Introduction

In Ezra Pound's famous construction, 'literature is news that stays news'. It is tempting at points when reading *The Collector* to wish that so many aspects of it had not stayed news. Since it was first published in 1963, and accelerating over the second decade of the twenty-first century as we continue to live in what has become known as the post-#MeToo era, there has been a huge reckoning in relation to sexualised male violence against women in all of its expressions. And yet the voices of this novel's male characters feel utterly familiar to anyone with a passing familiarity of contemporary misogyny. Here is negging, gaslighting, the rejection of the sexual economy, the tyranny of the friendzone as it relates to the 'nice guy', aggressive moralised sexual disgust and appropriated victimhood with all their familiar cadences. Though much of its exploration of class and its signs and stories can feel somewhat distant, coming to us like a period piece, its story of the darkest recesses of how men relate to women feels whispered directly into your ear. To finish this novel is to emerge into the light, blinking and thankful, yet feeling that you have brought some new understanding with you.

The Collector presents at first as the story of Frederick Clegg, a clerk in a city hall, disconnected from society, obsessed with collecting butterflies but who, when we first meet him, has found a comparable thrill in catching glimpses of art student Miranda Grey. From the outset, the link between Miranda, butterflies and violence is clear as Fred describes her hair as 'silky, like burnet cocoons', how 'seeing her always made me feel like I was catching

a rarity' but that after seeing her with another man he has 'the bad dreams' where 'she cried or usually knelt. Once I let myself dream I hit her across the face as I saw it done by a chap in a telly play.'

Miranda leaves for a scholarship at an art school in London. Fred wins the pools and leaves his job, and his only living family leave for Australia. He begins to follow Miranda as she goes about her life. So much of the tension of the book comes from the gradual accrual of chilling details in the same reasonable euphemistic tone, heightened by the idea that these events happen before Miranda becomes his 'guest'. We learn that he has bought a house in Sussex with a large cellar. He buys furniture to exacting specifications including 'a camper's lavatory and all the etceteras'. He worries about the problem of 'doors and noise' but is able to make one that is 'two-inch seasoned wood with sheet metal on the inside so she couldn't get at the wood'.

Bit by bit, Fred and Fowles assemble the central conceit of the novel – that Fred will kidnap Miranda and keep her in his cellar. And so we witness his careful preparation, including 'a special plastic bag sewn in my mac pocket' for the chloroform. And then he gets her.

The Collector is a novel that has perhaps suffered from the power of its central conceit. It doesn't help that for a modern reader the title and plot description can't help but call to mind that genre of violent police procedural in which high-concept violence is meted out regularly to almost exclusively female victims. In an interview given a few months after publication Fowles professed himself 'shocked' that a novel that dealt with serious philosophical questions of authentic and inauthentic existence was being treated as 'mere' crime fiction. He would later come to see it as 'a small or narrow book'; important primarily as proof he could 'write well enough to get published'. It did more than that. When the paperback rights were sold in 1963, it was said to have been one of the biggest paperback deals ever done for a debut author. It certainly

functions as a piece of propulsive fiction in a contemporary context and has been described as 'the first psychological thriller', though it is tempting to wonder what would happen if this novel were pitched to a publisher today.

Ultimately, though, it feels like one of those novels where how it tells its story has often been eclipsed by the resonance of its plot. The fact that the 1965 film adaptation effectively leaves out 50 per cent of the book and 100 per cent of Miranda's point of view feels especially important. This is a book that has often suffered from paraphrase, but to borrow Fred's take on class, sometimes 'it's the way people speak that gives them away, not what they say.'

The Collector is certainly a far more structurally complicated and formally interesting book than I remembered from my first reading of it over twenty years ago. And it clearly prefigures that sense of playing with how fiction works that Fowles's later work would come to be known for. In this book we see an author immediately interested in the stagecraft of the novel, by who speaks and what they sound like, where those words come from and how a reader might knit them together into a character, whatever that might be. It is concerned with how innate the act of deception is to telling stories and how fragmentary the self is both inside and outside the novel. He is already interrogating that pretence at authorial objectivity that he would later skewer in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*: 'fiction usually pretends to conform to the reality: the writer puts the conflicting wants in the ring and then describes the fight – but in fact fixes the fight, letting that want he himself favours win.'

It is a fascinating book to scan for signs of his enduring fascinations, which are there right from the beginning – the authentic and inauthentic self, those who live inside and outside of norms, what different sorts of text mean to a reader, and an interest in other artforms. In many ways that exploration of the urge to collect a butterfly, and in neatly fixing and categorising it, killing it, echoes throughout much of his work. What I missed when I first

read *The Collector* were the techniques Fowles employs to achieve the overall effects.

Only once in the book, before Miranda arrives as his guest, does Fowles use speech marks: when Fred is imagining the taunting voice of a former colleague he especially hates. All the speech is reported, all filtered through Fred. But now Miranda arrives with speech marks and Fred's dialogue remains without them. It creates that claustrophobic sense that Fred and the book's points of view are the same. We hear Miranda's voice but it sounds somehow shrill in comparison to the soft reported speech of Fred, which continues to come to us in the same reasonable tone established in the first part of the book. It's clear how he's exploring those playful qualities of how stories function that he would later become known for. There is Fred and there is Fowles, assembling the box in which Miranda is to live, controlling her environment, choosing the furniture. All reasonable, without a cigarette paper between the voice of the book and the voice of Fred and only Miranda's voice left without context, somehow jarring against that male reasonableness.

Large sections of this first part of *The Collector* are scenes in which Fred tries to reasonably justify why bringing her here as his guest was necessary, and Miranda railing against it. The frequent refrain is that someone from her background wouldn't give someone from his background the time of day if he hadn't. That he has to keep her captive, as she would get him in trouble if he let her go. The violence of his act is hidden within a reasonable tone that makes her anger dismissible as hysteria and in which any challenge to that reasonable male position is rude and hurtful, impolite. When, early on, Miranda offers to be his *friend* if he lets her go, he is so hurt that he has to leave her and cannot sleep because of how 'she made me seem a fool'. One is reminded of Margaret Atwood's quote that 'Men are afraid women will laugh at them. Women are afraid that men will kill them.' Fowles frequently pulls away from showing us moments of actual conflict, refusing to report exactly

what Miranda says when Fred deems it too 'disgusting', and with veiling constructions like 'we had a good old argument about that'.

He brings her meals, at one point allows her to go for a bath. All the time he is aware that she is trying to find a version of herself that will convince him to free her but he also desperately wants to interpret her behaviour as signalling her true feelings towards him. We, as readers, are of course part of much the same process: aware that Fred is not reaching the correct conclusions but believing that we are doing a better job at working out what she really feels, who the real her is, as if we're involved in one of those 'fair fights'. A mutual deception that we are complicit in as readers, while thinking we see through it. She also begins to give him her philosophy of life and especially of art and culture. She repeatedly tells him she disdains the suburban and the square and stale but is not snobbish. At points she mocks his sensibility, his intellect, his speech and his looks. Meanwhile he wants her to think of how lucky she is that *he* has kidnapped her, as most other men would have raped her by now. At points Fred allows himself to believe that she doesn't mind her situation, whatever she might say to him. And all the time, her behaviour is a mystery to him, her screaming, her anger, her reciprocal verbal cruelty comes as if from nowhere into the void of his calm reasonableness. The effect is that the book is pulling us in different directions: the formal effects of the way that Miranda appears on the page pull against the events we witness. Many readers over the years have focused on the book's ambiguity over whose 'side' you are on, and there is something important about society in that statement. She is forcibly abducted, kidnapped and threatened with rape and murder, yes, but she's quite pretentious about art and can be somewhat sharp-tongued. Let's call it a draw.

Her attempts to escape are framed as unkindness. Fowles layers on the oppositions. She draws (when doing so, she is 'fluttery'), he photographs. She refuses to buy into facile ideas of morality and he lives by them maniacally, separating the world into the nice and

the nasty, of which anything relating to sex belongs. She continually posits his denial of desire and passion as the opposite of beauty. She negotiates a timeframe he will let her go by and on the supposed last night there is a grotesque parody of a date, as the layers of deception build up and finally he asks her to marry him. She is unable even to pretend, as she can't 'marry a man to whom I don't belong in all ways'. As a reader we are crying out for her to dissemble, to pretend she will marry him, rather than make this vacuous stand. From this point on, the mutual deception leads inexorably towards the end of the first part, described with a classically chilling piece of Fred euphemism: 'What I am trying to say is that it all came unexpected. I know what I did next day was a mistake, but up to that day I thought I was acting for the best and within my rights.'

Part 2 is that most classic device from the early novel, a diary written by Miranda, in which many of the events we've seen from Fred's perspective are replayed but this time from within her consciousness. It forces the reader to again cross-examine the Miranda that appears. We learn of her fear, which Fred never thought about for a moment. We see her genuine contempt for him and his 'funny inbetween' voice, 'uneducated trying to be educated. It keeps on letting him down.' She begins to refer to him as 'Caliban', a character who has been a site of all sorts of debate about civilisation, nature and hierarchies of importance. At first, this portrait of Miranda seems to back up everything that Fred has thought about her and that she denies. But gradually she starts to reveal her 'almost' relationship with a much older artist, G.P., in which it becomes clear she had been systematically groomed. He isolated her from her friends and family, he tells her she is not very clever or talented and that even her beauty is somehow suspect. Though she worships him, G.P. is unkind, arrogant, aggressive, sure of his own brilliance, darkly artistic. When he asks if she wants to go to bed with him and she says no, he tells her he didn't want to anyway, it was a test. When his eyes are on Miranda she feels alive,

when he is angry with her she can't think straight. We begin to recognise his voice in her confident pronouncements on art and life. We see her dismay at her own ignorance projected onto Fred. We recognise how much of her voice is an echo of G.P. She is entombed within his voice. When Fred proposes to Miranda she sticks to 'her values' (or perhaps G.P.'s values) rather than agreeing to live above ground as Fred's wife, which would be her only chance of a real possibility of escape. In this way G.P. sentences her to her fate. Miranda's understanding of misogyny: 'He hates me, he wants to defile me and break me and destroy me. He wants me to hate myself so much that I destroy myself.'

For me there is some hope in the novel, despite its horror and claustrophobia, in those glimpses of Miranda's voice, hidden from Fred for most of the novel – her rebellion and successful concealment of herself until after death. In amongst the toxicity of G.P.'s grooming, we get brief snatches of Miranda – her deep love for her sister, and their shared experience of their parents, the forgiveness of her alcoholic mother, and even a softness at times towards 'Caliban'. Then there is the rage which manifests as she tries to dig herself out of the cellar with her bare hands, hits at Fred with an axe, screams and laughs maniacally at him, smashes his ceramic ducks. These moments feel like Miranda herself, like a deep female rage, rather than how she imagines G.P. would want her to be.

Finally I have been struck by the extent to which both writer and readers are complicit in the terrible events in fiction. The writer calls the situation into being, reasonably justifying the horror they visit upon their characters in the name of literature. Like Fred does at the beginning, they must imagine all the potential angles for escape and thwart them. The reader feels pleasure at witnessing the suffering of the characters in the book. The author pretends to be giving us unpatterned reality, the reader looks for clues as to what's really happening. A book about characters lying to each other and themselves. Deception piles upon deception. I

think about the long sections of dialogue set out as a playscript by Miranda, which stretch the realism of her ability to transcribe so much dialogue in so much detail. The way that texts are embedded, the parts that foreground the shaped-ness of the text. The final image I have is that of Fowles closing a door and turning a key.

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When she was home from her boarding-school I used to see her almost every day sometimes, because their house was right opposite the Town Hall Annexe. She and her younger sister used to go in and out a lot, often with young men, which of course I didn't like. When I had a free moment from the files and ledgers I stood by the window and used to look down over the road over the frosting and sometimes I'd see her. In the evening I marked it in my observations diary, at first with X, and then when I knew her name with M. I saw her several times outside too. I stood right behind her once in a queue at the public library down Crossfield Street. She didn't look once at me, but I watched the back of her head and her hair in a long pigtail. It was very pale, silky, like burnet cocoons. All in one pigtail coming down almost to her waist, sometimes in front, sometimes at the back. Sometimes she wore it up. Only once, before she came to be my guest here, did I have the privilege to see her with it loose, and it took my breath away it was so beautiful, like a mermaid.

Another time one Saturday off when I went up to the Natural History Museum I came back on the same train. She sat three seats down and sideways to me, and read a book, so I could watch her for thirty-five minutes. Seeing her always made me feel like I was catching a rarity, going up to it very careful, heart-in-mouth as they say. A Pale Clouded Yellow, for instance. I always thought of her like that, I mean words like elusive and sporadic, and very refined – not like the other ones, even the pretty ones. More for the real connoisseur.

The year she was still at school I didn't know who she was, only how her father was Doctor Grey and some talk I overheard once at a Bug Section meeting about how her mother drank. I heard her mother speak once in a shop, she had a la-di-da voice and you could see she was the type to drink, too much make-up, etcetera.

Well, then there was the bit in the local paper about the scholarship she'd won and how clever she was, and her name as beautiful as herself, Miranda. So I knew she was up in London studying art. It really made a difference, that newspaper article. It seemed like we became more intimate, although of course we still did not know each other in the ordinary way.

I can't say what it was, the very first time I saw her, I knew she was the only one. Of course I am not mad, I knew it was just a dream and it always would have been if it hadn't been for the money. I used to have daydreams about her, I used to think of stories where I met her, did things she admired, married her and all that. Nothing nasty, that was never until what I'll explain later.

She drew pictures and I looked after my collection (in my dreams). It was always she loving me and my collection, drawing and colouring them; working together in a beautiful modern house in a big room with one of those huge glass windows; meetings there of the Bug Section, where instead of saying almost nothing in case I made mistakes we were the popular host and hostess. She all pretty with her pale blonde hair and grey eyes and of course the other men all green round the gills.

The only times I didn't have nice dreams about her being when I saw her with a certain young man, a loud noisy public-school type who had a sports car. I stood beside him once in Barclays waiting to pay in and I heard him say, I'll have it in fivers; the joke being it was only a cheque for ten pounds. They all behave like that. Well, I saw her climb in his car sometimes, or them out together in the town in it, and those days I was very short with the others in the office, and I didn't use to mark the X in my entomological observations diary (all this was before she went to London,

she dropped him then). Those were days I let myself have the bad dreams. She cried or usually knelt. Once I let myself dream I hit her across the face as I saw it done once by a chap in a telly play. Perhaps that was when it all started.

My father was killed driving. I was two. That was in 1937. He was drunk, but Aunt Annie always said it was my mother that drove him to drink. They never told me what really happened, but she went off soon after and left me with Aunt Annie, she only wanted an easy time. My cousin Mabel once told me (when we were kids, in a quarrel) she was a woman of the streets who went off with a foreigner. I was stupid, I went straight and asked Aunt Annie and if there was any covering-up to do, of course she did it. I don't care now, if she is still alive, I don't want to meet her, I've got no interest. Aunt Annie's always said good riddance in so many words, and I agree.

So I was brought up by Aunt Annie and Uncle Dick with their daughter Mabel. Aunt Annie was my father's elder sister.

Uncle Dick died when I was fifteen. That was 1950. We went up to Tring Reservoir to fish, as usual I went off with my net and stuff. When I got hungry and came back to where I left him, there were a knot of people. I thought he'd caught a whopper. But he'd had a stroke. They got him home, but he never said another word or properly recognized any of us again.

The days we spent together, not together exactly, because I always went off collecting and he'd sit by his rods, though we always had dinner together and the journey there and home, those days (after the ones I'm going to say about) are definitely the best I have ever had. Aunt Annie and Mabel used to despise my butterflies when I was a boy, but Uncle Dick would always stick up for me. He always admired a good bit of setting. He felt the same as I did about a new imago and would sit and watch the wings stretch and dry out and the gentle way they try them, and he also let me have room in his shed for my caterpillar jars. When I won a hobby prize

for a case of Fritillaries he gave me a pound on condition I didn't tell Aunt Annie. Well, I won't go on, he was as good as a father to me. When I held that cheque in my hands, he was the person, besides Miranda of course, I thought of. I would have given him the best rods and tackle and anything else he wanted. But it was not to be.

I did the pools from the week I was twenty-one. Every week I did the same five-bob perm. Old Tom and Crutchley, who were in Rates with me, and some of the girls clubbed together and did a big one and they were always going at me to join in, but I stayed the lone wolf. I never liked old Tom or Crutchley. Old Tom is slimy, always going on about local government and buttering up to Mr Williams, the Borough Treasurer. Crutchley's got a dirty mind and he is a sadist, he never let an opportunity go of making fun of my interest, especially if there were girls around. 'Fred's looking tired – he's been having a dirty week-end with a Cabbage White,' he used to say, and, 'Who was that Painted Lady I saw you with last night?' Old Tom would snigger, and Jane, Crutchley's girl from Sanitation, she was always in our office, would giggle. She was all Miranda wasn't. I always hated vulgar women, especially girls. So I did my own entry, like I said.

The cheque was for £73,091 and some odd shillings and pence. I rang up Mr Williams as soon as the pools people confirmed the Tuesday that all was well. I could tell he was angry that I left like that, although he said at first he was pleased, he was sure they were all pleased, which of course I know they weren't. He even suggested I invested in the Council 5% Loan! Some of them at Town Hall lose all sense of proportion.

I did what the pools people suggested, moved straight up to London with Aunt Annie and Mabel till the fuss died down. I sent old Tom a cheque for £500 and asked him to share with Crutchley and the others. I didn't answer their thank-you letters. You could see they thought I was mean.

The only fly in the ointment was Miranda. She was at home at the time of winning, on holidays from her art school, and I saw her only the Saturday morning of the great day. All the time we were up in London spending and spending I was thinking I wasn't going to see her any more; then that I was rich, a good spec as a husband now; then again I knew it was ridiculous, people only married for love, especially girls like Miranda. There were even times I thought I would forget her. But forgetting's not something you do, it happens to you. Only it didn't happen to me.

If you are on the grab and immoral like most nowadays, I suppose you can have a good time with a lot of money when it comes to you. But I may say I have never been like that, I was never once punished at school. Aunt Annie is a Nonconformist, she never forced me to go to chapel or such like, but I was brought up in the atmosphere, though Uncle Dick used to go to the pub on the q.t. sometimes. Aunt Annie let me smoke cigarettes after a lot of rows when I came out of the army, but she never liked it. Even with all that money, she had to keep on saying spending it was against her principles. But Mabel went at her behind the scenes, I heard her doing it one day, and anyway I said it was my money and my conscience, she was welcome to all she wanted and none if she didn't, and there was nothing about accepting gifts in Nonconformism.

What this is all leading to is I got a bit drunk once or twice when I was in the Pay Corps, especially in Germany, but I never had anything to do with women. I never thought about women much before Miranda. I know I don't have what it is girls look for; I know chaps like Crutchley who just seem plain coarse to me get on well with them. Some of the girls in the Annexe, it was really disgusting, the looks they'd give him. It's some crude animal thing I was born without. (And I'm glad I was, if more people were like me, in my opinion, the world would be better.)

When you don't have money, you always think things will be very different after. I didn't want more than my due, nothing

excessive, but we could see straight away at the hotel that of course they were respectful on the surface, but that was all, they really despised us for having all that money and not knowing what to do with it. They still treated me behind the scenes for what I was – a clerk. It was no good throwing money around. As soon as we spoke or did something we gave the game away. You could see them saying, don't kid us, we know what you are, why don't you go back where you came from.

I remember a night we went out and had supper at a posh restaurant. It was on a list the pools people gave us. It was good food, we ate it but I didn't hardly taste it because of the way people looked at us and the way the slimy foreign waiters and everybody treated us, and how everything in the room seemed to look down at us because we weren't brought up their way. I read the other day an article about class going – I could tell them things about that. If you ask me, London's all arranged for the people who can act like public schoolboys, and you don't get anywhere if you don't have the manner born and the right la-di-da voice – I mean rich people's London, the West End, of course.

One evening – it was after the posh restaurant, I was feeling depressed – I told Aunt Annie I felt like a walk, which I did. I walked and I suddenly felt I'd like to have a woman, I mean to be able to know I'd had a woman, so I rang up a telephone number a chap at the cheque-giving ceremony gave me. If you want a bit of you-know-what, he said.

A woman said, 'I'm engaged.' I asked if she knew any other number, and she gave me two. Well, I took a taxi round to the second one's address. I won't say what happened, except that I was no good. I was too nervous, I tried to be as if I knew all about it and of course she saw, she was old and she was horrible, horrible. I mean, both the filthy way she behaved and in looks. She was worn, common. Like a specimen you'd turn away from, out collecting. I

thought of Miranda seeing me there like that. As I said, I tried to do it but it was no good and I didn't try hardly.

I'm not the crude pushing sort, I never have been, I always had higher aspirations, as they say. Crutchley used to say you had to push nowadays to get anywhere, and he used to say, look at old Tom, look where being slimy's got him. Crutchley used to be very familiar, much too so in yours truly's opinion, as I said. Though he knew when to be slimy when it paid; to Mr Williams, for instance. A bit more life, Clegg, Mr Williams once said to me, when I was on Inquiries. The public like a smile or a small joke once in a while, he said, we aren't all born with a gift for it, like Crutchley, but we can try, you know. That really riled me. I can say I was sick to death with the Annexe, and I was going to leave anyhow.

I was not different, I can prove it, one reason I got fed up with Aunt Annie was I started to get interested with some of the books you can buy at shops in Soho, books of stark women and all that. I could hide the magazines, but there were books I wanted to buy and I couldn't in case she tumbled. I always wanted to do photography, I got a camera at once of course, a Leica, the best, telephoto lens, the lot; the main idea was to take butterflies living like the famous Mr S. Beaufoy; but also often before I used to come on things out collecting, you'd be surprised the things couples get up to in places you think they would know better than to do it in, so I had that too.

Of course the business with the woman upset me though, on top of all the other things. For instance, Aunt Annie had set her heart on going on a sea-cruise to Australia to see her son Bob and Uncle Steve her other younger brother and his family, and she wanted me to go too, but like I say I didn't want to be any more with Aunt Annie and Mabel. It was not that I hated them, but you could see what they were at once, even more than me. What they were was obvious; I mean small people who'd never left home. For

instance, they always expected me to do everything with them and tell them what I'd done if by any chance I had an hour off on my own. The day after the above-mentioned I told them flat I wasn't going to Australia. They took it not too bad, I suppose they had time to reckon it was my money after all.

The first time I went to look for Miranda it was a few days after I went down to Southampton to see off Aunt Annie; May 10th, to be exact. I was back in London. I hadn't got any real plan, and I told Aunt Annie and Mabel I might go abroad, but I didn't truly know. Aunt Annie was scared really, the night before they went she had a solemn talk with me about how I wasn't to marry, she hoped – that is, without her meeting the bride. She said a lot about it being my money and my life and how generous I was and all that, but I could see she was really scared I might marry some girl and they'd lose all the money they were so ashamed of, anyway. I don't blame her, it was natural, especially with a daughter who's a cripple. I think people like Mabel should be put out painlessly, but that's beside the point.

What I thought I would do (I already, in preparation, bought the best equipment in London) was to go to some of the localities where there were rare species and aberrations and get proper series. I mean turn up and stay somewhere for as long as I liked, and go out and collect and photograph. I had driving lessons before they went and I got a special van. There were a lot of species I wanted – the Swallowtail for instance, the Black Hair-streak and the Large Blue, rare Fritillaries like the Heath and the Glanville. Things most collectors only get a go at once a lifetime. There were moths too. I thought I might take them up.

What I'm trying to say is that having her as my guest happened suddenly, it wasn't something I planned the moment the money came.

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Well, of course with Aunt Annie and Mabel out of the way I bought all the books I wanted, some of them I didn't know such things existed, as a matter of fact I was disgusted, I thought here I am stuck in a hotel room with this stuff and it's a lot different from what I used to dream of about Miranda and me. Suddenly I saw I'd thought myself into thinking her completely gone out of my life, as if we didn't live within a few miles of each other (I was moved into the hotel in Paddington then) and I hadn't anyhow got all the time in the world to find out where she lived. It was easy, I looked up the Slade School of Art in the telephone directory, and I waited outside one morning in the van. The van was the one really big luxury I gave myself. It had a special fitting in the back compartment, a camp bed you could let down and sleep in; I bought it to carry all my equipment for when I moved round the country, and also I thought if I got a van I wouldn't always have to be taking Aunt Annie and Mabel around when they came back. I didn't buy it for the reason I did use it for. The whole idea was sudden, like a stroke of genius almost.

The first morning I didn't see her, but the next day at last I did. She came out with a lot of other students, mostly young men. My heart beat very fast and I felt sick. I had the camera all ready, but I couldn't dare use it. She was just the same; she had a light way of walking and she always wore flat heels so she didn't have that mince like most girls. She didn't think at all about the men when she moved. Like a bird. All the time she was talking to a young man with black hair, cut very short with a little fringe, very artistic-looking. There were six of them, but then she and the young man crossed the street. I got out of the van and followed them. They didn't go far, into a coffee-bar.

I went into that coffee-bar, suddenly, I don't know why, like I was drawn in by something else, against my will almost. It was full of people, students and artists and such-like; they mostly had that beatnik look. I remember there were weird faces and things on the walls. It was supposed to be African, I think.

There were so many people and the noise and I felt so nervous I didn't see her at first. She was sitting in a second room at the back. I sat on a stool at the counter where I could watch. I didn't dare look very often and the light in the other room wasn't very good.

Then she was standing right next me. I was pretending to read a newspaper so I didn't see her get up. I felt my face was red, I stared at the words but I couldn't read, I daren't look the smallest look – she was there almost touching me. She was in a check dress, dark blue and white it was, her arms brown and bare, her hair all loose down her back.

She said, 'Jenny, we're absolutely broke, be an angel and let us have two cigarettes.' The girl behind the counter said, 'Not again,' or something, and she said, 'Tomorrow, I swear,' and then, 'Bless you,' when the girl gave her two. It was all over in five seconds, she was back with the young man, but hearing her voice turned her from a sort of dream person to a real one. I can't say what was special in her voice. Of course it was very educated, but it wasn't la-di-da, it wasn't slimy, she didn't beg the cigarettes or like demand them, she just asked for them in an easy way and you didn't have any class feeling. She spoke like she walked, as you might say.

I paid as quick as possible and went back to the van and the Cremorne and my room. I was really upset. It was partly that she had to borrow cigarettes because she had no money and I had sixty thousand pounds (I gave Aunt Annie ten) ready to lay at her feet – because that is how I felt. I felt I would do anything to know her, to please her, to be her friend, to be able to watch her openly, not spy on her. To show how I was, I put five five-pound notes I had on me in an envelope and addressed it to Miss Miranda Grey, the Slade School of Art … only of course I didn't post it. I would have if I could have seen her face when she opened it.

That was the day I first gave myself the dream that came true. It began where she was being attacked by a man and I ran up and rescued her. Then somehow I was the man that attacked her, only

I didn't hurt her; I captured her and drove her off in the van to a remote house and there I kept her captive in a nice way. Gradually she came to know me and like me and the dream grew into the one about our living in a nice modern house, married, with kids and everything.

It haunted me. It kept me awake at nights, it made me forget what I was doing during the day. I stayed on and on at the Cremorne. It stopped being a dream, it began to be what I pretended was really going to happen (of course, I thought it was only pretending) so I thought of ways and means – all the things I would have to arrange and think about and how I'd do it and all. I thought, I can't ever get to know her in the ordinary way, but if she's with me, she'll see my good points, she'll understand. There was always the idea she would understand.

Another thing I began to do was read the classy newspapers, for the same reason I went to the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery. I didn't enjoy them much, it was like the cabinets of foreign species in the Entomology Room at the Natural History Museum, you could see they were beautiful but you didn't know them, I mean I didn't know them like I knew the British. But I went so as I could talk to her, so I wouldn't seem ignorant.

In one of the Sunday papers I saw an advert in capitals in a page of houses for sale. I wasn't looking for them, this just seemed to catch my eye as I was turning the page. 'FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD?' it said. Just like that. Then it went on –

> Old cottage, charming secluded situation, large garden, 1 hr by car London, two miles from nearest village …

and so on. The next morning I was driving down to see it. I phoned the estate agent in Lewes and arranged to meet someone at the cottage. I bought a map of Sussex. That's the thing about money. There are no obstacles.