Boy with a Trumpet

Rhys Davies

All he wanted was a bed, a shelf for his trumpet and permission to play it. He did not care how squalid the room, though he was so clean and shining himself; he could afford only the lowest rent. Not having any possessions except what he stood up in, the trumpet in an elegant case and a paper parcel of shirts and socks, landladies were suspicious of him. But he so gleamed with light young vigour, like a feather in the wind, that he kindled even in those wary hearts less harsh refusals.

Finally, on the outer rim of the West End, he found a bleak room for eight shillings a week in the house of a faded actress purply with drink and the dramas of a succession of lovers.

'I don't mind a trumpet,' she said, mollified by his air of a waif strayed out of a lonely vacancy. 'Are you in the orchestra, dear? No? You're not in a jazz band, are you? I can't have nightclub people in my house, coming in at all hours. No?… You look so young,' she said wonderingly. 'Well, there's no attendance, my charwoman is on war work; the bathroom is strictly engaged every morning from ten to half past, and I do not allow tenants to receive visitors of the opposite sex in their rooms.' Behind the blowsiness were the remnants of one who had often played the role of a lady.

'I've just committed suicide,' he said naively. She saw then the bright but withdrawn fixity of his eyes, single-purposed.

'What!' she said, flurried in her kimono, and instinctively placed a stagey hand on her bosom.

'They got me back,' he said. 'I was sick. I didn't swallow enough of the stuff. Afterwards they sent me to a – well, a hospital. Then they discharged me. From the Army.'

'Oh dear!' she fussed. And, amply and yearning: 'Did your nerve go, then…? Haven't you any people?' There had been a suicide – a successful one – in her house before, and she had not been averse to the tragedy.

'I have God,' he said gravely. 'I was brought up in an orphanage. But I have an aunt in Chester. She and I do not love each other. I don't like violence. The telephone is ringing,' he said, with his alert but withdrawn awareness.

She scolded someone, at length and with high-toned emphasis, and returning muttering; she started to find him still under the huge frilled lampshade by the petunia divan. 'Rent is in advance,' she said mechanically. 'Number eight on the second floor.'

He went up the stairs. The webby carpet, worn by years of lodgers, smelt of old dust. A gush of water sounded above; a door slammed; a cat slept on a windowsill under sprays of dusty lacquered leaves. Later, as he was going out to the teashop, two young girls, silent and proud, sedately descended the stairs together in the dying sunshine. They, too, had that air of clear-cut absorption in themselves, unacknowledging the dangerous world. But they were together in that house of the unanchored.

And he was alone, not long back from the edge of the dead land, the intersecting country where the disconnected sit with their spectral smiles.

That evening, in the tiny room, he played his trumpet. His lips, as the bandmaster of his regiment had told him, were not suitable for a trumpet; they had not the necessary full, fleshy contours, and also there were interstices in his front teeth; his face became horribly contorted in his effort to blast 'Cherry Ripe' out of the silver instrument. Nevertheless,

when the benevolent spinster in the cathedral town where he had been stationed and sung Elizabethan madrigals asked what she could buy him after he had left the asylum, he said: 'A trumpet.' And, alone, he had come to the great city with his neurosis and a gleaming second-hand trumpet costing sixteen guineas. On arrival he spent half his money on four expensive poplin shirts and in the evening went to a lecture on world reform; the night he had spent in Regent's Park, his trumpet case and parcel on his lap.

The landlady rapped and came in. Violet circles were painted round her eyes and her hair was greenish. Within a wrap large, loose breasts swam untrammelled as dolphins. She looked at him with a speculative doubt.

'It's very noisy. Are you practising? There are neighbours.'

'You said I could play my trumpet,' he pointed out gravely.

She said: 'I am artistic myself, and I have had actors, writers, and musicians in my house. But there's a limit. You must have a certain hour for practice. But not in the evenings; the mornings are more suitable for a trumpet.'

'I cannot get up in the mornings,' he said. The trim, fixed decision of the young soldier stiffened his voice. 'I need a great deal of sleep.'

'Are you still ill?' She stepped forward, her ringed hands outstretched. He sat on the bed's edge in his clean new shirt, the trumpet across his knees. From him came a desolate waif need. But his round, fresh-air face had a blank imperviousness, and down his indrawn small eyes flickered a secret repudiation. 'Are you lonely?' she went on. 'I play the piano.'

'I don't like trembling young girls,' he said. But as if to himself: 'They make me unhappy. I usually burst into crying when I'm with them. But I like babies; I want to be a father. I used to go into the married quarters in barracks and look after the babies… Sometimes,' he said, with his grave simplicity, 'I used to wash their napkins.'

In her slovenly fashion she was arrantly good-natured and friendly. 'Did you have a bad time in the orphanage, dear?'

'No, not *bad*. But I cannot stand the smell of carbolic soap now; it makes me want to vomit… I would like,' he added, 'to have known my mother. Or my father.'

'Hasn't anyone ever cared for you?' she asked, heaving.

'Yes. Both girls and men. But only for short periods.' Detached, he spoke as if he would never question the reason for this. The antiseptic austerity of his early years enclosed him like a cell of white marble; later there had been the forced, too-early physical maturity of the Army, which the orphanage governor had induced him to join as a bandboy, just before the war. He had no instinctive love to give out in return for attempts of affection: it had never been born in him. 'People get tired of me,' he added, quite acceptingly.

After that, in her erratic fashion, he obsessed her. She occasionally fed him; in his room she put cushions and a large oleograph of Dante and Beatrice on a Florence bridge; she even allowed him to play the trumpet when he liked, despite complaints from the other lodgers. She badgered her lover of the moment, an irate designer of textiles, to find him a job in the studio of the huge West End store. But the boy categorically refused all jobs that required him before noon. His head like an apple on the pillow, he lay in bed all the morning sunk in profound slumber.

In the afternoons he would sit at his window drinking her tea or earnestly reading a modern treatise on religious problems. He insisted to her that a fresh upsurge of religious awareness was about to arrive in the world. He had already passed through the hands of a hearty, up-to-date Christian group, and he corresponded regularly with a canon whose sole panacea, however, was an exhortation to pray.

'But I can't pray,' he grieved to her. There was a deadlock of all his faculties.

Only when playing his trumpet he seemed a little released. Harshly and without melodic calm, he blew it over a world in chaos. For all the contortions of his round face he bloomed into a kind of satisfaction as he created a hideous

pattern of noise. Cast out of the Army as totally unfit for service, it was only in these blasts of noise that he really enjoyed his liberty – the first that had ever come to him.

'Your rent is a fortnight overdue,' she reminded him, with prudent urgency. 'You really must find work, dear. Think of your future; now is your opportunity, with so many jobs about.'

'What future?' he asked curiously. 'Why do you believe so confidently in the future?'

He could always deflate her with this grave flatness. But her habit of working up emotional scenes was not easily balked. She would call him into her sitting room and, stroking his hand, among the billowy cushions, heave and throb about the rudeness of her lover, who was younger than herself. 'We are two waifs,' she said, while the telephone concealed under the crinoline of a doll rang yet again.

But he did not want the sultry maternalness of this faded artificial woman; unerringly he sensed the shallow, predatory egotism of her need. Yet neither did he want to know the two beautiful and serious girls, flaxen-haired and virginal, who lived on the same floor; he always ducked his head away from them. He wanted to pick up a prostitute and spend a furtive quarter of an hour with her in the blackout. But he could not afford this. He was destitute now.

'You are horrible,' she exclaimed angrily when, in a long talk, he told her of this. 'You, a boy of nineteen, wanting to go with prostitutes!'

'You see,' he insisted, 'I would feel myself master with them, and I can hate them too. But with nice, proud girls I cannot stop myself breaking down, and then I want to rush away and throw myself under a Tube train… And that's bad for me,' he added, with that earnest naiveté of his.

'But *is* it bad for you to break down?' she asked with some energy.

'Yes; I can't stand it.' Beyond the fixed calm of his small crystal eyes something flickered. 'When I was discharged

from the Army the MO advised me to attend a clinic. I've been to one. It made me feel worse. I don't want to feel I'm a case.'

'The clinic,' she said sagely, 'couldn't be expected to provide you with a mother. You've got nineteen years of starvation to forget.'

She had got into the habit of giving him a glass of milk and rum at nights. Nevertheless, she had her real angers with him, for she was of tempestuous disposition. She knew that he would not – it did not occur to her that he could not – unfold to her other than in these talks. He did not weep on her waiting bosom; he did not like his bright glossy hair to be stroked. And sometimes when he played the trumpet in his room she was roused to a transport of queer, intent fury and she would prowl about the staircase in helpless rage.

He had been in the house a month when one afternoon, after he had been playing for an hour, she walked into his room. Her green hair was frizzed out, the heavily painted eyes sidled angrily, the violet lips twisted like a cord. There was something both pathetic and ridiculous in the frenzy of this worn and used woman gallantly trying to keep up an air of bygone theatrical grandeur and, indeed, of ladylike breeding. But she was so brittle. Carefully looking at her, he laid the trumpet on his knees.

'Why must you *keep on*!' she fumed. 'That everlasting tune, it's maddening. The neighbours will ring up the police and I shall have them calling. You are not in a slum.'

'You said I could play my trumpet.'

And still there was about him that curious and impervious tranquillity, not to be disturbed, and, to her, relentless. It drove her to a vindictive outburst, her gaze fixed in hatred on the trumpet.

'Why don't you go out and look for *work*? Your rent – you are taking advantage of my kindness; you are lazy and without principle. Aren't you ashamed to sit there doing nothing but blowing noises on that damned thing?' She

heaved over him in the narrow room, a dramatic Maenad gone to copious seed and smelling of bath salts.

He got up from the bed's edge, carefully disconnected the trumpet's pieces and put them in the elegant case and his shirts and socks into a brown paper carrier. She watched him, spellbound; his crisp, deliberate decision was curbing. At the door he raised his hat politely. All recognition of her was abolished from the small, unswerving eyes.

'Good afternoon,' he said in a precise way. 'I will send you the rent when I earn some money. I am sure to find a position suited to me before long.'

He stored the trumpet in a railway station. On no account would he pawn it, though there was only a shilling or two left of the pound the canon had last sent him, together with a copy of *St Augustine's Confessions*. He knew it was useless to look for a job even as second trumpet in the cabarets; not even his fresh, shiny, boy appearance, that would look well in a Palm Beach jacket, could help him.

That night he hung about the dark, chattering Circus, not unhappy, feeling vaguely liberated among this anonymous crowd milling about in an atmosphere of drink, flesh, and boredom. He listened carefully to the soldiers' smudged catcalls, the female retaliations, the whispers, the ironical endearments, the dismissals. But as the night wore on and the crowd thinned, his senses became sharpened, alert, and at the same time desperate. Like a young hungry wolf sniffing the edge of the dark, he howled desolately inside himself. In the blackout the perfumed women, dots of fire between their fingertips, passed and repassed, as if weaving a dance figure in some hieratic ceremony; his mind became aware of a pattern, a design, a theme in which a restated lewd note grew ever more and more dominant. He wanted to play his trumpet. Startle the night with a barbaric blast.

He began to accost the women. He had heard that some would give shelter to the temporarily destitute, exercising a

legendary comradeship of the streets. But none had use for him. After a brief assessment of his conversation they passed on rapidly. Only one was disposed to chatter. She told him he could find a job, if his discharge papers were in order, as a stagehand in a certain theatre; she gave him a name to ask for.

'Nothing doing, darling,' she replied promptly to his subsequent suggestion. 'No fresh pineapple for me tonight.'

Waiting for morning, he sat on a bench in the ghostly Square garden and returned to an earlier meditation on the nature of God. In this mental fantasy he continually saw the embryo of a tadpole which split into two entities. The force that divided the embryo was God, a tremendous deciding power that lay beyond biology. It was eternal and creative, yet could one pray to it, worship it? Would it be conscious of a worshipping acknowledgement, and, if so, could it reward with peace, harmony, and contentment? He ached to submerge himself in belief and to enter into a mystic identification with a creative force; he wanted to cast himself at the knees of a gigantic parent of the universe. But on every side were frustrations, and the chaotic world, armed for destruction, was closing in on him triumphantly. Yet he knew it was that creative force that had driven him to attempt suicide as a solution and a release; he had believed that the power within him would not die but return to the central force and be discharged again. But he shivered at the memory of the hours before that act of suicide, those furtive, secret hours that had ruptured his mind. Outside himself he had never been able to kill even a spider.

'You must think of your future!' he suddenly whinnied aloud, causing a bemused sailor on an adjacent bench to lift his round cap off his face. He tried to envisage a concrete picture of that future, but saw only a ravaged place of waste with a few tufts of blackened vegetation against a burnt-out sky.

He began working among acres of painted canvases depicting idealised scenes in a world devoted to song, hilarity,

and dance. Rainbow processions of girls passed in and out, pearly smiles stitched into glossy faces, the accurate legs swinging like multi-coloured sausages. Watching these friezes in tranced gravity, he sometimes missed a cue, rousing the stage manager to threats of instant dismissal, despite the labour shortage. The hardworking young girl dancers, lustrously trim and absorbed in professional perfection, took no notice of the new stagehand fascinated in attempts to adapt their integrated patterns to his consciousness. But though hypnotised by this new revelation of idealised flesh and movements, he still could not identify himself with them. He was still cut off, he had not yet come through to acceptance that the world breathed, and that these pink and silver girls actually could be touched.

He started and listened carefully when a distinguished young man, a hero of the sky, sent a message backstage that he 'would like to collaborate' with a certain starry beauty of the chorus. 'She'll collaborate all right,' remarked another of the girls in the wings; 'I never heard it called that before.' That night he went home straight from the theatre and filled the house with the blasts of his trumpet.

He had rented a small partitioned space in the basement, its window overlooking the back garden. It contained a camp bed and one or two bugs which he accepted as outcomes of the God-force. The street was not of good repute, but it was beyond the West End, and an amount of lace-curtained and fumed-oak respectability was maintained.

'You can blow your trumpet as much as you like,' Irish Lil said. 'Blow it in the middle of the night if you like – it might drive some of the bastards out. Can you lend me five bob till tomorrow morning?'

There had been a quarrel among the five prostitutes upstairs: four accused the fifth of bringing in clients during the daytime – they declared the house would get a bad name. They were entirely daughters of the night; in daylight there was a moon glisten on their waxen faces, their hair looked

unreal, and their voices were huskily fretful. They called him the Boy with a Trumpet, and he was already something of a pet among them. He shared the roomy basement with four refugees off the Continent who came and went on obscure errands and everlastingly cooked cabbage soup.

Irish Lil was the disgrace of the house. Though she always had real flowers stuck in the two milk bottles on her sideboard, she was a slut. Her slovenly make-up, her regular OMS lover in the Guards who got roaring drunk, and her inability to discriminate and to insist on prepayment angered the four younger women. Blonde Joyce carried on a year-old vendetta with her. Over a stolen egg. Irish Lil was creeping downstairs one evening with the egg, which she had taken from Joyce's room, when a bomb fell in the Avenue. Kathleen rushed out of her room with a Free French client and found Lil struck daft on the stairs with the crushed egg dribbling through her fingers.

'Don't trust your trumpet to her,' Joyce said. 'She'll pawn it.' For, as his room had no lock, he asked where in the house he could hide his trumpet while he was at the theatre.

'She weeps,' he said gravely. 'I've heard her weeping.'

'If,' Joyce said, hard, 'she was on fire, I wouldn't pee on her to put her out.'

But they all, in their idle afternoons, liked him about their rooms. He fetched them newspapers and cigarettes; he was a nice boy and, yawning in their dressing gowns and irremediably nocturnal, they discarded their professionalism with him. Their calm acceptance of the world as a disintegration eased him; his instinct had been right in seeking a brothel to live in.

Yet he saw the house, for all its matter-of-fact squalor, as existing in a world still spectral to him. Still he lived behind thick glass, unreleased and peering out in dumb waiting. Only his old Army nightmare was gone – the recurrent dream in which he lay sealed tight into a leaden pipe under a pavement where he could hear, ever passing and returning,

the heeltaps of compassionate but unreachable women. But the tank-like underwater quiet of the observation ward in the asylum was still with him, always. And he could not break through, smash the glass. Not yet.

It was Kathleen who took quite a fancy to him. They had disconnected conversations in her room; she accepted him amicably as a virginal presence that did not want to touch her. She was plump as a rose, and a sprinkle of natural colour was still strewn over her, the youngest girl in the house. She promised to try to find him a job as trumpeter in one of the clubs; he could earn a pound a night at this if he became proficient.

'But I don't want to earn a lot of money,' he said earnestly. 'It's time we learned how to do without money. We must learn to live and create like God.'

'I've met all types of men,' she said vaguely, tucking her weary legs under her on the bed. 'And I hate them all. I tell you I've got to have six double gins before I can bring one home. That costs them a quid or two extra; I make the sods spend.'

He said dreamily: 'When I took poison I felt I was making a creative act, if it was only that I was going out to search.' He could still rest in the shade of that release; the mysteriousness of that blue underworld fume was still there, giving him a promise of fulfilment. 'I saw huge shapes… they were like huge flowers, dark and heavy blood-coloured flowers. They looked at me, they moved, they listened, their roots began to twine into me, I could feel them in my bowels… But I couldn't rise, I was lying in the mud. I couldn't breathe in the new way. I tried to struggle up… through. But I fell back, and everything disappeared—'

'Don't you go trying to commit suicide in this house,' she said. 'Mrs Walton would never forgive you. That Irish tyke's doing enough to advertise us already… You're not queer, are you?' she asked, desultory. 'I like queer men, they don't turn me sick… Always at one,' she ruminated of the others.

She attracted him more than the other four, but, to content his instinct completely, he wished her more sordid, lewd, and foul-tongued, more disintegrated. The ghostly lineaments of a trembling young girl remained in her. They conversed to each other across a distance. But she was the only one of the women who still appeared to observe things beyond this private world of the brothel. He sometimes tried to talk to her about God.

The taxicabs began to purr up to the front door any time after midnight. Sometimes he got out of his bed in the basement, mounted the staircase in trousers and socks, and stood poised in the dark as if waiting for a shattering revelation from behind the closed doors. There was the useless bomber pilot who broke down and shouted weepingly to Joyce that his nerve was gone – 'Well,' Joyce had said in her ruthless way, 'you can stay if you like, but I'm keeping my present all the same, mind!' That pleased him, as he carefully listened; it belonged to the chaos, the burnt-out world reduced to charcoal. He laughed softly to himself. What if he blew his trumpet on this phantasmagoric staircase? Blew it over the fallen night, waken these dead, surprise them with a new anarchial fanfare?

One week when the elder tree and the peonies were in blossom in the once-cultivated back garden, Irish Lil declared she had a birthday. She opened her room on the Monday night – always an off night – to whoever wished to come in. Ranks of beer flagons stood on the sideboard, and Harry, her Guards sergeant regular, roared and strutted before them in his battledress like David before the Ark. Three refugees from the basement ventured in; Joyce forgot her vendetta, but refused to dress or make up; Pamela sat repairing a stocking. When he arrived from the theatre the beer was freely flowing. Irish Lil, in a magenta sateen gown, was wearing long, ornate earrings in a vain attempt to look

seductive. Kathleen, on this off-night occasion, gazed at him with a kind of sisterly pensiveness.

'Heard that one about Turnham Green—?' bawled Harry, and took off his khaki blouse before telling it, owing to the heat.

He was a great tree of flesh. His roots were tenacious in the earth. The juice in his full lips was the blood of a king bull; the seeds of war flourished in the field of his muscular belly. For him a battle was a dinner, a bomb a dog bark, a bayonet a cat-scratch, and in the palm of his great blue paw statesmen curled secure. He was the salt of the earth. The limericks flying off his lips became more obscene.

But they fell flat. The prostitutes were bored with obscenity, the refugees did not understand English humour. Joyce yawned markedly.

'Hell, what's this?' Harry panted a bit – 'The funeral of the duchess…? Reminds me. Heard that one about Her Grace and the fishmonger?'

'Fetch your trumpet, will you?' asked Irish Lil, feeling a little music was necessary.

'What!' shouted Harry, delighted. 'He's got a trumpet? I been in the band in my time. A kick or two from a trumpet's jest what's needed.'

He snatched the beautifully shining instrument and set it to his great curled lips. The bull neck swelled, the huge face glowed red. And without mistake, unfalteringly, from harmonious lungs, he played the 'Londonderry Air'. A man blowing a trumpet successfully is a rousing spectacle. The blast is an announcement of the lifted sun. Harry stood on a mountain peak, monarch of all he surveyed.

Kathleen came in, hesitating, and sat beside him on the campbed. 'What's the matter?' she asked. He had flung away with the trumpet as soon as Harry had laid it down. He sat concentratedly polishing it with a bit of chiffon scarf she had once given him, especially the mouthpiece. 'Has he spoilt it, then?' she murmured.

He did not answer. But his fingers were trembling. She said wearily: 'He's started reciting "Eskimo Nell" now.'

'I wish I could play like him,' he whispered.

'You do make an awful noise,' she said in a compassionate way. 'You haven't got the knack yet, with all your practising … I wonder,' she brooded after a while, 'if it's worth going down West. But they're so choosy on a Monday night.'

'Don't go.' He laid down the trumpet as if abandoning it for ever. 'Don't go.'

She seemed not to be listening, her preoccupied eyes gazing out of the window. The oblong of garden was filled with the smoky red after fume of sunset. Their low voices drifted into silences. Two pigeons gurgled in the elder tree; a cat rubbed against the windowpane and became intent on the pigeons. Kathleen's mouth was pursed up thoughtfully. He was conscious of the secret carnation glow of her thighs. Her thick hair smelled of obliterating night.

'I won't ever play my trumpet.' His voice stumbled. 'I have no faith, no belief, and I can't accept the world… I can't *feel* it.'

'Christ, there's enough to feel,' she protested. 'This bloody war, and the bombs—'

'In the Army they taught us to get used to the smell of blood. It smells of hate… And to turn the bayonet deep in the guts… There were nice chaps in our battalion who had letters and parcels from home… from loving mothers and girls… and they didn't mind the blood and the bayonets; they had had their fill of love and faith, I suppose. But I was hungry all the time, I wanted to be fed, and I wanted to create, and I wanted children… I am incomplete,' he whispered – 'I didn't have the right to kill.'

'But you tried to kill yourself,' she pointed out, though vaguely, as if her attention was elsewhere.

'My body,' he said – 'that *they* owned.'

'Well, what can you *do*?' she asked, after another silence. 'You ought to take up some study, a boy with your brains…

It's a shame,' she cried, with a sudden burst of the scandalised shrillness of her kind: 'the Army takes 'em, breaks 'em, and chucks 'em out when they've got no further use for 'em. What *can* you do?'

'There's crime,' he said.

'It don't pay,' she said at once.

'I believe,' he said, 'there'll be big waves of crime after the war. You can't have so much killing, so much teaching to destroy, and then stop it suddenly… The old kinds of crime, and new crimes against the holiness in the heart. There'll be fear, and shame, and guilt, guilt. People will be mad. There's no such thing as victory in war. There's only misery, chaos and suffering for everybody, and then the payment…. There's only one victory – over the evil in the heart. And that's a rare miracle.'

His voice faltered in defeat. 'I've been trying to make the attempt. But the air I breathe is full of poison.'

She let him talk, pretending to listen. Clients sometimes talked to her oddly and, if there was time, it was professional tact to allow them their airings.

'Harry, up there,' he went on dejectedly, 'carries the world on his shoulders. But he'll rob his mother and starve his wife and pick his neighbour's pocket.' He took up the trumpet off the bed, turned it over regretfully, and let it drop back. 'I can't even play my trumpet like him,' he reiterated obsessively. 'Would I make a better criminal?'

'Now, look here,' she said, her attention arrested, 'don't you go starting down *that* street! Boys like you alone in London can soon go to the bad. I've seen some of it. It won't pay, I'm telling you.'

'But crime as a protest,' he said earnestly. 'As a relief. And don't you see there's nothing but crime now, at the heart of things?'

Professionally comforting, she laid her hand on his, which began to tremble again. Yet his small crystal eyes remained impervious, with their single-purposed rigidity. She stroked

his hand. 'Don't tremble, don't tremble… Do you ever cry?' she asked, gazing into his face in the last light.

He shook his head. 'I can't.' But something was flickering into his eyes. He had leaned towards her slowly.

'If you could,' she said, but still with a half-vague inattentiveness – 'I'm sure you ought to break down. You're too shut in on yourself.'

He breathed her odour of flesh. It seemed to him like the scent of milky flowers, living and benign, scattered in a pure air. As if it would escape him, he began to breathe it hungrily. His hands had stopped trembling. But the rigid calm of his appearance, had she noticed it in the dusky light, was more disquieting.

'There!' she said, still a little crouched away from him; 'you see, a little personal talk is good for you. You're too lonely, that's what it is.'

'Will you let me—'

'What?' she asked, more alert. The light was finishing; her face was dim.

'Put my mouth to your breast?'

'No,' she said at once. She shook her head. 'It wouldn't be any use, anyhow.'

But, now that the words were out, he fell on her in anguish. 'Stay with me! Don't go away. Sleep with me tonight.' He pressed his face into her, shuddering, and weeping at last. 'Stay!'

She heaved herself free, jumping off the bed with a squirm, like anger. 'Didn't I tell you that I hated men!' She raised her voice, very offended. 'I could spit on them all – and you, too, now.' She opened the door. 'But I will say this' – her voice relented a degree – 'I wouldn't sleep with you if you offered me ten pounds! I know what I am, and I don't want any of your fancy stuff.' She flounced out with scandalised decision.

He rolled over and over on the bed. Shuddering, he pressed his face into the pillow. When the paroxysm had passed he half rose and sat looking out of the window. In his movement

the trumpet crashed to the floor, but he did not pick it up. He sat gazing out into the still world as if he would never penetrate it again. He saw grey dead light falling over smashed cities, over broken precipices and jagged torn chasms of the world. Acrid smoke from abandoned ruins mingled with the smell of blood. He saw himself the inhabitant of a wilderness where withered hands could lift in guidance no more. There were no more voices and all the paps of earth were dry.