

She was never again a plump and rosy child and, I believe, had actually entered into some new layer of consciousness rather abruptly, and was suddenly aware of all sorts of questions and possibilities hitherto closed to her. I remember one evening as we were jumping about naked, she and I, in the bathroom, she suddenly asked me which I liked best, my father or mother. Such a question seemed to me rather terrible; surely one ought not to ask it. I felt certain Thoby would have snubbed the questioner. However, being asked, one had to reply, and I found I had little doubt as to my answer. 'Mother,' I said, and she went on to explain why she, on the whole, preferred my father. I don't think, however, her preference was quite as sure and simple as mine. She had considered both critically and had more or less analysed her feelings for them which I, at any rate consciously, had never attempted. This seemed to begin an age of much freer speech between us. If one could criticize one's parents, what or whom could one not criticize? Dimly some freedom of thought and speech seemed born, created by her question.

Before Thoby went to school at the age of ten, he and I had done all our lessons together, but after that it was Virginia and I who shared ours. My mother taught us Latin, French and history – not very well, I think, and I am sure most mistakenly, both on her own account and on ours. What a relief it was when for a short time she went abroad with my father and we had a harmless, ordinary little governess. It is much too nerve-wracking to be taught by one's parents. But my father's lessons in arithmetic were the worse of the two, and how the poor man endured them I cannot think. Thoby was the only one of his children whom it can have been a pleasure to teach. Virginia all her life added up on her fingers and I am very little better. She always said that she had had no education, and I am inclined to agree with her, if by education is meant learning things out of books. If she had none, however, I had less, for she did at least teach herself or get herself taught Greek, and was given books to read by my father which may, for all I know, have had educational value.

However there were also classes. Music naturally, since we were girls, had to be drummed into us, and the piano mistress succeeded in reducing us to complete boredom. The singing class, on the other hand, had its amusing side in the shape of other children. Miss Mills, a well known teacher of the tonic sol-fa system in those days, was discovered by us to be intensely religious. So when one day she asked very seriously if any of us knew the meaning of Good Friday, Virginia began to giggle. Of course we hadn't the slightest idea, being little heathens. But when the prize girl of the class, a serious creature with a hooked nose and a fringe and the astonishing name of Pensa Filly, stepped forward and said something (I suppose accurately) about our Lord being crucified on that day, it was too much and Virginia had to be hurriedly banished, shrieking with

laughter. It amused her very much too when Connor O'Brien, a fiery little Irish boy, burst into floods of tears because he wasn't top of the class; but when that happened it was he, kicking and screaming, who had to be removed by his shamed mother.

Then there was the dancing class with the celebrated Mrs Wordsworth in black satin. She had a stick and a glass eye at which she dabbed perpetually with a lace pocket handkerchief, and she croaked like a raven and made all the little girls jump up and down in a frenzy. But we were bored and sometimes retired to the W.C. and spent as long as we dared there. I don't know what the sixty or seventy other girls did meanwhile. I cannot remember a time when Virginia did not mean to be a writer and I a painter. It was a lucky arrangement, for it meant that we went our own ways and one source of jealousy at any rate was absent.

Our happiest afternoons were spent in a small room handed over to us, opening from the large double drawing room. It was a cheerful little room, almost entirely made of glass, with a skylight, windows all along one side looking on to the back garden, a window cut in the wall between it and the drawing room, and a door (also half window) opening into the rest of the house. In this room we used to sit, I painting and she reading aloud. We read most of the Victorian novelists in this way, and I can still hear much of George Eliot and Thackeray in her voice. From this room too we could spy on the grown-ups. Naturally we produced a family newspaper, *The Hyde Park Gate News*. Virginia wrote most of it, and it lasted four or five years, I believe – I have copies of it from the years 1891 to 1895. She was very sensitive to criticism and the good opinion of the grown-ups. I remember putting the paper on the table by my mother's sofa while they were at dinner, and then creeping quietly into the little room to look through the window and hear the criticism. As we looked, she trembling with excitement, we could see my mother's lamplight figure quietly sitting near the fire, my father on the other side with his lamp, both reading. Then she noticed the paper, picked it up, began to read. We looked and listened hard for some comment. 'Rather clever, I think,' said my mother, putting the paper down without apparent excitement. But it was enough to thrill her daughter; she had had approval and been called clever, and our eavesdropping was rewarded. I think it must have been a good deal later that she sent a short story to *Tit Bits*, keeping it a deadly secret from all but me. *Tit Bits* was our favourite weekly, which we used to buy together with 3d worth of Fry's Chocolate, taking both to Kensington Gardens to read and eat together, lying in the grass under the trees on summer afternoons. The story was refused – as far as I remember, it was a wildly romantic account of a young woman on a ship – and the secret kept till this day.