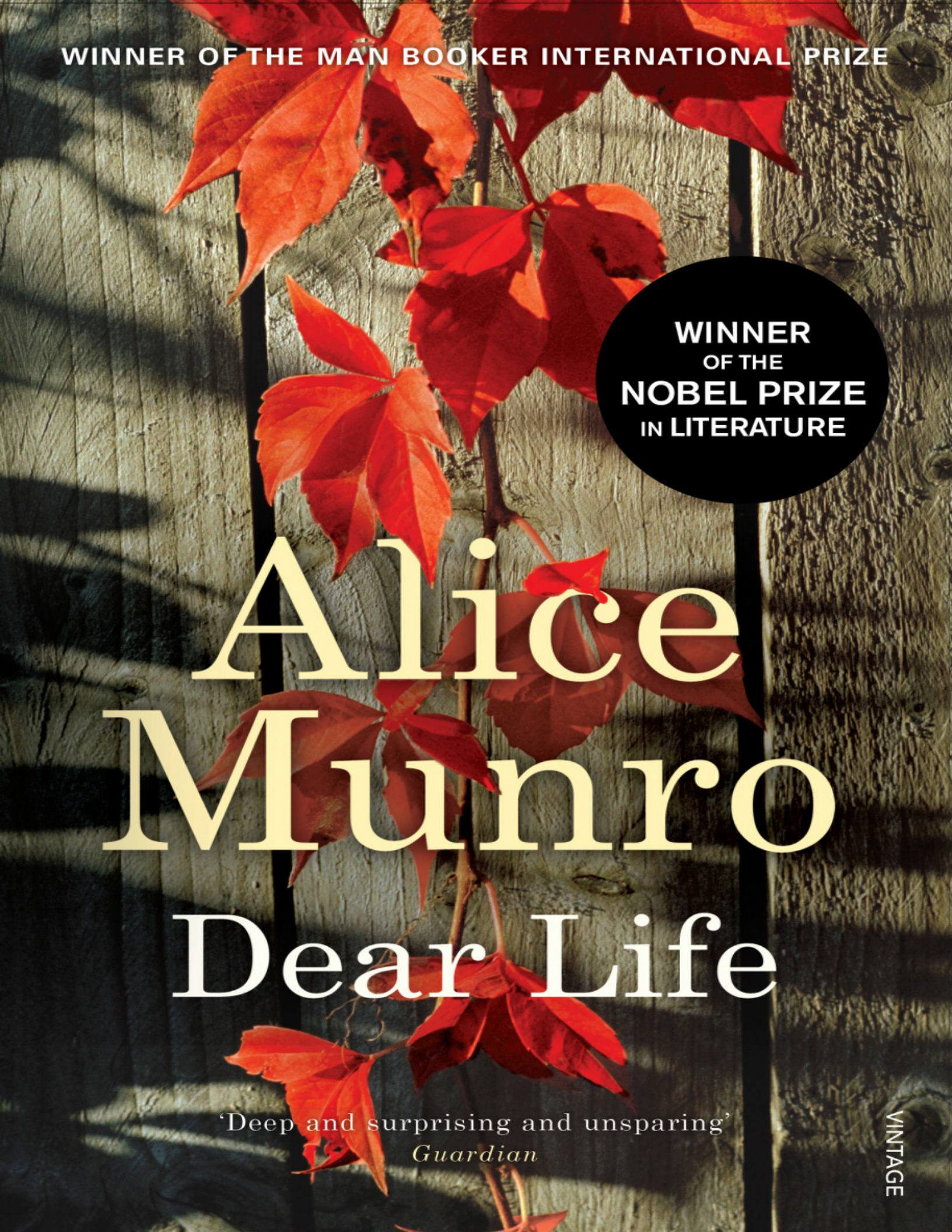
WINNER OF THE MAN BOOKER INTERNATIONAL PRIZE
WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE
Alice Munro
Dear Life
'Deep and surprising and unsparing'
Guardian
VINTAGE

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# About the Book

In this new and brilliant collection, Munro once more explores the lives of various inhabitants of the countryside and towns around Lake Huron. With her now trademark ability to give us the essence of a life in often brief but spacious-and timeless-feeling stories, Munro illumines the moment a life is shaped – the moment a dream, or sex, or a new way of looking at things, or perhaps just fate turns a person out of his or her accustomed path and into another way of being.

This collection, suffused with Munro’s clarity of vision and her unparalleled gift for storytelling – this collection of departures and beginnings, accidents, dangers, and homecomings both virtual and real, paints a vivid and lasting portrait of how strange, dangerous, and remarkable “dear life” can be.

# About the Author

****Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature****

Alice Munro was born in 1931 and is the author of twelve collections of stories, most recently *Dear Life*, and a novel, *Lives of Girls and Women*. She has received many awards and prizes, including three of Canada's Governor General's Literary Awards and two Giller Prizes, the Rea Award for the Short Story, the Lannan Literary Award, the WHSmith Book Award in the UK, the National Book Critics Circle Award in the US, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for *The Beggar Maid*, and has been awarded the Man Booker International Prize 2009 for her overall contribution to fiction on the world stage. Her stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Paris Review* and other publications, and her collections have been translated into thirteen languages. She lives with her husband in Clinton, Ontario, near Lake Huron in Canada.

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# DEAR LIFE

Alice Munro

Chatto & Windus
LONDON

# TO REACH JAPAN

ONCE PETER HAD brought her suitcase on board the train he seemed eager to get himself out of the way. But not to leave. He explained to her that he was just uneasy that the train should start to move. Out on the platform looking up at their window, he stood waving. Smiling, waving. The smile for Katy was wide open, sunny, without a doubt in the world, as if he believed that she would continue to be a marvel to him, and he to her, forever. The smile for his wife seemed hopeful and trusting, with some sort of determination about it. Something that could not easily be put into words and indeed might never be. If Greta had mentioned such a thing he would have said, Don't be ridiculous. And she would have agreed with him, thinking that it was unnatural for people who saw each other daily, constantly, to have to go through explanations of any kind.

When Peter was a baby, his mother had carried him across some mountains whose name Greta kept forgetting, in order to get out of Soviet Czechoslovakia into Western Europe. There were other people of course. Peter's father had intended to be with them but he had been sent to a sanatorium just before the date for the secret departure. He was to follow them when he could, but he died instead.

"I've read stories like that," Greta said, when Peter first told her about this. She explained how in the stories the baby would start to cry and invariably had to be smothered or strangled so that the noise did not endanger the whole illegal party.

Peter said he had never heard such a story and would not say what his mother would have done in such circumstances.

What she did do was get to British Columbia where she improved her English and got a job teaching what was then called Business Practice to high school students. She brought up Peter on her own and sent him to college, and now he was an engineer. When she came to their apartment, and later to their house, she always sat in the front room, never coming into the kitchen unless Greta invited her. That was her way. She carried not noticing to an extreme. Not noticing, not intruding, not suggesting, though in every single household skill or art she left her daughter-in-law far behind.

Also, she got rid of the apartment where Peter had been brought up and moved into a smaller one with no bedroom, just room for a foldout couch. So Peter can't go home to Mother? Greta teased her, but she seemed startled. Jokes pained her. Maybe it was a problem of language. But English was her usual language now and indeed the only language Peter knew. He had learned Business Practice—though not from his mother—when Greta was learning *Paradise Lost*. She avoided anything useful like the plague. It seemed he did the opposite.

With the glass between them, and Katy never allowing the waving to slow down, they indulged in looks of comic or indeed insane goodwill. She thought how nice-looking he was, and how he seemed to be so unaware of it. He wore a brush cut, in the style of the time—particularly if you were anything like an engineer—and his light-colored skin was never flushed like hers, never blotchy from the sun, but evenly tanned whatever the season.

His opinions were something like his complexion. When they went to see a movie, he never wanted to talk about it afterwards. He would say that it was good, or pretty good, or okay. He didn't see the point in going further. He watched television, he read a book in somewhat the same way. He had patience with such things. The people who put them together were probably doing the best they could.

Greta used to argue, rashly asking whether he would say the same thing about a bridge. The people who did it did their best but their best was not good enough so it fell down.

Instead of arguing, he just laughed.

It was not the same thing, he said.

No?

No.

Greta should have realized that this attitude—hands off, tolerant—was a blessing for her, because she was a poet, and there were things in her poems that were in no way cheerful or easy to explain.

(Peter's mother and the people he worked with—those who knew about it—still said poetess. She had trained him not to. Otherwise, no training necessary. The relatives she had left behind in her life, and the people she knew now in her role as a housewife and mother, did not have to be trained because they knew nothing about this peculiarity.)

It would become hard to explain, later on in her life, just what was okay in that time and what was not. You might say, well, feminism was not. But then you would have to explain that feminism was not even a word people used. Then you would get all tied up saying that having any serious idea, let alone ambition, or maybe even reading a real book, could be seen as suspect, having something to do with your child's getting pneumonia, and a political remark at an office party might have cost your husband his promotion. It would not have mattered which political party either. It was a woman's shooting off her mouth that did it.

People would laugh and say, Oh surely you are joking and you would have to say, Well, but not that much. Then she would say, one thing, though, was that if you were writing poetry it was somewhat safer to be a woman than a man. That was where the word poetess came in handy, like a web of spun sugar. Peter would not have felt that way, she said, but remember he had been born in Europe. He would have

understood, though, how the men he worked with were supposed to feel about such things.

That summer Peter was going to spend a month or maybe longer in charge of a job that was being done at Lund, far up, in fact as far as you could go north, on the mainland. There was no accommodation for Katy and Greta.

But Greta had kept in touch with a girl she used to work with in the Vancouver library, who was married now and living in Toronto. She and her husband were going to spend a month in Europe that summer—he was a teacher—and she had written Greta wondering if Greta and her family would do them a favor—she was very polite—by occupying the house in Toronto for part of that time, not letting it stand empty. And Greta had written back telling her about Peter's job but taking up the offer for Katy and herself.

That was why they were now waving and waving from the platform and from the train.

There was a magazine then, called *The Echo Answers*, published irregularly in Toronto. Greta had found it in the library and sent them some poems. Two of the poems had been published, and the result was that when the editor of the magazine came to Vancouver, last fall, she had been invited to a party, with other writers, to meet him. The party was at the house of a writer whose name had been familiar to her, it seemed, for her whole life. It was held in the late afternoon, when Peter was still at work, so she hired a sitter and set off on the North Vancouver bus across Lions Gate Bridge and through Stanley Park. Then she had to wait in front of the Hudson's Bay for a long ride out to the university campus, which was where the writer lived. Let off at the bus's last turning, she found the street and walked along peering at house numbers. She was wearing high heels which slowed her down considerably. Also her most sophisticated black dress, zipped up at the back and

skimming the waist and always a little too tight at the hips. It made her look somewhat ridiculous, she thought, as she stumbled slightly, along the curving streets with no sidewalks, the only person about in the waning afternoon. Modern houses, picture windows, as in any up-and-coming suburb, not at all the kind of neighborhood she had expected. She was beginning to wonder if she had got the street wrong, and was not unhappy to think that. She could go back to the bus stop where there was a bench. She could slip off her shoes and settle down for the long solitary ride home.

But when she saw the cars parked, saw the number, it was too late to turn around. Noise seeped out around the closed door and she had to ring the bell twice.

She was greeted by a woman who seemed to have been expecting somebody else. Greeted was the wrong word—the woman opened the door and Greta said that this must be where they were having the party.

“What does it look like?” the woman said, and leaned on the doorframe. The way was barred till she—Greta—said, “May I come in?” and then there was a movement that seemed to cause considerable pain. She didn’t ask Greta to follow her but Greta did anyway.

Nobody spoke to her or noticed her but in a short time a teenage girl thrust out a tray on which there were glasses of what looked like pink lemonade. Greta took one, and drank it down at a thirsty gulp, then took another. She thanked the girl, and tried to start a conversation about the long hot walk, but the girl was not interested and turned away, doing her job.

Greta moved on. She kept smiling. Nobody looked at her with any recognition or pleasure and why should they? People’s eyes slid round her and then they went on with their conversations. They laughed. Everybody but Greta was equipped with friends, jokes, half-secrets, everybody appeared to have found somebody to welcome them.

Except for the teenagers who kept sullenly relentlessly passing their pink drinks.

She didn't give up, though. The drink was helping her and she resolved to have another as soon as the tray came around. She watched for a conversational group that seemed to have a hole in it, where she might insert herself. She seemed to have found one when she heard the names of movies mentioned. European movies, such as were beginning to be shown in Vancouver at that time. She heard the name of one that she and Peter had gone to see. *The Four Hundred Blows*. "Oh, I saw that." She said this loudly and enthusiastically, and they all looked at her and one, a spokesperson evidently, said, *"Really?"*

Greta was drunk, of course. Pimm's No. 1 and pink grapefruit juice downed in a hurry. She didn't take this snub to heart as she might have done in a normal way. Just drifted on, knowing she had somehow lost her bearings but getting a feeling that there was a giddy atmosphere of permission in the room, and it didn't matter about not making friends, she could just wander around and pass her own judgments.

There was a knot of people in an archway who were important. She saw among them the host, the writer whose name and face she had known for such a long time. His conversation was loud and hectic and there seemed to be danger around him and a couple of other men, as if they would as soon fire off an insult as look at you. Their wives, she came to believe, made up the circle she had tried to crash into.

The woman who had answered the door was not one of either group, being a writer herself. Greta saw her turn when her name was called. It was the name of a contributor to the magazine in which she herself had been published. On these grounds, might it not be possible to go up and introduce herself? An equal, in spite of the coolness at the door?

But now the woman had her head lolling on the shoulder of the man who had called her name, and they would not welcome an interruption.

This reflection made Greta sit down, and since there were no chairs she sat on the floor. She had a thought. She thought that when she went with Peter to an engineers' party, the atmosphere was pleasant though the talk was boring. That was because everybody had their importance fixed and settled at least for the time being. Here nobody was safe. Judgment might be passed behind backs, even on the known and published. An air of cleverness or nerves obtained, no matter who you were.

And here she had been desperate for anybody to throw her any old bone of conversation at all.

When she got her theory of the unpleasantness worked out she felt relieved and didn't much care if anybody talked to her or not. She took her shoes off and the relief was immense. She sat with her back against a wall and her legs stuck out on one of the lesser of the party's thoroughfares. She didn't want to risk spilling her drink on the rug so she finished it in a hurry.

A man stood over her. He said, "How did you get here?"

She pitied his dull clumping feet. She pitied anybody who had to stand up.

She said that she had been invited.

"Yes. But did you come in your car?"

"I walked." But that was not enough, and in a while she managed to offer up the rest of it.

"I came on a bus, then I walked."

One of the men who had been in the special circle was now behind the man in the shoes. He said, "Excellent idea." He actually seemed ready to talk to her.

The first man didn't care for this one so much. He had retrieved Greta's shoes, but she refused them, explaining that they hurt too much.

"Carry them. Or I will. Can you get up?"

She looked for the more important man to help her, but he wasn't there. Now she remembered what he'd written. A play about Doukhobors that had caused a big row because the Doukhobors were going to have to be naked. Of course they weren't real Doukhobors, they were actors. And they were not allowed to be naked after all.

She tried explaining this to the man who helped her up, but he was plainly not interested. She asked what he wrote. He said he was not that kind of writer, he was a journalist. Visiting in this house with his son and daughter, grandchildren of the hosts. They—the children—had been passing out the drinks.

"Lethal," he said, referring to the drinks. "Criminal."

Now they were outside. She walked in her stocking feet across the grass, barely avoiding a puddle.

"Somebody has thrown up there," she told her escort.

"Indeed," he said, and settled her into a car. The outside air had altered her mood, from an unsettled elation to something within reach of embarrassment, even shame.

"North Vancouver," he said. She must have told him that. "Okay? We'll proceed. The Lions Gate."

She hoped he wouldn't ask what she was doing at the party. If she had to say she was a poet, her present situation, her overindulgence, would be taken as drearily typical. It wasn't dark out, but it was evening. They seemed to be headed in the right direction, along some water then over a bridge. The Burrard Street bridge. Then more traffic, she kept opening her eyes to trees passing by, then shutting them again without meaning to. She knew when the car stopped that it was too soon for them to be home. That is, at her home.

Those great leafy trees above them. You could not see any stars. But some shine on the water, between wherever they were and the city lights.

"Just sit and consider," he said.

She was enraptured by the word.

“Consider.”

“How you’re going to walk into the house, for instance. Can you manage dignified? Don’t overdo it. Nonchalant? I presume you have a husband.”

“I will have to thank you first for driving me home,” she said. “So you will have to tell me your name.”

He said that he had already told her that. Possibly twice. But once again, okay. Harris Bennett. Bennett. He was the son-in-law of the people who had given the party. Those were his children, passing out the drinks. He and they were visiting from Toronto. Was she satisfied?

“Do they have a mother?”

“Indeed they do. But she is in a hospital.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No need. It’s quite a nice hospital. It’s for mental problems. Or you might say emotional problems.”

She hurried on to tell him that her husband was named Peter and that he was an engineer and that they had a daughter named Katy.

“Well that’s very nice,” he said, and started to back out.

On Lions Gate Bridge he said, “Excuse me for sounding how I did. I was thinking whether I would or wouldn’t kiss you and I decided I wouldn’t.”

She thought he was saying that there was something about her that didn’t quite measure up to being kissed. The mortification was like being slapped clean back into sobriety.

“Now when we get over the bridge do we go right on Marine Drive?” he continued. “I’ll rely on you to tell me.”

During the coming fall and winter and spring there was hardly a day when she didn’t think of him. It was like having the very same dream the minute you fell asleep. She would lean her head against the back pillow of the sofa, thinking that she lay in his arms. You would not think that she’d remember his face but it would spring up in detail,

the face of a creased and rather tired-looking, satirical, indoor sort of man. Nor was his body lacking, it was presented as reasonably worn but competent, and uniquely desirable.

She nearly wept with longing. Yet all this fantasy disappeared, went into hibernation when Peter came home. Daily affections sprang to the fore then, reliable as ever.

The dream was in fact a lot like the Vancouver weather—a dismal sort of longing, a rainy dreamy sadness, a weight that shifted round the heart.

So what about the rejection of kissing, that might seem an ungallant blow?

She simply cancelled it out. Forgot about it entirely.

And what about her poetry? Not a line, not a word. Not a hint that she had ever cared for it.

Of course she gave these fits houseroom mostly when Katy was napping. Sometimes she spoke his name out loud, she embraced idiocy. This followed by a scorching shame in which she despised herself. Idiocy indeed. Idiot.

Then a jolt came, the prospect then certainty of the job at Lund, the offer of the house in Toronto. A clear break in the weather, an access of boldness.

She found herself writing a letter. It didn't begin in any conventional way. No Dear Harris. No Remember me.

> *Writing this letter is like putting a note in a bottle—*
> *And hoping*
> *It will reach Japan*.

Nearest thing to a poem in some time.

She had no idea of an address. She was bold and foolish enough to phone the people who had given the party. But when the woman answered her mouth went dry and felt as big as a tundra and she had to hang up. Then she carted Katy over to the public library and found a Toronto phone

book. There were lots of Bennetts but not a single Harris or H. Bennett.

She had a shocking idea then, to look in the obituaries. She couldn't stop herself. She waited till the man reading the library copy was finished. She did not see the Toronto paper usually because you had to go over the bridge to get it, and Peter always brought home the *Vancouver Sun*. Rustling through its pages finally she found his name at the top of a column. So he was not dead. A newspaper columnist. Naturally he would not want to be bothered with people calling him by name, at home.

He wrote about politics. His writing seemed intelligent but she did not care anything about it.

She sent her letter to him there, at the newspaper. She could not be sure that he opened his own mail and she thought that putting Private on the envelope was asking for trouble, so she wrote only the day of her arrival and the time of the train, after the bit about the bottle. No name. She thought that whoever opened the envelope might think of an elderly relative given to whimsical turns of phrase. Nothing to implicate him, even supposing such peculiar mail did get sent home and his wife opened it, being now out of the hospital.

Katy had evidently not understood that Peter's being outside on the platform meant that he would not be travelling with them. When they began to move and he didn't, and when with gathering speed they left him altogether behind, she took the desertion hard. But she settled down in a while, telling Greta that he would be there in the morning.

When that time came Greta was apprehensive, but Katy made no mention at all of the absence. Greta asked her if she was hungry and she said yes, then explained to her mother—as Greta had explained to her before they ever got

on the train—that they now had to take off their pajamas and look for their breakfast in another room.

"What do you want for breakfast?"

"Crisp peas." That meant Rice Krispies.

"We'll see if they have them."

They did.

"Now will we go and find Daddy?"

There was a play area for children but it was quite small. A boy and a girl—a brother and sister, by the looks of their matching bunny-rabbit outfits—had taken it over. Their game consisted of running small vehicles at each other then deflecting them at the last moment. CRASH BANG CRASH.

"This is Katy," Greta said. "I'm her mom. What are your names?"

The crashing took on more vehemence but they didn't look up.

"Daddy isn't here," said Katy.

Greta decided that they had better go back and get Katy's Christopher Robin book and take it up to the dome car and read it. They wouldn't be likely to bother anybody because breakfast wasn't over and the important mountain scenery hadn't started.

The problem was that once she finished Christopher Robin, Katy wanted it started again, immediately. During the first reading she had been quiet, but now she began chiming in with ends of lines. Next time she chanted word for word though still not ready to try it by herself. Greta could imagine this being an annoyance to people once the dome car filled up. Children Katy's age had no problem with monotony. In fact they embraced it, diving into it and wrapping the familiar words round their tongues as if they were a candy that could last forever.

A boy and a girl came up the stairs and sat down across from Greta and Katy. They said good morning with

considerable cheer and Greta responded. Katy rather disapproved of her acknowledging them and continued to recite softly with her eyes on the book.

From across the aisle came the boy's voice, almost as quiet as hers:

> *They're changing guard at Buckingham Palace—*
> *Christopher Robin went down with Alice*.

After he finished that one he started another. "'I do not like them, Sam-I-am.'"

Greta laughed but Katy didn't. Greta could see that she was a bit scandalized. She understood silly words coming out of a book but not coming out of somebody's mouth without a book.

"Sorry," said the boy to Greta. "We're preschoolers. That's our literature." He leaned across and spoke seriously and softly to Katy.

"That's a nice book, isn't it?"

"He means we work with preschoolers," the girl said to Greta. "Sometimes we do get confused though."

The boy went on talking to Katy.

"I maybe could guess your name now. What is it? Is it Rufus? Is it Rover?"

Katy bit her lips but then could not resist a severe reply.

"I'm not a dog," she said.

"No. I shouldn't have been so stupid. I'm a boy and my name's Greg. This girl's name is Laurie."

"He was teasing you," said Laurie. "Should I give him a swat?"

Katy considered this, then said, "No."

"'Alice is marrying one of the guard,'" Greg continued, "'A soldier's life is terrible hard, says Alice.'"

Katy chimed in softly on the second Alice.

Laurie told Greta that they had been going around to kindergartens, doing skits. This was called reading

readiness work. They were actors, really. She was going to get off at Jasper, where she had a summer job waitressing and doing some comic bits. Not reading readiness exactly. Adult entertainment, was what it was called.

“Christ,” she said. She laughed. “Take what you can get.”

Greg was loose, and stopping off in Saskatoon. His family was there.

They were both quite beautiful, Greta thought. Tall, limber, almost unnaturally lean, he with crinkly dark hair, she black-haired and sleek as a Madonna. When she mentioned their similarity a bit later on, they said they had sometimes taken advantage of it, when it came to living arrangements. It made things no end easier, but they had to remember to ask for two beds and make sure both got mussed up overnight.

And now, they told her, now they didn’t need to worry. Nothing to be scandalized about. They were breaking up, after three years together. They had been chaste for months, at least with each other.

“Now no more Buckingham Palace,” said Greg to Katy. “I have to do my exercises.”

Greta thought this meant that he had to go downstairs or at least into the aisle for some calisthenics, but instead he and Laurie threw their heads back, stretched their throats, and began to warble and caw and do strange singsongs. Katy was delighted, taking all this as an offering, a show for her benefit. She behaved as a proper audience, too—quite still until it ended, then breaking out in laughter.

Some people who had meant to come up the stairs had stopped at the bottom, less charmed than Katy and not knowing what to make of things.

“Sorry,” said Greg, with no explanation but a note of intimate friendliness. He held out a hand to Katy.

“Let’s see if there’s a playroom.”

Laurie and Greta followed them. Greta was hoping that he wasn't one of those adults who make friends with children mostly to test their own charms, then grow bored and grumpy when they realize how tireless a child's affections can be.

By lunchtime or sooner, she knew that she didn't need to worry. What had happened wasn't that Katy's attentions were wearing Greg out, but that various other children had joined the competition and he was giving no sign of being worn out at all.

He didn't set up a competition. He managed things so that he turned the attention first drawn to himself into the children's awareness of each other, and then into games that were lively or even wild, but not bad-tempered. Tantrums didn't occur. Spoils vanished. There simply was not time—so much more interesting stuff was going on. It was a miracle, how much ease with wildness was managed in such a small space. And the energy expended promised naps in the afternoon.

"He's remarkable," Greta said to Laurie.

"He's mostly just there," Laurie said. "He doesn't save himself up. You know? A lot of actors do. Actors in particular. Dead offstage."

Greta thought, That's what I do. I save myself up, most of the time. Careful with Katy, careful with Peter.

In the decade that they had already entered but that she at least had not taken much notice of, there was going to be a lot of attention paid to this sort of thing. Being there was to mean something it didn't use to mean. Going with the flow. Giving. Some people were giving, other people were not very giving. Barriers between the inside and outside of your head were to be trampled down. Authenticity required it. Things like Greta's poems, things that did not flow right out, were suspect, even scorned. Of course she went right on doing as she did, fussing and probing, secretly tough as nails on the counterculture. But at the moment, her child

surrendered to Greg, and to whatever he did; she was entirely grateful.

In the afternoon, as Greta had predicted, the children went to sleep. Their mothers too in some cases. Others played cards. Greg and Greta waved to Laurie when she got off at Jasper. She blew kisses from the platform. An older man appeared, took her suitcase, kissed her fondly, looked towards the train and waved to Greg. Greg waved to him.

“Her present squeeze,” he said.

More waves as the train got going, then he and Greta took Katy back to the compartment, where she fell asleep between them, asleep in the very middle of a jump. They opened the compartment curtain to get more air, now that there was no danger of the child’s falling out.

“Awesome to have a child,” Greg said. That was another word new at the time, or at least new to Greta.

“It happens,” she said.

“You’re so calm. Next you’ll say, ‘That’s life.’”

“I will not,” Greta said, and outstared him till he shook his head and laughed.

He told her that he had got into acting by way of his religion. His family belonged to some Christian sect Greta had never heard of. This sect was not numerous but very rich, or at least some of them were. They had built a church with a theater in it in a town on the prairie. That was where he started to act before he was ten years old. They did parables from the Bible but also present day, about the awful things that happened to people who didn’t believe what they did. His family was very proud of him and of course so he was of himself. He wouldn’t dream of telling them all that went on when the rich converts came to renew their vows and get revitalized in their holiness. Anyway he really liked getting all the approval and he liked the acting.

Till one day he just got the idea that he could do the acting and not go through all that church stuff. He tried to be polite about it, but they said it was the Devil getting hold. He said ha-ha I know who it was getting hold.

Bye-bye.

“I don’t want you to think it was all bad. I still believe in praying and everything. But I never could tell my family what went on. Anything halfway true would just kill them. Don’t you know people like that?”

She told him that when she and Peter first moved to Vancouver her grandmother, who lived in Ontario, had got in touch with a minister of a church there. He came to call and she, Greta, was very snooty to him. He said he would pray for her, and she as good as said, don’t bother. Her grandmother was dying at the time. Greta felt ashamed and mad about being ashamed whenever she thought about it.

Peter didn’t understand all that. His mother never went to church though one reason she had carried him through the mountains was presumably so they could be Catholics. He said Catholics probably had an advantage, you could hedge your bets right until you were dying.

This was the first time she had thought of Peter in a while.

The fact was that she and Greg were drinking while all this anguished but also somewhat comforting talk went on. He had produced a bottle of ouzo. She was fairly cautious with it, as she had been with any alcohol she’d had since the writers’ party, but some effect was there. Enough that they began to stroke each other’s hands and then to engage in some kissing and fondling. All of which had to go on beside the body of the sleeping child.

“We better stop this,” Greta said. “Otherwise it will become deplorable.”

“It isn’t us,” said Greg. “It’s some other people.”

“Tell them to stop, then. Do you know their names?”

“Wait a minute. Reg. Reg and Dorothy.”

Greta said, “Cut that out, Reg. What about my innocent child?”

“We could go to my berth. It’s not far along.”

“I haven’t got any—”

“I have.”

“Not on you?”

“Certainly not. What kind of a beast do you think I am?”

So they arranged whatever clothing had been disarranged, slipped out of the compartment, carefully fastened every button of the berth where Katy was sleeping, and with a certain fancy nonchalance made their way from Greta’s car to his. This was hardly necessary—they met no one. The people who were not in the dome car taking pictures of the everlasting mountains were in the bar car, or dozing.

In Greg’s untidy quarters they took up where they had left off. There was no room for two people to lie down properly but they managed to roll over each other. At first no end of stifled laughter, then the great shocks of pleasure, with no place to look but into each other’s wide eyes. Biting each other to hold in some ferocious noise.

“Nice,” said Greg. “All right.”

“I’ve got to get back.”

“So soon?”

“Katy might wake up and I’m not there.”

“Okay. Okay. I should get ready for Saskatoon anyway. What if we’d got there just in the middle of it? Hello Mom. Hello Daddy. Excuse me just a minute here while I—Wa—hoo!”

She got herself decent and left him. Actually she didn’t much care who met her. She was weak, shocked, but buoyant, like some gladiator—she actually thought this out and smiled at it—after a session in the arena.

Anyway, she didn’t meet a soul.

The bottom fastener of the curtain was undone. She was sure she remembered fastening it. Though even with it

open Katy could hardly get out and surely wouldn't try. One time when Greta had left for a minute to go to the toilet, she had explained thoroughly that Katy must never try to follow, and Katy had said, "I wouldn't," as if even to suggest that was treating her like a baby.

Greta took hold of the curtains to open them all the way, and when she had done so she saw that Katy was not there.

She went crazy. She yanked up the pillow, as if a child of Katy's size could have managed to cover herself with it. She pounded her hands on the blanket as if Katy could have been hiding underneath it. She got control of herself and tried to think where the train had stopped, or whether it had been stopped, during the time she had been with Greg. While it was stopped, if it had been stopped, could a kidnapper have got on the train and somehow made off with Katy?

She stood in the aisle, trying to think what she had to do to stop the train.

Then she thought, she made herself think, that nothing like that could have happened. Don't be ridiculous. Katy must have wakened and found her not there and gone looking for her. All by herself, she had gone looking.

Right around here, she must be right around here. The doors at either end of the coach were far too heavy for her to open.

Greta could barely move. Her whole body, her mind, emptied. This could not have happened. Go back, go back, to before she went with Greg. Stop there. Stop.

Across the aisle was a seat unoccupied for the time being. A woman's sweater and some magazine left to claim it. Farther along, a seat with the fasteners all done up, as hers—theirs—had been. She pulled them apart with one grab. The old man who was sleeping there turned over on his back but never woke up. There was no way he could be hiding anybody.

What idiocy.

A new fear then. Supposing Katy had made her way to one or other end of the car and had actually managed to get a door open. Or followed a person who had opened it ahead of her. Between the cars there was a short walkway where you were actually walking over the place where the cars joined up. There you could feel the train's motion in a sudden and alarming way. A heavy door behind you and another in front, and on either side of the walkway clanging metal plates. These covered the steps that were let down when the train was stopped.

You always hurried through these passages, where the banging and swaying reminded you how things were put together in a way that seemed not so inevitable after all. Almost casual, yet in too much of a hurry, that banging and swaying.

The door at the end was heavy even for Greta. Or she was drained by her fear. She pushed mightily with her shoulder.

And there, between the cars, on one of those continually noisy sheets of metal—there sat Katy. Eyes wide open and mouth slightly open, amazed and alone. Not crying at all, but when she saw her mother she started.

Greta grabbed her and hoisted her onto her hip and stumbled back against the door that she had just opened.

All of the cars had names, to commemorate battles or explorations or illustrious Canadians. The name of their car was Connaught. She would never forget that.

Katy was not hurt at all. Her clothes hadn't caught as they might have on the shifting sharp edges of the metal plates.

"I went to look for you," she said.

When? Just a moment ago, or right after Greta had left her?

Surely not. Somebody would have spotted her there, picked her up, sounded an alarm.

The day was sunny but not really warm. Her face and hands were quite cold.

“I thought you were on the stairs,” she said.

Greta covered her with the blanket in their berth, and it was then that she herself began to shake, as if she had a fever. She felt sick, and actually tasted vomit in her throat. Katy said, “Don’t push me,” and squirmed away.

“You smell a bad smell,” she said.

Greta took her arms away and lay on her back.

This was so terrible, her thoughts of what might have happened so terrible. The child was still stiff with protest, keeping away from her.

Someone would have found Katy, surely. Some decent person, not an evil person, would have spotted her there and carried her to where it was safe. Greta would have heard the dismaying announcement, news that a child had been found alone on the train. A child who gave her name as Katy. She would have rushed from where she was at the moment, having got herself as decent as she could, she would have rushed to claim her child and lied, saying that she had just gone to the ladies’ room. She would have been frightened, but she would have been spared the picture she had now, of Katy sitting in that noisy space, helpless between the cars. Not crying, not complaining, as if she was just to sit there forever and there was to be no explanation offered to her, no hope. Her eyes had been oddly without expression and her mouth just hanging open, in the moment before the fact of rescue struck her and she could begin to cry. Only then could she retrieve her world, her right to suffer and complain.

Now she said she wasn’t sleepy, she wanted to get up. She asked where Greg was. Greta said that he was having a nap, he was tired.

She and Greta went to the dome car, to spend the rest of the afternoon. They had it mostly to themselves. The people taking pictures must have worn themselves out on the Rocky Mountains. And as Greg had commented, the prairies left them flat.

The train stopped for a short time in Saskatoon and several people got off. Greg was among them. Greta saw him greeted by a couple who must have been his parents. Also by a woman in a wheelchair, probably a grandmother, and then by several younger people who were hanging about, cheerful and embarrassed. None of them looked like members of a sect, or like people who were strict and disagreeable in any way.

But how could you spot that for sure in anybody?

Greg turned from them and scanned the windows of the train. She waved from the dome car and he caught sight of her and waved back.

“There’s Greg,” she said to Katy. “See down there. He’s waving. Can you wave back?”

But Katy found it too difficult to look for him. Or else she did not try. She turned away with a proper and slightly offended air, and Greg, after one last antic wave, turned too. Greta wondered if the child could be punishing him for desertion, refusing to miss or even acknowledge him.

All right, if this is the way it’s going to be, forget it.

“Greg waved to you,” Greta said, as the train pulled away.

“I know.”

While Katy slept beside her in the bunk that night Greta wrote a letter to Peter. A long letter that she intended to be funny, about all the different sorts of people to be found on the train. The preference most of them had for seeing through their camera, rather than looking at the real thing, and so on. Katy’s generally agreeable behavior. Nothing about the loss, of course, or the scare. She posted the letter when the prairies were far behind and the black spruce went on forever, and they were stopped for some reason in the little lost town of Hornepayne.

All of her waking time for these hundreds of miles had been devoted to Katy. She knew that such devotion on her part had never shown itself before. It was true that she had