"Older Children"

by

Alan Moore

and

Melinda Gebbie

with letters by

Todd Klein

TOP SHELF PRODUCTIONS
ATLANTA / PORTLAND
Tell me a story.

Oh, I don't know any stories.

Your little white breasts, they're so lovely. They'll never be as beautiful once you're grown.

Will you touch them for me?

Most certainly not. First, you really ought to tell me a story.

That's manners.

Well, at least let me see you properly. Open your legs just a little and I'll do the same.

Yes, there. Like that.

May I have my story now?

Goodness, child, were you always this impatient?

I haven't forgotten your story. It's just that I want to touch myself, even if you don't, and I've made myself very sore...

Just wait a moment. There's a jar of cream in the dresser.
You really must learn to be patient with me. After I've had my medication, it all becomes so curious and muddled.

"Cold cream," Hmph, I hate this hot, sticky place. Everything melts.

Anyway... your story... Where had I got to? It's so difficult to remember...

I recall there was something very important, very fragile. But then, a terrible thing happened and it got broken. Forever. Nobody could ever mend it. But what...?

Something about soldiers? The king's horses, the king's men...

Do pardon me for interrupting, but was it the mirror? In the story, does the mirror ever get broken?

Oh, no. No, my love. The mirror never breaks. The mirror never melts. Not any more.
She had a girl here yesterday at lunch, I heard 'em.

That's none of your business, Emma. I never heard such impudence.

Now, wherever shall I put this? In her drawer, I expect.

There, I don't know if it's washed, but that's her lookout.

What sort of girls?

A little girl, I heard Lady Fairchild talking about her little bitties.

I think that's disgustin', don't you? 'Wim young children?

Well, I expect that's why her family wanted her over here rather than in England, so her ways wouldn't show 'em up.

Huh! They tell 'er she's here managing their little mine, but that's all stuff.

The foreman come by once a month and she signs some papers. That's all she does. Too piecey to manage 'erself most o' the time.

I dunno.

Drugs, little girls... what makes people act like that?

Good breedin'. Ain't it not for the likes of us to question it?

Now, I've got to draw her ladyship's bath...

You go and see how them niggers are gettin' on in the yard.
Simpson? What should you say if I were to tell you that Mr. De Vries... you recall Mr. De Vries?

That he has made me a certain offer and that I have accepted it?

Of course not, you stupid woman. He wants to buy the mine, and for my part, I want to be rid of it.

I hate Pretoria.

But... your ladyship, the family... what your brother said about keepin' up an imperial presence after the Boer War...

Imperial Fiddiesticks!

Geoffrey just doesn't want me scandalising the home counties by escorting some lady-in-waiting to the opera.

Anyway, it's all settled.

I shall be relocating to a hotel upon the Austrian border. You and Emma will return to Greywangs... I've already written to Geoffrey, preparing him.

But your ladyship... all your things.

Transport is arranged. Other than my clothes, there's really only this mirror.

I couldn't bear to leave it, it's been in the family for so long now.

Since I was a child, in fact.
Yes...yes, there I think, in the alcove with the curtain, that will be acceptable.

Jacques! Edouard! Allez-vous maintenir?

Quite so! Your ladyship’s excellent taste shame the Hotel Himmelgarten.

You do yourself an injustice, Monsieur Rougeur. The hotel is exquisite. I am quite sure I shall enjoy my stay here.

Your ladyship, that is my sincerest wish.

Now, I wonder... may I ask a question?

Very well, forgive my impudence, but it is suggested that you have authored fictions of a certain nature under the nom de plume of ‘Hippolyte’?

Is this correct?

Please do.

No, no, no! You misunderstand! I admire these works greatly!

My infrequent writings, Monsieur Rougeur, are merely amusing diversions. If, however, they offend you, I should be happy to take my custom elsewhere and...

Indeed, as a connoisseur of such literature, may I say that in your ladyship’s hands, fiction becomes the very mirror of reality...

...where memorable idealised characters reflect our truest selves.

Hmm, I’m flattered, Monsieur Rougeur... though I cannot endorse your view of fiction.

I rather favour Plato’s view... the ‘idea’ is the thing; the world beyond fiction’s mirror, that is the true world...

...and we are but the faintest of reflections grown pale beneath the glass.
Aaa!  Ooahh...  ...oohhh...

Oh, that was good, just watching you, it thrills me so much...

How did I look?  How did I look to you?

Well I must say, you looked most unladylike.

But not old?

No...no, don't answer that.
You were going to tell me about the fat hotel manager with little hands.

Oh, him. He just wanted me to autograph a story I'd written. Give me something from his collection in return. Oh, I wish I could touch you.

Now you're being silly.

I know, I know. The barrier between doesn't melt anymore. Does it, like silvery mist? It doesn't break. Dear child, I miss you terribly. Come and kiss me goodnight.

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chapter

2

Silver Shoes
Hi, sure is beautiful up here, ain't it?

Er... yes.

Increasingly so.

Oh, hello there, I have a reservation? The name's Gale?

But of course. One moment please, Miss Gale.
Here we are: room one eleven on the first floor. Welcome to the Hotel Himmelgarten, Miss Gale. I'll summon a porter for your luggage.

Would you? Oh, that's real sweet.

There will be no need for porters. I myself am on that floor. Perhaps I might show the lady and assist her with her baggage.

Bauer. Captain Rolf Bauer. I'm here at Himmelgarten some time for to convalesce.

Those are very beautiful shoes, by the way.

Oh, well, gee, thanks. Ha ha ha...

Convalescence... are you sick?

Oh, well thank you, Mister... uh...

Gale. Dottie Gale... and dinner'd be just swell. I know, I like Europe already.

I am glad... anyway, here we are at your room.

Tell me; are you engaged otherwise for dinner this evening, or might I invite you to the Terrace Restaurant, Miss...?
So that's why I come here soon as Momma's inheritance come through. Nobody in the midwest had no style.

Charge it to room one-three-five, please.

Anyway, I was visitin' Kansas City with my stepmom, I saw these shoes, I just about died! I'd never seen nothing so elegant.

Like its women.

Nor I. They are so bright and exciting, like America.

That I understand. Ha...you know, the shoes and the fantasy? They are very alike...

Oh! You stop that! European men, I swear...

No, I wanted them shoes so bad I had dreams... fantasies...

Certainly sir, if you could just sign, sir...thank you.

Like shoes, we try our fantasies on, yes? Sometimes they are too big for us, sometimes we outgrow them; they become too small, too confining.

But always, our shoes, our fantasies, they take us somewhere new, yes?

Or perhaps they wear out; become dull, familiar, merely comfortable.

Boy, you can say that again. Why, mine done got me all the way t' Austria.

Oh yes...and I am certain, they will take you farther still...

...take you places that you have not dreamed.
Hmmm.

Y'know, back where I come from, a gentleman would never presume to take a lady's arm on such a short acquaintance.

Really? Then, for him to kiss her would be out of the question, yes?

And what if he had done...this?

Why, I should say so! The folk back home would've been, just mortified if he'd done any such thing.

I see...

Oh, if he'd done that, they'd strung him up for sure...ohh...

Ahhhh!

Mmm...
Ahh, Just let me...

...ah...

There...

Oh, Lord...

Look, I can't go all the way.

I... Jeez...

See, I ain't got no preventions, and I ain't wantin' no baby, so...

Aww, heck.

It does not matter, there is so much else we can do.

What are these pretty things? They should not be hiding themselves.

Ohh, But... but we're so near the hotel. What if somebody sees?

And none of its pictures...

Mnnh.

Nnnm...

...none of them are as lovely as you.

Ahh.

Ah, your sex. It smells so good, with the grass, with the night...

Let me taste it.

The manager? Oh, he is very tolerant. You should see his library sometime. His "White Book" with its pictures...

Mnn.

Mnni.
Oooh...

...ohh...

...oh Rolf, what are you doing to me? That's just...

Ahmmh...
your foot. Keep moving your foot...mmmm...

Oh, Rolf, Oh God, Jim...

Ahmmh!

Ah, Jesus...

...ooh...

Oh, Oh, lover, I'm gonna do it. You're gonna make me do it...

Uhhh...
Ouuhhhhh...

Hahh...Hahh...
your foot...hahh...keep moving it...keep...

Yes, like that, yes. Yes!

Auuhhh!

Uuuhh...

...nhh...
"Huhhh..."

"Huhhhhh..."

"Oh."

"Your shoes... huhhh... please forgive me. It... huhhh... it is a passion for me. I... huhhh... I hope I have not startled you..."

"Hahaha! Well, I'm sure not in Kansas anymore..."

"Hey, is it starting to get cold out here? You got all goosebumps.

"Perhaps we should be getting inside. I have kept you up far too late as it is."

"Oh... I hope I did not...

"Oh, no. No, it's the other foot. It's fine."

"Hey, listen... this don't mean anything 'ccept havin' fun, okay? I mean, I like you an' everything, you're a real nice guy..."

"Thanks... ow! My foot's gone to sleep."

"Here... allow me..."

"And you are a very nice girl."

"Goodnight, Miss Gale."

"Sweet dreams."
chapter

3

Missing Shadows
Hi! Guess you don't remember me, my name's Gale. We met when I was arrivin', but I didn't get your name.

I love how they got this balcony right outside the breakfast room, don't you?

A Lady? Pity's sake, I ain't curtseyed, or nothin! Whatever must you think o' me?

Gee, you musta bin' till them royal parties. You don't know how it'd be for me to hear all that fancy gossip.

Sorry, Harold.

Look, I'm not criticizing, old girl, but we nearly missed the blasted hotel. Too much daydreaming.

Now, run along and open the door and let's get out of this devilish midday sun.

"Breakfast room?" My dear child, look how the shadows are disappearin'; it's almost noon! For the moment, I prefer to think of it as the lunch room.

Oh, and since you enquire, I'm Lady Fairchild.

Ha ha ha! Bottomlessly dull, I should imagine. Still, perhaps someday I may satisfy your curiosity concerning the aristocracy. We shall see.

Oh, look... there's someone else arrivin'.

With a man.
...there... just there. Very good. Welcome to the Hotel Himmliegarten, Mr. Potter, Mrs. Potter. I hope you will enjoy your stay.

Pietro? Show Mr. and Mrs. Potter to room one-thirteen.

...but never mind. I expect it's what you were angling for, eh?

Is this it? Bit fanciful for my tastes...

It's very nice. I hope sir will be comfortable here. And Madame, of course.

Huh, all very grand. I'm sure, all these fiddly bits, but they charge for 'em. I know that's the thing with these places. Still, no point fretting...

We ought to get this lot unpacked, I suppose.

Actually, it's ideal for compiling my German ship production reports. I'm eager to...

Oh, I say! That really is too bad. Look... they've given us a double bed and not a twin like you wanted.

Tell you what, I'll unpack 'em, you put 'em away, how's that?

I'm certain a twins what I asked for. Absolutely positive. Oh, well. Can't be helped. Just have to make do.
There. That's everything put away. I was thinking I might take a walk before the sun goes in. I...

Oh, I'm sorry. I'm interrupting your reading.

Muh?

Oh, no, this. It's just some old hotel thing. Found it in the bedside table.

No, you go on out, old thing. Get some air before it's too dark.

Thank you. I shan't be long.

The story of VENUS AND TANNHAUSER.
nce reached, Venus's boudoir was a sumptuous melody of scent, sequinned brocade and gilded furnishings, played as a nocturne. All was dark, save for that light decanted by three candle-sticks, the bold design of which emboldened Rosalie to beg her mistress that she might set one such candle in that shrine beloved by devotees of the Aegean's fabled poëtress, a plea to which the gentlemen attending could but lend encouragement.

n their return, the three were charmingly received by Rosalie; the daintiest Pierrot ever seen, save that from cap to toe the darling imp wore black, (her hose, her domino; the ruff of organvic that bloomed about her throat as if it were some monstrous dahlia) and black alone. She led through empty halls, while Cosmé, following, teased Tannhauser by stepping on the foaming lace that hemmed the poor Chevalier's gown.

With candle set to his new task, the shadows swelled like sweet desire, in that each shade would alter shape yet be beside its owner always, unremarked upon, a secret twin, inhabitant of that dark realm beyond the demi-monde's far shore.

Rosalie tilled her queen's most private cove, nor shirked to lap the dew from off the curling fronds that ringed the fragrant dell, undaunted by that twilight grotto or its mysteries.
ithin that wanton chiaroscuro, Rosalie and Cosmé bucked like foals, while Venus rode her waxen steed alone, calves twined about its glistening flanks.

Save luckless Tannhauser, none lacked a mount, until the goddess, taking pity, bade him kneel and raise his petticoats while she reached out to pinch the very tip of that remaining source of light, whence streams of wax coiled down along the shaft; a decorative effusion.

Thus, darkness swallowed Venusburg, and oh! what a delicious umber kingdom it contained, alive with whispers, sighs and the most intimate of sounds.

We leave our knight and his enchanted queen to their night, sprawled upon a counterpane so deep as to become quite lost within; a world of shade; a sweetly furtive land of boundless license where the dark is swelled by our most rare imaginings; below the hill.

Inflamed beyond endurance by this shadow-play, Cosmé threw off his frills, entreatling Rosalie to take him as she did her mistress, with recourse unto that needle’s eye that scripture names the narrowest gate of paradise.

Thus, leaving Venus mounted on a nobler pillar than great sculptor e’er afforded her, the maid procured another candle for the coiffeur’s shadiest recess. A single flame remained, the lecherous shadows burgeoning with each extinguished light.
Oh, hello. That didn't take long.

No, I... I remembered some mending I have to do before bed. I only wanted a little walk...

Hmmph. Looks like you've run most of the way. You're red as a beetroot. I've just been, y'know, just looking for some documents I need to begin work tomorrow.

Documents?

Spect you've tidied them somewhere... documents!

Roll of contracts, little ribbon round them. I knew I should have put them somewhere myself...

Just a moment. Let me put this lamp down lower for my mending, and I'll help look...

What would've helped is not misplacing them to begin with! If they're lost...

Oh, yes. Yes, it is. Thank you.

Y'know, I'm going to make this report perfect. Drop it on Fairbarn's desk and watch his face.

Oh, yes. Yes, it is. Thank you.

I told him, I said, 'Y'know, mature couple are less likely to be diverted from business at hand than certain younger types.'

I didn't mention Blakeby by name, but he cottoned on...

I mean, old Fairbarn mistrusts me enough already! Before we left, he said, 'Remember it's a business trip not a second honeymoon.'

Harold? Is this it?

Mmm.

You know how there's some things you've always dreamed of doing?
That's show Blakeley and his cronies I was still a potent force at Edwards. God, they disgust me! Always going on about how much they earn!

I mean, there are things one simply doesn't talk about.

Mmm. Well, that's the mending done.

Ahh.

Of course, for me it's the challenge that's the thing: doing something you haven't tried before. Realizing your opportunity and seizing the moment... Just imagine: promotion, sales division manager...

Anyway, I'm ready for sleep. Shall I put the light out, or are you staying up?

No, no. I'm quite tired myself, suddenly. Tired and contented. Prospects, decent income, foreign travel...what more could we want, eh?

I can't imagine.

Goodnight, Harold.

Goodnight, old thing.
chapter

4

Poppies
A table for one? But certainly, Miss Gale. Allow me to escort you...

Oh, that’s sweet, but you got people waitin’ an’ I can just as soon find one myself.

There by the window looks nice.

Evening, Miss... Gale, isn’t it? I’m so bad at names.

How unusual to encounter you without your military escort.

Huh? Oh, you mean, ROY? Ha ha ha! Ah, he ain’t nothin’ special.

Really? You wouldn’t mind? Gee, I ain’t never dined with a lady before! I mean, I don’t know which wine goes with fish, or nothin’...

I mean, it ain’t like we’re courtin’ nor nothin’. Besides, he’s away visitin’ with his folks.

...leaving you to dine alone. How perfectly dismal. Well, in that case, perhaps you’d care to join me?

Oh, I find about the goes with practically everything. Shall we ask for a menu?
...she married Grandfather to spite everyone, and the breeding stock never really recovered. So our blood isn't quite blue...more a sort of watery violet.

Phahaha! Oh stop, you're making me laugh so I can't eat!

I mean, all o' them stories; them places an' people...you sure done a lot of things different in your life to what I done in mine.

Ha ha ha...oh, you'd be surprised.

My dear, I was born into a class who don't work, take the money of those who do, and have not yet been put to death by stoning.

After that, life holds few surprises, believe me.

Ha ha ha ha! Land's sake, the things you say about your own kin...

Ha ha ha! Yeah...so would you.

Nonsense. You should hear what they say about me.

Now, shall we risk dessert? That peach sherbet looked rather nice, don't you think?
Boy, that was some astin!
I hope my havin' a cigarette with
coffee didn't embarrass you none.
I know real ladies don't smoke.
We certainly don't.

Other than a
little opium now and
then, we're utterly
abstemious.

Opium? Ohh, now I know
you're havin' me on...
Not at all. Normally, I
prefer laudanum, but I keep
the smokeable variety by for
when the mood takes me.
Would you care
to try some?

No! You're
serious? Ohh, I
couldn't do that!
I'd just...

...you
really got
some? Ohh...
no, I couldn't.
What'd folk
say?

Well, that
rather depends
on whether
you tell them,
doesn't it?

My room's
this way.
Oh... your room has one of those little white Bibles, too. I just had mine away, I seen enough of that stuff in Kansas.

Hahhhhh!

Goodness! Kansas must be frightfully progressive. Have you looked inside?

Inside the Bible? Well, no, I never...

...Oh! Why, that's just disgraceful!

Oh, I thought it rather jolly, actually. Here... do have some of this.

It'll help you get over the shock.

Mmp. Like this?

Hmm. It may be going out. You'll have to suck quite hard...

Woohhh...

Woh.

Oh, I'm sorry. I just don't know what happened to my legs. Here... I guess you better take this...

...yeah, I feel... it's like everything just sorta looks real pretty, y'know? I mean, this picture, all these little dots on the lace. It's...

Of course... but how do you feel? Is it nice?

Everythings so beautiful! Lord, I just love looking at beautiful things...
Yes, yes, so do I.

No, no, wait. Don't...

Oh, I'm sorry. I thought...

No, it's just I only got these two nice dresses, and... I already got one all messed up. Just let me take it off first, huh?

There.

Hey, is it all right if I have some more o' this?
Mmmmm...
Be my guest. It is rather pleasant, isn't it? The way it brings your dreams so much closer...

Here, give me your hand...

Oooh, Ooh, that feels so silky...
...do you wanna smoke anymore?

Ahh, ahh, yes, yes, but don't move your hand away.
Take a mouthful and pass it to me with your lips...

Hahahaha...
Mmmmm, say, did I just hear a woman cry out in the next room or some guy askin' "is it sore?" Ha! Maybe they're doin' it too, huh?

Boy, this stuff's swell. Where's it come from?

Poppies, lovely long-stemmed red blossoms...
m'm...open your legs.

Sure... Poppies... yeah, I remember about poppies...

I...I was in a poppy field. I fell asleep.

Oh, Oh, that's good. You do that so good...

In the field... just poppies everywhere. And it... it got dark. Yeah... and somebody was looking for me.
...and it got cold and...

...and all I could smell, all I could smell were the poppies...

...and I was so scared.

AHH!

Oh! Oh, what...? What's the matter? What did I do?

N...nothing. I...

My God, I...

I...I was just seeing things, that's all. I just remembered a sort of... a sort of dream I used to have. A sort of game...

...when I was young.

But...

...but that's what I just did.

Look, I... I feel sorta funny. I think I better go back to my room.

I'm dizzy an' I think I need to get some sleep...

Yeah, yeah, so do I. You sleep good, now.

Yes, yes, of course. Here... borrow this robe. We can talk in the morning, when I've had time to think.

I really do think we should talk.
Ah. Evening.

Lovely night.
Straight On Till Morning
...got those trade figures coped out, so I think I'm entitled to celebrate with a slap-up meal.

Come on, old girl, perk up! The whole night's ahead of us.

Sorry, Harold.

Ah! Mr. and Mrs. Potter, I am so glad you could dine with us this evening.

Yes, yes. Table for two. Hope your food's not too fancy as you usually like your furnishings.

Sir does not admire the Art Nouveau?

Huh. "Noodle style" don't you French call it? Yeah, I know the odd thing about art, but this stuff?

I mean, what's it all about? All frills and no substance...

Ah, what can I say? Faced with this profound insight, I am speechless.

Bon appétit.

However, I assure you our menu is broad enough for even sir's remarkable tastes. As you see, there are no noodles.
...and fifthly, if you're talking about real artists for our time, then for my money, you can't beat the charmers who design our ships. They're...

Darling, are you listening?

Sorry, Harold, I was just eating...

...and I mean of course, it's all terribly decadent, wallowing in the senses like that, all pleasure and no purpose. Everything, just decoration and icing sugar...

...effeminate, that's what it is. It's effeminate.

Now, battle-ships...

Hmmm. Yes, rather good salmon, that, actually. Anyway, the future is industrial design. Art Nouveau, just fanciful nonsense, flying in the face of reality.

Prows and propellers, that's the thing! Not fauns and flowers...

I'm sorry, Harold, but would you excuse me? I have to visit the ladies' restroom...

Oh. No, of course, old girl, you carry on.

I'll get a menu and pick a dessert for us, eh?
Ah! Mr. Potter! The decor did not ruin your digestion?

Ha ha! No, no...still, not quite my cup of tea. But a lovely spot of grub, nonetheless.

It was very nice. Thank you.

Ah, well, we're here for months yet. We'll get to know everybody soon enough.

Right now, I'm ready for bed. Sleep off that meal. You should never have let me touch that gateau...

Hmph. Funny chap, that manager. Bit smarmy for my liking. He...

Oh, I say, there's that old bird from the room next to ours. Is that her daughter, d'you think?

I-I'm not sure. She sounded American...

Sorry, Harold.
G'night, old thing.

Good night, Harold.

...you'll have to suck quite hard...

Wooohhh...
...my legs...
...how do you feel? Is it nice?

Yeah, I feel...
...on the lace...
...so beautiful...
...beautiful things...

No, No, wait. Don't...

---

...nice dresses...
...all messed up...

1 × 19 = 19
2 × 19 = 38
3 × 19 = 57
4 × 19 = 76
5 × 19 = 95
6 × 19 = 114

7 × 19 = 133
8 × 19 = 152
9 × 19 = 171
10 × 19 = 190

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Just let me take it off first...

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I—I've just remembered.
I meant to have a bath before I came to bed.
Please excuse me.

Muh? Where're you going?
Mmm...

...it is rather pleasant, isn't it?

The way it brings your dreams so much closer.

Here, give me your hand...oohh, Ooh, that feels so silky...

Ahhh, Ahh, yes, but don't take your hand away.

AAAaaa!

What...? I say, old girl, whatever's the matter? Are you all right in there?

Yes, yes, I'm all right. I...I just scalded myself.

It isn't serious.

I'd finished my bath anyway.

Yes, yes, I'm all right. I...I just scalded myself.

Oh, Bad luck. Is it sore?

Well, never mind. You come back to bed. It'll be better by morning...
Oh, that's good. Oh, you do that so good.

...and all I could smell...all I could smell were the poppies...

Ahh!

...seeing things...just remembered a sort of...sort of dream I used to have.

A sort of game...when I was young.

But...but that's what I just did!

That's it! Now I shan't have a wink of sleep all night. Blasted racket! I'm going to give them a piece of my mind.
Ah, Evening.

Lovely night.
chapter

6

Queens Together
Hi, Breakfast on the terrace?

Mm, Forgive me for not asking you to join me. I'm always terribly cross during breakfast.

Aren't days contrary? They begin dreadfully, then usually improve. Quite unlike life, I assure you.

Oh...breakfast makes me fat.

I just wanted to apologize. See, I used to have this whole...fantasy world, I guess.

Last night kinda brought it back.

Precisely my difficulty. Events grow cu...more curious by the moment.

Shall we meet by the stream and talk?

Gee, that'd be great! Maybe we can swim?

Mankind, if intended to swim, wouldn't have invented the punt.

There! I'm cross already. Leave me with my book. Later we'll discuss what dreams we share.
ut Gabrielle, I hate to be conspicuous.” These protests, for the benefit of the indifferent, mute proprietor, are Valentine’s attempt to have her non-complicity established from the first, an innocent led on by Jezebels, as Gabrielle and I propel her through the muslin fog of the costumiers.

I scold her. “Nonsense! It’s a costume ball. They’ll think you’re an attention-seeker if you turn up plainly dressed.” Curtains sweep back, reveal a twilit cubicle where, black and red, our dresses wait: poppies at dusk. With one invertebrate-like shiver of her apricot flesh, Gabrielle sloughs off her clothes while I calm our reluctant Valentine.

Still fresh to Paris, Valentine clings to her rustic modesty as if it were a rag-doll. Swamped by daunting saloon crowds, her disapproval has become her armour. Here, within the perfumed gloaming of the dressing room, she scents a trap, and shies at the disrobing. Gabrielle and I, with soft, placatory murmurings, remove her evening-coloured crepe de chine, her maillot corset with its trim of lavender Valencia lace crushed all about her breasts, like tissue wrapping winter tangerines. We peel her self-effacing stockings, purple tulle, from adolescent legs, intent upon surprising her with nothing more than femininity, naked and regal, languishing beneath.
Oooh, it's freezing! How's your book?

Puzzling. This story's by Henry Gauthier-Villars, husband of Colette. She wrote "Claudine," published under his name. I'm not sure...

If I were a lady, I'd read books.

Nonsense. Books require titles; reading them doesn't. I'll teach you. We'll be Queens together.

Hm. Another childhood phrase.

Your fantasies. You were going to tell me. Mine started with, you know, sex?

Sex was this whole different world. I made up stuff...daydreams about it.

So did I. Desire's a strange land one discovers as a child, where nothing makes the slightest sense.

Watching you makes me shiver. Do come out.

Okay. I'm seeing Rolf for dinner, so I sure don't need to catch a chill.

Those daydreams were so funny. I still think about 'em even now, as if part of me's still back there somewhere.
There, I'm out. I sure hope nobody can see us from the hotel.

Do you have my towel?

Certainly, Here... let me dry your back.

Oh, that's warm... y'know, you shouldn't kneel so close. I'm gonna make you all wet.

Hm, it's already far too late to prevent that, I'm afraid.

Hey! Hahaha! You're drying my back, remember? Are all English women like you?

No, sadly. Or we'd all have become blissfully extinct centuries ago. How about down here?

Oh, Oh, Lord. This ain't helping me get dry. Where'd you learn to handle things like that?

Playing chess. Between moves... Give me your mouth...
How considerate. Which way should I lie?

Like that. It's so pretty with that cloud of blonde across it.

Is this it? How women do it?

Sometimes, it is a most delectable configuration, though I fear to outside eyes, we must resemble people on a playing card.

Mmnhff ha ha ha...

Mmm.

Oh, yes. Oh, that's good... mmm...

Mmm... Mm, that feels so good I just know it's wrong. I oughta be doing something for you.

My stan... uh, my aunt always says it's more blessed to give than receive.
I know you, Mrs. Potter, isn't it? From the room next to mine? Would you care to explain yourself?

I'm sorry. Oh, I'm sorry. This is awful. I didn't mean... I didn't mean to spy. I wasn't...

Oh! Somebody's watching us over there. By that bush!

Hahaha. I'm afraid these incessant interruptions are rather spoiling my mood.

You! You there!

Yes, you! Don't you dare run away. I consider very few activities wholly repulsive, but furtive voyeurism counts highly amongst them.

Step into the light!
Didn't mean to spy? You leer through the bracken like a common Peeping Tom...

No! No, it isn't like that...

It isn't like that at all.

I-I came to listen. I didn't know you'd be...

I overheard what you said at breakfast... and last night about dream worlds, when you were young...

You see, that's my story. I've never told anyone else about it. But when I heard you say...

Oh... I'm sorry, I've made a fool of myself.

How extraordinary. Oh, don't take on, it's just my way, making others more embarrassed than myself.

Child! Stop skulking in the undergrowth. Come and be introduced.

Now then, Mrs. Potter, I am Lady Fairchild. My companion is Miss Gale.

Fate, seemingly, has brought us to the Himmelgarten for a reason. Therefore, I propose we devote this afternoon to storytelling.

Just the three of us. Together.
Valentine, we decide, lacks only vanity, which rankles with her country-born proclivity for camouflage. She winces and recoils while we, half-dressed ourselves, attend her wardrobe; place a fichu of Alençon lace upon her shoulders, white on freckled amber. Next, the décolleté bodice and a skirt of Empire faille, its chenille borders worked with motif hearts.

"Oh no," she cries. "It's too much." Gabrielle and I are undeterred, drunk with this ancient drama of initiation. We ensure the dynasty of women, propagate that powdered lineage. Arms pinned by her side, she bites her lip.

At last it's done. Adorned with diamonds, spades and hearts we stand before the mirror, oriental monarchs seeking a distaff nativity. Our own paste tiaras fixed securely, Gabrielle and I attach a sequin-dusted aigrette to the brushed ink hair. We set her ornate crown in place. The faintest smile divides the crystallized red cherry lips, and apprehensive glances steal between us as we recognize, too late, the fiend of appetite we have unleashed. She tilts her chin and studies us, both in our turn; toys with one midnight curl, considering.

"Tiaras," there is pity in her voice. "But aren't they rather common?"
chapter

The Twister
Hiya, Mister Roux! Haven't trouble getting your kite off the ground?

Haha! It was easier to launch this hotel.

Dear ladies, I must run to take advantage of this wind. Au revoir...

Such a charming man.

But we did come here to hear each other's stories and learn what we have in common.

Perhaps you first, Mrs. Potter.

No, I...I couldn't. Not yet. I just...

Oh, I don't mind tellin' my story. Ain't much to it, anyways. Ain't much o' nothin' back in Kansas where I come from.
"I lived with my aunt and uncle on a farm out in the middle of nowhere. Lost my real folks. There was animals, places to hide, rabbits for my dog... heck, I never thought about, y'know, grown-up stuff.

"Then, one afternoon, I was alone on the farm. Sunny kind of day; no birds singin'; everythin' quiet. Anyways, crossin' the yard, I looked out over the fields...

"There it was.

"I mean, I was near on turned sixteen, so I'd seen twisters afore, but they was just little ones. Little ones a long ways off.

"This'n was blacker'n pitch, a hundred and fifty mile high and comin' right across them fields at me, chewin' up everythin' that got in its way.

"I didn't know what to do. I just picked up my dog an' I ran in the house.

"Weren't no time to fix shutters, an' no place for him 'cept to squeeze up in the corner there. I tried huggin' on my dog, but he run off. I daren't go after him.

"Silliest thing: I thought about that tall no trespassin' sign my aunt set on the east gate, and hoped that old twister could read. I shut my eyes tight and waited.

"Didn't have to wait long."
"It was like God shouted all the windows in, an' I knew right there I was gonna die.

"All I could think was how it weren't fair, me only fifteen. Never been with a man or gone nowhere, an' here I was dead.

"Caught myself holding my dress down, so's I didn't die unladylike, an' it all seemed so dumb. Strangest thing was, I just lay there in that awful wind. I started feelin', you know...

"Sorta hot.

"Oh, now you're lookin' at me an' I'm gettin' all embarrassed. I know it sounds funny, but...

"See, if I was dyin', I could do what the heck I liked! Didn't have to think. 'No I aren't,' or 'No I mustn't,' or nothin'. It was scary, but kinda excitin', just like the wind.

"I let go my skirt, and my hand just kinda settled down there. I shouldn't say this, but Lord... I was wetter'n June in Seattle."
"I was so excited. The feeling between my legs was getting faster and louder, spinning tight like a hot twister. I had a tornado inside and outside, too, like I was just a skin stretched out tight in between them. I could feel something was gonna happen to me, getting nearer and bigger all the time, but I didn't know what it was.

"I guess... I dunno..."

"I guess I thought it was death."
"I guess I thought that big wind would just blow me right up in the clouds. Me, the farm, every Bible and whorehouse in Kansas, then show-girls and church-women all alike blew clean to heaven.

"I wriggled my fingers deep down in me like I was diggin' 'em into the grass, so's to keep me from fallin' up into the sky.

"I hung on for dear life. I guess mostly what I was hang onto was bent a kid, learnt candy, any dolls, all that stuff. But my hands, they were both workin' faster'n faster, an' inside my head I had all these pictures an', oh, just the dirtiest thoughts, an' the twister inside me was whirlin' so hard I just couldn't hold on, and the house sorta flipped...

"And I screamed...

"...and let go..."
"When I opened my eyes, it was quiet. The twister was gone and I was still here. Or anyways, that's what I thought.

"Got up, legs all shakin', and staggered outside.

"Everythin' was all different, with trees in the wrong fields, the barn on its side. The east gate had its sign broke in two so that 'trespassin' lied there broke up in the mud, with top screwed round sideways. Felt like I'd been picked up and twisted around, then put down someplace else in some whole other country.

"The country where I'd been, brung up was gone. I leaned agin' the busted fence an' held my hand close by my face, just for the smell of it, and it was new and I stood on new ground where anything was like to happen.

"Them next years I spent explorin' all that new territory. Had all kinda big adventures. Why, the things I did, like when I..."
...oh, but that's just a whole mess o' other stories. You don't wanna hear no more 'bout me an' my ol' farm.

Me going on like that, you musta been just bored clean outta your minds.

My dear child. Even I'm not old enough to have grown bored with tornadoes. Your tale was utterly absorbing. So different, yet so similar to my own.

And...and to mine. I didn't know. I didn't know that other people ever felt that way.

Oh, but...you're so young and so brave. I don't know how you can summon up the courage to just talk about it like that.

Really? Then perhaps you'll have the opportunity to find out...

...when you tell us your story next.

More tea, anyone?
8

Come Away, Come Away
Well, Mrs. Potter? We've heard Mrs. Bale's story. Shall we hear yours?

Yes, yes, you shall, it's just that... finding the words, it's so difficult...

Say, look! There's Monsieur Roujeur and his wife again!

Ah, Madame et Mademoiselles. Bon après-midi.

Why, ain't this just the sweetest thing? It's one of them little places for folks to set.

It's called an arbour, dear.

Now, I suggest we make ourselves comfortable while we listen to Mrs. Potter.

But... well, it's just not the sort of thing I'm used to talking about.

Oh, now you hush! If I can tell you what I did, how come you're any different?

Flying the kite, it's more like the hotel business than I had thought. Always there are snags and tangles.

Ha ha! Don't give up hope, Monsieur. I expect that we shall see you later. Au revoir.

You... you don't understand. I haven't let myself even think about it all for so long.

You see, it was years ago. One school holiday, when I was a girl...
That summer, my brothers and I often visited the park. One afternoon, Michael, the youngest, noticed something in the ruled-off spinney at the park's centre.

John, my eldest brother, shouted, 'Come away, come away!'

Michael wouldn't, though, so we went over to see for ourselves.

"I don't really know how to tell you what we saw. It...it was a boy. And a girl.

"She was leaning across a fallen log, with her skirts all...disarranged.

"The boy knelt down behind her and I realized that he had...you know. His britches. They were down.

"He was...sort of pushing, backwards and forwards, and whenever he did the girl cried out..."

"...almost as if he were hurting her. The boy remained silent until suddenly he quivered and gave a cry, opening his eyes to stare straight at me.

"His eyes. They were the brightest green."
"Our name was Darling, although we called our parents Mr. and Mrs. Darling because they used that word constantly.

"In our big house, my brothers' room adjoined mine far from our parents, and after supper we were gathered there, whispering about what we'd seen...

"...when something rattled against the window.

"It was the boy. The boy from the park, standing in our garden and throwing stones up at the pane. When he saw us looking down at him, he smiled and waved. It was the most beautiful smile.

"I waved back, almost without thinking.

"Taking it as a signal, he began climbing the drainpipe towards our window.

"I became very afraid and wished I could call back my gesture, but...well, part of me didn't want that at all.

"As he climbed, he was...

"...very agile. Very lean, and quick.

"His name was Peter."
"He said he'd followed us from the park, because he liked our looks. He stared straight at me when he said that. His voice was common, very lower class, yet it was musical.

"He said that he and his friends often played games in the spinning...games that we might enjoy.

"Clearly intrigued, John and Michael asked what kind of games. Seeming almost coy, the boy replied only that they were games to make one feel better. When Michael pressed him further he agreed to show us, although with a great show of reluctance, as if the idea had been ours.

"He... Oh, this sounds dreadful. He undid his trousers and showed us his...his affair, then he urged John and Michael to do the same. He said he was going to rub some invisible dust on them and that they should think nice thoughts about...you know.

"About girls.

"Heart thundering, I watched them playing there in the lamplight and shadows. Shortly, Peter approached me, asking if I'd like to play. I couldn't speak, which he took as assent. Perhaps it was. From across the room, still practicing what he'd taught them, my brothers gazed toward us expectantly."
"I hardly dared breathe. Our Nanny, Mine, Bernard, slept just downstairs and I was afraid she'd hear. Then Peter smiled and everything seemed all right, as if we both knew that this was only a harmless game.

"His hand settled upon my knee. It...it felt like lightning running through me.

"He started...oh, this is so embarrassing. I don't know if I can..."

"He started to push my nightgown further up my leg so that he could...see me. My brother seemed so excited. I was sixteen, they hadn't seen me undressed since we were babies.

"I'd never imagined they thought about me in that way.

"He...he put his hand between my...o-on my private parts, and...and then nothing seemed quite real anymore. I didn't believe it was happening.

"He took my hand, very gently, and he made me touch his...his affair. It was so warm. Then he began to uncover my bosom.

"He started stroking me, one of his fingers was...

"Oh, how could I? How could I let him? I know it was wrong, but...the way it felt, and then...then he started moving, in my hand. His face...

"His eyes were closed. He looked like a little boy, going to sleep."
"He leaned over to kiss me, and... it wasn't an ordinary kiss, the way you'd kiss your husband. It was.

"His tongue, he... he put it in my mouth. Too... you must think me a woman of no character. Watching from the bottom of the bed, John and Michael began... a sort of gasping.

"It was all so fast, I couldn't see properly. My brother's hands were moving faster and faster beneath each other's nightgowns. Michael made a noise and something seemed to leap between them, splashing off their shirt. Everything became feverish. Peter in my hand, I was in his. Something was going to happen...

"He started bucking as though I'd hurt him, and then something wet trickled between my fingers, falling in warm droplets down the front of me.

"I realized that I was... moving myself, against his hand, then everything in me seemed to burst and there was such joy. Such perfect joy...

"Afterwards came a quiet, dreamy time. He told us to visit him in the sickbay, but that we must never, never tell anyone.

"He left them, through the window, but in my dreams he took us all with him, out over London, up into the sky like a wish..."
...and that's how both my real adventures and my dream adventures began: with a vision of flying.

Oh, whatever must you think of me? I did so need to tell someone, but now you must fear that I am deranged.

Of course I did spend a number of years in a Sanatorium.

You...? B-but... you're a lady. You come from a good family.

He would find your image of flight perfectly acceptable and indeed appropriate. I have no doubt you are as sane as I.

My dear Mrs. Potter, it was my 'Good family' that had me confined to that institution.

You see, I've always been rather... difficult, ever since certain events in my own childhood...

Fiddlesticks! Why, there is a notable professor of the mind currently practising not far from here, in Vienna.

...and perhaps, if we were to relocate to the courtyard by the fountains, where it is cooler, I might be prevailed upon to recount them. So, come away, dear ladies.
Looking Glass House
Oh, look! There's Monsieur Rougeur again! My Monsieur Rougeur!

M-Monsieur Rougeur...

Well, I never! Did you see that? Why, he walked right past me! What's he in such a fit about?

I think I see the answer before us. The poor dear's lost that rather sweet little kite he was playing with.

And after he made such a point of comparing it to the hotel business, as well. I suppose the wind dropped.

Yes, it does seem a little warmer now. Perhaps we might sit here while you tell us your story, Lady Fairchild?

Oh, very well...although I must say, I've never enjoyed stirring up the past. One's memory is such a curious place.

You see, there's the way things seemed, and then there's the way things were...

...and one is so often the total reverse of the other...
"I was fourteen, as I remember, and the summer afternoon seemed to drone on forever. It was during holidays. My sister and myself, so often left alone in that big house, went up and sat beside the stream where she would try her best to read improving books, dull things with neither pictures nor conversations, then would fall asleep. In some ways, it was her fault what occurred.

"I lay there, staring at the stream, with my reflection staring back at me. One might say I was thoroughly infatuated with myself; this underwater girl amidst the brine and drifting weed, her face was mine, yet now and then, a queer, deep fish would shimmer through it, just as if some dreadful thought had crossed her mind. Caught up in her, at first I did not notice him.

"He was my father's oldest friend, the white hair ringed about his bald, pink crown. He seemed forever anxious, eager to be somewhere else. We called him 'Bunny,' though his actual name escapes me now. In hushed tones, so as not to wake my sister, he complained about the sun and asked if I would come inside to keep him company, awaiting my Papas return. It seemed ungracious to decline."
"Enquiring when my father might be home he glanced uneasily, it seemed, towards his pocket-watch, but otherwise said nothing as we walked towards the house. No bird sang. No dog barked. No dray-horse clattered in the lane. A breeze sent ripples through the puddles, like a housemaid shaking out a bedsheet. save for that the air was still as if the afternoon were under glass.

"Leading me to the sitting room, he said the oddest thing. He asked me if I were afraid, and I remember wondering why I should be afraid in my own home. In Mother's absence I was hostess, after all, while he was but a visitor. It made me feel peculiar, as if the proper way of doing things had been reversed; the afternoon turned back to front without my noticing.

"Inside, both of us perched on the sofa. He enquired as to my age and seemed surprised at my reply, remarking at how grown up I'd become. He told me I should sit more as a lady yet, proceeding to arrange my legs by way of demonstration. Wishing Father would come home, I gazed towards the clock, its ticking, hushed and lowly, filled the room."
"He told me that he had on numerous occasions been assured that he was quite at liberty to help himself to wine while under Father's roof. He then went on to add that, in consideration of my evident maturity, he felt that I might also have a glass. He winked and said it would be our secret. On my tongue the wine was strange and sharp, like unfamiliar poetry.

"I drank, drank deep to please him, yet my glass was never empty, seeming to refill itself. After a time I had the feeling that my body had grown, suddenly too large or small, the room about me similarly shrinking or increasing, so my oscillating state went unobserved. Upon my brow, a film of perspiration formed. He said I must be hot and, without thinking I agreed, provoking further liberties.

"The room, upon a tide of wine, would rush away from me and then come flooding back, so that it was some little while before I understood the warmth and movement there between my legs to be his hand. In the decanter's inset eye the highlights danced like sparks in iodine."
"It seemed so like a dream. The wine that made sweet vinegar of my saliva now began to make the room revolve, negating gravity. I fell or floated down a hole inside myself and at its far end all that I could see was Mother's mirror, there across the room. Inside me fingers fluttered, strange birds in a deep salt pool, their movements making ripples I could neither name nor own.

"The birds moved faster, caught up in a race with rules beyond my comprehension; purposeful and frantic. I imagined that I heard their cries, then knew them for my own. I fell, and from the hole's far end she fell towards me, half bare, hair like wild rape, white lace petals opening about her skinny legs. His hand was hot between my thighs. I made pretense that it was hers.

"The mirror-glass was melting into silver, boiling into mist, and I reached out and felt young muscle in her shoulder, her neck, the child-silk at her nape. We slid together, wet with mirror, slick as mercury, smeared kisses down each other's hips and rolled each other's wine upon our tongues. Legs twined into a warm caduceus we clung, pressed shivering against reflected heat; lost, tumbling in brightness."
"The room returned at last. My father's friend was gone, left hurriedly as though late for some appointment, nothing save a crumpled handkerchief to mark that he was ever there. My clothing had been readjusted hastily; one buttonhole left surplus at the collar. Everything was different. In the mirror sat my lover, watching me with heavy eyes between the strands of fallen blonde, my scent evaporating on her fingertips.

"I stood, and weaved on someone else's legs towards the looking-glass. She rose and came unsteadily to meet me, lifting up her hand to press with mine. Beneath our palms the glass was cold, unyielding; I no longer felt like me. The house no longer felt like mine. I had no substance. I was the reflection. From beyond the mirror-pane the real me gazed out, lost, quite hopeless.

"The clock's dull murmur measured off the silence like a senile relative. I stumbled in a trance towards the hall and there collapsed upon the checkered tiles, a toppled pawn. My parents, when they found me, put it down to too much sun. I never told my father that his friend had visited, and after that he never called again. By evening I was barely sure the afternoon had happened."
But it had.

As time went on, the feeling still persisted, that I'd been cast into an inverted world where nothing made sense in the way it once did.

I have been there ever since.

Judging by your accounts, it seems we've much in common. There was something of my story mirrored in your own. We must talk further.

Aah, but I see both of your respective gentlemen approaching.

Oh gee, it's Rolf... and Mr. Potter, too. I get so caught up in our talk, I plain forgot that I was supposed to meet him.

Never mind. I've tickets for a ballet shortly opening in Paris. We could all go there together and continue our discussion.

Please don't answer yet. Take time. Reflect upon it.
chapter

10

Stravinsky
lots to catch up on.
I confess to misgivings about inviting Miss Balle, Mrs. Potter and their respective companions to the opening of the new ballet in Paris. Harold Potter is a ghastly constipated bore who talked about battleships from Fushch to the Sarre de Biron, while Miss Balle's young man, Herr Bauer, gazed from the carriage window looking Austrian and superior, occasionally casting sidelong glances at Miss Balle's feet...

...over-long if anything and rustic looking. Her worst feature.) How could such bright women harness themselves to such tedious men? Arriving in Paris a little after three we found our hotel (not a patch on the Himmelpalast) and shopped for postcards.

Reaching the opera at dusk we found our seats. The ballet is extraordinary. It's called Le sacre du printemps.
The opening revealed a set of valleys cleaving mountains, wildly humped in deep rich colour; looming there above a stage where gaudy primitives were crouched or moved in groups about their stylized labours, sowing seeds or fetching wood there in their settlement of golden light before the onslaught of the World of Time and History. Their swan arms, falling, stroked the slopes of music, sparse and sad, a lonely blackbird flainted across the dawn-fogged prehistoric marsh.

Over an ancient world the sound, over a changeless soil. Oh, the sound.

It was as if I knew it from before, and yet I'd never heard a music half so curious, evoking dread and longing both at once. A tingle ran down my length to settle in between my legs, which I confess I pressed together, secret in delight.

About, the audience were a restless ocean, slipping into a puzzled trance. Miss Tate gasped, unaffected as a ten-year-old, provincial and delighted. At the music gathered time, I breathed her perfume and took her hand.
The dance, became now delicate with movements careful and precise as those of cranes, took on an atmosphere of ritual, a pool-still semblance of vast gentleness that only served to emphasize the pagan cock's-comb brightness of the passions held in check.

A village elder enters, stooped and yet not frail, bent underneath the great weight of his power. Round, scrotum-bellied, rolling slowly through the dance, his head fringed white with beard and wrinkled like a flaccid member.

The woodwinds paused. The moment held its breath.

The audience sat mesmerized. It was intoxicating, not unlike those opium moments where our memory and our anticipation, all our was and will-be is made gloriously muddled in the luminescent blur of now, repeated phrases in the music, eerie as repeated instants set like jewels in time.

Enchanted, moving slowly as if through a honey of pure sound, my free hand reached across Miss Kate to clasp about the cool flesh of her arm. She turned a heavy-lidded smile towards me and we kissed.
Amidst a time-dissolving cloud of echoed notes and duplicated gestures came the old man’s sudden posture, stark and singular as a remark from God. A message, a commandment had been handed down; a single unseen pebble, hard with meaning, dropped to splash into the waiting vacuum.

Here the dance resumes, erupting into wildness, intertwining, spinning, adolescent, celebratory...the empty spaces blossoming between the moving bodies, and as soon dispersed, seemed at some moments fraught with unseen shapes, a quadrille of the glimpsed and the invisible.

In the low male throats of brass the notes are deep, deep, rising up into a strained friability.

(And some drums come thumping up from under, thunderous and muttering.)

Between my pearl incisors, Miss Dale’s lip was plump: the sweetest segment of a tangerine. Nobody noticed, save for Mrs. Potter with her eyes upon my back, two small hot points of stifled longing and anxiety. Withdrawing from Miss Dale, I turned to smile at Mrs. Potter. When she looked surprised yet unoffended, I leaned in and kissed her neck.
On stage, night had fallen, both acts merging in the time-diverted minds of the audience. Girls, startled, stamped their circling path and curled their arms to rigid serpent hooks for dragging down the moon.

Ringed by a tide of moving womanhood, a girl was singled out, thus rendered naked; vulnerable; targeted by fate. There in that moment she was all of us, was every young girl plunged into the dark of that experience. She was Miss Gale, caught up in her tornado. Wide-eyed, she was Mrs. Potter, stricken by that primal glimpse between the old, dark trees. The awful knowledge in her eye was mine, led helpless to the looking-glass room by my father's friend.

The brass and percussion stab through the staccato, stab and stab, in the rising tempo, stabbing space, stabbing time, stabbing, stabbing... Everyone was lost within the marvelous dance of music. Anything could happen. My right hand mapped thunderstorms of static on the silk of Miss Gale's knee. My left was clasped by Mrs. Potter, wondering, to her breast. A rabbit pulse leaped there against the beat.
The strange luminous planet of the music rolled now further from alignment with reality, phantasmagoric shifts of hue and sound and motion blurring in the mind until I can no longer say how much occurred that night not on the stage nor with we three there in the audience.

I scarcely knew which one of us I was, nor if I was the chosen girl stood there with beast-skinned witchmen skulking widdershins about. She started, jumped and spread her fingers wide with fear, but she could not escape them. We none of us escape those beast-skinned men, their poaches filled with death and revelation.

The audience were whooping, crying. Did that really happen? Did I lean back Mrs. Potter like a cello, sloped across my lap and kiss the snooded and olive-dark between her breasts while Miss Gale licked last powder from her cheek?

I think I pressed my hand against their wetness, there beyond the footlights; think we shifted and moaned like aching continents, while up above us all the music and the movements of a murder mounted, mounted...
Miss Bate’s knee was pressed hard between my legs. I spent against it. Drums. She had no chance to get away from it. The desperate dance to make the flowers come back. I had a sense that something big and fragile was about to fall. I lanced my tongue in Mrs. Potter’s anus, up and fast between the tropic lips into her beast-peach hole. Crowed hot with bronze, American girl heat rubbed shameless as a cat against my thigh. The smash of wet cymbals inside me as the maid surrendered to the sacrifice. I’m weeping.

In the seats behind us somebody was screaming. Men were bellowing. Europa. Oh, Europa. All the King’s men. Cunt and crack. They held her body up and everything just stopped. And everything erupted. Over a timeless world that sound. Over an ageless soil. Oh...
As the riot broke out I think I saw Nijinsky. He was standing on a chair and shouting that the audience were stupid. I could not hear what they shouted back at him. They sounded like some huge and wounded animal enraged, cut to the heart by beauty. It's a wonder we got out untrampled.

Outside everyone was fighting, yelling. The men departed self-importantly to find a cab. The darkness gleamed, illuminated by the moment's shock. I had not known that Europe's heartstrings were at such a pitch.

The fighting and the noise about us seemed so far away. I touched their hands. The girl so long misplaced, inside me touched the girl misplaced in them. I wanted to talk to them.

What happened? It was like a dream.

I'm still shook up. How about you, Lady Fairchild?

My dear child. We've been through far too much for you to still be calling me Lady Fairchild. Let's all be properly introduced.

I'm Alice.

Oh, well. My name's Wendy. And I'm Dorothy.

Y'know, ain't it just perfect we should all be friends?

I knew so many stories.

End of Book One