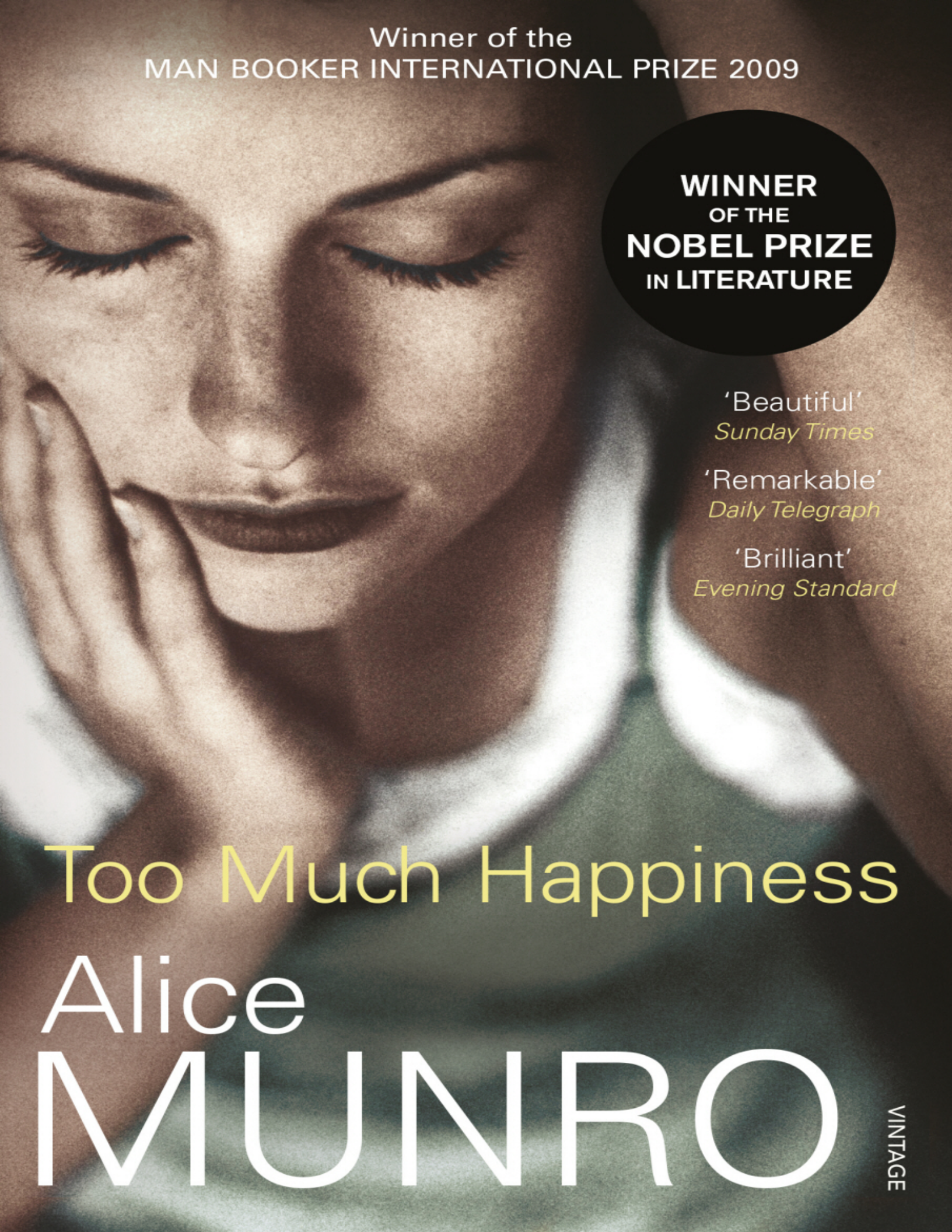
Winner of the
MAN BOOKER INTERNATIONAL PRIZE 2009
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OF THE
NOBEL PRIZE
IN LITERATURE
'Beautiful'
Sunday Times
'Remarkable'
Daily Telegraph
'Brilliant'
Evening Standard
Too Much Happiness
Alice
MUNRO
VINTAGE

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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.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The View from Castle Rock
Runaway
Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage
The Love of a Good Woman
Selected Stories
Open Secrets
Friend of My Youth
The Progress of Love
The Moons of Jupiter
The Beggar Maid
Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You
Lives of Girls and Women
Dance of the Happy Shades

TOO MUCH HAPPINESS

Alice Munro

Chatto & Windus
LONDON

To David Connelly

Dimensions

Doree had to take three buses—one to Kincardine, where she waited for the one to London, where she waited again for the city bus out to the facility. She started the trip on a Sunday at nine in the morning. Because of the waiting times between buses, it took her till about two in the afternoon to travel the hundred-odd miles. All that sitting, either on the buses or in the depots, was not a thing she should have minded. Her daily work was not of the sitting-down kind.

She was a chambermaid at the Blue Spruce Inn. She scrubbed bathrooms and stripped and made beds and vacuumed rugs and wiped mirrors. She liked the work—it occupied her thoughts to a certain extent and tired her out so that she could sleep at night. She was seldom faced with a really bad mess, though some of the women she worked with could tell stories to make your hair curl. These women were older than she was, and they all thought she should try to work her way up. They told her she should get trained for a job behind the desk while she was still young and decent-looking. But she was content to do what she did. She didn't want to have to talk to people.

None of the people she worked with knew what had happened. Or, if they did, they didn't let on. Her picture had been in the paper—they'd used the picture he took of her and the three kids, the new baby, Dimitri, in her arms, and Barbara Ann and Sasha on either side, looking on. Her hair had been long and wavy and brown then, natural in curl and colour, as he liked it, and her face bashful and soft—a reflection less of the way she was than of the way he wanted to see her.

Since then, she had cut her hair short and bleached and spiked it, and she had lost a lot of weight. And she went by her second name now: Fleur. Also, the job they had found for her was in a town a good distance away from where she used to live.

This was the third time she had made the trip. The first two times he had refused to see her. If he did that again she would just quit trying. Even if he did see her, she might not come again for a while. She was not going to go overboard. As a matter of fact, she didn't really know what she was going to do.

On the first bus she was not too troubled. Just riding along and looking at the scenery. She had grown up on the coast, where there was such a thing as spring, but here winter jumped almost directly into summer. A month ago there had been snow, and now it was hot enough to go bare-armed. Dazzling patches of water lay in the fields, and the sunlight was pouring down through the naked branches.

On the second bus she began to feel jittery, and she couldn't help trying to guess which of the women around her might be bound for the same place. They were women alone, usually dressed with some care, maybe to make themselves look as if they were going to church. The older ones looked like they belonged to strict, old-fashioned churches where you had to wear a skirt and stockings and some sort of hat, while the younger ones might have been part of a livelier congregation that accepted pantsuits, bright scarves, earrings, and puffy hairdos.

Doree didn't fit into either category. In the whole year and a half she had been working she had not bought herself a single new piece of clothing. She wore her uniforms at work and her jeans everywhere else. She had got out of the way of wearing makeup because he hadn't allowed it, and now, though she could have, she didn't. Her spikes of corn-

coloured hair didn’t suit her bony bare face, but it didn’t matter.

On the third bus she got a seat by the window and tried to keep herself calm by reading the signs—both the advertising and street signs. There was a certain trick she had picked up to keep her mind occupied. She took the letters of whatever words her eyes lit on, and she tried to see how many new words she could make out of them. “Coffee,” for instance, would give you “fee,” and then “foe,” and “off” and “of,” and “shop” would provide “hop” and “sop” and “so” and—wait a minute—“posh.” Words were more than plentiful on the way out of the city, as they passed billboards, monster stores, car lots, even balloons moored on roofs to advertise sales.

Doree had not told Mrs. Sands about her last two attempts, and probably wouldn’t tell her about this one either. Mrs. Sands, whom she saw on Monday afternoons, spoke of moving on, though she always said that it would take time, that things should not be hurried. She told Doree that she was doing fine, that she was gradually discovering her own strength.

“I know those words have been done to death,” she said. “But they’re still true.”

She blushed at what she heard herself say—“death”—but did not make it worse by apologizing.

When Doree was sixteen—that was seven years ago—she’d gone to visit her mother in the hospital every day after school. Her mother was recovering from an operation on her back, which was said to be serious but not dangerous. Lloyd was an orderly. He and Doree’s mother had in common the fact that they both were old hippies—though Lloyd was actually a few years the younger—and

whenever he had time he'd come in and chat with her about the concerts and protest marches they'd both attended, the outrageous people they'd known, drug trips that had knocked them out, that sort of thing.

Lloyd was popular with the patients because of his jokes and his sure, strong touch. He was stocky and broad-shouldered and authoritative enough to be sometimes taken for a doctor. (Not that he was pleased by that—he held the opinion that a lot of medicine was a fraud and a lot of doctors were jerks.) He had a sensitive reddish skin and light hair and bold eyes.

He kissed Doree in the elevator and told her she was a flower in the desert. Then he laughed at himself and said, "How original can you get?"

"You're a poet and don't know it," she said, to be kind.

One night her mother died suddenly, of an embolism. Doree's mother had a lot of women friends who would have taken Doree in—and she stayed with one of them for a time—but the new friend Lloyd was the one Doree preferred. By her next birthday she was pregnant, then married. Lloyd had never been married before, though he had at least two children whose whereabouts he was not certain of. They would have been grown up by then, anyway. His philosophy of life had changed as he got older—he believed now in marriage, constancy, and no birth control. And he found the Sechelt Peninsula, where he and Doree lived, too full of people these days—old friends, old ways of life, old lovers. Soon he and Doree moved across the country to a town they picked from a name on the map: Mildmay. They didn't live in town; they rented a place in the country. Lloyd got a job in an ice-cream factory. They planted a garden. Lloyd knew a lot about gardening, just as he did about house carpentry, managing a woodstove, and keeping an old car running.

Sasha was born.

———

“Perfectly natural,” Mrs. Sands said.

Doree said, “Is it?”

Doree always sat on a straight-backed chair in front of a desk, not on the sofa, which had a flowery pattern and cushions. Mrs. Sands moved her own chair to the side of the desk, so they could talk without any kind of barrier between them.

“I’ve sort’ve been expecting you would,” she said. “I think it’s what I might have done in your place.”

Mrs. Sands would not have said that in the beginning. A year ago, even, she’d have been more cautious, knowing how Doree would have revolted, then, at the idea that anybody, any living soul, could be in her place. Now she knew that Doree would just take it as a way, even a humble way, of trying to understand.

Mrs. Sands was not like some of them. She was not brisk, not thin, not pretty. Not too old either. She was about the age that Doree’s mother would have been, though she did not look as if she’d ever been a hippie. Her greying hair was cut short and she had a mole riding on one cheekbone. She wore flat shoes and loose pants and flowered tops. Even when they were of a raspberry or turquoise colour these tops did not make her look as if she really cared what she put on—it was more as if somebody had told her she needed to smarten herself up and she had obediently gone shopping for something she thought might do that. Her large, kind, impersonal sobriety drained all assaulting cheerfulness, all insult, out of those clothes.

“Well the first two times I never saw him,” Doree said. “He wouldn’t come out.”

“But this time he did? He did come out?”

“Yes, he did. But I wouldn’t hardly have known him.”

“He’d aged?”

“I guess so. I guess he’s lost some weight. And those clothes. Uniforms. I never saw him in anything like that.”

“He looked to you like a different person?”

“No.” Doree caught at her upper lip, trying to think what the difference was. He’d been so still. She had never seen him so still. He hadn’t even seemed to know that he would sit down opposite her. Her first words to him had been “Aren’t you going to sit down?” And he had said, “Is it all right?”

“He looked sort of vacant,” she said. “I wondered if they had him on drugs?”

“Maybe something to keep him on an even keel. Mind you, I don’t know. Did you have a conversation?”

Doree wondered if it could be called that. She had asked him some stupid, ordinary questions. How was he feeling? (Okay.) Did he get enough to eat? (He thought so.) Was there anyplace where he could walk if he wanted to? (Under supervision, yes. He guessed you could call it a place. He guessed you could call it walking.)

She’d said, “You have to get fresh air.”

He’d said, “That’s true.”

She nearly asked him if he had made any friends. The way you ask your kid about school. The way, if your kids went to school, you would ask them.

“Yes, yes,” Mrs. Sands said, nudging the ready box of Kleenex forward. Doree didn’t need it; her eyes were dry. The trouble was in the bottom of her stomach. The heaves.

Mrs. Sands just waited, knowing enough to keep her hands off.

And, as if he’d detected what she was on the verge of saying, Lloyd had told her that there was a psychiatrist who

came and talked to him every so often.

“I tell him he’s wasting his time,” Lloyd said. “I know as much as he does.”

That was the only time he had sounded to Doree anything like himself.

All through the visit her heart had kept thumping. She’d thought she might faint or die. It costs her such an effort to look at him, to get him into her vision as this thin and grey, diffident yet cold, mechanically moving yet uncoordinated man.

She had not said any of this to Mrs. Sands. Mrs. Sands might have asked—tactfully—who she was afraid of. Herself or him?

But she wasn’t *afraid*.

When Sasha was one and a half, Barbara Ann was born, and, when Barbara Ann was two, they had Dimitri. They had named Sasha together, and they made a pact after that that he would name the boys and she would name the girls.

Dimitri was the first one to be colicky. Doree thought that he was maybe not getting enough milk, or that her milk was not rich enough. Or too rich? Not right, anyway. Lloyd had a lady from the La Leche League come and talk to her. Whatever you do, the lady said, you must not put him on a supplementary bottle. That would be the thin edge of the wedge, she said, and pretty soon you would have him rejecting the breast altogether.

Little did she know that Doree had been giving him a supplement already. And it seemed to be true that he preferred that—he fussed more and more at the breast. By three months he was entirely bottle-fed, and then there was no way to keep it from Lloyd. She told him that her milk had dried up, and she’d had to start supplementing. Lloyd

squeezed one breast after the other with frantic determination and succeeded in getting a couple of drops of miserable-looking milk out. He called her a liar. They fought. He said that she was a whore like her mother.

All those hippies were whores, he said.

Soon they made up. But whenever Dimitri was fretful, whenever he had a cold, or was afraid of Sasha's pet rabbit, or still hung on to chairs at the age when his brother and sister had been walking unsupported, the failure to breast-feed was recalled.

———

The first time Doree had gone to Mrs. Sands's office, one of the other women there had given her a pamphlet. On the front of it was a gold cross and words made up of gold and purple letters. "When Your Loss Seems Unbearable . . ." Inside there was a softly coloured picture of Jesus and some finer print Doree did not read.

In her chair in front of the desk, still clutching the pamphlet, Doree began to shake. Mrs. Sands had to pry it out of her hand.

"Did somebody give you this?" Mrs. Sands said.

Doree said, "Her," and jerked her head at the closed door.

"You don't want it?"

"When you're down is when they'll try to get at you," Doree said, and then realized this was something her mother had said when some ladies with a similar message came to visit her in the hospital. "They think you'll fall on your knees and then it will be all right."

Mrs. Sands sighed.

"Well," she said, "it's certainly not that simple."

"Not even possible," Doree said.

"Maybe not."

They never spoke of Lloyd in those days. Doree never thought of him if she could help it, and then only as if he were some terrible accident of nature.

“Even if I believed in that stuff,” she said, meaning what was in the pamphlet, “it would be only so that . . .” She meant to say that such belief would be convenient because she could then think of Lloyd burning in hell, or something of that sort, but she was unable to go on, because it was too stupid to talk about. And because of the familiar impediment, that was like a hammer hitting her in the belly.

———

Lloyd thought that their children should be educated at home. This was not for religious reasons—going against dinosaurs and cavemen and monkeys and all that—but because he wanted them to be close to their parents and to be introduced to the world carefully and gradually, rather than thrown into it all at once. “I just happen to think they are my kids,” he said. “I mean, they are our kids, not the Department of Education’s kids.”

Doree was not sure that she could handle this, but it turned out that the Department of Education had guidelines, and lesson plans that you could get from your local school. Sasha was a bright boy who practically taught himself to read, and the other two were still too little to learn much yet. In evenings and on weekends Lloyd taught Sasha about geography and the solar system and the hibernation of animals and how a car runs, covering each subject as the questions came up. Pretty soon Sasha was ahead of the school plans, but Doree picked them up anyway and put him through the exercises right on time so that the law would be satisfied.

There was another mother in the district doing home-schooling. Her name was Maggie, and she had a minivan. Lloyd needed his car to get to work, and Doree had not

learned to drive, so she was glad when Maggie offered her a ride to the school once a week to turn in the finished exercises and pick up the new ones. Of course they took all the children along. Maggie had two boys. The older one had so many allergies that she had to keep a strict eye on everything he ate—that was why she taught him at home. And then it seemed that she might as well keep the younger one there as well. He wanted to stay with his brother and he had a problem with asthma, anyway.

How grateful Doree was then, comparing her healthy three. Lloyd said it was because she'd had all her children when she was still young, while Maggie had waited until she was on the verge of the menopause. He was exaggerating how old Maggie was, but it was true that she had waited. She was an optometrist. She and her husband had been partners, and they hadn't started their family until she could leave the practice and they had a house in the country.

Maggie's hair was pepper-and-salt, cropped close to her head. She was tall, flat-chested, cheerful, and opinionated. Lloyd called her the Lezzie. Only behind her back, of course. He kidded with her on the phone but mouthed at Doree, "It's the Lezzie." That didn't really bother Doree—he called lots of women Lezzies. But she was afraid that the kidding would seem overly friendly to Maggie, an intrusion, or at least a waste of time.

"You want to speak to the ole lady? Yeah. I got her right here. Workin' at the scrub board. Yeah, I'm a real slave driver. She tell you that?"

Doree and Maggie got into the habit of shopping for groceries together after they'd picked up the papers at the school. Then sometimes they'd get takeout coffees at Tim Hortons and drive the children to Riverside Park. They sat

on a bench while Sasha and Maggie's boys raced around or hung from the climbing contraptions, and Barbara Ann pumped on the swing and Dimitri played in the sandbox. Or they sat in the mini, if it was cold. They talked mostly about the children and things they cooked, but somehow Doree found out how Maggie had trekked around Europe before training as an optometrist, and Maggie found out how young Doree had been when she got married. Also about how easily she had become pregnant at first, and how she didn't so easily anymore, and how that made Lloyd suspicious, so that he went through her dresser drawers looking for birth-control pills—thinking she must be taking them on the sly.

"And are you?" Maggie asked.

Doree was shocked. She said she wouldn't dare.

"I mean, I'd think that was awful to do, without telling him. It's just kind of a joke when he goes looking for them."

"Oh," Maggie said.

And one time Maggie said, "Is everything all right with you? I mean in your marriage? You're happy?"

Doree said yes, without hesitation, After that she was more careful about what she said. She saw that there were things that she was used to that another person might not understand. Lloyd had a certain way of looking at things: that was just how he was. Even when she'd first met him, in the hospital, he'd been like that. The head nurse was a starchy sort of person, so he'd call her Mrs. Bitch-out-of-Hell, instead of her name, which was Mrs. Mitchell. He said it so fast that you could barely catch on. He'd thought that she picked favourites, and he wasn't one of them. Now there was someone he detested at the ice-cream factory, somebody he called Suck-Stick Louie. Doree didn't know the man's real name. But at least that proved that it wasn't only women who provoked him.

Doree was pretty sure that these people weren't as bad as Lloyd thought, but it was no use contradicting him. Perhaps men just had to have enemies, the way they had to have their jokes. And sometimes Lloyd did make the enemies into jokes, just as if he was laughing at himself. She was even allowed to laugh with him, as long as she wasn't the one who started the laughing.

She hoped he wouldn't get that way about Maggie. At times she was afraid she saw something of the sort coming. If he prevented her from riding to the school and the grocery store with Maggie it would be a big inconvenience. But worse would be the shame. She would have to make up some stupid lie to explain things. But Maggie would know—at least she would know that Doree was lying, and she would interpret that probably as meaning that Doree was in a worse situation than she really was. Maggie had her own sharp way of looking at things.

Then Doree asked herself why she should care what Maggie might think. Maggie was an outsider, not even somebody Doree felt comfortable with. It was Lloyd said that, and he was right. The truth of things between them, the bond, was not something that anybody else could understand and it was not anybody else's business. If Doree could watch her own loyalty it would be all right.

It got worse, gradually. No direct forbidding, but more criticism. Lloyd coming up with the theory that Maggie's boys' allergies and asthma might be Maggie's fault. The reason was often the mother, he said. He used to see it at the hospital all the time. The overcontrolling, usually overeducated mother.

"Some of the time kids are just born with something," Doree said, unwisely. "You can't say it's the mother every time."

“Oh. Why can’t I?”

“I didn’t mean *you*. I didn’t mean you can’t. I mean, couldn’t they be born with things?”

“Since when are you such a medical authority?”

“I didn’t say I was.”

“No. And you’re not.”

Bad to worse. He wanted to know what they talked about, she and Maggie.

“I don’t know. Nothing really.”

“That’s funny. Two women riding in a car. First I heard of it. Two women talking about nothing. She is out to break us up.”

“Who is? *Maggie?*”

“I’ve got experience of her kind of woman.”

“What kind?”

“Her kind.”

“Don’t be silly.”

“Careful. Don’t call me silly.”

“What would she want to do that for?”

“How am I supposed to know? She just wants to do it. You wait. You’ll see. She’ll get you over there bawling and whining about what a bastard I am. One of these days.”

And in fact it turned out as he had said. At least it would certainly have looked that way, to Lloyd. She did find herself at around ten o’clock one night in Maggie’s kitchen, sniffling back her tears and drinking herbal tea. Maggie’s husband had said, “What the hell?” when she knocked—she heard him through the door. He hadn’t known who she was. She’d said, “I’m really sorry to bother you—” while he stared at her with lifted eyebrows and a tight mouth. And then Maggie had come.

Doree had walked all the way there in the dark, first along the gravel road that she and Lloyd lived on, and then on the highway. She headed for the ditch every time a car came, and that slowed her down considerably. She did take a look at the cars that passed, thinking that one of them might be Lloyd. She didn't want him to find her, not yet, not till he was scared out of his craziness. Other times she had been able to scare him out of it herself, by weeping and howling and even banging her head on the floor, chanting, "It's not true, it's not true, it's not true" over and over. Finally he would back down. He would say, "Okay, okay. I'll believe you. Honey, be quiet. Think of the kids. I'll believe you, honest. Just stop."

But tonight she had pulled herself together just as she was about to start that performance. She had put on her coat and walked out the door, with him calling after her, "Don't do this. I warn you!"

Maggie's husband had gone to bed, not looking any better pleased about things, while Doree kept saying, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, barging in on you at this time of night."

"Oh, shut up," Maggie said, kind and businesslike. "Do you want a glass of wine?"

"I don't drink."

"Then you'd better not start now. I'll get you some tea. It's very soothing. Raspberry-chamomile. It's not the kids, is it?"

"No."

Maggie took her coat and handed her a wad of Kleenex for her eyes and nose. "Don't tell me anything yet. We'll soon get you settled down."

Even when she was partly settled down, Doree didn't want to blurt out the whole truth and let Maggie know that she herself was at the heart of the problem. More than that, she didn't want to have to explain Lloyd. No matter

how worn out she got with him, he was still the closest person in the world to her, and she felt that everything would collapse if she were to bring herself to tell someone exactly how he was, if she were to be entirely disloyal.

She said that she and Lloyd had got into an old argument and she was so sick and tired of it that all she'd wanted was to get out. But she would get over it, she said. They would.

"Happens to every couple sometime," Maggie said.

The phone rang then, and Maggie answered.

"Yes. She's okay. She just needed to walk something out of her system. Fine. Okay then, I'll deliver her home in the morning. No trouble. Okay. Good night."

"That was him," she said. "I guess you heard."

"How did he sound? Did he sound normal?"

Maggie laughed. "Well, I don't know how he sounds when he's normal, do I? He didn't sound drunk."

"He doesn't drink either. We don't even have coffee in the house."

"Want some toast?"

In the morning, early, Maggie drove her home. Maggie's husband hadn't left for work yet, and he stayed with the boys.

Maggie was in a hurry to get back, so she just said, "Bye-bye. Phone me if you need to talk," as she turned the minivan around in the yard.

It was a cold morning in early spring, snow still on the ground, but there was Lloyd sitting on the steps without a jacket on.

"Good morning," he said, in a loud, sarcastically polite voice. And she said good morning, in a voice that pretended

not to notice his.

He did not move aside to let her up the steps.

“You can’t go in there,” he said.

She decided to take this lightly.

“Not even if I say please? Please.”

He looked at her but did not answer. He smiled with his lips held together.

“Lloyd?” she said. “Lloyd?”

“You better not go in.”

“I didn’t tell her anything, Lloyd. I’m sorry I walked out. I just needed a breathing space, I guess.”

“Better not go in.”

“What’s the matter with you? Where are the kids?”

He shook his head, as he did when she said something he didn’t like to hear. Something mildly rude, like “holy shit.”

“*Lloyd*. Where are the kids?”

He shifted just a little, so that she could pass if she liked.

Dimitri still in his crib, lying sideways. Barbara Ann on the floor beside her bed, as if she’d got out or been pulled out. Sasha by the kitchen door—he had tried to get away. He was the only one with bruises on his throat. The pillow had done for the others.

“When I phoned last night?” Lloyd said. “When I phoned, it had already happened.

“You brought it all on yourself,” he said.

———

The verdict was that he was insane, he couldn’t be tried. He was criminally insane—he had to be put in a secure institution.

Doree had run out of the house and was stumbling around the yard, holding her arms tight across her stomach as if she had been sliced open and was trying to keep herself together. This was the scene that Maggie saw, when she came back. She had had a premonition, and had turned the van around in the road. Her first thought was that Doree had been hit or kicked in the stomach by her husband. She could understand nothing of the noises Doree was making. But Lloyd, who was still sitting on the steps, moved aside courteously for her, without a word, and she went into the house and found what she was now expecting to find. She phoned the police.

For some time Doree kept stuffing whatever she could grab into her mouth. After the dirt and grass it was sheets or towels or her own clothing. As if she were trying to stifle not just the howls that rose up but the scene in her head. She was given a shot of something, regularly, to quiet her down, and this worked. In fact she became very quiet, though not catatonic. She was said to be stabilized. When she got out of the hospital and the social worker brought her to this new place, Mrs. Sands took over, found her somewhere to live, found her a job, established the routine of talking with her once a week. Maggie would have come to see her, but she was the one person Doree could not stand to see. Mrs. Sands said that that feeling was natural—it was the association. She said that Maggie would understand.

Mrs. Sands said that whether or not Doree continued to visit Lloyd was up to her. “I’m not here to approve or disapprove, you know. Did it make you feel good to see him? Or bad?”

“I don’t know.”

Doree could not explain that it had not really seemed to be him she was seeing. It was almost like seeing a ghost. So pale. Pale, loose clothes on him, shoes that didn’t make

any noise—probably slippers—on his feet. She had the impression that some of his hair had fallen out. His thick and wavy, honey-coloured hair. There seemed to be no breadth to his shoulders, no hollow in his collarbone where she used to rest her head.

What he had said, afterwards, to the police—and it was quoted in the newspapers—was “I did it to save them the misery.”

What misery?

“The misery of knowing that their mother had walked out on them,” he said.

That was burned into Doree’s brain, and maybe when she decided to try to see him it had been with the idea of making him take it back. Making him see, and admit, how things had really gone.

“You told me to stop contradicting you or get out of the house. So I got out of the house.

“I only went to Maggie’s for one night. I fully intended to come back. I wasn’t walking out on anybody.”

She remembered perfectly how the argument had started. She had bought a tin of spaghetti that had a very slight dent in it. Because of that it had been on sale, and she had been pleased with her thriftiness. She had thought she was doing something smart. But she didn’t tell him that, once he had begun questioning her about it. For some reason she’d thought it better to pretend she hadn’t noticed.

Anybody would notice, he said. We could have all been poisoned. What was the matter with her? Or was that what she had in mind? Was she planning to try it out on the kids or on him?

She told him not to be crazy.

He had said it wasn’t him who was crazy. Who but a crazy woman would buy poison for her family?

The children had been watching from the doorway of the front room. That was the last time she’d seen them alive.

So was that what she had been thinking—that she could make him see, finally, who it was who was crazy?

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When she realized what was in her head, she should have got off the bus. She could have got off even at the gates, with the few other women who plodded up the drive. She could have crossed the road and waited for the bus back to the city. Probably some people did that. They were going to make a visit and then decided not to. People probably did that all the time.

But maybe it was better that she had gone on, and seen him so strange and wasted. Not a person worth blaming for anything. Not a person. He was like a character in a dream.

She had dreams. In one dream she had run out of the house after finding them, and Lloyd had started to laugh in his old easy way, and then she had heard Sasha laughing behind her and it had dawned on her, wonderfully, that they were all playing a joke.

“You asked me if it made me feel good or bad when I saw him? Last time you asked me?”

“Yes, I did,” Mrs. Sands said.

“I had to think about it.”

“Yes.”

“I decided it made me feel bad. So I haven’t gone again.”

It was hard to tell with Mrs. Sands, but the nod she gave seemed to show some satisfaction or approval.

So when Doree decided that she would go again, after all, she thought it was better not to mention it. And since it was hard not to mention whatever happened to her—there being so little, most of the time—she phoned and cancelled her appointment. She said that she was going on a holiday. They were getting into summer, when holidays were the usual thing. With a friend, she said.

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"You aren't wearing the jacket you had on last week."

"That wasn't last week."

"Wasn't it?"

"It was three weeks ago. The weather's hot now. This is lighter, but I don't really need it. You don't need a jacket at all."

He asked about her trip, what buses she'd had to take from Mildmay.

She told him that she wasn't living there anymore. She told him where she lived, and about the three buses.

"That's quite a trek for you. Do you like living in a bigger place?"

"It's easier to get work there."

"So you work?"

She had told him last time about where she lived, the buses, where she worked.

"I clean rooms in a motel," she said. "I told you."

"Yes, yes. I forgot. I'm sorry. Do you ever think of going back to school? Night school?"

She said she did think about it but never seriously enough to do anything. She said she didn't mind the work she was doing.

Then it seemed as if they could not think of anything more to say.

He sighed. He said, “Sorry. Sorry. I guess I’m not used to conversation.”

“So what do you do all the time?”

“I guess I read quite a bit. Kind of meditate. Informally.”

“Oh.”

“I appreciate your coming here. It means a lot to me. But don’t think you have to keep it up. I mean, just when you want to. If something comes up, or if you feel like it—what I’m trying to say is, just the fact that you could come at all, that you even came once, that’s a bonus for me. Do you get what I mean?”

She said yes, she thought so.

He said that he didn’t want to interfere with her life.

“You’re not,” she said.

“Was that what you were going to say? I thought you were going to say something else.”

In fact, she had almost said, What life?

No, she said, not really, nothing else.

“Good.”

Three more weeks and she got a phone call. It was Mrs. Sands herself on the line, not one of the women in the office.

“Oh, Doree. I thought you might not be back yet. From your holiday. So you are back?”

“Yes,” Doree said, trying to think where she could say she had been.

“But you hadn’t got around to arranging another appointment?”

“No. Not yet.”

“That’s okay. I was just checking. You are all right?”

“I’m all right.”

“Fine. Fine. You know where I am if you ever need me. Ever just want to have a talk.”

“Yes.”

“So take care.”

She hadn’t mentioned Lloyd, hadn’t asked if the visits had continued. Well, of course, Doree had said that they weren’t going to. But Mrs. Sands was pretty good, usually, about sensing what was going on. Pretty good at holding off, too, when she understood that a question might not get her anywhere. Doree didn’t know what she would have said, if asked—whether she would have backtracked and told a lie or come out with the truth. She had gone back, in fact, the very next Sunday after he more or less told her it didn’t matter whether she came or not.

He had a cold. He didn’t know how he got it.

Maybe he had been coming down with it, he said, the last time he saw her, and that was why he’d been so morose.

“Morose.” She seldom had anything to do, nowadays, with anyone who used a word like that, and it sounded strange to her. But he had always had a habit of using such words, and of course at one time they hadn’t struck her as they did now.

“Do I seem like a different person to you?” he asked.

“Well, you look different,” she said cautiously. “Don’t I?”

“You look beautiful,” he said sadly.

Something softened in her. But she fought against it.

“Do you feel different?” he asked. “Do you feel like a different person?”

She said she didn’t know. “Do you?”

He said, “Altogether.”

Later in the week a large envelope was given to her at work. It had been addressed to her care of the motel. It contained several sheets of paper, with writing on both sides. She didn't think at first of its being from him—she somehow had the idea that people in prison were not allowed to write letters. But, of course, he was a different sort of prisoner. He was not a criminal; he was only criminally insane.

There was no date on the document and not even a "Dear Doree." It just started talking to her in such a way that she thought it had to be some sort of religious invitation:

People are looking all over for the solution. Their minds are sore (from looking). So many things jostling around and hurting them. You can see in their faces all their bruises and pains. They are troubled. They rush around. They have to shop and go to the laundromat and get their hair cut and earn a living or pick up their welfare cheques. The poor ones have to do that and the rich ones have to look hard for the best ways to spend their money. That is work too. They have to build the best houses with gold faucets for their hot and cold water. And their Audis and magical toothbrushes and all possible contraptions and then burglar alarms to protect against slaughter and all (neigh) neither rich nor poor have any peace in their souls. I was going to write "neighbour" instead of "neither," why was that? I have not got any neighbour here. Where I am at least people have got beyond a lot of confusion. They know what their possessions are and always will be and they don't even have to buy or cook their own food. Or choose it. Choices are eliminated.

All we that are here can get is what we can get out of our own minds.

At the beginning all in my head was purturbation (Sp?). There was everlasting storm, and I would knock my head against cement in the hope of getting rid of it. Stopping my agony and my life. So punishments were meted. I got hosed down and tied up and drugs introduced in my bloodstream. I am not complaining either, because I had to learn there is no profit in that. Nor is it any different from the so-called real world, in which people drink and carry on and commit crimes to eliminate their thoughts which are painful. And often they get hauled off and incarcerated but it is not long enough for them to come out on the other side. And what is that? It is either total insanity or peace.

Peace. I arrived at peace and am still sane. I imagine reading this now you are thinking I am going to say something about God Jesus or at any rate Buddha as if I had arrived at a religious conversion. No. I do not close my eyes and get lifted up by any specific Higher Power. I do not really know what is meant by any of that. What I do is Know Myself. Know Thyself is some kind of Commandment from somewhere, probably the Bible so at least in that I have followed Christianity. Also, To Thy Own Self Be True—I have attempted that it is in the Bible also. It does not say which parts—the bad or the good—to be true to so it is not intended as a guide to morality. Also Know Thyself does not relate either to morality as we know it in Behaviour. But Behaviour is not really my concern because I have been judged quite correctly as a person who cannot be trusted to judge how he should behave and that is the reason I am here.

Back to the Know part of Know Thyself. I can say perfectly soberly that I know myself and I know the worst I am capable of and I know that I have done it. I am judged by the World as a Monster and I have no quarrel with that, even though I might say in passing that people who rain down bombs or burn cities or