

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

I could not endure to feel, that this marvel of what men and women are, should decline from its height of branded surprise.

When I left him, that flaming afternoon, I could not have stayed at home as I promised. I went to the music, the thing that had led me on, the very essence of what I had done.

It was Brahms—a string quartette. The unshaken music caught my flying nerves in steady hands.

I remember looking at the people, as I walked past them to my seat—it was only half an hour before the end—and wondering if they could know that I had just been assisting at the birth of music, the very heart of the desire that was crying from the violins; the meaning of all the beauty that was turning the air of the hall to the vibrations of the voices of the captured gods.

SECOND DAY

THE very waves look ashy and ineffectual this morning; even Nature has her fatigues. Life, too, does not supply the setting for a constant tragedy.

It is the contrast between excitement and ordinary life that has put exaggerated emphasis on such things as those of the other day; it is the fatigue of nerves asking for rest. You wouldn't call running a crime because you were tired after it. If nerves could talk, how they would laugh at our morals! Imagine arranging a social code for muscular exercise!

One should vary experience by scenery, by winds; by, as I am doing now, the magnificence of the sea. Then it would be easier to balance the sense of strength,

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that the momentary flare of creative instinct lends, I suppose, even to the meanest minds.

I am tired, and this sapped daylight suits me.

He assumed instantly that the affair was made of the personal element. There was nothing personal in it, as far as I was concerned. He merely represented the knowledge of Nature to me—a practical demonstration, more or less, of cosmic dynamics.

But we seemed just as much in sympathy before; he only seems less interesting, he no longer represents a mystery. I have nothing to answer that grieved look of craving in his eyes, as when we make a poodle stand on its hind legs too long, with a lump of sugar on its nose.

In one way the knowledge seems to rob the poets, in another to show something

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they never suggested. Unless children are the object, it shows that the physical act can be no more important to women than to men. The climax of love is nothing. It is only love that counts.

And I kept myself so immaculately pure for it—I kept my lips untouched for the man I would love, or would think I loved. Perhaps I would have enjoyed it all more, if I hadn't so rigorously denied myself everything of the kind before.

But I want to forget; I want to get back to the dreams—to the dream world, that surrounded me like a globe of glass! You can't set thought to the abandonment of Giorgione, to the passion of Kundry, and find yourself satisfied then by a kiss, by a human act that any reptile in any pond can duplicate. Can you picture the rapture of alligators, or stoop to re-

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member anything that mirrors the ecstasy of rats?

I am impatient of humanity in the face of this sea. Better to be drowned, to be lost in the power of the ocean, than to drown your love in the mean outlets of a restricted creation. The beat of the sea on the sand—that is passion: I could pardon submerged continents for remembering the yielding of their existence.

Still, in everything that I have had to do with him, I have been weighted by the inevitableness of what we were to each other. Instinct gibbered to us from every tree we passed, and narcotised us in the breath of each flower we saw. The sun went down, as though weighted by the dreams of damask July days. The world phoenixed itself; and I have to cage the new ornithological object—that is all.

But the translation of an emotion into act is its death, its logical end. I am

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another person now, and so make new emotions. I have yet to find out whether my new self gives him a place in them. We approached it, too, from different sides of impression. It was to him the final of a struggle of unrecognised prejudice—he thought it wrong; whereas with me, he is the beginning of cataclysmal knowledge—the knowledge of how Nature makes her worlds, the motive of Art. And I must say I think, in itself, it is inconceivably flat.

These last facts in the fog and cold of winter are all less to me—less to be remembered than the immaterial magic of last summer. That is what it means to me—what his name means to me, what it means to me, being a woman and young. And I can never have it again. No matter what wonder and delight and rapture I may find in life, it cannot give me back the dreams I had before I understood.

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We still carry our visions inviolate from eternity, that they should all climax in that unhappy, bleak hour—the smell of the fog, the ashy white of the dying fire.

There is nothing in it to remember; no mystery, no pleasure. All that I have of these is the time when his lips touched the lace on my sleeve; the hour on the Terrace when he first said "I love you," and the night and the stars and life were made one. And all that only means the secret of this winter.

And I have come away, left him. It is all fused into those few minutes in the courtyard, the yellow rain, the iron sky, the eager babbling pigeons fluttering through the wet. And then—I came away; drove, it seemed, straight into the sea. The next morning I had sailed.

The Afternoon.—I have a sodden, dull

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sense to-day that perhaps it is all raving against windmills; that the world easily and silently has gone on its subjective manner, and done all those things which I, in a gasped surprised mood, at last surmise exist. I have had suddenly to realise my language.

I sit and look at the words Chastity, Honour, Virginity, Passion, Love. I have played with all, and tried all their power, and yet the world swings on, from getting up to bed-time, in perfect, normal simplicity. I sit down with calmness, and am conscious of enjoying my breakfast. Marianna, Elaine, Isolde—they managed things better.

It is destructive of its value as an artistic factor, to meditate on the exact emotional quality of your virginity, while you are devouring toast and eating a soft-boiled egg.