

certainly have been a misfortune. That cannot have lasted long, for we were not very old when speech became the deadliest weapon as used by her. When Thoby and I were angry with each other or with her, we used good straightforward abuse, or perhaps told tales if we felt particularly vindictive. How did she know that to label me 'The Saint' was far more effective, quickly reducing me to the misery of sarcasm from the grown-ups as well as the nursery world? One was vaguely aware that it was no good trying to retort in kind. No, our only revenge for such injuries, Thoby's and mine, was to make her, as we said, 'purple with rage'. I don't remember how we did this, I only remember watching her colour mount till it was the most lively flaming red – and then I suppose nurses interfered. Was it altogether painful to her? I am not sure.

I see us as children nearly always in the two nurseries almost at the top of the tall house in Hyde Park Gate. There we spent about ten months of the year, and in spite of the delights of our Cornish home I used sometimes to feel it almost unbearable so seldom to be in a wood in the spring – in the early summer, never. (Brighton was the nearest we usually got to such joys, and I have hated it ever since in consequence.) Not that we were often bored even in London; Kensington Gardens was comparatively wild in those days, and in the long grass between the Flower Walk and the Round Pond we had once had the thrill of finding the deserted corpse of a dog – a little black dog. Then four children can make a good deal of amusement and trouble for each other. Perhaps I should say three, for Adrian was still a baby or a delicate little boy, and Thoby the brother both Virginia and I adored. She has described him so fully that I need say nothing. But he and I had had an intimate friendship before she came on the scene, doing everything together, and later, though life was more interesting and exciting, it was also less easy. Even then she had the faculty of suddenly being able to create an atmosphere of tense thundery gloom. I think she always had this – perhaps it's a Stephen characteristic – but I had not been aware of it before she produced it. Suddenly the sky was overcast, and I in the gloom. It would last for endless ages – so it seemed to a child – and then go. But it was I who had been in the gloom – not the other two – and I suppose, though I cannot remember ever feeling it at the time, that it was simply the result of two little females and a male. Or was it something different and part of her temperament?

Children are jealous little creatures, and brothers and sisters in a large family have one great disadvantage over only children. No one ever says how nice Mary is or how lovely Jane, but always Mary is nicer than Jane and Jane prettier than Mary. It's inevitable, and comparisons are the easiest form of criticism, no doubt, but it may lead to trouble. I don't

remember being jealous of the fact that her appearance and her talk had obviously the greatest success with the grown-ups. They laughed at her jokes but so did we all, and probably I was as much aware as anyone of her brilliance and loveliness to look at. She reminded me always of a sweet pea of a special flame colour. But then there was the unfortunate question of our godparents. We hadn't been baptised, but all the same we had godparents of a kind. Mine were very dull, a decrepit old cousin in Ceylon and Lady Vaughan Williams, the judge's wife, whom I couldn't bear. But Virginia had the American ambassador, James Russell Lowell, a great friend of our parents who was quite an important figure to us. He used to produce his chain purse and pull out of it 3d bits for each of us except Virginia, who got 6d. That wasn't very important though rather marked, but what really roused our jealousies was his giving her a bird, a real live bird in a cage. I suppose the poor man would have been much surprised had he known what evil passions he had caused.

One of the two nurseries in which we lived was the day, the other the night nursery, and in this we four children and a nurse slept and had our baths and did all else in what I think must by modern standards have been a very unhealthy atmosphere. Was the window ever open at night? I doubt it. There was a lovely bright fire to go to bed by, coal, food, hot water and babies being carried up many times a day. We were very snug, if stuffy, and of course told stories in bed. The only one I remember was a serial which went on night after night. The characters were real ones, those of our next door neighbours, the Dilke family, whom we mocked for not being able to pronounce the letter R. The story always began by my saying in an affected drawl, 'Clemente, dear child.' Virginia then took the part of Clemente and the *séance* would begin. The plot consisted in the discovery under their nursery floor of immense stores of gold. It then went on to describe the wonderful things they could buy in consequence, especially the food, which was unlimited, though mostly consisting of not then very ruinous eggs and bacon – our favourite dish. But as we got sleepier our ideas got vaguer, and vast oceans of wealth and sleep seemed to overwhelm one. The fire flickered, one by one we dropped off to sleep, and presently 'Clemente dear child' gave no answer. The story had to wait till next night. It was in these two nurseries that we all had whooping cough, for of course there was no question of one alone getting any infectious disease. I believe children on the whole love being ill, but that particular disease did seem to last a very long time. Probably the treatment was completely wrong; anyhow I think we stayed indoors most of the time and had special foods and lots of medicines and in the end emerged four little skeletons and were sent to Bath for a change. The rest of us quickly recovered, but it seemed to me that Virginia was different.