

*Elizabeth Brewster*

## Visitations

I am browsing through old diaries. Should I throw them away? Are they evidence for me or against me? How true are they? Am I still the same person who wrote them?

I look at the very first entry, dated Monday, February 14, 1944. I had been away from university classes for a week with the 'flu and had missed classes on Thomson and Gray. "No great loss, I think," I said, thus dismissing Thomson and Gray. I was reading *Medea* in Greek and sympathized with the young princess more than with Medea. I was glad that landscape paintings had been replaced by portraits in the Arts Building. "I don't like nature on a grand scale," I wrote. "I like the individual parts of nature—a tree, a rock, a rose-bush—but put together they make an infinitely dull and dreary picture."

I went to French class that day, too:

*Dr. Deschamps in a somewhat philosophical mood this morning. Said, "When you are as old as I am you will discover that there are no such things as absolute values. Things are always comparative. I have changed my religious beliefs four times and my other beliefs forty times. If you don't change your opinions fifty times between now and middle age there's not much hope for you."*

I pause over that passage. It's odd to realize that I'm now older than he was at the time. Do I agree with him? I guess I could say I had also changed my religious beliefs four times, have certainly changed my opinions on other subjects a number of times. I like Thomas Gray, for example. Sometimes I prefer landscapes to portraits. Not always. I guess I like them both.

My diary doesn't give me a portrait of Deschamps, a short, round man with dark hair and bulging brown eyes. An eccentric who cultivated his eccentricity, wore battered old hats, kept goats.

I worked in the university library that evening. "The library positively bristling with cleanliness. Not a book on the desk. I believe they

were at work all day to achieve this miraculous effect. The charwoman very proud of it. She was in such a happy mood that she called me 'darling' all evening and once threw her arms most affectionately about my shoulders—to my infinite horror. However, she was something of a help to me, for she said that she'd lock the doors and turn out the lights, and so saved me a most distasteful task. There is a gruesome feeling about being in an empty building, just after the lights are turned off, that I don't like it at all. I don't believe in ghosts with my mind, but I half believe in them with my emotions."

I would like to omit that adjective "gruesome," but it's there, even though I had a struggle with it and erased another adjective. (The first half dozen pages are in pencil. Then I shifted to ink.)

Hard to imagine now one solitary undergraduate student (second year only, too) in charge of a university library in the evening with no computer aid. Not many people came in the evening, of course, except around examination time. I can close my eyes now and see the big, shadowy reading room with the tidy, varnished desks, the dark portraits on the walls. I must have been sitting at the circulation desk, a date stamp on its inked pad in front of me, maybe a pencil on a chain so that any possible borrower could sign out a book. Maybe I was sorting catalogue cards for filing. Maybe I was just reading. In fact, the diary says, "Read Katherine Mansfield's first book, *In a German Pension*, which was published when she was twenty-one. Why haven't I written anything that's worth publishing?" Ah, of course, I would have liked to be Katherine Mansfield, publishing books at an early age. Fame and love, that's what I wanted. Accomplishment, fame, and love. Though I was horrified by the charwoman's embrace, or said I was. Afraid of ghosts, too, on the nights when the charwoman wasn't there, and I went up and down stairs turning off lights in the stacks and the basement until there was only one light glimmering in the front entry of the library, and I turned that out as I stepped outside and clicked the lock, hurrying off the deserted campus and across Queen Square towards the streets of the town.

Not much of interest, I think, not much of interest. I wrote sonnets and showed them to my professors. I changed a line as I walked downstairs from the women's cloakroom in the Arts Building. Inspiration—I thought it was inspiration—made my head whirl. I studied with Louise and Blanche and Dorothy. I slid down the icy hill in a February rain with a young man who later joined the Navy. I bought a red hat that was almost all bow on a Saturday afternoon shortly before Easter. I took communion at St. Anne's Anglican Church and noticed the coloured circles—green, red, purple—made

by the light coming through the stained glass windows onto the priest's surplice. I believed in God and the angels. I think I believed, though I don't say so in the diary. Maybe I was in love too, though I don't say that in the diary either.

There is a notebook missing, I don't know why. Did I stop writing the diary or just lose what I had written? Intentionally or unintentionally?

Anyhow, suddenly it is mid-summer. June 27. I am teaching myself to type in the university library. (It's impossible to buy a typewriter of my own that summer because of war-time shortages.) My English professor, Michael Rae, has suggested that I visit a girl in the hospital who has had polio. (Infantile paralysis as we called it then.) Did I agree because of the warmth of my heart? my curiosity? or because it was Michael Rae who asked me? And why did he ask me? Did he think Maidie would be good for me, or that I would be good for Maidie? That I would have some practice in teaching, which after all I planned to do for a living later?

We walked together, that first afternoon, to the hospital. "This is too hot, really," he said as we started off from the gate of my parents' house. "But of course I suppose it's fortunate in a way. I have to have something to grouse at in order to be happy, and the weather always gives me excuse enough."

(Not the cleverest comment, I suppose, but I recorded it. I must've thought it was clever. In fact, there was something about the way Michael Rae said things that made me think them immensely clever.)

At the polio clinic we had to wait for a time in the waiting room, a little back room decorated with some half-dead peonies and a poster telling people what foods to eat each day.

There were a few funny-papers lying about, and Professor Rae picked one up. "Are these things really such a menace to civilization?" he asked.

"Then civilization must be weak," I said. I suppose I laughed.

"I don't know," he answered. "What about that fable—it was in one of my early school readers, I recall—about the lion and the mouse? I don't recall the exact story, but the moral—wasn't it?—was that small things were sometimes powerful."

"I think I remember it myself in my sister's reader," I said. "Picture of a lion wrapped around with mosquito netting. Mouse looking at it in a startled way."

"That's it," he said. "Your sister must have belonged to my generation."

"I dare say," I answered. "She's about twelve years older than I am."

My diary adds, "A remark that no doubt was flattering to him, for I imagine he's forty or so."

He was, in fact, forty-two. Twice my age, or thereabouts. Beginning to go bald, but lean, handsome, with brown eyes, a dark Spanish look. I suppose he was near the age of Deschamps and had eyes of the same colour; but it would never have occurred to me to have a crush on Deschamps.

*But he had no time to answer, for a nurse came in just then and took us to the girl's room. Her name is Maidie—Maida?—Hart, or Hartt, I'm not exactly sure which. She had just got up when we went in, and one of the nurses was combing her hair. She was a rather plain girl, though she might have been more attractive if she had not been so pale and listless. I dug up one of the books of short stories from the little closet where they were kept, and, after Professor Rae had left, read her a story of Stevenson's, though I was frequently interrupted by nurses coming in and by her mother coming in for a few minutes (when I suppose I ought to have left, but stayed out of curiosity). I also, at her request, read part of a history of English literature that she is reading, a chapter on Addison, since her next theme is to be on Addison and Steele. She did not seem to be at all animated at any time, though she spoke of the short stories with mild interest. Still, I think that at least some of her listlessness is protective, so that I may not manage too badly. I left about four o'clock, thinking she was probably tired out, as it was a hot day, and I was rather limp myself.*

Here is Monday, July 3:

*In the afternoon I went to the clinic again to read to Maidie. At first when I asked if I might see her the nurse in charge said that visitors were only allowed on Saturday and Sunday. "Well," I said, "I was here Tuesday and I promised to read to her twice a week".*

*"Oh, that's different," she said. "She'll be ready in five or ten minutes."*

*While I was waiting, a gray-haired woman with a pleasant face came in. "You're Miss Clare?" she said. "I'm Miss Payne. Professor Rae told me about you." It seems that she's been teaching the children at the clinic, but is going away soon. She talked to me about Maidie, and told me to get her to read for herself as much as possible when she is sitting up. However, when I went in she was lying flat on her back and certainly couldn't read in that position without ruining her eyes—I've done it often enough to know. I read her some of Steele's Letters, a chapter or so on prose forms, and a couple of ballads. I was delighted with her response*

*to the ballads. "Oh, they're cute, aren't they?" she said when I'd finished reading them; and she wants me to read her some more next time. I agreed with Miss Smith, the head nurse, to come in Mondays and Wednesdays, but this week I'll go on Tuesday, as on Wednesday they are going to have a movie—or is it slides?—for the children.*

We must have been an ill-assorted pair, when I think of it. I don't suppose she would have read a book at all, or listened to my reading, if she could have done anything else, walked or run about or played games or even swept a floor. I liked to walk, too but I felt there was space for walking on the printed page. Did she think me strange—all that enthusiasm for eighteenth century writers? Did she think it was unjust that I should walk out of the clinic into the sunshiny street when she was confined to this narrow room with its smell of antiseptics? We were friendly enough, but we could hardly be called friends. I don't even remember whether she called me Emma or Miss Clare. Probably Miss Clare. I was a few years older than she was, after all, and a university student. We were more formal then than we are now. Or some of us were.

I suppose she told me something of herself, when I wasn't reading to her. She was one of a large family who lived on a farm not too far from town. She was about to start to high school when she took sick, but probably would not have graduated if she had been healthy. Her imagination of her life had been that she would marry and have children, like her mother. Now she could not see a path into the future. All this is in my mind now, but it isn't in the diary.

I also, of course, didn't know my future path. I too hoped I might marry some time. Perhaps I thought of the young man who had joined the Navy, or one of the Macdonald twins, who had joined the Air Force. (I met them, tanned and enthusiastic, on leave together, as I was walking up to see Maidie.) I fussed about my hair, a combination of roll and braids, which one or the other of the Macdonald twins admired. No doubt I was glad I wasn't crippled like Maidie. Maybe I felt guilty that I was glad.

I tried, I think, to notice things that might interest her:

*Monday, July 10*

*In the afternoon I went to the hospital to read to Maidie. On Northumberland Street, I saw a rickety car draw up at a rickety house in front of which there was standing a fat, dirty woman and three or four ragged children who looked as though they would have been pale if it weren't that their faces were totally covered with soot. The woman gave a gasp of surprise and exclaimed, "Look who's here! Lord!" Then the door of the car opened,*

*disclosing another woman, just about as slatternly. "Hi there, Nelly, old gal, old gal. How are ya?" And the two kissed each other affectionately and noisily.—I don't know why I write of such things, except that these people are so comfortably solid. I like them because they have no doubts of their own existence.*

Did I share this glimpse with Maidie? A glimpse of the street down which I walked and she couldn't? A glimpse of two women touching each other and knowing they were real?

The diary continues:

*When I got to the hospital I had to wait for a while in that stuffy recreation room, of which I'm positive I could now give an itemized account if I wished. Finally, one of the nurses told me that I might go to Maidie's room where I found her sitting up. I read her a couple of short stories and some of the ballads, and left the ballads with her. When I was leaving, Miss Macnair, the pretty little nurse with the brown eyes, stopped me to say that she knew Maidie enjoyed my visits, and to ask how she was getting on.*

My next visit was two days later. There was a cool spell in the midst of the summer heat wave, and I put on a red suit to cheer myself up, and perhaps to cheer Maidie too.

*In the afternoon, I went again to the hospital. I had to wait for a time in the recreation room, where Miss Macnair was giving a new little girl her exercises. Diane, as she was called, was a pale, thin little creature, painfully shy. The nurse told me, "Her home is in Saint John, and, from what she says of her home life, it must be the Black Hole of Calcutta." In contrast to Diane was Margaret, a plump, pretty, spirited, rather wilful child, who rocked away in a rocking chair looking at the pictures in a magazine and pointing out the "nice kitties" and "pretty ladies" to Miss Macnair and me. A handsome little boy with big dark eyes and a lop-sided smile wheeled himself into the room and over to the book shelves, beside which I happened to be sitting. He tried to reach a pile of National Geographics but was unable to, and I pushed them over to him. He discussed the pictures with me until one of the nurses came and told me that Maidie was ready.*

*I read Maidie a story by Wells, "The New Accelerator," and a chapter on ballads. Discussed the answers she had written to some questions Professor Rae had assigned her. They were altogether too brief, and I told her that Professor Rae would probably expect more, but she said Miss Payne had told her to keep them short.*

*She told me that she was leaving Saturday and would be away for perhaps a month, so I said that I'd be back Friday and bring my copy of Cranford, which she thought she'd like to read.*

How did my parent take my visits to Maidie, I wonder? I don't say in the diary. I rather imagine my mother thought they were a good thing. She sometimes scolded me for not being friendly enough with other young people. She thought I should learn not to be selfish. My father, of course, always thought whatever I did was right. "How are your visitations going?" he asked me now and then. Dad was fond of that word "visitation" because it conveyed so many meanings. It could be a mere visit, somebody dropping in Sunday afternoon for tea. It could be a state visit, a visitation by the Bishop or a royal personage. It could be a spectral appearance by ghosts, which he almost, but not quite believed in. It could be a disaster, an Act of God or maybe some malign power. Whenever any of my mother's relatives turned up (especially poor Aunt Matty, who talked too much) he spoke afterwards to Mother of "the visitation." There was often amusement in the word, sometimes affection, sometimes—on rare occasions—awe or fear. For my visits to Maidie, his tone was affection mixed with just a little amusement.

*Thursday, July 13*

*This morning when I woke up it was raining in that steady, monotonous way that usually indicates an all-day rain. But to my surprise while we were eating breakfast the rain stopped and the sun came out. In a short time it was burning hot. I walked up the hill to the university sweating all the way. When I got to the library I saw Professor Rae sitting on a stool by the window in the first floor of the stacks, so went in and told him that Maidie was leaving, and asked if he had been to see her lately. He said that he had not had the opportunity since Summer School started, as he lectures in the afternoons, but that he would try to get in today or tomorrow, so as to see her before she leaves. He approved my reading of the ballads, and also my advice to her on the answers to his questions. He asked me if I found the job too much of a trouble. "Not in the least," I said. "I don't mind reading aloud. I really enjoy it. It gives me the opportunity to hear my own voice."*

What am I to read between the lines here? Did I in fact enjoy reading and talking to Maidie? Or did I want to show Michael Rae what a kind-hearted young woman I was? (Nevertheless, I mustn't speak to him as though I were kind-hearted: sentimentality was one of my great horrors. I felt that a soft heart ought to be combined with a sharp tongue.) I can't believe I enjoyed visiting the hospital. I was never one

of those little girls, not uncommon in my generation, who imagined themselves as ministering angels bringing consolation to the sick and suffering. Probably I wasn't displeased that she was going away for a while.

*Friday, July 14*

*This afternoon took Cranford to the hospital, as I had promised. As Maidie was leaving this afternoon instead of tomorrow, I had time to read her only one chapter. When her sister came in, I left, taking the ballads with me. Maidie told me that Professor Rae hadn't been in.*

*At home, I read Etherege's Man of Mode, which I had got from the library. Had a pleasant time reading and eating plums.*

*After supper, decided to write a couple of parallel poems, one complaining that death carries away all living things, the other being flippant about the idea. Wrote out a draft of the second—flippant—one, but did not get the first done, as Cousin Hope came in and stayed for ages. She is horribly boring.*

Naturally, Maidie disappears from my diary for some time. Maybe her absence makes me feel freer, happier. Maybe it's just a change in weather. Anyhow, here I am writing, on July 19, after an afternoon in the library: "Started down the hill, my eyes pleased with the warm ripe sunshine, mild as early September. It was one of those times when you actually feel the happiness in you, the tightness in your throat as if you were going to cry from too much joy. Queer how little it takes to make you dizzily happy—sunshine and quiet and a peacefulness within you."

A dangerous feeling, as I now know. Never to be trusted. Almost always followed by disaster, if only a cold in the head and a fever, which I woke up with a few days later.

The summer went on, a heat-wave summer. There were other visits, or visitations, by the boring Cousin Hope and other relatives. My mother and I were invited to visit relatives in the country—but that is another story. I started to write a novel and recorded in my diary the number of words I wrote each day. My sister-in-law visited, in search of my brother. They had had a squabble, and my brother had taken the little boy and disappeared. My brother had been discharged from the Army in the spring after a nervous breakdown. Later he and his wife patched things up, at least temporarily.

It was the second of August when Professor Rae told me he was leaving, moving West, where he came from.



Wednesday, August 2

*Was typing in the university library when Professor Rae came in and asked to see me. I went upstairs with him to the seminar room, and when we had sat down he told me that there would be no winter work from the Summer School students to mark (as he had thought before) but if I wished he would put my name forward as an assistant in marking the essays of the Freshmen, and would write a note to his successor.*

*"Your successor?" I asked. "Are you going away?"*

*"Yes," he answered. "Back to the cow country. University of Alberta."*

*"I dreamed you were going away," I said, "as a chaplain in the army."*

*"Thank heavens I haven't gone to that extreme yet. Did I preach so very much in my lectures? What was the rest of your dream?"*

He told me that I'd likely get on well with his probable successor, a young man, a Cambridge graduate who was something of an author himself.

I didn't think until later, What about Maidie? What do I do about Maidie?

*After leaving the seminar room, went to look for something to read. Sat down on the steps of the top floor of the stacks, feeling rather dizzy. After a while got up and went downstairs and got Matthew Prior's poems and an anthology of modern American verse. Decided that I felt too tired to stay. When I got home found Mum and Aunt Matty eating ice cream. Ate some myself and felt much better.*

Next week, Professor Rae told me that he would go and see the nurse about Maidie, and would leave directions for his successor, but would consult me first.

The last time I saw him was on August 17. It must've seemed an important conversation to me: I took eight pages of my diary to write it up. Much of the conversation, in fact, was about some of my poems which I had shown him. "They're much better," he said. "You've developed something different in the last month or so—a plain style, a sense of the tragic."

I told him about the novel I was writing, and he asked me to send him a carbon copy to the University of Alberta.

"I hate to ask you to read anything as long as a novel." I said.

"Oh, it's no imposition, you know. If I don't like it, I can stop after the first three chapters. And if I do like it, it's a pleasure. By the way, is

it on the same lines as your short stories—did you use the same characters?

“No—I’m doing that another time. But the background’s somewhat the same. After all, it’s the only background I know. And the style’s the same.”

“Mm. No doubt excellent and completely unsalable. What about the plot?”

“I’m afraid there really isn’t much of a plot to speak of.”

“Not best seller material. Well, you’ll probably work in obscurity for thirty or forty years, and then ten years or so after your death the Prime Minister will read one of your novels and decide that you were a genius. And your books will be in the Book-of-the-Month Club.”

“And the Alumnae Society will raise a monument to my memory and have the grass on my grave clipped. How encouraging you are.”

“Think how many people it’s happened to. It’s common enough to be likely.”

No doubt I was pleased to have him prophesy my fame, even a posthumous fame. I’ve worked that forty years now. Does the Prime Minister read novels or poems, I wonder? Would anybody care if he did? Other good opinions would likely be worth more. Maybe, in any case, Michael Rae was thinking of his own work.

He told me he would see me again before he left, after he had talked to the nurse about Maidie. He had been too busy packing to do it before.

Wednesday, August 23

*This morning Aunt Matty came to visit, so I wasn’t able to write at my story. A picture of the new president of the university in the Telegraph. He looks rather like Charlie Chaplin, or maybe like Hitler. They look alike, don’t they?*

*In the afternoon, up to the university library. When I went in, Dora gave me a letter addressed to me at the library in Professor Rae’s writing. I went and sat down at the farthest end of the reading room and opened it. Dated “1/2 hour before train time” yesterday. Said he was sorry he hadn’t been able to get up to the university to say good-bye to me, but wished me luck and all that sort of thing. Said to get in touch with Maidie and read now and then to her until Dr. Northcott (new professor) came, and then ask him for a reading program. Said he was afraid he had let me down in the matter, but for the last month he had been too busy to think. Also mentioned my novel and my job with Northcott, saying that he had written about it, but told me to remind Northcott again the first of the term.*

*At first could not settle down to writing, but finally wrote a bit, until Birdie Hawes came in and chatted for a while. She asked me*

*if I had heard the news this morning, and when I said I hadn't, told me that Paris had been taken. After she had settled down to studying (for a math. supp. this fall) I typed out a couple of pages of my story, and then, about four o'clock, went home.*

*Aunt Matty was with us till after supper.*

*Wrote about 1050 words today, and now have about 18,500 done.*

Friday, August 25

*In the afternoon went to the hospital and asked about Maidie, but she was asleep, and the nurses were new and didn't know anything about the matter.*

*Wrote about 1200 words of my story today. Have over 21,000 words done.*

Monday, August 28

*In the afternoon went up to the hospital, where I read Maidie a couple of chapters of Cranford (which she doesn't particularly like) and promised to take her Three Men in a Boat on Wednesday. (At least it's funny.) She said that Professor Rae got the books he had lent her, but did not come to see her, at which she was somewhat aggrieved.*

I think I guessed that Maidie, like me, had had a crush on Professor Rae. Certainly she was in a peevish mood. First, I suppose she thought, he had got me to substitute for him; then he had left for good, without talking to her.

Wednesday, August 30

*Visited Maidie in the afternoon. Had to wait for a while in the recreation room, where I played with the little boy who showed me the pictures a month or so ago. Read Maidie a few chapters of Three Men in a Boat, which she liked, but I think it would take dynamite to make that girl laugh outright.*

There was a period when Maidie was sick. I had a cold and a fever, but I went on writing at my story. It crept up to 45,000 words, then to 50,000. I had discovered one of the most seductive and habit-forming of friends and lovers, the typewriter. Temporarily, at least, I could forget both Professor Rae and Maidie.

Monday, September 18

*Up to the library this morning. Mrs. T., the head librarian, lent me a story by Professor Rae published in a magazine. Read it before going up to the hospital this afternoon. After I came*

home, wrote steadily at my story till nearly ten o'clock, when I got it done. Thought I'd feel excited, but just feel flat and lost.

Tuesday, September 19

Up to the library again this morning. Dr. Northcott, Professor Rae's replacement, came in. He told me Professor Rae had written him about the job, so that was all right. When I spoke of Maidie, however, he said that he had never heard tell of her, and, so long as he was not officially informed of her existence, he would not consider her. When I asked what to tell her, he suggested not telling her anything and not bothering to go to see her. I didn't think that would be right, and said that it would not only be cowardly but unprofitable, as she had a book of mine. I couldn't blame him, of course, as he's probably having an upsetting time getting used to the place, but felt rather sad about poor Maidie just the same, as I was beginning to feel responsible for her.

Dr. Northcott is slight, homely, with a sad face and long dark hair. He seems rather pleasant, and I'd probably like him if he weren't taking Rae's place.

In the afternoon went to the hospital and told Maidie that I didn't think I could do any more reading to her. Left Three Men in a Boat, as she said she'd like to finish it. Should have liked to see Mrs. Payne but didn't. Came home and had a sad cup of tea with Mother.

Friday, September 22

In the afternoon to the library, where I typed six pages of my revision. Had tea with the head librarian and Dora and Birdie. Dr. Northcott and Dr. Deschamps dropped in while we were having tea. Deschamps told us that he had six goats, including, so he said, two goatlings.

"Oh, Dr. Deschamps, you must mean kids," said Mrs. T.

"No, goatlings. There is a difference between a kid and a goatling. You are an English professor," he appealed to Dr. Northcott. "There is a difference, isn't there?"

"I'm afraid I don't know," Northcott said. "What is it?"

"Well," said Deschamps, "when a kid is over a year old it becomes a goatling, provided it is a female. Up to now, I teach every other subject on the campus. Now I teach English too. R-r-right, Emma, my little kidlet?"

"I'm not a kid any longer, Dr. Deschamps," I said.

"Aren't you, Emma? Maybe not."

Monday, September 25

*First day of the fall term. Got to the campus around twenty to nine, nearly late for initiation, as registration was earlier than in former years. At 11:30 went to hear the president's address, which didn't last long. Chatted with Deschamps. At two p.m., a meeting about the seven days of war-work that the girls have to give. Sat with Birdie and Dora. Came home, where Mother told me that Cousin Charley was killed in action.*

*Typed only eleven pages of revision today.*

Bloody war, bloody world, bloody God. Bloody, bloody life. Pour Cousin Charley. Poor Maidie. That's what I might have written—but didn't.

I threw away that novel eventually, though both Michael Rae and Harry Northcott liked it. I kept the diary, though. I don't know what happened to Maidie. Somebody years later told me she used to pray to die, but that may not be true. I have a friend who was paralysed like Maidie, but who nevertheless had a husband and two daughters and a job, though she has outlived the job and the husband.

Professor Deschamps and Harry Northcott are dead. So is the young man who joined the Navy, and so (long ago) is one of the Macdonald twins. Aunt Matty has been boring my parents for years in the courts of heaven—if either boredom or years can be supposed to exist in eternity. Michael Rae has also been dead for twelve years. I'm friendly with his widow, though. We live in the same town. I don't know whether it would bother Christina Rae that I had a crush on her husband all those years ago. Probably not, it's so far in the past. In fact, probably she does know. Maybe that's why we're friendly, come to think of it. Sometimes we cook dinner for each other. Sometimes we have lunch with each other at that revolving restaurant in town. We look down over the city and the river, and the building reminds us of how the world moves and seasons change. That's what life has been, I think—a view from a revolving restaurant, turning in circles. Some things it brings back, others it doesn't. It's a pleasant restaurant. The food's fairly good. "I look forward to dessert more than I used to." I tell Christina, dipping my spoon into something dark and rich and sweet and faintly mysterious, tasting of chocolate and brandy and what else?

Ghosts lean over our table, of course, but I don't mind. I rather like these visitations. Ghosts—some ghosts, anyway—don't mean us any harm.