



## LATE AT NIGHT (1917)

By Katherine Mansfield

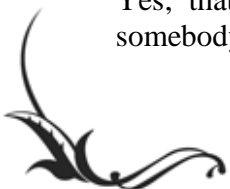
*(Virginia is seated by the fire. Her outdoor things are thrown on a chair;  
her boots are faintly steaming in the fender.)*

Virginia (*laying the letter down*): I don't like this letter at all—not at all. I wonder if he means it to be so snubbing—or if it's just his way. (*Reads*). “Many thanks for the socks. As I have had five pairs sent me lately, I am sure you will be pleased to hear I gave yours to a friend in my company.” No; it can't be my fancy. He must have meant it; it is a dreadful snub.

Oh, I wish I hadn't sent him that letter telling him to take care of himself. I'd give anything to have that letter back. I wrote it on a Sunday evening, too—that was so fatal. I never ought to write letters on Sunday evenings—I always let myself go so. I can't think why Sunday evenings always have such a funny effect on me. I simply yearn to have someone to write to—or to love. Yes, that's it; they make me feel sad and full of love. Funny, isn't it!

I must start going to church again; it's fatal sitting in front of the fire and thinking. There are the hymns, too; one can let oneself go so safely in the hymns. (*She croons*) “And then for those our Dearest and our Best”—(*but her eye lights on the next sentence in the letter*). “It was most kind of you to have knitted them yourself.” Really! Really, that is too much! Men are abominably arrogant! He actually imagines that I knitted them myself. Why, I hardly know him; I've only spoken to him a few times. Why on earth should I knit him socks? He must think I am far gone to throw myself at his head like that. For it certainly is throwing oneself at a man's head to knit him socks—if he's almost a stranger. Buying him an odd pair is a different matter altogether. No; I shan't write to him again—that's definite. And, besides, what would be the use? I might get really keen on him and he'd never care a straw for me. Men don't.

I wonder why it is that after a certain point I always seem to repel people. Funny, isn't it! They like me at first; they think me uncommon, or original; but then immediately I want to show them—even give them a hint—that I like them, they seem to get frightened and begin to disappear. I suppose I shall get embittered about it later on. Perhaps they know somehow that I've got so much to give. Perhaps it's that that frightens them. Oh, I feel I've got such boundless, boundless love to give to somebody—I would care for somebody so utterly and so completely—watch over them—keep everything horrible away—and make them feel that if ever they wanted anything done I lived to do it. If only I felt that somebody wanted me, that I was of use to somebody, I should become a different person. Yes; that is the secret of life for me—to feel loved, to feel wanted, to know that somebody leaned on me for everything absolutely—for ever. And I am strong, and far,



far richer than most women. I am sure that most women don't have this tremendous yearning to—express themselves. I suppose that's it— to come into flower, almost. I'm all folded and shut away in the dark, and nobody cares. I suppose that is why I feel this tremendous tenderness for plants and sick animals and birds—it's one way of getting rid of this wealth, this burden of love. And then, of course, they are so helpless—that's another thing. But I have a feeling that if a man were really in love with you he'd be just as helpless, too. Yes, I am sure that men are very helpless...

I don't know why, I feel inclined to cry tonight. Certainly not because of this letter; it isn't half important enough. But I keep wondering if things will ever change or if I shall go on like this until I am old—just wanting and wanting. I'm not as young as I was even now. I've got lines, and my skin isn't a bit what it used to be. I never was really pretty, not in the ordinary way, but I did have lovely skin and lovely hair—and I walked well. I only caught sight of myself in a glass to-day—stooping and shuffling along. ... I looked dowdy and elderly. Well, no; perhaps not quite as bad as that; I always exaggerate about myself. But I'm faddy about things now—that's a sign of age, I'm sure. The wind—I can't bear being blown about in the wind now; and I hate having wet feet. I never used to care about those things—I used almost to revel in them—they made me feel so *one* with Nature in a way. But now I get cross and I want to cry and I yearn for something to make me forget. I suppose that's why women take to drink. Funny, isn't it!

The fire is going out. I'll burn this letter. What's it to me? Pooh! I don't care. What is it to me? The five other women can send him socks! And I don't suppose he was a bit what I imagined. I can just hear him saying, "It was most kind of you, to have knitted them yourself." He has a fascinating voice. I think it was his voice that attracted me to him—and his hands; they looked so strong—they were such man's hands. Oh, well, don't sentimentalise over it; burn it! ... No, I can't now—the fire's gone out. I'll go to bed. I wonder if he really meant to be snubbing. Oh, I am tired. Often when I go to bed now I want to pull the clothes over my head—and just cry. Funny, isn't it!

