

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Mrs. Dalloway said, "I will buy the flowers myself."

Lucy had more than enough to do. Men were coming to take the doors off their hinges. Deliveries would soon arrive. The whole house was already moving toward the evening, toward trays, glasses, cold dishes, candles, voices, footsteps on the stairs. But Clarissa Dalloway, standing near the door, felt the morning call to her with a force that was almost childish. It was too beautiful to miss.

"What a morning," she thought. "How fresh it is."

She stepped outside, and the air touched her face. At once she felt that old feeling, the one she had known long ago at Bourton, when she was eighteen and would throw open the French windows and rush out into the morning. The little sound of the hinges seemed to come back to her now. The air had been cooler there, calmer too, more solemn. It had touched her then like a wave on the sea, cold and sharp, and yet full of meaning. Standing there in that early light, she had often felt, "Something terrible is going to happen." And yet she had loved it.

She remembered flowers. She remembered trees with thin smoke rising from them in the morning. She remembered the rooks going up and down in the sky. And then, as always, one thought led to one person.

"Peter," she thought. "It always comes back to Peter."

Peter Walsh had once spoken to her in that garden at Bourton. "Thinking among the vegetables?" he had said. Or perhaps, "I like people better than cauliflowers." It was strange, she thought, how a few little sentences stayed alive when thousands of large events died and were gone. She could not remember the whole of his letters. She could not remember dates properly. Was he coming back from India in June? In July? She had forgotten. His letters were so dull. But she remembered his sayings, his eyes, his smile, his bad temper, the pocket-knife he always carried. Those things remained.

She reached the curb and stood very straight, waiting for a van to pass.

Scrope Purvis, who knew her in the distant way neighbors know one another in Westminster, happened to see her. He thought, "She is charming." He thought there was something bird-like about her, something light and quick, like a bright jay. She was over fifty now, and she had grown much whiter since her illness, but she still carried herself as if some small, lively creature were resting upright inside her body.

Clarissa did not see him. She was listening for the city.

"There is always a pause," she thought. "Always this hush before Big Ben strikes."

She felt it even in traffic, even in the middle of London, even at night when she woke from sleep. A pause. A suspension. Something waiting. Perhaps, she thought, it was only her heart, which had never been quite right after influenza. Then the sound came. Big Ben struck the hour, first like a warning, then like a command. The sound spread through the air and disappeared.

"How foolish we are," she thought as she crossed the street. "And yet how I love it."

She loved London for reasons she could never explain. She loved the noise, the movement, the pushing and passing, the cabs, the buses, the vans, the footsteps, the cries. She loved the way people made the city every moment by living in it. Even the poorest people sitting in doorways, even the tired women, even the men ruined by drink, still loved life in their way. She was sure of it. Laws could not explain them; governments could not fix them. They loved life. That was the truth under everything.

"Life. London. This June morning," she thought.

It was the middle of June. The War was over, though not really over for everyone. There were mothers still grieving. There were houses altered by death. There were names that would never return. But the great public fact of war had ended, and now London moved again in its old patterns: horses, games, clubs, carriages, girls laughing after dances, old ladies in cars on secret errands, shopkeepers arranging bright things in windows.

And she, too, would play her part that evening.

“I shall give my party,” she thought. “I shall bring them together.”

When she entered the Park, the noise changed. There was mist. There were ducks. There were birds moving slowly on the water. The silence there was not empty. It held the city at a distance. And then she saw Hugh Whitbread.

“Of course,” she thought. “Hugh.”

He came toward her carrying his official box, with that handsome, well-fed, polished air he always had. He had known her since childhood. He greeted her warmly, almost too warmly, and asked where she was going.

“I love walking in London,” she said aloud. “It is better than walking in the country.”

Hugh explained, in his smooth and careful way, that he and Evelyn had come up to London to see doctors. Clarissa felt at once both sympathy and discomfort. Evelyn again. Illness again. Hugh always managed to make illness sound like a social duty, almost a fine accomplishment. He was too well dressed. He was too upholstered, too finished, too sure of his little place at Court. And yet, she could not dislike him. She never could.

“Peter hated Hugh,” she thought. “Peter never forgave me for liking him.”

At once Bourton rose again before her.

She remembered Peter speaking cruelly about Hugh, laughing at him, attacking him, calling him empty, stupid, polished on the outside and nothing underneath. But Peter, at his worst, could be unfair. Hugh had done what was asked of him. He had looked after his mother. He had behaved decently. He was limited, yes, but not worthless.

“Dear Peter always judged,” she thought. “He could not leave anyone alone.”

The June leaves shone over them. Warm currents of life moved through the Park and through Clarissa’s mind. She thought of how Peter could walk beside her on a day like this and notice nothing of the trees, the grass, the child in pink passing by. He would notice argument, character, books, politics, defects. Above all, her defects.

“How he scolded me,” she thought. “How we fought.”

He had said she would marry a Prime Minister one day. He had said she would stand at the top of the stairs and welcome guests. He had called her the perfect hostess. The phrase had wounded her so much that she had cried alone in her room. And even now, years later, she still answered him in her mind.

“I was right not to marry you,” she thought. “I was right.”

Marriage needed space. It needed privacy. It needed some little freedom between two people who lived under the same roof every day of their lives. Richard gave her that. She gave it to Richard. They did not ask everything. They did not demand everything. But Peter would have wanted to break every door open. He would have wanted to share all thoughts, all feelings, all doubts, all movements of the soul.

“I could not bear it,” she thought. “It would have destroyed us both.”

Then the old pain returned, soft now but still sharp enough to be felt. The garden with the fountain. The quarrel. His voice asking for truth. Her refusal. The long grief after. The years that followed like an arrow in the heart. And then the horrible moment at a concert, when someone told her Peter had married a woman he met on the ship to India.

“I never forgot that feeling,” she thought. “Never.”

She had reached the gates now and paused, looking at the buses and taxis moving beyond.

“I feel old,” she thought. “And I feel young. Both at once.”

She felt herself inside life and outside it. She felt herself sharp, alive, able to cut through things. And at the same time she felt far away, as if she stood at a distance and watched everything happen. To live even one day seemed dangerous. But how absorbing it all was. She did not think herself clever. She knew how little she knew. No history, no language, no great learning. And yet the world, simply passing in front of her, was enough.

“My gift is knowing people,” she thought. “That is all, perhaps. But it is something.”

She remembered houses lit up at night. She remembered hosts of people. She remembered dancing until morning. She remembered Sally Seton. She

remembered the old drive home through the Park. She remembered throwing a coin once into the Serpentine. Memory was everywhere. But what she loved most was still this moment, this one, the fat lady in the passing cab, the sound of traffic, the sky above Bond Street.

And then a darker thought rose in her.

“Does it matter that I must die?” she asked herself. “Does it matter that all this will go on without me?”

She did not know. Death ended everything, yes. But sometimes she believed another thing too. She believed that people went on somehow. Not as ghosts in a childish sense, but as part of one another, part of places, part of trees, houses, voices, habits, memories. She thought of Bourton. She thought of Peter. She thought, “I live in people I have known. I spread among them like mist. They hold me up on their branches.”

For a moment that belief comforted her.

Then she turned again toward Bond Street.

“Flowers first,” she thought. “The flowers. The morning has only begun.”

Part 2

I walk toward Bond Street, and the city opens around me like a stage. The shops shine in the sun. Windows are full of silk, hats, gloves, bright glass bottles, little boxes tied with ribbon. I feel as if the whole street is alive, moving slowly forward with the day. And I move with it.

But even while I walk, I am still arguing with Peter.

It is strange. Years pass. Letters stop. Lives change. And yet suddenly, in the middle of the Park, I begin speaking to him again as if he were beside me.

“I was right,” I say to him in my mind. “I was right not to marry you.”

The argument returns exactly as it was. I feel the same heat in my chest. I hear his voice accusing me.

“You will become a perfect hostess,” he had said once. “You will stand at the top of the stairs and greet important people.”

How angry I had been! I had cried that night in bed. I remember the pillow under my face and the way the words burned in my ears. Perfect hostess! As if that were the worst thing a woman could be.

But perhaps, I think now, he was not entirely wrong.

I cross another street. A carriage passes. A policeman lifts his hand. London moves in smooth lines, almost like a dance.

I think of Richard.

Richard does not demand everything from me. That is why I chose him. With Richard there is space. There is calm. We do not search into each other's souls every moment of the day. We allow silence. We allow privacy. I never ask him what happens in his committees, and he never asks what thoughts pass through my mind when I walk in the Park.

"Marriage must have freedom," I tell Peter again inside my head. "Otherwise it destroys two people."

But even while I say it, I feel the old wound.

The quarrel in the little garden at Bourton comes back to me as clearly as if it happened yesterday. The fountain was broken. Water dropped slowly from the stone into a green pool below. Moss grew on the edge. I remember the smell of wet leaves.

Peter stood across the fountain from me.

"Tell me the truth," he kept saying. "Tell me the truth."

I stood very still. I could feel the whole of my body grow hard, like stone. Something inside me refused to move.

"It is useless," I said at last. "It is over."

I turned away from him. I left him standing there beside the fountain.

And then he called after me.

"Clarissa! Clarissa!"

But I did not go back.

Even now, walking down Bond Street, I feel again the terrible silence that followed. Years of sadness came after that day. It was like carrying an arrow in the heart. I could not pull it out.

And then one evening, at a concert, someone said to me very casually:

“Did you hear? Peter Walsh has married.”

The coldness of that moment still lives in me.

I stop for a moment beside a shop window. Gloves lie arranged on blue velvet. A young woman inside the shop lifts a box and places it on the counter.

“How strange life is,” I think. “All those years ago.”

And suddenly another memory rises—another person.

Sally Seton.

I feel a quick warmth, almost like a flame, when I think of her.

Was it love? I ask myself. Perhaps it was.

I remember the first time I saw her. She was sitting on the floor, holding her knees, smoking a cigarette as if she did not care what anyone thought. I cannot remember whose house it was. Perhaps the Mannings. Perhaps the Kinlock-Joneses. But I remember asking someone beside me, “Who is that girl?”

They told me her name: Sally Seton.

They also said her parents did not get along. That shocked me deeply at the time. The idea of parents fighting seemed terrible.

But I could not stop looking at her.

She was beautiful. Dark. Her eyes were large and full of life. She had something I did not have—something free and daring. She seemed able to say anything, to do anything, without fear.

Sometimes she did foolish things.

She rode her bicycle along the stone rail of the terrace. She smoked cigarettes openly. She laughed at rules. Everyone said she was reckless.

But to me she was wonderful.

I remember one night at Bourton when I stood in my bedroom holding the jug of water for washing. I remember saying aloud:

“She is under this roof... under this very roof!”

My whole body felt cold with excitement.

Of course now those words mean nothing. The feeling itself has faded. I cannot call it back completely. But I remember the strength of it. I remember my heart

beating.

I turn again and continue walking.

The street becomes quieter here. A carriage waits near the corner. Two men talk beside a door.

That night at Bourton returns to me again.

The sky was pink with evening light. The rooks flew above the trees. I dressed carefully and went downstairs. And as I crossed the hall I thought, “If I were to die now, I would be perfectly happy.”

Because I knew Sally would be there at dinner.

I see her again now in my mind—wearing a pale dress, almost shining. She seemed to fly across the room like a bird or a bright balloon.

When you love someone, I think, the strangest thing is that other people do not notice. They talk about music, about politics, about Wagner perhaps, while the whole world has changed for you.

That evening Peter and Joseph Breitkopf were talking about Wagner, I remember. Sally and I walked just behind them.

And then the moment came.

We passed a stone vase full of flowers. Sally stopped. She picked one flower from the vase. She turned toward me.

And she kissed me.

I stop walking.

Even now, years later, that moment shines brighter than almost anything in my life.

It felt as if the whole world had turned upside down. All the other people disappeared. There was only Sally and me. It was like being given a small package wrapped in paper, and being told to keep it safe without opening it.

But when I opened it, the light inside burst through the paper like fire.

It was revelation.

A kind of religion.

The memory still warms me as I continue along Bond Street.

But suddenly another feeling rises behind it.

A darker one.

I look at the people passing me. I see women carrying parcels. I see men hurrying to offices. I see the shop signs and the polished windows.

And I think suddenly:

“Who am I in all this?”

I am no longer Clarissa.

I am Mrs. Richard Dalloway.

That is the name the world knows.

The realization strikes me sharply. I feel almost transparent, as if my body could disappear among the crowd.

This body, which once had so many possibilities, now moves through London as if it were only a shadow. I will never marry again. I will never have another child. I walk in this long procession of people, one figure among many.

“Mrs. Dalloway,” I think. “Only that.”

I try to shake the thought away.

I remember my party tonight. I remember the rooms filling with voices. I remember laughter and music.

“It will be wonderful,” I tell myself.

Just then, as I reach the flower shop and push open the door, a sudden sound explodes in the street outside.

A pistol shot.

The noise jumps through the air and into the room. I feel my whole body start with surprise. The shopkeeper lifts her head at once.

“Those motor cars,” Miss Pym says, hurrying toward the window.

Outside, people stop walking. Heads turn toward the road. A large motor car has stopped directly opposite the shop.

Everyone stares.

For one second, someone inside the car can be seen—a very important face against grey cushions.

Then a hand pulls down the blind.

The car becomes a silent grey box.

And the street begins to whisper.

Part 3

I stand among the flowers while the street outside begins to murmur. The sound of voices spreads quickly, like wind moving across water.

“Who was it?” someone asks outside.

“The Queen perhaps.”

“No, the Prince of Wales.”

“The Prime Minister!”

Nobody knows. The blind of the motor car is down now. All that can be seen is a square of grey cloth.

Inside the flower shop, Miss Pym smiles politely and returns to her work. But even she looks a little excited. Everyone does. Something important has passed through Bond Street, even if no one knows exactly what.

I move from jar to jar with Miss Pym.

“Sweet peas perhaps?” she suggests.

The flowers glow softly in the morning light. Reds, blues, whites, yellow roses opening like small suns. The scent rises gently around me.

“Nonsense, nonsense,” I say quietly to myself.

I say it again, more softly each time.

It is my way of pushing something away. Something dark. Something heavy. Because for a moment, while I stand here surrounded by flowers and color, I feel another feeling rising inside me.

Hatred.

I do not even know why.

But the beauty of the flowers begins to wash over it. The scent, the colors, Miss Pym’s kindness, the fact that she likes me and trusts me. All of it rises like a wave.

The wave lifts me.

“Yes,” I think. “Life is beautiful.”

Then—another sound outside.

The motor car starts again. Traffic moves. Voices follow it down the street. And somewhere nearby someone laughs.

I step toward the window and look out.

The crowd is still gathered. Boys have jumped off their bicycles. A policeman lifts his hand. Old ladies sit high on the tops of buses holding black umbrellas. Green umbrellas open. Red umbrellas open.

Everyone looks toward the car.

And among them stands a man who does not look like the others.

I do not know him. But at that moment his mind is full of fear.

I am Septimus Warren Smith.

I cannot move.

The crowd presses around me, but I feel alone inside it. The sound of the motor engines beats like a pulse through the air. The sun grows hotter because the car has stopped here. Everything becomes too bright.

“The world has lifted its whip,” I think. “Where will it strike?”

My heart begins to pound. I feel the eyes of people everywhere.

“They are watching me,” I think. “They know.”

My wife touches my arm.

“Come,” she says gently. “Let us go, Septimus.”

Her name is Lucrezia, though most people call her Rezia. She is small and pale, with large dark eyes and a sharp little face. She is from Italy. Sometimes she looks at England as if she cannot understand it at all.

I feel her hand pulling me away from the crowd.

But the crowd still looks at the motor car.

I hear the voices around me.

“Who was it?”

“Did you see the face?”

“No.”

“The Queen perhaps.”

But I know the truth.

It is not the Queen. It is not the Prime Minister.

It is judgment.

The world itself has stopped.

I feel the sky tremble above me.

“It is coming,” I think.

Rezia looks at the people standing around us.

I am Rezia now.

Everyone will notice, I think. Everyone will understand.

I look at the crowd carefully. English people everywhere—men, women, children. Their horses, their clothes, their hats. Everything looks orderly, correct, strong. Even their clothing seems powerful.

Normally I admire it.

But not today.

Not since Septimus said the terrible words this morning.

“I will kill myself.”

The words still echo inside me.

If these people heard him say that, what would they think? I imagine them turning toward us suddenly, staring, whispering.

“Help,” I want to cry.

“Help us.”

I look at the butcher’s boy. I look at the women near the shop doors. I want to shout at them.

“Please help!”

But I do not shout. I only hold my husband’s arm more tightly.

Because I am afraid.

The motor car moves away slowly. The crowd begins to break apart. People return to their errands. The moment fades.

But Septimus is still trembling.

I see his pale face. His thin mouth. His strange eyes.

He looks like a man listening to something far away.

And I know he is slipping further from me.

Back in the flower shop, I am Clarissa again.

Miss Pym wraps the flowers in paper and ties them carefully with string. Her hands move gently. She smiles as she works.

I like her very much.

There is something comforting about her trust in me, about the way she treats me not as a grand lady but as a person she knows.

“These will be lovely tonight,” she says.

“Yes,” I answer.

Tonight.

My party.

For a moment the thought lifts me again. The rooms full of light. People arriving. Friends meeting friends. Conversations beginning. Small connections forming between people who might never otherwise meet.

That is what I give them.

That is what I do.

Yet as I step outside again into Bond Street, another thought suddenly strikes me with strange force.

“What am I really?”

I walk slowly along the pavement.

My body feels thin, almost transparent, as if people could pass through me without noticing.

I am fifty-one years old.

I have had my child. I will have no more. My youth is behind me. The future stretches ahead quietly, like a long corridor.

“Mrs. Dalloway,” I think again.

That is what the world calls me.

Mrs. Richard Dalloway.

The name is not quite mine. It belongs partly to him. It belongs to society. It belongs to the world outside.

Somewhere behind that name there was once a girl named Clarissa.

But perhaps she is already fading.

The street grows busier as the morning moves forward. A carriage rattles past.

A shop door opens. A group of girls laugh together as they hurry along.

Life continues everywhere.

And suddenly another thought rises quietly in my mind.

“One day I will disappear,” I think.

The world will continue exactly as it is now. The buses will run. The shops will open. People will walk along Bond Street just as they do today.

Does that matter?

I ask myself the question seriously.

No.

Not really.

Death is the end of the body. That is true. But sometimes I believe something else too.

I believe that Peter and I—and others—continue somehow inside the places we have lived.

I think of Bourton.

I think of the trees there, the long lawn, the wide old house with its uneven rooms.

“I am part of those trees,” I think.

I am part of the people I have known.

Even people I never met may carry some small part of me without knowing it. Just as mist spreads through branches, my life spreads through other lives.

Perhaps that is enough.

The thought comforts me slightly.

I take a deep breath of the warm June air and begin walking home again, the flowers held carefully in my arms.

The day is still young.

But already the past, the present, and the future seem to be moving together around me, like quiet circles spreading through water.

Part 4

I walk back toward Westminster with the flowers in my arms. The paper rustles softly when I move. The scent rises around me. Sweet peas. Roses. Life itself seems to breathe from them.

The traffic grows louder again as I leave Bond Street behind. Buses roar past. Horses stamp the pavement. Drivers shout. The city pulls me back into its movement.

Yet even while I walk, the thoughts inside me continue to drift.

“I am part of this,” I think. “And yet I stand apart.”

I feel both things at once. I am Clarissa walking through London on a June morning. But I am also something else—something that watches life as it passes.

A strange loneliness touches me.

Perhaps it comes from age. Perhaps it comes from illness. Ever since the influenza, I sometimes feel as if my heart is thin glass. One sharp moment could break it.

But I push the thought away.

“The party,” I remind myself. “Tonight.”

Already I begin to imagine the evening. People climbing the stairs. The lights shining. Voices filling the rooms.

My gift is simple.

I bring people together.

Someone lives in South Kensington. Someone else in Bayswater. Another person in Mayfair. They all live separate lives. They pass each other in the streets without knowing one another. But for one evening they will meet.

“Come,” I will say to them with my smile. “Come in.”

And for a few hours the city will gather inside my house.

“It is my offering,” I think.

Offering to whom? I do not know. Perhaps to life itself.

The thought feels both foolish and deeply serious.

I turn the corner and walk the final distance home.

Meanwhile, in another part of London, another life moves toward its own dark afternoon.

I am Septimus again.

Rezia and I walk slowly away from the crowd that gathered around the motor car. The noise of the city follows us. Wheels grind against stone. A bus passes with a loud rattle.

But inside my head there is another sound.

Voices.

They whisper behind the ordinary sounds of the street.

“You are guilty,” they say.

I try to look at ordinary things. Trees. Buildings. People walking past. But each object trembles with secret meaning.

The sky itself seems alive.

“They are sending messages,” I think.

I try to explain it to Rezia.

“Do you not see?” I say quietly.

She looks at me with fear in her eyes.

“See what, Septimus?”

How can I tell her? Words are too slow.

The leaves on the trees move. Their shapes form patterns. The wind carries signals through them.

“Evans,” I whisper.

Evans was my friend in the war.

Evans is dead.

Yet sometimes I feel he is near me still.

Rezia pulls my arm.

“Please,” she says softly. “Let us walk.”

I see the pain on her face. She tries to hide it, but I see it clearly.

I am Rezia again.

He frightens me.

The man I married in Milan is disappearing little by little. When we first met he was quiet, serious, thoughtful. He worked in an office. He read books. He spoke gently.

Now he speaks to invisible things.

London feels strange to me. The buildings are heavy and grey. The people move quickly and do not look at one another.

In Italy the streets were bright. People talked loudly. They laughed. They lived in the open air.

Here I feel alone.

I look at my husband beside me.

“He must get better,” I think desperately.

We have already seen Dr. Holmes. Dr. Holmes said nothing serious was wrong. He said Septimus should take exercise. He said he should rest.

But I know something is wrong.

Sometimes Septimus sits for hours without speaking. Sometimes he suddenly cries out in terror.

This morning he said the words that filled me with fear.

“I will kill myself.”

I feel my heart tighten again when I remember it.

If people heard him say that! What would they think? What would happen to us?

I look around at the ordinary faces passing us in the street. But none of them know our secret.

“We must see another doctor,” I think.

The name comes back to me.

Sir William Bradshaw.

Everyone says he is the best doctor for such illnesses.

“He will cure Septimus,” I tell myself firmly.

We walk through Regent’s Park. The grass lies bright in the sun. Children run along the paths. Nurses push baby carriages.

The peacefulness of the park feels almost cruel.

How can everything look so calm when inside my husband’s mind there is such chaos?

Septimus sits down suddenly on a green bench beneath a tree.

He begins speaking softly to himself.
Perhaps he is speaking to Evans again.

I sit beside him.

“Look,” I say. “Look at the trees.”

The leaves move gently in the wind.

“They are alive,” he whispers.

Yes, I think. Of course they are alive.

But the way he says it frightens me.

I remember happier days.

Once we took a bus together to Hampton Court. We sat on the upper level and watched the river pass below us. The grass beside the water was full of tiny red and yellow flowers.

Septimus had laughed.

“They look like little lanterns floating on water,” he said.

We laughed together then. We invented stories about strangers we saw along the road. We were happy.

But later that day, standing beside the river, he suddenly said:

“Let us kill ourselves together.”

His eyes had been fixed on the water.

Not like a man looking at a river.

Like a man looking at something calling him.

I had grabbed his arm.

“No,” I said quickly. “No.”

Now I sit beside him on the bench and watch the leaves move above us.

“Everything will be well,” I whisper.

I am not sure whether I am speaking to him or to myself.

The clock strikes eleven somewhere far away across London.

Time continues moving.

And in another house not far from here, a different life prepares quietly for the afternoon.

I am Clarissa again.

Back in my bedroom, I place the flowers carefully in water. The scent spreads through the room.

The green dress for tonight lies across the bed.

For a moment I simply stand there looking at it.

The party will begin soon enough.

But the morning still holds its memories.

And one memory in particular refuses to leave me.

Sally Seton.

Was it really love?

The question returns again and again.

I sit down slowly.

“Perhaps it was,” I think.

And once more the long summer days at Bourton begin to open before me.

Part 5

I sit in my bedroom looking at the green dress on the bed, and the past opens again like a door.

Sally Seton.

Even saying her name inside my mind brings back a strange warmth. I take a hairpin from my hair and place it on the table. Slowly I begin to brush my hair, and as I do, the memories grow stronger.

Was it love?

I ask myself the question honestly.

Perhaps it was.

I remember how she first entered our lives at Bourton. She seemed to bring with her a storm of energy. She laughed loudly. She spoke without fear. She shocked people again and again.

The older people disapproved of her.

They said she was wild.

They said she had no manners.

They said she would come to a bad end.

But to me she seemed full of life.

I remember her riding her bicycle along the stone edge of the terrace, balancing dangerously while everyone cried out for her to stop. I remember her smoking cigarettes in the garden. I remember the way she argued with everyone.

She was foolish sometimes.

Yet I loved that foolishness.

There was something fearless in her.

Something honest.

I had never seen anyone like her before.

I brush my hair slowly, and the memory becomes clearer.

That evening at Bourton again.

The sky glowing pink above the trees.

The rooks flying in wide circles.

I had dressed carefully for dinner. My heart beat fast as I went downstairs.

“She will be there,” I had thought.

That was enough.

When you are young, feelings come with such power that the whole world seems to change. I remember feeling that the air itself was alive.

Then I saw her.

Sally stood near the door wearing a pale pink dress. She seemed to shine in the evening light. Her dark hair moved slightly as she turned her head.

I could hardly breathe.

The others were talking about music. Peter and Joseph Breitkopf were discussing Wagner again, very seriously. But none of it mattered to me.

Sally and I walked behind them.

The gravel path curved through the garden. Flowers grew in large stone pots beside the path. The evening air smelled sweet and cool.

And then it happened.

Sally stopped beside one of the stone pots.

She reached out and picked a flower.

For one moment she looked directly at me.
Then she leaned forward and kissed me.
I stop brushing my hair.
Even now the memory strikes me with its sudden brightness.
The whole world seemed to vanish.
Everyone else disappeared.
There was only Sally and me standing together in the fading light.
It felt like receiving a precious gift—something wrapped carefully in paper that you must open slowly and secretly.
But when I opened it, the light burst through the wrapping like fire.
It was revelation.
Something holy.
Something beyond words.
I place the brush down on the table.
Of course life did not remain like that.
Soon after, everything changed.
We grew older.
We moved away from Bourton.
Sally married. She became Lady Rosseter. She had children. She lived somewhere far away, surrounded by responsibilities and ordinary life.
The great brightness of that moment faded.
Yet it remains the most perfect moment I ever knew.
I stand and look again at the green dress lying across the bed.
“Strange,” I think.
How different my life became from what I imagined then.
The door opens softly.
I turn quickly.
It is my daughter Elizabeth.
She stands quietly in the doorway, tall and serious. She is nearly seventeen now.
Her face is calm, almost thoughtful in a way that surprises me sometimes.
Behind her stands Miss Kilman.

I feel a sudden tightening inside my chest.

I am polite to Miss Kilman, of course. But I cannot help disliking her. She moves heavily. She dresses poorly. Her long coat always looks damp and worn.

Yet it is not only her clothes.

There is something hard about her spirit.

Something that judges.

She looks at me now with those serious eyes, as if measuring me.

I smile politely.

“Elizabeth,” I say warmly, “you look lovely.”

Elizabeth smiles faintly.

She wears a pink dress. Around her neck hangs a necklace Richard gave her.

For a moment I see the young woman she is becoming.

She is not like me.

She is quieter.

Stronger perhaps.

She belongs to the future in a way I no longer do.

Miss Kilman speaks.

“We were about to go out,” she says.

Her voice carries that heavy seriousness I always feel around her. She speaks of religion often. She speaks of suffering and sacrifice. She believes that life must be endured rather than enjoyed.

I cannot bear it.

“Yes, yes,” I say quickly. “Do enjoy yourselves.”

Elizabeth leaves with her.

When the door closes, I feel relief.

“Why do I dislike her so much?” I ask myself.

I try to be fair.

Miss Kilman has suffered in life. During the war she lost her job because she was German. People treated her badly. She found comfort in religion.

Perhaps that explains her bitterness.

Yet whenever she enters the room, I feel as if she wishes to destroy something

in me.

“She hates me,” I think.

And perhaps she does.

The house grows quiet again.

I move toward the window and look outside.

Somewhere in the distance a clock strikes the hour.

Time continues to move forward.

And elsewhere in London another mind struggles with its own terrible memories.

I am Septimus again.

I sit beside Rezia in the park, but I am no longer in the present.

The war rises again before my eyes.

I see the trenches.

I smell the mud and smoke.

I hear the shells exploding across the fields.

And beside me I see Evans.

Evans was my officer.

My friend.

Perhaps more than a friend.

We were together constantly during the war. We talked. We argued. We laughed even there in the terrible darkness.

Sometimes we behaved like two dogs playing beside a fire.

One would growl and snap at a piece of paper. The other would lie half asleep watching the flames.

That was our friendship.

Strong.

Simple.

Alive.

Then Evans died.

A shell exploded near him shortly before the war ended.

And when it happened, I felt nothing.

Nothing.

That is the crime I cannot forgive.

I should have cried.

I should have broken down with grief.

But instead I remained calm.

I even felt proud of myself.

“I have become a man,” I thought then.

But later the guilt came.

Now the guilt lives inside me like a living thing.

At night when I wake, it rises beside my bed.

It points at me with accusing fingers.

“You felt nothing,” it says.

“You are empty.”

The voices laugh.

They call me a coward.

They call me a liar.

The sun shines through the leaves above the bench.

Rezia touches my arm again.

But she cannot see what I see.

She cannot hear what I hear.

Evans stands somewhere nearby.

Waiting.

Part 6

I leave the window and look once more at the green dress lying on the bed. The house is quiet for a moment, but the quiet is full of small movements. Somewhere downstairs Lucy is speaking with one of the servants. Doors open and close softly. Plates touch each other in the kitchen.

Tonight the house will be full.

I pick up the dress and hold it against myself, looking in the mirror. The fabric

is light. It falls easily around the body. I remember the doctor telling me once that I must not become too tired. My heart, he said, must not be strained.

“Nonsense,” I think.

Still, sometimes I feel it. A small weakness. A reminder that life is fragile.

I lay the dress down again and move toward the window.

Outside the sky is pale and bright. The city continues as it always does—cabs passing, voices rising and fading, footsteps crossing the pavement.

How strange that everything goes on.

Even when a life ends.

I shake away the thought quickly.

“No,” I tell myself. “Today is beautiful.”

The memory of Bourton returns again, softer now.

The long garden paths.

The sound of bees moving through flowers.

Peter walking beside me, always speaking, always questioning everything.

I smile a little when I think of him.

“How he loved to argue,” I think.

He would walk up and down the terrace, pulling out that little pocket-knife of his, opening and closing it while he spoke. His dark eyes would flash with impatience.

“Clarissa,” he would say, “you care too much about society. Too much about what people think.”

And I would answer him sharply.

“You care too little,” I would say.

We were always fighting.

Yet there were moments when we understood each other completely.

That is what made everything so painful in the end.

I turn away from the window and begin to straighten the room. Small tasks calm the mind. I fold a scarf, move a book, close a drawer.

Suddenly I hear a sound on the stairs.

Footsteps.

They pause outside my door.
I feel a quick irritation.
“Who can it be?” I think.
“At eleven o’clock in the morning, on the very day of my party!”
The handle of the door moves.
I feel strangely shy, as if I must hide the dress, as if someone were about to discover a secret.
The door opens.
A man enters.
For one second I cannot remember his name.
I feel shock, delight, confusion all at once.
“Peter!”
I am Peter Walsh.
I stand inside the room looking at her.
Clarissa.
She has grown older.
Of course she has. So have I.
But still—something in her remains the same. The light movement of her body, the quick turning of her head.
She seems smaller than I remembered.
I feel my hands tremble slightly.
“How are you?” I say.
I take her hands in mine and kiss them.
When I sit down, I cannot help thinking:
“She has grown old.”
I do not say it aloud. That would be cruel.
Instead I look around the room. The furniture is elegant. The objects are carefully arranged. Everything speaks of comfort and order.
The house of Richard Dalloway.
I feel a sudden sharpness inside my chest.
“So this is her life,” I think.

Clarissa looks at me closely.

I am Clarissa again.

Seeing Peter sitting there is like seeing a ghost from another life.

The years disappear for a moment.

“Do you remember the lake?” I say suddenly.

The words rise out of my heart before I can stop them. Something inside me tightens as I speak.

I see his face change slightly.

“Yes,” he answers. “Of course I remember.”

But I know what he is thinking.

“Why bring that up?” he thinks.

I can almost hear him shouting silently.

“Do not bring back the past!”

Yet the past rises between us anyway.

Peter shifts in his chair. I see his fingers move restlessly toward his pocket.

He pulls out the old pocket-knife.

Of course.

Some habits never change.

I watch him open and close the blade slowly.

I am Peter again.

She wants to drag the past out of the water like some old heavy object.

“The lake,” she says.

Does she not understand that such memories still hurt?

I feel anger rising in me.

I want to shout.

“Stop! Leave it buried!”

But I say nothing.

Instead I look around the room again.

The polished table.

The decorated paper-knife.

The small silver objects.

The carved chair legs.
Everything is perfect.
And suddenly I think with bitter clarity:
“Compared to all this, I am a failure.”
Yes.
I admit it.
In the eyes of these people—the Dalloways and their friends—I am a failure.
My life has wandered.
I left Oxford without finishing my studies.
I went to India.
I married badly.
I failed again and again.
And now here I sit in this perfect room.
Clarissa watches me quietly.
I realize she is waiting for me to speak.
I feel a sudden impulse.
Perhaps I will tell her everything.
Perhaps I will speak honestly for once.
“I am in love,” I say.
The words come out before I can stop them.
Clarissa sits very still.
I see the light in her eyes change slightly.
“He is in love,” she thinks.
Not with me.
Of course not with me.
With someone young.
Someone new.
“Who is she?” I ask.
My voice sounds calm, but my hands tremble slightly where they hold the
fabric of the dress.
Peter hesitates.

“She is married,” he says at last.

“Her husband is a Major in the Indian Army.”

He continues slowly.

“She has two children.”

I understand immediately.

He has returned to England to arrange a divorce.

The old pattern repeats itself.

I feel a strange mixture of emotions.

Amusement.

Pity.

And something else.

“How foolish he is,” I think.

Yet he is still my Peter.

And he is in love.

I look at him more gently now.

The room grows quiet between us.

Outside, London continues to move.

But inside the small room two people sit surrounded by memories that have never truly disappeared.

Part 7

I sit with the green silk dress across my knees. The needle still rests in the cloth where I had stopped sewing. My hands are very still, but inside my mind thoughts move quickly.

“He is in love,” I think again.

Peter Walsh—my Peter from those long summers at Bourton—has come all the way from India because he is in love with another woman.

Not with me.

Of course not.

I feel something strange in my chest. It is not exactly pain. It is not exactly relief

either.

Perhaps it is both.

I am Clarissa.

I look at him carefully now.

His hair is thinner. There are lines beside his eyes. His clothes look slightly worn. He sits forward in the chair, restless, opening and closing the small pocket-knife again and again.

How familiar the movement is.

“He has not changed,” I think.

Yet everything has changed.

“What is her name?” I ask quietly.

Peter shifts in his seat.

“Daisy,” he says.

The name sounds soft and distant.

He begins explaining quickly, almost defensively.

“She is young,” he says. “Very beautiful. She understands me.”

His voice becomes faster.

“Her husband is a Major. A dreadful man. A brutal fellow. She has suffered terribly.”

I listen without interrupting.

Inside my mind another voice speaks.

“What a waste,” I think.

Peter has always rushed from one great passion to another. At Oxford there was trouble. Then the marriage to the woman he met on the ship to India. Now this.

“How foolish he is,” I think again.

And yet—there he sits before me, trembling slightly with excitement, his eyes shining.

He is alive.

That has always been his gift.

I am Peter again.

I can see what she is thinking.

Clarissa always hides her thoughts behind calm politeness. But I know her too well.

She thinks I am ridiculous.

She thinks I have wasted my life.

And perhaps she is right.

But I cannot stop myself.

“I love her,” I repeat stubbornly.

Clarissa does not laugh.

She only watches me.

Something about her calmness makes me uneasy.

I feel suddenly exposed.

My hand moves again to the pocket-knife.

I begin cleaning my fingernails with the blade.

It is a childish habit, perhaps, but it gives my hands something to do.

Inside my head another thought grows stronger.

“They think I am a failure,” I tell myself.

The Dalloways and their friends. All their polished rooms, their perfect furniture, their quiet success.

Compared with all that—yes—I am a failure.

The thought hits me with sudden force.

Before I realize what is happening, my chest tightens.

My eyes fill with tears.

I begin to cry.

Not quietly.

Not politely.

I cry like a child.

The tears run down my face. I cannot stop them.

I feel ashamed, but the shame cannot stop the crying.

I sit there in the chair, weeping.

Clarissa leans forward quickly.

I am Clarissa again.

For one moment the sight of Peter crying shocks me deeply.

This man—who once seemed so strong, so fierce in his judgments—now sits before me helpless, tears running down his face.

My heart softens immediately.

I reach for his hand.

“Peter,” I say softly.

I pull him toward me.

I kiss him.

For a moment the years disappear.

I feel the warmth of his face close to mine.

Something inside my chest trembles violently—like tall silver reeds bending in a tropical storm.

Then slowly the feeling settles again.

I release his hand gently.

I tap his knee lightly, almost playfully.

Suddenly everything feels easier.

Being with him again is strangely comfortable.

The tension disappears.

And then a sudden thought flashes through my mind.

“If I had married him,” I think, “would life have felt like this all the time?”

The thought surprises me.

I do not answer it.

Peter wipes his face roughly.

He stands up suddenly.

“I must go,” he says.

He cannot bear the room any longer.

I am Peter again.

I move quickly toward the door.

If I stay another minute, I will break completely.

Clarissa’s house—her calmness—her life—everything presses against me.

I must escape.

I reach the hallway and start down the stairs.
Behind me I hear her voice.
“Peter! Peter!”
I turn halfway on the staircase.
She has followed me to the landing.
She leans forward slightly, raising her voice above the noise of traffic outside.
“My party tonight!” she calls. “Do not forget!”
I hear the words faintly.
At that moment the street outside roars with passing vehicles. A clock begins striking somewhere nearby.
The sounds swallow her voice.
By the time I step out the door, her words reach me only as a distant echo.
I walk quickly along the pavement.
The city surrounds me again.
London is enormous.
Crowds pass on every side.
For a few minutes I walk without direction.
My mind returns to the past.
Bourton.
The evening when I first saw Richard Dalloway.
I remember the moment perfectly.
Dinner was nearly finished. I looked across the table at Clarissa. She was speaking to a young man sitting beside her.
Suddenly a thought flashed through my mind.
“She will marry him.”
I did not even know the man’s name.
Yet I knew it instantly.
That same afternoon the young man had arrived at Bourton.
Someone introduced him.
Clarissa accidentally called him “Wickham,” the name of a character from a novel.

Everyone laughed.
The young man corrected her politely.
“My name is Dalloway,” he said.
That was the first time I saw Richard.
He was tall, fair-haired, slightly awkward.
Sally Seton later joked about it constantly.
She called him “Mr. My-name-is-Dalloway.”
I walk slowly through the streets now, remembering.
The memory grows clearer.
Clarissa later came toward me with that perfect social grace she always had.
“I would like to introduce someone,” she said.
Her voice sounded almost formal.
I felt anger rising inside me.
Yet at the same time I admired her.
Her courage.
Her talent for dealing with people.
“Perfect hostess,” I had said deliberately.
The words struck her like a blow.
I had meant them to.
Because from that moment on I wanted to hurt her.
She was slipping away from me.
And I knew it.

Part 8

I walk quickly through the streets after leaving Clarissa’s house. The air feels warm and bright. Traffic moves steadily around me. Buses pass. Taxis turn corners. People hurry along the pavement.

London always seems to move with great confidence.

I slow my steps and look around.

Shops open their doors. Clerks arrange goods in the windows. Women stop to

examine hats and dresses. The city is full of energy.

Yet inside my mind I still hear Clarissa's voice.

"My party tonight!"

I stop for a moment beside a shop window.

The glass reflects my face faintly.

I look older than I feel.

"What am I doing here?" I ask myself.

The question feels large and difficult.

I had come to England with a purpose. I had come to arrange the divorce for Daisy. I had come to begin a new life.

Yet after seeing Clarissa again, everything feels uncertain.

I move away from the window and continue walking.

The memory of Bourton rises once more.

Those long summer days.

The arguments.

The laughter.

Sally Seton smoking cigarettes in the garden.

Clarissa walking across the lawn in the early morning light.

I remember the terrible evening when everything ended.

The broken fountain.

The silence between us.

Her words.

"It is over."

I had wanted to shout.

I had wanted to beg.

But pride stopped me.

Pride and anger.

Now, years later, I realize how foolish that pride was.

I shake my head and continue walking.

Gradually the streets grow greener. Trees appear along the paths. I have reached Regent's Park.

The park is full of people enjoying the sun.
Children run across the grass. Nurses push baby carriages. Old men sit quietly
on benches reading newspapers.
The peacefulness surprises me.
I sit down on a bench and watch the people passing.
A young woman walks past with a baby in her arms.
Two boys chase each other across the path, shouting with laughter.
Somewhere nearby a dog barks.
I feel strangely calm.
“Life continues,” I think.
Even when love fails.
Even when dreams collapse.
The world continues.
I close my eyes for a moment.
When I open them again, I notice a young couple sitting not far away.
The man sits stiffly on the bench, staring ahead. His face looks pale and tense.
Beside him sits a small dark-haired woman. She speaks gently to him, touching
his arm from time to time.
I watch them with curiosity.
Something about the man’s expression catches my attention.
He looks as if he is listening to something that no one else can hear.
I do not know his name.
His name is Septimus Warren Smith.
I am Septimus.
The trees above me move slowly in the wind.
Their leaves whisper together.
The sound carries meaning.
I know it does.
“Look,” I whisper.
Rezia leans toward me.
“Look at the leaves.”

They move in patterns. The branches bend and straighten again.
Messages travel through them.
The whole world is speaking.
But the people around us do not understand.
They sit quietly on benches, reading newspapers or feeding birds.
They are blind.
I feel a terrible pressure inside my chest.
“I must tell someone,” I think.
The truth must be spoken.
But the words will not come.
I am Rezia again.
I watch my husband’s face carefully.
His eyes move strangely, following the leaves above us. His lips move as if he
is speaking to someone who is not there.
My heart tightens with fear.
“Septimus,” I say softly.
He does not answer.
I try again.
“Septimus, please look at me.”
Slowly he turns his head.
For a moment his eyes focus on my face.
Then they drift away again.
I feel tears rising.
“This cannot continue,” I think.
Something must be done.
I remember the name again.
Sir William Bradshaw.
Everyone says he understands such illnesses.
He will know what to do.
I grip Septimus’s arm firmly.
“We will see another doctor,” I tell him.

He says nothing.
Perhaps he does not even hear me.
A sudden loud sound cuts through the air.
An airplane passes high above the park.
Its engine roars.
Everyone looks up.
Children point excitedly.
The airplane moves slowly across the blue sky, leaving behind a thin line of white smoke.
The smoke begins to form letters.
Advertising letters.
The people in the park try to read them.
“K...R...” someone says.
“No—T...O...”
The letters dissolve and change as the smoke spreads.
I watch the sky carefully.
The message is important.
It must be important.
The letters form shapes again.
They tremble in the sunlight.
“They are writing to me,” I think.
The sky itself speaks.
Around us people laugh and point.
But they do not understand the message.
Only I understand.
I feel the truth growing larger inside me.
Rezia pulls at my sleeve again.
“Come,” she says quietly.
“Let us walk.”
But I cannot move.
The message in the sky is not finished yet.

The smoke letters stretch and twist above the park.

The whole world seems to pause while the sky writes its secret across the morning air.

Part 9

The airplane moves slowly across the sky above Regent's Park. Its engine roars loudly, and behind it a white trail of smoke spreads through the blue air.

People in the park stop walking.

Heads tilt upward.

Children point with excitement.

"Look!" someone shouts.

The smoke begins to form letters.

At first the shapes are unclear. They twist and stretch in the wind. But gradually the letters grow larger.

Everyone tries to read them.

"K...R..." a man says uncertainly.

"No, it is T...O..." another answers.

The smoke shifts again.

The letters dissolve and reform.

The whole park seems to wait.

I am Septimus.

The sky burns with meaning.

The letters speak directly to me. I know they do.

The world itself is writing its message across the air.

The trees whisper beneath it.

The birds circle.

The sunlight trembles on the leaves.

Everything connects.

"They are signaling," I think.

My heart begins beating faster.

I must understand.
The shapes in the sky twist again.
“T...O...F...F...”
Someone nearby laughs.
“It is an advertisement,” he says.
Of course.
Advertising.
That is what ordinary people see.
But they do not understand.
The true meaning hides beneath the letters.
I lean forward slightly, staring upward.
The sky is full of voices.
I am Rezia again.
I see the way my husband stares at the sky.
His face is pale.
His lips move silently.
Around us the other people in the park laugh and point. They try to read the
smoke letters.
But none of them look frightened.
Only Septimus looks frightened.
My fear grows stronger.
“Septimus,” I whisper.
He does not answer.
I touch his arm.
“Let us go.”
The airplane moves farther away. The letters begin to break apart in the wind.
The white smoke spreads into soft clouds.
The message disappears.
The crowd slowly returns to its ordinary business.
People begin walking again.
Nurses push their baby carriages along the paths.

Children chase each other through the grass.
The moment fades.
But the fear remains.
I stand up and pull gently at Septimus's sleeve.
"Come," I say again.
At last he rises from the bench.
We begin walking slowly along the path.
Meanwhile, in another part of the city, another mind drifts through its own thoughts.
I am Peter again.
I remain sitting on the bench in the park long after the airplane disappears.
The peaceful scene around me feels strangely distant.
Clarissa fills my thoughts.
Clarissa at Bourton.
Clarissa this morning in her quiet room.
Clarissa with the green dress across her knees.
I shake my head slightly.
"Why do I still care?" I ask myself.
After all these years.
After all the failures and disappointments of my life.
Yet I know the answer.
Because some people remain part of us forever.
Clarissa is one of those people.
I stand up slowly and begin walking through the park.
The sunlight falls gently across the grass.
I pass a group of young girls laughing together.
Their voices remind me of Sally Seton.
Sally with her wild laughter.
Sally balancing along the stone terrace.
Sally shocking everyone with her courage.
I smile at the memory.

Life seemed so large then.
So full of possibilities.
Now everything feels smaller.
Yet perhaps that is not entirely sad.
I walk toward the edge of the park.
The streets of London appear again beyond the trees.
Buses move along the road.
Crowds gather at the corners.
The city continues its endless motion.
I feel suddenly curious about the people around me.
Their lives.
Their secrets.
Every face that passes must carry its own story.
A woman with a parcel under her arm.
A clerk hurrying toward his office.
A child holding his mother's hand.
Thousands of lives moving together through the city.
And somewhere among them, Clarissa prepares for her party.
I imagine the evening already.
The lights shining through the windows of her house.
Guests arriving.
Conversations beginning.
I see her standing at the top of the stairs greeting everyone with that calm smile.
Perfect hostess.
The words return to me again.
I had meant them as an insult once.
Now they seem almost like praise.
Perhaps that is her true gift.
Bringing people together.
Creating a place where lives touch each other for a moment.
I cross the street and continue walking.

The day grows warmer.
The city grows louder.
Somewhere a clock strikes the half hour.
Time moves forward steadily.
And across London, different lives continue to move toward the same evening.
Clarissa with her preparations.
Septimus with his troubled mind.
Rezia with her growing fear.
And I, Peter Walsh, wandering through the bright streets of the city, carrying
the past quietly beside me.

Part 10

Septimus and Rezia walk slowly along the path in Regent's Park. The grass shines in the sunlight. Children shout in the distance. A nurse pushes a baby carriage past them.

To anyone watching, they might appear to be an ordinary young couple taking a morning walk.

But nothing feels ordinary to them.

I am Rezia.

I hold my husband's arm firmly as we walk.

"We must see Sir William Bradshaw," I repeat to myself.

Dr. Holmes said there was nothing seriously wrong. He said Septimus should take long walks and enjoy the fresh air.

But I know Dr. Holmes is wrong.

Something terrible is happening to my husband.

When we first met in Milan he was quiet and thoughtful. He liked books. He spoke kindly to me. We laughed together often.

Now he speaks to invisible things.

He listens to voices no one else can hear.

I look at him again as we walk.

His eyes move strangely. Sometimes he stops suddenly as if he has heard a call.
I feel helpless.
“We must see Sir William,” I say aloud.
Septimus does not answer.
He walks beside me like a man moving through a dream.
I am Septimus.
The world trembles with secret meaning.
The leaves on the trees whisper.
The sky sends signals.
Even the pavement beneath my feet feels alive.
Yet the people around me walk calmly as if nothing unusual is happening.
They cannot hear the voices.
They cannot see the signs.
I feel both proud and terrified.
Proud because I understand the truth.
Terrified because the truth is too large.
Evans stands nearby.
I feel his presence.
He died in the war, yet he stands beside the path as clearly as any living man.
“Do not be afraid,” he seems to say.
But I am afraid.
The voices accuse me.
They say I did not feel enough when he died.
They say I am guilty.
I try to speak.
The words come slowly.
“Rezia,” I say.
She turns toward me at once.
Her eyes are full of worry.
“Yes?”
I struggle to explain.

“Men must not cut down trees,” I whisper.

She stares at me in confusion.

“What do you mean?”

I shake my head.

The meaning is too large for words.

The trees are alive.

They suffer.

Everything suffers.

Yet people continue with their ordinary lives as if the world were simple.

We reach the edge of the park.

The traffic of London rushes past again.

Buses roar.

Motor cars honk.

The noise strikes my head like hammer blows.

I close my eyes briefly.

Rezia grips my arm more tightly.

“Come,” she says.

“We will go home.”

Meanwhile, in another house across the city, Richard Dalloway prepares to return home for lunch.

I am Richard.

I walk slowly through the streets near Westminster after leaving the meeting of my committee.

The morning sun warms the buildings. The air smells faintly of dust and flowers.

I carry a small bouquet in my hand.

Red roses.

I bought them suddenly while passing a flower shop.

They are for Clarissa.

I feel slightly foolish carrying them.

After all these years of marriage, it seems unnecessary to bring flowers home.

Yet the thought came to me strongly.

“I will give them to her,” I decided.

“I will tell her that I love her.”

The idea surprises me even now.

I have never spoken those words to Clarissa.

Not once.

We have been married for many years. We share a house, a daughter, a life.

Yet the words themselves have never been spoken.

I feel awkward thinking about it.

But today the thought remains.

“I will say it,” I tell myself again.

I walk toward home.

The streets near our house are quieter. The buildings stand tall and solid.
Policemen watch the traffic at the corners.

I climb the steps and enter the house.

Lucy greets me in the hallway.

“Mrs. Dalloway is upstairs, sir,” she says.

I thank her and begin climbing the stairs.

As I reach the landing, I pause.

My heart beats slightly faster.

“I will say it now,” I think.

I knock lightly and open the door.

Clarissa stands near the window.

The room smells of fresh flowers.

She turns and smiles when she sees me.

For a moment the words almost come.

“Clarissa, I love you.”

They rise to my lips.

But suddenly I feel embarrassed.

The words seem too large.

Too serious.

Instead I hold out the roses.

“I brought these for you,” I say simply.
Clarissa takes them with delight.
“Richard!” she says warmly.
Her happiness fills the room.
Yet the words I planned to say remain unspoken.
I feel both relieved and disappointed.
Clarissa places the roses among the other flowers.
The colors brighten the room.
“How lovely they are,” she says.
I watch her for a moment.
She moves lightly through the room, arranging the flowers carefully.
I feel a deep affection for her.
But the words remain locked inside my chest.
Instead we begin speaking about ordinary things.
The party tonight.
Our daughter Elizabeth.
The small events of the day.
Outside the window London continues moving.
And somewhere far away in the city, another life moves slowly toward its final crisis.

Part 11

Richard sits down in the chair beside the table while I arrange the roses in water.
The red petals open softly in the sunlight. They glow among the other flowers I brought home from Bond Street.
“They are beautiful,” I say again.
Richard smiles quietly.
I am Clarissa.
I know him so well that I understand what he has not said.
Something had been on his mind when he entered the room. I could see it in

the way he held the flowers, in the slight hesitation in his voice.

He had wanted to say something more.

But he did not.

That is Richard's way.

We do not often speak of deep feelings. Our life together moves gently, calmly.

We share our days without searching too deeply into each other's hearts.

Perhaps that is why our marriage works.

Too much passion can destroy peace.

Still, I know what he meant when he brought the roses.

I place them carefully into the vase.

"Thank you," I say softly.

Richard clears his throat slightly.

"How are the preparations for the party?" he asks.

We begin speaking of practical things.

Lucy will arrange the tables.

The servants will bring extra chairs into the drawing room.

The cook is already preparing the food.

Richard listens patiently.

I see that he enjoys these quiet domestic conversations.

Yet suddenly I remember something.

"Peter Walsh came this morning," I say.

Richard looks surprised.

"Peter?" he repeats.

"Yes."

I feel a strange mixture of excitement and nervousness as I explain.

"He has returned from India."

Richard nods slowly.

"Ah," he says.

I can almost see the thoughts moving through his mind.

Peter has always been a complicated presence in our lives.

Richard knows the history between us.

Yet he never speaks of it directly.
That is another reason our marriage survives.
He trusts me.
And I trust him.
Richard rises from the chair.
“I must return to my office,” he says.
He glances once more at the flowers.
Then he leaves the room.
I watch the door close behind him.
The house grows quiet again.
For a moment I stand completely still.
The morning has been full of memories.
Peter.
Sally.
Bourton.
It feels as if many different lives are moving inside my mind at once.
Yet the present calls me back.
Tonight there will be guests.
I begin moving around the room again, straightening small objects, checking
the arrangements.
Meanwhile, far across the city, another household struggles with fear.
I am Rezia.
Septimus and I sit in our small room.
The curtains move slightly in the warm air from the window.
The room feels too quiet.
Too empty.
Septimus sits at the table with paper in front of him.
His pencil moves slowly across the page.
He is writing.
I watch him carefully.
“What are you writing?” I ask.

He does not answer.
His hand continues moving.
At last he speaks softly.
“It must be written down,” he says.
His voice sounds distant.
I feel afraid again.
Since the war he has changed completely.
At first the doctors said he only needed rest.
Then they said he must work.
Then they said he must forget the war.
But he cannot forget.
Sometimes he wakes in the night shouting.
Sometimes he sits silently for hours staring at nothing.
I stand beside the table.
“Septimus,” I say gently.
“Look at me.”
Slowly he raises his head.
His eyes look strange.
Too bright.
Too full of something I cannot understand.
“I have committed a crime,” he says.
My heart jumps.
“What crime?”
He stares at the paper again.
“I felt nothing when Evans died.”
The name fills the room with silence.
Evans.
The friend who died during the war.
I have heard the story many times.
Septimus believes his lack of grief was a terrible sin.
But I know it was only shock.

Men often feel nothing during war.
The horror is too great.
I place my hand gently on his shoulder.
“It was the war,” I say softly.
“It was not your fault.”
But he shakes his head.
“The voices know,” he whispers.
“They accuse me.”
My fear grows stronger.
The voices again.
I look around the small room helplessly.
“We must see Sir William Bradshaw,” I think.
He will understand.
He must understand.
I speak firmly now.
“Septimus, we will visit Sir William this afternoon.”
He does not protest.
He only sits quietly.
That frightens me even more.
Because sometimes silence means he is slipping further away from the world.
Outside our window London moves through its ordinary afternoon.
Carriages pass.
Voices rise from the street.
Life continues everywhere.
But inside this small room a terrible struggle grows stronger.
And no one outside knows it is happening.

Part 12

The afternoon sun begins to move slowly across London.
Inside Clarissa’s house the preparations for the evening continue. Servants walk

quietly through the rooms carrying trays and dishes. Chairs are moved into new positions. Glasses are polished until they shine.

The house waits for the party.

I am Clarissa.

I stand in the drawing room looking around carefully.

Everything must be perfect.

The flowers are placed on the tables. The chairs are arranged so that small groups of people may sit together comfortably. The windows are open slightly so the evening air can enter later.

I move slowly through the room, checking each detail.

“Will they enjoy themselves?” I wonder.

The success of the evening matters deeply to me.

A party is not simply an entertainment.

It is something more delicate.

When people gather together, something invisible happens between them. Conversations begin. Old friendships return. New connections appear.

Life moves from one person to another.

I feel responsible for that moment.

“It must work,” I think.

Yet even while I plan the evening, my thoughts return again and again to the past.

Peter Walsh.

Seeing him this morning opened old memories that I believed were finished.

Bourton.

The garden.

Sally Seton.

For a moment I feel the same sudden excitement I felt long ago.

Then the feeling fades again.

Life changes.

People change.

Sally is now Lady Rosseter with five sons.

Peter is chasing another impossible love in India.

And I am Mrs. Richard Dalloway preparing for a party.

I smile slightly at the thought.

“So be it,” I tell myself.

Meanwhile, in another part of the city, a young couple prepares to visit a famous doctor.

I am Rezia.

Septimus and I leave the house together.

The afternoon feels heavy and warm.

The streets seem louder than usual. Buses roar past. People hurry along the pavements. The city feels impatient.

Septimus walks beside me in silence.

I hold his arm gently but firmly.

“We will see Sir William Bradshaw,” I repeat inside my mind.

Everyone says he is the greatest doctor for nervous illnesses.

He will know what to do.

He must know.

We reach the large house where his office is located.

The building is tall and elegant. The door is polished. A servant opens it quietly when we ring the bell.

We enter a quiet waiting room.

The carpet is thick.

The chairs are large and comfortable.

Everything smells faintly of medicine and polished wood.

A nurse asks our names and tells us to wait.

Septimus sits down beside me.

His hands rest loosely on his knees.

His face looks calm now.

Too calm.

I feel uneasy.

Minutes pass slowly.

The silence in the room feels heavy.
Finally the door opens.
A tall man enters.
His hair is grey.
His face is serious.
This is Sir William Bradshaw.
I am Sir William.
I study the young couple carefully as they enter my office.
The man looks thin and nervous.
His eyes move restlessly.
The woman beside him looks frightened but determined.
I have seen many such cases.
The war left behind thousands of nervous men.
Many suffer from what people now call “shell shock.”
But my duty is clear.
Balance must be restored.
Discipline must be restored.
Society cannot function if individuals lose control of themselves.
I ask the usual questions.
“What troubles you?”
The young man speaks slowly.
His words move strangely from subject to subject.
Trees.
Voices.
Guilt.
Messages in the sky.
I listen carefully.
The case is clear.
The man suffers from severe nervous disorder.
He must be removed from ordinary life for a time.
“Rest is necessary,” I say firmly.

The woman leans forward anxiously.

“Will he recover?”

I answer calmly.

“With proper treatment, yes.”

I explain my plan.

The patient must spend time in one of my special homes.

There he will rest quietly.

There he will be separated from all disturbing influences.

Complete rest.

Silence.

Order.

The woman looks alarmed.

“But he cannot be alone!” she says quickly.

I remain calm.

Emotion must not interfere with treatment.

“It is necessary,” I explain.

“Only in quiet isolation can the mind regain balance.”

The young man suddenly speaks.

I am Septimus again.

The doctor’s voice fills the room.

His words press against my mind like heavy stones.

“Rest.”

“Isolation.”

“Discipline.”

I understand the meaning immediately.

They want to take away my freedom.

They want to lock me in a place where the voices cannot be heard.

But the voices are the truth.

Evans stands beside the window watching.

I cannot betray the truth.

The doctor continues speaking.

His calm voice becomes unbearable.

Something inside me begins to break.

I sit very still.

But inside my mind a terrible decision begins to form.

The world outside the office continues quietly.

Carriages pass.

People walk through the streets.

London moves steadily toward the evening.

And far away, in a bright house filled with flowers, Clarissa Dalloway continues preparing for her party, unaware that another life in the same city is moving slowly toward tragedy.

Part 13

Septimus and Rezia leave Sir William Bradshaw's office in silence.

The afternoon light outside feels harsh after the quiet darkness of the doctor's rooms. Carriages pass along the street. A bus roars by with a loud rattle. People move quickly across the pavement.

London continues as always.

Yet for us everything has changed.

I am Rezia.

My heart feels heavy as we walk.

Sir William spoke calmly and confidently, but his words frightened me deeply.

A special home.

Isolation.

Rest away from ordinary life.

That means taking Septimus away from me.

I look at him anxiously as we walk.

"What are you thinking?" I ask softly.

He does not answer.

His face looks pale and distant.

I feel a sudden wave of anger.
Why must everything become so difficult?
Why must the war follow us even now?
We return slowly to our small apartment.
The building stands quietly on a narrow street. The rooms inside are simple but comfortable.
I open the door and let Septimus enter first.
The familiar furniture greets us.
The table.
The chairs.
The small window looking onto the street.
Everything feels strangely fragile.
I remove my hat and sit down heavily.
“We will be all right,” I say aloud, though I am not sure whether I believe it.
Septimus stands by the window.
He looks down at the street below.
I am Septimus.
The doctor’s voice still echoes in my mind.
“Isolation.”
“Rest.”
“Discipline.”
They want to silence me.
They want to shut away the truth.
But the truth cannot be hidden.
The world speaks constantly.
The leaves whisper.
The sky sends messages.
Evans stands near me again.
I feel his presence clearly.
He watches quietly, waiting.
My heart begins beating faster.

I understand something now.
There is only one escape.
If they take me away, they will destroy the truth.
I cannot allow that.
I turn slowly from the window.
Rezia sits at the table sewing quietly.
She believes everything will improve.
She believes the doctors will cure me.
But she does not understand.
I love her.
Yet even love cannot save me.
I am Rezia again.
I sew carefully at the table.
My hands move automatically through the cloth.
I must remain calm.
If I panic, everything will become worse.
“We will make a hat together later,” I say gently.
“You always enjoy making hats.”
Sometimes such simple tasks help Septimus feel better.
For a moment he sits beside me.
We begin working quietly together.
I feel hope returning.
Perhaps the doctor will help after all.
Perhaps this terrible period will pass.
But suddenly there is a knock on the door.
I look up quickly.
The landlady enters.
“Dr. Holmes is coming,” she says cheerfully.
My heart sinks.
Dr. Holmes.
Septimus dislikes him deeply.

The doctor always says nothing serious is wrong.
He laughs too loudly.
He speaks as if everything is simple.
I glance at Septimus.
His face has changed again.
His eyes widen with fear.
I am Septimus.
Dr. Holmes.
The name strikes me like a blow.
He represents everything that wishes to silence me.
His heavy footsteps approach the door.
I feel trapped.
The room suddenly seems very small.
Evans stands beside the wall watching silently.
There is only one escape.
I look at the open window.
The air moves gently through the curtains.
Freedom lies beyond it.
Rezia turns toward me.
“Septimus?” she says nervously.
I step backward slowly.
The door begins to open.
Dr. Holmes’s voice sounds in the hallway.
“Now then! What is all this nonsense?”
The voice grows louder.
My decision becomes clear.
I must preserve the truth.
I must escape their control.
I move toward the window.
Rezia cries out.
“Septimus! No!”

But it is already too late.
I climb onto the sill.
For one final moment I feel the warm air of the afternoon on my face.
Evans stands beside me.
The world below rushes upward.
Then everything becomes silent.
In another part of London the afternoon continues quietly.
Clarissa Dalloway sits in her drawing room speaking with Lucy about the arrangements for the evening.
She knows nothing yet of the tragedy that has just occurred.
The city moves steadily toward night.
And toward the party that will bring so many lives together for a single moment.

Part 14

Evening slowly settles over London.
The warm light of the afternoon fades. Lamps begin to glow behind the windows of houses. Carriages move through the streets carrying people toward dinners and gatherings.
In Clarissa Dalloway's house the servants move quickly through the rooms.
Glasses are arranged.
Plates are placed carefully on tables.
The flowers shine softly in the lamplight.
The party is about to begin.
I am Clarissa.
I stand in my bedroom before the mirror.
The green dress lies smoothly across my shoulders. The fabric moves gently when I breathe.
I adjust the flowers in my hair.
For a moment I study my reflection carefully.
Fifty-one years old.

The face in the mirror shows both strength and fragility.
Life has left its marks.
Yet something remains.
Something bright.
Something determined.
“It will be a good evening,” I say softly.
I take a deep breath and leave the room.
The first guests have already begun arriving.
Voices rise in the hallway.
Coats are handed to the servants.
Laughter fills the drawing room.
I walk down the stairs slowly.
At the bottom I pause for a moment.
This is always the most important moment.
The beginning.
I step forward to greet my guests.
“How delightful to see you!” I say warmly.
One by one they arrive.
Friends.
Politicians.
Neighbors.
Old acquaintances.
The room fills quickly with voices and movement.
Richard stands nearby speaking with several important men.
My daughter Elizabeth moves quietly through the crowd with Miss Kilman.
The party begins to live.
Meanwhile Peter Walsh also moves toward the house.
I am Peter.
I arrive a little later than the others.
The evening air feels cool now.
The lights of Clarissa’s house shine warmly through the windows.

I pause for a moment outside the door.
A strange nervousness rises inside me.
“Why am I so anxious?” I wonder.
I have attended many parties in my life.
Yet this one feels different.
I ring the bell.
The servant opens the door.
I enter.
The house glows with light and voices.
The drawing room is already crowded.
I see familiar faces everywhere.
Old friends.
Politicians.
Society ladies.
Clarissa moves gracefully through the room greeting everyone.
For a moment I simply watch her.
She moves lightly among the guests, speaking, smiling, connecting one group
of people with another.
Perfect hostess.
The words return again.
But now they feel like admiration rather than criticism.
She has created something here.
Something delicate.
A small world where many lives meet.
Suddenly a new group enters the room.
Among them stands Sir William Bradshaw.
I do not notice him at first.
But Clarissa does.
I am Clarissa again.
Sir William Bradshaw enters with his wife.
I greet them politely.

He begins speaking about his day.
His voice sounds calm and professional.
Yet suddenly he mentions something unusual.
“A very unfortunate case today,” he says.
I listen with polite attention.
“A young man suffering from nervous illness,” he continues.
“He threw himself from a window this afternoon.”
The words strike me with unexpected force.
The room continues buzzing with conversation.
No one else seems deeply affected.
Yet inside me something stops.
A young man.
Dead.
Alone.
I feel suddenly overwhelmed.
The laughter around me becomes distant.
The lights seem too bright.
I excuse myself quietly and move toward a small empty room nearby.
I close the door behind me.
The noise of the party becomes softer.
I stand alone in the quiet room.
The story of the young man fills my mind.
Why did he do it?
What terror drove him to such a final act?
I feel strangely connected to him.
Though I never knew him.
Though he lived an entirely different life.
Yet something about his decision speaks to me deeply.
He refused something.
Perhaps he refused the pressure of the world.
Perhaps he refused the control of doctors.

Perhaps he simply chose freedom.
The thought shocks me.
But it also fills me with strange admiration.
Life can become heavy.
Society demands many things.
Sometimes a person feels trapped.
That young man escaped.
I stand quietly for a moment.
Outside the party continues.
Laughter.
Music.
Voices rising and falling.
Life itself continues.
I take a deep breath.
The young man is gone.
But his act reminds me of something important.
Life is fragile.
Life must be cherished.
Even in its confusion.
Even in its suffering.
I open the door and return to the party.
The guests turn toward me again.
I smile.
The evening continues.
Somewhere beyond the bright windows of the house, the dark streets of London stretch endlessly into the night.

Part 15

The party continues in the bright rooms of Clarissa Dalloway's house.
Voices fill the air.

Glasses touch lightly.
Laughter rises and fades like waves.
The lights shine warmly on the faces of the guests.
I step back into the drawing room.
For a moment no one notices that I was gone.
Conversations continue without pause.
I am Clarissa.
The thought of the young man still moves quietly inside my mind.
A young man who threw himself from a window.
I never knew him.
Yet somehow his final act feels close to me.
Something brave lived in that decision.
Something desperate.
Something honest.
Life is heavy.
Society presses upon people with rules, expectations, judgments.
That young man refused it all.
I cannot explain why the thought touches me so deeply.
But it does.
I move slowly through the room again, greeting guests, smiling, speaking softly.
“How delightful that you could come!”
“So good to see you again!”
The party grows livelier.
More guests arrive.
The Prime Minister himself appears briefly, surrounded by curious eyes. People
whisper excitedly when they see him.
Yet to me he seems small and ordinary.
Just another man passing through the room.
I continue greeting everyone.
My daughter Elizabeth stands quietly near the window speaking with a young
man. She looks serious, thoughtful.

Richard moves easily among the guests, comfortable in his world of politics and committees.

And somewhere in the crowd stands Peter Walsh.

I am Peter.

I watch Clarissa from across the room.

She moves lightly from one group to another, speaking with perfect grace. Everyone seems pleased to see her.

I feel a strange mixture of emotions.

Admiration.

Surprise.

And something deeper.

For years I believed her life would become shallow and empty if she married Richard Dalloway.

I believed she would lose her true self.

Yet watching her now, I see that I was wrong.

She has created something real.

This gathering.

This connection between people.

It is her work.

I feel suddenly proud of her.

The crowd shifts slightly.

I lose sight of her for a moment.

Then suddenly she appears again near the doorway.

Our eyes meet across the room.

For a moment neither of us speaks.

The years between us seem to disappear again.

I feel the same sudden excitement I felt long ago at Bourton.

Clarissa walks slowly toward me.

The guests around us continue talking and laughing.

But for a moment the noise fades into the background.

She stops before me.

We look at each other quietly.
I am Clarissa again.
Peter stands before me.
Older now.
His hair thinner.
His face marked by time.
Yet the same restless energy lives in him still.
For a moment neither of us speaks.
We simply stand there, aware of everything that has passed between us.
The garden at Bourton.
The broken fountain.
The years apart.
I feel no regret now.
Only recognition.
Life has taken us along different paths.
Yet some part of our connection remains.
I smile slightly.
“Peter,” I say.
He answers softly.
“Clarissa.”
The room continues moving around us.
Conversations rise and fall.
The lights glow warmly.
For one brief moment the past and the present meet.
Peter feels his heart beating quickly.
I am Peter again.
What is this feeling?
Terror.
Excitement.
Happiness.
All at once.

Seeing her again here at the center of her world fills me with powerful emotion.

“There she is,” I think.

Clarissa.

Alive.

Beautiful.

Real.

The party continues.

Life continues.

And in that moment I feel something I have not felt in many years.

I feel joy.

The room grows brighter.

The voices grow louder.

Clarissa smiles.

And I understand suddenly that life—despite all its confusion and sorrow—remains wonderfully alive.