

MRS
DALLOWAY

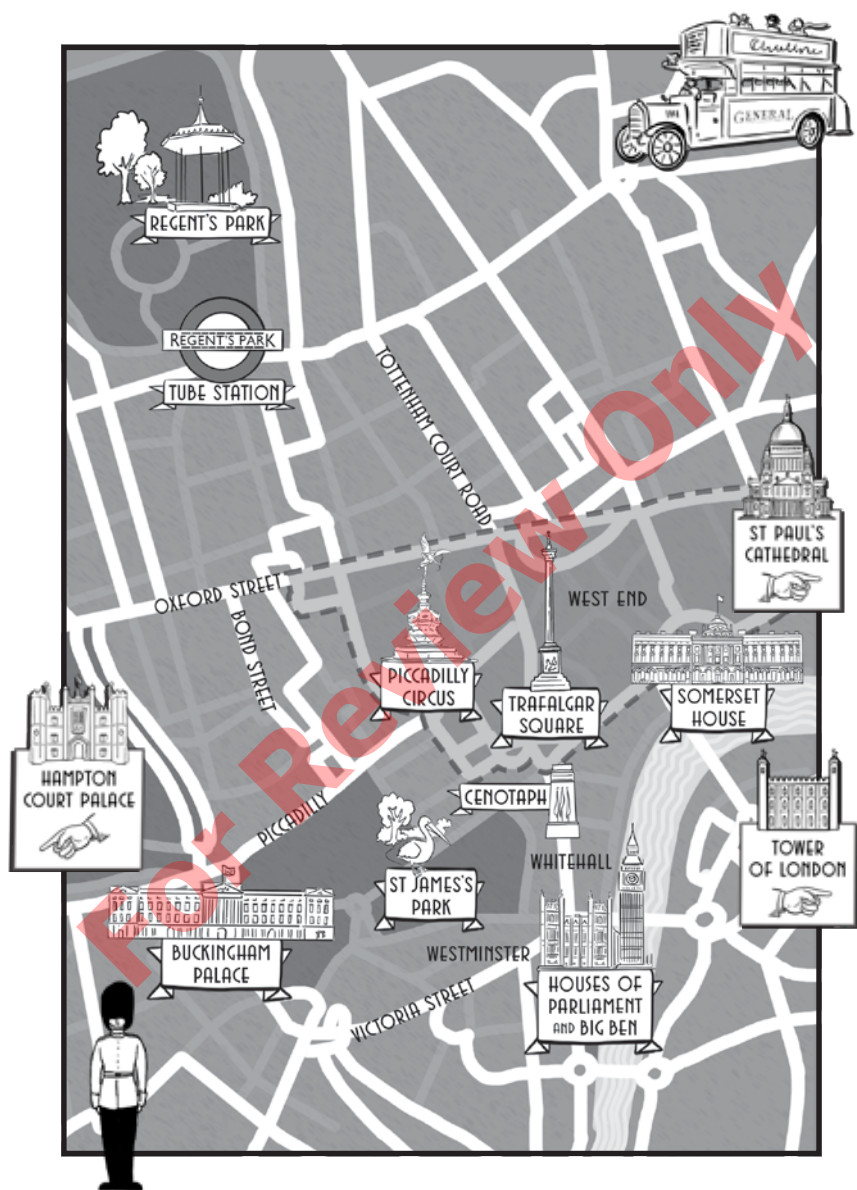
VIRGINIA WOOLF



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Map of London



Mrs Dalloway

Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy had more than enough to do. The doors would be taken off for the party; Rumpelmayer's men were coming to do it. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning – fresh as if presented to children on a beach.

What fun! What a **plunge**! For that's how it had always seemed to her, when she had thrown open the **French windows** at Bourton and **plunged** into the open air. There, it was stiller, quieter than this, of course. How fresh, how calm the air was in the early morning, like the kiss of a wave, cool and sharp. And yet it was **solemn** (for a girl of eighteen as she had then been), standing there and feeling that something awful was about to happen. She was looking at the flowers, at the trees with smoke rising through them, at the birds rising and falling. She was standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, "Daydreaming among the vegetables?" – was that it? Or did he say "I prefer men to cauliflowers?" Was that what he said? He must have said it early one morning when she had gone out into the garden. Peter Walsh. He would be back from India soon – June or July, she forgot which, for his letters were awfully dull. It was his sayings that **one** remembered; and his eyes, his pocket-knife, his smile, his moods. And how strange it was, when millions of things had disappeared, to remember a few sayings like this about cabbages.

She paused at the edge of the pavement, waiting for a van to pass. A **charming** woman, her neighbour Scrope Purvis thought her (knowing her as one knows the people who live next door in Westminster). She was like a bird, blue-green, light, full of life, though she was over fifty and he noticed that her hair had turned very white since her illness. There she stood, waiting to cross, perfectly **upright**, never seeing him.

Having lived in Westminster so long – was it twenty years now, or more? – Clarissa felt the beat of calm, a pause, (but that might be her heart, affected by **influenza**, the doctors had told her), before Big Ben sounded. There! First a warning, musical; then the hour, final. We are such fools, she thought, crossing Victoria Street, for loving life so much: these crowds, this noise, this movement. Carriages, motor cars, vans, bands playing in the parks, and the strange high singing of some aeroplane up above. That was what she loved: life, London, this moment of June.

For it was the middle of June. The War was over, except for someone like Lady Bexborough who had opened a church **fête**, they said, with the **telegram** in her hand. John, her favourite, was killed. But it was over, thank Heaven – it was over. It was June. The King and the Queen were at Buckingham Palace. And everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a stirring of life, wrapped in the soft, grey-blue morning air. And she, too, loving it as she did, was a part of it, for that very night she was going to light a **spark**, to give her party.

But how strange the silence was, on entering St James's Park; the **mist** on the lake, the slow-swimming, happy ducks. And there, coming along on some important business, handsome,

manly, almost too perfectly dressed, was her old friend Hugh Whitbread – the admirable Hugh!

“Good morning to you, Clarissa!” announced Hugh, rather **extravagantly**, since they had known each other as children. “Where are you going?”

“I love walking in London,” said Mrs Dalloway. “Really, it’s better than walking in the country.”

Hugh and Evelyn were in London, unfortunately, to see doctors. Clarissa could not count the times she had visited Evelyn Whitbread in hospital. Was Evelyn ill again? She was not at all her usual **self**, Hugh told her, not needing to say more, for Clarissa understood at once in her sisterly way. At the same moment she felt oddly **aware** of her hat. Perhaps it was not right for the early morning, was that it? For Hugh always made her feel like a girl of eighteen, as he moved on, raising his own hat rather extravagantly and promising to come to her party. He might be only a little late after the garden party at Buckingham Palace. But she always felt attached to him, having known him so long, and thought him a good man in his way, though Richard was nearly driven mad by him. As for Peter Walsh, he had never to this day forgiven her for liking Hugh.

She could remember **scene** after scene at Bourton – **quarrelling** with Peter. Hugh was never Peter’s equal, of course, but was not such a fool as Peter believed. When Hugh’s old mother wanted him he went, without a word, unselfishly. Peter would say that Hugh had no heart, no brain, nothing but the **manners** of an English gentleman, but that was just her dear Peter at his worst. He could be impossible, unbearable, but wonderful to walk with on a morning in June like this.

For she and Peter could be parted for hundreds of years; (she never wrote him a letter and his were so dull); but suddenly she would wonder – If he were with me now, what would he say? He would not notice the beautiful day, the trees and the grass, and the little girl in pink – Peter never saw a thing of all that. It was the **state** of the world that interested him, and the failings of her own character. How they quarrelled! He said she would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of her stairs, greeting her guests, and be the perfect hostess. (She had cried over that in her bedroom.)

So she would find herself in St James's Park, still arguing with herself that she had been right not to marry him. For in marriage there must be a little independence between people living together every day in the same house, which Richard gave her, and she gave him. (Where was Richard this morning, for example? At some government meeting, but she never asked what.) But with Peter everything had to be shared. And it was unbearable. When it came to that scene in the garden by the **fountain**, she had to break with him or they would both have been destroyed; though she had felt the pain for years, like an arrow in her heart. Then there had been the horror of hearing at a concert that he had married a woman he met on the boat going to India! Never would she forget all that! Cold and heartless, he had called her. She would never understand how he cared, he said. And there was no need for her to waste her **pity**. He did not need it, he was perfectly happy, though he had never done anything they talked of. His whole life had been a **failure**. It made her angry still.

She had reached the park gates. She stood for a moment, looking at the buses in Piccadilly.

She would not say of anyone in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time incredibly old. She had a lasting feeling, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being far, far out to sea and alone; a feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or anything but ordinary. She knew nothing: no languages, no history; she hardly ever read a book except in bed. Yet she was completely **fascinated** by all this life passing before her; and she would not say of Peter, or of herself, I am this, I am that.

Her only **gift** was knowing at once what people were like, she thought, walking on. She remembered the house at Bourton, full of people, lit up for parties at night; she remembered her sister Sylvia and Sally Seton – such crowds of people dancing all night. But everyone remembered; what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, that one day all this must go on without her? Did she mind, or was it **comforting** to believe that death was an end? But still she believed that here, there, in the streets of London, somehow she survived, Peter survived. She was part of the trees at home, of the house there, of the people she had never met, laid out like a mist between the people she knew best. Her life, her self, spread far.

But what past was she dreaming of as she looked into the bookshop window, reading Shakespeare's poem about death in the open book?

Fear no more the heat of the sun