

# Turnstile

A STORY BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE WAVE" AND "A CALENDAR OF SIN"

*By Evelyn Scott*

LANDING in Canada had seemed the quickest way to get there, for Mrs. Winston had missed her boat from Cherbourg, and, besides, had been obliged to go to London to consult her bankers. Not that a speedy arrival would serve any practical purpose. It was merely what the state of her emotions demanded. Derek was married; and nothing more could be done about *that*; even had she felt a desire for interference. Just the same, every instant aboard ship had been terrible. It seemed to have taken ten years to get out of the Thames. And the gulls, like a cold white harvest of bright leaves, falling, suspended, above the decks, had assured her she was where she was forever, until, suddenly, the sand banks, where the waves were bearing down like augers, driving up white dust, were left behind for the more depressing monotony of the glaring, shrivelled-looking, wintry sea.

And, now, the train, taken from Montreal, seemed maddeningly slow. We are in the U. S. A. at last, Mrs. Winston had told herself, when, on awakening, she had pushed up the creaking shade in the window by her berth, to stare resentfully out on the passing, glinting lakes and hills of upper New York State. This helped. Closer to Derek! closer, closer, every moment. She had a swooning feeling of exquisite joy. Was it wrong? *Ought* she to be so elated, because she was to see Derek this afternoon, when he didn't belong to her any more? But, then, of course, he never had!

Mrs. Winston had very modern and exceptional views on the relation between a mother and son. For as long as she could remember, she had been reminding herself: Derek doesn't owe me *anything*! On the contrary, she was deeply and hopelessly indebted to Derek. The miseries of childbirth were such a small price to pay for the joys which had followed. Derek had been a delightful baby; a charming and affectionate little boy of eight or nine; a precociously intelligent son of twelve; a moody, but still sweet and affectionate youth. And now he was married! She had tried not to feel hurt by the secrecy with which his plan to marry immediately had been conducted. He and Helen had written her all about the love affair, but had said nothing

of the intended ceremony until it was over. Mrs. Winston, before she had received the cable of announcement, had even prepared herself to accept it that they might be living together without benefit of clergy. And she had given herself a fortnight of education in tolerance, in preparation for such a discovery. Such a clean, if transitory, association of youth with youth, would be ever so much better than the priggish hypocrisies in which *she* had been reared, when young men were supposed to "sow their wild oats," and young ladies to resign themselves.

Derek was studying engineering and Helen, who wanted to be an interior decorator, was in the same co-ed university. Derek was under age for marriage—he had grown up in a hurry—and his mother could easily have annulled the new bond. But *this* possibility she had dismissed instantly, as unworthy of her own principles and of what Derek's upbringing would have led him to expect. It would mean disastrous intrusion into his emotional life; and one to which she had no right. Helen had written such sweet, expansive, lyrical letters; praising Derek; insisting that she would never allow herself to become jealous of Mrs. Winston, whom Derek so loved. And Mrs. Winston had been touched, and had felt powerful to do good, be generous. She was not going to be guilty of the meannesses with which older generations envy the happiness and faith of the young!

But she had still to remember the night she had just endured on the train. Somehow, despite every best effort of her *conscious* mind, her *unconscious* had got uppermost of her thoughts. The impression of those hours now continued into daylight, into wakefulness; and her nerves were still fretful; still sought, and could not find, the lapse into unguarded rest. She was haunted by a fantastic phraseology. Old Mother Death! I tucked him into his crib and planted the cross over him to keep goblins away! I laid grass over him, to keep him warm!

What on earth was she talking about! It was a nightmare; and she continued to have in her ears the thin, threadlike vibration, which, never ceasing, had seemed

to carry the cars on through the blank spaces of the indeterminable hours. Then she had sometimes peeped out-of-doors, and had glimpsed lamps, flowering in the utter blackness, melting in the gloss of the empty window, as snowflakes melt upon black water even as they fall. At the moment, she had been nothing, nowhere. And human relations had appeared as nothing.

Mrs. Winston's husband had died ten years previously, and death had already shown her how less than nothing were the human beings who protested its decrees. Now life, also, was telling her that, before it, all her supreme importances were insignificant. So she had reclined, in a semi-upright position, on the tumbled pillows, with the sombre green berth curtains slowly *sch-shishing* on her left hand, the sea shell of the berth's illumination glowing wanly from its niche on her right, and a man snoring hissing in the bunk opposite. And she had petitioned Sleep. She had begged for sleep. Armfuls of sleep. Sleep to hoard, to sift through idle fingers, loving it, as if it were a miser's gold.

Exhaustion can itself become a slow-drugging joy; but Mrs. Winston was not sufficiently tired. She had to remain awake, panic-stricken by the squirrel-cage impression that, though the train thundered at top speed, she was not getting anywhere. She was in a sequence which went round and round, and she remained stationary. Life was going by. It was moving away from her. And she must make no vain struggle to impede it. She must defy time by standing still *deliberately*, while the world rushed on.

In the almost *wicked* seclusion of the berth, she listened to the woodwork singing a high, cacophonous song. The wheels muttered. The roar from the rails was like the roar of a blast out of a furnace. A blast of destruction. And she was not to hurl herself into it and be driven on, in atoms, but to remain quiet. The present, with all its altering agitations, belonged to the young. Why had nobody prepared her to feel like this—the way she *had* to feel? She herself had always admired, more than she had practised, recklessness. It had become inappropriate. Old women being rushed along by a mob, shrieking! It mustn't happen to her. She must stand somewhere, *calmly*, at ease with herself, sure of her roots. Certain philosophies become certain ages. Physical decline *must* be accepted with stoicism. No use rushing out after life and trying to hold it as you might hold some one by the hair, a victim.

But it was no more midnight. The landscape, in the dawn, was silver and sad, as it swerved behind, and was blurred by the smoke of the engine. This was not old country—not old like the France she had quitted; but, in the pale morning, it looked very ancient. In the sunrise, she could see black flocks of crows, alighting and clattering the tall trees with moving fruits; or the crows, their purple wings flashing, strutted on the

ground, in the newly upturned soil. She repeated to herself: My dust to this or any other dust. What does it matter!

It was rather like a play—too dramatic—saying that. She could not believe herself. She had a swift glimpse of a silhouetted ploughman, stalking in a furrow behind straining horses with clumsy bushy fetlocks. In this land, the crows were nearer the sky than she was, nearer freedom. For they had their moment of this sallow landscape, these farmhouses and graveyards, and were unthinking—of where she, and everything alive, would go, in the end.

But why these reflections appropriate to major calamities! For Derek's sake, if for no other reason, she ought to be happy. Her mood shouldn't be one of bereavement. She had not been despoiled of anything. She had been added to. Robbery is of the tangible. The things of value—which can be secured by acceptance, by generosity—cannot be stolen. Only voluntary bonds can hold; and true pride rejects others. To demand is to ask, either for what is worthless, or for that to which you have no right. So the proper view of her situation, Mrs. Winston thought, would be to consider Helen as someone else who had approached and offered to put love with love. Everybody needed love. Mrs. Winston did her best to gaze forward, to make herself gay.



It was day, so the mental mood was brighter; and she hated herself for grudging rejoicing to another, and tried to court elation from the scene outside. The heaviness of the rainy blue was beginning to lighten, thrilling with foreign color; though the horizon—a solid, formless cloud bank—remained, persistently, a milky gray. But the tender vapors were lifting out of the fields. And the sky, barred and ribbed with black, suffered, tremulously, a gradual scalding in deep rose. All at once the morning, in stainless puerility, leaped up openly; and the miracle had been accomplished.

Baby, I love you. You lift my heart up from the earth. I do not quit you, darling; and you will come back!

What was she saying to herself? Startled, she began to climb from the bedcovers and to prepare to dress. She had *never* imposed on Derek. She had made it a point not to. Very early, friends had commented on the intimacy of the relation between them, and, what with their meaning glances and psychoanalysis—So she had sent him off to live with his own generation, in a boarding-school. Resistance to Helen was wicked! She *must* be happy in this Helen she had never seen!

Mrs. Winston took considerable high-minded satisfaction in accusing herself. When she had pulled on her stockings and fastened the buckles of her shoes, she glanced into the aisle. No more did the sloping,

polished surfaces of unused upper berths reflect themselves. No more did each dark window fix its one picture of lamps and other dark windows. The daylight was bleak. A couple of men in shirtsleeves stood at one end of the Pullman and talked loudly. Their voices were hurled toward her roughly, as with fluctuations in the currents of some unfelt wind. But everything was quite commonplace. She felt elevated.

She put on her smart coatsuit. (Derek had always told her that she had "style.") And she walked, with her mussed hair, and her little bag of toilet articles in her hand, back to the ladies' room.

Except for the blithering and pounding of the wheels, and the jerking of the springs, the roar from underneath the car, it was quiet in here. Apparently, there were no other women in this portion of the train. Mrs. Winston removed the top part of her costume and began to wash herself, dragging the wash cloth over her long throat and over her white arms. Around her, on every side of her, were mirrors, dim with the sunshine filtered sootily through the ground glass. She stared at herself, and she thought: When did that fold begin to come—as I turn my head? What's happened to my cheeks? The line's broken. They used to be such a smooth oval.

She thought her cheeks looked sunken.

She dried her hands and the shoulders John Carter had always assured her were so girlish and lovely in evening clothes; and she shook out her hair, beginning to comb it. She had once been like a peacock about her hair. She could remember standing in the light, with her back to a glass, to have the sheer joy of seeing it, like a gilt mantle, covering her to her waist. Then she had cut it off. (John had joked her about wanting to seem younger.) And now it was grown again. But it would never be so luxuriant, and there were silver streaks in it. She had always scorned hair dye, just as she had fought shy of "treatments" in beauty parlors. If the character is satisfactory, as one matures, the face remains attractive, expressive of an inner harmony. But petty conflicts are always apparent, and they make a countenance hideous, no matter how successfully youth has been embalmed, and the skin freed from wrinkles. Mrs. Winston had taken Eleonora Duse as her model. Yet, even a Duse, at ninety—toothless!

Derek had always liked her face. Though, of course, she hadn't exactly expected to be his ideal. Maybe Helen was very *unlike*. It was shameful to admit having been gratified by his information that she was a blonde.

Mrs. Winston's experience, of recent years, had been cosmopolitan. She refused to be prudish. And, just *because* she wouldn't allow her vanity to feed unfairly on Derek's adoration, she had accepted admirers. She had even considered taking a lover. She did this minute. It would be a sort of revenge on all this terrible-

ness of life to compel *somebody's* desire. Once, she had been on the verge of marrying again. But she had been wary about that. She had felt she couldn't afford the possible alienation of Derek. He was very jealous of his father's memory. Why hadn't she accepted a lover? She knew, *now*. She had thought about it too late. For they were not going to condescend to *her*—any of them!—any of the men who had looked favorably on her, and might find out, if they knew her more intimately, that she was not really so lovely. That she was aging. They might see her one day as she already saw herself—looking at the little lines around her eyes, the depressions where had once been the fulness of her cheeks.

It was a horror to contemplate. John Carter had told her that she was greedy, that she was insatiable for praise. But couldn't *she* detect what was still beyond *them*, and see, as it were, her own skeleton, stripped of every frail, present enhancement?

As long as women lead independent lives and are reasonably *selfish*, they aren't likely to fall into the Victorian vice of getting every experience vicariously, either through their husbands or their young!

Mrs. Winston could not submit to pity. Somebody might feel for her what she had felt for old Doctor Anderson, when, as he was proposing to her, she had noticed how loosely the skin fell under his chin and how his hands and his voice were both shaky. And she had felt a fearful apology, a sense of treachery in having thought these things, while she had been listening to his honorable offer. If she had known any man as kind as herself, who was abased before misfortunes that were uninvited—

The porter, bearing clean towels, inadvertently burst in upon her through the thick curtains. Mrs. Winston, caught scrutinizing the profile, which, at least, had withstood time, was so humiliated that she wanted to cry. There was only one rule to follow: not to care. Yet she, an intelligent woman, remarkably detached about these things, when she read the newspapers, took note of the ages of actresses, and was consoled when she learned that this one, that one, still presentable and posing as a siren, was as old as herself, or, at worst, but a few years younger.

If sex must be regarded as something done with, it *had* to be! In a materialistic age, it is very much the fashion to consider physical welfare the one thing to be sought. But there *are* other values! There *is* a difference between people who let old age creep upon them, closing their eyes, determined to cling meanly to the pleasures, the intoxications right for youth. There *is* a difference, on a higher plane, between Shakespeare and Jane Austen. Shakespeare *saw* more. With his inner eyes he saw more.

The sloshing water gurgled reluctantly from the metal bowl, and Mrs. Winston, repacking her posses-



sions, returned to her seat in the Pullman. She sat stiffly, with no more than an affectation of ease. Whenever men came through the car, she was very much aware of them, as they rocked stumblingly past her. She felt as if she were on trial. If the most beefy looking among them gave her, as he went by, a second glance of curiosity, it proved that, even by such low standards as *his*, she was still an object for interest. She was sick of herself! That *she* should solicit such judgments. A large stupid fellow across the aisle, who wore speckled tweeds, stared at her quite a lot. She writhed, acknowledging she took this as tribute. When, after all, it might only be that her hat was on crooked or that he was keen in spotting Paris clothes. She had a sudden feeling that she would like to spring up and leap through the train window, and get away—away—away from herself! She was debased, repulsive! She was injuring her own self-respect! She went up to the diner, to prove to herself that she was, at heart, indifferent to his opinion.

The afternoon wore chillily on, and it was evening. The outskirts of New York, on which a spring snow had fallen, were a leprous white, erupting the drab of buildings, the black of dump heaps and occasional trees. From a pale sky, the pink waftings of a delicate sunset rubied the snow. The heavens were a delphinium blue. A new moon, like a bent icicle, with fearful distinctness, clasped the shadow circle of its obscured self. From a sordid bit of water, Manhattan lights began to spring, or to make wriggling dives into the shadows. Beauty! And you were not of it. It was not in your own quality. When you were young, the very gestures you made in living conveyed happiness to others. For the young, everything was so *easy*! How had she failed to see that, when she, herself, had been engaged in a timid, difficult rebellion against an old authority! To enjoy what was lovely, now became a self-abnegation, a kind of glorifying martyrdom. You had to be true to the vision.

Harlem. Here, there was a constant show of squalid back bedrooms, of people undressing or having supper, high up in the squat cliffs of tenements overlooking the elevated tracks. Harlem was like a vast, many-tiered stage, enacting modern New York at its least prosperous. Death, you can take this refuse of a life finished with; but how can I dare go with you, and leave my child—to *this*! What did she mean? She was staring at snowy streets, already churned to chocolate froth. A horse, drawing a delivery wagon, slithered and slid on bowed haunches, as it came to a halt at a curb. White, bleeding air circled the lamps; and each lamp and electric sign had become the centre of a new solar system.

Derek would have become very much excited about Harlem in a snowfall. Would Helen? But, surely!

Helen would, too. Helen's letters humbled you. If she will only let me *do* something for her, *be* something to her, Mrs. Winston thought; as the train slipped into darkness, and all was as it had been the night before, with the roaring and the feeling of hollowness, and of being lost.



The train shed was dim and monstrous, as usual. Mrs. Winston, beginning her brisk walk up the concrete incline, toward the marbled floors and sonorous brilliance of the Grand Central Station, was overwrought to the point of incoherence. I mustn't let Helen think me a hysterical fool! But she was not focused upon seeing Helen. No, it was Derek! In ten minutes, five minutes, three minutes, two and a half, she had been saying to herself, in the bright blackness of the Pullman, in the tunnel, with New York City overhead no more than a fiction, no more than a vast mechanism to hold one true life—Derek's.

Now I must remember not to be *too* affectionate, as if I owned him. (For the flesh of the mature continues to crave its refreshment from youth; while, to youth, maturity may be actually repulsive! How horrible to have Derek and Helen saying to themselves: Poor Mrs. Winston, poor Mother, poor Jane—Helen had once begun a letter: "Jane.")

She *saw* him! She would have known him anywhere. He was craning, gazing over the parti-colored, hustling crowd, that was splashed, as by design, with the constant red caps of porters. Mrs. Winston was so elated that she caught hold of her own porter's arm and shook it. "There!" she cried. "Right there, to the left! My son is meeting me! He's over *there*!" The porter nodded stolidly and stumbled forward with her load of bags. Why, Derek looked so *young*! She felt embarrassed by the thought that he, a child, was married, too. How had Helen had the heart to do it!

Helen's young, too, Mrs. Winston insisted to herself. I must remember that! She's *very* young! But females—somehow they *had* to be older. She picked Helen, at last, and, by this time, Derek and Helen had seen her. Mrs. Winston felt a queer, physiological surprise, at finding Derek in the company of this tall, handsome, blond young girl. There was a faint circling of coldness about Mrs. Winston's heart. Why, she's lovely! She's absolutely *beautiful*, Mrs. Winston drew from herself. And so *chic*. She disparaged Helen a little, calling her "*chic*." A conventional enough looking sort of girl, in appearance. Her smart little jacket and her fly-away beret with its feather. So *that's* Derek's ideal in womanhood! Of course *any* boy would think that kind of a girl pretty. Was she disappointed in Derek—*she*, his mother? Hadn't she *wanted* Derek to be like other boys? It was as if she had been trying to protect him,

and he had rebuffed her. Both of them had rebuffed her. Yet Helen had such a sweet smile—a little self-conscious in coquetry, maybe—and Derek was waving his hat. Derek had recognized *her* first. It brought a tiny, gloating thrill. He was rushing to meet her, elbowing his way. But he was dragging Helen after him, too; and she hung back.

"Why, hello, Mother! This is—*good!*" Mrs. Winston shifted her chin instantly. With Helen there—she felt she shouldn't kiss him on the mouth. Derek had caught hold of his mother's chin and dragged her face around to his. What's the matter, Mother? She could read it in his eyes. So her reluctance had been wrong. They exchanged a full and resounding kiss. Now I must kiss Helen! Helen had remained in the background, watching, diffident, anxious to do the right thing. When Mrs. Winston offered her trembling lips, Helen responded with enthusiasm. And this was doing the right thing, also. "You didn't recognize me from Derek's description of me, did you?" Mrs. Winston accused graciously. "Of course I did!" But Helen lied. "You ought to hear the way he's raved, and now, my dear, I see why he—I don't know what to call you, dear."

"Why don't you call me 'Mother,' too?" It hurt. Like making something valuable quite cheap! Like a betrayal. It was done for *him*.

Helen laughed sweetly, the broad laugh of perfect teeth. Her eyes were quizzical, demurely deferential in their cautious scrutinies. "You look too young. And you're so small. I once dared to begin a letter 'Jane.' Maybe you'll let me call you 'Jane'?"

Mrs. Winston could feel, over her, the flush of an unwilling defiance. She felt quite nude. They were taking her at a disadvantage. "I don't *mind* being called 'Mother,'" she said. "I don't mind being called 'Jane,' either; but *not* because I 'look so young.' I can't bear women who hang on to youth!"

"But you don't *have* to hang to it! You're Derek's sister, I believe! Derek, why did you deceive me?" Helen bestowed her flattery with too much certainty. Her warmth—her cordiality—were offered carelessly, as those too lavishly endowed cosign their gifts. But I *mustn't* be censorious, Mrs. Winston reminded herself. I'm strange. She can't know how she ought to treat me, yet. It's difficult for her, as well. I *am* a brute!

Because here was Derek, glad to see Mother—being *terribly* glad to see Mother! (Almost *too* glad!) What is the matter with me, anyway? I *won't* be poisoned!

"Gee, Mother, you look fine," Derek remarked. But added: "Just a little tired. Suppose I dump this stuff of yours out in the parcel room, and we'll go have a bite to eat?"

Mrs. Winston and Helen were to be left tête-à-tête. Mrs. Winston glanced at Helen's composed, pleasantly

attentive face uneasily. As Derek, with the porter, moved off, Derek called over his shoulder: "Isn't she pretty?" And, again: "Mother used to be something to look at herself, Helen."

Mrs. Winston's lips were primed to smile. Derek was truthful. She had always treasured his ingenuousness. Oh, it was true! Yes, it was true—for him. John Carter hadn't talked like that.



Helen's expression was of someone balanced on a very precarious edge. She was exactly like one of these tight-rope dancers, teetering and swaying with a parasol; but smiling reassuringly. It was—insulting! Though she didn't mean to be. You could catch the fright behind the smile. She made a small sound of amusement and disapproval. "Isn't he *terrible*? And so ridiculous! He *knows* his mother's pretty *now*. You mustn't mind him, will you, dear? I really *haven't* made him think he ought to flatter me!"

"I'm used to Derek's ways," Mrs. Winston said, aching with rebuke. "Besides, I've given up my vanity. He's right to give his compliments to you."

"But he's *so* proud of you, really. We've been counting the minutes all day. We could hardly wait!"

Helen was more serious, Derek out of the way. She was not letting anything escape her. Mrs. Winston felt her face condemned; though Helen's attitude was one of affection. As if *she* were the mother, I, the child, Mrs. Winston thought. To have *her* saying: You won't *mind* him, dear? Again, Mrs. Winston felt betrayed. She longed to leave them, who could never understand that there had been—a loss. If only Helen wouldn't keep on pampering her! They *don't* need to be gentle with me *all* the time, Mrs. Winston thought!

Derek was returning. To Mrs. Winston, isolated with Helen, his hat and shoulders seen above the bobbling throng were like a star. Helen, of course, had spied him, too. "Hurry, you silly! Keep us waiting here! Come on, Jane's hungry. Take her arm!"

Hungry! Mrs. Winston felt she couldn't *bear* to eat! "All right, girls. There's a restaurant in the arcade. That suit you, Mother? Shall we eat down here?" Mrs. Winston dropped behind; pushed them ahead. "You'll get lost, Jane, dear. Keep with us." But Mrs. Winston shook her head. "I won't, dears. You, two, go right on. The crowd's too thick."

Helen and Derek were a perfect "pair." Helen marched cockily along by him. Her complexion was just perfect. She seemed unmindful when men swerved to gaze. Unspoiled, Mrs. Winston told herself. Yet—indifference to admiration comes so cheap. To look like *that*! No wonder she doesn't care—or pretends that she doesn't care! A rich man who ignores the coppers that

lie in his way! Mrs. Winston's cheeks were touched with rouge. Her pride was forcing her to speak. "I've been admiring you, afar," she said to them, as she came up. "And your complexion—in New York!" Mrs. Winston's eyes were warm with tears. "Helen!" she blurted suddenly. "You—you are *beautiful*!" To say this was, somehow, almost nobility.

"Isn't she, though!" Derek grinned, seeming to answer: Shan't we share her? As if it were possible! What share had Mrs. Winston in a young Venus? And what to give? Before this beauty, all her gifts were poor! They'd be no use to her, Mrs. Winston thought—till she's like me! 'You see—I used to be a blonde!' The silver streaks—and—in the dressing-room. As if I wanted to be like her *now*! There's something else—no one can touch! With every comment Mrs. Winston made, it seemed she did herself an injustice!

"I *told* you she was hard to beat," Derek said. "You watch! Look around you, Mother—anywhere in New York. You won't find another like her!"

"Derek, you're tiresome," Helen said. "Come on, let's eat."

They marched, with Helen leading decorously, through glass doors and a wilderness of white linen, and shaded lamps, and steely, burning cutlery. The tables were prepared for four. Derek, quite automatically, had drawn his chair. Helen was gently pouting, making grimaces. "Darling, you sit *between* us, now. It's crowded, when you're close to me!"

"Oh!" Derek was confused. He moved his place. Mrs. Winston caught the interchange of eyes. He understood!

If she could just not be *with* them! If she could sit afar and look at Derek! O, God, look at Derek! Fill her eyes and her soul, forever; then go away, and never come back!

Helen, with her mock-reproachful smile at her young husband, said: "Isn't it a pity we can't have champagne? We should celebrate! She's come *home*—all across the water, Derek, dear. For *you*!"

"For you, too," Mrs. Winston lied. "But I wouldn't call it coming 'home.' I leased my cottage until June. I can't stay in New York too long." It was misery to state this. And untrue. They were driving her to it. Their mockery of *home*! And they comprehended nothing—not a single thing. Mrs. Winston had an arrogant feeling of relief. She could grimace her affection, now, more easily. What she was suffering, they should not realize. She was *alone*! But, Derek— Would she be able to live on, and cast off all longing—all but a pure, vivid indifference? Indifference to Derek, still, was like a *sin*!

Helen said: "Oh, what a pity! You poor little Jane! But we want you to consider it home where *we* are!" While Helen was talking, Derek was fumbling, under-

neath the tablecloth, to catch her hand. She perked at him and fought him off. Her eyebrows crinkled in coquettish reprimand. She frowned in vain. The reprimand became a more inviting moue.

"I do feel *quite* at home with you," Mrs. Winston argued feverishly, as to herself. "But—your flat is so tiny, dear. When we leave here, I think it would be sensible—I would prefer—for the sake of all of us—to go to an hotel."

Derek was distracted to quit his furtive love-making. He scrutinized his mother with a troubled air. He *cares*! (The thrill.) Then—have I sunk to *this*? His sheepish and emotional gaze sharpened to a faint doubt and pain. "Why, Mother! Yes, it's very small—but Helen's moved the furniture for you! Of course if you had rather be all by yourself—"

"She *had*," Helen propitiated, "so just let's don't nag! We'll see her when she feels like seeing us. It would be simply *lovely* having her there to ourselves, but—if she were—I expect Jane had rather feel herself quite free."

Mrs. Winston felt she wasn't making any special plea, but she was *not* the petty-natured sort! Her reputation, even among women friends, was that of some one very frank! And she *couldn't* be frank with Helen! Could *not* tell Helen that she knew herself superfluous! Am I a book that Helen believes she has read, Mrs. Winston thought! (Let me be stone!)

"Darling," Helen said to Derek—a Helen still perky and glowing with the adulation which she considered no more than due, but *tender* to a woman who was her inferior (so she regarded it)—tender and kind! "You never told me that your mother had such lovely eyes! You *should* have bragged! They're like yours, dear—though more—though more—I don't know what."

"Boo!" Derek derided self-centredly. "Who cares a hang about my eyes! Let's change the subject, please!" He looked hard at the menu card. His cheeks were flushed. When he lifted his head impulsively, he cried: "But, I say, Mother, what about Helen? Aren't her eyes what's called 'gentian blue'?"

"Yes," Mrs. Winston agreed, with lean enthusiasm (though, of course, sincere).

"We have a million questions to ask you, and don't know where to begin," Helen said brightly, covering a silence, with *too much* discretion.



If she could just get him alone, and say: Derek, I don't *want* to possess you! But I am here, passively; and I'll always be here—for *you*! If you are in trouble—if ever you *want* anything of me—

How sad that happy people don't need you! So, without wanting to be that, you become a sort of harpy.



Because only where there is pain, will you be required! You won't be needed for a gayer feast!

Let them blot her out! Far from this scene, from which they casually excluded her, her blessing might, again, be genuine and *sweet*! You *can't* delight in that bruised look in Derek's disconcerted face! You self-perjured, you hideous, you *old*, revoltingly deceitful thing!

Mrs. Winston let Derek slip her lax arms into the sleeves of her fur coat. Helen guesses I am jealous, Mrs. Winston thought. She's too secure, and too superior, to condemn me! She *knows* I'm her inferior! The old are always far beneath the young! But age is just a kind of illness, after all. A gradual, unspectacular descent. I'm sick! I'm *sick*!



All the way across town in the taxi, Mrs. Winston could see Helen's eyes wondering at her, and, with a keen, repressed skepticism, questioning her good will. Helen regarding the mother-in-law! The burdensome problem! "You're nervous and overwrought, Jane, dear," Helen said. "Maybe you've been brooding too much. Derek does that—sometimes. But I'm curing him of it." Helen, wriggling back into the taxi seat, put on her cockily cajoling air. "I'm not deep and profound like he is—I mean I'm not philosophical about life, and everything. But I just feel, somehow, people *do* invite trouble by dwelling on morbid aspects. And if we all try to see the bright side—Derek makes fun of me! He says I'm Pollyanna. Isn't he *too* mean! Because I want to try to cheer you up, *you* won't do that?"

She reached over and gave a squeeze to Mrs. Winston's glove. "It's headache. Such a stuffy railway journey," Mrs. Winston said. "We *need* a Pollyanna in this family, I expect." She sent the nervous pressure back. Should *she* concern herself with Helen's mind! Now she and Derek had exchanged a look. Derek had wanted to apologize. Mrs. Winston, resisting her evil ecstasy, refused to meet another glance.

Derek must be happy! If Derek is unhappy—and because of me—I *can't* exist—way off—*alone*!

"Listen, you children," Mrs. Winston said, pulling herself up stiffly, and, as she moved forward on the cushions, laying a cramped palm on the knees of each, "you are neither of you *ever* to be *good* to me! Do you understand? Your business is to live your own lives, and be as selfish about it as human beings normally are. And if you dare give me *one* thought that isn't spontaneous—except as you actually need me—I won't forgive you! Do you hear me, Helen? This is meant for *you*!"

Mrs. Winston felt Helen squirm, wriggle, shifting her knees, not knowing how to reply to such an abrupt,

astonishing proposal. It was unkind, bringing on a *situation*, when there wasn't anything, Helen would think. "Why, Jane, darling! We're selfish. I guess everybody is. But to want to *push* you out of our affairs! It isn't nice of you to imagine I would—when Derek's always simply *worshipped* you! Though I admit I have been jealous of you—just a little bit!" It was thrown out—that! With Helen's cunning little smile. Another *sop*! "You tell Jane how much you adore her, Derek. She won't believe me!"

"I thought she didn't need to be told any more," Derek reproached. His voice was gruff. His eyes sought Helen's, for a clue. "Mumsy, you don't *mind* it that I'm a nut about old Helen, *do* you, now?" he pleaded.

"*Mind*? When your happiness is everything to me! Helen should know I'm very grateful, dear." Have I become a hobgoblin?

It was snowing slightly, after the deceptive moonrise, and the store fronts, seen across the satin damask of the asphalt street, were purpled by an atmosphere like mist. Where there were red electric signs, the air was filtering a rain of jewels. The road lamps all had hair of gold. A drug-store window might have held the eucharist. New York was ugly, and was beautiful—for *them*! The dead resent!

The hotel front shot up in lights. The taxi stopped. "I don't believe I'll get out of the taxi, Derek," Helen said tactfully. "You take your mother in and find a room for her. She might like ten minutes alone with you. *Anybody* has a right to want to see their only child alone."

Derek said anxiously: "You'll get so cold!"

Helen was snuggling in her fur. The quick, demure flash of her scrutiny. Derek interrogated with his helpless stare. Helen was reassuring him. "I'm *so* pleased you've arrived, Jane," Helen whispered, with her fleetest smile. "You *would* have felt that you were tripping over us in our joke of an apartment! You'll be lots better here, *won't* you?" And, this time, it was Helen who produced the kiss.

Mrs. Winston, fidgeting in the marbled lobby, which was teeming with its night crowd, going out to dinner, coming in, watched Derek bent above the hotel desk. She loved—she—Oh, could love be *wrong*? "Will you please come and sign your name, Mother?" She obeyed quickly, docile and abased. When the clerk examined her with weary curiosity, she asked: "Where, *son*? Just on that line?" And felt, degradingly, *so* proud.

They marched on toward the brazen rows of elevators, behind potted palms. Lamely—a beggar who would have a crumb—she sought for Derek's withheld arm. In the carpet-cushioned mausoleum of the upper corridor, between the hospital-like lines of doors, her sense of illness grew acute. She couldn't bear her silence more. "Darling," she murmured in his ear, "it's

lovely—Helen—and it's *all* all right! Please forgive me for being *tired*. I don't mean to upset you both. Don't worry about *anything*!"

Derek's grave, darkened eyes expressed a prompt relief. He swerved to gaze at her and glow upon her solemnly. She *meant* it! She was aching to express sincerity. "I *won't*!" How she could worship at his boyish readiness to put aside the instant passed!

The bellboy trotted forward toward the empty room. Derek surveyed the corridor. His arm slipped ardently about his mother's waist. "You mustn't ever think it isn't *everything* to have you back again!" he cried, with a broken, petitioning exuberance. "You don't know how I—count on you! You've always been such a—darn *brick*!"

Now there was such a gush of her affection that it wiped out misery, wiped out constraint. The bellboy had already turned to leave. She felt quite gay, entering the naked comfort of the bedchamber. "Sweet-heart!" she gasped. She thought about the thronged and radiant streets. New York! Derek had always said that anything could happen here. Her pulse revived. Its strength was lifting her. The whole world, in this dim imprivity of the discreet hotel, took color from the mood which re-bestowed her normal universe, filled with the million strangers out of doors, the snow; and there was, suddenly, within her heart, a conviction of plenty and of gorgeousness!

Derek had slung his hat on the rebuffingly immaculate bed. "It's not so bad." He glanced around. "You won't mind if I flop here half a sec', will you? Here, Mother, have a cigarette."

Mrs. Winston shook her head, as she removed her hat. This time, she didn't bother with the looking-glass. She couldn't smoke. But Derek let her *love* herself! At last, he could! His grin was better than a looking-glass. It approved *her*! There was an end of enigma. His gaze admiring and accepting *her*. No intervention. Her and *him*! She drank his tolerance and had life!

"How nice to have you," she remarked. "And Helen's really dear and sweet!" She could praise Helen, since they were alone—add praise to praise, for *him*, for HIM!

"I *knew* you'd like her," Derek said. She caught the flicker in his tone—a faint deflection from his attitude of easiness. But *let* me praise her—now I can. "Oh, Derek! *Like*! I am in love with her! She's so exquisite! Oh, she's *beautiful*!"

"I'll have to go. She might get cold." He walked up to a tray on the nightstand and snuffed his cigarette. Then he marched to his mother and hugged her close. "I *do* appreciate you," he said breakingly.

His arms strained. She could feel his heart. "I—Mother—I—" His mutterings broke. Oh, rapture! Let me never wake! Neither could speak.

"Well, so long," Derek said. "Have a good night in this barracks! See you tomorrow!" The interchange of loving stares had, somehow, all at once, become a treachery. "Helen will telephone, when you have had a rest. And, if you want me—" He was at the door. On the way, he had snatched up his hat. With that gesture, he had resumed his casualness. So it was done. Committed sin. Derek waved jauntily and stepped outside. The strange, impersonal, engulfing corridor had swallowed him, and wicked hope.



Mrs. Winston shrank, in her indecent solitude. She glanced down. Saw a crumpled object lying on the floor. And picked it up. One of his gloves! Before she had considered, she was folding it avidly against her mouth. She held it there. Out of the limpid darkness which was now her mind, the heavy, almost disemboweling sobs rose slowly. Thank God, there was no one to see! She flung herself on the uncrinkled linen of the chintz bedspread, and wept and wept. Above the roofs, beyond the window, city lights crept stealthily over the night. Her own lamp beamed into her eyes. She moved the switch and isolation grew appropriate—in the sweet gloom. But what she had at this instant was *truly* hers! Derek himself could never take this thing away. What last years have and cannot share. *Never* to share. Not grace, not pain. To live in lands where *you* will be the only citizen—with a Derek, Derek himself would never recognize. And Helen didn't even know. Mrs. Winston wanted Helen with her here. Helen, just look! He was like *that*! The child of memory!

Mrs. Winston crawled from the bed and turned on the lamp again. She stared over the buildings. Gradually, minutely, in its weak solution of electric pink—of watered claret and bitter ashes—the pale atmosphere sent a slow blessing toward the emptying streets. The sidewalks grew lichen. The roads were lambs' wool. Each pedestrian was a pathfinder, leaving a track across a hitherto untrodden world. The motor tires made a clean carving through the fresh white snow. At the line of the park, there was the black, fairy anger of the little, barren trees, against the bright, drab blush.

When you are young enough, you like, occasionally, to consider yourself as a child—an abused child. And you like to think that some man will be considerate of your sorrows—because of the turn of your cheek, or the line of your ear. When you are an old woman, you have nothing with which to soften people's hearts. You can't ask them to accept your griefs in exchange for the pleasure you are giving them. And then you have to grow up, very suddenly. Dignified old people are the only ones who have *really* grown up—who must look



to themselves and not to the crowd, or to the next sympathetic adviser. *Must* I face that?

Mrs. Winston drew herself laggingly before the broad dressing-table, with its lacy cover. It was like an altar unadorned, without worshippers to stand before it. She wasn't *really* so bad looking—yet. But—after all—what *had* to come! It couldn't be circumvented—the human fate. Supposing she dropped off—from the fire escape—down there—on the stones that would take nothing from her feeling? It wouldn't be fair to Derek. So, in a negative fashion, you had to go on living for people—even when they were done with you.

The telephone rang. It tringled monotonously for a long while. If Mrs. Winston had dared, she would have refused to answer it. But it might be the office. They might think—

With a cringing feeling, wanting to withdraw from all contacts, she lifted the receiver. "Hello," said Mrs. Winston's weary and unfriendly voice. "Hello, Jane, sweetheart. You sound tired. Are you feeling a little better? Derek and I have been talking about you—worrying about you. We are *so* delighted to have you here, my dear—I am particularly, Jane. I hope you'll *like* me—just a teeny bit?"

"I do like you, darling. I think you and I are going to be great friends. And I have something for you. I'll give it to you in the morning. Yes, I shall be ready

for you about nine o'clock. You can come by. Good-night. My blessings upon both of you!"

But she wanted to run to the window and throw herself over the sill! She was caught. She couldn't get away! She might turn in sixty directions and *never* get away! Her fate went on ahead of her, like a road which was endless, harder and harder to climb, with more humiliation—if they should find out!—at every step! What was *her* meaning—a meaning that didn't belong to youth only? What was it? And she sat there, on the edge of the bed, clapping her hands together softly, lacing her fingers and pressing her palms against each other until the force she exerted hurt her. People don't think this time ever has to *be*! They don't recognize it, she thought wildly, amazed that *she* had never prepared for it!

And then she was certain. She felt a kind of stoic rigidity—not exactly resistance, but a stiffening; and then a calm.

She opened the largest of her suitcases and began to remove from it square after folded square of ivory and orchid silk. They were nightgowns, step-ins. She had bought them for Helen, and she must make an interesting parcel of them. But she ought to *really* give them—with everything in herself which had once had care for personal adornment, and for the vanity of admiration. She would. She *could*! But, afterward, what then?

## THE CHILDREN IN AUTUMN

By George Dillon

THEY come in the dead season, insulting Time,  
Whistling, disputing, dragging behind them, each,  
Enormous boughs of red and gold, and climb  
Shouting into a great dishevelled beech.

Nothing remonstrates—nothing is distressed:  
No bird flies out, uneasy for its brood,  
Nor whitefaced hornet from its papery nest.  
They are unheeded in the echoing wood.

They are unheard among the ravelling leaves,  
The spoiled cocoons, the moths that hang and rot  
In the round silver lace a spider weaves.  
Busy with death, the great tree knows them not.

Now in the wind it solemnly shakes and sighs,  
Shedding its ragged colours cloud on cloud.  
Joyous, with shirts ballooning and bright eyes,  
The children hug the branches, jeering aloud,

Louder than autumn! But to what avail?  
Time like a wind is blowing night and day,  
And the old wood will stand against that gale  
When it has blown these lovely ones away.