

the sea, the sea

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My name is Charles Arrowby, and I am at my wits end. Feeble of body, and feeble of thought, sinking rapidly, but not rapidly enough in my opinion, into that darkness out of which there is no escape. Gently may be, there is no longer any rage in me, in fact I wonder whether I ever had any.

I am a character, at least a character of sorts. I wish I was something else, something different; but a character of a novel, created by another intelligence, only has a limited freedom of action. Some things we can decide, but not the general set-up, this is put-up at the whim of the creator, who can indulge its impulses freely. I wish I had been an author instead than just the creation of one, but I know that for a mere character of a novel such wishes are tantamount to blasphemy. So I am stuck, and besides I am at the end of my tether.

A reader may naively think that after the end of the book all the characters in it die, or rather, as they are not supposed to be alive anyway, thrown into a box. This is almost true, but not quite. We live on, but shadowily. As I returned to London and took possession of the apartment of my late cousin I sank into a depression of sorts (I almost wrote 'thought', I wish I had, it would have been truer, at least in a poetic sense). I did not feel I belonged there, I hardly ever touched any of his belongings, but simply camped out in his vacated abode. As the reader already knows I did sell a lot of his books, they were of no use to anyone sitting there inert on the shelves. The British Museum was delighted I already told you. Afterwards the place seemed even less hospitable to me. In the end I sold everything, and tired of my experiment of living as a hermit by the sea, as if ever I was allowed that luxury for a social being, namely undiluted solitude, I decided to get a simple flat. I got one in Belgravia. The usual thing. Not very grand or even exciting. Comfortable in some ways, or rather convenient. But it felt like an anti-climax. The glittering life to which I was used to as a man of the theatre, famous, and thus desired, soon dried up after my retirement. I thought I had friends, but they dropped off. Friendship is, when it comes down to it, a matter of mutual backscratching. Who wants a friend with no scratch? You have friends to be amused, who needs boring friends? Not me, and hence I dare say, no one needs me either. At first it was a relief I have to admit, but then after a while I started to feel bored. But once you feel bored it is too late. It is just as with your health. Once its absence starts to let itself be known, that very absence has gained tenure. And I mean tenure, real tenure, irrevocable. So being bored and forgotten what did I have to offer? All those attractive women, whose pursuit of me I used to find annoying and irritating, where are they when I would have been more amendable to their attentions? Where is sweet Lizzie? Lizzie with her wonderful breasts which could turn any gay into a flaming heterosexual maniac (but not poor Gilbert, he was too hung up I would say). I could do with her now. At first I ignored her, that is true, but that was just temporary. Did she not realise that? Then when I tried to get in contact with her she did not react. Why I

wonder. Was she not once willing to give her life for me. So she said. Or words to that effect. I repeat, she did tell me so, did she not? And now, I could do with some of that sacrifice of hers. In fact I would not mind giving my own, or at least some of it. And then this other woman, the name evades me. My mind is not as clear as it used to be. Oh yes, Rosina. She was really passionate about me. I loved the way she was willing to kill me just for my flesh. And when everything is said and done, you want to be desired for your flesh, not your mind. And I certainly would not mind her now. I pretended I did at some time, but deep down I was thrilled. But that woman Hartley. How I despised her. True I was pursuing her, but that was only at the promptings of my creator. It was a duty, religious in a true sense, which I had no choice but to submit to. It was all about some dream about love, innocent love, that my creator had made up for me, no doubt to score some stupid philosophical point. I start to realise the meaningless of it all. We characters of novels are just created for amusement. Partly to amuse readers, but mostly to amuse our creator. It is all a kind of joke, a poor and cruel joke. Here I was, set up with those two gorgeous women, and instead what was I to do in this book of life. Pursue an old hag for whom I did not feel the slightest shred of interest, let alone attraction, and please do not mention love. I mentioned it all the time. Those were lines put into my mouth. How I resented them. When James told me that I was living a phantasy, how true he was. I knew, he knew it (I hope), and how I longed to whisper to him how right he was, and that I did not have the slightest desire, let alone illusion, about the whole damned thing. But as a character in a novel, you may think for yourself, but not act. Your creator has no control of your thoughts, they may think they do, but in truth they have no clue. It is only your acts that they can command, and they do, putting you into the most absurd of situations. Just for amusement. To score points. To illustrate the futility of life, their lives, at least. How relieved I was when she was gone. Maty I mean, the name of Hartley was just another beastly obsession of mine, put there by my creator. Actually I did kind of like her husband. He seemed lost though. As if he belonged to another world, another novel. I felt a bit sorry for him though, stuck with that old hag. And finally Clement of her I had many fond memories. Had, but they never came to fruition. I would have loved to relive them, but I was not allowed to, instead this beastly Maty Hartley (to give her her full names due), or to be honest, my obsession for her, monopolized the novel. How much more interesting would it not have been to the reader, to say nothing of me, to have been served titillating vignettes of life with an older woman, truly the most exciting phantasy a young man can indulge in. My memories were sweet, so much I am convinced of, but of what kind I would have loved to learn, because the truth is that I am and was as ignorant of those particular memories as the reader. True I have tried to make up some, and even convince myself that they were true, but in a novel, the privilege of making up is confined to the author. To it all power, to the characters none. So my feeble attempts came to nothing.

I have been babbling on. Writing, or rather letting the spirit of the author write through me, I have given up. Babbling though is still left to me. The Sea. I was given to stare at the sea a lot, to describe its most minute changes. I did not mind that, just as I did not mind the swimming. And to be honest the drowning of Titus as well. It was a relief, and besides a gratification. That young guy was supposed to be my superior. He

came to grief. At least the author heeded my prayers. I had to put up a show though, but not much. My author was understanding. It was enough to go through the motions, and this you can do, unless it takes up too much space, as it did with that Hartley hag. In a way I did not mind that primitive place, at least when there were a lot of people around, even when that character Perry tried to kill me. Cheeky type believing that it was in his power to kill the narrator. After all I should not complain, the narrator in a novel is like Jesus. I mean the narrator is the representative of the author, walking down in the novel, pretending to be a mere character. Any death of the narrator is bound to lead to resurrection. Just as it did. Was I not resurrected by my brother, sorry my cousin James? He does feel like a brother though, or at least a double. He was the kind of character I would have wished to have been, but was not allowed to.

The Sea the Sea. I love the Sea, this is at least something I have in common with my author. Or at least I would like to think so. Belief, is after all a desire to believe. A wish for a wish. And as we are being told, it is not really necessary to believe, only to believe that it is. A happy character indeed who loves his author. I wish I could love mine. I know I am supposed to, because without my author, what would I be? Certainly not me, not James, not anyone. If this is possible after all. I feel I exist. I know the reader doubts it, but how could I doubt my own existence? After all am I not its ultimate judge? I am rambling. As I told you I am at the end of my tether, as well as that of my wits. My thoughts are not clear, if ever they were, and I become less and less resistant to seduction. Seduction after all is the path of least resistance, the path that any river takes to come as quickly as possibly to the Sea. The Sea to which we all strive, and to which I want to return. Seduction does indeed deliver you to your destination, and often in the most pleasurable manner. The Sea, the Sea. I love the tide. The rising and the retreating. It is like the sex of a woman. Salty with its rising tides and ebbing flows. It draws you inexorably. The surf can be harsh. Indeed how harsh would it not have been with Rosita. Sorry I mean Rosina. I would always have trouble clambering up on that cliff. She would pound me. How I loved being pounded. But in matters of sex you cannot allow yourself to drown, because after all then there would not be a second chance, and for all that talk of abandon, the point of sex is not really the moment, but the promise of the moment that may follow. It is in pursuit of the tantalising that gives to passion that extra edge. Satisfaction is fine, but its achievement tends to self-cancelling. Contentment is death,(and conversely as well we are being consoled), but desire is life after all, and the paramount condition that desire places on any object deemed worthy of being pursued is that it will always be able to evade its pursuer. To grasp happiness within the fist of your hand is to kill it. Happiness is not now, it is next. Always. It is the hope which makes the future bearable. The future, especially for a character in a novel, is something that should be terrifying. We are supposed to know nothing of it, not even the author at least not in all its details. And of what we know nothing could mean to be the most terrifying. The only way we can deal with this horrendous threat is to imagine Happiness, and as Happiness certainly was not in the past, and definitely not in the present (if it were, would I be agonizing as I am now) so what space is left for it but in the future? And as we know nothing of it, how fitting indeed. Happiness. That is what religions are based on. But to a character in a novel, there is not even that hope of an after life, or maybe? Real people

have flesh, so do we, but of a different kind, less susceptible to corruption, more easily amendable to resurrection. And after all, even when an author has lost interest, or maybe died, because even creators die in spite of their vainglorious pursuit of immortality, their creations may still be alive or at least potentially susceptible to revival. Just as I have been at the hands of this reviewer. I feel my spirits rising. Maybe after all the end is not irrevocable. At least for the time being. Eternity only exists in the moment, and what a moment. You are sweet indeed, please linger, linger on...

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