HAPPINESS

As Stuart Elton stooped and flicked off his trousers a white thread, the trivial act accompanied as it was by a slide and avalanche of sensation, seemed like a petal falling from a rose, and Stuart Elton straightening himself to resume his conversation with Mrs Sutton felt that he was compact of many petals laid firmly and closely on top of each other all reddened, all warmed through, all tinged with this inexplicable glow. So that when he stooped a petal fell. When he was young he had not felt it - no - now aged forty-five, he had only to stoop, to flick a thread off his trousers, and it rushed down all through him, this beautiful orderly sense of life, this slide, this avalanche of sensation, to be at one, when he stood up again adjusted — but what was she saying?

Mrs Sutton (still being dragged by the hair over the stubble and up and down the ploughed land of early middle age) was saying that managers wrote to her, even made appointments to see her, but nothing came of it. What made it so difficult for her was that she had naturally no connections with the stage, her father, all her people, being just country people. (It was then that Stuart Elton flicked the thread off.) She stopped; she felt rebuked. Yes, Stuart Elton had what she wanted, she felt, as he stooped. And when he stood up again, she apologised — she talked too much about herself she said — and added, 'You seem to me far the happiest person I know.'

It chimed oddly with what he had been thinking and that sense of the soft downward rush of life and its orderly readjustment, that sense of the falling petal and the complete rose. But was it 'happiness'? No. The big word did not seem to fit it, did not seem to refer to this state of being curled in rosy flakes round a bright light. Anyhow said Mrs Sutton, he was of all her friends the one she envied most. He seemed to have everything; she nothing. They counted — each had money enough; she a husband and children; he was a bachelor; she was thirty-five; he forty-five; she had never been ill in her life and he was a positive martyr, he said, to some internal complaint — longed to eat lobster all day long and could not touch it. There she exclaimed! as if she had her fingers on it. Even his illness was a joke to him. Was it balancing one thing against another, she asked? Was it a sense

of proportion, was it? Was what, he asked, knowing quite well what she meant, but warding off this harum scarum ravaging woman with her hasty ways[,] with her grievances and her vigour, skirmishing and scrimmaging[,] who might knock over and destroy this very valuable possession, this sense of being — two figures flashed into his mind simultaneously - a flag in a breeze, a trout in a stream - poised, balanced, in a current of clean fresh clear bright lucid tingling impinging sensation which like the air or the stream held him upright so that if he moved a hand, stooped or said anything he dislodged the pressure of the innumerable atoms of happiness which closed and held him up again.

'Nothing matters to you,' said Mrs Sutton. 'Nothing changes you,' she said awkwardly making dashes and splashes about him like a man dabbing putty here there trying to cement bricks together while he stood there very silent, very cryptic, very demure; trying to get something from him, a clue, a key, a guide, envying him, resenting him, and feeling that if she with her emotional range, her passion, her capacity, her gifts had that added, she could straight off be the rival of Mrs Siddons herself.' He would not tell her; he must tell her.

'I went to Kew this afternoon,' he said, bending his knee and flicking it again not that there was a white thread there, but to make sure, by repeating the act, that his machine was in order, as it was.

So if one were being pursued through a forest by wolves one would tear off little bits of clothing and break off biscuits and throw them to the unhappy wolves, feeling almost, but not quite secure oneself, on one's high swift safe sledge.

With this whole pack of famished wolves in pursuit, now worrying the little bit of biscuit he had thrown them, - those words, 'I went to Kew this afternoon' — Stuart Elton raced swiftly ahead of them back to Kew, to the magnolia tree, to the lake, to the river, holding up his hand, to keep them off. Among them (for now the world seemed full of howling wolves) he remembered people asking him to dinner and lunch, now accepted now not, and his sense there on the sunny stretch of grass at Kew of mastery, even as he could swing his stick so he could choose, this that, go here, there, break off bits of biscuit and toss them to the wolves, read this, look at that, meet him or her, alight at some good fellow's rooms— 'To Kew alone?' Mrs Sutton repeated. 'By yourself?'

Ah! the wolf yapped in his ear. Ah! he sighed, as he had for one instant thinking of the past sighed ah by the lake that afternoon, by some woman stitching white stuff under a tree with geese waddling past, he had sighed, seeing the usual sight, lovers, arm in arm, where there was now this peace, this health once there had been ruin storm despair; so again this wolf Mrs Sutton reminded him; alone; yes quite alone; but he recovered, as he had recovered then, as the young people passed, grasping this, this, whatever it was and held it tight and walked on, pitying them.

'Quite alone,' Mrs Sutton repeated. That was what she could not conceive she said, with a despairing swoop of her dark bright haired head - being happy, quite alone.

'Yes,' he said.

In happiness there is always this terrific exaltation. It is not high spirits; nor rapture; nor praise, fame or health (he could not walk two miles without feeling done up) it is a mystic state, a trance, an ecstasy which, for all that he was atheistical, sceptical, unbaptised and all the rest of it, had[,] he suspected[,] some affinity with the ecstasy that turned men priests, sent women in the prime of life trudging the streets with starched cyclamen-like frills about their faces, and set lips and stony eyes; but with this difference; them it prisoned; him it set free. It freed him from all dependence upon anyone upon anything.

Mrs Sutton felt that too, as she waited for him to speak.

Yes he would stop his sledge, get out, let the wolves crowd all about him, he would pat their poor rapacious muzzles.

'Kew was lovely — full of flowers — magnolias azaleas,' he could never remember names he told her.

It was nothing that they could destroy. No; but if it came so inexplicably, so it might go, he had felt, leaving Kew, walking on the river bank up to Richmond. Why, some branch might fall; the colour might change; green turn blue; or a leaf shake; and that would be enough; yes; that would be enough to shiver, shatter, utterly destroy this amazing thing this miracle, this treasure which was his had been his was his must always be his, he thought getting restive and anxious and without thinking about Mrs Sutton he left her instantly and walked across the room and picked up a paper knife. Yes; it was all right. He had it still.

ANCESTORS

Mrs Vallance, as Jack Renshaw made that silly, rather conceited remark of his about not liking to watch cricket matches, felt that she must draw his attention somehow, must make him understand, yes, and all the other young people whom she saw, what her father would have said; how different her father and mother, yes and she too were from all this; and how compared to really dignified simple men and women like her father, like her dear mother, all *this* seemed to her so trivial.

'Here we all are,' she said suddenly, 'cooped up in this stuffy room while in the country at home — in Scotland' (she owed it to these foolish young men who were after all quite nice, though a little under-sized [,] to make them understand what her father, what her mother and she herself too, for she was like them at heart, felt).

'Are you Scotch?' he asked.

He did not know then, he did not know who her father was; that he was John Ellis Rattray; and her mother was Catherine Macdonald.

He had stopped in Edinburgh for a night once, Mr Renshaw said.

One night in Edinburgh! And she had spent all those wonderful years there - there and at Elliottshaw, on the Northumbrian border. There she had run wild among the currant bushes; there her father's friends had come, and [she] only a girl as she was, had heard the most wonderful talk of her time. She could see them still, her father, Sir Duncan Clements, Mr Rogers (old Mr Rogers was her ideal of a Greek sage), sitting under the cedar tree; after dinner in the starlight. They talked [about] everything in the whole world, it seemed to her now; they [were too] large minded ever to laugh at other people. They had taught her to revere beauty. What was there beautiful in this stuffy London room?

'Those poor flowers,' she exclaimed, for petals of flowers all crumpled and crushed, a carnation or two, were actually trodden under foot; but, she felt, she cared almost too much for flowers. Her mother had loved flowers: ever since she was a child she had been brought up to feel that to hurt a flower was to hurt the most exquisite thing in nature. Nature had always been a passion with her; the mountains, the sea. Here in London, one

looked out of the window and saw more houses - human beings packed on top of each other in little boxes. It was an atmosphere in which she could not possibly live; herself. She could not bear to walk in London and see the children playing in the streets. She was perhaps too sensitive; life would be impossible if everyone was like her, but when she remembered her own childhood, and her father and mother, and the beauty and care that were lavished on them —

'What a lovely frock!' said Jack Renshaw; and *that* seemed to her altogether wrong - for a young man to be noticing women's clothes at all.

Her father was full of reverence for women but he never thought of noticing what they wore. And of all these girls, there was not a single one of them one could call beautiful - as she remembered her mother, — her dear stately mother, who never seemed to dress differently summer or winter, whether they had people or were alone, but always looked *herself* in lace, and as she grew older, a little cap. When she was a widow, [she] would sit among her flowers by the hour, and she seemed to be more with ghosts than with them all, dreaming of the past, which is, Mrs Vallance thought, somehow so much more real than the present. But why. It is in the past, with those wonderful men and women, she thought, that I really live: it is they who know me; it is those people only (and she thought of the starlit garden and the trees and old Mr Rogers, and her father, in his white linen coat smoking) who understood me. She felt her eyes soften and deepen as at the approach of tears, standing there in Mrs Dalloway's drawing-room, looking not at these people, these flowers, this chattering crowd, but at herself, that little girl who was to travel so far, picking Sweet Alice, and then sitting up in bed in the attic which smelt of pine wood reading stories, poetry. She had read all Shelley between the ages of twelve and fifteen, and used to say it to her father, holding her hands behind her back, while he shaved. The tears began, down in the back of her head to rise, as she looked at this picture of herself, and added the suffering of a lifetime (she had suffered abominably) - life had passed over her like a wheel — life was not what it had seemed then — it was like this party) to the child standing there, reciting Shelley; with her dark wild eyes. But what had they not seen later. And it was only those people, dead now, laid away in quiet Scotland, who had known her, who knew what she had it in her to be - and now the tears came closer, as she thought of the little girl in the cotton frock; how large and dark her eyes were; how beautiful she looked repeating the 'Ode to the

West Wind'; how proud her father was of her, and how great he was, and how great her mother was, and how when she was with them she was so pure so good so gifted that she had it in her to be anything. That if they had lived, and she had always been with them in that garden (which now appeared to her the place where she had spent her whole childhood, and it was always starlit, and always summer, and they were always sitting out under the cedar tree smoking, except that somehow her mother was dreaming alone, in her widow's cap among her flowers - and how good and kind and respectful the old servants were, Andrewes the gardener, Jersy the cook; and old Sultan, the Newfoundland dog; and the vine, and the pond, and the pump - and Mrs Vallance looking very fierce and proud and satirical, compared her life with other peoples' lives) and if that life could have gone on for ever, then Mrs Vallance felt none of this - and she looked at Jack Renshaw and the girl whose clothes he admired — could have had any existence, and she would have been oh perfectly happy, perfectly good, instead of which here she was forced to listen to a young man saying - and she laughed almost scornfully and yet tears were in her eyes - that he could not bear to watch cricket matches!