

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Bruno's Dream

Iris Murdoch

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About the Book

Bruno is nearly ninety. Obsessed with his past and a passion for spiders, he is the still centre of a complex web of relationships. Caught up in the web are Danby, Bruno's hapless son-in-law; Danby's mistress, Adelaide, and her twin cousins: Will, bent on avenging Adelaide's seduction, and mischievous, sinister Nigel.

The web's strands are further entangled when Bruno insists on seeing his long-estranged son, Miles, who lives with his wife and sister-in-law. Soon the uneasiness long smouldering below the surface erupts into passion and violence.

About the Author

Iris Murdoch was born in Dublin in 1919 of Anglo-Irish parents. She went to Badminton School, Bristol, and read classics at Somerville College, Oxford. During the war she was an Assistant Principal at the Treasury, and then worked with UNRRA in London, Belgium and Austria. She held a studentship in Philosophy at Newnham College, Cambridge, and then in 1948 she returned to Oxford where she became a Fellow of St Anne's College. Until her death in February 1999, she lived with her husband, the teacher and critic John Bayley, in Oxford. Awarded the CBE in 1976, Iris Murdoch was made a DBE in the 1987 New Year's Honours List. In the 1997 PEN Awards she received the Gold Pen for Distinguished Service to Literature.

Since her writing debut in 1954 with *Under the Net*, Iris Murdoch has written twenty-six novels, including the Booker Prize-winning *The Sea, the Sea* (1978) and most recently *The Green Knight* (1993) and *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995). Other literary awards include the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for *The Black Prince* (1973) and the Whitbread Prize for *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974). Her works of philosophy include *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (1953, reissued 1987), *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) and *Existentialists and Mystics* (1997). She has written several plays including *The Italian Girl* (with James Saunders) and *The Black Prince*, adapted from her novel of the same name. Her volume of poetry, *A Year*

of Birds, which appeared in 1978, has been set to music by Malcolm Williamson.

ALSO BY IRIS MURDOCH

Fiction

Under the Net
The Flight from the Enchanter
The Sandcastle
The Bell
A Severed Head
An Unofficial Rose
The Unicorn
The Italian Girl
The Red and the Green
The Time of the Angels
The Nice and the Good
A Fairly Honourable Defeat
An Accidental Man
The Black Prince
The Sacred and Profane Love Machine
A Word Child
Henry and Cato
The Sea, the Sea
Nuns and Soldiers
The Philosopher's Pupil
The Good Apprentice
The Book and the Brotherhood
The Message to the Planet
The Green Knight
Jackson's Dilemma

Non-Fiction

Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues

Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals
Existentialists and Mystics
Sartre: Romantic Rationalist

TO
SCOTT DUNBAR

Iris Murdoch

BRUNO'S DREAM

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Robert Irwin


VINTAGE

INTRODUCTION

‘ADELAIDE SAID, “BRUNO told me yesterday that spiders existed a hundred million years before flies existed.” ’

“Mmmmm.”

“But what did the spiders eat?”

Danby was asleep dreaming of Gwen.’

In chapter 4 of his *The World of Spiders* (London, 1958), W.S. Bristowe, M.A., Sc.D. draws attention to the immense antiquity of spiders, as compared with flies, which only ‘arrived in the Jurassic period!’ (The answer to Adelaide’s question would appear to be that spiders, who go back to the Devonian era, at first dined on more primitive and mostly flightless forms of insects.) Bruno, who broods in the centre of Iris Murdoch’s novel, like a spider at the centre of its web, owes quite a lot to the real-life arachnologist, Bristowe, an amateur whose obsessive enthusiasm brought him real eminence in his avocation. Bristowe, who liked to imagine himself ‘half an inch high walking through jungles of grass’, was above all a spider-watcher, whose chief preoccupation was the observation of the behaviour of spiders, their courting rituals, hunting techniques and feats of web-engineering. It took a great deal of patience and imagination to enter the profoundly mysterious world of spiders and, for example, Bristowe spent many hours trying to determine whether spiders had intelligence or experienced emotions. The bed-bound Bruno

similarly watches the spider and the fly and asks himself whether the fly felt pain or the spider felt fear. 'How mysterious life was at these extremities.' Yet, as we shall see it is similarly difficult to imagine what it would be like to be another human being experiencing these things.

Bruno dreams that he has been condemned to death. 'He woke up with a racing heart. He felt sudden instinctive relief at knowing it was a dream before he realized a moment later that it was true. He was condemned to death.' Bruno is old and sick and going to die. I do not think that I am giving any of the plot away by revealing this. We all must die sometime. The wall between Murdoch's fiction and non-fiction is fairly permeable and topics encountered in her career as an academic philosopher often resurfaced in her novels. *Bruno's Dream*, which was published in 1969, can be read as, in part, a fictional elaboration on certain issues that would be raised in her philosophical work, *The Sovereignty of Good*, which was published a year later. In the latter work she remarks on how death casts an austere light on life, in which nothing can be seen to be of any value except the attempt to be virtuous. She continues: 'It is not easy to portray death, real death, not fake prettified death. Even Tolstoy did not really manage it in Ivan Ilyich, although he did elsewhere. The great deaths of literature are few, but they show us with an exemplary clarity the way art invigorates us by a juxtaposition, almost an identification of pointlessness and value.' *Bruno's Dream* is Murdoch's response to this challenge, her attempt to outdo Tolstoy's story, 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich'.

Bruno like most of us finds it difficult to imagine not existing after death. (Yet it is curious that the thought of not existing before birth troubles very few people.) *Bruno's Dream* is a novel about dying rather than death, for, as Wittgenstein observes in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: 'Death is not an event in life'. Towards the very end of 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich', it was revealed to

Ilyich 'that his life had not been what it ought to have been but that it was still possible to put it right. He asked himself: "But what is the right thing?" and grew still, listening.' Murdoch, however, starts where Tolstoy ends, for it is her protagonist's desire to make peace with his son, Miles, that sets the novel into motion; a superficially unproblematic desire on Bruno's part to be shriven by his son sets off a storm of recriminations, jealous fears, lovers' meetings, mystical ecstasies and physical violence. There is nothing prettified about Bruno. He is old, smelly and querulous. Tears of self-pity come easily to him, but the 'world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man', as the *Tractatus* observes, and, while Bruno broods lachrymosely, the other characters race around London and, driven by love and jealousy, they take the most extraordinary emotional and physical risks with each other.

The most admirable and striking feature of *Bruno's Dream* is its polyphony. Its cast of characters exist on contrasting levels of awareness, so they experience life and apprehend each other in very different ways. Each of their personalities is so uniquely shaped and the ways that they deal with the world are so very different that they are opaque and ultimately mysterious to one another. Murdoch's fictional characters, however fantastic they seem in some ways, do resemble real human beings in their lack of transparency. Adelaide's level of awareness, for example, is low. She lived 'in a perpetual state of anxiety in a world of important signs the exact bearing of which constantly eluded her. She lived like an animal, seeing nothing clearly beyond her immediate surroundings, hiding at movements, sniffing, listening, waiting. She could see the kitchen, the paint on her dress, the broken Wedgwood cup. But even Stadium Street was already a mystery to her: and the two largest portents in her life, Danby and Will, were almost entirely mysterious and terrifying.' Adelaide's lover, Danby, when we first encounter him seems to be *un*

homme moyen sensual, whose way of apprehending the world is not vastly more profound than that of Adelaide. He is not especially intelligent, his emotions are commonplace and he asks little of the world. However, his life will be changed by his encounter with Miles's sister-in-law, Lisa, who is a kind of godless mystic. Lisa is characterised by Miles's wife Diana as someone who 'wants to be nothinged'.

Miles (who at first preferred to describe Lisa as a masochist) is himself also a kind of mystic, dedicated to his poetry and waiting, like Rilke, for his inspirational angel to descend. While he waits, he keeps a *Notebook of Particulars*, through which he schools himself in attention to the world and tries to *see* things – to *see* the precise brown of a fallen leaf, the ecstatic flight of a pigeon or the vibrations of twilight. Miles is pursuing a literary version of secular sainthood and his sense that true observation must involve self-abnegation has unmistakable echoes of the teachings of the French philosopher, Simone Weil. Weil, who died in London in 1943, is together with Plato and Ludwig Wittgenstein, one of the incongruously solemn brooding presences behind Murdoch's comic novel. In *La Pesanteur et la Grâce* and in other writings, Weil taught that good art is the product of good morals and that true attention involved forgetting oneself in order to register the full reality of the world around one. 'Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer.' In *Bruno's Dream*, both Miles and his creator appear to be engaging in observation as prayer. Miles's course is not an easy one and, faced with Bruno's demands to be visited and forgiven, Miles reflects that he 'did not want emotions and memories and scenes and unmanageable unforeseeable situations. He did not want to go through the rigmarole of forgiving and being forgiven.' But all of that is, of course, precisely what he will get, for *Bruno's Dream* is composed of nothing but emotions, memories, unforeseeable situations and bizarre rigmaroles.

Almost all the characters in the novel exist on a level of awareness that is somewhere on the spectrum between Adelaide on the one hand and Miles on the other. Nigel, however, is wholly exceptional. *Bruno's Dream* plays complicated intertextual games with other books. When Tolstoy's Ivan Ilyich became incapable of looking after himself, he acquired the ideal male nurse. This was a peasant called Gerassim, who was always cheerful, always attentive and never repelled by the disagreeable tasks inherent in caring for the dying. No trouble was too much for this angelic carer. In *Bruno's Dream*, Nigel, Will's twin brother, performs similar services for Bruno and he does so with similarly unfailing thoughtfulness and courtesy. Yet, whereas Gerassim is a simple peasant, Nigel is a dark parody of Tolstoy's virtuous invention, for Nigel is weirdly creepy and not at all simple. At one level he can be taken to be a common voyeur and a snitch. At another level, he can be viewed as an all-seeing mystic, who sacrifices flowers to the Thames, as if he were a Hindu standing on the bank of the Indus. (Murdoch playfully inserts strings of gnomic propositions that have been extracted from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* into Nigel's mystic meditations.) As he meditates, he is transported into a different tense from the rest of the characters, for he moves into the continuous present, whereas ordinary mortals like Adelaide, Danby and Lisa remain stuck in the past. But Nigel's mystic awareness seems to approximate to omniscience and so there is also the possibility that he is more than a mystic who is hungry for God. It may be that Nigel, despite his apparent cruelty and hopelessly mortal loves, is actually God. Nigel enigmatically suggests to Lisa that he is a false god, but that a false god is still a kind of god. 'The false god is the true God. Up any religion a man may climb.' Nigel is the most opaque of all the characters in *Bruno's Dream* and I doubt if even his creator knew quite who or what her creation was.

In his farewell letter to Danby, Nigel, having pointed out what a 'trouble-maker' love is, adds that it 'is a weird thought that anyone is *permitted* to love anyone and in any way he pleases' and that is pretty well what happens throughout the novel. While Bruno waits for death, the other characters collide with one another and fall in love, renounce love and experience quasi-mystical epiphanies. There is a switchback quality to the sequences of linked revelations and self-discoveries. For example, Danby's panicky giddiness when he first sees Lisa is as nothing compared to Miles's prophetic terror when he belatedly realises that Lisa can be courted and that he is doomed to love her. After he has confessed his love to Lisa, the 'black joy returned to him and stretched him out on the rack of love'. Then when Lisa, who loves Miles, nevertheless decides to leave for Calcutta to devote her life to The Save the Children Fund, Miles undergoes a spiritual and physical crisis, at the end of which the muse descends upon him and he knows with the grace of certainty that he is at last truly a poet. A little later yet and Lisa is telling Danby that she has finally discovered that she is a woman who needs 'warmth and love, affection, laughter, happiness, all the things I'd done without', so Miles is renounced in favour of Danby.

In *Bruno's Dream*, as in so many of Murdoch's novels, the waltz of changing partners is quite dizzying and in *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1976) Malcolm Bradbury has wickedly parodied this distinctive aspect of Murdoch's plotting. There comes a point in Bradbury-as-Murdoch's *The Sublime and the Ridiculous* when Lavinia tells Alex that she is in love with Fred:

"“You can't be,” said Alex, speaking without thought, absorbed in his own misery, “Augustina is in love with Fred. Hugo is in love with Augustina, Flavia is in love with Hugo, Fred is in love with Flavia, Moira is in love with Fred, I am in love with Moira, and you are in love with me.”

"No, Fred ... Hugo ... Alex rather," said Lavinia, her voice trembling, "I'm afraid you have it *all the wrong way round*. I am in love with Fred, you are in love with me, Moira is in love with you, and you utterly missed out Leo, who is unutterably particular as anyone else, and who is in love with Moira."

"But how, why?" Alex murmured, his hands over his face.

"It's one of the wonders of the world."

The ritual dance and the almost arbitrary exchange of partners reflects Murdoch's belief in the absolute nature of the demands made by love, as well as her wish to give her characters a degree of freedom. The world they inhabit is chancy and contingent. The shattering, self-annihilating demands made by the sudden apprehension of love are like foretastes of death. But this kind of plotting is also the engine of comedy; at times indeed it generates a bedroom-farce concatenation of misunderstandings as when Danby, possessed by his newly discovered love for Lisa, climbs over the garden wall of Miles's house and creeps up to the house to spy upon Lisa, who is sitting with her sister Diana, and Diana's husband, Miles, but he is spotted through the window by Diana. Diana, who is under the misapprehension that Danby is possessed by love for her, slinks out into the rain to send him away before she is discovered, but their hasty tryst is interrupted by Miles, who sends Diana back indoors. Miles is aware that it is Lisa that Danby has come for, but his attempts to get Danby to leave straightaway are interrupted by Lisa herself ...

A novel that was just about levels of awareness, epiphanies of love and self-abnegation and the pursuit of the Good in a Godless world would be somewhat tiresome. But *Bruno's Dream* is about spiders and stamps, as well as Danby's and Diana's passion for the foxtrot, Auntie's crazy claims to be a Russian aristocrat, Will's determination to kill Danby in a duel if he can and the Thames bursting its

banks. According to the *Tractatus*, 'It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists.' The world conjured up by *Bruno's Dream* is not that of some shadowy thought experiment, but of 'sinful London and the flooding Thames and the grimy ringed towers of Lots Road power station'. But it *is* a conjuring trick and, though the physical appearance of the seedier parts of 1960s Battersea and Chelsea is repeatedly evoked and meditated on by the protagonists who inhabit the area, nevertheless, this particular version of south-west London is a dreamscape. For Bruno, imminent death is a kind of wake-up call. His whole life has been a kind of dream and Bruno's London is an elaborate version of Plato's cave in which men are imprisoned and so constrained that they can only see the shadows of things. In order to become virtuous, it is necessary to wake up. As *The Sovereignty of Good* puts it, 'The idea of a good man living in a private dream world seems unacceptable ... the chief enemy of excellence in morality (and also in art) is personal fantasy: the tissue of self-aggrandising and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what there is outside one.'

In his very last days Bruno is naturally confused and deluded about many things. He believes that he did actually write a two-volume monograph, *The Great Hunting Spiders*, rather than just vaguely plan to do so one day. He has no idea who the woman is who holds his hand. He observes his ominous dressing gown moving closer to the foot of the bed. However, faced by the absolute nature of imminent extinction, he has realised the one big important thing – that his wife Janie so many years ago faced with the same absolute, must in her last moments have forgiven him for his betrayal of her. Bruno dreams and the people in his dream also dream. In much the same way that the filmmaker, Derek Jarman presented *The Tempest* as Prospero's dream, so that the storm, the shipwrecked crew, Miranda, Ariel and Caliban are all figments in Prospero's feverish

imaginings, so also I believe that Bruno's dream is the stuff of the novel and that all the characters in it are in his dream, trapped in his web of consciousness, and, when he dies, they will be gone too.

Robert Irwin
September, 2000

BRUNO WAS WAKING up. The room seemed to be dark. He held his breath, testing the quality of the darkness, wondering if it was night or day, morning or afternoon. If it was night that was bad and might be terrible. Afternoon could be terrible too if he woke up too early. The drama of sleeping and waking had become preoccupying and fearful now that consciousness itself could be so heavy a burden. One had to be cunning. He never let himself doze in the mornings for fear of not being able to fall asleep after lunch. The television had been banished with its false sadnesses and its images of war. Perhaps he had nodded off over his book. He had had that dream again, about Janie and Maureen and the hatpin. He felt about him and began to push himself up a little on his pillows, his stockinged feet scrabbling inside the metal cage which lifted the weight of the blankets off them. Tight bed clothes are a major cause of bad feet. Not that Bruno's feet minded much at this stage.

It was not night, thank God. The cowering mind and body fidgeted, discovering themselves in time. He remembered, or somehow knew, that it was the afternoon. The curtains were tightly pulled, but there was a cold reddish glow about the edges. The sun must be shining out there, the chilly spring sun, casting a graceless light upon sinful London and the flooding Thames and the grimy ringed towers of Lots Road power station which would be

visible from the window when Adelaide came at five o'clock to pull the curtains. He reached for his glasses and held his watch up towards the dim curtain-edge and made out that it was four fifteen. He wondered if he should call out to Adelaide but decided not to. He could manage three quarters of an hour without the horrors. And Adelaide was a rather irritable servant who disliked a premature summons. Or perhaps she had become irritable only in the last year. Did she smash the best plates on purpose? There were always crumbs on the tray. He was so old now and he had been ill so tediously long.

No letters today. There would be none by the afternoon post. But when five o'clock came it was a cosy time of day, the best time really, with tea and muffins and anchovy toast and a new kind of jam and the *Evening Standard* and then Danby coming home from the printing works. It was nicer in winter when there was a coal fire in his room and it was dark outside. That lucid spring sun was his enemy and the interminable summer evenings were a torture to the mind. He would have liked a coal fire now, only it made so much work and even Nigel who thought of most things had not thought of that. Bruno would have tea, making it last as long as possible, then read the *Evening Standard*, starting with the strip cartoons, then six o'clock news on the wireless, then talk for half an hour to Danby, not about business of course but about the funny things that happened in Danby's day. Danby always had funny things in his day. Then play telephone perhaps or look at the stamps and then it would be seven and he could start drinking champagne, then read some spider books or a detective novel, then it would be supper brought by Nigel, and then talk with Nigel and then settle down for the night by Nigel. Soft padding Nigel with the angel fingers. Danby said Nigel was unreliable and threatened to sack him once. Danby must not know that Nigel broke the Simla cup. Bruno must remember to say that he broke it himself.

But of course Danby would not send Nigel away if Bruno did not want. Nigel was not really a trained nurse, he had just been an orderly or something, but he was so good with pillows and helping out of bed, he was so gentle. Danby was a kind son-in-law to Bruno. He would never send the old man to a home, Bruno knew that. It was years now since Danby had absolutely insisted that Bruno should come to stay with him and be looked after. Danby was kind, though no doubt it was all a matter of temperament and good health and being always hungry and ready for a drink. Danby was the sort of man who, if civilisation were visibly collapsing in front of him, would cheer up if someone offered him a gin and French. God knows what Bruno's daughter had seen in Danby, Gwen such a strong serious girl and Danby a shambler through pubs. Women were unaccountable. Yet they had seemed to love each other. He could remember that much, though poor Gwen had died so long ago.

He could see now in the twilight of the room the hump of the foot-cage, the big wooden box on the table which held the stamp collection, the bottle of champagne on the marble-topped bookcase, and near it upon the wall the square framed photograph of his wife Janie. Janie had died twenty years before Gwen, but they seemed equally far away now. Gwen's photo was still downstairs on the piano. He could not bring himself to ask for it to be brought. Three weeks ago he had overheard Adelaide saying to Nigel, 'He won't be coming downstairs any more.' He had felt a sense of injustice and a thrill of fright. How could he concede that 'any more'? He had not been downstairs for more than a month. But that was 'not any more'. He could still get to the lavatory quite easily. Yet why was Nigel always talking about bedpans now and saying how easy they were and suggesting that today he was surely too tired to go? Was Nigel preparing him for that time? Well, it was not yet. He was sure of that, although he no longer wanted

to know what it was that Danby and the fool doctor were whispering about on the landing. The fool doctor had said he might live for years. 'You'll outlive us all!' he had said, laughing healthy laughter and looking at his watch. Years might mean anything. He must live three years anyway, he had to do that so as to cheat the Income Tax, to live three years was a statutory requirement.

When I ought to be thinking about death I am thinking about death duties, thought Bruno. That was not really altruism. It was more like a pathetic inability, even now, to divest himself of a sense of property. It was all very confusing.

He felt quite muzzy today, it was those tablets, though they did stop the pain. Or perhaps those bromide sleeping pills were poisoning him slowly. Sometimes he got muddled, a dislocated feeling quite unlike the euphoria of the champagne, and overheard himself talking aloud without knowing what he was talking about. One million brain cells were destroyed every day after the age of twenty-five, Danby had told him once, having read it in the Sunday paper. Could there be any brain cells left at that rate when one was well over eighty, Bruno wondered. Some days were clearer. There was so much less pain now. Wonderful what science can do. He must find out about a deed of gift and make the stamp collection over to somebody and not let the Income Tax have it. The stamp collection should fetch twenty thousand pounds. Twenty thousand pounds tax free was worth anybody's having. How his father had hated giving it to him at the end. He could still see with clarity, a little coloured picture in the nutshell of his mind, the thin white hand pushing the box towards him along the mahogany table. His dying father saying to him with bitterness, 'You'll sell it, Bruno you fool, and you'll be cheated royally.' Well, he had not sold it, he had even added to it a little, he had even loved it a little, though he was never a serious philatelist like his father. He

had kept it for a rainy day, and now his life was nearly over and there had been no rainy day. He might have had a world tour. Or bought great works of art and enjoyed them. Or had oysters and caviare every day. Or given it to Oxfam. He must find out about the deed of gift, how it worked, only he did not like to ask Danby. Danby was very kind but he was a thoroughly worldly man. Danby must be wondering who would get the stamps. Bruno wondered too. His son-in-law Danby or his son Miles? But it was years since he had seen Miles. Miles had rejected him long ago.

Of course they all caused him pain, all the time, they just could not help it. He could spy their assumptions, their thoughts which no longer ended in him but sped away past him into that unimaginable time when he would no longer be. He had become a monster to them. 'A fine old man,' he had overheard someone calling him more years ago than he liked to think of. What was he now? In his own consciousness he was scarcely old at all. He could see that his hands had aged. He noticed that with puzzlement as he promenaded the two twisted dried up heavily spotted things upon the counterpane. He no longer looked into the mirror though he could feel sometimes like a mask the ghost of his much younger face. He glimpsed himself only in the averted eyes of Danby and Adelaide, in the fastidious reluctances which they could not conceal. It was not just the smell, it was the look. He knew that he had become a monster, animal-headed, bull-headed, a captive minotaur. He had a face now like one of his spiders, *Xysticus* perhaps, or *Oxyptila*, that have faces like toads. Below the huge emergent head the narrow body stretched away, the contingent improbable human form, strengthless, emaciated, elongated, smelly. He lived in a tube now, like *Atypus*, he had become a tube. *Soma sema*. His body was indeed a tomb, a grotesque tomb without beauty. How differently death appeared to him now from how it had seemed even three years ago when he still had his white

hair. Real death was nothing to do with obelisks and angels. No wonder they all averted their eyes.

The printing works ought to be a kind of monument only he still thought of the works as his father's creation. Gater and Greensleave. Greensleave and Odell it ought to be now with Danby in charge, only Danby had refused to change the name although old Gater had been dead these forty years. There had been a bad patch after the war when it was so hard to get spare parts for the American presses, but things had picked up somehow. Was that due to Danby? Variety was the secret, and nothing too humble: programmes, catalogues, leaflets, posters, Bingo cards, students' magazines, writing paper. Bruno had done his best for the place. He had been born to it, for it, practically in it with the clack of monotype machines in his infant ears. But he had never felt at home with printers and their strange private language had always been for him a foreign tongue. He had been always a little afraid of the works, just as he had been afraid of the horses which his father had forced him to ride when he was a child. It was different for Danby who had no natural bent and no creative gifts and was not even an intellectual, and who had taken to printing when he married Gwen as if this were the most natural thing in the world. Bruno, who never got over thinking Danby a fool, had resented that calmness. Yet it was Danby who had turned out to be the business man.

Bruno had wanted to study zoology and not to go into the printing works. His father had made him study classics and go into the printing works. How had he made him? Bruno could not remember. Only through business, only through money, had he ever really communicated with his father. Because of certain punishments he had forgotten almost everything about his father, who remained nevertheless in his life as a source of negative energy, a spring of irritation and resentment, a hole through which things drained away. He could flush with anger even now

when thinking of his father, and even now the old hatred came to him fresh and dark, without images. Yet he could see his mother so clearly and see that particular strained smile on her face as she tried to persuade her husband, and the tones of her voice came to him clearly over an interval of eighty years. 'George, you must be more gentle with the boy.'

I ought to have been a recluse, Bruno thought, lived in the country like an eighteenth century clergyman with my books of theology and my spiders. The proper happiness of his life, the thing which he had so completely mislaid, came to him always associated with his mother, and with memories of summer nights when he was sixteen, seeing in the light of his electric torch the delicate egg-laying ritual of the big handsome *Dolomedes* spider. O spiders, spiders, spiders, those aristocrats of the creepy crawly world, he had never ceased to love them, but he had somehow betrayed them from the start. He had never found an *eresus niger*, though as a boy his certainty of finding one had seemed to come direct from God. His projected book on *The Mechanics of the Orb Web* had turned into an article. His more ambitious book, *The Spiders of Battersea Park*, had shrunk to a pair of articles. His monograph on the life and work of C. A. Clerck was never published. His book on *The Great Hunting Spiders* did not get beyond the planning stage. He corresponded for several years with Vladimir Pook, the eminent Russian entomologist, and Pook's great two-volume work *Soviet Spiders*, inscribed to *B. Greensleave, an English friend and a true lover of spiders*, was among his most treasured possessions. But he had never accepted Pook's invitation to visit Russia; and it was Pook who had written the last letter.

What had happened to him and what was it all about and did it matter now that it was practically all over, he wondered. It's all a dream, he thought, one goes through life in a dream, it's all too *hard*. Death refutes induction.

There is no 'it' for it to be all about. There is just the dream, its texture, its essence, and in our last things we subsist only in the dream of another, a shade within a shade, fading, fading, fading. It was odd to think that Janie and Gwen and his mother and for all he knew Maureen now existed more intensely, more really, here in his mind than they existed anywhere else in the world. They are a part of my life-dream, he thought, they are immersed in my consciousness like specimens in formalin. The women all eternally young while I age like Tithonus. Soon they will have that much less reality. This dream stuff, this so intensely his dream stuff, would terminate at some moment and be gone, and no one would ever know what it had really been like. All the effort which he had put into making himself seemed vanity now that there were no more purposes. He had worked so hard, learning German, learning Italian. It seemed to him now that it had all been vanity, a desire at some moment which never came, to impress somebody, to succeed, to be admired. Janie had spoken such beautiful Italian.

As one grows older, thought Bruno, one becomes less moral, there is less time, one bothers less, one gets careless. Does it matter now at the end, is there really nothing outside the dream? He had never bothered with religion, he had left that to the women, and his vision of goodness was connected not with God but with his mother. His grandmother had had evening prayers every night with the servants present. His mother had gone to church every Sunday. Janie had gone to church at Christmas and Easter. Gwen was a rationalist. He had gone along with them and lived in casual consciousness through the life and death of God. Was there any point in starting to think about it all now, in setting up the idea of being good now, of repenting or something? Sometimes he would have liked to pray, but what is prayer if there is nobody there? If only he could believe in death-bed repentance and instant salvation. Even

the idea of purgatory was infinitely consoling: to survive and suffer in the eternal embrace of a totally just love. Even the idea of a judgement, a judgement on his cruelty to his wife, his cruelty to his son. Even if Janie's dying curses were to drag him to hell.

It must be ten years since he had seen Miles, and that had been about the deeds of the house in Kensington which had been let and which Miles wanted to sell. The house was in Janie's name, bought with Janie's money, and of course she had left everything to the children. Before that he had met Miles at Janie's funeral, at Gwen's funeral, and there had been one or two other encounters about money. Miles, so cold, so unforgiving, writing those regular patronising letters for Christmas and birthday: *I always think of you with affection and respect*. It could not be true. He had thought his son distinguished. He had admired him for refusing to go into the works, envied him perhaps. Yet Miles had not done all that much with his life. How hard it was to believe that Miles must be over fifty. He was an able civil servant, they told Bruno, but nowhere near the top. And then there had been all that poetry nonsense, getting him nowhere.

If only certain things had not been said. One says things hastily, without meaning them, without having thought, without understanding them even. One ought to be forgiven for those hasty things. It was so unfair to have been made to carry the moral burden of his careless talk, to carry it for years until it became a monstrous unwilled part of himself. He had not wanted Miles to marry an Indian girl. But how soon he would have forgotten his theories when confronted with a real girl. If only they had all ignored his remarks, if only they had made him meet Parvati, let him meet Parvati, instead of flying off and building up his offence into a permanent barrier. If they had only been gentle with him and reasoned with him instead of getting so highminded and angry. It all happened

so quickly, and then he had been given his role and condemned for it. And Miles said he had said all those things he was sure he had never said. There were so many misunderstandings. Gwen tried a little. But even Gwen did not have the sense to argue with him properly. And then Parvati was killed so soon after the marriage. It was not till much later that he even saw a picture of her, a snapshot taken of her and Gwen in Hyde Park, enlaced together, their arms around each other's waists. Gwen had taken Parvati's long black plait of hair and drawn it round over her own shoulder. They were laughing. Even that snapshot might have brought him round.

Miles had forgiven nothing. Perhaps it was her death that fixed him in that endless resentment. The often quoted remark about 'coffee-coloured grandchildren'. Well, there had been a judgement. Bruno had no grandchildren. Gwen and Danby, childless, Miles and Parvati, childless, Miles and – Bruno could not recall the name of Miles's second wife, he had never met her. Oh yes, Diana. Miles and Diana, childless. Was there any point in trying even now to be reconciled, whatever that meant? It was a mere convention after all that one ought to be on good terms with one's son or father. Sons and fathers were individuals and should be paid the compliment of being treated as such. Why should they not have the privilege, possessed by other and unrelated persons, of drifting painlessly apart? Or so he had said to Danby, many years ago, when the latter had questioned him about his relations with Miles. Danby had probably been worrying about the stamps.

Of course Miles's resentment had started much earlier with the Maureen business. Had Janie told them about it or had the children just guessed? He would like to know that. The dark-eyed handsome censorious pair, whispering, looking at him unsmilingly. Gwen had come back to him much later, but Miles had never come, and that old bitterness had entered into what happened afterwards, so

that the two guilts seemed to be entwined. No one had ever understood about Maureen and it was now too late to try to explain it all and who could it be explained to? Not to Danby, who would just laugh, as he laughed at everything, at life, even at death. He said he found Gwen's death comical, his own wife's death comical. It was years later of course, long after that terrible meaningless leap from the bridge. Could he explain to Miles about Maureen and would Miles listen? He was the only person left in the world who cared about it any more. Could he compel Miles to see it all as it really was? Could Miles forgive him on behalf of the others or would it all be coldness and cruelty and a final increase of horror?

Janie had called Maureen a pathetic little tart. But how remote words, particularly angry words, are from the real thing at which they aim. Of course Maureen had had a lot of money out of him. Janie had forced him to reckon up how much. But money had not entered into his real relationship with Maureen, and it had not been just bed either, but somehow joy. Maureen had been sweetness, innocence, gentleness, gaiety, and peace. He bought her sheets and new curtains and cups and saucers. Playing at domesticity with Maureen gave him a pleasure which he had never had in setting up house with Janie. That had been a matter of quarrels about antique furniture with Janie's mother. Janie had equipped the house: she had not expected him to be interested. Maureen singing in her little Liverpool Irish voice *Hold that tiger, hold that tiger*. Maureen swaggering in the new short skirts. Maureen, dressed only in a blue necklace, dancing the charleston. Her little flat, full of the paraphernalia of her millinery trade, was like an exotic bird's nest. Once when he returned home covered with feathers and Janie noticed he said he had been to the Zoo. Janie believed him. Maureen laughed for hours.

Well, not perhaps innocence. How did she live? She never seemed to sell any of those hats. She said she