

The Best Short Stories 1935

English and American



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On the Floor

BY JOAN JUKES

(From *New Stories*)

BUT when I open the door I find someone has moved my chair. A flash of fierce anger passes through me, then I am calm again. I lean heavily on the door handle, change hands, and drag round my left foot, holding the door in my left hand and trying to sidle round it. I begin to slide, and the door scrapes up my spine. How wearisome if I am to be trapped here doing nothing! Yes, I am going, down, come down (for love is of the valley, come thou down and find it), let yourself go, fall gently, softly as a flake of snow — So! Did anyone hear me? Listen for a moment. No. I have been lucky again. The door is grazing my back, push it away. I am sitting on my right foot and it hurts. I must ease it, push it away, push hard! So! Now I am comfortable. Can I close the door and sit with my back against the wall? Yes. Someone may happen along in five minutes (or it may be an hour and a half). What can I do? Nothing. How can I amuse myself? I must meditate on the mutability of human affairs.

Five minutes ago I set out from the study to fetch a letter from the dining-room (not in a spirit of pride or arrogance, for I never walk like that, but none the less hoping for the best. A letter is so easy to carry. I can slip it in my shoulder-straps or down my neck). But someone had moved the chair. I steady up on three feet to the right, so it all came to nothing. The time, which was too short for what I wanted to do, will crawl past while I am sitting uncomfortably and impatiently on the floor. (But at least the summer has come. I won't be frozen.)

It is impossible to grovel along the floor and help myself to the most readable book on the most accessible shelf of the nearest bookcase, for I am in the dining-room. There are no bookcases, no shelves and no books. So there is nothing for

me to do I can indulge myself, then, by thinking about anything I like, for as long as I must stay here.

What did I dream last night? It was something ridiculous—I remember I laughed when I woke up. Oh yes, I was walking up a stair. Just went up like a snap of the fingers, perfectly simple. I knew there was something wrong somewhere, even while I was sleeping 'This is none of me' It is strange that I have begun to have dreams like this. The night before I thought I was threading a needle. I held it up firmly and steadily in my left hand, and pushed the thread straight through, quite casually, with my right nothing in it at all. Thread you another dozen while you wait My dreams were always like this a few years ago. I crawled about by day, but at night I was brisk and competent My dreams were lagging behind the truth But by this time they have dropped their pinch of salt on the tail of a feeble actuality, and I am as helpless by night as by day. They were slow to overtake, but they have done it now. They have overdone it. One night my dreams took me back twenty years or more I was a child again It was the Christmas Treat. We were all wearing our white dresses, and some of us had pink sashes. (I had no sash, but I had a blue ribbon on my hair.) We were going to dance the Hay-makers, we were all lined up in order, jumping with excitement, waiting for the piano to strike up I was not the first, some of the big girls had crowded in before me, but I was nearly at the beginning, so that I would have only a short time to wait and then it would be my turn to skip up the middle, trip round and dance down again. I could scarcely have patience till the music should begin—

Every night when I go home
The monkey's on the table

Suddenly mother came up behind and tried to draw me aside to speak I wasn't going to go without some reason

given. 'You'd better not try this, dear,' she said. I was astonished and indignant. 'Why not?' I demanded, 'Why not?' She tried to lead me away without explaining, but I was stubborn, I would not have it, not likely. I jerked my shoulder and stood firm. 'Why not?' I insisted, exasperated, feeling sure that she couldn't have a word to say for herself. But her face was sad. 'You would keep the others back, dear,' she said gently. I gasped and choked with anger—what was this? Questions whirled in my head like bees in a hive. Keep them back! What was all this? What sort of a person was I? Do I or do I *not* keep people back? I tried to remember. Everything was confused. 'Do I keep people back?' so that I wakened, and remembered that I am that sort of person. I always keep people back. But what was all that nonsense about Haymakers? What had that to do with it? Nothing at all.

For until I was about twenty I was more or less like anybody else. I lived an ordinary life. Nothing much happened to me. I was insignificant and commonplace, and just such another as the duller among my neighbours. Then things began to change and they are altogether different now. Everyone notices me. I am a sensation. In any assembly or any house I am the most important person, just as Dr Johnson was, and no one grudges me my pride of place.

All my friends would rush along now if they knew I was here. When I fall noisily the house is in an immediate uproar. Doors are flung open in all directions to let people leap along passages or downstairs to where I am. They all call out to ask each other what has happened this time. 'Where is she? Who's with her?' I thought she was with you,' they shout reproachfully to each other, flying along. Someone jumps shamelessly out of the bathroom door and calls for reassurance, towelling vigorously. It gives a severe shock to everyone but me, and the whole subsequent evening is gloomy. But I have only one moment of terror, until I discover that I have a moderately safe spot for my forced landing.

And now I have no great wish to stay here all night I should like to cry out so that someone could come and pick me up and take me along where there was something to do But as soon as my voice was heard, the commotion would begin, and to-night there are visitors in the house They would look at each other with faces pale and horror-stricken when their hostess sprang from the room They would go home and tell their friends about the dreadful thing that had happened while they were in our house, whereas nothing has happened, nothing at all, except that I am sitting here on the dining-room floor, time is creeping past, and I have absolutely nothing whatever to do On an occasion like this I have sometimes tried to sing out for help in an unmistakably jaunty tone of voice to let everyone know at once that I am happy and carefree, I haven't lost an eye or broken a leg, but this attempt has never been successful, because through closed doors my gay halloo seems to pierce like a shriek of agony. The long-dreaded has happened, they think, their worst fears are realized, and the helter-skelter is wilder than ever.

They know I never hurt myself, however often I fall, at least, never badly, so what a ridiculous fuss! At first when I began to fall, my stockings were always torn and my knees bruised or cut But now I am never hurt. I am an acrobat in all but strength and agility. I bear a charmed life (But my charm is powerless beside an open fire. I have to admit that)

Very likely someone will come along soon and say, 'Hello, all right? Been there long? I'll bring your chair,' then I shall be flicked into it and wheeled off. Something like that will happen very soon.

I wonder how long it is since I saw a star? I don't know. It must be nearly ten years since I climbed a hill. We crossed the Pentlands one day from Balerno and walked through the dark elephant valley till we reached the hill above Pennycuik. It was cold and a heavy rain was blowing. We climbed up slowly in the shelter of the hill, and when we reached the top, a snell blast of wind and rain struck flat across us, stung our faces, swept our breath away, and forced us to turn our

heads. We looked at each other and laughed. Then we began to scramble down in the teeth of it. When I got back, my landlady refused to clean my shoes. Nobody cleans my shoes now. There is no need. They are never dirty.

Well, I shall never climb up there again, never. But I don't want to. Sitting here on the dining-room floor, with nothing much to trouble me (except that I have nothing to do here, and there are many things I want to do, and life is so short, and, of course, I must keep moving my legs when they are cramped, and sometimes they jerk and a spasm passes through them so that the button on my shoe is pressed painfully into my foot), sitting quietly here, I cannot believe that climbing hills has ever given any pleasure to anyone. Only to think of it makes my brain reel and my legs ache.

And in any case, I was already rocky then. Life was often perplexing, and not very pleasant. I can remember that.

There was that surprising night when a lad in good faith walked with me to my lodgings, and was disturbed to find he had to help me to keep erect, which he had felt safe in assuming (or he might have put the snaffle on his gallant impulse) that Providence had enabled me to do for myself. Wondering gloomily, were my intentions honourable or were they perhaps not, he gave me all the assistance that seemed to be called for in the circumstances.

It was the darkness, of course, that made me reel and clutch for support. But I was stupid. I did not see that. I began to be afraid to walk alone at night. I knew I was far from steady. Yet I was surprised that night when I made my way in fear through some quiet dark streets. I lurched across a blind alley and threw myself against a railing which was strong, I could keep a firm hold of it. But I was surprised to hear a lady say I was just a young girl and a disgusting sight, since it was the first time it had happened. But it wasn't of any importance. I had a strong railing to cling to, and I clung to it. And even if I had left it, and, in a fury of self-justification, had staggered across to assure her (clutching

her firmly by the shoulders to keep me steady) that I could solemnly swear that I never touch a drop, she might not have believed me. My conduct might not have seemed to her a conclusive proof of my sobriety. But how often this sort of thing happened! It was only the first time that I noticed it particularly. I remember that time I had to change stations in Paris. I asked my porter to find a taxi. He said it was not worth the trouble. I am docile. I took his advice. I wavered into the darkness and swayed along at his heels. It felt like walking at the bottom of the sea. The lights of Paris waltzed and floated all together beyond the bridge. The bridge floated too. My porter turned now and then to watch my progress with interest. I believe he was thinking that it might have been worth the trouble after all.

At the time everything was uncertain and puzzling, but it is amusing to look back on it now. I can sit here and chuckle (moving my left leg over my right if my position becomes too unksome) when I remember that amazing Saturday morning. I set out to walk along Princes Street, to drift in the stream of loiterers, gay and elegant still as they were more than a century before, when Thomas Carlyle used to float leisurely through and take a turn with the general flood. I had done it so often. It was so pleasant. I joined the promenade at the Register House—that was where Carlyle turned to look back at Christopher North, striding impetuously along—and I walked on carelessly and confidently, glad to be there among all these people brighter and better than myself. Suddenly Jenners' shop window sprang towards me. I drew in my breath and stood still for a moment while it swung back slowly to its place. 'I must be cautious,' I told myself, and I proceeded more anxiously. But the windows grew bolder. They leaned over menacingly almost on top of me and then jerked back. They stepped up within an inch of my nose and invited me to walk through them. People were crowding in on me, and I had to get out of the way, but where was I to go? There was nowhere to go unless I plunged into the display window of a bootshop which had suddenly swerved

in front of my eyes. Then it drew back again, and I was able to creep past in the narrow space between the people who were bearing down on me, and the glass that, if I was not very careful, would lurch forward and smash into pieces all round me. So I must keep steady I must keep walking straight on, my attention keen and alert on the tiny patches of space left clear for me to walk on, as I threaded my way through, thinking about Macvittie's snack counter, and how there would be chairs there, scores upon scores of chairs, all empty, one would be enough, I would sit on one, the nearest one I had almost succeeded. I was almost there. None of the shop-gazers had laid me low I had escaped the murderous attacks of those sheets of plate glass. When lo, there separated itself from the forms and faces dancing before my glazed and dazzled eyes the figure of a man, a man I knew, a most agreeable man. He was coming forward to speak to me, what better could a girl want? The sight ought to have delighted me, and so, had things been right, it would have done, but now I could not stop. I lunged forward in grim determination, thinking of the chairs in Macvittie's snack counter waiting empty, and before long I would be sitting on one I must walk steadily and firmly up the step and through the crowded shop—let no one try to stop me—For he had thought, quite naturally and innocently, that he would have liked to linger and speak to me for a few minutes, but he did not understand. If he had realized that I could not have stopped, that I must have fallen into the window behind me or pitched forward to butt him in the stomach, or, in one way or another, landed him in some awkward situation he would prefer to be out of, he would not have been so eager to accost me. He would have kept himself at a safe distance if he had known what danger he was in. I plodded along earnestly, with steps very heavy and very flat, and arrived at the snack counter. There was an empty chair I reached it. I sat down in it. 'My aunt,' I said (or whatever mild oath I was in the habit of using at the time)

My body seemed to have a mind of its own. It was no longer trustworthy. But for some time I refused to accept this state of affairs, and issued commands which were ignored. I felt uncommonly silly. Sometimes I fell. I could give no explanation. Everybody looked surprised, but not more than I felt. I began to go through life apologetically and nervously. I remember striking my head against a lamp-post. I hoped none of my friends had noticed. I continued to converse with as much animation as I was mistress of, feeling that the bump was closing my eye.

Well, I need never live through that again. So I think as I sit awkwardly but tranquilly here on a hard floor, leaning against the wall, waiting for someone to come and pick me up. I pull up my right knee with both hands and push it with all my strength over my left, thinking that that sort of thing is over for good, thank Heaven. I need never live through it again.

Because afterwards things were easier. It was discovered that I could not be expected to behave normally. My condition was recognized. Medical men put their heads together and attached the appropriate label. They tested and punctured me, and examined into all the tricks I could and couldn't do. I hate to think how much I cared, and how desperately eager I was that they should find out what was wrong and put it quickly right. It is better to be as I am now, I think, when the worst any doctor could tell me about myself wouldn't, I hope, cost me a flicker of an eyelid. But I was uneducated then. I watched them earnestly and anxiously. Sometimes I noticed that one or another was very pleased. I thought I was as good as cured already. But this was a mistake. I found out afterwards that a sudden gleam of joy in the eye of a medical man—even a very kindly medical man—does not necessarily indicate that your prospects are dazzlingly bright, that he is about to mutter an incantation, perform a few magic passes and send you home in half an hour, fit as a flea. Nothing of the

kind! It only means that somehow—you do not understand it at all yourself—you have startlingly confirmed his provisional diagnosis. And the provisional diagnosis? That is a different story altogether.

They did very well by me. They did not put me off with a trifle. I was to be another Barbellion. They had not made a fool of me. I hate to think of my dismay when a doctor glibly referred to my paralysis—Barbellion didn't like the word either—or to the possible effect on my mind, or of my bitterness when I found that, instead of being grown-up and my own mistress, I was likely to be under tutelage until I died. I hate to think of it. But I am not so vulnerable now.

I have had wisdom and resignation thrust upon me; I should even be content to sit here with nothing to do, if the floor were not so hard, if I could reach that cushion—I can! I can wriggle across to the fireplace, pull over the cushion with the tongs, then I can lie and rest my head on it—Good, I have done that. I have all the helplessness of a child without its charm or promise, but I have a higher degree of intelligence—so I think complacently—in relation to my physical powers. And I am more restrained. I do not yell and scream till I am attended to. I lie quietly here with my head on the cushion which my own ingenuity has procured for me, remembering all that has ever happened to me.

I can remember how I used to walk across the Park to see my friends. I can see myself setting out now. I step out cautiously from the front gate and stop, keeping my head still, for a jerk would upset me, while I see and feel that there are no cars or bicycles (but of course there are none—how could there be any?) crawling in this quiet street. Then I must step off the kerb, and, now that I have learned how to do this under my new disabilities, it is quite simple. I plant my stick firmly in the roadway and lean some of my weight on it. Then, keeping my eyes wide open so as to see everything and look at nothing, I slowly transfer my feet from the kerb to the causeway. The houses shudder slightly meanwhile, but the spasm dies away when I set off on level

ground to a light regular jolt at each footstep. The walk to the Park gates is calm and secure. The footpath is not broken or irregular. There is a railing on my right hand, and in my left I have a stick. Nothing can happen unless I am careless and look too intently at something without remembering that my balance depends on my eyes. There is someone across the street looking at me. I might stop and hold my railing and peer across, contorting my face into some sort of a grimace if I think I can see a smile, but I prefer to keep straight on. It can be no one who knows me, because anyone who knew me would cross the street to speak to me. It is someone who has never seen me before, and who is admiring the strikingly individual way I manage my legs, as any must do who see it. So I stumble on. But when I have reached the Park gates the world already is not such a good place as it was five minutes before. The skies have darkened. The birds are not singing, or if they are I wish they would stop. I have left my railing and am walking across the asphalt walk, but it is unruly. It tilts up before the toe of my shoe. I have to lift my foot high and then press it down. There are seats in the Park. I should like to sit on one of them until the ground was quieter and stopped heaving up and trying to throw me forward, but, because of the stupidity or malice of the members of the Town Council—I would like to see them all lying stone dead—the wooden seats have not been fixed close to the walks. I should have to cross a stretch of rough tufted grass before I reached them, and six yards of uneven ground is three score and ten miles afoot with me. There is a seat over there bobbing up and down just on the far side of my restricted field of vision. If I could only reach it safely and sit there, I should have no troubles any more. I would never get up again. I would shut my eyes and think about nothing. And if it rained, what would it matter? It would mean I had no choice. I should have to sit still. For if I tried to walk when it was raining, my stick would slip on the wet surface and the rain would flow in my eyes and blind me. Sooner or later I

should fall. So I would sit still on the wooden seat, rain or fine, if I could only get there, but I can't I must keep walking on over this switchback, trying to keep it down and force it to lie still and flat under my footsteps, because of the spiteful tricks of that gang of misbegotten scoundrels on the Council, who are not fit to live, but no worse—Steady! steady! where the ground begins to slope down. Don't let it fling me on my face!—not worse in any respect than all the other people in the world, who walk about quickly, in order, if they can, to knock someone down.—All, that is, except the people I am going to see, who have a strong arm-chair in their hall, quite near the front door. There are plenty of strong ledges and door handles for me to hold firmly, and there is nothing horrible about their house. They have no highly-polished floors with impassable skin rugs which tangle up my feet and slide away. They have no glass cabinets or china vases or bowls or plaster casts. Nothing is lying about for me to smash. I needn't go near their glass bookcase. I have just this one step to go up, holding on to the trellis, and then very soon, very soon—she is opening the door to help me in; she saw me coming; in a moment I shall be sitting down. But she is so slow, she is so stupid, she takes my hand and says trivial irrelevant things about my health and the weather, instead of pressing on with me towards the chair. Let me push on into the hall. There! now I see what has happened! My face is hot, but it flushes again with anger.—No wonder she was ashamed!—They have cozened and beguiled me! They have moved away the chair! I must make straight for the study. I can no longer believe in anyone. She even makes to delay me further by pretending to help me off with my things. But I edge past her. I am like Proust's grandmother in the Champs Élysées. I don't care if my hat is on or off, or straight or squint. It is nothing. I shall reach the stair-rails and then to the study. Did I enjoy my walk through the Park? Humbug. I only want to sit down and close my eyes without falling and let my feet and my legs rest. There! I knew it!

He has come out of the study! He is standing at the door on purpose to delay me, saying how pleased he is to see me—sneering, vindictive hypocrite! Asking me to his house, standing talking about tulips in the Park, and not letting me sit down! If I could only strike him down, smash him! Stand clear, on your life!—by heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me—stand clear! stand clear!—Heaven's blessing be on him He has helped me to a chair, comfort and ease flow through my legs In my heart are peace and good-will Yes, take off hats and scarves, anything, as much as you like and can I don't concern myself about that

Well, I need never walk about outside again That laboursome and dangerous business is over and done with. I can forget it all now But I wish someone would come along I have a cushion, but it is maddeningly tedious, doing nothing. I must do something If there were anything within reach I would break it or throw it on the floor, but there is nothing. I can do nothing

What about the dictionary? A little dictionary is lying on the sideboard. I had forgotten it. I could wriggle along for the poker, then I could knock the dictionary down from the sideboard. (In form and moving how express and admirable!) But really it is not worth the trouble. I might ruin my clothes. And then a dictionary is like a baby. Even a very little one is awkward to handle.

Still, I could do that if I chose I soothe my stiff knees and reflect that I am lying here in idleness which is not enforced but voluntary. I could do that, I think complacently, and with ease

It is wonderful what we can do I knew a woman in hospital once who was ticketed like me and Barbellion. We said, 'Hello, twins,' and compared notes Her legs were quite useless to her, but she said she was a good cook. 'And how—?' I asked. She rolled about on the floor—we cannot crawl, our knee-jerks are too strong—and carried what she wanted from the cupboard to the stove Her little daughter

helped her, but she would be five soon and go to school. What would happen then?

While she was telling me how she could sit on the floor and lift pans of boiling water from the stove, she laughed till she cried. I laughed too. We both laughed. I believe the doctors call our laughter symptomatic, but I think we have moved round the corner of life, and now we can see the funny side. The ordinary man takes himself quite seriously and forgets how ridiculous he is in his grotesque body. Every mechanical device encourages him to deny its puny absurdity. He is lulled into a solemn complacency because taps, switches and door handles are always exactly where he can reach them. He walks about like a god. But it is different with us. We are never likely to forget that we have an unwieldy and capricious yoke-fellow. Our minds work differently from other people's. Can I go to that concert? (This is the sort of thing we ask ourselves.) Why not? Everyone will help me to get there. I need only sit still. Yes, but—suppose my foot began to tap quickly in the middle of the Adagio. Suppose everyone turned round to scowl at me and say 'Sh!' And suppose it wouldn't stop then. And then again, I wish that lady wouldn't stand so near me. I don't know that I'm going to kick her, but I can't possibly know that I'm not. We are always thinking in this way. And then I'm very sorry, sir, that my foot is blocking your passage, and I mean to use any little influence I have to remove it, but I advise you to trust to your own exertions, and not to rely on me. Shove it out of the way. Just like a mother who knows very well how ill-behaved her children are, and who takes them into company with anxious apprehensions. It is a ludicrous situation. We cannot help laughing. We have bitten into the very core of laughter.

When first I began to fall, and did so suddenly and unexpectedly, with a crash, it was my eyes I always thought of first, for Braille would be difficult for my numb fingers. And so it does not surprise me that John Milton found the

loss of his sight no subject for laughter. But my twin laughed loudly when she told me how she did the cooking. She laughed uproariously. The other patients called to her to shut up.

Now that I look back on it, I can see that she ought to have had a chair like the one I use indoors. Only a slight pull, and it goes wherever you want, skimming over the floors and turning corners like magic. But the other day it let me down, and that would be awkward for her when she was alone. I jerked it. It keeled over, and flung me in the coalbox. But once again fortune smiled on me. I was wearing a sleeveless frock, and when my arms and face were sponged, I was clean again. No need for the weariness of changing my clothes.

I travel in a bath chair now. I can set most of the shocks that flesh is heir to at defiance. I am unruffled and serene. I can progress at a comfortable walking speed without any exertion at all, without any anxious calculations about the next ledge to cling to, and whether it will bear my weight, and traffic problems concern no one less than me. A great deal depends, of course—I am reluctantly obliged to remember this drawback about my bath chair—on the discretion of the driver. I had a maid to pilot me once. She was buoyant and vigorous. She would charge me into unoffending pedestrians, and before I could apologize I was borne off, waving my hands in my helpless eagerness to communicate, till I found I had nipped the next victim in the legs. Then one lady, quite unscrupulous, pulled me backwards, all unwitting, into a butcher's shop. I was suffocating with the smell of blood. I was surrounded with carcasses. I was shaking hands with the butcher, and responding to his civilities—but very briefly, because from a woman in a bath chair one remark is as good as another. Every attention is given to her, but nothing much is expected in return. I mumbled into my handkerchief. He thought I was an imbecile. He would have thought that no matter what I had said.

Another day they all went down to the end of a strange, steep garden to buy tomatoes. They parked me at the top, lovely, full of shrubs, flowers, and sweet odours. But when I turned round there was a beehive at my elbow! Bees were swarming all round me. They didn't like it. Nor did I. But I couldn't do anything about it. Nor could they, and I hoped they would accept this fact quietly, and they did! We agreed to tolerate each other, and before very long I was wheeled off.

I still shudder when I think about one of my experiences. I was sitting in my chair by a railway bookstall, watching my friends attending to the tiresome duties I am now happily relieved of. I thought I was secure, but suddenly the chair was dislodged, we leapt forward, heading full tilt for the railway line and the oncoming train. Among the desirable sudden deaths I had turned over in my mind, meeting a train in my bath chair was not a favourite. I drew in my breath, half wailing, and shrank back. Would someone stop me? I was flying faster, I was in despair; I saw my friends coming, but they could not possibly be in time, they were sauntering unconcerned. I was almost over the edge—suddenly I turned and bowled along parallel to the line. Of course, someone was propelling me. How stupid I had been! But who on earth? I twisted my neck round. It was a porter. He had been directed to collect the baggage, and asked no leave of either me or the suit-cases. In a bath chair I am not taken seriously as an individuality at all.

For the most part I am even invisible. I might not have discovered this if I had not read about Stevenson. Women always looked at him—so he says, and I can well believe it—until he wore a shabby suit and neglected to shave. Then they did not see him. He had not noticed their glances till they were all at once withheld. Then he realized that he had become 'invisible to the well-regulated female eye'. Without any means of determining whether any eye that had ever fallen on me was well-regulated or not, I none the less discovered when I went out in a bath chair that something of the same kind had happened to me. While I had walked

about like my neighbours, I had been accustomed, like my neighbours, to be glanced at by the casual passer-by, before he decided that for grace and beauty he must look elsewhere. But no one glances at me now, I have the recipe of fern seed. Except to the aged and infirm I am invisible.

But no, not always. Sometimes a surly-looking stranger catches sight of me, and brings an offering of all the best blooms in his garden. The spectacular part of patient sufferer is one I never thought to have been cast for, and after years of practice I still play it badly, but my fellow actors are so quick to take their cues that my own botched performance passes tolerably well.

I am an invalid. I can't walk. I have no other characteristics. People never speak of me as 'such and such a person, addicted so and so,' but they say 'That little invalid, you must have noticed her going past in her chair.' The reply is 'Oh, yes, I've often wondered who she was.'

How long did it take me—I move my legs and rub my left arm—how long was it before I found out that a live dog is better than a dead lion? Truth to tell, I never was a lion, but what of that? A rabbit can be just as dead. For although there is a great fluster and to-do wherever I go, I am really not of any account now.

I have no enemies worth speaking about. When I was able to walk there were plenty of people who never felt any the better for seeing me. However, as soon as I was obviously done for, my enemies all cleared. They scurried off like rats from a sinking ship. I saw one of them once. We had been at school together. She had hated me well. No one could give me a better setdown. It is monotonous to be perpetually lapped in loving-kindness, and never to be braced by a stiff breeze of antagonism, so, when I saw her, and my nostrils caught, as I thought, a welcome whiff of hostility, I was glad, and I hobbled along hopefully to meet her. But it was no good. As she turned to look at me, the lines of her face softened, and her eyes grew moist with pity. 'I was terribly sorry to hear—' she began. '*Et tu,*

Brute.' I limped away, crestfallen. My enemies, base deserters, have left me in the lurch.

But I grow kinder myself. For who am I to judge harshly the frailties of my fellow-man? My own vices—they are closely circumscribed, it is true—are never so designated, vanity and impudence are now counted to me for grace, and none of my sins are ever laid to my charge. Affection and indulgence are become my daily bread. So I lie here, half asleep, the hard floor rubbing on my bones, and feel no anger against anyone—except people who make me stand, or move my shoes out of reach, or pretend to help me along and pinch my arm, and some people pull me and hurt me and knock me about when I have fallen, making the excuse that they are trying to help me to rise.

I hate those people. But just now it is not of any moment. I only wish someone would come and pick me up. I am so tired of lying here.