

from *Mrs. Dalloway*

Virginia Woolf

NOVEL EXCERPT



This version of the selection alternates original text with summarized passages. Dotted lines appear next to the summarized passages.

In the opening scene of the novel, the third-person narrator primarily presents the point of view of the character Clarissa Dalloway. Mrs. Dalloway, an upper-class woman in London, is preparing her house for a party. She decides to buy the flowers herself instead of sending her busy servant, Lucy.

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming.

Mrs. Dalloway is struck by the beauty of the June morning. She recalls the delight of opening the French windows at her father's country estate when she was eighteen. The early morning air was so fresh, calm, and still, like a wave lapping. But it was also solemn. Clarissa recalls how, at the time, she would feel that something awful was about to happen. She would stand and stare at the flowers and trees and fluttering crows. She recalls how her friend Peter Walsh would tease her. Mrs. Dalloway remembers that Peter will return from India soon. She contrasts his dull letters with other things she remembers about him, particularly his sayings.

She halts at the curb, waiting for a truck to pass. Her next-door neighbor Scrope Purvis, who thinks Mrs. Dalloway is charming, watches her. To him, she seems a bit birdlike, lively despite her age. Mrs. Dalloway has recently recovered from influenza.

... She was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness. There she perched, never seeing him, waiting to cross, very upright.

It is a bustling, noisy day in Westminster. Carriages and buses fill the streets. Although Clarissa has lived in London for over twenty years, she always senses—even in the midst of traffic—when Big Ben¹ is about to strike. She feels a suspenseful pause in the air.

There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street.

She has no idea why this so delights her. Even the poor, miserable women sheltering in doorways seem to feel the same thing, she believes. And it's because, like her, they love life. Mrs. Dalloway can see this love of life in people's faces and movements. She hears it in the sounds of traffic, of brass bands and barrel organs ...

... in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment in June.

1. **Big Ben** tall clock tower that is one of London's most well-known landmarks.

NOTES



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