

in a crossword puzzle. Still no light came, and suddenly I took the combination lock and began to finger it, for I remembered how, at school, I could always open it by the sense of touch when someone else had set the combination. It was one of my show-pieces, and when I first mastered it drew some applause, for I declared that to do it I had to put myself into a trance: and this was not quite a lie, for I did deliberately empty my mind and let my fingers work without direction. To heighten the effect, however, I would close my eyes and sway gently to and fro, until the effort of keeping my consciousness at a low ebb almost exhausted me; and this I found myself instinctively doing now, as to an audience. After a timeless interval I heard the tiny click and felt the sides of the lock relax and draw apart; and at the same moment, as if by some sympathetic loosening in my mind, the secret of the diary flashed upon me.<sup>8</sup>

Yet even then I did not want to touch it; indeed my unwillingness increased, for now I knew why I distrusted it. I looked away and it seemed to me that every object in the room exhaled the diary's encraving power, and spoke its message of disappointment and defeat. And as if that was not enough, the voices reproached me with not having had the grit to overcome them. Under this twofold assault I sat, staring at the bulging envelopes around me, the stacks of papers tied up with red tape — the task of sorting which I had set myself for winter evenings, and of which the red collar-box had been almost the first item; and I felt, with a bitter blend of self-pity and self-reproach, that had it not been for the diary, or what the diary stood for, everything would be different. I should not be sitting in this drab, flowerless room, where the curtains were not even drawn to hide the cold rain beating on the windows, or contemplating the accumulation of the past and the duty it imposed on me to sort it out. I should be sitting in another room, rainbow-hued,<sup>9</sup> looking not into the past but into the future:<sup>10</sup> and I should not be sitting alone.

So I told myself, and with a gesture born of will, as most of my acts were, not inclination, I took the diary out of the box and opened it.

*Diary  
for the year  
1900*

it said in a copper-plate script unlike the lettering of today; and round the year thus confidently heralded, the first year of the century,<sup>11</sup> winged with hope, clustered the signs of the Zodiac, each somehow contriving to suggest a plenitude of life and power, each glorious, though differing from the others in glory.<sup>12</sup> How well I remembered them, their shapes and attitudes; and I remembered too, though it was no longer potent for me, the magic with which they were then invested, and the tingling sense of coming fruition they conveyed — the lowly creatures no less than the exalted ones.

The Fishes sported deliciously, as though there were no such things as nets and hooks; the Crab had a twinkle in its eye, as though it was well aware of its odd appearance and thoroughly enjoyed the joke; and even the Scorpion carried its terrible pincers with a gay, heraldic air, as though its deadly intentions existed only in legend.<sup>13</sup> The Ram, the Bull, and the Lion epitomized imperious manhood; they were what we all thought we had it in us to be; careless, noble, self-sufficient, they ruled their months with sovereign sway. As for the Virgin,<sup>14</sup> the one distinctively female figure in the galaxy, I can scarcely say what she meant to me. She was dressed adequately, but only in the coils and sweeps of her long hair; and I doubt whether the school authorities, had they known about her, would have approved the hours of dalliance my thoughts spent with her, though these, I think, were innocent enough. She was, to me, the key to the whole pattern, the climax, the coping-stone, the goddess — for my imagination was then, though it is no longer, passionately hierarchical; it envisaged things in an ascending scale, circle on circle, tier on tier, and the annual, mechanical revolution of the months did not disturb this notion. I knew that the year must return to winter and begin again; but to my apprehensions the zodiacal company were subject to no such limitations: they soared in an ascending spiral towards infinity.

And the expansion and ascension, as of some divine gas, which I believed to be the ruling principle of my own life, I attributed to the coming century. The year 1900 had an almost mystical appeal for me; I could hardly wait for it: 'Nineteen hundred, nineteen hundred,' I would chant to myself in rapture; and as the old century drew to its close, I began to wonder whether I should live to see its successor. I had an excuse for this: I had been ill and was acquainted with the idea of death;<sup>15</sup> but much more it was the fear of missing something

infinitely precious — the dawn of a Golden Age.<sup>16</sup> For that was what I believed the coming century would be: a realization, on the part of the whole world, of the hopes that I was entertaining for myself.

The diary was a Christmas present from my mother, to whom I had confided some, though by no means all, of my aspirations for the future, and she wanted its dates to be worthily enshrined.

In my zodiacal fantasies there was one jarring note, to which, when I indulged them, I tried not to listen, for it flawed the experience. This was my own role in it.

My birthday fell in late July<sup>17</sup> and I had an additional reason, an excellent one, though I should have been loath to mention it at school, for claiming the Lion as my symbol. But much as I admired him and what he stood for, I could not identify myself with him, because of late I had lost the faculty which, like other children, I had once revelled in, of pretending that I was an animal. A term and a half at school had helped to bring about this disability in my imagination; but it was also a natural change. I was between twelve and thirteen, and I wanted to think of myself as a man.

There were only two candidates, the Archer and the Water-carrier,<sup>18</sup> and, to make the choice more difficult, the artist, who probably had few facial types at his command, had drawn them very much alike. They were in fact the same man following different callings. He was strong and sturdy and this appealed to me, for one of my ambitions was to become a kind of Hercules.<sup>19</sup> I leaned to the Archer as the more romantic, and because the idea of shooting appealed to me. But my father had been against war,<sup>20</sup> which I supposed was the Archer's profession; and as to the Water-carrier, though I knew him to be a useful member of society I could not help conceiving of him as a farm-labourer or at best a gardener, neither of which I wanted to be. The two men attracted and repelled me at the same time: perhaps I was jealous of them. When I studied the title-page of the diary I tried not to look at the Sagittarius-Aquarius combination, and when the whole conception took wing and mounted to the zenith, drawing the twentieth century with it for a final heavenly romp, I sometimes contrived to leave it behind. A zodiacal sign without port-folio,<sup>21</sup> I then had the Virgin to myself.

One result of the diary was that I went to the top of the class for knowing the signs of the Zodiac. In another way its influence was less

fortunate. I wanted to be worthy of the diary, of its purple leather, its gold edges, its general sumptuousness; and I felt that my entries must live up to all these. They must record something worthwhile, and they must reach a high standard of literary attainment. My ideas of what was worthwhile were already rather advanced and it seemed to me that my school life did not provide events fit for such a magnificent setting as my diary was, or for the year 1900.

What had I written? I remembered the catastrophe well enough, but not the stages that led up to it. I turned the pages. The entries were few. 'Tea with C's pater and mater — very jolly.' Then, more sophisticated, 'Jolly decent tea with L's people. Muffins, scones, cakes and strawberry jam.' 'Drove to Canterbury in 3 breaks. Visited Cathedral, very interesting. Thomas A'Beckett's blood.<sup>22</sup> Tres ripping.' 'Walk to Kingsgate Castle.<sup>23</sup> M. showed me his new knife.' This was the first reference to Maudsley; I turned the pages more quickly. Ah, here it was — the Lambton House saga.<sup>24</sup> Lambton House was a nearby preparatory school with which we felt ourselves on terms of special rivalry; they were to us what Eton is to Harrow.<sup>25</sup> 'Played Lambton House At Home. Match drawn 1-1.' 'Played Lambton House Away. Match drawn 3-3.' Then, 'Last and Ultimate and Final Replay. Lambton House VANQUISHED 2-1!!!! McClintock scored both goals!!!!'

After that, no more entries for a time. Vanquished! That was the word for which I was made to suffer.<sup>26</sup> My attitude to the diary was twofold and contradictory: I was intensely proud of it and wanted everybody to see it and what I had written in it, and at the same time I had an instinct for secrecy and wanted nobody to see it. I spent hours balancing the pros and cons of either course. I thought of the applause that would greet the diary as it was wonderingly passed from hand to hand. I thought of the enhancement to my prestige, the opportunities to swank of which I should avail myself discreetly but effectively. And on the other hand there was the intimate pleasure of brooding over the diary in secret, like a bird sitting on its eggs, hatching, creating; losing myself in zodiacal reveries, speculating upon the glorious destiny of the twentieth century, intoxicated by my almost sensuous premonitions of what was coming to me. These were joys that depended upon secrecy; they would vanish if I told them or even betrayed their source.

with a smile — from them it was but a short step to the hardly more august and legendary figures of the Zodiac.

One of the items in my trousseau<sup>10</sup> was a bathing-suit, and partly from the promptings of nudism, partly because I fancied the idea of myself in it (the day with Marian had made me conscious of myself in many ways) I badly wanted to put it on. I confessed that I couldn't swim unless somebody held me but Marian said she would arrange for that. Here, however, my hostess put her foot down. My mother had written to her that I was delicate and liable to colds; she would not take the responsibility of letting me bathe without first having my mother's permission. But of course I could watch the others bathe if I liked.

There was a bathing party afoot and I had just time to write the letter and go down and join them. It was Saturday the 14th — meteorologically a disappointing day, for the thermometer (which I now wished to soar to unprecedented heights) had not reached seventy-six. But this was a secret that I shared with Marcus and his father; the others, ignorant of the true state of affairs, complained loudly of the heat. I took my bathing-dress with me, to be in keeping with the spirit of the party. Marcus also had his, for use, though like me he could not swim. Neither of them, I ruefully realized, made many concessions to nakedness; I had tried mine on, it was disappointingly ample, and so was Marcus's.

I had never been to a grown-up bathing party before. There was nothing surprising in that, for in those days bathing was a pastime of the few and the word denoted an intenser experience than it does now. I was curious about it and almost frightened — this idea of surrendering oneself to an alien and potentially hostile element. Though my knowledge of it was to be only vicarious I felt a tingling on my skin and a faint loosening of my bowels.

We trooped down the path, six of us — Marian and Denys, a young man and a young woman whose names are in my diary but whose faces I cannot remember — and Marcus and I bringing up the rear. It was about six o'clock but the heat still lingered, not burning but diffused and benign. We went through a wicket gate into a belt of trees. I was often to go that way on hotter days; but never again did I get quite the same impression of cold succeeding heat. The trees

for I felt that my experience of it would somehow be cumulative, and that if it would only get hotter and hotter there was a heart of heat I should attain to.

The green suit, with its smoked pearl buttons and open collar that sat so lightly on me, the thin underclothes whose touch caressed me, the stockings hardly thick enough to protect my legs from scratches, the 'low' shoes that were my special pride — these, I felt, were only first steps towards my complete, corporeal union with the summer. One by one they would be discarded — in what order I couldn't decide, though it was a question which exercised me. Which garment would be the last I should retain, before the final release into nakedness? My notions of decency were vague and ill-defined, as were all my ideas relating to sex; yet they were definite enough for me to long for the release of casting them off with my clothes, and being like a tree or a flower, with nothing between me and Nature.

These yearnings for nudist<sup>8</sup> fulfilment hovered on the confines of my mind; perhaps I never thought them capable of realization. In the meantime my pride in my new rig-out had, at another level of consciousness, altered my outlook on the world, and my relation to it. New clothes are always a tonic, and the circumstances in which I had come by mine made them a super-tonic. I strutted, I preened myself. But I was not incapable of gratitude or awe, and both these feelings had been awakened in me. Gratitude for the gifts — how was it possible that my benefactors did not value me, how was it possible that I should not value them, when such pledges of amity had been bestowed? and awe for the way they had been given: the casual accumulation of colossal bills, mounting from shop to shop, as if money were nothing! The expenditure had been godlike; it belonged to another, ampler phase of being than the one I was accustomed to. My mind could not grasp it but my imagination could make play with it, for unlike my mind, which could dismiss what it did not understand, my imagination loved to contemplate the incomprehensible and try to express my sense of it by an analogy. And I had one ready-made. From those resplendent beings, golden with sovereigns (and, I suspected, guineas), arriving, staying, leaving, apparently unaffected by any restrictions of work or family ties, citizens of the world who made the world their playground, who had it in their power (for I did not forget that) to make me miserable with a laugh and happy