

VERSION ANGLAISE ET COURT THÈME

I : VERSION

The mill startled them all, staring, light-eyed, ghoulishly, round a bend of the valley. Lois had to come hurrying up to explain how it frightened her. In fact, she wouldn't for worlds go into it but liked going as near as she dared. It was a fear she didn't want to get over, a kind of deliciousness. Those dead mills — the country was full of them, never quite stripped and whitened to skeletons' decency: like corpses at their most horrible. 'Another,' Hugo declared, 'of our national grievances. English law strangled the —' But Lois insisted on hurrying: she and Marda were now well ahead.

The river darkened and thundered towards the mill-race, light came full on the high façade of decay. Incredible in its loneliness, roofless, floorless, beams criss-crossing dank interior daylight, the whole place tottered, fit to crash at a breath. Hinges rustily bled where a door had been wrenched away ; up six stories panes still tattered the daylight. Mounting the tree-crowded, steep slope some roofless cottages nestled under the flank of the mill with sinister pathos. A track going up the hill from the gateless gateway perished among the trees from disuse. Banal enough in life to have closed this valley to the imagination, the dead mill now entered the democracy of ghostliness, equalled broken palaces in futility and sadness ; was transfigured by some response of the spirit, showing not the decline of its meanness, simply decline ; took on all of the past to which it had given nothing.

Rooks disturbed the trees, disturbed the echoes. 'Don't go in!' cried Lois and clutched Marda's arm convulsively.

'Come on,' said Marda, 'I feel demoralized, girlish. Let's hide from Mr Montmorency.' Lois shied through the gateway with more than affected nervousness. This was her nightmare: brittle, staring ruins. Mr Montmorency, disgruntled, still dawdled by the river ; the idea of escape appeared irresistible. But the scene was strangely set for a Watteau interlude. Inside the mill door, a high surge of nettles ; one beam had rotted and come down, there was some debris of the roof.

'If he starts shouting,' Lois said, apprehensive, 'he'll certainly bring the mill down. Oh, I can't come in, oh, I can't possibly. Oh, it's beastly here ; I feel sick. I think you are quite mad.'

'I think you're a shocking little coward.'

'I'm not afraid of anything *reasonable*. But I'm simply nervous, one can't help that.'

'Come in through that door.'

'But it's so *high*.'

Marda put an arm round her waist, and in an ecstasy at this compulsion Lois entered the mill. Fear heightened her gratification ; she welcomed its inrush, letting her look climb the scabby and livid walls to the frightful stare of the sky. Cracks ran down ; she expected, now with detachment, to see them widen, to see the walls peel back from a cleft — like the House of Usher's.

'Hate it?' said Marda.

'You'd make me do anything.'

The sun cast in through the window sockets some wild gold squares twisted by the beams ; grasses along the windows trembled in light. Marda turned and went picking her way through the nettles ; there was a further door, into darkness — somewhere, a roof still held. 'Marda, help ; here's a dead crow!'

Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*, 1929.

II : THÈME

Et puis je ne pensai plus à Mlle d'Orgeville, simplement parce que nos chemins cessèrent, pendant un temps assez long, de se croiser. Je la trouvai quasi sous mes pieds, au bois de Boulogne, un jour que j'y suivais ma chienne en quête de lac, d'herbe tendre et de pommes de pin. Assise à même le gazon, tête nue, Mlle d'Orgeville tenait par le cou, d'un bras, un jeune homme bien fait dans sa stature moyenne, châtain un peu roux et les dents sans défaut, qui, à force d'être de la même race qu'elle, lui ressemblait comme un frère. Au grand jour de la clairière, on voyait que c'était un frère cadet. Mais Lucette avait bonne mine, et l'œil doux, l'œil d'une femme qui n'a pas de femmes à combattre.

Après les récris et les bonjours, elle me présenta son compagnon :

— C'est Luigi. Vous savez bien, Luigi.

Colette, *Chambre d'hôtel*, 1940.