

VIRGINIA WOOLF
To the Lighthouse

I THE WINDOW

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“Yes, of course, **if it’s fine tomorrow**¹,” said Mrs. Ramsay. “But you’ll have to get up early,” she added.

To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy. Even at the age of six, James Ramsay even in earliest childhood had the power to crystallize and transfix the moment of gloom or radiance into a feeling. He was sitting on the floor and cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy stores. The wheelbarrow, the lawnmower, the trees, the leaves before rain, rooks, brooms, dresses, — all these were coloured and distinguished in his mind.

“But,” said his father, “it won’t be fine.”

James was ready to gash a hole in his father’s breast and kill him. Mr. Ramsay annoyed his children very much by his mere presence. He liked to disillusion his son and cast ridicule upon his wife, who was ten thousand times better in every way than he was (James thought). What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth.

¹ **if it’s fine tomorrow** — если завтра будет хорошая погода

“But it may be fine — I expect it will be fine,” said Mrs. Ramsay.

She was knitting the reddish brown stocking. If she finishes it tonight, if they go to the Lighthouse after all, she will give the stockings to the Lighthouse keeper for his little boy. She will add a pile of old magazines, and some tobacco. Those poor fellows must be bored to death.

“**It’s due west**¹,” said the atheist Tansley.

That is to say, the wind blew from the worst possible direction for landing at the Lighthouse.

Tansley says disagreeable things, as usual. None of her children liked him and still, Mrs. Ramsay invited him to stay with them in the Isle of Skye and protected him from their attacks.

There must be some simpler way, some less laborious way, she sighed. She looked in the glass and saw her hair grey, her cheek sunk, at fifty. In all probability, there were ways in which she could manage things better: for her husband and for her children. But **for her own part**² she would never for a single second regret her decision.

“We’ll not land at the Lighthouse tomorrow,” said Charles Tansley.

He clapped his hands together as he stood at the window with her husband. Surely, he had said enough. She looked at him. He was miserable, the

¹ **It’s due west.** — Резко западный ветер.

² **for her own part** — в отношении себя

children said. He couldn't play cricket; he poked; he shuffled. He was a sarcastic brute, Andrew said.

It was not his face; it was not his manners. It was him — his point of view. When they talked about something interesting, people, music, history, anything, Charles Tansley would always turn it into a talk about himself.

When the meal was over, the eight sons and daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay went to their bedrooms. They were so critical, her children, Mrs. Ramsay thought. They talked such nonsense.

She went from the dining-room and ruminated the problem of rich and poor, and the things she saw with her own eyes, weekly, daily, here or in London. Social problems. Insoluble questions, it seemed to her. He had followed her into the drawing-room, that young man they laughed at; he was standing by the table. They had all gone — the children; Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley; Augustus Carmichael; her husband — they had all gone. So she turned to the man with a sigh and said,

“Would you like to come with me, Mr. Tansley?”

She had things to do in the town. A letter or two to write. She will be in ten minutes perhaps; she will put on her hat and take her basket and her parasol.

They were making the great expedition, she said and laughed. They were going to the town.

“Stamps, writing-paper, tobacco?” she suggested.

No, he wanted nothing. No, nothing, he murmured.

As for her little bag, may he not carry that? No, no, she said, she always carried that herself.

“Let us all go!” she cried.

“Let’s go,” he said, repeating her words. “Let us all go to the circus.”

No. What was wrong with him then? She liked him warmly, at the moment. When he was a child, he did not go to circuses. He had a large family, nine brothers and sisters. His father was a working man.

“My father is a chemist, Mrs. Ramsay. He keeps a shop.”

He himself has worked since thirteen. Often he went without a warm coat in winter. He worked hard — seven hours a day. They were walking on and Mrs. Ramsay did not quite catch the meaning, only the words, here and there ... dissertation ... fellowship ... readership ... lectureship. She will tell Prue about it. He was an awful prig — oh yes, an insufferable bore.

They came out on the quay, and the whole bay spread before them. Mrs. Ramsay exclaimed,

“Oh, how beautiful!”

The great plateful of blue water was before her; the hoary Lighthouse, distant, austere, in the midst; and on the right, in soft low pleats, the green sand dunes, which always were running away into some moon country, uninhabited of men.

That was the view, she said, that her husband loved. She paused a moment.

But now, she said, artists come here. There indeed, stood one of them, in **Panama hat**¹ and yellow boots. Ten little boys watched him. Since Mr. Paunceforte had been there, three years before, all the pictures were like that, she said, green and grey, with lemon-coloured boats, and pink women on the beach.

So Mr. Tansley supposed she meant that that man's picture was skimpy? It was awfully strange.

There he stood in the parlour of the poky little house. He was waiting for her, while she went upstairs a moment to see a woman. With stars in her eyes and veils in her hair, with cyclamen and wild violets — what nonsense was he thinking? She was fifty at least; she had eight children. He took her bag.

“Good-bye, Elsie,” she said, and they walked up the street.

She was holding her parasol and walking as if she expected to meet someone round the corner. Charles Tansley was very proud. For the first time in his life Charles Tansley felt the wind and the cyclamen and the violets. He was walking with a beautiful woman.

¹ **Panama hat** — панама

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“We won’t go to the Lighthouse, James,” he said.

Odious little man, thought Mrs. Ramsay.

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“Perhaps you will wake up and find the sun and the birds,” she said compassionately.

She was smoothing the little boy’s hair.

“Perhaps it will be fine tomorrow,” she said.

All she could do now was to admire the refrigerator, and turn the pages of the catalogue. All these young men parodied her husband, she reflected.

They ceased to talk; that was the explanation. She concluded that poor Charles Tansley was shed. That was none of her business. If her husband required sacrifices (and indeed he did) she cheerfully offered up to him Charles Tansley. Charles snubbed her little boy.

One moment more, she listened; and then she heard something rhythmical. Suddenly a loud cry, as of a **sleep-walker**¹, sung out with the utmost intensity in her ear:

“Stormed at with shot and shell!”

Mrs. Ramsay turned her head to see if anyone had heard him. Only Lily Briscoe, she was glad to find; and that did not matter. But the sight of the girl standing on the edge of the lawn painting reminded her; she was supposed to be keeping her

¹ **sleep-walker** — сомнамбула

head as much in the same position as possible for Lily's picture. Lily's picture! Mrs. Ramsay smiled and, remembering her promise, she bent her head.

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Indeed, he almost knocked her easel over. He came down upon her, "Boldly we rode and well!" Never was anybody at once so ridiculous and so alarming.

Someone came out of the house. He came towards her. It was William Bankes; her brush quivered. William Bankes stood beside her.

They had rooms in the village. When they were walking in, walking out, parting late on door-mats, they said little things about the soup, about the children, about one thing and another which made them allies. When he stood beside her now (he was old enough to be her father too, a botanist, a widower, very scrupulous and clean) she just stood there. He just stood there. Her shoes were excellent, he observed. He was lodging in the same house with her.

Mr. Ramsay glared at them. That did make them both vaguely uncomfortable. It was with difficulty that she took her eyes off her picture.

She laid her brushes neatly in the box, side by side, and said to William Bankes:

"It suddenly gets cold. The sun gives less heat," she said.

It was bright enough, the house starred in its greenery with purple passion flowers. But something

moved, flashed, turned a silver wing in the air. It was September after all, the middle of September, and past six in the evening. So off they strolled down the garden in the usual direction, past the tennis lawn, past the pampas grass, to that break in the thick hedge.

They came there regularly every evening. The pulse of colour flooded the bay with blue, and the heart expanded with it.

They both smiled, standing there. They both felt a common hilarity. William Bankes was looking at the far sand hills. He thought of Ramsay, he thought of a road in Westmorland. William Bankes remembered a hen with its little chicks. It seemed to him that their friendship had ceased, there, on that stretch of road. After that, Ramsay married and something important went out of their friendship. Whose fault it was he could not say. But in this dumb colloquy with the sand dunes he maintained his affection for Ramsay.

He was anxious to clear himself in his own mind from the imputation of dryness. Ramsay lived in a welter of children, whereas Bankes was childless and a widower.

Yes. That was it. He turned from the view. And Mr. Bankes felt aged and saddened. He has dried indeed.

The Ramsays were not rich. It was a wonder how they managed **to contrive it all**¹. Eight chil-

¹ **to contrive it all** — со всем этим справляться

dren! To feed eight children! And the education was very expensive (true, Mrs. Ramsay had something of her own perhaps). And those fellows, angular, ruthless youngsters, required clothes. He called them after the Kings and Queens of England; Cam the Wicked, James the Ruthless, Andrew the Just, Prue the Fair. Prue must be beautiful, he thought, and Andrew must have brains.

While he walked up the drive and Lily Briscoe said yes and no and capped his comments (for she was in love with them all), he commiserated Ramsay, envied him. But what, for example, did this Lily Briscoe think?

“Oh, but,” said Lily, “think of his work!”

Whenever she “thought of his work” she always saw clearly before her a large kitchen table. It was Andrew’s. She asked him what his father’s books were about.

“Subject and object and the nature of reality,” Andrew said.

She said,

“Oh, I don’t understand what that means”.

“Think of a kitchen table then,” he told her, “when you’re not there.”

So now she always saw, when she thought of Mr. Ramsay’s work, a scrubbed kitchen table.

Mr. Bankes was glad that she had asked him “to think of his work.” He had thought of it, often and often.

“Ramsay is one of those men who do their best work before they are forty.”

He had made a definite contribution to philosophy in one little book when he was only five and twenty. But the number of men who make a definite contribution to anything whatsoever is very small, he said.

How to judge people, how to think of them? She was standing by the pear tree. You have greatness, but Mr. Ramsay has none of it. He is petty, selfish, vain, egotistical. He is spoilt; he is a tyrant. But he has what you (she addressed Mr. Bankes) have not; a fiery unworldliness; he knows nothing about trifles. He loves dogs and his children. He has eight. Mr. Bankes has none.

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“And even if it isn’t fine tomorrow,” said Mrs. Ramsay, glancing at William Bankes and Lily Briscoe as they passed, “it will be another day. And now, James, stand up, and let me measure your leg,”

William and Lily must marry — she took the stocking, and measured it against James’s leg.

“My dear, stand still,” she said.

She looked up and saw the room, saw the chairs. They were fearfully shabby. But what was the point, she asked, of buying good chairs? The rent was low; the children loved the house. It is very good for her husband to be three hundred miles from his libraries and his lectures and his disciples; and there was room for visitors. Mats, camp beds, crazy ghosts of chairs and tables; and

a photograph or two, and books. She never had time to read them. Alas! She sighed and saw the whole room from floor to ceiling, as she held the stocking against James's leg. Things got shabbier and shabbier summer after summer. The mat was fading; the wall-paper was flapping. You can't tell anymore that those were roses on it.

But it was the doors that annoyed her; every door was left open. She listened. The drawing-room door was open; the hall door was open. It sounded as if the bedroom doors were open. Certainly the window was open. That windows must be open, and doors shut — it's simple. Can't they remember it?

She had a spasm of irritation, and spoke sharply to James:

“Stand still. Don't be tiresome.”

He knew instantly that her severity was real. He straightened his leg and she measured it.

The stocking was too short. It was the stocking for Sorley's little boy, and he was less well grown than James.

“It's too short,” she said.

Never did anybody look so sad. Bitter and black. A tear formed; a tear fell. Never did anybody look so sad.

Mrs. Ramsay smoothed out her harsh manner, raised his head, and kissed her little boy on the forehead.

“Let us find another picture to cut out,” she said.