



*To Room
Nineteen*

THIS IS A STORY, I suppose, about a failure in intelligence¹: the Rawlingses' marriage was grounded² in intelligence.

They were older when they married than most of their married friends: in their well-seasoned late twenties³. Both had had a number of affairs⁴, sweet rather than bitter⁵; and when they fell in love – for they did fall in love – had known each other for some time. They joked that they had saved each other⁶ ‘for the real thing’. That they had waited so long (but not too long) for this real thing was to them a proof of their sensible discrimination⁷. A good many of their friends had married young, and now (they felt) probably regretted lost opportunities; while others, still unmarried, seemed to them arid, self-doubting⁸, and likely to⁹ make desperate or romantic marriages.

Not only they, but others, felt they were well-matched¹⁰: their friends' delight¹¹ was an additional proof of their happiness. They had played the same roles, male and female, in this group or set, if such a wide, loosely connected¹², constantly changing constellation of people could be called a set¹³. They had both become, by virtue of their moderation, their humour,

1 **a failure in intelligence**: un fracaso de la inteligencia • 2 **grounded**: basado
• 3 **well-seasoned late twenties**: bien entrados en la veintena experimentada • 4 **a number of affairs**: una serie de aventuras • 5 **bitter**: amargas • 6 **they had saved each other**: se habían reservado el uno al otro • 7 **sensible discrimination**: criterio sensato • 8 **self-doubting**: vacilantes • 9 **likely to**: con posibilidades de • 10 **they were well-matched**: hacían buena pareja • 11 **delight**: deleite • 12 **loosely connected**: relacionada de forma flexible • 13 **a set**: un grupo

and their abstinence from painful experience, people to whom others came for advice. They could be, and were, relied on¹. It was one of those cases of a man and a woman linking themselves whom no one else had ever thought of linking, probably because of their similarities. But then everyone exclaimed: Of course! How right! How was it we never thought of it before!

And so they married amid general rejoicing², and because of their foresight³ and their sense for what was probable, nothing was a surprise to them.

Both had well-paid jobs. Matthew was a sub-editor⁴ on a large London newspaper, and Susan worked in an advertising firm. He was not the stuff⁵ of which editors or publicised journalists⁶ are made, but he was much more than 'a sub-editor', being one of the essential background people⁷ who in fact steady⁸, inspire and make possible the people in the limelight⁹. He was content¹⁰ with this position. Susan had a talent for commercial drawing¹¹. She was humorous about the advertisements she was responsible for, but she did not feel strongly about them¹² one way or the other.

Both, before they married, had had pleasant flats, but they felt it unwise¹³ to base a marriage on either flat, because it might seem like a submission of personality on the part of the one whose flat it was not. They moved into a new flat in South Kensington¹⁴ on the clear understanding that when their mar-

1 **they could be, and were, relied on:** podían ser, y eran, de confianza • 2 **amid general rejoicing:** en medio de un júbilo general • 3 **foresight:** previsión • 4 **sub-editor:** redactor • 5 **he was not the stuff:** no estaba hecho de la pasta • 6 **publicised journalists:** periodistas de renombre • 7 **essential background people:** gente indispensable a la sombra • 8 **steady:** dan estabilidad • 9 **the people in the limelight:** la gente que está en el centro de atención • 10 **content:** satisfecho • 11 **commercial drawing:** ilustración publicitaria • 12 **she did not feel strongly about them:** no les daba mucha importancia • 13 **unwise:** imprudente • 14 **South Kensington:** barrio acomodado de Londres

riage had settled down (a process they knew would not take long, and was in fact more a humorous concession to popular wisdom¹ than what was due to themselves) they would buy a house and start a family.

And this is what happened. They lived in their charming flat² for two years, giving parties and going to them, being a popular young married couple, and then Susan became pregnant, she gave up her job, and they bought a house in Richmond³. It was typical of this couple⁴ that they had a son first, then a daughter, then twins, son and daughter. Everything right, appropriate, and what everyone would wish for, if they could choose. But people did feel these two had chosen; this balanced and sensible family was no more than what was due to them because of their infallible sense for *choosing* right.

And so they lived with their four children in their gardened house⁵ in Richmond and were happy. They had everything they had wanted and had planned for.

And yet . . .

Well, even this was expected, that there must be a certain flatness⁶ . . .

Yes, yes, of course, it was natural they sometimes felt like this. Like what?

Their life seemed to be like a snake biting its tail. Matthew's job for the sake of Susan, children, house, and garden⁷ – which caravanserai⁸ needed a well-paid job to maintain it. And Susan's practical intelligence for the sake of Matthew, the children, the

1 **popular wisdom**: sabiduría popular • 2 **charming flat**: piso encantador • 3 **Richmond**: localidad cercana a Londres • 4 **it was typical of this couple**: como era de esperar de esta pareja • 5 **gardened house**: casa con jardín • 6 **flatness**: monotonía • 7 **Matthew's job for the sake of Susan, children, house and garden**: el trabajo de Matthew estaba dedicado a Susan, los niños, la casa y el jardín • 8 **which caravanserai**: semejante caravasar (posada en Oriente destinada a las caravanas o grandes grupos de personas)

house and the garden – which unit¹ would have collapsed in a week without her.

But there was no point about which either could say: ‘For the sake of *this* is all the rest.’ Children? But children can’t be a centre of life and a reason for being. They can be a thousand things that are delightful, interesting, satisfying, but they can’t be a wellspring² to live from. Or they shouldn’t be. Susan and Matthew knew that well enough.

Matthew’s job? Ridiculous. It was an interesting job, but scarcely³ a reason for living. Matthew took pride⁴ in doing it well, but he could hardly be expected to be proud of the newspaper; the newspaper he read, *his* newspaper, was not the one he worked for.

Their love for each other? Well, that was nearest it⁵. If this wasn’t a centre, what was? Yes, it was around this point, their love, that the whole extraordinary structure revolved⁶. For extraordinary it certainly was⁷. Both Susan and Matthew had moments of thinking so, of looking in secret disbelief⁸ at this thing they had created: marriage, four children, big house, garden, charwomen⁹, friends, cars . . . and this *thing*, this entity, all of it had come into existence, been blown into being out of nowhere¹⁰, because Susan loved Matthew and Matthew loved Susan. Extraordinary. So that was the central point, the wellspring.

And if one felt that it simply was not strong enough, important enough, to support it all¹¹, well whose fault was that?

1 **which unit**: unidad que • 2 **wellspring**: fuente • 3 **scarcely**: a duras penas
 • 4 **took pride**: se enorgullecía • 5 **nearest it**: lo que más se aproximaba •
 6 **revolved**: giraba alrededor • 7 **for extraordinary it certainly was**: porque
 realmente era extraordinario • 8 **secret disbelief**: callado escepticismo •
 9 **charwomen**: asistentas • 10 **(had) been blown into being out of nowhere**:
 había surgido de la nada • 11 **to support it all**: para sostenerlo todo

Certainly neither Susan's nor Matthew's. It was in the nature of things. And they sensibly blamed neither themselves nor each other.

On the contrary, they used their intelligence to preserve¹ what they had created from a painful and explosive world: they looked around them, and took lessons. All around them, marriages collapsing, or breaking, or rubbing along² (even worse, they felt). They must not make the same mistakes, they must not.

They had avoided the pitfall³ so many of their friends had fallen into – of buying a house in the country *for the sake of the children*, so that the husband became a weekend husband, a weekend father, and the wife always careful not to ask what went on in the town flat which they called (in joke) a bachelor flat⁴. No, Matthew was a full-time husband, a full-time father, and at night, in the big married bed in the big married bedroom (which had an attractive view of the river), they lay beside each other talking and he told her about his day, and what he had done, and whom he had met; and she told him about her day (not as interesting, but that was not her fault), for both knew of the hidden resentments and deprivations⁵ of the woman who has lived her own life – and above all, has earned her own living – and is now dependent on a husband for outside interests⁶ and money.

Nor did Susan make the mistake of taking a job for the sake of her independence, which she might very well have done, since her old firm, missing her qualities of humour, balance⁷, and sense⁸, invited her often to go back. Children needed their

1 **to preserve:** conservar • 2 **rubbing along:** ir tirando • 3 **pitfall:** trampa, escollo • 4 **a bachelor flat:** un piso de soltero • 5 **hidden resentments and deprivations:** resentimientos y privaciones ocultos • 6 **outside interests:** lo que se refiere al mundo exterior • 7 **balance:** equilibrio • 8 **sense:** juicio