

into his pockets and began to walk upstairs again in search of the coat. As once before, when he was delirious with influenza, he was saying he knew not what and embarking on endless disputatious controversies which he was mentally unequal to following. What was the absurd phrase he had just used—opportunity the equivalent of virtue? It seemed so profound when he used it; now, when he was awake again, he could see the meaningless folly of it. Really, it was rather disconcerting when your brain took forty winks like that. . . .

Once back on the roof he remembered the earlier sense that he was throwing away a rare opportunity. Why? It was an extraordinary thing, but he felt no fear. Yet why should he feel fear? Nor irritation, for that matter. Now, downstairs (when he had that ridiculous altercation about the coat) he was in a condition of what he always described to himself as "prickly heat"; his nerves seemed to stretch, stretch, stretch and finally snap; then he was like a man flayed alive! He could cry out if anyone spoke to him or touched him, even kindly; he could not bear himself, he did not know what he wanted, but he had at such times to get away to solitude lest he did irreparable injury. Always in that mood he was ready to be rude, satirical, wounding (he had said things to Lucile Welman which cut her like a lash across the face); thank God! he had managed to hang up the receiver, or run away and hide, when he had been with Idina; she only knew him as abrupt and variable, she had never seen him savage.

He never knew what brought on these attacks. That afternoon (as soon as his god-forsaken guests had left him in peace) he had been quite tranquil and contented; only when he considered the question of re-joining them did the "prickly heat" assail him, and then he had stood in the hall, tensely but vacantly blaspheming—like an angry child yelling because it had to yell. And then he had started an absurd discussion with himself about "Bleak House" . . . Prickly heat: spontaneous combustion—He was by no means sure that it *was* Bleak House. . . .