

## THE LAST TRIP

As she stood on that grey March afternoon and looked out over the park, Rachel realised, for the first time in her life, that she was bored. It was not loneliness that had motivated her through the arid fifteen years of marriage. It was a deep rooted fear of boredom. It was to escape boredom that had brought her to live in London, to invent an interest in the theatre, attend the Ballet. It had been the fear of boredom that led her to the extremes of visiting museums and art galleries and, in doing so, she had hit upon the idea of taking up painting. For several years painting had staved off the gradually encroaching sands, but now she had lost interest in all her external activities. She no longer went to the theatre or the Ballet. They were boring. It had become an effort just to leave the flat which she maintained spotless and perfect in every respect. It was her world in which he could sit and paint, but how much longer would she be able to bear painting?

Perhaps if she had married younger? Goodness, she had received enough proposals, she told herself. The suitors had been handsome, well-fetched, eligible, but she had found each, in his turn, boring. And just as she reached the point at which courtship itself was threatening to become boring, Stuart had appeared in her life. Looking back she struggled to find an explanation for her saying "yes". He was nothing exceptional, nothing more than an estimator with a firm of international engineering contractors. That sounded dull enough when he told her, but there was the prospect of overseas trips and she soon recognised and, initially, enjoyed, the change in his metabolism as each tender date approached.

He was successful. The trouble was, he was good at his job, too good for his own good. His reward, ultimately, was an all absorbing executive position in the London office followed by a long period of lingering stagnation. "There are not many branches at the top of the tree," he would say, but it always appeared to Rachel that he was satisfied with his life, whilst she was not.

Perhaps had they been able to have children, it would have been different. When they lived in the provinces she had watched, with a remote, detached, curiosity, the young mothers, and felt herself alienated from this strange world of motherhood. They had passed the house on their way to and from the school, or the shops, gossiping, sometimes discarding their sullen faces for laughter, always in small flocks, never alone. She had no baby. She was alone, and there was no friendship there for her.

She conceived, bore, and gave birth to the idea that she was lonely. Stuart told her that she should go out and meet people, then would go off to his office and his companions. The people that she now saw were all small and distant, far below her. She could no more meet one of them that she could meet anyone from the television that languished, cold, in the corner of the room.

As she turned away from the window she glimpsed her weak reflection smearing the spotless glass. That was her apotheosis, pale and wan, transparent, without substance, almost ephemeral. Was then this all that her life was to amount to? Was it to be her fate to live out her life high in the clouds above the London streets, watching, looking, observing, staring down on the people, buses and cars, remote, isolated and lonely? Perhaps she was fated to die there?

No! She was not lonely. She needed no-one, not even Stuart. She was self-sufficient. As an only child of a working mother who had, herself, died before her child was eleven years old, she had learned how to be self-sufficient. The nuns had taught her that. She did not need company. She did not need her husband, except to relieve the boredom. He would arrive home and disarrange the flat. She would occupy herself next day with the task of re-ordering it. No, it was not loneliness. Most of the time she thought she was perfectly happy to sit there, surrounded by her paintings, copied from photographs from the National Geographic magazine, and dream of those far-off, exotic, places. Yet, there were moments when.....

"It is a damned nuisance," said Stuart over dinner, one evening. "I have to go out to Gibraltar for a few days."

"You don't appear to be very excited about it," mused Rachel, studying his features.

"I am not!"

"May I come?" He gave a sigh and pushed his plate away as if its proximity was repugnant to his.

"It is a working trip," he groaned, "not a holiday. We have to price a major job for the Government in joint-venture with a firm of mechanical engineers, and Ron Spencer chooses this moment to go sick with shingles, or something like that. He's always ill when there's hard work about and a tight deadline to meet, as far as I can see. Anyway, I've got to go out there and meet their representative and all we have is drawings. We have to come up with a complete take-off and the price by the end of next week. It's impossible, but there's no competition, you see. I can't afford to spend more than four days out there and there will be absolutely no time for sightseeing or anything else." His tone was aggressive and belligerent, but was there something more?

"It would be quite pleasant out there now," she suggested, thinking of the article she had read in the magazine.

"What would you do?" he growled. "There is nothing there, just a large piece of rock. You can see the whole wretched place in a morning. And you can't go into Spain."

"I could paint," Rachel asserted, lightly.

"As long as you don't expect me to be at your beck and call!"

"I can be quite self-sufficient," she said softly. Stuart stared at her for a moment, then a brief smile appeared on his face.

"If this bloke really pulls his weight and we get cracking right away, there might be a little time towards the end of the trip. I'm making no promises, you understand? Work comes first!"

"Yes dear," whispered Rachel, wondering whether there had ever been a time when it had not. She also found herself wondering how much the flat would deteriorate without her daily attention. It would be something to occupy her when she came back.

The flight out bore no special excitement for her. She was able to look down on the coastline of North Africa and the Mediterranean with the same remote detachment she nourished in the flat. It was all another world. However, the vivid combination of warmth and brightness struck her forcibly as she stepped out from the plane. It was pleasing, yet there was a dryness in her throat and a tense throbbing excitement of a kind that she had not experienced since her teens. "Now I suppose we will have trouble getting a taxi," grumbled Stuart. She half wondered why they would need one if the Rock was as small as he had made out but, in the event, they had no difficulty. Less than half an hour later Rachel was able to stand on the balcony to their hotel room and look across the hazy bay at the indistinct coastline of Spain.

"I don't know what you are going to do," groaned her husband as he sorted, arranged, and re-arranged his papers with a fastidiousness she had come to tolerate and, of late, imitate. "The border's closed. That is forbidden territory, over there!"

"Forbidden territory," she said to herself, and thrilled. "I think right now I will go for a walk around the hotel grounds," she said aloud.

"A walk? I thought you'd be tired and need a rest, and all that. Look, I've got to meet this fellow in less than twenty minutes."

"Is he staying here?"

"Hell, no! That would have been too sensible. He's booked in at the Holiday Inn, or somewhere like that. I don't know why he didn't come here. It would have made matters so much easier, but he isn't."

"Then I will be out of your way, won't I?" she said lightly, with a swirl of her skirt. "I will just walk around the grounds. What time shall we meet up again?"

“Seven,” he said abruptly.

Rachel took her sketch pad. She preferred the thought of making sketches and water-colours as mementoes of the trip rather than to take photographs. The action of the camera shutter was too rapid. Using photography was as if the whole of scene was packaged up in a mere instance of time. She liked to assemble her vistas piece by piece, exploring every feature and angle, every crook and gully, twig and branch, to relish every shape until she was intimate with every aspect of the view before her. No-one could accomplish what she did with a camera.

The ground fell steeply away from the hotel in a series of terraced gardens, bordered by deep green shrubs and plants, and connected by small flights of steps. She settled in one of these gardens and started to sketch an ancient archway which guided the pathway towards the road. The late afternoon sun was still strong and the air was rich with an aromatic fragrance. There was no doubt that she felt drowsy. “Intoxicated” might have been the word she would have used to describe it.

“That is very good,” said a man's voice, startling her. “I am sorry,” he continued. “I did not mean to disturb you.” Rachel looked up and caught her breath. Bronzed and handsome, a perfect Adonis stood above her. She assumed immediately and without question, that he was French.

“I think I was dozing,” she murmured, smiling.

“Ah, ha!” said the stranger, sitting beside her. “You must be careful. It can become quite damp and cold here, suddenly, at this time of year.”

“Do you live here?” she asked casually, having no real interest in either the question or the answer, but finding herself fascinated by his features and physique.

“No,” said the god after a pause and some reflection which made her think he did not fully understand the question. If he was French he might not, yet his English appeared to be good. “And you?” he added. “You are a guest at the Hotel?”

She nodded and looked down at the pad resting on her lap as she tried to impose some self-discipline, but when he reached out and took it, she made no attempt to restrain him. “It is very good,” he repeated. “Do you draw professionally? Are you an artist?”

“Oh, no!” she exclaimed. “I am a married woman!” It was such a ridiculous thing to say. He laughed with amusement, but she did so to hide her embarrassment and confusion.

“I like it,” he said. Oh, his English was good. There was no more than the merest trace of an accent there. “Now I must leave you,” he said, standing and offering the sketch pad back to her. “You will be staying for how long?”

“Only a few days,” she whispered.

“Then perhaps I'll see you again? We shall see.” Rachel bit her lip. She had found herself on the brink of saying that she hoped so. Instead she murmured a sole, noncommittal, reply.

“Perhaps,” she whispered. She watched him leave. At the arch he turned and looked back, giving her a little wave to which she could not prevent herself from responding. Then he was gone and she felt quite chilly.

“I've mapped out the day and a programme for the week. I'm meeting friend Ferguson at his hotel to review his part of this assignment. If he pulls his weight, we can just about get through everything with a few hours to spare. Then we will be able to have a little time together.”

“That would be nice,” murmured Rachel.

“I am not promising anything,” Stuart added.. “It all depends on friend Ferguson.” She studied him across the breakfast table.

“Do I detect a note of doubt in your voice regarding this Mr Ferguson?” she asked boldly.

“I wasn't over impressed with him,” he grumbled. “I told him that he wasn't along for the ride and that he would have to pull his weight, but I don't know.”

“Don't know?”

“Well, you get those who will work and those who think it's all a holiday and do no more than swan about. I'm not sure which he is.”

“I though you were cross yesterday evening.”

“I wasn't!”

“Especially cross.”

“I was not cross,” he snapped. “I was just tired.”

“Yes, dear,” she said softly and smiled internally.

“And you?” he said suddenly. “Have you decided how you are going to occupy yourself?”

“Today? I will have a look around,” she offered.

“Well, be careful. Keep a tight grip on your handbag and don't wander up sidestreets. You're not in England now.”

“It is a Colony, isn't it?”

“It may well be, but it seems to me to be full of Maltese exiles and slimy Moroccans. I wouldn't trust a single one of them. Just be careful who you talk to and don't buy anything.”

“Can we meet up for lunch?” she asked after a respectful period of reflection on his warning.

“I don't know whether that will be practicable,” sighed Stuart. “I don't know where I will be at lunchtime.”

“I thought you had a programme,” she said to herself and wished she had the courage to say it out loud.

“You can come back here, to the Hotel, surely, can't you?”

“I suppose so,” she said quietly, and finished her breakfast in silence. The day was faultlessly fine. Apollo was already high in the cloudless blue sky, advanced on his eternal journey, when Rachel began hers, and explored Main Street. Stuart's assessment had been reasonably accurate. There was not much to see, yet she felt the same excitement she had experienced when disembarking from the plane. She was looking for something, and it was here to be found - but what?

There was the light, an abundance of colour, and a bustling, noisy profusion of people. Her eyes anxiously sought potential subjects and a place of seclusion in which to work. She did not feel inclined to erect her easel in the middle of the hubbub. Painting was, for her, a solitary occupation. She would not feel comfortable in a crowd. She was a solitary creature.

She found sanctuary in a small, shaded and secluded, garden which appeared to have once been a graveyard hollowed out of the unrelenting rock. Weathered gravestones had been crudely uprooted and now stood around the perimeter in meticulous ranks, witnesses of the garden's origin. What of the dead? Had they been disinterred too, or were the bones of unfortunate crusaders and ancient mariners, plucked from the galleys by death's hand, reposing there still, beneath her feet?

It was peaceful and cool there, almost cold, but a sweet aroma hung thick in the air about her, and she was alone, totally alone, a sensation that struck her as not altogether unpleasant, except..... “What incredible luck, finding you here!” Rachel could hardly conceal her pleasure at hearing the voice. “Ah, that is better,” he continued. “For a moment you looked so glum and very serious. But this is not the place for you. You shouldn't be here, really.”

“Why ever not?” she asked, glancing around to see where the notices of prohibition were placed. “I came in here because it is so peaceful.”

“So it may appear, but the local people do not come. They believe it is haunted.”

“Haunted?”

“So they say.”

“By what, or by whom?” she asked, looking around once again as if the ghostly inhabitants could be invoked and spirited up at the mention of their existence.

“Oh, it is a long and sad tale, and I can see that I am disturbing you. Still, this is not the place - what are you doing for lunch?”

“I don't know. I hadn't thought about it.”

“You are not meeting your husband?”

“Oh, no! He is far too busy.”

“He is here on business?” She nodded in reply. “Ah, it is who you now that matters here, not what. Business is easy here once you know the right people. Now, I know this delightful little restaurant, quite discreet, not at all far away even by the Rock's standards. Will you join me for lunch?” Almost before an affirmative formed on Rachel's lips, she felt him take her arm gently, though firmly, and lead her.

As she sat and watched the white sand trickle through the gaps between her toes, Rachel reflected on what had been an extraordinary afternoon. She could not recall any occasion in her life when so many unpredictable things had happened in such a short time, nor when she had decided, spontaneously, almost recklessly, to depart from her previously conceived plans. Her god introduced himself simply as “Barrie”, and she had confided her Christian name. Over the meal he entertained her with a combination of overwhelming charm, wit, and pathos, telling her the legend of the gardens. She learned how a married woman of noble birth had died there, heartbroken of the unrequited love of a younger man, a mere commoner. She was buried there, close to rock face by the entrance. Her death was perversely avenged by her relatives, and he was buried there too, but at the other end of the cemetery. “The sun never shines on her grave,” Barrie added, darkly. “It is said that she is doomed to wander until her remains are laid to rest in the sunlight, alongside those of her loved one. Of course it is all allegorical.”

“It is?” she asked. “Oh, don't spoil it!”

“Oh, yes,” he said as he topped up her wine glass. “It's a myth. She's Persephone, you know. Nature laid to rest in the dark of Winter awaiting rebirth with the coming of Spring.”

“Perhaps I will not go there again,” she whispered.

He had almost taken her breath away when he suggested that they went to the beach for the afternoon. “There are several places on the other side of the Rock. We could drive there.”

“You have a car?”

“I can arrange one.” On the way he took her to the frontier. Rachel stood and looked at the tall, locked, iron, gates and the road beyond that led into Spain. “Into forbidden territory,” she told herself. She felt guilty when she thought of Stuart. He was probably measuring up something, with his Mr Ferguson clutching onto one end of the tape whilst he feverishly wrote down the figures in one of his notebooks. He would measure every single inch, and one at a time. She knew that. No doubt he was happy, enjoying himself in his perverse way.

“Are you enjoying yourself?” asked Barrie. She felt guilty, yet did not know why. Spain lay still, beyond the locked and guarded gates. She had not put a foot wrong.

“We could easily have bought you a costume in the town,” he had protested, but she had sat and watched him come from the sea, glistening, majestic. Oh, she would like to draw him! Yet she had declined the offer of a costume. She was not yet ready to bare her skin to him.

She lay in bed that night and romanced. Stuart was tired after having worked frenetically all evening. He said little to her and soon fell asleep at her side. Rachel could not, and did not wish to, go to sleep. Instead she lay, curled on her side and looking wide-eyed out of the window, across the dark waters of the bay at the sharp, bright, glittering lights of Spain as they twinkled and beckoned to her from the shore and reflected off the surface. She had only to put out her arm and touch them, yet they were as remote as the people who walked their dogs in the park below

the flat. The chasm before her seemed to be unbridgeable. The channel appeared un-swimmable. "I will never have the courage, anyway," she whispered, and fell asleep.

"How are you getting on with your Mr Thingey?" she asked at breakfast next morning. Stuart looked drawn and tired, haggard as the early rays illuminated his gaunt features. She wanted to suggest that he should relax in the sun for a couple of hours, but she was painfully aware what his response was likely to be. His hard, steel-blue, eyes stared at her through the gold-rimmed spectacles as she offered him a half-smile, almost coquettish.

"I don't know," he groaned, scowling as the toast disintegrated under his butter-laden knife. "I sent him off to check the position with local taxation, customs duty, harbour dues, and that sort of thing. He failed to turn up for lunch and I haven't seen him since. I am going around to his hotel first thing to give him a piece of my mind as soon as I have had breakfast!"

"You think he's come along just for the ride?" It was an unkind thing to say. She was raising the ominous spectre of his worst fears. She could so easily have defused the situation and placated him as she would have done normally, but she felt the grip of a new emotion, an awakening inside her which brought with it a dimension of rebelliousness. She had changed but if Stuart detected a change in her, he made no visible indication.

"I will damned well soon find out!" he snarled. "If he has, it will be a blessed nuisance because it is a two man job. He might as well go straight home if that's the case. I'll do it all alone!" Rachel nodded in agreement. She almost wanted to tell him that he was looking for a circumstance that might not exist, but she said softly,

"I am sure that you will." When he rose abruptly and left her at the table to finish breakfast alone, she did not feel lonely. She knew that it was his way of stressing the fact he was there to work and that she was not. It was a broad hint that she should have stayed in London and minded the flat. Perhaps he felt guilty? It did not matter. The day before, Barrie had asked her to meet him and she had refused. Now the recollection caused her some anxiety, a pang in her heart. That was the familiar pattern of her life, a whole succession of little pangs, one after the other.

As if to be contrary she perversely set up the easel in the gravestone flanked garden. Something in her mood simply would not admit strong sunshine. She sketched a wall and a series of pointed arches which looked as if they might have once formed part of a chapel, adding the shrubbery above the gravestone and the dark, gloomy, corner in which lay the entrance. She pictured the lovers standing there, locked in an eternal embrace. As she ran colour onto the paper, she left a blank area where she saw them as standing. When she hinted at their grey forms she was possessed with the idea that if she raised her eyes from the paper she would see them there, exactly where she was painting their shapes. When she did look, she had a severe shock.

"I hoped I might find you here," he said. "May I sit and watch you?" She had never known her hand to be so unsteady as the colour flowed uncontrollably. Inexplicable tears welled in her eyes as she fought to clear her throat and speak.

"How long have you been standing there?" she asked, hoarsely.

"I could sit here and watch you all day," he said after a pause. "You know, you are beautiful."

"Don't be silly!" she said, careful not to raise her gaze from the paper. "I am over forty."

"You are beautiful, and dignified. Your features, the texture of your skin, your colouring. Have you ever painted yourself?" Rachel said nothing. She went on nervously forcing paint into most of the remaining blank spaces. "It is very good," Barrie said after a further period of silence. "Won't you say something nice about me?"

"I would like to sketch you," she said, impetuously.

It was late afternoon when Rachel gathered herself and her belongings and left the Holiday Inn. She had spent the afternoon in unforgettable ecstasy, an experience unparalleled in her life. Perhaps it had been that for which she had been living all those years, an engulfing sensual and emotional zenith. The Reverend Mother had warned them all. "One mistake, one tiny trip and you will fall headlong into damnation." So that was it, but she did not regret it. The frontier gates had swung open and she had passed through, unchecked, unhindered, to stand on foreign, forbidden, soil. Together, they had swum the Hellespont.

"Will we see each other tomorrow?" Barrie had asked as she paused at the door to his room.

"Oh, no," she breathed.

"There's a dance at your hotel in the evening. Will you go?" Mixed emotions tugged at her heart. Stuart had been a good dancer. He had the rigidity, the formality, and in those days, in those dancing days, he could lead her.

"I would like to," she whispered, "but, my husband."

"I will be going, anyway. Should we meet you can trust me to be discreet." As she walked back to the hotel she rebuked herself for her stupidity. She had been taken in, had she not? She had been with this man and she did not even know his full name, his background, where he came from, or what he did for a living. In all probability he was, like her, married. Perhaps he was married to several women, she told herself. No doubt he was the kind of man who preyed on vulnerable, middle-aged, women like her. It was so easy to think, but so hard to whole-heartedly believe.

Stuart was working in their room when she arrived. He grunted a greeting, then took little notice of her before dinner. She was greatly relieved. At the table she had the courage to ask him how his day had gone. It had not gone well. "And your Mr Ferguson?" she added. She had remembered the name.

"I've chucked him out! I told him to his face that he can go home! He's useless. He has no idea and seems to want to spend the whole of his day enjoying himself."

"Then you are better off without him," she said soothingly.

"How do you make that out?"

"At least you know exactly where you stand."

"That's true," he said grudgingly, "but I've double the amount of work to do, and tomorrow must be the last day out here otherwise we won't get the tender in on time next week."

"There's a dance here tomorrow night," she said. "Shall we go?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Rachel," he snarled.

"May I go, then?"

"If you really want to join the ranks of pathetic, middle-aged, daego-seeking, wallflowers, do so by all means."

Rachel spent the whole of the next day feverishly painting. She settled herself high in the hotel gardens almost under the balcony of their room and painted the view across the bay. She could not resist introducing a solitary figure, a woman standing in the middle foreground, looking out longingly at the Spanish coastline. It was her, was it not? Waiting for a sail or a swimmer. Waiting for a sign, any sign. It was the only time she painted herself.

Stuart was totally immersed in his work as she dressed and diligently prepared herself for the dance. He hardly uttered a word. She should have felt sorry for him as she looked and saw how he was weighed down by the responsibilities he had shouldered, but her mind was exclusively and un-deflectingly concentrated on other matters. "Are you absolutely sure that you cannot come?" she asked when she was ready to leave. She did not understand the grunt that he

gave in reply, assuming it to be another rebuttal. So be it. It was as she would then have wished, exactly as she would have wished.

At around twenty minutes past eleven that evening, Stuart wearily roused himself, left the bedroom and went in search of the ballroom. The dance was still in full session and was well attended. A seething knot of couples was massed on the floor while others sat around the perimeter at dim, candle-lit, tables. He ordered a whisky and paused at the bar, scanning the tables in vain. The thought crossed his mind that she might not be there, but then he saw her on the dance floor and the shock was immeasurably greater than it would have been had he not found her there at all. Stuart was to relive, many times, the pain of his mixed emotions, of pleasure and of horror, of desire and jealousy, of that moment.

For a start, Rachel looked stunningly beautiful. He had barely looked at her when she had left their room earlier that evening. Perhaps he had not looked really closely at her for many years. Now, on this evening, she looked breathtaking. She was dancing with a man, but it was the expression on her face, not his presence, that filled Stuart with horror and panic. They were not particularly close, not in each other's arms, so as to speak, but in her feature he could see an unmistakable look of unquestioning devotion and love, of absolute submission, total assent, a look that he had never been able to evoke. He had no doubt as to the situation.

The band had stopped playing and the couples were making their ways to the tables for an interval. Stuart gulped his drink and thrust his way towards his wife. Neither Rachel nor her partner was aware of his approach and impending arrival until he was right on top of them at the side of the table. Rachel coloured and tried to stand but she could not because her chair struck the back of one at the adjoining table. "Stuart!" she exclaimed in disbelief and confusion. At that moment he could have killed her. "Stuart!" she repeated, gesticulating frantically. "May I introduce ....."

"Mr Ferguson and I am acquainted," Stuart snapped. "It is an acquaintance which I thought I had terminated yesterday, but one which I firmly sever now!"

The impact on Rachel of the catastrophic realisation was unforgettable. Her colour and beauty appeared to evaporate and she suddenly looked old, ashen, limp and helpless. Barrie had remained seated and looked away when she turned to him. She offered no resistance when Stuart gripped her arm and firmly propelled her towards the exit. Barrie was now on his feet, trying to restrain her husband. "Rachel and I," he began.

With no consideration of the risks or merits of his action, Stuart thrust his face close to Barrie's. "Rachel and you?" he hissed. "Rachel is my wife. The holiday is over, as at now! Find someone else's wife!" Later, on reflection, Stuart thought his words sounded insipid. Perhaps he should have struck the man, perhaps not. It would not have made Rachel think any better of him, nor alter the outcome. What was done was done, whether he knew of it or not.

They travelled back to London the next day, to spend a weekend of tense formality and polite near-silence. Rachel yearned to assure her husband that nothing had happened, but could not. Stuart longed to ask for that assurance, but dared not. However, it was Rachel who, whilst her husband slept, found herself lying awake at night, haunted and tormented, reliving her memories yet finding that every time she did so she added another straw to the unbearable burden that she was carrying. Why did Stuart not speak? Why did he not admonish her? Did he not realise that she was now terrified of herself, petrified by the possibility that now she had stepped beyond the pale she would, after years of deprivation, find it difficult to say "no" in future? How could he be there, in the flat with her, and still remain silent, pretending he was blameless, making out that it was he alone who was suffering, when it was she who was gradually sinking deep into the quicksand, and she who so desperately needed the offer of his hand to save her?



On Monday morning he left for the office acting as if everything was normal, awarding her that little customary peck on the cheek. She let him go and mechanically went through her routine around the flat. At eleven o'clock she stopped and took out the water-colour she had completed on the last day of the trip. It was easily her best work. She would never paint another like it. There would never be another trip.

An empathetic thought drew her to the window. It was drizzling and the pavements were deserted except for a lone, now familiar, figure, stood near the entrance to the park and looking up. She never knew whether he could see her. She made no attempt to attract his attention. He was now like the rest, remote and far away, over the frontier and the great iron gates were swinging on their hinges, slowly closing. Once shut, they would never again be opened. "How sad," she thought as she sat at the writing desk, but she reassured herself that she would be all right. She had carefully checked the contents of the medicine cabinet. She was safe and secure there, in her flat. There was no need to leave it ever again.

THE END

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