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1888

We married in St Jude's, Whitechapel, a tiny dilapidated church that appeared to have sprouted like a fungus between two unconcerned buildings in Commercial Street. The vicar complained that the congregation only ventured inside on Sundays if it rained, and even then expected dole money, otherwise they'd be skipping and dipping down Petticoat Lane. I wore a blue travelling dress and a straw bonnet that Sister Park had insisted on decorating with a veil and paper orange blossoms, squinting at it by candlelight in the room we shared above the hospital. I told her to save her eyes, but she wouldn't hear of it, being the sort that finds cheer in such pointless rituals.

Thomas's best man was a fellow doctor, Dr Richard Lovett. I remembered him vaguely from the hospital, our paths not destined to cross, and only met him properly the day we were married. They seemed as close as two friends could be: laughing with each other, elbows into ribs and sly winks. They even resembled each other, both being

dark and well groomed, tall and slender; they could have been brothers.

As soon as we were married, I told Matron Luckes, and she fired me on the spot, as I knew she would. A married woman could only devote herself to one profession, that of wife. Nursing was too demanding a career to accept anything other than complete devotion. There ended my career, the career I'd gambled my very existence on procuring, in the process rejecting everything my grandmother had wished for me. I had moved willingly to quite possibly the worst part of London and for two years had studied until I was near blind, to attain the coveted position of ward sister. Now I'd thrown that all away with both hands in a fit of cavalier delirium. Nevertheless, I couldn't believe my luck: a plain old maid like me marrying so well, and to a young and beautiful man who adored me. It shouldn't have happened. For a moment I really did believe in miracles.

I was giddy with joy and excited for our future. I felt rubber-stamped and approved by all things proper. Catapulted into another realm. Only weeks before, I had not known how I would carry on or what to do with myself, and now I had an entirely different existence and someone to make this future with. There was only one instance when I played my part badly. In the run-up to our marriage, when he suggested we honeymoon in Brighton, I hesitated. He asked if I'd ever been there before. I lied and said no. It was not a bad lie, but Brighton held memories for me and there would be no easy way to explain it.

My new husband took me to a hotel called the Royal Albion opposite Brighton Pier. It rained constantly, but I barely noticed. Summer had trouble starting in the year of

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1888; it coughed and spluttered, trying to clear its lungs of a bitter winter. Only the occasional blast of light was able to break through the ashen clouds. We locked ourselves away in our room with its huge windows up to the ceiling. The murders hadn't started yet. I was just another June bride on her honeymoon, struck with euphoria at my novel world, unaware the newlywed glow would tarnish.

At night, the wind would become trapped inside our hotel room and howl around the ceiling. We lay in bed and listened to its whistling with our limbs wrapped around each other, the skin of our bodies smooth and warm, like paper.

'See how we fit, Chapman,' he said. 'We fit so perfectly together, don't you think? As if we were chiselled from the same piece of rock. Made to match.'

And we did fit. I was happy. It was such sudden relief from the misery I'd nearly drowned in, I almost didn't recognise it. This new excitement at a future with someone else, after I'd given up all hope of ever feeling happiness again. We stayed in bed morning, noon and night in those first days. Thomas was building his private practice and had few patients on his books, which made it the perfect time to take a holiday. Soon he'd be far too busy to take any leave. He had grand ambitions, my wonderful husband. If we did not take a holiday now, when would we next have the chance? Anything was possible. Everything could be ours. That was the feeling I'd missed, the feeling that the future could and would be marvellous. Together we would make it so.

We used to leave our burrow for food, and then, like children, we'd chase each other up the stairs on all fours

and disappear under the bedclothes. He showed me how to put drops of laudanum in brandy, which burned my chest and made my head seem as if it would explode, like I was falling down a bottomless black hole. But when he kissed me all over, I burst into fits of laughter. We were living in a barrel of feathers.

Thomas experienced the world through his senses, and he had an appetite for it all: food and music, art and beautiful things, architecture and adventure, liquor and laudanum. We were no angels, but we never professed to be. Thomas was drawn on impulse to whatever would give him pleasure in that moment, and, in those days, pleasing me was one such thing. It was a soft and sensory experience; all lust. As yet I was unaware the same desires would quickly become a burden. I was fascinated by him. After the dark events of the last few months, I felt I was being pushed in a different direction and that this was the right path, the life in the light I craved. This man and my role of wife would be the new terrain I could explore and conquer. I would be damn good at it.

Thomas was often like an excitable child, skipping around, eyes always on me, bleary with a damp glaze as if spellbound. He tried to hold my hand at all times. I would wait as long as I could, then attempt to slip free, only for his fingers to search mine out again. His attention was so intense, it was embarrassing. People stared, although I don't believe he noticed. It was as if he didn't care about anything or anyone but us. This wasn't driven by rudeness or a conscious aim to offend; it was simply a matter of training. Thomas had never been conditioned to consider others or to imagine he might not matter as much as other people.

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Thomas thought he mattered very much, and, as his wife, so did I.

I wanted nothing more than to be like him. Now that I was married to an upper-middle-class doctor, I pictured a life free of the exhausting, ever looming fear of poverty, free of the drudgery of hard, physical labour, of never being able to earn enough money to put a bit aside. Now at last I had the opportunity to create wealth rather than merely exist. This was my chance. I only had one job: to stop myself from ruining it.