



**THE OUTWARD
ROOM**

MILLEN BRAND

AFTERWORD BY
PETER CAMERON

MILLEN BRAND (1906–1980) was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, into a working-class family and was of Pennsylvania German descent on his mother’s side. Following graduation from Columbia University in 1929, he worked briefly as a psychiatric aide and for several years as a copywriter for the New York Telephone Company before taking up faculty posts at the University of New Hampshire and New York University. *The Outward Room*, Brand’s first and most acclaimed novel, appeared in 1937, and was adapted for Broadway in 1939 as *The World We Make*. In 1948, with Frank Partos, Brand received an Academy Award nomination for his screenplay adaptation of Mary Jane Ward’s novel *The Snake Pit*. Brand’s association with members of the Hollywood Ten led to his questioning by the House Un-American Activities Committee; he refused to cooperate, invoking the Fifth Amendment. From the early 1950s to the early 1970s, Brand was an editor at Crown Publishers. His other novels include *The Heroes*; *Albert Sears*; *Some Love, Some Hunger*; and *Savage Sleep*. He was also the author of *Local Lives*, a book of poems about the Pennsylvania Dutch; a posthumously published account of his participation in the 1977 Peace March from Nagasaki to Hiroshima; and the text to *Fields of Peace*, a book of photographs by George Tice.

PETER CAMERON is the author of three collections of short stories and five novels, including *Andorra*, *The City of Your Final Destination*, and *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You*.

The Outward Room
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The Outward Room

To Pauline

For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope.
—ECCLESIASTES

Think then, my soule, that death is but a Groome,
Which brings a Taper to the outward roome,
Whence thou spiest first a little glimmering light,
And after brings it nearer to thy sight:
For such approaches doth heaven make in death.
—JOHN DONNE

Part One

SHE ALWAYS woke up early. Often a bell far away in the little group of buildings where the doctor in residence lived woke her, or a particularly loud note of a bird penetrated her sleep and left her listening. This morning she heard a nurse's step on one of the walks outside; she followed the receding sound. The air was gray, sunless just before dawn, it was only light enough to take the darkness from her room. In its half-light, clean of thought, she lay looking at the indistinct furniture—her dress over a chair, the door of the wardrobe a black crack—but hardly seeing it. More than not seeing. It was peace. Untouched, she kept looking steadily ahead of her. At a certain moment, the room changed. Like footlights flooding up a curtain, the sun filled it, the full light folded out and down and in the trees there was the loud sound of the birds. A wave of light and in spite of her will, she looked up and saw, shattering her, the bars.

She turned her head into her pillow. Remorselessly the bars were behind the white linen against her eyes. The pillowslip became a nurse's white skirt, and on it she saw a large ring of keys, a hand lifted to the keys, and the nurse with known movements unlocked and went through a door. Unlock and lock down corridors of endless doors. She put her closed eyes against her hands, holding out the sight, but the ring of keys became a ring on her finger. The ring burned, she opened her eyes again to the sun and sight faded out.

She began to dress, keeping her back to the window and the rising sun. She let her nightgown slip to the floor and the chill of the April morning entered her and she stretched for a moment with her breasts pulling against her arms. Her heavy hair slid black across her shoulders as she leaned down at an angle of her knee, the thigh shadowed and the light flooding around her hips and narrow waist. Body that had lain in the warm baths, the running water holding her in hours of blanched calm. Now dry and free—her flesh was firm and cool. When she was dressed, in a smartly-cut dark blue dress—the administration believed in the therapy of clothes—she sat on the edge of the bed. It was too quiet to move. She looked at her legs; they were hard, nicely formed, with good ankles and calves. Why should she be interested in her appearance? A question Dr. Revlin would like. Were there degrees of death for Miss Barrett. It was a long time, she suddenly thought, since she had looked at her face. Had it changed her; each time she wondered whether it would alter her but it never did. Although half-afraid she determined to look. Hidden in the wardrobe was a circular face mirror which Miss Cummings had given her. "It's too small for me," Miss Cummings had said. "It would fit you." She went and got it. Still half-afraid, she held the circle of reflection up and looked into it. She saw her face split by the dark line of heavy eyebrows. It was her face; the total form was hers. She looked more closely for the details. Her eyes, the same brown almost black; the sockets of her eyes were hollower than they would be in a few months, but that was not what she was looking for. She looked carefully at the skin; it was what it had been. Her nose and nostrils formed the same line she remembered; her mouth, more important, was unchanged—it was impregnable.

She put the mirror away and went to the window. In the trees were the loud birds, the spring. She made the bars disappear and looked at the sun, it blinded her and she thought of her brother. In a few days it would be his birthday. b. April 14, 1906—d. Other dawns broke in her throat and reaching out with her hands she took the bars, holding them. Imprisoned. Without turning she saw the bed. I.H. On the pillowslip. They gave it a nice name, Hospital. Death within, she was walled closer than in the walls of the skin. And yet, beyond the fence, outside, was the world—somewhere there was life.

Seven years. She dropped her hands. She could remember even the first slow becoming aware of death after her brother's death. She too had died, but her death was not the peace the tombstone said, but

struggle lasting until exhaustion. From this quiet she slowly was remade, as if with pity, to a new kind of existing. In it, she reached backward to her brother. Horrified by the first sight, she tried not to think of him. She went still further back to find him, but always knowing a false movement in time would drop her full upon him, undefended, at the moment of his death.

Seven years, plunging again and again into blind struggle and agony and emerging. It was hard to decide which contained greater suffering, the months of black horror, of nothingness, or the retaking of life. As slowly over her weaving in the Occupational Therapy room she began to see clearly the gaze of nurses, of doctors, a new agony replaced the agony of the abyss. How careful they were with their concealing words—"sick," "recovered." She told herself, I'm insane. Periodic insanity, death in her blood. And they knew, they never stopped knowing. The other recovered patients knew too and their pity and knowledge was in them. Always the bars, the locked doors, the enclosed porches, the high picket fence, revolving stamping its lines behind tables, walks, trees. She was imprisoned in death.

In death, she had found herself a refuge, this room. The room in which she was now, was in a wing of a building given over to the hopelessly insane. The women on this floor, in the rooms off the corridor with its locked stairway doors, were harmless, their minds completely lost, rifted away into little distortions and vagaries they never saw. And as they were not aware of their own state, they were not aware of hers—a democracy of the dead. It had been difficult for her to get permission to stay here; Dr. Revlin had finally given it to her, for other reasons than that for which she had wanted it.

The floor now was peculiarly quiet, silence extended to its ultimate moment of breaking. As the sun rose higher and the dawn lifted into fuller light, she heard a faint step in the room across the hall from hers and heard the whirring circular scratch of a phonograph record followed by its shift into music. It was Miss Cummings greeting the day with a dance record. The record scraped steadily, unrolling the beat of jazz, until near the middle a worn groove switched the needle back and four notes were repeated over and over with jagged monotony. She heard Miss Cummings push the needle onward and the record continued again unbroken to the end. When the needle had slid off into hissing silence Miss Cummings set it once more at the beginning. This repetition of records was the only pleasure she knew, to play them over and over for hours at a time. Sometimes, although she was heavy and awkward, she tried to dance to them, circling in the small space in her room. It made her happy, she was never tired of it. From being played so much, the records frequently wore out, but she had a sister who brought her new ones.

As if started by the dance record, other sounds began on the floor, steps, sounds of furniture touched or moved. Soon Miss Barrett's tottering steps came down the corridor. From fear, she stood rigid. Miss Barrett several times a day went from her room to the bathroom, and always dressed as if she were going outdoors in the cold. From the bundle of a heavy coat, a fur, a thick hat covering a face but her eyes, the mute eyes looked out blank as if Miss Barrett inside had died. It was like something killed. Nonrecognition, seeing without sight. Before these eyes and the little tottering steps that expressed too the noncontrolling being, there could be no hope, outgoing, or warmth. Miss Barrett was the one person on the floor who made her afraid.

Miss Cummings was different, she could be a friend. Sympathy, many of the capacities of the living were still hers. She often came in to visit, and they talked together. "I see by my paper this morning that my friend the Pope," she said. But in between was straight ordinary talk, of weather, of nurses, of food. She had a story of her operation. She believed she had once had her liver taken out by a famous surgeon. The surgeon, after the operation, put her liver in his icebox. At supper his wife served some meat and he complimented her on it. "Where did you get it?" he asked. "Why from the icebox where you left it," his wife replied. This story gave her great satisfaction.

Miss Barrett's steps came back down the corridor and her room door opened and closed. The dance record went on and on, occasionally, as the machine unwound, swerving unharmoniously toward silence, and then under Miss Cummings' firm grinding of the handle, regaining its full beat. The sun seemed fixed at the horizon, and a calm—made by the repeated record—fell upon the world. She gazed through the window and as in rotogravure saw smoke seep up from factories, horses go to the fields, men walk along streets. She felt her legs planted on the floor and looked down at her immobility. If he had not died, it would be her world. Her world? She dropped suddenly to her knees and began to sob.

The record stopped and in its silence she heard Miss Cummings' door open. Miss Cummings came slowly to her. "What is it, dear," she said; she leaned over her and picked her up. "Perhaps it's the weather," she said and seeing in a moment that she was about to stop crying, tactfully left.

SITTING on the edge of the bed, she looked downward passively at the floor. The storm of longing and deprivation that had shaken her had left her; she was able to think more quietly. In the way she sat, looking down, she felt a repetition of her recent months in the depressive ward. It was better to retreat there for strength than to give way—to give way was to go back, to the terrible beginning of the cycle and its convulsive darkness. The surge of longing that had overcome her was a part of emerging from depression; she understood it, yet feared it as an echo of the manic state. That was what she feared, any return, even by implication, to the “manic.” Darkness, the suction of her death—horror “God don’t, home, home, I want to go home”—was Stoney her voice the hours “Says he” loud “and shot, shot, intercede, O Mary, home.” Darkness, hard, a wall VISITORS ARE REQUESTED NOT TO GIVE MATCHES TO THE PATIENTS the red light, slow puncture of fear, began in the corridor and she knotted the bedclothes for protection; the arm approaching, but when the lights went on, Miss Regis said, “You know who this is, Miss Regis. Be quiet now.” The train roar. Sometimes she saw her brother in all the violence of, but she must not remember; and sometimes there was a dull pounding that was Miss Batras at the coffin, Miss Batras who was death. If in time she could rub the monogram I.H., Islington Hospital, from the pillow, but there was no time; she must escape. Now in the corridor the hard hand took her, Now die. “Why have you left your room? I’m Miss Regis, you know—“Where is death?” Again, “Let me hold this glass,” Miss Regis said. “It’s paraldehyde; it will make you sleep.”

STILL sitting on the bag, she remembered a day of her childhood, which, although only a few years actual time separated her from it, now seemed almost forgotten. Her brother and she had set out together one day to go fishing; they fished occasionally in a small stream near the town where they lived. She was only nine years old and small and delicate for her age—the hair which she now kept cut to shoulder length then poured dark and lanky down her back. Her brother was older, was large and strong; as he walked beside her, she felt privileged just to be going with him, yet she knew that he was glad she was with him and that part of his pleasure was giving his attention to her. The day was hot, she remembered the haze of fields of timothy they passed and the trembling of trees when the sun was behind them. There was a threat of thunder; a few webs of cloud in the sky at some time of the day would solidify into storm.

“Try here,” her brother said as they came through some brush out to the stream. They baited and dropped their hooks together; the hooks sank out of sight. As she stood looking down at the stream, a minute after minute went by and they got no bite, she began to lose interest; as she sometimes did, she began to daydream. She thought of the future. Like any child, her thoughts were indistinct and vague, they excited her. All that she had read in books, all that she realized intuitively from the indications that came down to her from adults, all the surmise that bred with fiery heat in her blood rose with her. And suddenly she was afraid. She called to her brother. He turned in surprise, expecting her to say something. What she had wanted to say was, “I’m afraid. You’ll always be with me, won’t you?” but it was impossible for her to say it. She continued to stare at the water.

AT BREAKFAST Miss Cummings sat next to her. She was particularly thoughtful, and asked her more often than usual if she wanted sugar. After the fruit, a wheat cereal she knew Miss Cummings disliked was served. Miss Cummings ate it slowly, clicking her spoon against the side of the heavy bowl, and at last said, "The food could really be better, but I suppose it's all one could expect for the money."

The dining hall was a bare room with a long table, high walls, and a double door at one end through which the kitchen could frequently be seen. Bare as it was, occasionally somebody got up and as if detecting an irregularity in the room, walked away from the table and came back. It troubled her when something like this happened; she always felt glad when a meal went through without incident. Occasionally it was worse. Miss Cummings once tried to exchange places with a mild-mannered woman named Miss Garabrandt. Miss Garabrandt resisted and Miss Cummings, with restraint, said to her, "You look like somebody I don't like." She remembered this because later, with no apparent connection, Miss Cummings had said, "My mother had dark hair, like Miss Garabrandt," and Dr. Revlin had made her tell this remark to him. She had had it in her mind and he had insisted that she tell him. She knew things like this were what he wanted her to see here, and were one of the reasons why he allowed her to stay here with the incurable cases, but she wanted to forget that there was any meaning to what they did or said, and to think of Miss Cummings and the others only as dead. It particularly irritated her to have Dr. Revlin find this significant proof of his theories in Miss Cummings, who was her friend. "You said such a thing could go by opposites," she said. "Maybe that means Miss Cummings was really fond of her mother." "Do you think so?" he said.

Always at breakfast she began to think of him. The peace, the other agonies even, gave way to him. She separated him from the other doctors, nurses, "recovered" patients, who knew. He was something different from them, a different face, voice. Voice, so much a voice. Trusted? Lately her feelings towards him had changed. What was it? Trying to find out what the change was, she went back—

Ever since he had known her, he had taken more than a routine interest. "Case," that was it at first. Then professional pride, generosity? She had to admit there was generosity. A long and difficult analysis. Yet the feeling she had towards him was not in this. Doubt. How did she feel? Lately at each talk with him—

She knew he was kind, open with her, but he kept her at times from fully understanding certain things about herself, that was it—she felt she had never found out completely all that he knew, that he was leading her up to something.

Miss Cummings nudged her shoulder. "Eat, my dear," she said. She realized she had been staring fixedly at the wall opposite, thinking. She finished her breakfast and tried not to think of Dr. Revlin again. "Drink your coffee," Miss Cummings said. "It will do you good." She drank her coffee and a few moments later a nurse took them upstairs. As they went up, Miss Cummings walked heavily at her side, helping her, holding her elbow. At the second-floor landing, the nurse lifted a key from a ring, opened the lock of the heavy door, and let them inside. In the corridor, daylight came only through the doors of rooms that stood open—Miss Barrett's door was always closed.

"You feel all right now?" Miss Cummings said.

"Yes, I do, thanks."

She left Miss Cummings and went alone into her room and from across the corridor she soon heard a new record beginning to play. She wondered if it were through thoughtfulness that Miss Cummings had changed the record, not to remind her of what had happened before breakfast. The record would

on and on, the little stylus grating with saxophone and horn. One phrase played into a fixing memory the line of lifting chords, a quick beat, became joined in her mind with the wide stone of the stairs, the darkness of the corridor, and everything that made up this place, this moment. Memory. She thought how often, in Dr. Revlin's office, she had known some moment of the past to come into her mind as clear as this one now, and not just one but many moments so that they could be placed side by side. "What was his name?" "I can't remember." "Think, what was it?" "Cam—Cal—I can't." "It's there. Keep trying." "Lambert." Relentlessly in, farther and farther. Everything was there, and just as she found a forgotten name, other things came, closer, stronger, until they burst into consciousness.

Even more than in waking, in her dreams the things he wanted came.

Thinking. Thinking. She must stop thinking. The record played its mounting phrase, at the peak started to die, falling away through key after declining key. Quickly Miss Cummings caught it, turned the crank and pushed it up to its original speed. Record, Dr. Revlin. All that was in her mind had touched with dream, association—listened. When she slowed, fell from full key, he knew it and—

She pressed her hands to her forehead. Stop! Stop! Far off, she heard a scream. Silence. Scream. Her brother, she thought, if you had not died— Before her grew the world, cities, all the outside where there was life. Here nothing changed, there had hardly been any change in her body, nothing that took place in the living had taken place in her. Innocent and dead. She felt of a thin-banded ring she wore that her brother had given her and thought back seven years to the spring before his death. Birthdays. All the earth now ripening to his birth, the buds opening his life again. "They lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel, and have no mercy—" Quickly she got up from the bed and went towards the door, intending to go out. There was the sound of a nurse's steps in the corridor. No. She would be aware; she would see him dead. She stood and waited. The steps stopped; the nurse then was going to come into her room. She turned, facing away from the nurse as she came in. "A letter for you." She made no move to take it; the nurse left it and went out.

What could the letter be? The world beyond the fence had so long ago dropped from her, she believed it lost. Standing with her back to the window, she stared into the room— It could not be from her parents, not from them, they knew she would not want to hear from them. She went across the room and picked the letter up.

It was from her mother.

Darkness, death filling the room.

She read

"Dear Daughter, It has been a number of years since we wrote to you. As you know, Dr. Revlin asked us not to, during his treatment. We are writing now with his permission." Anger— "Dr. Revlin suggests that in a month or two we come to visit you."

She had been right. There had been something. Dr. Revlin—She folded and unfolded the letter. What did it mean? It had something to do with what she had feared. She went to the bars at the window and looked out. She drew back. In spite of fear, she must speak to him.

Miss Cummings stopped playing the record.

“HELLO,” Dr. Revlin said as she entered his office, getting up and taking her hand. “It’s a nice day, isn’t it? Have you been out?”

“No—”

He noticed. “Something is troubling you,” he said.

“Yes.”

“What?”

She was suddenly afraid to speak.

“Yes, tell me. We’ve been through much together, haven’t we? And I’m your friend, no?”

She said, “You are.”

“You’ll tell me then?”

“May I tell you afterward?”

He hesitated. “All right,” he said.

She lay down on a couch, according to their routine, and he drew a shade, darkening the room. He sat down to one side, out of range of her sight. All she knew of him now was his voice.

“As you’ve something important to tell me later, we’ll get right to business. Let’s hope this won’t interfere; for the time being put it out of your mind.”

He waited.

“What did you dream last night,” he said.

“Nothing.”

“Resistance today. Or is it—? No, try to remember.”

“I’m sure I didn’t dream—”

“You’ve remembered before when you thought you hadn’t dreamed. Try to think.”

“I can’t.” Yet she was yielding, her mood changing. She said, “When I woke up, there was nothing in my mind. I even forgot I was in the hospital.”

“That’s interesting. Tell me a little more about it.”

“That’s all, I had just forgotten.”

“No, how was it—did you feel you were home, before you came to the hospital?”

“I don’t know, I didn’t think of anything. But I was happy.”

“Good! You were happy and didn’t realize you were in the hospital. When you wake up and find you are in the hospital, you’re unhappy, is that right?”

“In a way.”

“Why ‘in a way’?”

“I—all right, I’m unhappy.”

“I wish you could tell me what you meant by ‘in a way.’ I want to know.”

“I can’t, I don’t know.”

“Let’s try again. If you had woken up at home, before you came to the hospital, would you have been happy?”

“Yes, you know that!”

He paused. “Then you would like to be the way you were then.”

“I know what you want to make me say. Can you bring back my brother?” she said.

He sighed.

“Let’s start again differently. Suppose now, right now, you woke up somewhere and were not at the hospital—would you be happy then?”

“Yes, in a way—but not as happy as the other way.”

“Why would it make you happier now, to be out of the hospital? Do you mean you want to be well?”

She said nothing.

“Would it be just that it meant you were well that would make you happy?”

“Stop!”

“You would be happier if you were outside, whether you were well or not?”

“Yes.”

“But why?”

“Isn't there reason enough? Here everybody knows, they see my brother's death, my own death.”

“You're not dead.”

She said nothing.

“If you were not well, you would have to come back.”

She still said nothing.

“Outside then you would forget your brother's death?”

“No, I'd—have it alone, for a while.”

He waited a minute and said, “Is there any other reason why you would be happier outside?”

“No.”

“You're sure? Be honest.”

She hesitated. “Yes,” she said.

“To have escaped me, could that be it?”

She felt her face flushing. “Yes.”

“Tell me, had you thought of trying to escape?”

“Please, Doctor—”

“Tell me.”

“I've always thought of it—not seriously, perhaps.”

“All thought is serious. And what you think about this is very serious.” He paused. “Let me tell you something, there have been people who were about to undergo an operation, one that would mean life or death to them. At the last moment, with all the arrangements made, they take a train, go away somewhere—in order not to go through with the operation. Possibly that's what you want to do?”

“I see what you mean.”

“I think you know we're reaching a kind of—that we're coming towards something. Perhaps what you are going to tell me is the same as what I am going to tell you. But first I'm interested in your dream.”

“How can I think?”

“You can. Don't think of when you woke up. Think back into the night.”

She lay quietly, her thoughts out of control. But she was experienced and kept pressing back backward to the night. All thought would stop, meeting darkness—then begin again.

“Yes. I did dream. I was acting in a play, in costume, and I was taking two parts, at the same time. The dream formed before her eyes, sudden, spreading out. She could feel as much as see, it was hard to put into words. What she said would not be the dream, and it would be the dream. “Go on,” he said. “As one person I was very tall, a giant—as the other I was very small. No, that isn't it,” she said. “Yes, it is! Go on.” “I felt really that I was the tall person and somebody else was the small person, but I was myself too. Is that possible?”

“Yes. It's all just as you remember. Go on.”

“The small person was my servant and I felt very scornful towards her. No—” “Yes, you were scornful. But tell me, was there anything—why, in what way did you feel scornful?”

“I don’t know.”

“This is important. Did you express it in any way?”

Farther in. “Yes.” How did he know? “I took my servant’s mail and opened it. I think I even read to her and she couldn’t do anything about it.”

“That’s very interesting. Was there anything else? Think of the dream carefully.”

“We, that is both of us, were wearing a strange kind of clothing.”

“What kind?”

“It was like a costume, like historical plays.”

“Good. Can you remember anything else?”

“No.”

“All right, let’s see what we can do with it—does it mean anything to you?”

“No.”

“Let’s go over it. You’re a giant and the servant is very small, what can that mean?”

“I can’t think—no, I can’t think of anything.”

“How about the dress?”

“I don’t think of anything.”

“Try.”

“Yes.” It came to her suddenly. *Gulliver’s Travels*.

“That’s very interesting.” He paused. “Yes, that must be it.”

“But I didn’t think of *Gulliver’s Travels* in the dream.”

“No. You just thought of it now. But there is some connection.”

“Why? Anybody might have thought of it.” She felt angry.

“Perhaps. But why Gulliver? Why not David and Goliath, or Jack and the Giant Killer—you see isn’t so simple. No, you thought of it because it really is connected with your dream. That’s how works, the laws are rather strong.”

She said nothing.

“Now let’s see if perhaps there isn’t some connection. A giant—” He paused. “Is the giant Gulliver in Lilliput, or is it a Brobdignagian?”

“I don’t know.”

“I’d say a Brobdignagian, do you know why?”

“No.”

“Perhaps you do. Think.”

“The Brobdignagians made Gulliver a kind of servant, a slave. They kept him in a cage.”

“Yes, that’s what I was thinking of. By the way, you know your Gulliver very well. Did you read as a child?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“When I was five or six, I guess.”

“Did your father or mother ever read it to you?”

“My father.”

“Were there pictures in the book?”

“Yes—oh, I remember. There was one picture, the hat, yes I can see it—it’s the same as in the dream.”

“What?”

“The servant looked like Gulliver in this picture.”

“Well, now we’re getting somewhere.” He stopped. “Then let’s go back. Why did you think you were the same person?”

“I don’t know.”

“This may be rather important. Try association.”

After a long wait, she said, “One flesh.”

“Why ‘one flesh’?”

“We were the same person.”

“Any more associations?”

“My father used to say to my mother, ‘You’re my better half.’”

Immediately, as if excited, he asked, “How young were you when you first heard your father make that remark, about the ‘better half’?”

“I don’t know, I can’t remember that.”

“Tell me this. You’ve mentioned before that your father was weaker than your mother. Could you have felt it when you were five, six?”

“Maybe.”

“How did he seem weaker, at that time?”

“My mother always ordered him around. I can remember her doing that. Oh, I remember—the man. She used to open his letters and read them—”

“So that’s the letters.”

“It made him angry.”

“Is there anything more about the dream?”

“Yes, there’s something. But I don’t know whether it’s worth mentioning.”

He said irritably, “You know everything is worth mentioning.”

“I remember how as the giant I wasn’t entirely sure I was superior to the servant.”

“Yes, that’s good. It all fits together. Gulliver in the story had a good mind, he knew more than the giant. And haven’t you sometimes admitted to me your father was a remarkable man, that he had a quality of mind, not practical, but still superior somehow to your mother’s?”

“Yes—”

“You realize it now better than you did as a child.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Well, you’ve explained the dream to me. And I haven’t forced you to, have I, except to make you tell me?”

“No, I agree that that’s the meaning of the dream.”

He paused. “And it’s close, like most of your dreams, to the whole problem of your illness. I said before that today we were going to talk things over as we never had before. You want to do this, don’t you? We’re going to, as they say, put the cards on the table.”

“Yes.”

“I want you to let me do most of the talking for a while now, and just answer what I ask you. Is that arrangement all right?”

“Yes.”

“You know for a long time certain things have kept coming up, recurring. I had hoped they would give you an understanding of yourself, without my help—without my telling you too much. And now I think you’ve come near it, some of it you know and much more of it you must guess. But it isn’t

enough, you don't really know it. And so I think the time has come to go farther—to sum the whole thing up quite fully and plainly. I believe it's the best. You may not see it now, but some time you will. And I have in mind too something else, to help you. Now, have you enough courage, will you go through with it?"

"Yes, I will," she said.

"All right. Then I'll tell you. It won't be easy for you. I don't know how it may affect you; maybe you'll be angry and won't believe me at all. But I think you ought to have it stated, put before you. Try not to argue, just listen to what I say."

She remained silent, looking upward, waiting.

"Here it is, then. At the center of your dream, clearly, you became your mother, you were putting yourself in her place in relation to your father. The letters, the 'better half,' everything shows it. It's just another proof of something I've told you, that almost all children go through a period when they fall in love with the parent, the one of the opposite sex. It's an old story now, well-known. And being in love with one parent, children are jealous of the other parent—you were jealous of your mother. During the period of your childhood represented by this dream, you were in love with your father, but not as much as at first. Already your father seemed inferior to you. Later you substituted your brother for him, who was stronger and took after your mother—"

"No!"

"Remember, it isn't a matter of belief now, just listen." He went steadily on, "At a certain age, towards the end of childhood, the child, daughter in your case, becomes reconciled with the mother in order to be freed from the father. Then she can find her love outside of the family—she is identified with her mother; she can reach full adult love." He paused. "As I told you, your brother was substituted for your father, but it would have made no difference. Unfortunately your brother's death occurred just when you were beginning to free yourself from him and because of it, you have never been able to go on, past his death."

"No, I can't believe it. It's just words, it's just the way you want it. It isn't like that in me."

"You know, I'm not basing what I say on this one dream. All the material, all I've uncovered—hundreds, thousands of details support what I've told you. You say it's the way I want it—that isn't fair. I don't care about theories—I'm not trying to prove a case, I'm trying to help you."

She said nothing.

"At least you've kept your promise, you've listened to me. You don't have to believe me now; just remember what I've said. Remember it carefully." She heard him move in his chair. "And now we come to what I mentioned before—something else I've thought of, to help you."

"Yes—"

"In a month or so, I want you to have your parents come to see you."

"No!"

"I know how you feel towards your parents—you think they killed your brother, but I hope by the time they come, I can make you overcome this feeling. At least enough so that you can see them—"

"No, please!"

"You say your father was tired the day of your brother's death and asked your brother to drive the car. And so, remotely speaking, he killed him. However, no reasonable person—"

"He did!"

"Remember—"

"He had no right to have a car. We were always poor, never had money, and yet he kept the car. An old one, a death trap. And my mother let him. It was my mother's fault as well as his—"

~~“You can make it look the way you want, but it isn’t that really. That’s what you’ll have to see. By the time your parents come—I’ll tell you— This is the final thing I’ve wanted to tell you. In the situation in which you were placed, something you could not know happened. It’s a very delicate thing to explain to you, and you must forgive me if I’m too blunt. You know that unconsciously you must have felt some guilt about your love for your brother—”~~

“No!”

“It must have been a very strong love, it must have been that to do what it did to you.”

She was silent.

“So it was a help to you, when you had to make a new adjustment to life, to blame your parents. Unconsciously, you said, ‘If I’m guilty, they’re guilty too. They killed him.’” He paused. “I’ve been honest as I can. It’s been hard to tell you all this. I haven’t wanted to hurt you. I hope when you see your parents, things will suddenly become clear to you. In the meantime, with what you know, your mind can be more at rest. You know there is nothing else now, nothing unknown. And I count on you to be brave, to go on working with me, not to try to escape. Tomorrow, much of the pain of this talk will be gone. You’ll find that your father’s intelligence, which you have, will begin to help you. And this is very important—remember, even if this experiment I’m counting on fails, even then you can still have hope.”

WEEK BY week the Earth broke greenly into spring. She watched foliage, like a fog, spread in the trees. It was not birth, Dr. Revlin said, it was knowledge. "Something is hidden and must be found, in you yourself." It seemed that now they went beyond where they had ever gone before. "Then what did your father say?" "Were there?" "Why do you remember?" And she—"He let me play with his knife and—" "My father tried to stop me and he said, 'Run,' and—" Phonograph turning, coming closer and closer to the center. She was increasingly fearful; she was so afraid that only the final decision she had taken made her go on. "You won't be like those," he said, "who run away."

Particularly during this month, Dr. Revlin went over with her her relation with her parents. He told her that a great deal might depend on her visit with them. "Something may happen. I'm hoping—"

He made her herself write a note, in answer to her mother's letter. It was a difficult experience. She sat at his desk and he prompted her. "When shall—what date?" "Do you think two weeks?" he said, leaning over and thumbing the pages of his desk calendar. "Suppose we make it Sunday the twenty-first." "All right, the twenty-first." She tried the pen; the ink ran. "Dear Mother, How shall I say it?" "Just say it naturally, not formal." She went on writing. "Dr. Revlin—thinks that Sunday—the twenty-first of this month—would be a good time—for you and Father to visit me—Shall I say anything more?" "If you just said, 'I'll look forward to seeing you,' it might make them happy." "I'll look forward to seeing you," she wrote. Quickly laying down the pen, she got up. "You haven't signed it," Dr. Revlin said. "Oh yes." She sat down and signed the letter and he gave her an envelope and made her address it.

Now that a definite day had been set, all her thought concentrated on that. When she was alone in her room, she listened to the sounds outdoors, or to Miss Cummings' records, or to any sound that came to her and it was like a draft in her blood. What will I do?— She thought of the features of her parents, hard to remember. She could remember voice, physical gestures more easily. Sometimes she shivered with hate, other times not.

She made a definite effort not to give way to hate, she pushed the hate down—refused to think of it. She developed a trick that helped her. On her brother's birthday, a week after she had received her mother's letter, she had thought of her mother. Birth. Once a woman had been brought to the hospital who had been driven out of her mind by childbirth; at times she would think she was beginning labor pains and the shrieks she gave, even to her, were terrifying. Her mother had gone through that for her brother. Could she then—? But her thought stopped. When she wanted, now, to push down the hate she remembered the woman who had thought she was in childbirth.

For several days just preceding her parents' visit, Dr. Revlin talked a long time with her. At the end of his long talk, he told her all that they had done and all that he hoped for for her. "I don't think there's anything more I can do to prepare you. It will help to have a little rest, even to forget me. Stay in your room, lie down. An important moment of your life is coming; believe that it will be for the best." He took her hand, and pressed it in encouragement. "Just one more thing. Forgive me for saying it—but don't hurt them. That must not be."

When the final night came, before the visit, she was continually restless. She was a long time going to sleep and when she finally got to sleep, she had a peculiar dream—it duplicated an experience of her childhood. One summer she had been visiting somewhere in the country with her parents, and had gone alone to play in a stable. With a child's daring, trying to see how far its courage will go, she had started to climb down from a hay chute into an empty stall. She meant to catch her feet in a metal feed trough and to get down that way, but as she swung from the edge of the chute, she couldn't reach it.

She tried to climb back and found the hay silt had made the loft floor too slippery for her to get up. She began to scream. It seemed to her that she hung timelessly, weakening and hanging over an abyss when her father ran in and caught her.

In the morning, remembering the dream, she thought of Dr. Revlin, but thought, I won't have to tell him. The time for telling dreams, for inquiry, for doubt, is gone. Now, only a few hours ahead, was the certainty.

At eleven, a nurse came and took her to the visitors' room to wait for her parents. With the unrelaxing vigilance of the hospital, even here the door was locked. Its heaviness, the fact that it was locked, took away any illusion she might have had of freedom. She stood looking out of a window, and listened for the footsteps that would tell her her father and mother were coming. She breathed, pressing her breath carefully to keep it silent. Below her were the grounds, silent; a few trees that had dropped their rusted blossoms or strings of pollination, a bed of iris breaking sheathed bloom. Birth. As she stood waiting, she began to feel something at her heart. Not altering the silence, the shriek of the woman out of childbirth flowed into her. In my brother's death, she thought, you were made childless. Childless because I died too. She looked at the trees and at the furling blooms of the iris. A breeze moved them; she heard the sound of steps...

When she turned, a tall man, hollow-eyed, was looking at her as if frightened. Beside him was a smaller, firm-looking woman whose look was like her brother's. She said, "Mother—" Her father came across the room and took her in his arms. She let him. The room with its bare walls, paint. If they were not here, with locked door, the locks, separation—"Father!" He touched her hair, the separateness was still there.

They began to talk, they felt each other's voices. They talked of life, of how her father had worked now, not making much, but better than what he used to have. "We think of you, we love you," he said. Her mother told her, hesitatingly, They had moved away from the town where they had lived when— A wish began to grow in her, a terrible wish, one that she could not hold back. In a momentary silence she said, "Could I ask you something?" "Yes, of course," her mother said. "Where is my brother buried?" She saw the shiver of pain; her mother conquered it and told her, described the grave. You have wept there, she thought, It's the place of your death. When her mother had finished, they sat silent, brought together for a moment.

Her mother said, "You'll come home to us?"

Something that seemed near a junction separated. "No," she said, "I can't—" She looked at her mother, and saw her eyes pitiful with longing. "I can't, I can't." Longing? It was a lie. Beyond her power, everything began to break, everything changed. "You killed him!" All at once she realized the speech was pouring from her without control. They had killed him; she knew it. Her mother's eyes lied.

"Go away," she said at last.

SPRING tightened against the Earth, and she tried to forget. She had a new nurse, Miss Child. Miss Child had only recently gotten her cap in a general hospital, and seemed different, less impersonal than the older nurses. She was dark and slight, with regular features and close-cut hair that waved in a short curve around her forehead and sometimes dropped in her eyes. Her voice was young and kind.

As they talked together, she learned that Miss Child had gone through the nurse's long hard course of study "to live my own life." "Of course," she said, "I liked the work too, but what I wanted most was to have something, a profession, that would make me independent." This nurse, to be independent to live her own life, had come here, to this hospital, the place that to her was a place of death.

Being twenty-two, almost the same age as she was, Miss Child preferred her to any of her other patients. In the mornings, she would often come to take her for a walk through the grounds. When she wanted it very much, she would bring her a meal to her room and sometimes eat with her. She also helped her in her studies; Dr. Revlin wanted her to go through some high school textbooks: English, advanced algebra, French. Miss Child talked with her a little in French. Whenever she said, "*pourquoi?*" it reminded her of Dr. Revlin. She had once heard him speaking in French with his wife and he had used that phrase, in a humoring tone of voice. Her own French was not good, and she had no real interest in her studies.

She was thinking of Miss Child one morning, hoping that she would come, when she knocked on the door. "Come in," she said. It was something she liked in Miss Child that she always knocked on many of the nurses thought it unnecessary. "I was hoping you'd come," she said. "Why, do you want to go for a walk?" She frowned. "I didn't mean it that way," Miss Child said. "A day like this, why not want to go for a walk?"

She put on her hat and a worn leather jacket. They went together out into the hall, to the stairway door. She watched while the ring of keys was lifted and the door opened. At that moment Miss Child became a nurse. They went on down the stairs and Miss Child came back from the nurse's uniform a girl again and was speaking in her resonant, alert voice. She said she had had a quarrel with one of the doctors. "Who?" "Dr. Thompson." He had been speaking the day before of why we enjoy a warm bath, he said pompously it was because it reminded us of the softness and protection of the womb and its amniotic fluid. "How do you know that—you can't know that," Miss Child said. The doctor disliked being contradicted by her. "All these theories of everything going back to the womb, it's nonsense," she said. They went out the side door of the building and along a cement walk. Sun, the faint smell of summer. Dr. Thompson. Dr. Revlin disliked him. She thought of Dr. Revlin. After her parents' visit, he had asked her to come to his office. She had come in with a hard face. "So you failed," he said. He seemed irritated in spite of himself. Then sorry. "There is no hope now," she said. "There is always hope," he said. Their daily talks had begun again, but now without her feeling hope or fear. One day she said to him, casually, "I still want to escape." "You might as well," he said, smiling. "We've tried everything else." Then immediately he stopped smiling.

Restlessly, she wanted to walk faster and Miss Child quickened her pace. They were quiet, in the companionship of silence in a world of ruin. The buildings were red brick, discolored and rimed by the rain and seasons, with the blot of the enclosed porches black against their sides. Far off on one side was a long low building that had no porches, the manic ward. Once when through curiosity she had gone near it, she had smelled a bland horrible odor that can never be cleansed from such a building and heard the sound coming from it. She felt repulsion different from that she had felt when she was within it. It was as if she had never been there. Yet all of the buildings had their knowledge in her. A

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