

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# Bruno's Dream

Iris Murdoch

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# About the Book

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Bruno is nearly ninety. Obsessed with his past and a passion for spiders, he is the still centre of a complex web of relationships. Caught up in the web are Danby, Bruno's hapless son-in-law; Danby's mistress, Adelaide, and her twin cousins: Will, bent on avenging Adelaide's seduction, and mischievous, sinister Nigel.

The web's strands are further entangled when Bruno insists on seeing his long-estranged son, Miles, who lives with his wife and sister-in-law. Soon the uneasiness long smouldering below the surface erupts into passion and violence.

# About the Author

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Iris Murdoch was born in Dublin in 1919 of Anglo-Irish parents. She went to Badminton School in Bristol, and read classics at Somerville College, Oxford. During the war she was an Assistant Principal at the Treasury, and then worked with UNRRA in London, Belgium and Austria. She held a studentship in Philosophy at Newnham College, Cambridge, and then in 1948 she returned to Oxford where she became a Fellow of St Anne's College. Until her death in February 1999, she lived with her husband, the teacher and critic John Bayley, in Oxford. Awarded the CBE in 1976, Iris Murdoch was made a DBE in the 1987 New Year's Honours List. In the 1997 PEN Awards she received the Gold Pen for Distinguished Service to Literature.

Since her writing debut in 1954 with *Under the Net*, Iris Murdoch has written twenty-six novels including the Booker Prize-winning *The Sea, the Sea* (1978) and most recently *The Green Knight* (1993) and *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995). Other literary awards include the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for *The Black Prince* (1973) and the Whitbread Prize for *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974). Her works of philosophy include *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (1953, reissued 1987), *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) and *Existentialists and Mystics* (1997). She has written several plays including *The Italian Girl* (with James Saunders) and *The Black Prince*, adapted from her novel of the same name. Her volume of poetry, *A Year of Birds*, which appeared in 1978, has been set to music by Malcolm Williamson.

Fiction

*Under the Net*  
*The Flight from the Enchanter*  
*The Sandcastle*  
*The Bell*  
*A Severed Head*  
*An Unofficial Rose*  
*The Unicorn*  
*The Italian Girl*  
*The Red and the Green*  
*The Time of the Angels*  
*The Nice and the Good*  
*A Fairly Honourable Defeat*  
*An Accidental Man*  
*The Black Prince*  
*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*  
*A Word Child*  
*Henry and Cato*  
*The Sea, the Sea*  
*Nuns and Soldiers*  
*The Philosopher's Pupil*  
*The Good Apprentice*  
*The Book and the Brotherhood*  
*The Message to the Planet*  
*The Green Knight*  
*Jackson's Dilemma*

Non-Fiction

*Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues*  
*Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*  
*Existentialists and Mystics*  
*Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*

TO  
SCOTT DUNBAR

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Iris Murdoch

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# BRUNO'S DREAM

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
Robert Irwin

V  
VINTAGE



# INTRODUCTION

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‘ADELAIDE SAID, “BRUNO told me yesterday that spiders existed a hundred million years before flies existed.” ’

“Mmmmm.”

“But what did the spiders eat?”

Danby was asleep dreaming of Gwen.’

In chapter 4 of his *The World of Spiders* (London, 1958), W.S. Bristowe, M.A., Sc.D. draws attention to the immense antiquity of spiders, as compared with flies, which only ‘arrived in the Jurassic period!’ (The answer to Adelaide’s question would appear to be that spiders, who go back to the Devonian era, at first dined on more primitive and mostly flightless forms of insects.) Bruno, who broods in the centre of Iris Murdoch’s novel, like a spider at the centre of its web, owes quite a lot to the real-life arachnologist, Bristowe, an amateur whose obsessive enthusiasm brought him prominence in his avocation. Bristowe, who liked to imagine himself ‘half an inch high walking through jungles of grass’, was above all a spider-watcher, whose chief preoccupation was the observation of the behaviour of spiders, their courting rituals, hunting techniques and feats of web-engineering. It took a great deal of patience and imagination to enter the profoundly mysterious world of spiders and for example, Bristowe spent many hours trying to determine whether spiders had intelligence and experienced emotions. The bed-bound Bruno similarly watches the spider and the fly and asks himself whether the fly felt pain or the spider felt fear. ‘How mysterious life was at these extremities.’ Yet, as we shall see it is similarly difficult to imagine what it would be like to be another human being experiencing these things.

Bruno dreams that he has been condemned to death. ‘He woke up with a racing heart. He felt a sudden instinctive relief at knowing it was a dream before he realized a moment later that it was true. He was condemned to death.’ Bruno is old and sick and going to die. I do not think that I am giving away any of the plot by revealing this. We all must die sometime. The wall between Murdoch’s fiction and non-fiction is fairly permeable and topics encountered in her career as an academic philosopher often resurfaced in her novels. *Bruno’s Dream*, which was published in 1969, can be read as, in part, a fictional elaboration on certain issues that would be raised in her philosophical work, *The Sovereignty of Good*, which was published a year later. In the latter work she remarks on how death casts an austere light on life, in which nothing can be seen to be of any value except the attempt to be virtuous. She continues: ‘It is not easy to portray death, real death, not fake prettified death. Even Tolstoy did not really manage it in Ivan Ilyich, although he did elsewhere. The great deaths of literature are few but they show us with an exemplary clarity the way art invigorates us by a juxtaposition, almost an identification of pointlessness and value.’ *Bruno’s Dream* is Murdoch’s response to this challenge, her attempt to outdo Tolstoy’s story, ‘The Death of Ivan Ilyich’.

Bruno like most of us finds it difficult to imagine not existing after death. (Yet it is curious that the thought of not existing before birth troubles very few people.) *Bruno’s Dream* is a novel about dying rather than death, for, as Wittgenstein observes in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: ‘Death is not an event in life’. Towards the very end of ‘The Death of Ivan Ilyich’, it was revealed to Ilyich that his life had not been what it ought to have been but that it was still possible to put it right. I

asked himself: "But what is the right thing?" and grew still, listening.' Murdoch, however, starts where Tolstoy ends, for it is her protagonist's desire to make peace with his son, Miles, that sets the novel into motion; a superficially unproblematic desire on Bruno's part to be shriven by his son sets off a storm of recriminations, jealous fears, lovers' meetings, mystical ecstasies and physical violence. There is nothing prettified about Bruno. He is old, smelly and querulous. Tears of self-pity come easily to him, but the 'world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man' as the *Tractatus* observes, and, while Bruno broods lachrymosely, the other characters race around London and, driven by love and jealousy, they take the most extraordinary emotional and physical risks with each other.

The most admirable and striking feature of *Bruno's Dream* is its polyphony. Its cast of characters exist on contrasting levels of awareness, so they experience life and apprehend each other in very different ways. Each of their personalities is so uniquely shaped and the ways that they deal with the world are so very different that they are opaque and ultimately mysterious to one another. Murdoch's fictional characters, however fantastic they seem in some ways, do resemble real human beings in their lack of transparency. Adelaide's level of awareness, for example, is low. She lived in a perpetual state of anxiety in a world of important signs the exact bearing of which constantly eluded her. She lived like an animal, seeing nothing clearly beyond her immediate surroundings, hiding her movements, sniffing, listening, waiting. She could see the kitchen, the paint on her dress, the broken Wedgwood cup. But even Stadium Street was already a mystery to her: and the two largest portents in her life, Danby and Will, were almost entirely mysterious and terrifying.' Adelaide's lover, Danby, when we first encounter him seems to be *un homme moyen sensual*, whose way of apprehending the world is not vastly more profound than that of Adelaide. He is not especially intelligent, his emotions are commonplace and he asks little of the world. However, his life will be changed by his encounter with Miles's sister-in-law, Lisa, who is a kind of godless mystic. Lisa is characterised by Miles's wife Diana as someone who 'wants to be nothinged'.

Miles (who at first preferred to describe Lisa as a masochist) is himself also a kind of mystic dedicated to his poetry and waiting, like Rilke, for his inspirational angel to descend. While he waits he keeps a *Notebook of Particulars*, through which he schools himself in attention to the world and tries to see things – to see the precise brown of a fallen leaf, the ecstatic flight of a pigeon or the vibrations of twilight. Miles is pursuing a literary version of secular sainthood and his sense that true observation must involve self-abnegation has unmistakable echoes of the teachings of the French philosopher, Simone Weil. Weil, who died in London in 1943, is together with Plato and Ludwig Wittgenstein, one of the incongruously solemn brooding presences behind Murdoch's comic novel. In *La Pesanteur et la Grâce* and in other writings, Weil taught that good art is the product of good moral and that true attention involved forgetting oneself in order to register the full reality of the world around one. 'Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer.' In *Bruno's Dream*, both Miles and his creator appear to be engaging in observation as prayer. Miles's course is not an easy one and, faced with Bruno's demands to be visited and forgiven, Miles reflects that he 'did not want emotions and memories and scenes and unmanageable unforeseeable situations. He did not want to go through the rigmarole of forgiving and being forgiven.' But all of that is, of course, precisely what he will get, for *Bruno's Dream* is composed of nothing but emotions, memories, unforeseeable situations and bizarre rigmaroles.

Almost all the characters in the novel exist on a level of awareness that is somewhere on the spectrum between Adelaide on the one hand and Miles on the other. Nigel, however, is wholly exceptional. *Bruno's Dream* plays complicated intertextual games with other books. When Tolstoy

Ivan Ilyich became incapable of looking after himself, he acquired the ideal male nurse. This was a peasant called Gerassim, who was always cheerful, always attentive and never repelled by the disagreeable tasks inherent in caring for the dying. No trouble was too much for this angelic carer. In *Bruno's Dream*, Nigel, Will's twin brother, performs similar services for Bruno and he does so with similarly unfailing thoughtfulness and courtesy. Yet, whereas Gerassim is a simple peasant, Nigel is a dark parody of Tolstoy's virtuous invention, for Nigel is weirdly creepy and not at all simple. At one level he can be taken to be a common voyeur and a snitch. At another level, he can be viewed as an all-seeing mystic, who sacrifices flowers to the Thames, as if he were a Hindu standing on the bank of the Indus. (Murdoch playfully inserts strings of gnomic propositions that have been extracted from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* into Nigel's mystic meditations.) As he meditates, he is transported into a different tense from the rest of the characters, for he moves into the continuous present, where ordinary mortals like Adelaide, Danby and Lisa remain stuck in the past. But Nigel's mystical awareness seems to approximate to omniscience and so there is also the possibility that he is more than a mystic who is hungry for God. It may be that Nigel, despite his apparent cruelty and hopeless mortal loves, is actually God. Nigel enigmatically suggests to Lisa that he is a false god, but that false god is still a kind of god. 'The false god is the true God. Up any religion a man may climb.' Nigel is the most opaque of all the characters in *Bruno's Dream* and I doubt if even his creator knew quite who or what her creation was.

In his farewell letter to Danby, Nigel, having pointed out what a 'trouble-maker' love is, adds that it 'is a weird thought that anyone is *permitted* to love anyone and in any way he pleases' and that is pretty well what happens throughout the novel. While Bruno waits for death, the other characters collide with one another and fall in love, renounce love and experience quasi-mystical epiphanies. There is a switchback quality to the sequences of linked revelations and self-discoveries. For example, Danby's panicky giddiness when he first sees Lisa is as nothing compared to Miles's prophetic terror when he belatedly realises that Lisa can be courted and that he is doomed to love her. After he has confessed his love to Lisa, the 'black joy returned to him and stretched him out on the rack of love.' Then when Lisa, who loves Miles, nevertheless decides to leave for Calcutta to devote her life to the Save the Children Fund, Miles undergoes a spiritual and physical crisis, at the end of which the muse descends upon him and he knows with the grace of certainty that he is at last truly a poet. A little later yet and Lisa is telling Danby that she has finally discovered that she is a woman who needs 'warmth and love, affection, laughter, happiness, all the things I'd done without', so Miles is renounced in favour of Danby.

In *Bruno's Dream*, as in so many of Murdoch's novels, the waltz of changing partners is quite dizzying and in *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1976) Malcolm Bradbury has wickedly parodied this distinctive aspect of Murdoch's plotting. There comes a point in Bradbury-as-Murdoch's *The Sublime and the Ridiculous* when Lavinia tells Alex that she is in love with Fred:

"'You can't be,'" said Alex, speaking without thought, absorbed in his own misery, "Augustina is in love with Fred. Hugo is in love with Augustina, Flavia is in love with Hugo, Fred is in love with Flavia, Moira is in love with Fred, I am in love with Moira, and you are in love with me."

"No, Fred ... Hugo ... Alex rather," said Lavinia, her voice trembling, "I'm afraid you have it all *the wrong way round*. I am in love with Fred, you are in love with me, Moira is in love with you, and you utterly missed out Leo, who is unutterably particular as anyone else, and who is in love with Moira."

"But how, why?" Alex murmured, his hands over his face.

"It's one of the wonders of the world."

The ritual dance and the almost arbitrary exchange of partners reflects Murdoch's belief in the absolute nature of the demands made by love, as well as her wish to give her characters a degree of freedom. The world they inhabit is chancy and contingent. The shattering, self-annihilating demands made by the sudden apprehension of love are like foretastes of death. But this kind of plotting is also the engine of comedy; at times indeed it generates a bedroom-farce concatenation of misunderstandings as when Danby, possessed by his newly discovered love for Lisa, climbs over the garden wall of Miles's house and creeps up to the house to spy upon Lisa, who is sitting with her sister Diana, and Diana's husband, Miles, but he is spotted through the window by Diana. Diana, who is under the misapprehension that Danby is possessed by love for her, slinks out into the rain to send him away before she is discovered, but their hasty tryst is interrupted by Miles, who sends Diana back indoors. Miles is aware that it is Lisa that Danby has come for, but his attempts to get Danby to leave straightaway are interrupted by Lisa herself ...

A novel that was just about levels of awareness, epiphanies of love and self-abnegation and the pursuit of the Good in a Godless world would be somewhat tiresome. But *Bruno's Dream* is about spiders and stamps, as well as Danby's and Diana's passion for the foxtrot, Auntie's crazy claims to be a Russian aristocrat, Will's determination to kill Danby in a duel if he can and the Thames bursting its banks. According to the *Tractatus*, 'It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* exists.' The world conjured up by *Bruno's Dream* is not that of some shadowy thought experiment, but of 'sinful London and the flooding Thames and the grimy ringed towers of Lots Road power station. But it is a conjuring trick and, though the physical appearance of the seedier parts of 1960s Battersea and Chelsea is repeatedly evoked and meditated on by the protagonists who inhabit the area, nevertheless, this particular version of south-west London is a dreamscape. For Bruno, imminent death is a kind of wake-up call. His whole life has been a kind of dream and Bruno's London is an elaborate version of Plato's cave in which men are imprisoned and so constrained that they can only see the shadows of things. In order to become virtuous, it is necessary to wake up. As *The Sovereignty of Good* puts it, 'The idea of a good man living in a private dream world seems unacceptable ... the chief enemy of excellence in morality (and also in art) is personal fantasy: the tissue of self-aggrandising and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what there is outside one.'

In his very last days Bruno is naturally confused and deluded about many things. He believes that he did actually write a two-volume monograph, *The Great Hunting Spiders*, rather than just vaguely plan to do so one day. He has no idea who the woman is who holds his hand. He observes his ominous dressing gown moving closer to the foot of the bed. However, faced by the absolute nature of his imminent extinction, he has realised the one big important thing – that his wife Janie so many years ago faced with the same absolute, must in her last moments have forgiven him for his betrayal of her. Bruno dreams and the people in his dream also dream. In much the same way that the film-maker Derek Jarman presented *The Tempest* as Prospero's dream, so that the storm, the shipwrecked crew, Miranda, Ariel and Caliban are all figments in Prospero's feverish imaginings, so also I believe that Bruno's dream is the stuff of the novel and that all the characters in it are in his dream, trapped in his web of consciousness, and, when he dies, they will be gone too.

Robert Irwin  
September, 2000

BRUNO WAS WAKING up. The room seemed to be dark. He held his breath, testing the quality of the darkness, wondering if it was night or day, morning or afternoon. If it was night that was bad and might be terrible. Afternoon could be terrible too if he woke up too early. The drama of sleeping and waking had become preoccupying and fearful now that consciousness itself could be so heavy a burden. One had to be cunning. He never let himself doze in the mornings for fear of not being able to fall asleep after lunch. The television had been banished with its false sadnesses and its images of war. Perhaps he had nodded off over his book. He had had that dream again, about Janie and Maureen and the hatpin. He felt about him and began to push himself up a little on his pillows, his stockinged feet scrabbling inside the metal cage which lifted the weight of the blankets off them. Tight bed clothes are a major cause of bad feet. Not that Bruno's feet minded much at this stage.

It was not night, thank God. The cowering mind and body fidgeted, discovering themselves in time. He remembered, or somehow knew, that it was the afternoon. The curtains were tightly pulled but there was a cold reddish glow about the edges. The sun must be shining out there, the chilly spring sun, casting a graceless light upon sinful London and the flooding Thames and the grimy ringed towers of Lots Road power station which would be visible from the window when Adelaide came at five o'clock to pull the curtains. He reached for his glasses and held his watch up towards the dim curtain-edge and made out that it was four fifteen. He wondered if he should call out to Adelaide but decided not to. He could manage three quarters of an hour without the horrors. And Adelaide was a rather irritable servant who disliked a premature summons. Or perhaps she had become irritable only in the last year. Did she smash the best plates on purpose? There were always crumbs on the tray. He was so old now and he had been ill so tediously long.

No letters today. There would be none by the afternoon post. But when five o'clock came it was a cosy time of day, the best time really, with tea and muffins and anchovy toast and a new kind of jam and the *Evening Standard* and then Danby coming home from the printing works. It was nicer in winter when there was a coal fire in his room and it was dark outside. That lucid spring sun was his enemy and the interminable summer evenings were a torture to the mind. He would have liked a coal fire now, only it made so much work and even Nigel who thought of most things had not thought of that. Bruno would have tea, making it last as long as possible, then read the *Evening Standard*, starting with the strip cartoons, then six o'clock news on the wireless, then talk for half an hour to Danby, not about business of course but about the funny things that happened in Danby's day. Danby always had funny things in his day. Then play telephone perhaps or look at the stamps and then it would be seven and he could start drinking champagne, then read some spider books or a detective novel, then it would be supper brought by Nigel, and then talk with Nigel and then settle down for the night with Nigel. Soft padding Nigel with the angel fingers. Danby said Nigel was unreliable and threatened to sack him once. Danby must not know that Nigel broke the Simla cup. Bruno must remember to say that he broke it himself.

But of course Danby would not send Nigel away if Bruno did not want. Nigel was not really a trained nurse, he had just been an orderly or something, but he was so good with pillows and helping out of bed, he was so gentle. Danby was a kind son-in-law to Bruno. He would never send the old man to a home, Bruno knew that. It was years now since Danby had absolutely insisted that Bruno should

come to stay with him and be looked after. Danby was kind, though no doubt it was all a matter of temperament and good health and being always hungry and ready for a drink. Danby was the sort of man who, if civilisation were visibly collapsing in front of him, would cheer up if someone offered him a gin and French. God knows what Bruno's daughter had seen in Danby, Gwen such a strong serious girl and Danby a shambler through pubs. Women were unaccountable. Yet they had seemed to love each other. He could remember that much, though poor Gwen had died so long ago.

He could see now in the twilight of the room the hump of the foot-cage, the big wooden box on the table which held the stamp collection, the bottle of champagne on the marble-topped bookcase, and near it upon the wall the square framed photograph of his wife Janie. Janie had died twenty years before Gwen, but they seemed equally far away now. Gwen's photo was still downstairs on the piano. He could not bring himself to ask for it to be brought. Three weeks ago he had overheard Adelaide saying to Nigel, 'He won't be coming downstairs any more.' He had felt a sense of injustice and a thrill of fright. How could he concede that 'any more'? He had not been downstairs for more than a month. But that was 'not any more'. He could still get to the lavatory quite easily. Yet why was Nigel always talking about bedpans now and saying how easy they were and suggesting that today he was surely too tired to go? Was Nigel preparing him for that time? Well, it was not yet. He was sure of that, although he no longer wanted to know what it was that Danby and the fool doctor were whispering about on the landing. The fool doctor had said he might live for years. 'You'll outlive us all!' he had said, laughing healthy laughter and looking at his watch. Years might mean anything. He must live three years anyway, he had to do that so as to cheat the Income Tax, to live three years was a statutory requirement.

When I ought to be thinking about death I am thinking about death duties, thought Bruno. That was not really altruism. It was more like a pathetic inability, even now, to divest himself of a sense of property. It was all very confusing.

He felt quite muzzy today, it was those tablets, though they did stop the pain. Or perhaps those bromide sleeping pills were poisoning him slowly. Sometimes he got muddled, a dislocated feeling quite unlike the euphoria of the champagne, and overheard himself talking aloud without knowing what he was talking about. One million brain cells were destroyed every day after the age of twenty-five, Danby had told him once, having read it in the Sunday paper. Could there be any brain cells left at that rate when one was well over eighty, Bruno wondered. Some days were clearer. There was so much less pain now. Wonderful what science can do. He must find out about a deed of gift and make the stamp collection over to somebody and not let the Income Tax have it. The stamp collection should fetch twenty thousand pounds. Twenty thousand pounds tax free was worth anybody's having. How his father had hated giving it to him at the end. He could still see with clarity, a little coloured picture in the nutshell of his mind, the thin white hand pushing the box towards him along the mahogany table. His dying father saying to him with bitterness, 'You'll sell it, Bruno you fool, and you'll be cheated royally.' Well, he had not sold it, he had even added to it a little, he had even loved it a little, though he was never a serious philatelist like his father. He had kept it for a rainy day, and now his life was nearly over and there had been no rainy day. He might have had a world tour. Or bought great works of art and enjoyed them. Or had oysters and caviare every day. Or given it to Oxfam. He must find out about the deed of gift, how it worked, only he did not like to ask Danby. Danby was very kind but he was a thoroughly worldly man. Danby must be wondering who would get the stamps. Bruno wondered too. His son-in-law Danby or his son Miles? But it was years since he had seen Miles. Miles had rejected him long ago.

Of course they all caused him pain, all the time, they just could not help it. He could spy the

assumptions, their thoughts which no longer ended in him but sped away past him into the unimaginable time when he would no longer be. He had become a monster to them. 'A fine old man' he had overheard someone calling him more years ago than he liked to think of. What was he now? In his own consciousness he was scarcely old at all. He could see that his hands had aged. He noticed this with puzzlement as he promenaded the two twisted dried up heavily spotted things upon the counterpane. He no longer looked into the mirror though he could feel sometimes like a mask the ghost of his much younger face. He glimpsed himself only in the averted eyes of Danby and Adelaide in the fastidious reluctances which they could not conceal. It was not just the smell, it was the look. He knew that he had become a monster, animal-headed, bull-headed, a captive minotaur. He had a face now like one of his spiders, *Xysticus* perhaps, or *Oxyptila*, that have faces like toads. Below the huge emergent head the narrow body stretched away, the contingent improbable human form, strengthless, emaciated, elongated, smelly. He lived in a tube now, like *Atypus*, he had become a tube. *Soma semper*. His body was indeed a tomb, a grotesque tomb without beauty. How differently death appeared to him now from how it had seemed even three years ago when he still had his white hair. Real death was nothing to do with obelisks and angels. No wonder they all averted their eyes.

The printing works ought to be a kind of monument only he still thought of the works as his father's creation. Gater and Greensleave. Greensleave and Odell it ought to be now with Danby in charge, only Danby had refused to change the name although old Gater had been dead these forty years. There had been a bad patch after the war when it was so hard to get spare parts for the American presses, but things had picked up somehow. Was that due to Danby? Variety was the secret, and nothing too humble: programmes, catalogues, leaflets, posters, Bingo cards, students' magazine, writing paper. Bruno had done his best for the place. He had been born to it, for it, practically in the clack of monotype machines in his infant ears. But he had never felt at home with printers and their strange private language had always been for him a foreign tongue. He had been always a little afraid of the works, just as he had been afraid of the horses which his father had forced him to ride when he was a child. It was different for Danby who had no natural bent and no creative gifts and was not even an intellectual, and who had taken to printing when he married Gwen as if this were the most natural thing in the world. Bruno, who never got over thinking Danby a fool, had resented this calmness. Yet it was Danby who had turned out to be the business man.

Bruno had wanted to study zoology and not to go into the printing works. His father had made him study classics and go into the printing works. How had he made him? Bruno could not remember. Only through business, only through money, had he ever really communicated with his father. Because of certain punishments he had forgotten almost everything about his father, who remained nevertheless in his life as a source of negative energy, a spring of irritation and resentment, a hole through which things drained away. He could flush with anger even now when thinking of his father and even now the old hatred came to him fresh and dark, without images. Yet he could see his mother so clearly and see that particular strained smile on her face as she tried to persuade her husband, and the tones of her voice came to him clearly over an interval of eighty years. 'George, you must be more gentle with the boy.'

I ought to have been a recluse, Bruno thought, lived in the country like an eighteenth century clergyman with my books of theology and my spiders. The proper happiness of his life, the thing which he had so completely mislaid, came to him always associated with his mother, and with memories of summer nights when he was sixteen, seeing in the light of his electric torch the delicate egg-laying ritual of the big handsome *Dolomedes* spider. O spiders, spiders, spiders, those aristocrats of the creepy crawly world, he had never ceased to love them, but he had somehow betrayed the

from the start. He had never found an *eresus niger*, though as a boy his certainty of finding one had seemed to come direct from God. His projected book on *The Mechanics of the Orb Web* had turned into an article. His more ambitious book, *The Spiders of Battersea Park*, had shrunk to a pair of articles. His monograph on the life and work of C. A. Clerck was never published. His book on *The Great Hunting Spiders* did not get beyond the planning stage. He corresponded for several years with Vladimir Pook, the eminent Russian entomologist, and Pook's great two-volume work *Soviet Spiders* was inscribed to *B. Greensleave, an English friend and a true lover of spiders*, was among his most treasured possessions. But he had never accepted Pook's invitation to visit Russia; and it was Pook who had written the last letter.

What had happened to him and what was it all about and did it matter now that it was practical all over, he wondered. It's all a dream, he thought, one goes through life in a dream, it's all too *hard*. Death refutes induction. There is no 'it' for it to be all about. There is just the dream, its texture, its essence, and in our last things we subsist only in the dream of another, a shade within a shade, fading, fading, fading. It was odd to think that Janie and Gwen and his mother and for all he knew Maureen now existed more intensely, more really, here in his mind than they existed anywhere else in the world. They are a part of my life-dream, he thought, they are immersed in my consciousness like specimens in formalin. The women all eternally young while I age like Tithonus. Soon they will have that much less reality. This dream stuff, this so intensely his dream stuff, would terminate at some moment and be gone, and no one would ever know what it had really been like. All the effort which he had put into making himself seemed vanity now that there were no more purposes. He had worked hard, learning German, learning Italian. It seemed to him now that it had all been vanity, a desire for some moment which never came, to impress somebody, to succeed, to be admired. Janie had spoken such beautiful Italian.

As one grows older, thought Bruno, one becomes less moral, there is less time, one bothers less, one gets careless. Does it matter now at the end, is there really nothing outside the dream? He had never bothered with religion, he had left that to the women, and his vision of goodness was connected not with God but with his mother. His grandmother had had evening prayers every night with the servants present. His mother had gone to church every Sunday. Janie had gone to church at Christmas and Easter. Gwen was a rationalist. He had gone along with them and lived in casual consciousness through the life and death of God. Was there any point in starting to think about it all now, in setting up the idea of being good now, of repenting or something? Sometimes he would have liked to pray but what is prayer if there is nobody there? If only he could believe in death-bed repentance and instant salvation. Even the idea of purgatory was infinitely consoling: to survive and suffer in the eternal embrace of a totally just love. Even the idea of a judgement, a judgement on his cruelty to his wife, his cruelty to his son. Even if Janie's dying curses were to drag him to hell.

It must be ten years since he had seen Miles, and that had been about the deeds of the house in Kensington which had been let and which Miles wanted to sell. The house was in Janie's name, bought with Janie's money, and of course she had left everything to the children. Before that he had met Miles at Janie's funeral, at Gwen's funeral, and there had been one or two other encounters about money. Miles, so cold, so unforgiving, writing those regular patronising letters for Christmas and birthday: *I always think of you with affection and respect*. It could not be true. He had thought his son distinguished. He had admired him for refusing to go into the works, envied him perhaps. Yet Miles had not done all that much with his life. How hard it was to believe that Miles must be over fifty. He was an able civil servant, they told Bruno, but nowhere near the top. And then there had been all that poetry nonsense, getting him nowhere.



If only certain things had not been said. One says things hastily, without meaning them, without having thought, without understanding them even. One ought to be forgiven for those hasty things. It was so unfair to have been made to carry the moral burden of his careless talk, to carry it for years until it became a monstrous unwilling part of himself. He had not wanted Miles to marry an Indian girl. But how soon he would have forgotten his theories when confronted with a real girl. If only they had all ignored his remarks, if only they had made him meet Parvati, let him meet Parvati, instead of flying off and building up his offence into a permanent barrier. If they had only been gentle with him and reasoned with him instead of getting so highminded and angry. It all happened so quickly, and then he had been given his role and condemned for it. And Miles said he had said all those things but he was sure he had never said. There were so many misunderstandings. Gwen tried a little. But even Gwen did not have the sense to argue with him properly. And then Parvati was killed so soon after the marriage. It was not till much later that he even saw a picture of her, a snapshot taken of her and Gwen in Hyde Park, enlaced together, their arms around each other's waists. Gwen had taken Parvati's long black plait of hair and drawn it round over her own shoulder. They were laughing. Even that snapshot might have brought him round.

Miles had forgiven nothing. Perhaps it was her death that fixed him in that endless resentment. The often quoted remark about 'coffee-coloured grandchildren'. Well, there had been a judgement. Bruno had no grandchildren. Gwen and Danby, childless, Miles and Parvati, childless, Miles and Bruno could not recall the name of Miles's second wife, he had never met her. Oh yes, Diana. Miles and Diana, childless. Was there any point in trying even now to be reconciled, whatever that meant? It was a mere convention after all that one ought to be on good terms with one's son or father. Sons and fathers were individuals and should be paid the compliment of being treated as such. Why should they not have the privilege, possessed by other and unrelated persons, of drifting painlessly apart? Or so Miles had said to Danby, many years ago, when the latter had questioned him about his relations with Miles. Danby had probably been worrying about the stamps.

Of course Miles's resentment had started much earlier with the Maureen business. Had Janie told them about it or had the children just guessed? He would like to know that. The dark-eyed handsome censorious pair, whispering, looking at him unsmilingly. Gwen had come back to him much later, but Miles had never come, and that old bitterness had entered into what happened afterwards, so that the two guilts seemed to be entwined. No one had ever understood about Maureen and it was now too late to try to explain it all and who could it be explained to? Not to Danby, who would just laugh, as Miles laughed at everything, at life, even at death. He said he found Gwen's death comical, his own wife's death comical. It was years later of course, long after that terrible meaningless leap from the bridge. Could he explain to Miles about Maureen and would Miles listen? He was the only person left in the world who cared about it any more. Could he compel Miles to see it all as it really was? Could Miles forgive him on behalf of the others or would it all be coldness and cruelty and a final increase in horror?

Janie had called Maureen a pathetic little tart. But how remote words, particularly angry words, are from the real thing at which they aim. Of course Maureen had had a lot of money out of him. Janie had forced him to reckon up how much. But money had not entered into his real relationship with Maureen, and it had not been just bed either, but somehow joy. Maureen had been sweetness, innocence, gentleness, gaiety, and peace. He bought her sheets and new curtains and cups and saucers. Playing at domesticity with Maureen gave him a pleasure which he had never had in setting up house with Janie. That had been a matter of quarrels about antique furniture with Janie's mother. Janie had equipped the house: she had not expected him to be interested. Maureen singing in her little Liverpool

Irish voice *Hold that tiger, hold that tiger*. Maureen swaggering in the new short skirts. Maureen dressed only in a blue necklace, dancing the charleston. Her little flat, full of the paraphernalia of the millinery trade, was like an exotic bird's nest. Once when he returned home covered with feathers and Janie noticed he said he had been to the Zoo. Janie believed him. Maureen laughed for hours.

Well, not perhaps innocence. How did she live? She never seemed to sell any of those hats. She said she sometimes worked as an usherette in the cinema, and she had seemed to him like a nymph of the cinema age, a sybil of the cavern of illusory love. But she had too many clothes, too nice a flat. He found a man's handkerchief once. She said it was her brother's. Yet even jealousy became, with her, a convention, a kind of game, a personal sweet game, like the chess game he had seen her setting out at a café with big handsome red and white pieces on a large board on the first occasion when he had seen her. It later appeared that she could not play chess. The chess men were simply an instrument of seduction. This discovery charmed Bruno utterly. She said she was eighteen and that Bruno was her first man. Yet even these lies were sweet as he tasted them mingled with her lipstick in long slow clinging kisses. Oh God, thought Bruno, and it all came back to him, it could come back even now with a warm rush to the centre of that dry schematic frame. Physical desire still stalked, still pounced, sometimes vague and fantastic, sometimes with memories of Maureen, sometimes with images of coloured girls whom he had followed in the street and embraced with impotent excitement in two rooms in Kilburn and Notting Hill long long after Janie was dead.

How selective guilt is, thought Bruno. It is the sins that link significantly with our life which we remember and regret. People whom we just knocked down in passing are soon lost to memory. Yet their wounds may be as great. We regret only the frailty which the form of our life has made us owe to. Before that moment in Harrods which had changed his world he had felt practically no guilt at all. Afterwards, after Janie's awful scene with Maureen, after Maureen crying behind that closed door, he had felt the burden and the horror of it, the ugliness and the scandal. Why ever had Janie married him anyway? Stylish Janie Devlin. He must have been momentarily transformed by love and ambition into the witty dashing youth that she wanted. Her disappointment had been ironical and dry.

His pictures of Janie all seemed to belong to before the first war, to the epoch of courtship and marriage. The war itself was scarcely there in recollection. He had not been fighting, he was already over thirty, he suffered from a stomach ulcer, he hardly seemed to have noticed it at all. His father was dead and he was running the printing works which was doing well on government orders. His mother who had gone to Norfolk because of the Zeppelins, died in nineteen sixteen. This shook him more than the holocaust. The pictures of Janie were brighter and yet more remote. Janie playing tennis in a white dress of heavy linen whose hem became green from brushing the grass through a long summer afternoon. Janie chattering Italian at a diplomatic party while her bright bold eye quizzes the men. Janie twirling her parasol surrounded by admirers in the Broad Walk. Janie in St. James's Theatre on the night when he proposed. How gay, how sweet, and how infinitely far off it all seemed now. Maureen's was the more febrile gaiety of a later and grimmer world. *At the parting of the ways, You took all my happy days, And left me lonely nights.*

Society conspires to make a newly wed couple feel virtuous. Marriage is a symbol of goodness though it is only a symbol. Janie and he had enjoyed their virtue for quite a long time. 'Is she a good woman?' his mother, who never quite got on with Janie, had asked him at the start. It was not a conventional question. Bruno was embarrassed by it and did not know the answer. His relation to Janie had fallen into two parts. In the first part, before Harrods, they had played social roles, put on smart clothes, been admired and envied, lived above Bruno's station and beyond his means, and born two handsome and talented children. In the second part, after Harrods, they seemed to have been alone

really related to each other at last, in an awful shut-in solitude, becoming demons to each other. Janie behaved so badly to me, he thought, or he tried for the ten thousandth time to frame the judgement but could not. Agamemnon was killed on his first night home from Troy. But Agamemnon was guilty, guilty. Janie's cancer came so soon after and she blamed it on him.

His love for Janie was not accessible to memory, he knew it only on evidence. She must have destroyed it systematically during that reign of terror. And he only, as it seemed to him now, knew for certain that she loved him when she was crucifying that love before his face. He only knew that she had kept all his letters when she tore them up and scattered them around the drawing-room, only knew that she had kept his proposal note when she hurled it screaming on to the fire. For weeks, months he was saying he was sorry, weeping, kneeling, buying her flowers which she threw out of the window begging her to forgive him. 'Don't be angry with me, Janie, I can't bear it, forgive me, Janie, forgive me, for Christ's sake.' He must have loved her then. Maureen had vanished as if she had never been. He did not visit her again. He sent her fifty pounds. He could not even write a note. He must have loved Janie then, but it was love in an inferno: that terrible relentless withholding of forgiveness. His mother would not have punished him so for any fault. Later he became ferocious, violent. Janie said, 'You have destroyed my world.' Bruno shouted, 'You reject me. You reject everything that I am. You always have done. You never loved me.' They began to quarrel and they went on quarrelling even when Janie was ill, even when they both knew that Janie was dying. He ought not to have let Janie make him hate her. That was worse than anything.

Bruno's heart was beating violently. He hauled himself up a little further on his pillows. These million-times thought thoughts could still blind him, make him gasp with emotion and absorb him into an utter oblivion of everything else. Was there no right way to think about those dreadful things, no way of thinking about them which would bring resignation and peace? Janie had been dead for nearly forty years. How well he knew this particular rat-run of his mind. He must not, must not become so upset or he would not sleep at night and sleepless nights were torture. He did not like to call out at night, he was affrighted by his own voice calling in the darkness. Even if he did call Nigel did not always hear, did not always come. Once in extremity he had shouted so loud that Nigel must have heard, but he did not come. Perhaps he was not there at all but lying somewhere else in the arms of a girl. He knew so little really about Nigel. After that he was afraid to call in case Danby should hear and find out that Nigel was not there.

He stared at his old red dressing gown hanging on the door, a big shrouded thing in the dim light. It was the only garment now which he put on, it represented his only travelling, his wardrobe was shrunk to this. Why had it somehow become the symbol of his death? Danby offered to buy him a new one, and Bruno had refused, saying 'It's not worth it now.' Danby accepted the remark. The old dressing gown would still be there when they returned with relief from the funeral and began to get out the bottles, and then someone would say, 'Bruno's gone, but there's his poor old dressing gown still hanging on the door.'

What would it be like, would someone be there? A girl perhaps? But there was no girl. If only he could be loved by somebody new. But it was impossible. Who would love him now when he had become a monster? Perhaps he would die alone, calling, calling. He had let Janie die alone. He could not bear it. He had heard her crying out, calling his name. He had not gone up. He feared that she would curse him at the end. But perhaps she had wanted to forgive him, to be reconciled with him, and he had taken away from her that last precious good thing? The groans and cries had continued for a while and become silent at last. Tears began to stream down Bruno's face. He murmured 'Poor Bruno, poor Bruno, poor Bruno ...'

*'O Adelaide, sweet Adelaide,  
The years may come, the years may go. ...'*

'SSSH!'

Danby Odell was in bed with Adelaide the maidservant. She had been his mistress for nearly three years. Before that there had been Linda. Linda was smart and neat, her shiny black handbags were like a sort of well-kept professional kit. Relaxed and divorcée, neatness was her form of virtue, and she had kept the affair, which she had initiated, tidy and well-organised. Then one day she went back to Australia. They exchanged three letters. Six months later Danby had taken up with Adelaide. She was sweet, she was there.

These things had nothing to do with the servitude of being in love. They had nothing to do with what it had been like with Gwen. With Gwen it had been the once-in-a-lifetime form of insanity Danby had suffered. Even when he was married to her he had suffered, as a soul might suffer in the presence of its God simply from an apprehension of a difference in substance. Gwen was intense and high and spiritual. Danby loved her moral intensity with physical love. They both suffered a pain at separation. Even when he was making her laugh, which he did very often, there would sometimes be a spasm of pain and they would both look quickly away. Gwen had loved him profoundly, meditating upon his unlikeness and their mutual impossibility, enclosing his separateness in the sweep of her love and brooding over it as a saint might brood secretly upon the wounds of the stigmata which unknown to his fellows he ever conceals in the folds of his robe. Danby had not recovered from her death. But his life energy was cheerful stuff.

Danby was attractive to women. He was tall but getting rather stout now. A bulky paunch was developing below his waist. The long hairs which covered his chest and stomach were still fine and golden while the straight thick hair of his head had become pure white. His face had the glowing yet slightly wrinkled texture of a russet apple, his eyes were a clear light blue, and he had excellent regular teeth which he often admired in the mirror. He enjoyed eating and drinking and doing business. When he was younger he had been an excellent ballroom dancer and a good tennis player. He came of an unambitious tradesman's family and though he was the only child of adoring parents neither he nor anybody else had had any particular plans for his life. He went to a mediocre grammar school and spent a year at a provincial university. His father died, his mother died, there was no money left. He realised, now that there was no one to bully and reprove him, how deeply he had loved his mother. He went into insurance. He was rescued from this fate by the war, every moment of which he enjoyed. Then came seriousness in the person of Gwen. Danby entered the printing works with some trepidation but soon found to his surprise that he had a talent for business and was indeed much better at it than Bruno was. Bruno, who was by then over sixty, was only too glad to surrender his power to his son-in-law. Danby flourished. It was not so much the money-making that he enjoyed but something much more like housewifery or domestic neatness: keeping things tidy, making things fit, dealing with twenty tiny crises every day. The men, with whom he was regularly to be found drinking in the public bar of The Old Swan, liked Danby. Indeed almost everybody liked Danby, though there were a few people who thought him an ass. Danby liked Danby.

He had no particular pangs of conscience about Adelaide. He thought that one should do what one

wanted on the whole so long as one did not make people unhappy, and he saw no reason why he should make Adelaide unhappy. She was at the age when women need the reassurance of being wanted. He had no idea whether she liked going to bed with him but he knew that she was in love with him and had been from almost the first moment when she arrived in answer to his advertisement. Bruno was just beginning to be ill. It had been a long business with poor old Bruno. Adelaide was useful and her cousin Nigel the Nurse had become indispensable. It never occurred to him, or he imagined Adelaide, that there was any question of marriage. It was not that sort of relationship. But he had begun to feel that he was getting old and had reached resting point. Adelaide suited him. He promised to support her in her old age. He got into bed with her every night, slightly drunk, and was perfectly happy.

Adelaide, though putting on weight and no longer very young, was really rather beautiful. Danby came to see after he had been going to bed with her for some time. She was heavy about the hips and stomach but her shoulders and breasts were classical. She had a round face and a natural rosy complexion and a great deal of long hair of a rich brown colour. (Her hair was dyed, only Danby had never realised this.) Her tendency to overdress – such a change from Linda – gave her for him a sort of exotic almost oriental charm. Adelaide clinked and rattled with accoutrements, rustled with frills. Her wide-apart brown eyes worshipped him as she coiled the straight abundant hair into an artful bun. Her flat South London voice was to him an infinitely sexy mating call.

Danby hiccupped. It was raining outside with a gentle friendly pissing sound. It was his evening for drinking with Gaskin at The Raven. He had had a bit too much as usual. He was lying on his back with his knees up. He liked to lie on his back like that, it gave him a relaxed happy feeling. Adelaide had just switched out the light and now she was up against him, glued to his side like Eve. He could see the hump of his knees outlined against the thin curtains which glowed faintly with the light of the street lamp which shone into the yard. He and Adelaide slept in the semi-basement annexe which the previous owner had built on to the house in Stadium Street in days when the neighbourhood was a good deal less seedy than it had since become. Danby was solaced by its seediness. The neat pretentious house in Notting Hill had been Gwen's house, Gwen's territory. Danby had fled from it and after years in lodgings had bought the Stadium Street house because it was so different, so shabby. And of course it was near the printing works. He loved the little yard outside his window, below ground level, always dark and covered in slippery green moss. It was always called 'the yard', never 'the garden' although it had a yellow privet bush and a laurel bush and a rose that had reverted to briar. The soil was black and no grass would grow on it, only a few dandelions and weedy marigolds which struggled up each year through the damp crust of the moss. The chimneys of Lots Road power station towered above suitable extensions of that murky infertile earth.

The printing works were situated on the other side of the Thames in Battersea, upon the water's edge, almost directly opposite the municipal wharf beside the power station, and every day Danby crossed Battersea bridge into another territory, equally dirty and seedy, but different, smelling of cattle cakes and brewing and watery flotsam. Gwen's dowry was still a source of joy to Danby. He loved the works, the clattering noise, the papery dust, the tribal independence of the printers, he loved the basic stuff of the trade, the clean-cut virginal paper, the virile elemental lead. As a child he had preferred melting his lead soldiers to parading them, and the manufacture of letters out of lead was an occupation that never ceased to satisfy. He was fond of the machines, especially the older simple ones, and took pride in the precarious multifarious domestic economy which constantly and only just kept the concern from foundering in its own antiquity. He occasionally went into Chelsea, at least he got as far along the embankment as The Kings Arms, and more occasionally he took Adelaide to

smart Kings Road restaurant, because she liked that, but he never felt at home over that particular border. Fulham, Battersea, where he knew every public house, this was the London on whose mystery he meditated. He was relieved when Bruno stopped urging him to move. He did not like disagreeing with the old man. They had always got on so well together.

‘Warm enough, Adelaide?’

‘Yes.’

‘Your hair’s all cool. Funny stuff, human hair. If you love me never cut your hair off.’

‘Shove over a bit, would you.’

‘Have I got a clean shirt for tomorrow? The Bowater chaps are coming.’

‘Of course you have.’

‘Did you hear the six o’clock news? What’s the river up to?’

‘Another flood warning.’

‘I hope we won’t have it in the back yard like we did two years ago.’

‘Did you have a nice day?’

‘Yes, fine. Did you? How was the old chap?’

‘Same as usual. He was on about Miles again.’

‘Oh.’

‘Talking about seeing him.’

‘Just talk.’

‘Well, I think he ought to see Miles. He is his son.’

‘Nonsense, Adelaide. There’d be no point after all these years. They’d have nothing to say. They’d just upset each other. By the way, did you remember to bring down the stamps?’

‘Yes.’

Danby did really think there was no point in his seeing Miles. It was not just that Danby hoped to get the stamps. Though of course he did hope to get the stamps. Anybody would.

‘Do you think he’s getting senile?’

‘Certainly not, Adelaide. He gets confused sometimes, but his mind’s very clear really.’

‘He will talk so about spiders. I think he imagines them.’

‘I suspect he attracts them. Have you noticed how his room is always full of spiders?’

‘Horrid things! How long do you think he’ll last?’

‘He sinks under a complication of disorders. Could be ages though.’

‘You said he wouldn’t talk business any more and it was a bad sign.’

‘Maybe. But he’s got a terrific will to live, poor old fellow.’

‘I can’t see why anyone would want to go on living when they’ve got like that. Whatever can I look forward to?’

‘The next drink.’

‘Well, *you* would! I think old age is awful. I hope I’ll never be old.’

‘When you are old, Adelaide, you will find that life is just as desirable as it is now.’

‘My Auntie’s senile. She’s got completely gaga. She thinks she’s a Russian princess. She talks some sort of gibberish she thinks is Russian.’

‘Funny how mad people go for titles. By the way, is your other cousin still out of work?’

‘Will Boase! He’s not even trying to get work! He just draws National Assistance. They give them too much.’

‘He could do that painting job for us. He needn’t tell the National Assistance people.’

‘He went to grammar school. So did Nigel.’

'I daresay, Adelaide, but I'm afraid I haven't any intellectual work to offer him just at the moment!'

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'He ought to be in a proper job. You paid him far too much last time.'

'Well, one likes to help. He's quite unlike Nigel, isn't he. It's odd to think they're twins.'

'They're not identical twins. I wish you hadn't got Nigel to work here. It wasn't my idea.'

'Well, that was not for charity. He's terribly good with Bruno. It's almost uncanny.'

'What are Bruno and he always *talking* about?'

'I don't know. They shut up like clams when I come in.'

'I think they're talking about sex, about girls.'

'Girls? Nigel? Mmmm.'

'Fancy Bruno being interested in sex at his age.'

'A topic of enduring fascination, my dear Adelaide.'

'But he can't *do* anything.'

'We all live in a private dream world most of the time. Sex is largely in the mind.'

'I've never noticed that *you* thought it was! I think Nigel knows all about it.'

'About sex? No one knows that, my dear. You have to specialise. I intuit an interesting and unusual specialist in our Nigel.'

'You'd need to be an odd sort of man to want to be a nurse.'

'It's a very honourable profession, Adelaide.'

'Don't be silly. Do you think Nigel takes drugs or something?'

'He is a bit mystical. But I doubt it. One has enough creepy-crawlies in one's mind without positively encouraging them. Nigel has some sense.'

'Well, I'm sure he takes something or other. His face is getting all lop-sided.'

'I think Nigel's rather beautiful.'

'You're mad. He's a demon.'

'I rather like demons, actually.'

'He gives me the creeps. I wish he wasn't here. I'm terrified he'll guess about us.'

'We're quite shut off in this part of the house, dear kid. Don't be so anxious about Nigel. He's sweet and perfectly harmless.'

'He isn't. I know him. He's bad. He'd tell people.'

'Well, it wouldn't matter.'

'It *would*. You *know* I don't want people to know.'

'All right, kid, all right. Sleepy-byes, sleepy-byes.'

The image of Gwen moved upon Danby's closed eyes. She was slowly turning her head towards him. Her heavily curled dark brown hair crept on her shoulder, tangled in her cameo brooch. The great-eyed brown glance gathered him into its close attention. 'Here comes your old comic relief Gwen my darling.'

There was another image which sometimes came with sleep and which was terrible. Gwen had been drowned in the Thames. She had jumped off Battersea bridge to save a small child which had fallen from a barge. The child swam to the shore. Gwen had a heart attack, became unconscious and drowned. Danby identified her dripping wild-haired body at the mortuary. It was just like Gwen, he told himself over the years, to jump off Battersea bridge in March to save a child who could swim anyway. It was just the sort of lunatic thing she would do. It was typical. Comic, really.

Adelaide said, 'Bruno told me yesterday that spiders existed a hundred million years before flies existed.'

‘Mmmmm.’

‘But what did the spiders eat?’

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Danby was asleep, dreaming of Gwen.



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