

her books all sorts of deceases, pious (you might perhaps say unctuous) and otherwise, but none of her imaginings seemed to fit in with her own experience, now that she was contemplating (she hoped from not far off) a death-bed of her own. She could not keep her attention to it : her mind strayed, and she had to make efforts to bring it back to the point again. She did not feel in the least unctuous or afraid ; she merely found the thought of it dull. And two minutes later, she gave up her meditations as a bad job, had lain down on the sofa, got the cushions thoroughly comfortable, and had begun to read the book she had not been able to begin hitherto. Almost immediately she found a split infinitive, which gave her a sense of superiority, for that was a crime of which she believed herself completely innocent. Then the story enchained her, and when Daisy returned an hour later and gave her her tea, Marion burned her mouth in her desire to get through with tea as quickly as possible, and continue reading.

But next morning her study was empty, and over the house brooded the tense quiet that hangs round the approachings of life and death. For those last days, by sheer force of that indomitable will, by sheer determination to have a festival of work and gaiety, Marion seemed to have kept her physical foe at bay. Her mind had half-defied, half-ignored it : she had been too busy to attend to it.