclosed with all this, all day—could there

be more in heaven itself?—I mean, how absurd the idea of heaven after life, when life itself has all the heaven we shall ever require! To taste each one, moving from fruit to fruit like a bee, and then, when each has been tasted, to move back to the first again, for a second and sweeter savouring! I felt plundered by them, sweetly jostled, deliciously cornered! Their habits, I discovered, were of a uniform cloth—but not they themselves! Each was a universe! For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance!

I arrived home exhausted as the sun was going down, not <sup>at</sup> all refreshed, as the Mother Superior had promised in her word rinfrresco! I was ravaged! Cassandra, moving darkly about the lounge, peered at me and asked where the devil I'd been. When I told her, To the convent, to a sort of garden party of theirs, she put a stiff whisky in my hand with a sympathetic glance—sans rocks, sans water, sans anything! I took several, and spent the whole evening remounting for myself the splendour of the afternoon—the swish of every habit, the touch of hands, the burning sweetness of oh// too many eyes! How impossible it all seemed, how deliriously unthinkable—that there was no law against the unenclosed entering the enclosed! I think there cannot have been a Roman emperor, nor a queen, not even Messalina herself, who feasted so unstintedly on the senses as I did that afternoon. In the dark lounge, at Cassandra's side, I sat deep in a beach chair, gazing into the shadowy world of olive trees, giddy with my bouquet of memories, drugged by their heavy jasmine perfumes! And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing: there shall be showers of blessing! Thank God I never believed in—never really perceived—this reality they talk about! Why worship a cardboard moon when there is the real one to shine her sisterly light? The outside of things, the touchable husk, is only cardboard! But touch the inside and the spark will light your life!

Standing among those fragrant brides of Christ I shuddered to think that it had ever been necessary to invent an absurd thing like 'history'! I felt I had always been standing there—and would be there again and again through all eternity, that I had never really come and so would never really go! I knew them all! We had met before aeons ago, and recently as well. We had, in fact, only been separate from each other in space and time! Sipping my lemon drink, letting my ears bask in the sweetly enclosed garden-gossip, I realised that the past and the future are simply convenient forms of intellectual arrangement, like using a torch in the ~~dark~~. We are living in eternity! Later, with a shock, <sup>2</sup>half-drunk, slumped in the beach-chair at Cassandra's side, I realised that you acquired stillness only when you realised this. That night I slept even more than usually like the dead; and in the morning, plodding ~~my painful way~~ through coffee after coffee back to the attics of daylight again, bending under the effort more than ever before, I knew that I was condemned never to escape those sensual claws by which we are pinned to the illusion of birth and death, while knowing the means of liberation from those claws as if I had invented them myself! That is, I acknowledge I shall never be free of ego-infatuation. Surely the kernel of <sup>my</sup> ~~my~~ infatuation with those fragrant brides lay in my being among them? I mean, there could be no infatuation on my side were it not for my consciousness also of my own thrilling presence! So we love more easily those we suspect of loving ourselves! Were I capable of worshipping those enclosed sweethearts without ego, then I would be worshipping God Himself!

The day after my visit was a blue void for me. Nothing happened, nothing was felt. I shuffled through the house in a chemise and old sandals. Even when Cassandra appeared as usual dressed for dinner about sundown (I mean she puts on a string of pearls and combs her hair) I remained where I was slumped in a chair. She gave me one of her beautiful long kindly glances that rested on my half-naked body like an angel's hand.

That night too I flung myself on my bed like a sack of grain, and lay among the dead all night. Resurrection came in the morning! The house blazed with a new light, the jasmine smells filled our rooms like a promise of future magic atmospheres which I must not yet even guess at. The bronze pieces, glowing gold-copper, wanted to dance on their marble stands, and the sun shouted encouragement through the corridors. I found myself dressing quickly, tipping half the lavender ~~vase~~ bottle over my person, and striding, fresher and cleaner than I had felt for years, towards the convent. I had now learned my part! I was speech-perfect, rehearsed down to the last gesture. Oh Mother Superior! I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his <sup>hen</sup> ~~hand~~, more giddy in my desires than a monkey!

I hear she appears at the convent almost every day, and has all but taken the vow. It is all a mad mistake on the Mother Superior's part of course. She believes Sophia to be a member of the Aaron family still, and ~~and~~ hopes to <sup>use</sup> her influence against a possible lawsuit. She invites her almost every day, keeps her there for hours—not presumably for praying or fasting, much less confessing, for I cannot imagine that a devout thought ever went through Sophia's head. (As for a confession, that would burn Mother Superior's ears off!) So here we have the spectacle of two human beings clasped together in an utterly false relationship. How often this must happen in life. The one hoping so much of the other. While only further harm can be incurred, for both. What does Sophia hope for, in this case? Well, she might be priming the Mother Superior for her legal defence, knowing the Aarons as she does. And that is all grist to her mill. It would be her final triumph over them, to see them paying vast court costs at the end of a squashed lawsuit. Meanwhile Mother Superior pours coffee and iced drinks down the ever-open hermaphroditic gullet in order (quite understandably) to pervert the course of justice in defence of her negligent girls. I often have occasion to thank God that fate

chose a business career for me, where relationships are measured in terms of dollar levels and not emotions. That measure may be despised but it puts one by way of being able to penetrate matters to the truth, in that it gives one a clear head. I notice that for all her praying and her attention to the true path, the Mother Superior is fooled in the smallest details of life.

My sister tells me that Miss Sophia is down at the convent every day and they are all entranced with her. She tells her beads, she is on her knees for hours on end, she even attends vespers, and one day she insisted on sweeping out the chapel with Sister Teresa, whose duty-day it was. My sister (who helps with the refectory) heard Mother Superior say that Sophia would never take the vow but was worthier to do so than many she could think of behind the enclosure. Sophia might not be poor, she said, but was 'chaste and obedient'. She is thinking of asking Sophia to become a lay-sister. My husband says that in view of the money Sophia has to spend he doesn't wonder at this. He says that convents sniff for endowments like bitches in season for dogs. The master is back again, and could hardly walk into the house. My sister says she thinks it was Sister Mahatma who made the mistake over the tablets. The other sisters call her 'the Mohammedan'. It was because she hates the Jews, my sister says.

Cassandra looks at me with almost frightened eyes when I slip out of the house in the morning, sometimes soon after dawn, when the olive trees are beginning to whisper to each other and the sunflowers turn their heads towards their rising king in the sky. I say 'slip out of the house' but I am too powerfully built to slip anywhere, unless it is on the floor. But I have been given the winged heels of Mercury in the last few days! Now I know the meaning of what someone said to me once at an auction in Buffalo, We illumine the universe! I thought nothing of it at the time. He happened to have been looking at a Lehmbruck figure when he said this, and I thought the remark entirely apropos of that slim youth's body in

stone, his arms slightly folded together. And now the remark returns, and I realise that all such remarks always are in a context which divert us from their meaning for ourselves, un<sup>e</sup>til such time ~~when~~ <sup>that</sup> they ~~can~~ <sup>(are ready to)</sup> be evoked as ~~an~~ experience. I now know why there is more light for me in ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> jasmine-scented <sup>convent</sup> garden than there is in the rest of the sunny island. I know that a great sustaining light is emitted from all creatures, and that if this is forgotten or denied, ~~if~~ <sup>then</sup> we forget or deny our real identity, and the earth goes dark, and the world begins to destroy itself precisely as the creature has eclipsed himself. Light is not the light we mean because without ourselves it would illumine nothing! We govern the universe with that light! We penetrate objects with it!

For a whore is a deep ditch, and a strange woman is a narrow pit.

Who said that?

Mother Superior delights to see me go down on my knees and say vespers, and stay sometimes for hours long in the chapel in silent prayer, all but buried from sight, in a great motionless heap in the second row. She does not realise that I could just as well be turning somersaults or screaming with laughter or rubbing dust in my hair, because any activity of worship is the same, given a proper root! At the same time I am in turmoil, keeping in mind the fact that the earth will not let me go with its sensual claws, and that for me the light must be transmuted into earthly ecstasies. Given my destiny, I feel apprehensive. And I feel mocked, desperately mocked, inside!

The truth is out. My wife got it from the man repairing our irrigation pipes. It was an Arab girl who planted the dog-tablets. Yes! She took the vow, she laid her life and her virginity at the feet of a dead Jew, but she kept a place in her heart for a race-hatred that no doubt entered her blood with her mother's milk! All day I was haunted by the thought that really we ought to move elsewhere. How to feel safe with that woman dispensing poisons not three hundred yards away, and perhaps with accomplices?

How far was she tacitly supported by the Mother Superior, who is German in origin? And—the thought made me leap up from my cane chair—is Sophia behind it all? She had the greatest possible interest in planting poison! There is no man she hates more vehemently on this earth. And what better place for the crime than one run by our religious enemies (who signed concordats with Mussolini and Hitler). What a fool Aaron was to put himself in their hands!

Am I a wicked woman? I can say with Lady Macbeth, What's done is done. Yet I feel as innocent as a spring lamb. As for my husband, he looks better every day, his eyes are getting back their fierce, self-vindicating look, now that the island is aflame with gossip about Sister Mahatma. I find I feel quite unsorry for him. What is this new terrible coolness in me? I enjoy his not grasping the truth! I even feel like planting the dog-tablets a second time, in order to say that Sophia must have employed a second Arab accomplice! I joke to myself about these frightful things. But everything serious falls through my fingers! I could plan // my own harm just as coolly. Yet I don't intend to harm him any more. It was only a joke! Just so that I could enjoy a real secret, and test the world's powers of divination. He gazed at me with those fierce eyes this morning and said, his teeth clenched, For the Lord shall comfort Sion, He will comfort all her waste places, and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord! That was supposed to be a speech against Mahatma (who was actually brought up by a devout Italian family in // Tunisi<sup>s</sup>, so they say!) I nodded like I always used to, as if his words were penetrating me slowly. For two years in the Harlem apartment I was forb<sup>i</sup>dden to use the word Jew. It had to be 'Hebrew'. Now I could no<sup>d</sup> to anything! Somewhere I feel a tiny ache of sorro<sup>v</sup> that Sophia should be denounced for feelings she

could never have—I mean he has started calling her 'Dachau' instead of 'S', and I feel myself tugged into a pit of regret which attached me to her for a passing moment. Is it possible that she is my only real attachment? Could it not be that she guided my hands towards the dog-pills? Something strange is happening to the world. Are you not moved, when all the sway of earth shakes like a thing unfirm?

All night I dreamt of Mahatma. I saw her black eyebrows as meeting in the middle, showing a disposition to anger (I suppose her eyebrows are pitch-black). And the eyes were drawn into slits wide with murderous intent. In her dazzling white teeth—I suppose she has white teeth!—she gripped a gleaming scimitar of a kind I once saw in a Damascus souk. In her arms, embraced like a new-born child, lay a small detonator: she only had to make two wires meet and all of us would ~~blow-up~~<sup>go</sup> up in the air! I was just about to ask her (how absurd to say crisp things in such danger—but dreams are like that, aren't they?), Are you suicidal as well as destructive? when I woke up to hear the coffee-grinder screaming away in the kitchen. It stopped and the island-silence returned—but like a friend with poison in his heart! Yes, the island has been poisoned for me! I can still see her relentless, narrowed eyes, from the dream. If only I could rid myself of this nightmare which stretches back to my early manhood! Once an over-talkative, over-clever financial wizard (and a Jew himself) said to me, Maybe analysis would do you good, you over-identify yourself with the word Jew, and all over-identification is bad. Perhaps he was right! Anyway, he added (and had not a big loan been dependent entirely on him I would have sniffed in my contemptuous way), Analysis was invented by Jews for Jews. In that case, I said quietly, keeping respect in my face, we have all become Jews. You can say that again, he said—and I got my loan. When I say he was over-clever I mean he wrote a book on economics trying to warn everybody about stretching the ancient Church ~~back against usury~~.

law against usury too far, and addressing it to 'the unhappy few'—that sort of thing. Usury, he said, is any interest on capital lent. I said, No, it's exorbitant interest. He said, No, that's the meaning it's been given just to save our faces. But oh this knife in my heart!

A cataclysmic thing is happening. Nothing in my life gave me warning of it. Each time I sit with the Mother Superior in her garden, or bend my knees in the company of sisters Teresa, Bianca, Maria, Esmeralda, Olive, Hanni or Brigitte I begin to feel a smouldering resentment, grotesque in such a place but no less burning for that, against the One of whom they are the brides! Yes! On the cross, his poor head hanging, the wound in his side a gruesome red, he silently repudiates my feeling. But still he has those parts, under the loincloth, parts which I can only find—struggling against it as hard as I can—compromising! I even find that some of my psychological patterns with married couples are cropping up here too. I suddenly turned away when Sister Esmeralda mentioned Him once, giving her a quick black glance that made her feel a confused sense of wrong-doing. And I whispered to Teresa, just when she was about to renew the altar cloth, But look after yourself for once! drawing her down from the chancel with a long caring look that made her feel she was over-dedicated, ~~like~~ like a housewife who watches her husband gorge her succulent meals without so much as a thankyou, while her life drains away in a smell of roast. Don't worry, I seemed to be saying, He'll always be there, waiting on his cross, so why not take a little time off? And once I hinted to Mother Superior that the sense of having a ~~Divine~~ Divine Husband was necessary perhaps for ~~the~~ other simple creatures but not for her, whose mind <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ able to rest placidly in the Godhead! What a fearful way of dressing Christ down! She gave me an understanding smile and went on with her ledgers. Bitterly aware of what I am up to, I pray for hours alone in the chapel, begging Him for forgiveness. But to do that I have

to think of Him as Her! Yes! I pray to Her who was crucified! And I have to blot out those terrible parts that lie between <sup>his</sup> ~~the~~ legs! I try to pray them away! Or I think of the pietà where he is already in the Madonna's arms, and dead, ~~and challenging me any more as~~ his poor bent body droops <sup>ing</sup> from the cross, ~~and that~~ <sup>the</sup> rod ~~is~~ now useless, <sup>ing</sup> challenging me no more.

Every time I hear of her spending the day at the convent the knife gives a twist in my heart! No doubt she is down there working out ~~some~~ <sup>some black</sup> racial doctrine with Sister Mahatma! What waves of ignorance cross the world! How can we hope for peace and balanced economies and the death of inflation when our hearts are so crooked? ~~Some~~ <sup>We</sup> are driven by wild demons! It reminds <sup>me</sup> of Peter Lorre in that film M, how he said, Always there is this evil force inside me! ~~It's~~ <sup>It's</sup> there all the time, driving me out to wander in the streets—yes, to murder children! Perhaps Adolf Hitler was right. Brutality is respected, he once said—the people need wholesome fear, he said, they want someone to frighten them, the masses need something that will give them a thrill of horror! Was he wrong? Now that the masses rule the earth, what do you see on your cinema ~~and~~ ~~your~~ television screens but crime, crime, <sup>h</sup>astiness and beastliness, and murder, and the police chase! I said all this to my wife and she said, In that case why do you spend so much of your time reading thrillers? After that I kept my mouth shut, the knife locked in my heart. People either understand or they don't.

I think of her night and day (it's still me speaking) down there in black conference with Sister Mahatma. They say it's awful at the convent, behind what they call the enclosure, a hotbed of ignorance and unclean ~~the~~ <sup>sheets.</sup> The Mother Superior has a pokey little plot of sandy earth with a few bedraggled palm trees and some broom running wild. There is damp in the chapel, and it stinks, swelling the stink of centuries of foul cooking. Even the nuns stink, I dare say, given their traditional horror

of any form of washing. The local priest stinks like a pole-cat, that I do know. Either it's his black teeth, his unwashed crutch or his cassock, or an amalgam of the whole damned lot. As to any kind of uplift in his face, it blisters with anger and the familiar shoulder-chip (God don't I know that chip—my ~~three~~ three sons have born<sup>e</sup>/it like a cross, ever since I started <sup>^</sup>treating them like princes!). Well, what do you expect? Any kind of religion that throws a protective halo round Sister Mahatma's murderous thoughts must be wrong! To think—a woman gives up <sup>r</sup>her life to hatred! And what does she get in return? Peace and security and never a money-worry! And people like me keep her going. As I said once to Josh when he was blowing his top off about corruption in high places, And who foots your ~~country~~ bill<sup>s</sup>? It's no good shouting about the people who happen to finance the voice you shout with! And the same with the mumbo-jumbo down at the convent—you hear them at it when you pass in the mornings, all that Latin rigmarole; who foots the bill for ~~me~~ that? And we <sup>who pay</sup> have no right to our say sometimes? When I feel like this I stride out of the house with my stick under my arm and for two pins I'd knock the first passer-by on the head with it, though of course the feeling passes almost as soon as it comes. As for Sister Mahatma, why 'sister'? WHORE! Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny!

And to my horror I began <sup>i</sup>blaming Christ while on either side of me these lovely brides of his are murmuring his praises! I blame him for building a Church that collapsed in schism and persecution before it had achieved a religion! I remember someone saying that sort of thing once. Of course I realise that the Church had little to do with him, that the body temporal is different from the body spiritual. But I needed a pretext for my resentment! So I drove the spear deeper in his side! I said to myself that his religion had falsely objectified the world—I had heard this said somewhere too; it had built what we see and hear

and touch into an eternal and stable reality, whereas ~~it was~~ <sup>the 'real' world is</sup> simply  
the cauldron of our desires! ~~My religion had failed to look into the~~  
~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ These words crowd into my brain without my understanding  
them—they aren't my own—perhaps they were a lecture—in California  
or somewhere—a man—but the words sound convincing enough to make me  
feel that my present crime is being committed for good ends—so more

sisters

and more I try to keep them ~~out~~ out of the chapel, and above all from silent meditation in their own cells. I want no lovemaking-in-solitude with the Divine Husband! Imagine my state! I am jealous of his invisible touches, his inaudible whispers! I begin to look for a certain excitement in their eyes when they slip away to their cells! I pushed open the door of a cell—it was Brigitte's—to see her astonished face look up from a breviary. She smiled, in silence. I ~~must~~ <sup>u</sup> have looked like a bull, mouth open, sweat on my upper lip. I gave the door ~~such~~ a push that the whole wing echoed! I made some foolish remark and backed out again.

I manage to speak to her a little when she returns in the evening. She is out of the house soon after dawn. She peeps into my room just as I am waking and nods good bye. Her telegrams are neglected, her approaching guests (always a multitude) kept in suspense. But Good Lord, I've known Sophia years enough to understand the pattern! She veers so easily from heaven to hell and back again! ~~I saw the sorrow in her eyes those~~

~~first days, I saw the paradise garden of the convent reflected in them.~~

Over dinner in the evening she talks huskily, and keeps glancing out at the olive grove, beyond which lies the hospital. I can almost touch those nuns, almost tell their names. Her silences have always been ~~so~~ ~~the~~ vast mysterious encyclopedias. But I can see the explosion coming soon. I may be able to cushion the blow, ~~if I'm involved,~~ as in the case of the Madison Avenue hairdresser (I made sure to become her friend, so that she would slip out of the house quietly, without <sup>the</sup> ritual showdown).

~~So I hope I am involved this time too.~~ I watch for her return anxiously in the evening. With relief I notice that the showdown ~~hasn't happened~~ <sup>isn't due yet.</sup>

~~was~~ But there is pain in her eyes, this soon, and that telltale frown that makes her face like a faun's. I unwillingly look forward to long evenings in the future, when she <sup>will</sup> no longer goes near the convent, and marvellously orchestrated descriptions will pour out of her—someone will be to blame for the déba^c^le, and un<sup>^</sup>consciously she will stoke me up with

whisky every few minutes. She will stride round, slap her thighs. The pain will dig a deep crease between her eyes. I look forward to it with excitement, because I shall be the sole audience! Sweetest Lesbia, let us live and love, and, though the sager sort our deeds reprove, let us not weigh them! There are no 'deeds' any more but it is all the more exciting for that.

Brigitte, despite her peaceful smile when she looked up from her breviary, went straight to Mother Superior and told her how I had burst into her cell. Mother Superior spoke to me quietly about it, <sup>which gave me a</sup> ~~I had~~ lovely sense of being one of them ~~for~~ being reprov'd. I said I had mistaken the cell. She said that the cells were not in the province of my business, that even she—perhaps especially she—respected them 'each as a separate temple'. Who had I been looking for? (Did I see a hint of jealousy in her eye when she asked this?) My genius (good or evil, I can never make up my mind) sprang to my protection and I said, For you, Mother Superior! I almost added, Love in my bosom like a bee doth suck his sweet, but Brigitte came in! I flung out of the room.

Apparently some youths with black cycling helmets ~~and~~ tried to stop a <sup>car</sup> yesterday evening. They came from the mainland. I hope this isn't symptomatic. So far we've been free of this sort of thing. I worked myself to the bone all my life, mostly for other people, I went through one or two minor <sup>crashes</sup> ~~crises~~ of the kind that don't get into the financial columns, ~~of the newspapers,~~ and having passed all peril I bought a plot of land on this island where I saw fresh shadows fit to shroud from sunny ray, fair lawns to take the sun in season due, sweet springs in which a thousand nymphs did play, soft rumbling brooks that gentle slumber drew (the springs and brooks by permission of a well-digging firm on the mainland). The driver didn't stop. He put his foot down. He felt a thud on the side of the car; it seemed to him that one of the kids fell. He made a report to the police when he got back but they said they

couldn't do anything about it as it was past their bedtime. All this increases my tension. The black-helmeted youths melt in with the black brows of Sister Mahatma to make for my nights a composite picture of hell. I am thinking of putting in for a revolver licence. I've never owned a dog in my life but now I'm thinking of investing in a couple of the most irritable bloodhounds I can lay my hands on. Sister Mahatma would hardly be a match for them, even with a scimitar between her teeth. And Sister Mahatma has also become identified in my mind with that girl who kicked open the door of my room at that Manhattan hotel. I think I need another business flight, to pluck the keen tooth from this fierce tiger's jaws, but I've only been back ten days from the last one.

\* \* \* \*

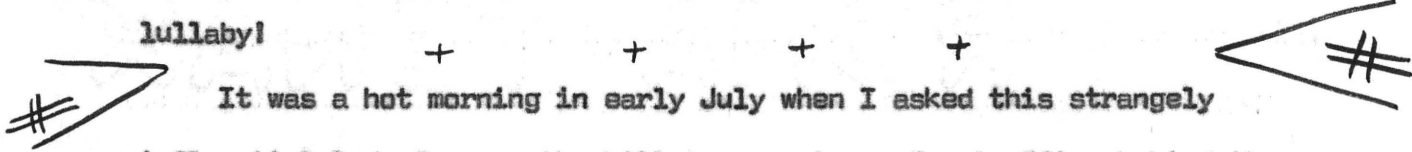
The Renegade's quotation here is from Spenser's The Happy Isle. His son Josh sees him as a money-making egotist with no imaginative life at all but he knows by heart some of the tenderest and most fairy-tale lines in the English language. I doubt if Josh has even read them. Of course the Renegade gives them the raspberry to save his face—'by permission of a well-digging firm'. A peculiar man. He is the soul of complacency, yet no one could call him complacent in the suffering he obstinately and successfully hides, and the punctilious attention he gives to all his mistaken conclusions. His rationalism is so obviously a necessary crutch. Indeed, the Mother Superior even describes rationalism as neurosis! It seems to hit the Renegade perfectly. His quotations are rarely biblical like Aaron's, because he likes the feeling of tradition and ceremony that past literature gives <sup>him</sup>. He ~~knows~~ his Shakespeare too—'to pluck the keen teeth etc' is from the eighth sonnet. But Aaron's quotations infect those round him—his

wife, Sophia—because The Song of Solomon, the Proverbs and the Psalms are like that. The Renegade has no desire to infect. He is acutely alone.

\* \* \* \*

To my added horror, I see that my resentment of the man on the cross is working its soft effect on the nuns. I say 'to my horror' but it was the fact that this fact did not cause me horror that made me feel the horror! I am beginning to enjoy it, in a flagrantly destructive way. I'm behaving like a scorpio, because this is self-destruction in the end of course, as all destruction is. The appeal for me in all this is that I am alienating not one delectable wife from her Husband but about a couple of dozen! I found the Mother Superior gazing at me, quite still, from the other side of the dark and musty chapel yesterday, simply studying me with a rather wistful expression. My ego-infatuation caressed me into believing that those eyes of hers were flashing love at me! But the moment she had gone I knew that she was taking sad stock of me. Yet even to her my ferment brings good (I have often been called a fermenter). She knows the geese from the hens now. Brigitte is all fire, unanswerable. Through me she has been revealed to the Mother Superior. The other brides will show themselves too! And her own nature will be revealed to her ~~self~~, who knows? Only Sister Mahatma is quite unknown to me yet. She has that alluring ivory pallor of the Arab woman, glimpsed behind the folds of a veil lifted by the wind! Her nose is strong like a scimitar! Her

eyes, black spent torches, put out by the desert sun, <sup>ate</sup> ~~was~~ hooded in a dream. She only looks in front of her. She walks in a gliding way, with hardly a sway of her habit. Her back is erect. She never talks at table. Her prayers are so long and concentrated that no one thinks to go near her during them. She floats, something is bearing her along all the time, invisible oars. Oh these lovely brides are giving me so much care! I think of them one by one at night just before sleep. I have become another Mother Superior, looking after their dreams and flagellated hopes, while she—the real <sup>Mother Superior</sup> ~~one~~—no, the unreal one!—sees to the grey routine. Was this why she gave me that long wistful look? But I love my charges! At night I send them kisses across the island's silence, thirty-two of them, which is their number, excepting Mother Superior. Sleep, pretty wantons, do not cry, and I will sing a lullaby!



It was a hot morning in early July when I asked this strangely influential lady from up the hill to come to my front office behind the west wing. I had heard a great deal about her from the banking gentleman's son Josh, when he was in the mainland hospital for rehabilitation after drug-addiction. He told me about her close association with the Jewish gentleman and his wife, and how they <sup>no longer saw each other.</sup> ~~had quarrelled five or six~~ <sup>at least</sup> ~~years ago~~. I thought she would know them well, and I might be able to help Matron in this matter of the wrong pills on the Jewish gentleman's table. We actually call him professor, as none of us can manage his Latvian name. Since that ~~first~~ moment when she strode, an extraordinary apparition, into my room ~~we~~ have had many pleasant hours together. First we sat in what I call my front office, then I took her 'behind'. It seemed, to me and I think to all the others, the most natural thing to do. We felt we had always known her, she had always been with us. She even seemed to know where we kept things—cups and talcum powder

and clothes for needy people. She is all alive with help! It pours out of her. She wants to know what can we do for that poor ~~creature~~ <sup>woman</sup> down the hill whose husband has just died? <sup>and</sup> could we not start a sort of rest-home at ~~her~~ <sup>Miss Sophia's</sup> expense for drug-addicts (of whom she seems to know so many)? She is always jumping up to help someone into a chair, or <sup>to</sup> carry a gray, or <sup>to</sup> move the refectory tables. Those massive shoulders! We are all excited like children. She miraculously caught Sister Esmeralda in her arms the other day when she fell off a ladder, and Sister Esmeralda is all of aeven stone. I talked to her about the fathers of the Theban desert. I said that ecstasy must form the basis of all religions, that it represents the birth of faith, and that those first Christians of the Nile were the founders of the Church more deeply than St Peter or St Paul. Thousands flocked to St Antony in the desert from Alexandria, just because of his ecstasies, which he could hardly <sup>have</sup> share with others! News of him spread to Rome. Yes, they went to see the bliss on his face! Clearly a religion that could bring that look into a man's eyes was worth something! I said that it was the most fatal thing that could have befallen Christianity after the time of St Augustine that it should have withheld its treasures of bliss until after life (fervent nods from Miss Sophia), and give way to the barbarian temperament by offering heaven to lull the primitive thirst for reward, and hell for revenge. I think my unorthodoxy surprised her. But this is always my method with people from outside. Yes, I said, a religion must fail sooner or later to hold the masses when it withdraws its living treasures! For heaven and hell, I said, are here and now.

I said what endless benefits came from right religion, and what horrors sprang from wrong religion. I said all this with a meaning. I wanted to move her, so to speak, further inside that ray of light from which none of us is <sup>+</sup> barred. Her face is tortured sometimes. There are a thousand little histories of calamity written there. She is never

still. She has <sup>hidden</sup> ~~hidden~~ unbelievable storms. I imagine she takes care never to be alone. Her fears struggle with her pride. She needs the pride (in her own physical strength, among other things) to stop the calamities pulling down the tower of virtue. She could be very bad, I imagine, when particularly blinded by appetite. But she pays each time—the heavy debts show so much in her face, and even in the slightly hunched way she has of striding along—because this is always the case with people of special destiny! They are no better than others, and may be worse, but they pay retribution spectacularly for everything they do. This is how they learn, and how their destiny remains intact. The most terrible lives are those of people who do not pay at all, or rather <sup>who do not pay</sup> at once, <sup>but</sup> ~~and~~ lay up a store of unanswered crimes. The wicked do not pay 'afterwards'. Those Job lamentations always annoyed me. The payment is here and now, however much it may be deferred. The murderer pays with the deed itself, which never leaves him. The dark thought pays with its darkness. The envious action pays with its gnawing worm of envy. The possessive pay by being possessed! From the smallest wrong desire an echo comes back. <sup>Down to</sup> In the tiniest physical detail <sup>the</sup> the body always pays for its greed. I <sup>saw</sup> ~~see~~ this in the hospital. ~~A few moments of self-violation in youth may produce lifelong trouble.~~ <sup>gave</sup> The VD wing ~~gives~~ graphic examples. The very wicked have a long deferment, but when they pay they pay cataclysmically. The good receive an immediate reaction to any wrong desire, which is gone in a moment, and is shadowy in substance. Sophia listened to me biting her lip, nodding and frowning. She told me about her many journeys—from Zagreb to Long island—sleeping on cabin floors—singing for her supper—being feted like a queen. She sings for us. Her tenor voice echoes across my little garden. It makes me think, I don't know why, of Lady Hester Stanhope and her walled Damascus garden, and those Muslim girls of hers who waited for her to get drunk so that they could steal her things! I mean there

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is some similar brave, eccentrically colourful self-assertion, a common vein of aristocracy between the two. I can imagine Sophia fuming over Lord Palmerston's refusal to pay her the rightful allowance. There are memories of great drawing rooms in Sophia, too. Not that she ever speaks of such a thing.

I spent half a day and all night trembling—my teeth actually chattering! I can't believe it! Sister Esmerlada actually pinched my bottom! I am immediately flung into torments of delight! So this is how they live together! Can it be possible? Am I being admitted to a kind of cathedral harem? They have bodies—then surely they need the signs of love, like the rest of us? They feed their bodies, they sleep—why should they deny their bodies in other respects? Of course, of course! Those cells! That retirement to cells! The way they have of standing close together! The ease with which they take each other's hands, with which they kiss me! And the quality of those kisses! You can give me all the unenclosed kisses you like, the enclosed ones are the richest my lips know! And I took it all for something child-like! And suppose it is child-like? Children are demons of desire! Their bacchanalia are secret, more voluptuous by far than their later experiences, because the flowers of their glands are just opening! Yes, I have uncovered a voluptuary chamber, the roof of gold, the floor of amber! Is this what Mother Superior means by ecstasy? Is this why the ecstasy// shines in their eyes from time to time? What exquisite darkness there is in the refectory, in the incense-musty corridors, the untidy chapel! How their habits whisper and croon together expectantly on their way to //prayers! How a whisper carries (and a kiss?)! She has full lips, cheeks as round and red and saucy as apples, and she laughs—and then, while I am standing in the refectory with Sister Olive, she sweeps with her broom and, quickly, in a second of time, a small gesture unseen and unheard that changes my life—she pinches

me! I began so to speak to retaliate—on all of them! My hand went riot that day! I patted Teresa on the cheek. I tickled Brigitte—she ran away with a look of even greater alarm than the one she gave me in her cell, the simulating minx! But what beautiful simulation they all practice! It ~~is~~ really brought to the finest pitch of art! And Mother Superior on top, with her ~~thrillingly~~ heretical hymns to Hans Denck 'the Anabaptist pope' and so forth! I see it all, I see it all, oh with relief and abandon I see it all! They are dancing for Christ, they are revellers in eternity! Whoever claimed that loud revellers were necessarily the happy ones? No, these are quiet and hidden, they are withdrawn secret and hushed, to the bridal chamber! Tomorrow and the next day and the day after that I shall be among them like the owner of doves, and they shall settle in my hands! Yes, I can construe the action of their familiar style! I shall be among them like a ~~hundred~~ snakes! I am giddy, revished, ecstaticly horrified! And Esmeralda! The appetite of her eye did seem to scorch me up like a burning glass! But I refuse to look back at her. She has been the instrument of my discovery but this is where it must end; I feel distaste at using queen's language but I can only bear straight trade! It is simulating Brigitte, retiring Olive, hymning Mother Superior who lures me, not finger-happy Sappho herself! Yet I die for another pinch in the backside! Pinch me from behind while I feast my eyes on Maria, Teresa, Mahatma—make me black and blue but spare me a confrontation! This is the period of my ambition! Oh this blessed hour!

I saw it by the look of his eyes when I ~~came~~<sup>came</sup> in his room to draw the shutters against the noon-day sun. He knew who put the dog-pills there. I left him at once. And this evening, apropos of nothing, he said, The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom. I was just putting

a glass of lemon tea down. I nearly dropped it. I must say that after all these years the Biblical quotation unnerves me! If he recited it like an actor I wouldn't mind but he speaks it with fire and truth. A sudden odd resolution came to me: I would study mathematics. A stirring lightness filled<sup>s</sup> me. As Novalis said, The life of the gods is mathematics! I shall have to go to the mainland and buy up a whole lot of books. Of course he will look at them with that serene gaze of his and murmur, Another path? another lifesaver? He must always have known that those nursing sisters weren't to blame. He watched their backsides night and day, *after all.*

I walked up the hill to visit the old bugger uninvited, clutching my silver-knobbed case just because I know it gives him the creeps. She let me in, unusually affectionate in her manner as if his period in hospital had liberated her from something (from him, I should think!). He gave me the usual twice-over with his eyes and quickly nodded<sup>me</sup>/towards a chair (he is sitting up) without saying a word. I remember my last visit, when all I wanted was to hear news of Sophia. Now that seems a nightmare. One thing I am grateful for—the variety of life, the fact that you can have your head in a hood of despair this morning and feel as light as a baby in the afternoon. He looks OK. I said how glad I was to see him fit again—which statement he seemed to doubt, as he sniffed and said nothing. <sup>Ac</sup> ~~Actually~~ I felt so gay I nearly ~~went into the room~~ ~~we~~ said, Well how are we after the dog-pill cure? I wonder if she had a bit on the side while he was in hospital. I wouldn't put it past any of these people. Look how long that ménage à trois, as the Irish say, lasted. What a magnificent head he has! I brought the subject round to dogs, via his bitch Silvia, and he gave me a scowl, which showed we were home and dry on the desired subject<sup>of PILLS!</sup> I said I imagined he would never go to that hospital again. He said, Oh I might.

I suppose he was just being funny. I thought it was my turn for a sniff, and did so. All of a sudden I realised ~~he~~ didn't know a thing about the Sister Mahatma rumour. I began to try to explain. I asked him which of the sisters nursed him. I even asked him to name them. None of them was Mahatma. I tried to get him on to Middle East politics, round to her that way. But it didn't work. He seems really dumb. I began to want to get away. Who was I to help such a man? I suppose he's still too ill to go too deep in the matter. On my way to the front door I gave her an almost <sup>to</sup> congratulatory smile. Yet I feel sorry for him—blinded as he is twofold.

Sister Brigitte complained to me for the second time about Miss Sophia. What was this 'wild creature', she asked, doing behind the enclosure? I asked her wasn't an effort to 'save' due from us, when the saving was so easy, and the supplicant so much in need? She said she had an altogether different impression of Miss Sophia, and wished that at least she would keep her hands to herself. I ought to take heed. Sister Brigitte, like Sister Mahatma, only opens her mouth to speak truth. I am troubled, and begin to realise—what seemed to be dormant for many years—the old weakness—is alive still.

The result of my feeling troubled was that I asked Miss Sophia to come in and see me even more often. Thus I shall 'sweat it out' of myself. It is what the Buddhists call 'mastery by giving way'. We talk quietly, as always. She leans forward, her elbows on her knees, sometimes cupping her chin in her hand, sometimes poised, staring down, like a great dark animal—I almost said 'my Caliban'! She doesn't actually <sup>listen</sup> listen to my words so much as tune into the sound of my voice, to its conviction or stress. She makes everything a performance. This is her approach to everything. My talking becomes a speech. Nothing voulu, I mean, but what I say becomes beautifully rounded and

measured as if she were conducting it. I discover how deeply I have come to need her. We all need to be saved! Did Sister Brigitte's eyes say this to me, as she left the room?

I began talking about the Germany of my youth. It was good for me to go back over the years. I said that a neurotic strain ran through the whole generation born in Germany at the beginning of this century. What was I saying? I suddenly remembered the words on John Gay's tombstone—Life is a jest, and all things show it, I thought so once, and now I know it! Yes, I went on, there was something uneven and unhinged in us all. I <sup>had</sup> felt it deeply in Munich. Those Nazi rallies of 1929 and 1930 seemed to <sup>point</sup> it up. I told her about the wildness of Berlin at that time, how it reminded <sup>one</sup> of Gozzi's remark about Venice in its decline—the men were women, and the women men, and both were monks <sup>eyes!</sup> There was the well-nigh ecstatic inflation, when a bar of soap cost millions of marks, and a group of Berlin children became rich men, with a car of their own, when they found a ~~an~~ crate of soap in perfect condition in a disused warehouse. 'Ecstatic' because we all sort of enjoyed it, those of us who managed to get food! You didn't have to be responsible about anything. And I remembered the youth movement—we wanted to escape the heavy rationalism of the nineteenth century and get out into the woods, and learn to be bodies again, not ideas any more! Rationalism, I told her, is a token of deep uncertainty and loss of self-control. Its craving for order comes from acute personal stress! I talked on urgently, my face close to hers. Therefore we <sup>Germanus had</sup> ~~were~~ <sup>been</sup> all the natural patients of Freud! We <sup>had</sup> worshipped him, I mean people like me, because the neurotic was his invention—we felt identified all of a sudden! None of Freud's callow analysis works, I said, unless you believe in him. He had what he called his 'empire' of followers, mostly in Vienna, but his real empire stretched across the western world, in every middle class home! He created us, I said, he brought our troubles

to light. His thought was a last attempt to get things straight rationally. And it didn't work! We <sup>in Germany</sup> were all the children, I said, of what we used to call the Gründerjahre after the fatal victory over France in 1870. Miss Sophia stared at me with almost frightened eyes. How much was she understanding? There <sup>had been</sup> too much money in Germany, I said, after that victory, and too little spirit! We had become the shallow inheritors of a stupendous culture—<sup>at</sup> look what we had achieved—the thought and the science—~~and~~ the poets, the operas, the music! Nothing, it seemed, was too big for us, everything had to be on big terms, we felt ourselves to be the deepest people on the earth, our language the most receptive, by its very sounds and combinations, of deep thoughts! Wagner's music had to be all music, it had to fill the whole universe! Nietzsche's thought the same! I grew up with my head full of vague, universal statements, too intellectual, because not closely enough connected with my own life, as I lived it. And, like so many others of my age, I reacted against that, into a kind of clipped and careful and basically sceptical rationalism which put a veneer over the real state of uncertainty and ardent impulsiveness <sup>inside.</sup> If there is a German weakness, I said, and a German strength, it is over-impressionability. The over-pursuit of the rational has fearful dangers for people who practice it irrationally! For the rational, I said, is always in terrible marriage with the irrational! The two <sup>go</sup> together—may I say in the same patient? Look at the immense crescendo of violence in the last century, corresponding precisely with the crescendo of rationalism! We Germans produced Einstein on the one hand and Wolfgang Gräser, the young writer who made phrases like 'body sense' and 'organic intuition' famous among us, on the other. I <sup>have</sup> even come to the conclusion that the higher the rationalist thought, the more terrifying the <sup>explosion afterwards!</sup> ~~consequences~~ Look at Einstein himself. He carefully weighed up the possibility that the physicists he had left behind in Germany were developing the atom bomb—

I mean in the last war, I said, when he was living in the United States—  
 and <sup>he</sup> went to the president and encouraged him to develop the Bomb before the  
 Germans did. And then, when the Bomb was developed and ready to drop,  
 he went to that president's successor and pleaded with him to stop manu-  
 facture! ~~So thought collapsed into a pit of error!~~ Here you see the  
 uncertainty, that lack of clear objectives which first provokes the  
 rationalist career, and then undoes it.

I was ~~sweating~~ sweating. All these years I had lived so cloistered,  
 had addressed not more than a brief sentence or two to anyone! had foll-  
 owed my precious routines and through ~~that~~ <sup>them</sup> been a pillar of support for  
 many, especially in recent years at the mainland hospital, Before I moved  
 here, when I was charge of rehabilitating <sup>the</sup> drug cases. I had for some-  
 thing like thirty years, oh more, chosen the words I spoke, and thought  
 them out before hand! But here I was gushing half-conceived thoughts  
 like a young girl, just as I had done in my last year at school, and  
 later in the Munich period! It showed how much I had simply interrupted  
 my true life, instead of developing it to what should now be the final  
 orchestration. Was Miss Sophia an instrument for showing me this?  
 She had broken on me like a storm, and I had found that I still had  
 panic in me, that after all terror had not been excised from my system,  
 not ~~other things~~ ~~ecstasies~~ <sup>ecstasies</sup> of a kind I would not have admitted to even  
 a month, a week ago!

Miss Sophia said briefly, with a slight cough, as if waking from a  
 trance, Yes, Einstein has always interested me, I followed his argument  
 with Werner Heisenberg, the author of the Principle of Indeterminacy,  
 and one of his best pupils. My mouth fell open! Where did those  
 words come from? It couldn't be from her mouth! But there she was,  
 sitting before me, reassuringly quiet. I laughed. <sup>Yes, I said,</sup>  
~~there~~ you have the

~~the~~

principle of uncertainty itself, in one of Einstein's followers!  
Finally everything is uncertain in the universe, <sup>I said,</sup> when confronted by pure  
reason—which in the end means pure unreason! Einstein never wanted to  
admit this, I said, he quarrelled with your Werner Heisenberg about it—  
but nevertheless it was the result of his own <sup>a</sup> rati<sup>a</sup>vity! Yes, Miss Sophia  
said, jumping up in her excitement, I have had these same thoughts, I'm  
sure I have! Yes, I said, we are moving towards the same objective!  
She took me by <sup>o</sup> ~~both~~ <sup>^</sup> hands, squeezed them with the strength of ~~two~~ two men!  
She drew very close to me, I could smell her lavender breath! So my  
random thoughts were worth it! We stood breathing close together!  
I could feel the curves of her body under her loose blouse, which billowed  
round her waist, while she stood astride in her leather boots and Russian  
trousers. She was much too excited, and I drew her gently to her chair  
again. I walked to the other side of the room, where the french windows  
were, and looked <sup>out</sup> ~~out~~, breathing deeply. I thought it better not to talk for  
a little. When we live a little unnaturally, for a long time, a storm  
gathers itself up in the sky in the distance, and approaches slowly, and  
may take half a lifetime to break over <sup>our</sup> ~~our~~ head. The longer the  
deferment, the greater the storm. I could have fainted ~~there and then~~ <sup>and there.</sup>  
I knew that in some way it was the end of the convent for me. After  
how many years of serene devotion—half a century, more even?

Suddenly she asked me, in that quietly pained way she sometimes has,  
What is a neurotic? am I one? She looked at me as if she were a visitor  
on the earth and would be gone again in a moment. I suppose, I said,  
a neurotic is someone who never leaves the level of the personal self.  
And that could hardly be true of you. In a certain way it is, she said,  
but only because somehow being personal, being myself is being—well,  
something to do with not being personal—you see what I mean?—some-  
thing supernatural—I don't want to blaspheme and say God<sup>!</sup>. I smiled.  
Is it blaspheming to say God? I asked her. We are all torn into the

*I said.*

divine, into the genuine self, <sup>^</sup> In deep sleep we are without that personal self, but we have not ceased to exist. Only our minds are not active. ~~There may not even be dreams.~~ Now the neurotic is concentrated on the immediate waking self to an obsessive degree. And to this degree he is the opposite of the religious man. I noticed it so much when I was working on the mainland. If you argued with the neurotic type, if you let yourself show indignation, he ~~can~~ <sup>could</sup> only hear the tone of your voice, ~~see~~ <sup>personal</sup> your menacing gestures, and translate your vehemence into ~~an~~ <sup>personal</sup> attack. ~~It is not a wish on your part to capture his mind in some way.~~ The neurotic sees the world as neurotic. Since little that he sees or hears has real content apart from his personal self, so he sees all others as prisoners labouring under various forms of <sup>personal</sup> distress. When I was young it became quite a fashion to challenge all forms of vehemence, indeed sincerity too, as of a nervous origin. It helped, you see, towards the coming emptiness, when no one believed in anything any more, when history died. ~~There was a time when I was young.~~ I was looking at her closely. It <sup>suddenly</sup> ~~really~~ seemed to me ~~as~~ that we had become as close as sisters. I was talking calmly. Yet I seemed to be speaking thoughts common to us both, quite as if she were talking as well, and me listening. Obviously, success and display and <sup>even</sup> ~~brutality~~ brutality weigh a great deal with the neurotic, I went on, almost touching her hand. You see, the neurotic is in awe of any certainty. This more than anything accounted for the success of the Nazis <sup>when I was young.</sup> No one really took them seriously, but they were certain of themselves. No one could seriously believe, before 1932, that a bunch of heartless ruffians could get to the <sup>Chancellery.</sup> ~~top~~ Did you know that the president of Germany, General Hindenberg, <sup>ridiculed</sup> ~~ridiculed~~ the idea of making Hitler his chancellor <sup>as</sup> grotesque and unthinkable until an hour before he actually did it? Especially the young fell for the Nazis, not because they believed their nonsensical ideas, or because they thought that Germany was in the grip of a Jewish conspiracy, but because ~~it~~

the Nazis were implacable in what they said! Their strokes were bold and direct. Business-men inside and outside Germany did the rest. No foreign government withdrew its embassy when it saw a trouble-making gang in charge of Berlin. Francois Poncet, the French ambassador there, even hoped for some kind of <sup>international</sup> big-business deal with the Nazis ~~and~~ against the trade unions. The communists went on voting against the social democrats, and dividing the anti-Nazi majority. They even voted with the Nazi party in the Reichstag on one occasion. Everyone needed Hitler for something, you see! The ordinary people only consolidated what was already an acknowledged success. Even the Holy Father did and said nothing! So what opposition there was among us dwindled away <sup>too</sup>. And then Hitler mentioned Christ respectfully now and then. You see where obsessive rationalism led people? Into the flames of irrationalism! For the over-development of the mind simply meant the under-development of the spirit. In a struggle between the mind and the animal, the animal <sup>is</sup> obviously going to win, ~~because~~ <sup>because</sup> the mind has turned it into a neglected and therefore furious ~~animal~~ <sup>beast</sup>!

<sup>German</sup> So the ~~doctors~~ <sup>doctors</sup> and lawyers and professors who thought that the mind and science and analysis had the last word <sup>to say</sup> about life suddenly found themselves with their backs to the wall, and in many cases ~~from themselves~~ <sup>actually voting for</sup> ~~supporting~~ a political group they knew to be a bunch of hooligans with not one serious political idea to their credit! Armies of the dark-suited respectable marched tamely into the concentration camps or the Nazi army! All Hitler had to do was ~~to~~ shout a little harder, and promise more brutality. I think the neglected animal in all those little rationalists warmed to the sound of a new barbarism. So many of them (as I know from my own home life) were brutes at home, and quiet-spoken rationalists outside. Perhaps the brute had to come out into the open in time!

Few people lack all vestige of Nazi colouring, I told her. An awe of success (so deeply German, at least when I was young) was already a step towards it. All the Nazis had to do was imitate the outward steps necessary for success! Their political message was almost irrelevant. It had to be simple. It needn't be true. If you told a lie you simply repeated it, and in the end all those armies of rationalists, not only in Germany but the rest of the world, believed it. How many, inside or outside Germany, believed in the concentration camps until the day they were opened? For them the truth was a matter not of direct apprehension, it was not a blinding light, a dawning revelation, but observation! It failed them completely!

She seemed to be thinking something out. I was sure that the problem of the neurotic was still in her mind. She leaned forward, elbows on her knees. I believe there is a haunting conviction in her that she is biologically twisted, and could be untwisted. I dare say a lot of Freudian propaganda has come her way; digging and delving into the Unconscious will straighten out her twisted desires! But how absurd to think that by rendering the past rational you exorcise its nightmares! Hopeless to duck your head in the space-time cosmology and say, This is my home, this is where I stay! The nerves fall to pieces that way, you create violent animal passions all round you, not to say madness, sorrow, self-destruction, rebellion in the young! All the time wondering how it came about, while you were so sensible and sober and fact-finding and cool! No use analysing past events, because past events are simply thoughts. They are our thoughts. And simply regurgitating thoughts cannot help us to escape them. We// can be rendered cold to them, yes, by making them public. There is a certain remedial technique here. We can be shown the degree to which our role determined a given distressing situation, rather than vice versa. Some poor and careful freedom could result, ducking inside the space-time

cosmology, clinging to its illusions for dear life. But only ceasing to identify ourselves with our thoughts, with thoughts altogether, can achieve the real liberation. You have to find out who you are, and begin to see that your desires are not genuinely yours, and your achievements not genuinely yours, but are played out on a kind of stage, whose scenes you have chosen, and continue to choose, in the quaint and exhilarating role of being both protagonist and spectator. You have to know that you own nothing, and in that are everything. We already have all we need. (I wish I could say I had learned this!) (1)

I didn't say this to Miss Sophia. I thought it would be 'taking her too far' just yet. And, after all, she is about three decades

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(1) Despite my promise that the Mother Superior would here talk about the Freudian unconscious, I find that she does so in other narratives, not published here. I tried to insert them above, but naturally they stuck out like a sore thumb. Her claim, if I understand it right, is that we have no 'static pool of images' inside us, into which we take a dip now and then, for a memory or impulse. We experience and we memorise, she says, in <sup>a</sup> manufacturing way. It is rather like doing exercises. The experience is a first exercise which the muscles absorb (though they do not store anything). When the exercise is 'repeated' the memory of the experience arises, being already in the muscles, their incipient strength. Now the muscles act towards a definite end. In the same way experience and memory are towards definite ends, but these are not rational, much less irrational. They are simply not thoughts at all. Thus we cannot solve our problems by turning everything experienced into thoughts. We increase the problem that way. 'Thought cannot control the animal', she says. Thus she sees the Freudian system as a desperate attempt to salvage rationalism, while completely undermining it—rather as she sees the Einsteinian and Kantian systems. M.R.

younger than myself. She cannot have sat thinking in solitude quite so many hours—days—weeks—as myself.

She left<sup>l</sup> almost at once, thoughtful, with those immense shoulders slightly hunched as always when she is under some distress. I was happy she was out of the room—out of the convent, with her strong aura. I walked into the garden, breathing freely again. I remembered her lavender breath, the strong iron touch of her hands, (but an iron that had just been manufactured at the hot centre of the earth!) Oh who am I to save? At this moment I need saving more desperately than anyone behind this enclosure! I remember what a long and tough road I had to travel, for twenty years or more, to avoid hands like hers! Now I am old and find that the fires are still not out! I try to tell myself, But these are only thoughts! Blow them away and return to your inner temple<sup>s</sup> of silence! I know they will go. I feel so confident of this that I even indulge them. I sat down and enjoyed those hands again in the silence of my room, I drew myself closer to them and—then the image disappeared<sup>a</sup>. Difficult to sin at seventy-three!

I was dozing in my chair when I heard the car drive up and saw Miranda flit by with two huge parcels i<sup>n</sup> her arms. She went straight to my wife's room. In the afternoon when the house was empty again I shuffled along to see what they were. By that time the wrapping paper had been taken off, and about two dozen books on mathematics—<sup>and</sup> by no means simply <sup>e</sup> <sup>jaw simple Euclid</sup> textbooks either—stood side by side on my wife's table. What am I to expect<sup>f</sup> from this? I would put it down to menopause except that she seems to have had an annual menopause for the last fifteen years. In the old days her desperate search for a function in life went on side by side with my work. It seemed natural and commendable. Now it always feels like a pistol<sup>e</sup> levelled at my head. That was Sophia's work. Since that woman set foot in my house I have been all things to my wife—

from harmless brother to wise uncle—but not the essential thing, not the husband I was before. People find it hard to understand my venom towards Sophia (I am naming her fully again!) but only I know what she can do. Step into a household and put the kiss of death on the quick and tender and warm, and that isn't done with talk or even action! Something silent and powerful is at work, a fearful radiation that withers anything unsuspecting in its path. I only realise now why I prayed so much in those New York days, swaying from side to side. I used to love those Sabbath gatherings in the Bronx, with an ~~army~~ <sup>my</sup> army of relatives, ~~the~~ the seven-branched candelabra on the table, ~~the~~ the women sitting round the wall, while we men swayed from side to side, ~~with~~ our arms round each other's shoulders and gradually began dancing as the chant became more and more ecstatic! I survived, yes! To whom ~~can~~ God be denied<sup>!</sup>, when God is called to? But this woman here in my house, on whom I once hung necklaces and spangles, in what sense did she survive? ~~Was she discriminated for good and all by that experience? And now she is embarking on all these inter-individual~~ It will be infinity and Pythagorean numbers and harmonics and whatnot for the next six months, until she finds that the cool-looking symbols <sup>of</sup> order and symmetry lead her even further into the hot darkness she is trying to escape. And I have to be a witness of all this, and must seem not to know. The godless irritate me.

I all but fell out of the Mother Superior's room. I ~~was~~ dashed back to the house ~~blinded by my thoughts, I was~~ unconscious of everything round me until I reached my room with its massive mirror, and there I couldn't remember having left the convent, much less walked up the hill! The mirror was the last thing I wanted to see, with its hated reflection! I forced myself to gaze at it, at the gorilla shoulders, the mastiff jaw, the snakey Medusa head! How could I so much as put a foot inside that consecrated hall of female virtue? Hadn't she as

good as told me I was sick and forlorn, with just about every mental disorder named by that arch-devil, arch-saviour Freud? Everything from schizophrenia to <sup>tertiary</sup> ~~simple~~ paranoia! [ How often I have stormed up and down the room with Cassandra as my sole wondering audience, vituperating, sometimes screaming abuse at the top of my voice, all because of THE MALE! The vehement, hour-long speeches were always on account of one of that race—and a friend, always a friend! And then, perhaps next day, ~~the~~ next minute, I might see him again, and open my eyes to the fact that here was simply a human being, simply another poor devil, smiling with slight hesitancy towards me, believing himself to be my friend—yes, a mere human being with a poor damned limp rod between his legs in a few, sad, last, gray hairs. Why all that screaming abuse, then? Cassandra would look at me with awed disbelief. So much theatre, so much banging of tables and stamping of feet! For little of it was real anger. It was vehemence of an essentially theatrical order. I meant no harm. But how to avoid the cold accusing gaze of the little Viennese doctor who tells me that I am nothing but a machine of reactions that can be formulated in medical terms <sup>they have no medicine in them.</sup> Some cure, that! I feel in the most frightful prison—where can I fly to, away from the <sup>11</sup>misunderstood consequences of my own actions? Only one creature can help me, and that is the creature who dashed me down so far this morning, into the chasm. Next day I found myself punctually at the convent.

\* \* \* \*

Naturally, Sophia misunderstood the Mother Superior in precisely the way she ~~is~~ needed to. As we know, the Mother Superior actually said how little of a neurotic Sophia seemed to her to be. She implied

that, on the contrary, she found a strong religious vein in <sup>her</sup> Sophia—  
 'religious' being by definition the opposite of 'neurotic' for the Mother  
 Superior. She talked about the Germany of her youth, the neurotic awe  
 of brutality, the Nazi success—and Sophia plunges out of the convent  
 feeling she has been reduced to nothing! Like so many of the Mother  
 Superior's patients at the mainland hospital, she was at the stage (nec-  
 essary for self-examination) of taking everything as a personal attack;  
 in this she is neurotic.

I like her misuse of <sup>John</sup> Keats—the 'limp rod' in its 'few, sad, last,  
 gray hairs'. Keats was telling the nightingale about what it had never  
 known—the weariness, the fever and the fret—here, where men sit and  
 hear each other groan, where palsy shakes a few, sad, last, gray hairs<sup>F</sup>.  
 And youth grows pale and specter-thin and dies! Yes, the very youth that slowly  
 Another example of the secret order in Sophia's life—behind the noisy <sup>wastes!</sup>  
 theatre. So secret that you would never find a copy of Keats in her  
 house. I suppose she is close to Keats in many of her moods. What  
 about 'when the melancholy fit shall fall sudden from heaven like a weep-  
 ing cloud'? And 'the voice I hear this passing night was heard in ancient  
 days by emperor and clown'?

Apropos of this 'order' in her life, perhaps we ought to note here  
 that every one of the people whose narratives we are following is (except  
 for Miranda, the Aaron maid) of middle-class upbringing as that used to  
 be—I mean <sup>the</sup> that distinct middle class which, before it was crushed by the  
 second world war, used to have access to leading positions in society,  
 was relatively small, and was given a decided form by its schools and  
 military colleges and even ~~convents~~ <sup>convents</sup>. <sup>A class full of snob—</sup> Now all these people  
 are dispersed (socially speaking), and carry about with them their separate  
 relics of the upbringing. I mention this now because their quotations—  
 the Renegade's from Spenser and Shakespeare, Sophia's from Keats—have

about them the surprise of a past society suddenly re-enacted. In a moment we realise that a class structure, long after it has disappeared, is carried about for years by those who in childhood absorbed it as simply the way life was. Sophia's 'order' as I have called it is, I believe, of this origin: it derives from the safety of a quiet seat—meals being cooked elsewhere—clean laundry waiting on the bed—in a room with the clock ticking and lazy country sounds/outside. <sup>news and barks and neighs and blackbird tentative notes</sup> I believe that though an orphan she always had a small army of well-to-do relatives to fall back on in trouble. There was something restful to the nervous system in that. Otherwise it takes a lifetime to recover from the nervous shocks of poverty in childhood. And her quotation is from an English poet. That argues acquaintance with English from an early age. More than a convent—and more than an orphanage—provided that.

\* \* \* \*

She came to me looking washed-out and pale under the tan. She reminded me of a tortured bear, <sup>who</sup> I had once seen ~~one~~ chained up in Kurdistan, and a man <sup>twisted</sup> the skin of <sup>the</sup> ~~its~~ <sup>whining creature's</sup> neck with a long iron pole, ~~just for a moment~~, just for the fun, and I heard this animal's pleading whimper, and <sup>his eyes</sup> saw ~~its~~ face. She almost fell into a chair. She said she had been through a gauntlet of nightmares: no sleep. Would I send a priest to bless her house? A peculiar question. I

her  
 // looked at her and smiled. I asked ~~how~~ did she hope this would exorcise the devil? She said, Well, I was away over Easter and the priest usually comes and gives each // of <sup>7</sup> rooms a blessing. It seems to help, she said. It only helps because you think it helps, I said. Good God, she said, her head buried in her hands, her shoulders hunched forward, so dynamically pregnant of action, How can you say that, in your position, in this place? I told her quietly that blessings and such things were pleasant actions in themselves, and they were for people who had to rely on others for spiritual secrets. But you, I added, strike me as self-reliant. You have to exorcise the devil yourself. And that means to stop being the devil, stop adopting ~~the~~ <sup>his</sup> role! Ha! That was the sound she made—half discovery, half disbelief. Because, I said, the devil is only a role. He doesn't exist. Only God exists. She looked up and said, Yes, yes! That's why his little eyes are cold and accusing! He sees the devil in everything! Therefore he is the devil! He plays the role himself!

Who are you talking <sup>about</sup>? I asked her from the other side of the room. She talked <sup>5</sup> half to herself, muffled up in her hands. Oh it doesn't matter, she said. And then—Tell me something comforting, something more, go on talking to me. I went closer to her (if she knew how I absorbed her thrilling radiations!) and said, still quietly, You see, Miss Sophia, you think yourself an abandoned person, and <sup>you see</sup> of God as looking at you from outside. Try to think of Him as looking outside from inside you, and you will have a better picture of what it is all about. ~~There lies the truth. Then you will see that all these so-called~~  
 These called 'devilish' things are only travails of the earth-self, ~~they are~~ the results of living in the world. They can't be refused. They ~~are~~ have to be understood. And ~~any~~ understanding only comes when you look inside for the answer, ~~not outside. Don't worry about reputation.~~  
 Don't be ashamed of yourself, because that is a concern for reputation,

where the audience, the accusing audience, is one ~~you~~ <sup>yourself.</sup> ~~then everyone~~  
~~thing begins to be a divine adventure.~~ Shame and pride and fear, they  
cling together. If you get rid of one, you get rid of all three. The  
first to tackle is fear. You have never been abandoned, you never will  
and never could be abandoned. Believe that blindly at first, then you  
will ~~begin to~~ live the truth of it slowly.

I said, If you believe God is outside (which means believing in  
the eternal abandonment of the human creature) it is a next step to  
blaming Him for suffering. But suffering, I said, is not a negative  
force, ~~not~~ <sup>r</sup> is it a definition of evil.

It's strange, she said, I feel as if I'd heard these words before.  
Somewhere along the jet-~~route~~ <sup>u e</sup>, some man! She looked up suddenly:  
You aren't very orthodox are you? No one religious is, I told her.  
That's why the Church broke ~~into~~ <sup>into</sup> pieces when the Spaniards tried to  
impose ~~an~~ <sup>their</sup> orthodoxy. ~~the Christian world~~ In Spain you ~~would be~~ <sup>were</sup>  
suspected of heretical leanings if you cut the fat off your pork, or  
failed to eat pork. I don't believe the Church would have tried to ~~do~~ <sup>impose</sup>  
such a thing, if left to itself, <sup>do you?</sup> It was a typical politician's move.  
The Church's power would have dwindled just the same with the ascent of  
rationalism from the sixteenth century onwards, but it would have kept its  
tender secrets. Unhappily everything was torn down, long before a religion  
had really taken root. ~~ourselves~~ We began to lose sight of the tremendous  
powers latent in ~~ourselves~~ us. We reduced ourselves to minds. We  
put all the power there, until we believed there was no ~~power~~ <sup>power</sup> elsewhere.  
The way to live was therefore forgotten. The way to change life with-  
out activity or calculation was forgotten. People ceased to shine.  
Thinking took the place of shining. And you are a marvel, I said—  
I suddenly faced her bravely, catching my breath, almost unable to go on—  
because you still shine, and that's why you stick out, that's why you

feel yourself to be abnormal. You shine not with finished spiritual powers but with those ~~some~~ latent ~~in the~~ animal <sup>ones</sup> which can lead to the ~~the~~ light! Mind hasn't withered you, I said. I almost fainted, having said this, but thank God she was unaware of the self-committal on my side that had led me to say it.

In the end, I said, <sup>if</sup> ~~with~~ the <sup>is</sup> mind in sole control, you get terrible nightmares. ~~They become too much, and thought is powerless to control~~

~~them~~ Think of those suicide waves in Germany, when I was a young woman! <sup>All</sup> those young people ~~were~~ unable to cope with the nightmare! Unable to know that we choose suffering and we choose release. ~~unable to realize their freedom, which made death sweet, for being the final and irreversible~~

~~release.~~ Really we Germans plunged into a frightful war ~~that~~ <sup>ing</sup> lasted more than thirty years, after 1914 (I was glad to be on the objective again!). Because we went further into rationalism than anyone else, we had to go further in irrationalism than anyone else! For these two, as I said the other day, can never be separated, and the growing precedence of science since the sixteenth century must mean the growing precedence of war. The last four centuries have indeed been the story of a growing

totalisation of war, until now society has become virtually a war-machine <sup>with us as</sup> ~~with us as~~ its spectators, our thoughts and our gleanings of truth and our adventures now simply private events, without much radiation on the dark powers outside us, as if we were all somehow on a protracted holiday,

ineffectual in everything we do! More than <sup>n</sup> any other consideration, I told her, it was this that drew me to the convent, when I was a ~~young~~ girl. I remember seeing this present world coming, I saw its flames,

physically, in a series of violent daydreams. Remember that this was even before the first world war, and our <sup>German</sup> world ~~was apparently unchallenged~~ <sup>at that time seemed unchallengeably</sup> ~~safe,~~ <sup>safe,</sup> our peace simply the ~~safe~~ way life was! ~~and always must be~~

I realised ~~was~~ clearly that the effective zone of action was going to

cease to be outside, in the world. That way led to nightmare and the obligation to destroy. An act of the deepest concentration was incumbent on us, in solitude, in order to bring our dormant powers alive again without which we could not go on (I mean even as a race). The war machine in which we live must destroy itself, but it might destroy us. You cannot fight the devil—that is, men dressed up as the devil—by action, because action and the world of power <sup>are</sup> ~~is~~ precisely his field.

I left her this time feeling—convalescent: not clear, or resolved, but under treatment. Really I couldn't tell what she had said. I returned to Cassandra at lunchtime and not at nightfall, and we attacked a huge three-course banquet between the two of us, with wine and coffee laced with brandy afterwards. What I did derive from Mother Superior's words was the feeling, There <sup>is</sup> work to do, ~~there is~~ <sup>and</sup> no more time for ridiculous private problems which Freud glorified. His world was smashed to pieces, so was his race, almost. Too many private problems! No, there is important work to do—I suddenly saw that private problems were nothing but vanity!

The moment she left me I rushed to the chapel and almost fell to my knees. I had talked about concentration—the powers that accrued from self-restraint, and while I was doing so I absorbed her lavender breath as if it were the last life-giving breath of all, I almost touched her great shoulders, pulled her magnetic head towards my stomach as I was standing there! What have I done? I asked this in my prayers. For years I had rejected those 'give-me' prayers that are really the degradation of prayer, though accepted now as the Christian way. But now I did ask for light! I am seriously disturbed. The garden no longer seems the same to me. I find myself no longer preoccupied by the welfare of those in my charge. I failed to visit the refectory to see that the <sup>scrubbing</sup> ~~cleaning~~ had been done and fresh flowers put out. The

mail lies unanswered on my desk. Forty years have slipped from my shoulders! ~~So~~ I have returned to the giddy roundabout of pleasure and pain after all these years! There must be a reason. We are guided in all things. And so I pray and pray for light. I am deeply in love.

I slept; no gauntlet of nightmares for me. But it was a tense, surface sleep. And some delirious ecstasy is at work. I should be suspicious of it, because it only has to do with the flesh, that is death, and not with life. But I hungrily absorb sensations from forty years ago. And how mysterious everything becomes! Was I getting stale in my easy piety, surrounded by these stout mediaeval walls, my holiness guaranteed by the socially useful hospital attached? Am I being shaken awake?

In my ecstasy my room begins to throb with secretly rapturous life, just like things were in youth! And the night outside, beyond the french windows, comes in like a divine dust whispering to me, and the sea all round the island joins the whisper, and I wish the night to go on and on, and myself not to fall asleep in case I miss a second of the excitement.

I ~~wake~~ <sup>wake</sup> not tired but voluptuously aware of myself. I have always eaten carefully, slept early, walked great distances. I am unwithered by my seventy-five years. My skin is fresh. So—I smiled to think it, feeling quite collected—the old lost friend vanity has dropped in to see me again! He was probably only just round the corner all these years, hoping to renew the acquaintance before I popped off for good! Yes, old times again! How poor! How unexpected! How lovely! I looked at myself in the mirror, naked. What did Lorenzo de' Medici say in one of his laudi—I die when I look at myself, but talking to You I never die again! I could fight all this. But something in me wants to see how far I will go, and where it will lead me.

For two days she didn't come. It meant I could enjoy my delirium in peace. Feast myself on her memory—better than having her a few

feet from me, ~~see~~ my eyes afraid to feast themselves on her directly! I did all my duties. There was a thrilling silence in the corridors, the garden. The occasional swish of a sister's habit was like a tremendous promise—tomorrow would come, I would see her again, I would feel the lavender breath steal over my face! All the time I am watching myself with faint disbelieving detachment. But detachment is hardly the right word. I am being swept along! A smile from her and the detachment is a dead intellectual bone tossed in the wind! On the third day she came, and clearly there had been no nightmares in the interval. Her skin was clear, her hair breathtakingly black, ~~and~~ sparkling like a midsummer night sky! And her hands! I admire them so much—the nails so cared-for, the skin smooth, the fingers capable and unhesitant. And her stride—I heard it suddenly, echoing down the corridor, and all the earth began to <sup>ring</sup>! I had to turn to my desk, bury my head in my accounts, to hide my delighted smile, my tears of relief! She sat down and luckily was so unaware of my state that I had time to collect myself and train my eyes in a few moments to look at the too-marvellous, the too-mysterious again! And yet I know all this is death and pain and unhappiness, that I am pulling down in a few days what it has taken forty careful and not at all unhappy years to build. Luckily again she wanted to talk about herself. It was a source of terrible alarm to her, she said, that she was so different from other people. I laughed. And other people, I said, spend the greater part of their lives trying to be precisely that—different! But being different all the time, she said, is no luxury. In my case, it's a crucifixion. And in what lies your difference? I asked her, keeping my voice dead level, holding on to my excitement as I had not needed to <sup>in</sup> ~~be~~ forty—<sup>figs!</sup> ~~on~~—years. Well, you see me as a woman, you call me a woman, but yet, ~~as~~ she said, I am also male in my parts, I mean not altogether, it really is

difficult—! The combination is strange and terrible, she said—  
I suppose all creatures are torn by the wild horses of passion but I  
am torn in opposite directions, passion means torture for me! But  
passion means torture for everyone, I said. The wild horses always pull  
in opposite directions, I said. We looked at each other and I knew  
what she could not bring herself to say. The horses dragged her to what  
she could not perform! Yes, I could read it everywhere in her face!  
Yet she founded her life on being able to perform, she was unable to give  
up the pretence! I don't know what it was that made me see this. Perhaps she  
wanted to tell me this truth in silence, and ~~she~~ was able to <sup>convey</sup> it because  
she is of such dynamic quality, she only has to send a strong shaft of  
thought towards someone for it to be <sup>distinctly</sup> ~~instantly~~ known! Or perhaps I  
saw that no woman would have been able to exercise such a spell over me  
as 'she' did, and even less a man—in the most captivating way she was  
the promise of both! I suddenly felt a fierce compassion for her—I  
wanted to fling my arms round her shoulders—but it was a compassion  
that withdrew itself like a coquette, because I want those wild horses to  
go on tearing her limbs and giving her a mask of such dynamic agony!

I left Mother Superior feeling strangely remote from myself. She  
makes the poor creature that not many minutes before had given Esmeralda  
a laughing kiss on ~~my~~ <sup>her</sup> lips (she had made me a present of a little  
breviary) seem ancillary to another me. I am <sup>ε</sup> astonished by Mother  
Superior's coolness. She is all God's. She can see everything I  
need and everything I am—without the smallest partiality for or  
against on her part. I really could be anyone for her—but I mean  
this in a special way: anyone and everyone is for her a god. This  
is why I took my problems—or really, come, let me face it, I only  
have one whale of a problem, of which the others are only the sparkling  
little pilot-fish!—and laid <sup>it</sup> ~~them~~ in her lap. I am incapable of

thinking an 'Esperalda' thought when I am with her. I keep my head lowered, and find it difficult to enter the penetrating shaft of her gaze which has probably already seen with its terrible inner eye the hot encounter between Esmeralda and myself—and has prayed for us both. I have always loved easy triumphs. And so Esmeralda got a return pinch in the backside as I walked down the corridor on my way out. I heard her rough, rich laughter echo behind me. No one listens twice to that. It rings through the convent all day. Not a sign of Sister Mahatma. I peeped round the corner into the chapel as if to take the holy water and say a quick standing prayer, but no one was there. I had a sudden unthinkable thought; ~~in a sense~~ I had triumphed over him—on the cross, watching me with his dying eyes at this very moment! This is what I meant when I told the Mother Superior of <sup>my</sup> being torn by wild horses! I hope He forgives me! Yes, I know He understands. ~~me~~ But at once, following this feeling, comes a rush of hot proud resentment that I of all people should be asking forgiveness of a man!

When she came home I told her the news, that Sister Mahatma was apparently behind putting the dog-pills by the professor's bed, or at least so the island's bush-telegraph is saying. Miranda, and also our own cleaning girl, told me. At once the marvellous creature looked dark; that is, her eyes became black like marbles and a deep crease appeared between them, making it seem that her ears would develop points like a faun's. She went utterly quiet. Cassandra, she said, how can you talk such frightful nonsense? I said it was only what I had heard. She has ~~passed~~ passed through such secret crises in the last few days, I quickly regretted having told her. ~~me~~ I am still waiting for the explosion to happen, when she will rush back home and give me the whole history of her visits to the convent in violent, vividly staged episodes, her voice rising and falling, echoing down the olive

grove, making the animals alert with happy excitement—yes, she has an effect on the animals—birds wake and twitter with elation when she walks at night, neighbouring dogs (who know her like a sister) come and <sup>tree</sup> ~~are~~ <sup>tree</sup> piss on the ~~tree~~ when her shout is heard, <sup>they</sup> ~~they~~ wag ~~their~~ tails, <sup>the</sup> ~~and~~ cats rub their backs against <sup>our chair-legs.</sup> ~~the~~ ~~tree~~. I saw, in her sudden black gaze, a special concern for Sister Mahatma. The injustice of it kindles a fire—I <sup>can</sup> ~~can~~ see it smouldering! What a lovely thing it ~~is~~ is to witness her horror of injustice! And ~~is~~ all the more ripe if a man administered the injustice. ~~is~~ Finding a man somewhere, as the first cause of any trouble, is never difficult for her. Cherchez l'homme is her motto! In this case it is clearly the old Jew. She lowered her head, biting her lip—pondering tomorrow's action. How I know it! She wants to rush back to the convent and shower on Sister Mahatma everything from kisses to nips of whisky! I persuaded her to sit down and have a quiet bite to eat. We had scampi preceded by avocado pear. I told her what trouble I had taken over the scampi, to transfer some of her compassion <sup>to me,</sup> ~~to~~ and in any case this is always a good way of getting her to eat with concentration because she feels a homage has to be paid, and she grows quiet and respectful, she seems to be listening to the food as she eats, with little mms of appreciation, and she takes the food with a quaint delicate care, giving me glances almost of awe. How can I leave gazing at this creature! how not feast my eyes night and day on her, trouble her in sleep! be her shadow in the world! Oh how I thank God for existing!

I prayed long after she left me. The convent is quieter these days, I mean for me. Sister Brigitte seems to have forgotten her complaints. This is only because the war is now ~~is~~ going on inside me! I long for her to have problems—to come to me again in agony! And then, today, my aching hope was satisfied miraculously, double-

satisfied—by the sound of her stride I could hear her feverish anxiety! And the strides made unhesitatingly for my room! I could hardly believe my luck—just as if I had prayed in the chapel for this! And how can I say that what He is doing is wrong, how do I know what the end will be? My faith is being tested. And I find it remains my settled conviction that a blessing bestowed is never taken away. Yes, my life was too deeply blessed to be disrupted in a moment! She h.p. burst into my room, and I almost ran to her in my relief. Her brow seemed fixed down by a great iron clip between her eyes—she was burning, burning! What great rivers of feeling crash <sup>through</sup> this body of hers! Sister Mahatma! This was the subject, of all unexpected things! She could hardly take breath—hardly make herself understood. Sister Mahatma was under suspicion of having done the work of that scheming viperous slim-legged bitch—! I took her arm—it had happened before I knew it, an involuntary action of help—and drew her towards a chair. Her skin was hot and vibrant. It was like touching a wild animal with all its native jungle strength intact. The touch shamed me in a deeply physical way—where had my vibrancy gone? where the dynamic power in my nerves? She did sit down, or rather she blindly obeyed the command of my hand. I asked her quietly, Now what does all this mean? Who is the viperous woman? Little by little it transpired that there was a rumour about Sister Mahatma (who has <sup>never</sup> ~~she~~ ventured near the hospital!) ~~she~~ having put the dog-pills by the professor's bed. I too sat down, facing her, ~~she~~ feeling a new pleasure (yes, new things happen to a seventy-year-old body!) at being able to use my momentary position as the calming nurse to feed my eyes on her hair, the skin of her face to which ~~she~~ excitement ~~she~~ give<sup>s</sup> a gaudy glowing dark bloom, and her passionately tussled hair, her hands that bely in their delicacy and restraint those predatory shoulders! I know she was astonished at my calm. (Nothing about Sister Mahatma or anyone else on the island, including myself,

could interest or alarm me much just at this moment. One creature is the sum of all my cares!) I said in a simple voice, Well, there are always nasty rumours, and obviously some of them are going to be about us here. But you must do something! she said—I can't bear to think of that poor creature smarting under that whiplash, which I know so well! I felt like jumping <sup>up</sup> and saying, No, not Sister Mahatma—lead your mind back to me! I closed my eyes, realising to what slim<sup>y</sup> primeval wastes my boat is being drawn. I forced myself to think of that sister (for a moment nearly hated). My favourite sister! I said (what is true) that Sister Mahatma was of all the people I knew the most capable of riding nasty rumours. But once these people start, she said, they can entice the devil into her cell—you don't know them! If the devil gets into her cell, I said with a laugh, she'll have to fight him, won't she?—it won't be the first fight of that sort in this place over the centuries! And what about those long talks we've been having? I went on. Didn't we agree that everything we know through the mind is thoughts and therefore the devil is only another thought? and therefore Sister Mahatma must have the thought, and even need the thought, if he does enter her cell? and therefore the thought must already have been strong in her? We are creating the world round us all the time! I said, ~~and~~ we are only the victims of other people's spells and machinations if we have failed to realise how much comes from ourselves, how little in the end from the 'outside'! I said I thought we needn't worry about Siter <sup>s</sup> Mahatma.

There was a long silence—her head was down—and then she said quietly (always the unexpected!), Why, then, isn't God just a thought too, if everything is a thought? I said, But everything isn't a thought. God is an experience. This <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ what all the quarrel <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ about, over the centuries. For those who haven't had the experience, He is a thought, ~~and~~ on the same discursive level as the devil and other thoughts. But—

The bell rang that moment—it meant that Torquemada as we call him had arrived for confession and Mass. If mild-seeming, sallow-faced, stiletto-eyed Father Osnuna, our Dominican from the mainland, knew all the thoughts behind my carefully orthodox smile he would have me screaming at the stake. My heart was always with those Anabaptists and Luterani as the Spaniards called them when the flames began to lick them and love poured from their eyes! As Montaigne said, it is rating one's conjectures at a very high price to roast a man alive on the strength of them. I went quickly to Sister Sophia and kissed her hand—yes! Then I was gone. How cleverly I use situations, how quick I am to touch, to kiss! Torquemada thought I had fallen in love with him, I'm sure—I beamed and beamed so. He ~~w~~<sup>w</sup>ouldn't roast me for that!

I took what I call one of my <sup>s</sup>orrowing walks today. Yes, with my silver-knobbed cane! How I love this cane, the more <sup>ad</sup> the world mocks it! I deliberately walked past the hospital—scene of recent terrorism. I even looked up at the windows hoping for a glimpse of Sister (not my sister—Beelzebub's!) Mahatma. Yes, I felt I needed her as I had that high-booted muscular girl with tight-fitting jumper and button-nose who suddenly appeared at the door in the Manhattan hotel. The enemy! How we want to embrace her! The guilt, the desire for persecution, the double personality wells up and asks for the embrace of death! Sister Mahatma, I almost die for a touch of your wicked and probably unwashed hands! Come down from your tower of evil machination and stand within six metres of me so that I may smell you! How you must relish the golden memory of the last bath you had about twenty years ago! And as for your habit—did that ever see a cleaner's? Did you never hear, Sister Mahatma, of the laundymats that have come into existence since you were born?—voluptuary centres!—never let your empty shaved head give them a thought! And surely life was more satisfying in the Bedouin encamp-

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ments where no water was available even for a quick wash? Water, like the flesh, my dear, is a mirage! Avoid its allurements and hold fast to the Lord! And if you should be called a second time to the bedside of a Jew, simply stand there for a time, your body odour will <sup>u</sup> cause far more damage than dog-pills! I walked on, reflecting on these things. The stiff, pointed, polished leaves of the palm-trees seemed quite different to me now—they <sup>o</sup> came from a dry, wasted land, the sea all round <sup>s</sup> had become sluggish, no longer covered by the sweet haze of Mediterranean summer ~~(and Mediterranean industries)~~, but ~~by~~ an ominous volcanic vapour. She has changed the island for me! I feel the closeness of the Arab world. I see holy murder flash in the air above the sea. And my silver-knobbed cane is the sceptre of an exile, the last physical testimony to a lost kingdom where decency and forbearance prevailed.

I am no sooner back ~~at~~ home—with fifteen guests at the lunch table, all of them nice people (for a couple of hours), and someone decides to do the equivalent of throwing camel shit straight in my eye! He was all on about how at Frederick 11's table in Naples Arabs and Christians and Jews <sup>had</sup> sat side by side and talked about the ancient world. Apparently old Fred the Hohenstaufen introduced Arabic numerals to us all, as well as starting the medical faculty at Naples university. The <sup>r</sup> Arabs even had an advanced surgery! They taught the Spaniards all they knew! Their marvellous culture was the basis and diving board of the Renaissance etc. etc. etc., bla-bla-bla! I pointed a sniff at every one of his remarks. I gulped my food so quickly that I ~~had finished~~ <sup>was waiting for</sup> my dessert before the others had got past their hors d'oeuvre. Then I got up and within thirty seconds of putting my head back in my kingdom of decency, my sceptre leaning against my desk, gleaming thrillingly in the shuttered afternoon darkness, I was off in the land of dreams.

Next morning I had to go to the mainland—for a medical check-up

as a matter of fact. There is a young German chap I always go to. I enjoy the trip across, and get a taxi on the other side. Near the hospital I slip into one of the bars for a coffee and croissants. I sometimes sit outside and watch the loading at the harbour. This is quite a little routine of mine. I end up with lunch down at the Plaza, <sup>on</sup> the other side of town, where it tried<sup>s</sup> to be the French Riviera. And a boat back in time to squeeze an hour's siesta. Anyway, I said to this young kraut in as casual way as possible, I said, Don't know why I never go to that local hospital of ours, it's bang opposite my front door you might say—expecting him to laugh and then give me a long list of the legalised murders that have been practised by the sisters over the years. Not on your Aunt Nelly. He said, I wonder you don't too, it's just as good as this place, from the equipment point of view, and much more convenient for you. He was just on his way out, so we lunched together. Took his degree at Hamburg. Wife and two small krauts. I talked about my army of German relatives, and had him laughing about how the family fought itself in the first world war. I have definite proof that my cousin Frank took a pot shot at my uncle Helmut at Ypres and made a hole in his Helmut! With the help of a bottle of yellow vintage piss I roared my head off, and didn't give a shit that the doctor failed to understand. Well, after we'd celebrated the end of the world with a glass of schnapps, and he'd finished his lecture on ecology (apparently Mother Nature has her knickers down at the moment)—not that I listened—he started talking about, of all people, our old friend Mother Superior. I could have eaten my Mahatma! An interesting woman, <sup>he</sup> // said. I nearly said, So was Mrs Bonnie, not to mention Mrs Clyde. He said she had once worked at the mainland hospital. Particularly successful in rehabilitating drug-cases. This pulled the smile off my face, as I have no fewer than three sons hooked and stoned to the eyeballs. I won't say

I always did my best for them. I did, but I know how phoney it sounds. I wept for them. I know that. I sent them to the best schools. I saw they were introduced to the best people, and by that I don't mean a lot of damned snobs but the key people in well-nigh every industry. I never kept them away from the dinner table if there was somebody important coming. I let them order their own newspapers, that sort of thing. I let their girls ~~come~~<sup>and</sup> go though of course I drew the ~~line~~ line at people screwing all over the house. (When I was a kid we weren't allowed our own wristwatch<sup>es</sup>/until we were turned eighteen, let alone a screw in dad's bedroom). So, falling over themselves with gratitude, my children have to start smoking! One taught the other. I discovered the house had become a sort of dope market. Long-haired vermin ~~was~~<sup>was</sup> calling at the front door with small parcels, and sometimes in the middle of the night. As one of them said when I came down to answer the door at four o'clock in the morning and told him to piss off, Oh, I had the impression the sun was shining. Timothy, my middle boy, who went on ~~acid~~<sup>acid</sup>, nearly ~~ruined~~ pulled us down to hell with him. Psycho<sup>y</sup>-analysts, hospitalisations, I shudder to think how<sup>much</sup> I ~~paid~~ paid out in medical fees, only to be abused when they got their sanity back. They look like funny young-old crocks now, all three of them, with lank hair<sup>y</sup> and sweaty yellow skins and shaking hands, and oh they think it so cunning that they've had an experience which I haven't (though at my expense). They each get an allowance, on condition that they keep away from me. Like David I thought, deliver me from the hand of strange children, children whose mouth speaks vanity, and their right hand a right hand of falsehood. They've all renounced the stuff now, so they say—it means they only take grass. They live quietly in the aftermath of their hallucinations, hoping to get back their will and initiative, though with small hope, so they go on living on me.

I swallowed a second grappa with my Kraut doctor, and felt like death. All this time he was talking quietly and reverently about the Mother Superior, and I didn't get a word. Back home again I slammed the door of my bedroom so as to wake my wife, because I now blame her for my derelict sons. She spoiled them. She must have done. She was always finding excuses for them. I didn't sleep. I wept again. Oh, Sister Mahatma, wouldn't you be in your seventh heaven to see the tears oozing out of my eyes as I lie gazing up at the ceiling? My wife knocks on my door hesitantly and says, Are you all right?, and I give myself the pleasure of not replying.

Lolling in the dark next to Cassandra, my jumper pulled up over my bare brown belly after a madly garlicky meal, I find myself numbed with fear, or it could be <sup>indigestion.</sup> ~~indigestion~~. I coax Cassandra to talk to me about the desert, our days together <sup>in</sup> ~~at~~ Tangiers, her youth in the Aden Protectorate. I close my eyes, seeing the black tents of the Bedouin. I can all but smell the stiff dark abbas of the women ('something between <sup>dried</sup> ~~dry~~ goat shit and opium') and at last, unknown to Cassandra, I see before me the loveliest nomad princess of the Sinai <sup>s</sup> dands, with rings at her toes, and turquoise necklaces chuckling at her neck, and <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ delicate black veil hiding all but her eyes, <sup>her</sup> ~~and the~~ abba disturbed ever so little by her proud upright breasts and her hips that sustain the cloth as she walks with that long stride which great distances and slipping sand and much heat and thirst impose on the children of Islam. Sister Mahatma! And you have come across so much desert (where God is said to have been born) to a poor Christian island to teach us not words any more, for our religion has long been reduced to words, but the look the face has, the texture the skin has, the shape the hand has, when determined by divine illuminations! The numbness left me little by little, and suddenly I felt an absurd dynamic joy. I <sup>stood</sup> ~~stood~~

in the middle of the olive grove and let~~h~~ out an enormous fart as I sometimes do when overjoyed. Cassandra laughed in her throaty way, as if yesterday's whisky were fermenting today's good cheer. She joined me and we walked, danced between the trees until I fell into a pothole with her on top of me, and we laughed until we were almost sick. I slept like a dog, because a plan of action has formed itself in my brain. From this time forth my thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth!

I was sitting gazing at a rare edition—pretty well the only one I've ever owned—Antonio Beccatelli's Hermaphroditus, dated 1421—I wouldn't let it go for fifty grand—when in strides THE GIRL THE BOOK'S ABOUT! How she got in God alone knows! And she starts screaming abuse at me, I can't believe my ~~eyes~~<sup>ears,</sup> I just stare at her, wondering how she managed to get past Miranda, and being in the strangest (and not at all unpleasant) way reminded of our New York days when rows flared up and she stood in front of me, her trunk bent forward, her hands on her thighs for support, the yellows of her eyes seeming to slide out of her face because she is shouting so much, just as she is doing now! I ~~know~~<sup>o</sup> she ~~has~~<sup>keeps</sup> a knife in her trousers, tucked into her socks, and I jumped up, backing towards the french windows and dragging my blanket with me. I ~~know~~<sup>also</sup> I ~~cannot~~<sup>cannot</sup> rely on my wife, supposing she ~~was~~<sup>is</sup> in the house, or rather I ~~was~~<sup>am</sup> afraid that, buried in her mathematics (the current night of her soul), she ~~would~~<sup>will</sup> hear and come running, and fall under the Sophian spell again! The abuse was all about Sister Mahatma, whoever that might be. She really must have gone mad. I always said it. She raved on— How dare I something or other? In future she would defend people against my calumnies, my verminous insinuations—that she loved Arabs (this I knew from the number of live sheikhs she always brought back to our apartment in Harlem)—and the dog pills ought to have killed me—and I had survived them through not having a heart! And then, as I realised she must (because she always, on previous occasions, ~~has~~<sup>did</sup>), she burst

into tears like a vast child, and dashed out of the room, straight into the arms of an astonished Miranda, who exclaimed, Miss Sophia!, before she was given a wet kiss and hug. Then the house was as empty of her as it has been for these five years past, and Miranda and I stood gazing at each other in the silence of my wife's mathematical studies three doors down, until I shrugged my shoulders resignedly, and returned to my chair. What is all this about? Everyone seems to come to the house to talk about Sister Mahatma. First the Renegade, then Medusa herself. And if I knew who Sister Mahatma was it would be a help. When, a few minutes later, my wife came into the room, busy pencil in hand, and asked what a square root was ('surely they are usually round?') I told her after a long pause, and with a serene smile, A square root, my dear, that is simply a root seen mathematically, and her Ah! of understanding as she left the room would have convinced Euclid himself that there was something in my explanation. Between fools and madmen the island basks in her careless sun. Sit still, I thought, and hear the last of our sea-sorrow, for the end will not be long. I decided to say nothing to her about the Sophian visit.

~~This~~ <sup>This</sup> was a morning of scirocco when the ~~sea~~ <sup>sea</sup> sent up snarling and dirty waves and the air hung dead over the island, a sick pall. The animals slept. Even the pigeons ceased to flap about heavily on the roofs, and Sister Brigitte stayed in her cell all morning. I don't know why I should couple her with the animals, my mind is under a pall too, all my thoughts are down inside that imprisoning triangle where the digestion thunders and grinds, and the waste is evacuated, and the serpent that should lie coiled up in happy anonymity is furtively raising his head. I think I must have gone to the chapel a hundred times today. Feeling a thousand tons in weight. And remembering all the heavens I have been through in the last twenty years—all one

heaven though they seem multitudes because each time feels <sup>to be</sup> ~~like~~ the first, when <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ divine dust settles on the head, and the glands and tissues and warring muscles go into a deep quiet that is beyond sleep or even rest, and you want to drink and drink at these/everlasting ~~clear~~ waters of life. And now all this is a memory. It seems I can be flung down into the pit of darkness as if all my daily wars over decades had been nothing. But I reject this thought at once. Time-thinking is body-thinking! I cling to the intellectual conviction that all this is being done to an end, and is under control. I remember something Sister Mahatma said, that the intellect is for keeping balance. I have to be patient. Perhaps I was getting too proud, seeing others fall, rehabilitating others all the time. In a most abject moment, walking across the garden back to my cell after putting maize for the doves, it crossed my mind that I must force myself never to see her again, and then—looking up—I saw that thought physically crushed to the ground, as she herself rushed out towards me, my fellow-prisoner in the triangle, whom I have almost started to blame! Her hair a thousand snakes trying to wriggle themselves free, sweat pouring down her face, arms akimbo like a bear's—she expresses in her body all I feel, the fevered anguish!—but how can I minister to her now, how speak with someone else's tongue as I ~~used~~ to—for I only have my own poor human tongue now, I am mortal! She stops, hardly pauses to say hullo. And again the subject is Sister Mahatma, Sister Mahatma! Shall I never be free of this wild storm? But where could I go, my darling, if I cannot find you again? if I sit patient in the silence, my eyes closed, and my dove that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, fails to come to me! what am I without your wings that take me up? But love cannot be killed! I suddenly thought this, in a crescendo of triumph—I heard nothing she said about Sister Mahatma—I was strong again, he had come to me again, I

had a voice to speak with! For many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it! If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned!

All the time she talked I forced other words into my head—My beloved is the chiefest among ten thousand, his head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven, his eyes are as the eyes of doves by the ~~drivers~~ <sup>drivers</sup> of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set!

And as we walked on to the stone terrace in front of my office I was clear and contained again. The sun is shining! Yet when I looked up I saw that it was a sultry, sickly day—but for others now, others! Suddenly I ~~loved~~ <sup>loved</sup> the mist-dimmed, yes even the sick, sunlight that gave the earth ~~treacherous~~ <sup>unwholesome</sup> shadows. And I listened to her. She is telling me that I must realise how an Arab girl feels, alone here, accused of trying to murder a Jew. What a terrible imputation! she says. And am I going to do nothing? I took her into my room—yes, it is blessed!—and it received us like a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon. Please listen to me, I told her. Sister Mahatma is from India, <sup>the child of a Hindu family.</sup> She is no Arab. She was educated in a convent close to Bombay and was sent here ten or twelve years ago. She never worked in the hospital. She never set foot there. 'Mahatma' means 'most holy one'. From her I learned almost everything.

That evening I told Cassandra what I had done. I was wearing a pink-flowered shirt with the sleeves rolled up, looking neat and clean. I had just taken a bath, and had squirted, sprinkled, dabbed lavender water on all parts of my person. I let her cook a simple meal. We put the day's cablegrams aside. Batches of them arrive to announce arrivals. Some day soon I must step on a plane and attend to arrears of business. The little apartment in Manhattan (far from their's) is hardly real for me now. I can face it easily—the late nights,

the hour-long efforts to keep a deal afloat, the endless long-distance calls—because only this, what I have just been through, is real to me now. As always, I have been helped. I mean I needed to stay here, and apparently by accident a few deals came to me over the phone, without me having to ~~move anywhere~~ <sup>leave the island</sup> to clinch them. What events have shaken <sup>me</sup> these last five days; what infinite powers the Clever One has, to somersault our thoughts at a whim, and translate us without our moving a muscle or a habit into worlds we never knew could exist! Who is Cassandra? I look at her heavy, fallen breasts that used to stand to attention so sweetly, twenty and thirty years ago, for those sailor boys with their voyaging fingers, and at the low round neck of her dress in a long-since outmoded style, and at her rather flat, moist, passive lips as they hungrily and guiltily receive a drink or a cigarette, and I ask myself, How can this body be the reservoir of anything individual? The body is a thought, Mother Superior says, a thought to Cassandra and a thought to me, received through all kinds of heard and seen and felt impressions that are then formulated into what looks like real life, but this formulation can be changed at short notice—we can be moved into heaven or hell, and this body is suddenly seen as a vehicle, a receptacle, an excuse for the dreams and the thoughts that clang like bells and the light that alters like the cleverest stage lanterns! I hug her and kiss her, and tell her—tell myself—tell the night!—what I did this morning when I strode into the Aaron house. She chuckles. She asks me in that throaty imperial way of hers, Was he surprised? I said, I didn't notice. And we laughed. Was he afraid, do you think? she asked. Yes, mortally, I said. I gave him the most fearful moment of his life, and I'm immensely grateful to have requited Sister Mahatma in that one small respect which she will never know about.

When I jumped out of my chair clutching my blanket (and letting

the precious Hermaphroditus go fly), I felt not the slightest fear. I <sup>e</sup> know she could not touch me. The power of prayer protected me. I was perfectly aware of this. And in those few moments she exorcised the demon of herself for me. In the last few years she had become a mountain for me, impassable, a shadow thrown across all my paths. Only now am I able to see that. And here she was, a human being again, the creature I had known in so many stifling situations in New York. I feel enormously quiet again. A telltale sign that I say nothing to my wife, whose face has taken on the look of an hypotenuse triangle. My impression of Sophia (I can say the name without the slightest ~~is~~ tremor) as a tormented Gentile also helped to end my attachment to her, my terrible attachment of hatred. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother? I dozed for the rest of the day in the island's dreaming silence, as it lies cupped in glittering water, its sea-breeze climbing softly over my face, anointing me. My wife's snores reverberated down the corridor with Euclidean regularity.

Sleeping so deeply that I seemed to have slid down a trap of forgetfulness under the island, I realised what my next step of self-liberation must be. From mathematics to mathematical shapes! It has been revealed to me that the inner form of life is mathematical. Therefore mathematical shapes must surely show the essential rhythms of life, the essential harmonics, the essential conflicts. I wanted to dance softly round <sup>my</sup> ~~the~~ room on bare feet, I felt I had made such a discovery! And all in silence! Not a sound from his room, or from the kitchen. Had I been a snorer perhaps, the spell wouldn't have worked. But my deep contented silent breaths brought a corresponding rhythm out of the earth. Yes, mathematical shapes! I must order the clay. I shall make <sup>any</sup> Donatello look like a snapshot. A little question occurs to me; would Sophia market the pieces for me? She is good at that. My husband 'takes a lick off' some of her deals,

I mean she really does have business acumen. She knows how to promote. For a reason I cannot discover, I feel close to her today, just as if she had been to this house. My soul is among lions.

What's Mahatma to him or he to Manhattan, that he should weep for her?

Who spoke?

Are you there my darling? My hands are doing a slow breast-stroke along your placid sea-bed.

I was asleep and—what happens once in twenty years or so—I started awake, sat up, stared at my reflected shadow in the huge mirror opposite my bed. I almost called for Cassandra. But fell back limply again. Could have sworn someone was trying to make love to me. My bed was as smooth as a sea-bed, then a storm rose up and tossed its surfaces. How we meet, even in sleep! But who were you? And, more aptly, who was I? Was it even my body you were trying to touch? 'My' body? What absurdities! To argue possession, of such a thing as a body, that is suddenly there, and we enter it, and never lose the sense of being strangers to it. Is my body really more familiar to me than anyone else's? It comes to me through my senses—so does everyone else's! I fell asleep. With pleasure I listened to my own snores, which boom like temple gongs in Kashmir. I dreamt that someone asked me what sex I was. I said a woman. He said, How do you know? I said, A psychologist told me.

I woke at ten, when the heat was heavy on the roofs, and Cassandra had to sit through three black coffees before she could get a whistle out of me. I leaned up in bed trying to focus on her and yawning like a baker's oven. She asked me what part of the Middle East Sister Mahatma came from, and I said, India I think. She laughed and said, No seriously, could it be Cairo? I said, Yes, possibly. Ah, she said, they're not strictly Arabs. It explains how she grew up as a

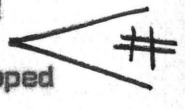
Christian, she said. Yes, I said, the oven-doors opening and closing again, but she has the Beddūin in her blood, the desert in her feet! How come feet? Cassandra asked with a little crack of her voice that implies jealousy. I mean the stride, I said, and open slid the oven-doors again.

I prayed behind Sister Mahatma. I could tell just from her erect back, which is sometimes motionless in prayer for an hour or more, that she knew everything that had happened, to me and to herself. Now I am so happy to have kept faith. I feel sweetly tired. The serpent has coiled himself up, but I don't care if he wakes again. If I am compounded of eternity, what can I lose or gain? Nothing changes. Nothing moves.

It isn't simply that I have nightmares, I have ridiculous dreams. And their ridiculousness troubles me more than the fleshy horror of the nightmares, that always seem to lurk in a state of matter half way between mucous and tissue. I simply cannot see why nonsensical situations should queue up to come into my mind night after night. I was cutting a roast in last night's dream and instead of passing a plate to one of the female guests I passed her my trousers. You know how dreams are. My trousers were still on but nevertheless there I was passing them to her in what I supposed to be a succulent ~~meat~~ bundle. Another night I was playing tennis with my silver-knobbed cane, though I have never played tennis in my life (golf is my game—all right, now sneer). Another night I was driving a bus by blowing at it from behind, and taking the fares. These are only bits and pieces of situations that ~~perpetuate~~ perpetuate themselves from absurdity to absurdity in a way I can't follow even a second after I have woken up (I sometimes say 'woken down', because I get such depressions first thing, until the pre-coffee walk). Surely all these tricks the mind plays (both the ridiculous dream-situations and the waking depressions) could be rationalised out—if only we knew

the right method. It's obviously not something I should go to an analyst with. I mean, I ~~could tell him~~ <sup>know precisely</sup> why I have the auroral depression; it is because I can never think of anything in the coming day that will provide pleasure or reveal its point. Thus, after ridiculousness all night, the ridiculousness of the coming day pours down on me! And I earnestly believe that the reason lies in the fact that we have attained all these tremendous advances over previous <sup>~</sup>generations, and previous civilisations, without our personal equipment so to speak keeping pace. Knowledge has outpaced the human nervous system (for a time). We are surrounded by every form of mechanical success, from the just-right warm shower in the gleaming bathroom to the faultless film seen in the air-conditioned cinema, but the ancient blood continues to stamp its war-dances inside us. One day, though not in my lifetime, these things too will be mastered; scotched in childhood, neatly cured in age, by techniques that will necessarily evolve as the smooth functioning world ~~makes~~ its purely functional demands on the inner creature. It is just like, say, acupuncture. Whenever that was mentioned at/ one time I used to make a loud sniff, and say something like, Yes, in darkest Africa they go one better than that, they dip their javelins in poison before they throw them, to be certain of a kill! Now of course I realise that there have been a number of clinical successes <sup>with acupuncture</sup> and some serious doctors from the west have actually witnessed the operations, and even sometimes practice them themselves. I go further than that; I believe that one day this method will be incorporated into valid medical practice, and for all I know every hospital will have its needlemen. But before that happens we have to find out about the processes going on behind it. There must be an explanation. Of course the Chinese have always put forward some sort of mystical argument, about the cosmos and all that, but there must be a real explanation somewhere. Until that is found, by experiment, the method

has to be doubted whatever its success. For only experiment and observ-  
ation can, as Leonardo da Vinci said, be the basis of certainty. Phew!



I am in the same state as the island at this moment—<sup>+</sup>torn and whipped <sup>+</sup>by furious winds. <sup>+</sup>The fragile olives are being stripped from the trees, <sup>+</sup>the vines are falling from their supports. What little humidity there was left in the parched earth, growing paler, cracking every day, is being dispelled into clouds that race along and pile up in ~~one~~<sup>a</sup> black monster too high to give us rain. And every screaming gust, ~~fetching~~<sup>fetching</sup> another branch down from the holm-oaks or the ~~acacias~~<sup>acacias</sup>, scudding the dust and sand along the terraces, scooping up the blackly shining metallic sea in contemptuous armfalls, shouts Sister Brigitte or Esmeralda or Mahatma or Mother Superior in my ear, and my poor jumping heart, my halted breath and inflamed ~~bowels~~ bowels seem themselves to be contrary winds, out of harmony with each other, not belonging to the same body. Each year I am burned on a sacrificial slab in this way, as the Mediterranean air, infuriated by the pollutions of our time, goes frantic with sudden desperate cloudbursts, with dry winds that chase each other like hungry beasts across the sky for weeks on end, and the hailstorms that lay quick black hands on the vine-crop and bring the farmers running down their slopes to light remedial fires, and then floods, and then snow in summer, and heat-mists that black~~en~~ out the valleys and scorch the leaves when the sun comes up. And I am all nature! I feel it<sup>all</sup> in my glands! I am wracked with the weather<sup>c</sup>-~~ports~~ports. I creep to one of the farmhouses feeling as grey as my hair, and sit among them at table and talk about it all; how the world is tired of its human<sup>f</sup>furniture, until I feel rested. Simple people always rest me in this way. They are my secret refuge in trouble. And then when the raging winds have stopped I go back to my bedroom with the vast mirror and don't even trouble to look at the damage to the olive grove or the vineyard, much less the garden round the house,

~~the concept~~

WILFRID BRIDGES

but accept it all, I receive the storms inside me and the storms outside, uniting them under// one humbled conviction (for I am ancient) that if the world is to go, then it must, and I plunge into its wars without resistant tension, just as I once saved myself in a long fall by putting out my arms// like wings and genuinely flying. How I remember that fall. Only my shock when I saw how far I had fallen made me take to my bed afterwards. There were no bruises. I know I am being called to the convent by someone, something, but I feel an enormous sleepiness and am unable to drag my feet there, and instead pull myself up the steep <sup>Haxetine</sup> steps to my room, with only energy enough to ask Cassandra to bring me a little toast, 'a little nice something'. I am too swept by the winds to be able to dream even; and the names Mahatma, Brigitte, Esmeralda stand before my eyes now like written signs, and my attempt to extract pleasure from them, a glance or a touch of the buttock or a sigh, fails utterly. I am just too near the <sup>death</sup> death. And in a moment sleep has closed over me, and Cassandra has of course not so much as moved from her chair, knowing that the request for toast, said in that derelict voice, means only 'help me', though no help could be given against the dark and soothing hand, that, because it imitates death so successfully, makes us feel afraid for a moment, just before it closes our eyes. I had just enough time to flop down on the feather mattress, my boots still on, before the silent imitator did his gentle work.

If it weren't for that imitator my body would long since have been torn to shreds by its winds of feeling, though in post mortem it would not show a trace of violence. I am saying this in sleep.

For a whole week I have had no word from her. My memory is unable to tell me what she looks like any more—that fatal sign of attachment deeper than visual observation can measure, a sign I thought I would never live to <sup>suffer</sup> ~~see~~ again. The heart beating fast when 'Miss Sophia' is men-

tioned by Esmeralda // (was it breathlessly? though I believe they never once spoke together). The loving mind is fogged, sweetly and securely! Am I afraid she will never come again? No. Why don't I send word to her house that she 'should not abandon us down here altogether, enclosed though we are', something <sup>arch</sup> ~~is~~-sounding like that (A Mother Superior tone)? Because I want her to stay away, at least for a time; as we grow in spirit we become perilously powerful, and things tend to happen as we need them to happen. And I really do need the space and time, the hours in my garden and the chapel, to formulate my plans, and test their soundness. She has left me with a feeling <sup>f</sup> of detachment I thought I would never ~~have~~ <sup>achieve:</sup> I am no longer tied to this convent by the slightest feeling. We have been torn by winds in the last few days. <sup>They have</sup> ~~They~~ screamed round the gables, rattled the water-piping like ~~a~~ madmen, torn limbs off the acacias and left the oleanders in shreds, and half the night I listened to it calmly, because it sounded like all the knots binding me here being blown free. Sister Mahatma always used to talk about 'a young tree having to be fenced round for protection', then 'sturdy, its roots deep and strong, the most violent winds cannot move it'. That was how I felt. My roots are now deep and wide, and I don't need the convent, my wire fence, any more. I knew that I was being taken somewhere, in this midsummer infatuation I have just been through, which I remember with happiness though there was no pleasure in it (but what does pleasure have to do with happiness?). I kept faith, in my mind. Thank God for that. I knew that all those years of sacrifice and ecstasy could never be undone, because there is no greater power than the power which engineered them! And now I am in the open again, refreshed, I see what has been done. She put me to trial. Tugging me into the world, she proved I could survive it. That is not quite well put. I mean, the convulsions my love put me through did not in the end shake me to pieces. So I am

no longer enclosed. I am in the world. The convent is, more likely, enclosed in me. I could only be a spectator here, from now on. I even omit to pray in the chapel. I sit there, or kneel, for the form. I need no formulae any more, not even the most sacred—no songs, no sweet routines of vespers or dawn-meditation, no confessions (least of all). What would my confessor, Torquemada, say? Well, I won't try to imagine. He never needed a wire fence to protect him: a weed will grow anywhere, and eventually strangle the life out of everything else that is hopeful and <sup>r</sup>green nearby. I say this to myself without dislike; the attachment of dislike has gone too. Now you shall never leave me, Christ—you are my son, my father, my lover<sup>y</sup>, my friend! you are in my walk, my breathing, my sleep! how can I pray to you if you are no longer outside?

I remember her so well, when she was hardly twenty, Sister Mahatma, and her way of saying things quite uninvited, and connected to nothing you had said or thought yet burningly relevant to your most secret state at ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> time. Given my country of origin, I find it hard to shake off idealism, and its attendant whore moralism. I used to call it 'the little Martin Luther in ~~me~~ me'. He always seemed to be talking in the silence, about ~~me~~ how this doctor yawned too much in the operating theatre (it was the mainland hospital) and that sister should talk a little more to the women patients and less to the men, in an endless nagging speech. And one day Sister Mahatma said apropos of nothing, with a priest <sup>standing</sup> ~~LL~~ there (he simply smiled at her politely), Other people are ourselves. So doubt of others is doubt of oneself. Then she looked at me (as if the words had come to her and <sup>she</sup> was only hearing them) and asked, Isn't that true? I saw how deep an ego-infatuation (Sophian words!) moral thinking argued, and fought with it night and day, identifying myself fervently with the blamed one, repeating to myself that whatever someone else did

was a matter for God, and had a meaning. I fought it like a lust; but I saw it was much more dangerous than anything to do with the simple flesh, as lust was. I realised that my deep dissatisfaction with others was a (justified) deep dissatisfaction with myself. And gradually I saw that the long fight was on a much wider front than I had thought at first; it was to rid myself of the ego's attachments, and the grappling irons of hate and love that it threw around everyone it met. And, with that, I realised that a real and lasting attachment to others was growing in me as the false, ego-bound one fell away. Every patient became my child, my father, my friend, every doctor and sister a messenger from whom I could learn another secret message. I did learn an extraordinary amount in this way. It was strange, people 'brought' me information just when I needed it. I had laid myself open to ~~them~~<sup>them.</sup> I still could not suffer evil with equanimity. That is a very long road yet. But now<sup>when</sup> I saw Torquemada—smelt him too (he is mediaeval enough to look on washing as a dangerous pleasure)—I began to notice his lazy kindness, especially to children, his ignorant hope in the simple hierarchies of ~~power~~ power, his serene acceptance of his own mean excitement whenever Esmeralda brushed past (she always brushes the floor close to her victims). And I began to love Esmeralda, with her easy rolling laugh. And from that time my power with others (I don't want to say 'power over') began. For the first time I found the convent easy to run (I had left the mainland hospital by now), because I left it <sup>to</sup> ~~run~~ run itself. And when I had occasion to criticise, another voice seemed to speak for me, with all the more authority because there was no selfly concern, no ego-striving, behind it. I began to live. I was already nearing seventy!

In the course of the Mother Superior speaking above I began to notice a different tone of voice. It wasn't precisely a vocal matter either. Before, she always spoke earnestly, in a smooth eloquent rush; it was the voice of someone who had spent many hours in silent thought. But the ardour still—how can I put it?—argued an interest, to convert, to do good, to change someone. So it conveyed, necessarily—ardour tends to—a sense that she was not quite home and dry in her faith. And, in the above, this disappeared. It was an even tone, the words came not only with authority—she always had that—but as if she were reading them from her own mind. She no longer argued as if she wanted to persuade someone, or clarify her own mind (the major reason for all discursive speech<sup>?</sup>). And what had happened to change her tone? She no longer had interests. She no longer loved 'this' person or 'that'. She was simply in a state of love. It is this, as far as I can understand it, that makes her feel 'free' of the convent. She never actually says this, but I have a sense of her being able now to radiate love in the world—I mean no longer from behind conventual walls. The walls, hitherto a necessary 'fence round the young tree', are now an obstacle. Interesting also that, being a woman of work, she now needs to take it up again <sup>after</sup> only a few years behind the enclosure. But I feel perhaps I am wrong here. Work, arguing interest, isn't any more in her mind. She no longer wants her way to God prepared for her—no more conventual routines, no protective walls. Yes, work she will—the work of her life—if that means changing the world ~~without~~ <sup>without</sup> any action or word on her part, simply by being in it, and by being the same as everyone else.

It could easily have been the Mother Superior who said 'What's Mahatma to him or he to Manhattan, that he should weep for her?' Thinking of

Aaron, she might have 'seen' his sudden freedom from ego-attachment to Sophia, in his no longer hating her. 'Sister Mahatma' and his 'Manhattan memories' were no longer operative, destiny-wise, for him. But we are getting into uncharted waters here. But I cling to this possibility, without knowing why—that she can<sup>now</sup> 'see' into situations she does not 'know' about. Perhaps this capacity has grown in her with the diminution of 'interest'. But then, I cannot even be sure that it wasn't Euripides himself talking!

And now—enter Pamela!

\* \* \* \*

She tiptoed into the lounge. I gasped, jumped up, half-laughing. Such a smile, such hair (competing with the early yellow sun), such legs that carried her body reverently! I managed to get myself out of my early-morning slough. I was so astonished to see a stranger, suddenly there, that for a moment I thought I must be far, far away at another

place on the Sophian jet-route, not in my own home. What <sup>marvels</sup> ~~things~~ are happening to me lately! ~~The supernatural is becoming real!~~ The house, the olive trees began to dance! Yes, without knowing her from Eve I felt all the dancing in the universe suddenly encapsulated here in my house, on this island, everything had dancing feet! I had slept like an ox in a stable, so deeply that I had to look twice at my feather bed afterwards to make sure I wasn't still lying there, the imprint of my body being so <sup>deep,</sup> ~~perfect~~ after ten hours of steady damp-ironing. And as fresh as the dawn, with the sea flashing serene messages across the terraced hills, in she floats like the original sylphide! No name, no nationality, no parentage! What angel wakes me from my flowery bed? And her legs, my eyes travelled up and down those endless magic stilts! And how the trunk sits small and erect and compact and still on them however fast she moves! And the tiny head blazing with sea-bleached yellow hair! And the smile that is a dance in itself! And how the island-light behind her seems to hold and support her! And all this undeserved, unexpected—yet (now that I see her) deeply desired and waited-for! Yes, all my life has been a waiting for this! And I never knew I was waiting! much less what I was waiting for! And now my life is explained, perfectly motivated—the greater part of it rendered in a moment a long anteroom where I waited patiently for admission to the blazing throne! Just as I was about to speak and break the spell, Cassandra came down the stairs on her heels, like a coffin being hammered home, and said with last night's whisky tossing her words about like drunken seamen in a rolling long-boat, Pamela caught the early-morning ferry, slept in the waiting-room on this side all night, but she's young. All followed by such enormous intakes of breath that I was <sup>re</sup>rieved of the necessity of saying anything. I simply grasped <sup>her</sup> hand (Pamela's). It was like taking a tiny sea-animal, ~~hot~~ and writhing

underwater mysteries! And we both laughed. So you've come! I felt like crying—you let me into the throne-room! And, forgetting Cassandra—forgetting that she had ever existed—indeed, de-existing her in the most magical way (I noticed her heavy breathing stop with a screech of brakes when it found it had no sympathetic audience)—I took her lightly by the elbow (a most significant and sensitive part of the body) and ushered her into the garden. And I sent up a clamorous prayer of gratitude for having at last been born!

And when we were out of sight of the house I sat down between two olive trees. She sank to the ground like Vera Trefilova doing the sleeping beauty! Ah! she sang with relief, closing her eyes, a smile still on those all-too-eatable cherries of her cheeks (but they must only be tasted, touched, never consumed—I shall protect you, my child~~手~~, You shall be the sun in my room, and by night my moon!) A sleepless night in a waiting room? I asked, or was it the port?—you must be exhausted! The only answer was a wider opening of the cherries to reveal such muscular white teeth, such perfect architectural blocks of sweetly moist ivory, that I still to this day (it is only two hours <sup>ago</sup> ~~later~~) cannot tell whether I planted my lips straight on to them or remained where I was, sitting lazily at her side. Then, surprise of surprises, she stretched out her <sup>hand</sup> ~~arm~~ with a laugh and began tickling the bare skin of my arm with naughty whispering ~~tips of~~ fingers! Of course she must know me—from somewhere along the Sophian route—someone's daughter, probably. In a moment we were romping together, running between the trees, falling, shouting, grappling with each other. She found a tall acacia tree and swung on a branch. She tiptoed, ran, leapt, she even danced a step or two! I raced, stormed, plunged across the heavy, parched sods, until Cassandra's imperial high command voice, smart with red shoulder straps, shouted down from the house,

Sophia, you'll hurt yourself! Not as much, I ~~thought~~, gathering myself up off the ground, as I shall hurt you if you don't take your binoculars off this olive grove. I visualised having to double her poteen that evening, and indeed this is what happened.

Pamela was the first name, and something quite unbelievable because immediately forgettable like Strangeways or was it Hollingford? We were at tea, with the shutters closed, in the cool half-darkness of the lounge in which marvellous projects are germinated and the expectant body lies sweating gladly in a lazy easy chair. Cassandra had gone out, most unwillingly—I had said to her, Listen, our whisky supplies don't order themselves, we're getting low, in fact down to half a bottle (which is ~~is~~ enough to freshen her upper leaves but not to get down to the roots).

Pamela and I romped again, in the half darkness. It transpired that she had just graduated from a dancing academy <sup>into</sup> a corps de ballet in Amsterdam. She stood on her points, using me as a dancing bar. I chuckled and clucked. She did pas de quatre and fouettés all over my bedroom upstairs, and my eyes were unable to decide which were lovelier, her actual silent leaps or their reflection in the mirror. How erect her body! how firm the tiny head on her spine, how motionless—stiff but utterly light—when her long legs, that seemed to climb lovingly towards her trunk, did the carrying and launching, like a young colt with its first rider gripping its back while the frehs, audacious legs do their marvellous business. The original Taglioni sylphide, yes! Virginia Zucchi, Legnani, Duncan herself were suddenly alive before me! The cruelly alluring scent of flowering jasmine drifted through the widdows with the first evening coolness, and suddenly I was Legat, Nijinsky, Woizikovsky all in one as she jumped towards me and—how did it happen?—I held her high in the air, whirled her <sup>down</sup>, suddenly discovering in my natural way the male dancer's secret of support,

floating her down to the ground again noiselessly, her firmly tense, spare, voluptuously muscular trunk close to mine, and her sweat quietly outdoing the jasmine in allurements, and her lips smiling, moist, close to my cheek, and her hair radiating so much light in the dimness that I was aware of her and the room with its smilingly confirming mirror as a great Matisse all round me. We fell on the bed laughing, began romping there too—soft, confined quarters obliged the game to obey a whole new set of rules. We jumped, we tickled, we sprang, we growled like animals—when all of a sudden there was a sound below, not loud but of that deliberately planted quality when someone wants to spoil your fun without in any way intruding. We sighed and gasped ourselves to a halt and I sat on the edge of the bed. It must be Cassandra, who had found the shop closed, or their whisky out of stock, damn her, or perhaps she had stopped at the bistrot down the hill and staggered back to the house soused to the eyeballs. I walked downstairs, drawing a silk gown over my nakedness, and there to my astonishment, standing quiet<sup>ly</sup> still in the shuttered room, was the Mother Superior.

My sense of detachment from the convent (I almost said 'my feeling free of the convent') didn't happen in a moment, as I realised the moment it had happened. For years I had watched Torquemada's comings and goings, and wondered how far his ignorance was <sup>less</sup> ~~not~~ a falling-short of the Church <sup>than</sup> ~~deliberately~~ ~~designedly~~ Her doing. I was always aware of the reformer in me, a talkative trio of Anabaptist pure-love, Zwingli civic duty and Calvinism. But I often <sup>remembered those</sup> ~~had to admit the~~ nails embedded points upwards in the parapet of the San Marco pulpit where Savonarola was due to preach; he always hammered home a scathing point with his fist at just that spot on the parapet. Florence had had enough of his government by sermon. The more I vituperated in the silence of my brain, and the more my fist pounded, the more my right hand began to <sup>bleed</sup> ~~ache~~, and I thought I would lose the use of my fingers, so strong was the impression

this story left me with, as if the nails were meant for me. The crisis was provoked, no doubt, by my being a German in the Mediterranean. Now these voices have left me, and I realise that Torquemada, all the time I was amused by him, and pitied him, was nearer to Christ than myself because his obsessive interest in sin was at least steeped in pleasure—how can I put it?—he trembled at the things he felt. His lingering bloodshot glances at Esmeralda (whose bosom manages to suggest itself under the loosest habit), his limp sweating handshake that seemed to draw all your latent carnal thoughts through your fingers into his trembling palm, even his stink had something submissively long-suffering about ~~them~~<sup>it</sup>, without remorse or recrimination, because the flesh was still God's pleasure of creation and Christ had after all chosen to clothe himself in it for a time. When Torquemada talked about lust he at least knew what he was talking about. He didn't turn it into devils outside him from which he was immune, as I did. His prayers, mechanical and deeply pagan, depending on repetition and not feeling, were touched by his lust to a kind of sweaty fervour; how many hail maries was a glance at Esmeralda's curves worth? So he did, in a strange reptilian way, his heavy belly always close to the ground, in prayer or sleep or eating, communicate all the time with his God. I learned not to despise lust. I learned that the serpent provoked the long journey towards God, even gave a foretaste of heaven with its excitements, its ecstatic horrors, I learned that mastery of lust was simply the eternal formula for the realisation of great powers. When Sister Mahatma said that when you realised God you felt a million sexual organs in your body opened towards Him I wanted to clap my hand over her mouth. In a convent! And slowly I realised that she was the only divinely realised person among us, and that our religion went on in the brain, which is the last place for it to function. I began to see that great powers were in

her; she didn't shine with a light of virtue, as I was led to expect from reading about my lifetime idol, St Clare of Assisi. There seemed no great virtue in her. She spoke sharply sometimes, she was late and sometimes lazy and unreliable (that is, whenever she wished to be).

But she did shine, <sup>Or rather,</sup> ~~in the memory afterwards.~~ And her presence ~~was~~ ~~made~~ the world shine. I began to learn that her body, and the thoughts of her body, had been penetrated <sup>through and through</sup> ~~and imbued~~ with living radiations from a divine force that the rest of us had come to regard as mental.

Even Torquemada was mental, by comparison! His body slumped and bulged inside his chasuble like a sallow-skinned bag of lard, a prisoner in a cell of obsessive desires, over-indulged in the matter of eating and drinking, under-indulged in //the matter of sex and nakedness, and trying to recoil from the daily weight of guilt-laden food, trying to advance towards the denied hot sexual encounter, with the result that the eating became a vengeful snatching of what could legitimately be had, and sex an equally vengeful imagining of what could not. A more erect and wholesomely fresh creature than Sister Mahatma you couldn't imagine. Every part of her body she attended to each day. Her teeth shone a brilliant white. And she moved in present time, always. She moved in real life. How can I put it? The rest of us moved in a sort of artificial space-time chamber that had been invented centuries ago, dividing life into past, present and future, with the seconds of the clock ticking out at regular intervals the endless movement of the past into present into future, like a snake swallowing a victim it could neither eject nor contain. I realised that the Christian world had developed a mathematical psychology (of which that strange instrument, the clock, was a result), and that this must have had its origins in the first monasteries that disciplined the barbarians of Europe into an ordered society. I began to see how useful this mathematical sense of time

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must have been to monks surrounded by tribal minds haunted by superstitious fears of the void where there was no regularity, no meaning, no order. For those monks were themselves barbarians. A rhyme kept ringing in my head—Tick tock, a monk with a clock! That terrible yawning sky, so fearful to the unbeliever (that is, <sup>to</sup> the believer in the body), had to be contained. So, for every good deed a reward—'in the future' (heaven); for every bad ~~was~~ <sup>deed</sup> revenge 'in the future' (hell). And so, ticking out that fearful chasm of eternal time, that silence, with serenely regular marks, order was imposed. I began to see that this extraordinary taming of the most unimaginably cruel and insensate tribes the earth had ever seen, pouring down among the ruins of the Roman empire and splitting the ancient Greek order into a million pieces, terrorising the members of the old order and yet, like animals, ~~was~~ quaintly beguiled and over-awed by that order, had happened only recently, a mere thousand years ago, a handful of generations, and that it was therefore quite natural for us to be at the mental stage of religion still, clinging to the mathematical formulation of life, unable to tap the real sources of power as Africans, <sup>Vedic</sup> Indians, Peruvians and Mexicans and Hindus and Buddhists had done centuries ago. ~~For these real sources of power still take the newly-tamed barbarian mind as a prey, for fear of collapse into the animal nightmire.~~ I then saw that while St Augustine and St Benedict had started the stupendous barbarian-taming operation, this ~~operation~~ had only now entered its productive stage, after centuries of ghastliness which only barbarians could have called civilisation, culminating in two wars that nearly did away with the human race altogether. Now we cannot believe in the future. Global destruction is too easy for any picture of the future to be sincerely felt. And the collapse of a major element in the mathematical formulation of life has brought the whole order low, and revealed its artificiality. ~~We can see now,~~

ROMANTENAS

Now we quiver and quail. The earth all but ruined. Sky and sea refuse dumps. Yes, we achieved order, but it was all upstairs in the brain! We did not in fact teach the barbarian how to live in the world. He learned to order his thoughts, but the earth and even his body began to fall to pieces. And I could see that Sister Mahatma, in herself, was not barbarian. She didn't walk like a barbarian. Her touch had no barbarian heaviness. Her thoughts and cares had a delicacy we simply could not imitate. They were natural in her, not self-developed. She offended our order—'late', 'unreliable'. But the order she had went right through her. Her talk ranged into the future as if it was already past, into the past as if it were to come. Just her thinking argued a freedom that made our little 'order', so primitively attached to routine and calculation, seem—what it is—a frightened flight from the vast order that lies in the ~~stillness~~ stillness round us. We had never learned to let that stillness permeate us. For this reason the stillness of death was still a shock to us. We were sunk in the earth, grovelling in matter. Her wholesomeness was itself a perfect act of civilisation. Some of the sisters were still scared, in this day and age, to see themselves naked! As a result they sometimes stank a bit high, until I put my foot down on matters of self-hygiene. The barbarian again! Dark fears and remorse! And Sister Mahatma's talk about 'a million sex organs turned to God' could only seem carnal to the barbarian mind. I saw how little power the rest of us had, compared with her, I mean power of an immediate supernatural kind, that radiates a special sweet optimism. When I began to see all this I became free of the convent in the sense that I no longer needed it, but found a power growing inside me ~~which~~ which could not recognise ~~order~~ order in routine and therefore chafed at conventual routine. Now I simply want to be. And even as I think this I realise that if I had

Sister Mahatma's freedom, in every pore of my skin, in every thought, I mean ~~from~~ freedom from the world, from the unreality, I would stay on at the convent, its routines would be no more to me than a dream. I wanted to say all this to Miss Sophia as I stood before her in the sattered lounge, but all I found on my lips was, I just called in to see how you were, my child—and (as I sat down with a tired sigh), We began to think you had abandoned us.

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I know Sophia likes to think of me as a drunkard, so I lingered in town, to give her time to imagine me dropping in at that smelly bistrot down the hill. Partly it excuses the whisky she likes to drink. But, more, it gives her a quaint sense of comfort to think of a drunkard at her side night and day—eyes blazing with lost adventures and disappointed quests, a kind of heroine of the abject surrender. She would never go to the drinks cupboard and actually verify the number of bottles and our rate of consumption. I think she likes to establish the people she loves as on a sort of permanent risk-line. I am bravely drinking myself into the grave (in fact, I am), a relic of Rule Britannia watching American cruisers in the harbour with ~~pragmatic~~ <sup>pragmatic</sup> satisfaction, my Alexandrian eyes dimmed with voluptuous memory. Even that ~~is~~ true, partly. But I wonder how far she hasn't invented me in the last few years, really invented a new person, and with my loving cooperation, for I would do anything for my Sophia. If I lost her I think I would become the kind of lush she believes me to be now. Though, if I kept this house, I would live on the relics of her presence, and follow her echoes round the rooms, and induce her to inhabit my body by sleeping in her bed and that sort of thing. I get really troubled sometimes. Methought a serpent ate my heart away, in a dream <sup>—that sort of thing.</sup> Sometimes I try to catch at life but mostly I let it go, taking comfort in my own softness, my ~~plentiful~~ <sup>plentiful</sup> breasts and ~~sunkissed~~ sun-yellowed buttocks (I take a gasping ~~in a rocky corner every day~~)

I take pleasure

swim in a rocky corner every day), in my slow hands and always moist lips that slur their words, in my long stride that seems to halt half way, in my silent reading with pince-nez on a chain at the tip of my nose, looking like a plenipot's wife in the Delta fanned by Nubians, as Sophia says. All such a relief from my early arrogance, always snubbing and dressing down. Not always. I don't <sup>really</sup> remember. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ I had wonderful friends. I couldn't have been too bad. What dreams we occupy! All our lives we rehearse them by yearning for them, and slowly we grow into them. I can't say I've really attained anything I deeply and truly wished for. Of course this can't be true. The one creature I was missing, in those early sailor-boy days, when I thought I could decoy my body into enjoyment of sex, was Sophia. Well, I attained her. I could feel her and hear her everywhere, not knowing what it was I felt and heard. <sup>That was</sup> Years before we met. She had not yet <sup>for me,</sup> taken on human definition, but <sup>a</sup> was inchoate like <sup>a</sup> thrilling sun-swathed shadow, and my pleasure lay in divining her future form. She came and <sup>her shadow,</sup> went, always without me understanding who or what this presence was that made me tremble with expectation—it happened at the oddest times, at dinner with local bigwigs, in the cinema, bathing. The visitations weren't even defined enough to be connected in my mind with one another, <sup>much less with a future person.</sup> Only afterwards, when she had appeared in marvellously touchable form, did I realise that all those throbbing moments of elation <sup>had been</sup> ~~were~~ a unity.

All my life I believed that there could never be real enjoyment, any-  
 I always felt, with Eristatus of Alexandria, that nervous breakdowns and sexual disorder thing genuinely carnal, in crooked sex. <sup>had been</sup> A woman edged near me once, <sup>off</sup> were connected. an Egyptian, plump, with drowsy eyes, the wife of one of the Canal pilots, and put her hand under one of my breasts—I had to laugh! Being in awe of me socially (these were colonial times) she was obliged to laugh too and make it seem that the movement of her hand <sup>had been</sup> ~~was~~ meant as a joke—she thought it best to round it <sup>off</sup> as a <sup>polite</sup> tickle, and I know she came to the

conclusion that I had simply misunderstood <sup>the gesture.</sup> It was behind drawn  
 curtains on a hot <sup>Cairo</sup> afternoon, and a copper tray, with ~~the~~ glasses of lemon  
 tea, touched our knees as we sat side by side. She wore no veil  
 physically, but invisibly she had one all over her face, even the eyes.  
 It had grown into her skin, this inherited veil, muting her face to  
 an expressionless and passive look of non-committal. But lust played  
 under the veil, something hungry and squalid. Where her husband found  
 his pleasure God alone knows. It could hardly have been in her bed. <sup>What she</sup>  
<sup>wanted from me</sup> ~~Now that~~ was crooked sex, ~~the~~ harem slap-and-giggle. With Sophia there  
 was never a sense of crookedness. You couldn't properly decide that she  
 was a woman, to start with. Especially in those days (I am talking of  
 twenty years ago) <sup>when</sup> she was a girl, ~~was~~ so forcefully handsome that  
 crowds in theatre foyers and concert halls really <sup>and truly</sup> divided, <sup>e</sup> stepped back,  
 to <sup>view</sup> ~~look~~ at her. Her hair was so densely black, her skin so wholesomely  
 soft, her teeth so fresh, her stride so long and decided, her frown so  
 deep, her eyes so fiery dark, darting their flames of enquiry everywhere,  
 that you could be forgiven for thinking her not simply neither man nor  
 woman, but more of a man than a man and more of a woman than a woman.  
 You didn't stop to think about your desires or your functions, or any  
 little physical apparatus, you were simply engulfed. You could as well  
 try to stop to analyse the roaring and implacable waves <sup>that sweep</sup> you  
 head over heels. ~~on a rough day.~~ But later I began to think of the crook- h.p.  
edness involved. Because it was involved. I mean, while surpassing  
 a man and a woman, she didn't attain either of them. Three or four  
 times I lay sweating at her side, <sup>'afterwards'</sup> while she hummed to herself, her  
 eyes closed, naked but for her girdle, wondering what had happened a  
 few moments before. <sup>In our love-making</sup> ~~I found that~~ she ~~was~~ resolved none of my desires,  
<sup>did she</sup> nor <sup>like ours -</sup> give me anything to replace my empty closet of unsatisfied dreams  
 with. I felt that all crookedness must end <sup>if</sup> in long serene and dusky  
 conversations, exchanging marvels and mysteries, ~~as ours did, when it~~

ended well at all (which must be rare). I could understand why my queer friends were distraught, ~~gestures~~, quick to feel a dagger <sup>at</sup> ~~in~~ their hearts, quick to draw a dagger of their own. there lay the real splendour for myself and Sophia, <sup>But</sup> in the friendship, <sup>'friendship'</sup> That flat word sounds an insult to describe all the thrilling daily revelations conveyed by gestures or a few chance words or a long vigil into the night until first cock-crow, in a joint exploration that took the bite out of anything physical. Anyway, as a child I had seen so far into the joys of the flesh which marriage could achieve—I mean my mother and father—in that immense country house where I was born—lapped on all sides by misty furrowed fields—yes, it was the breath-taking carnal excitement between them, wild as to seem a madness, a fierce self-consuming fire, that struck me dumb. That fire was only quenched, even then not completely, towards the end of their lives, and—as could have been predicted—they died within weeks of each other. The impression on me was so strong that I feel it robbed me of all chance of erotic pleasure myself, as if any thrills of mine could only be an imitation, a beggarly mockery. <sup>Yes,</sup> I know too much of the mysterious intimacies of marriage to do more than laugh when I hear (from the crooked) that 'straight love' is trite, a routine of progeneration, while in the crooked lies the throb of the forbidden. Even Sophia subscribes, of course for 'political' reasons, ~~or conventional~~, to this rubbish. The forbidden is at the heart of all love! But between a man and woman in marriage it echoes back and forth in the blood, it stretches ~~far~~ back to ancestors and to animal roots, and every gland, duct, nerve is awakened to a marvelling primeval attention which man with man and woman with woman cannot hope to know. I have never believed in 'ambidextrous' people. How do 'both'? The one is so all-engulfing that you ~~never~~ could never pass to anything lesser! How go from those deeply reverberating discoveries of the real biological encounter

n.p.

to one mixed ambiguously with friendship and, worse, enmity! I have never said this kind of thing to Sophia because she would roar me down. ~~She could say that~~ Her whole psychological life depends <sup>perhaps</sup> on the conviction that between male and female there is never more than a quick animal encounter, as limitedly physical as a good sneeze. She could never bring herself to face the fact that nothing she has given women has so much as approached the ~~the~~ wild satisfactions they derive from their men. She only likes 'straight' women. And all her thoughts on the subject are built on the assumption that she supplies these women with what no man can give. Partly this is true. But what she gives is not in the nature of the physical at all. But her belief that it is physical makes it possible for her to give it. Let me explain. In the course of ~~these~~ <sup>her</sup> first <sup>with women</sup> tumbles, so hot and noisy and chaotic, so unlike the wildly systematic crescendos of the successful marriage bed, she gives a hint of the intangible adventure, the 'friendship', that lies ahead. But it has nothing to do with the primordial organs that happen to become involved; these, bewildered and out of countenance, oblige with their climax, but they do not relish more than three or four <sup>of them.</sup> In the end she murmurs in rather a sad voice that, you know, I had better not go too deep, my darling, because then I shall never 'come out' again, we shall be inseparable for life, and after all we do have our lives to lead. Then begins the real thing, and the former bed-riots are hardly mentioned again! I believe that this is the story more or less with all of us— I mean all the Sophian women. One or two go on tasting the supposed delights, but they are usually the ones whose lives are in such a dis-temper that they dare not try to share them with a man, apart from the fact that no man will have them. Even then, she quarrels so violently with them that she has to take a convalescence after they have stayed with us. She sees, I think, that I watch over her with capable understanding, while the others come to her blinded with desires (most of

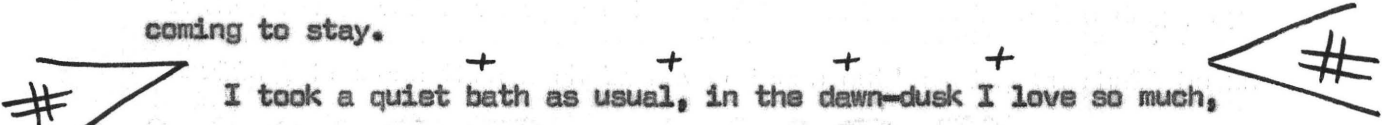
them, admittedly, not erotic). This is perhaps why she ~~likes~~ to think of me as a hard ~~drinker~~. There is no chance, while my eyes blaze with melted dreams, and my flesh pickles comfortably, that I shall reveal my understanding of her, and cause her brilliant rituals to be dissolved.

This is why I went to one of my ex-neighbours from the sailor-boy days and sat drinkless with her, chatting about old times, on her terrace overlooking the sea from a perilous height, until dusk came, and then I slowly hobbled downhill towards the hospital, and uphill between cypresses home. I arrived suitably out of breath, and began my familiar roll of the hips when I heard her coming. Except that she wasn't coming. I forgot we had a visitor. The french windows had been opened to admit the bland, warm sea-air, which I always think of as the second essential ingredient for the evening whisky after the rocks have gone in—to inhale and sip, inhale and sip, until you feel that nature is doing it all for you. I sank into my chair in the darkness, hot and out of breath, listening to the sound of shifting furniture upstairs, which I took to be the glad noises of Sophia playing the fool with that dumb ballet-dancer with the button nose. I hadn't the energy to make myself a drink even. Yet I wanted one so deeply. I don't say I needed one. I just wanted that accompaniment to the evening dream—the smell, the bite of the rocks on my lips, the clink of the rocks against the glass as I tipped it back, all quite as important as the liquid itself. Oh how I have yearned to turn life into a dream! But it is only partially so! I don't mean, to turn it into what it is not, to make it unsubstantial. No, I need all its substantiality! But if only there were someone to take my bath for me in the morning, get up for me and taste the first air, someone to sip my first coffee! I mean, it isn't servants I want only,

but ministering <sup>elves</sup> ~~angels~~ like those provided by Titania, little Ariels ~~angels~~ to transpose the substantial into spirit and back again, so that I remain a marvelling spectator. Every move I make reminds me of its own death, now. I so much want to  $\delta\nu\epsilon\iota\epsilon\iota\omega$  life—only the Greeks could have spoken such a desire—to render it all a vibrantly living dream.

Sophia came tumbling down the stairs—on an impulse, I could hear that. To fetch a drink or a ~~cigar~~ cigar, probably. She gasped with surprise when she felt my vibrations in the room—this always precedes her actually seeing someone. There was no sound from upstairs.

Pamela? Oh, she's gone to town to buy (splendidly in character, I thought) ~~some~~ some cooler knickers. I turned to look at her in the half darkness. She was tussled and dirty. I've been getting the guest-room ready for Mother Superior, she said. The Mother Superior? Yes, she said, she came here. But surely—? Oh, Sophia said, going with a characteristic decisiveness to the french windows and standing at the edge of the terrace with her feet wide astride, her hands on her hips as if challenging someone out there, I think she might be coming to stay.



I took a quiet bath as usual, in the dawn-dusk I love so much, careful as always not to disturb my wife who, God knows, needs an extra hour in the morning to rest from all her cares, and the loss of three once-healthy sons. I like to peep through the shutters at the lawn outside, to see how the dawn progresses: the shadows grow into oleander bushes and a fountain in Portuguese marble and into lemon-trees in pots ~~and laurel~~ and laurel, bougainvillea, jasmine, clinging wisteria, and great boulders which I allowed to remain when we started building, all of it growing into the morning like creatures stretching and blinking awake, as I too yawn and rub myself down and unscrew the eau de cologne, bottle.

And then the colours follow these graceful forms, filling them in—royal red and pink and yellow in the oleanders, and the deep brown-green of the cypresses against blue-green jasmine leaves, and drops of yellow lemon blossom and the flashing red of geranium, while the blue of the sky deepens as if the earth's darkness were being sucked upwards, to rest in the sun until needed again at the end of the day. I breathe in great mouthfuls of air, opening first the <sup>wi</sup>ndow and then the shutters. I ought to be satisfied. But I never know how the day will shape. A heavy mist or scirocco can throw me into depression. Of course weather cannot do that for long—the blazing sun burns the depression out somehow, but only while it blazes. This morning I took a walk, leaving my silver-knobbed cane leaning against a chair as if I were another person. And indeed this was the terrible theme of my walk. I walked towards the harbour with my hands in my pockets. And it was as if someone else was putting his hands in my pockets for me. But no, not even 'for me'. He was putting his hands in his pockets, and I was not being obliged or accounted for in any way. Many times this has happened in my life, as if other creatures were playing with my flesh. I feel my mouth form exactly the rather pursed smile of someone else, but it is someone else I have never known! Or it might be a sudden quick yet rolling stride. It can be a tone of voice—a sharpness or even a tenderness—which I cannot recognise as my own. It produces a strange itching effect on my body as if my birth had not been quite complete and the embryo had not decided fully or in perfect detail what it wanted to be. At other times it seems that strangers are edging each other to inhabit my flesh. Frequently I feel I do not own myself. My hand in my pocket actually feels the cloth of the pocket in the way someone else, not myself, would feel it. Of course I reject utterly all these things with my mind.

I deliberately go on with the walk. Reaching the harbour is some comfort: the noise of the ferry <sup>screws</sup> ~~engines~~, the cranes and the cries of the loaders, the cars edging themselves forwards into the bowels of the ships, remind me of the other times when, reaching this same spot, I have watched these same things and recovered from similar 'visitations'. When I look at other people I feel they cannot know these silent convulsions of the self. They walk along so steadily, <sup>have</sup> ~~are~~ their intentions written plainly in their eyes as they hurry to the dock or the market, or open their car-doors with an abstracted air, gazing round, before manoeuvring themselves into the seat. I let all this stirring normality soak into me. It really is only a matter of waiting, and of forcing myself to see everything as it is: I mean, myself at the harbour, expecting a telegram from the office which will reorientate me nicely the moment I step back into the house, and the lunch table as it will be set out, and the intriguing herbal smells coming from the kitchen, and the sound of hoeing from the garden. And the telephone will ring. The day will again slip into place. But—oh!—let my body return to me! Let it not be ~~foreign~~ foreign flesh as it is now, inside a suit of my choosing and a shirt ~~of~~ I remember buying, but how strange it seems in this moment to have bought things for this body! And what connection, please, do I have with the future <sup>if my body deserts me?</sup> how have I propagated myself? in three quivering old men who at best will be placid spectators of life, at worst murderers and lunatics! I wonder how far this corruption of my seed has to do with the severing of my body from my mind! Or did I make the corruption—just because I was not a whole man to start with? Did I force my children bit by bit to give up their bodies too—and they did it in the only way they knew, by blinding their senses and their sanity! For, like all men who have given <sup>them</sup> each child his portion, and assured/the best upbringing by all the accepted public canons of schooling and social hobnobbing, I feel

numbed with guilt that I have only visited my ills on them, because, you know, children look at what you are, not what you do! I dare not repeat this to anyone, even to myself. The mellow richness of the island seems to mock me, so silent, so still! It seems to say, You bring your hell even here? But I reserve it for here! In New York or Amsterdam the ~~the~~<sup>the</sup> traffic-noises, the rush of appointments and the indigestion and the hour-long telephone conversations squeeze it down to a fierce burning point at the centre of my heart!

Does his egotism really go so far that he thinks of his children as bits of his destiny and not their own, and as ciphers in his moulding hands? The young are implacable! They strike and destroy with un-cold regretting heart! They hate with a ~~ferocity~~<sup>ferocity</sup> that surprises them in later years! They choose their parents with their own life-objectives in view—of murder or thought or labour! Yes, we choose to whom we shall be born! And then we pursue our destiny! We make gods or devils of older people because we have those gods and devils inside ourselves. Parenthood, home, background have nothing to do with it! These are nothing but ~~the~~<sup>the</sup> chosen ~~decor~~<sup>décor</sup>. We tear the décor down, we build it up, we modify it, we fly from it—whichever serves our purpose best! Our destiny sweeps us forward and <sup>s</sup>vi-~~a~~<sup>a</sup>-vis this destiny the mother and father and sister and brother have only a serving role! The young are the movers! They snatch at the carrion or the gold—they invent nothing—they bring nothing by way of material—their revolutions and originalities are always those of the long-since dead or the no-longer young! What they do bring is their sweeping and implacable destiny, even if it is towards suicide! Left to themselves they would burn life to the ground, each in his way—one to the buildings and the streets, another to the patient earth, another to the feelings, another to the thoughts, swallowing themselves up too fast in their destinies! But they can only use what they find, as hens can only peck what awaits them on the

ground, and it is this that modifies them.

Little does he know that he gave birth to 'three old men' as he calls them, and that, so far from having formed them, it is they who bring deep influences to bear on him, so that—didn't you just hear?—he begins to genuinely think for the first time in his life! So he chose them, as well as they choosing him! For we are all working! Destiny on destiny! He himself, beginning to grow old, is working towards his future selves. This is why he feels he doesn't own his body (who does?)! This is why he feels another creature stretching his hand into his pocket, and his own face smiling with a stranger's smile! He is trying out other costumes, other skins, he is rehearsing for the future with all the apparatus of previous births—his real ancestors, not those bespoke ones of the family! The family is of all illusions the most bitterly illusive! I am shrieking with firmamental laughter!

Who spoke?