

MAUDIE: Good old *locus standi!*

HORACE: If you aren't going to give it them, gentlemen, and if they won't go back to their occupations without it, we ask you how they're going to live? Who's going to support them? Perhaps you're thinking of giving them all old age pensions and asking the country to pay the piper! The country will see you damned first, if, gentlemen, you'll pardon the expression. It's dawning upon us all that the women would never have taken such a step as this if they hadn't been the victims of a gross injustice.

ALL: Never.

HORACE: Why shouldn't they have a voice in the laws which regulate the price of food and clothes? Don't they pay for their food and clothes?

MAUDIE: Paid for mine since the age of six.

HORACE: Why shouldn't they have a voice in the rate of wages and the hours of labour in certain industries? Aren't they working at those industries? If you had a particle of common sense or decent feeling, gentlemen -

Enter GERALD WILLIAMS like a souvenir of Mafeking night. He shouts incoherently and in a hoarse voice. He is utterly transformed from the meek, smug being of an hour before. He is wearing several ribbons and badges and carries a banner bearing this inscription: The men of Brixton demand votes for women this evening.

WILLIAMS: Cole, Cole! Come on! You'll be late. The procession's forming up at the town hall. There's no time to lose. What are you slacking here for? Perhaps this isn't good enough for you. I've got twelve of them in my drawing-room. We shall be late for the procession if we don't start at once. Hurry up! Come on! Votes for Women! Where's your banner? Where's your badge? Down with the Government! Rule Britannia! Votes for Women! Do you want to support a dozen women for the rest of your life, or don't you? ... Every man in Brixton is going to Westminster. Borrow a ribbon and come along. Hurry up, now! Hooray! (*Rushes madly out crying* Votes for Women! Rule Britannia; Women never, never shall be slaves! Votes for Women!)

All the women who are wearing ribbons decorate HORACE.

ETHEL: My hero! (*She throws her arms round him.*)

HORACE: You may depend on me - all of you - to see justice done. When you want a thing done, get a man to do it! Votes for Women!

AGATHA gives him a flag which he waves triumphantly.

Curtain tableau. HORACE marching majestically out of the door, with the women cheering him enthusiastically.

Dorothy Richardson

1873 - 1957

Dorothy Richardson was the third of four daughters. Her father went bankrupt when she was twenty and her mother committed suicide shortly afterwards. She became a governess, a dental assistant and a secretary and later a journalist in London, where she met the married author H. G. Wells. Wells encouraged her to write and in 1915 appeared *Pointed Roofs*, the first of a series of autobiographical novels collectively entitled *Pilgrimage*, the last volume of which was published posthumously in 1967. A pioneer in the 'stream-of-consciousness' technique which aimed to capture the flow of individual consciousness, she was described by her friend Virginia Woolf as the inventor of the feminine sentence.

The following short story, 'Ordeal', is taken from *Window* (1 October 1930 edition).

Ordeal

When the taxi stopped, Agatha jumped out and gave the man money, evidently held ready in her hand all the way, and probably too much, to avoid a halt.

And when the lady-in-charge of the office asked if she were to send any telegrams, Agatha lost her head and stumbled over the address. Fan saw clearly then into her mind, the images it had held while she had talked so glibly in the cab.

In the hall she was even more un-nerving. Really, it was hopeless of her, just before her farewell hug, to let her eyes stray and find a nurse happening to pass, and recoil. Result of her recent too strenuous mental exercise. Truly it was a blessing she was not coming upstairs. . . .

Before Fan could recover from the spectacle of Agatha departing, to suffer all that her simple imagination and her inarticulateness in combination could force upon her, the lady-in-charge caught her with a remark to which she responded almost in Agatha's own manner; rushing wastefully outside herself into an obedient caricature of the speaker: in this case brusque and preoccupied, the fashion of one with mind alert and eyes all round the head. And was obliged, since the maid appearing at her side to take her suit-case had been a witness, to keep to this manner when she stepped out of the lift almost into the arms of a tall sister behind whom was waiting a short nurse.

She felt herself a guest being passed from hand to hand without release—being entertained. And indeed, for a moment, by each fresh face and fresh immediately revealed personality she *was* entertained. But she could not flatter herself into believing that these entertaining officials were themselves entertained. For them each visible hair of her head did not, as did theirs for her, stand out, a single separate mystery. If they felt anything at all it was relief, in finding that number seven had at her disposal as much manner as they. Their planned continuous engagement of her attention was very "psychological"—horribly wise, feminine. It had created for her a miniature past in this house, and when presently she was shut up alone in her room, undressing, she did not feel a stranger there. The room had stated itself while she was talking with the sister and nurse, and was now a known room. It seemed long ago that Agatha had gone away through the hall.

She had thought in advance that her sense of personal life must cease when she entered the door of the nursing home. But instead it was intensified, as if brought up against a barrier from behind which no certain future poured into it, her life flowed back upon itself, embarrassing her with its vivid palpitation. Her known self, arrested thus, was making all its statements at once. The most welcome was its cheerfulness, inexplicable and as little expected as the wise-seeming state of composure that had risen unsummoned during the last two days, like a veil between herself and her knowledge of her lack of courage. That was negative, acceptance of the inevitable. But there was nothing negative in this deep, good cheer that made her smile as she hung up her garments in a wardrobe, perhaps for the last time. It was not stoicism. It might be unconscious organic certainty of getting through. In her conscious mind was no certainty but that of the life-risk. Perhaps that itself was the invigorating factor. Whatever its cause, this present intensity of being made the possible future look like a shallow expanse; something very easy to sacrifice if she considered only herself. And those others out in life seemed now to call for solicitude only because they did not know how strange was the being in which they were immersed.

Very carefully she arranged her hair, firmly putting in extra pins, being back while she did so within the final moments of arranging herself for parties in her girlhood. And all the time the lugubrious thoughts and anticipations belonging to the occasion, and so fertile in her mind a week ago, seemed hovering in the background seeking in vain for space to intervene.

The short nurse brought the cup of thin soup that was breakfast and lunch, left hurriedly promising to come back in a moment, and came, with her already so well-known way of opening the door—a quiet, wide flourish that showed the whole of her at once, arm outstretched by hand holding door-knob.

They were all trained of course, Fan reflected, not to sneak into rooms: "Open the door wide, so, come in through the centre of the doorway and face at once *towards* the patient, close the door quietly behind you and advance, making a cheerful remark."

"Well? How are we?" the nurse had said, and paused in the middle of the room as if offering herself only as a momentary spectacle.

"Quite happy for the present. Are you going to stay with me for a bit?"

"I can't," she said, "I've got to attend to number eight," and perceived the tray and came forward to take it. "You've got to sleep now, till I come for you at five." This, then, was farewell to humanity on this side of the barrier. Fan asked leave to smoke—a single cigarette. While giving permission the nurse got herself to the door and away, as if hurriedly, as if driven, and in a moment Fan heard her voice asking cheerful questions in the next room. The replies came in a moaning monotone.

There was chattering in an open-doored room near by. Dining-room, common-room of nurses on duty on this floor of the great house where they earned their livings amidst pain and death. Whirring of the lift. Footsteps. Gushing of water into a basin. Swift rinsing, more gushing of water.

The sounds brought vivid images that ought, she felt, to be shocking, and rousing her to resist their suggestive power. But they passed through her mind without attaining her. Between them and the centre of her attention was something that had been waiting within the quietude of the room for its moment. Approaching now, as she sat back against the raised pillows and set down her book, with the note for Tom sticking out of it like a book-marker, on the table at her side with cigarette case and matches. These doings seemed the preliminaries to an interview.

A week ago, this moment of being left alone to wait for the summons had drawn her forward into itself and kept her there. She recalled the shock of finding the life all about her no longer her concern, the cold dry horror of the prospect of getting through the days and playing her part. And how at times with an effort she had forced herself out of her trance, dropped her own cancelled life, and felt each life about her, sharply, disinterestedly, seeing each one in its singleness to be equally significant; been aware of a strange, sure wisdom within her that seemed capable of administering the affairs of everyone she knew, guiding each life without offence. Had realised at one moment with an overwhelming clarity how it is that the character of an individual operates more securely, upon those who have known him, after he is dead. But for the last two days she had longed for this moment and the relief it would bring.

It was like being in great open spaces, in solitude. She rejoiced that she had decided not to tell Tom. This strange, familiar intimation all about her owed the power that was about to overwhelm her to her undivided solitude. Agatha, going, had gone utterly. If Tom had known, his suffering presence would have been in the room with her. She was severed even from Tom. With a deep, blissful sigh she felt all the tensions of her life relax. She was back again in the freedom of her own identity, in pre-marriage freedom, in more than childhood's freedom, with all the strength of her maturity to savour its joy. In bright daylight the afternoon lay before her, endless—the *first holiday of her adult life* . . .

Laughing softly and luxuriously, beside herself with the joy of complete return, she looked gratefully about at the features of the ugly, barely furnished room and lit the permitted cigarette. The act of smoking threw her back to the minute before last. It was occupation, distraction, waste of priceless opportunity, of time. No, of something that was more than time! It was cutting her off from her

deep life. It was unnecessary, because now she was back in her pre-smoking state of existence, and it had brought her to the present surface of life, away from the state of being into which she had just plunged. She crushed the burning end upon the match-box. The edge of that first blissful expansion was blunted, but the fruit of its moments lay in her thoughts and in her refreshed, delighted limbs, and in her recognition of the way the hint of tobacco smoke upon the air enhanced the familiar, remembered, surrounding freshness that was like that of a dewy garden in the early morning. All about her, emanating from her relaxed mind, was all the garden and countryside beauty she had ever known, its concentrated essence, so that what she saw was not any single distinct scene, but a hovering and mingling of them all—their visible spirit which was one with her own.

If this blissful state were the gift of the holiday from responsibility and from the tension of human relationships that only the chance of death had had the power to give her, then perhaps the perfect certainty of death must always bring it at the last? Perhaps people who were engaged in doing their dying were enjoying, behind even the most awful of the outward appearances, at the end of the exciting, absorbing struggle that prevented them from communicating their thoughts, the sense of being in its perfect fullness. . . .

•••••

She put down the book to question, as if it were a person with her in the room, the fact that she had forgotten, in the intensity of her absorption in *Green Mansions*, what lay ahead. The experience had been a fresh voyage of discovery into unchanged, underlying, timeless reality.

But with the book lying there closed, the sense of passing time came back. Her watch said half-past four. In half an hour. . . .

The door opened upon the sister almost ostentatiously displaying a hypodermic syringe. What hospital trick was this, sprung without warning?

"Your nurse is in the theatre, so I've come for this little job."

"What little job? What's the mystery in the syringe?"

"No mystery," smiled the sister, slipping the jacket from Fan's arm. "We always give this before the theatre."

"Theatre, theatre, theatre," absurd unsuitable word for the reality now near at hand and to remain, excluding all else for half an hour—an eternity—after the sister had gone.

"It prevents bleeding," said the steady, lying voice below eyes that looked serenely through the window as the syringe pricked home.

"I'd have gone quietly," said Fan resentfully.

"I daresay you would. But now you'll be happy for a quarter of an hour before the nurse comes." She spoke sternly, but finished with a smile. . . . the gleeful smile of one who outwits a naughty child. Brush, between two women. Managers? All women are managers. That's why they daren't give in to each other. That's why. . . . The nurse had gone. A quarter of an hour. Watch slow. This was some kind of drug. Stupefier. Very psychological. But that's why, I was saying. . . . Thoughts would not come.

Her effort to call up a picture of the theatre brought only a confused sliding together of images in a mind that could not hold them. Oh, very psychological. Perhaps they were wise. She could not decide. Would have liked to go down in full possession of all her senses, yet was grateful for this not unpleasant numbness.

With the nurse at her side she was walking down a shallow flight of stairs. Towards death . . . life? At the bottom of the stairs was another nurse, who greeted her as she passed, and whose greeting she returned. A turning to the left, another nurse in the offing, standing like a sentry at an open door, who also said "Good afternoon" and had to be answered. This was the theatre. Not yet quite. A corridor leading to the theatre's arched doorway, but giving no vista. The nurse was behind now. She was going forward alone, quite clear-headed and very matter of fact, not needing this careful passing from hand to hand. . . . In the doorway she was greeted by yet another nurse, standing away to the right, leading her on with her dreadful "Good afternoon." Oh, too psychological. Farical. She was round the bend. Here it was, the lofty room, the white-clad forms, high windows open, no smell of anaesthetic or of disinfectant. Trees beyond the window. Which still she could see as she lay—belonging completing.

"Breathe quite naturally, Mrs Peele."

Fresh and powerful came the volatile essences, playing in the air before her nostrils like a fountain. Her heart answered, her blood answered; but not herself. Desperately and quite independently her threatened heart fought against this power that was bearing her down. She raised her hands to still it.

"Clasp your hands."

All of herself was in her clasped hands, beating, throbbing. Less, and less, and . . . less. . . .



Rose Macaulay

1881 - 1958

A novelist, essayist and travel writer, Rose Macaulay was born in England, and lived in Italy from 1887 to 1894, when the family moved to Oxford. In 1900 she entered Somerville College, and started to write; her first