

The Long Chamber

By Olivia Howard Dunbar

There was perhaps no warrant for the vaguely swelling disquiet that possessed me from the moment that, late in the sultry August after noon, there arrived the delayed telegram that announced the immediate coming of Beatrice Vesper.

. . . Beatrice Vesper abruptly on her way to me, and alone—it was the most strangely unlikely news. Yet I had no cause for real concern. She would find ready conveyance over the three steep miles from the railroad—our pleasantly decaying village being unlinked with the contemporary world. And, as the others reminded me, it wasn't as though the redundant spaciousness of Burleigh House didn't seem to invite, almost to select and compel, unaccustomed guests; or as though the Long Chamber, our supreme source of pride, hadn't that morning received the final touches that consecrated it to the utmost hospitality we could offer. As for Beatrice, she would delight in the survival of Burleigh House as unfailingly as she herself would prove its most harmonious ornament. And that matter of ornament wasn't one that David and I could be said to have taken at all lightly. How prodigally, how passionately, we had spent our love and labor on the precious house, in the months since it had so unexpectedly fallen into our hands—only to admit to each other, at the end of it all, in almost hysterical dismay, that the stately interiors seemed always empty, however vociferously we strove to be at home in them. There were void, waiting spaces that not the sum of all our alien, cheerful presences could fill. We had achieved a background, but a background for brilliant life; and it was as though we, living in terms of the palest prose, defiled past it almost invisibly. The truth was that we had established no spiritual tenancy, I and that we didn't, ourselves, belong there. But though I was far from guessing with what mysterious tentacles the past would seize her, I knew that Beatrice Vesper would belong.

It was plain enough, however, from the first sight of my old friend, that she had come to me in no unhappy stress. Her secure and unvexed air was for an instant disconcerting; I had, in my panic, so prepared myself for haggard pathos. And indeed it was almost incredible that the hurrying, untender years should not have bruised so delicate a creature. With swiftly relaxing nerves I surrendered to the flattery of her explanation that when, only the day before, her husband had been summoned to Europe by cable—she herself being kept behind by the important final proof-reading of a technical work of Dr. Vesper's, to be published in the early autumn—she had from all her social resources chosen Burleigh House as her temporary refuge. . . . So that, after all, it seemed stupid to have taken fright. Beatrice and I had been the closest companions in earlier days. And doubtless I had exaggerated those conditions of her life which, for years past, had led her friends into the way of speaking of her ruefully, reminiscently, almost as if she were dead.

It was in this latter spirit that I had been speaking of her to David, only the day before, picturing her as the only woman I knew whose marriage had been complete self-immolation. Those of us who wore our fetters with a more modern jauntiness had resented, from our ill-informed distance, what seemed to be her slavish submission. She might as well have been chained in a cave—the rest of the world had not a glimpse of her. Dr. Vesper—a mild enough tyrant in appearance—did not care for society, so they had literally no visitors. There prevailed a legend that he was the most miserable of dyspeptics; and that Beatrice devoted most of her time to preparing the unheard-of substances that fed him. His financial concerns—for important

mining interests had sprung from the geological work in which he had become famous—kept him in the city throughout the year, and Beatrice had never left him for a day, even in torrid midsummer.

But David, who is sturdily unmodern, refused to be astonished. “Why not, if she’s in love with him?” he asked.

“But she’s not,” I insisted “or—she wasn’t. It’s her husband who’s in love, and with the most unheard-of concentration. He has cared for her ever since she was a child, so the thing hung over her—though I suppose that’s not a romantic way of putting it—for years before they were married. So isn’t it rather extreme for her to relinquish everything else in the world for the sake of the man she merely—likes?”

David may have submitted a discreet version of this to our old friend Anthony Lloyd, who had been with us all that summer, and I imagine that in consequence both men looked to find in Beatrice Vesper the dull, heavy-domestic type. So when, an hour after her arrival, they saw her vivid smile and smooth black hair and her young, slim figure in its mulberry-colored taffeta against the dark panels of our candle-lighted dining-room, they both bore very definite evidence of response to her loveliness. Anthony even betrayed his admiration a shade too markedly, for he had rather an assured way of paying court to women who attracted him. But his advance was deftly and unmistakably cut off. Beatrice Vesper’s wifely attitude remained true, I saw, to its severely classic pattern.

However, pitfalls of this order were easily avoided, teased as we all were by the irresistible topic of our dazzling inheritance. And David was shortly embarked upon his familiar contention that we cared much more for the place than if he had been the direct heir and we had been able to anticipate the glory of ownership.

“Oh, we’re very humble” David conceded, “but we do claim credit as resuscitators. That’s what we’ve really felt ourselves to be doing for months—breathing life into a beautiful thing that had been left for dead. And it has begun to live again, don’t you think, in a feeble way? But it’s as showmen that we’re so shockingly deficient. You see a house that Judge Timothy Burleigh built in 1723 and that was continuously lived in until they deserted it a generation ago, must—well, must have its secrets. But we have to admit we don’t know them!”

“Oh, do you think you *can* live here without knowing?” Beatrice broke out with an intensity that surprised us all. “You’ll divine them, if you learn them in no other way. Family traditions can never be smothered, you know—they cling too imperishably!”

“But the legend famine has already been relieved,” Anthony announced, “or we assume that it has. At least, we’ve found a group of old trunks, filled with papers, and they’ve all been assigned to me, to dig secrets from. I’m going to begin in the morning.”

“It’s not that Molly and I haven’t longed to dig for ourselves,” David hastily defended us, “but we haven’t had time. And as for divination—our imaginations lack the necessary point of departure because our cousins have kept all the portraits. That’s the really serious gap, you’ll notice, in our conscientious furnishing—that apparently we’ve sprung from the soil, that we haven’t an ancestor. Though of course we have seen the old pictures, long ago, or I have.”

“Oh, what were they—” Beatrice began.

“Mrs. Vesper, need you ask?” Anthony interrupted. “Wigged men with heavy, hawk-nosed faces—”

“And meek-eyed women,” David assented, laughing. “Yes, they do look like that, mostly. The Burleighs were a formidable race and their wives must have been unnaturally submissive.

“But that’s according to the Colonial portrait-painter’s conventions,” Anthony argued. “The very earliest of your portraits must have been painted less than two hundred years ago. Well, that’s time enough for fashions in portraits to change; but do human beings alter essentially? The old Burleighs cannot have been so different, inside their Colonial purple and fine linen, from you and Molly. Your hawk-nosed grandfathers must have enjoyed a joke, now and then, and those meek-eyed Patiences and Charities—mustn’t they have had their emotions?”

“There must be conditions so harsh that emotions remain latent,” I suggested, carelessly.

But Anthony never missed an occasion to dogmatize, after his own fashion: “I admit there are temperaments that cannot love, for instance. But to those that can the opportunity doesn’t fail.”

“But surely,” he roused me to protest, “there is a type of woman who never learns her own capacity, who remains ingenuous, undeveloped—”

“Only until her appointed time,” Anthony extravagantly persisted.

“What you are trying to express,” David flouted, “is the old-fashioned school-girlish belief in predestined lovers. And perhaps it has remained for you to explain what happens in case the predestined lover dies?”

“In that case he’ll come back from the dead to teach her!” But this point was made amid a shout of laughter, and we all conceded that the subject had been carried as far as it could be.

Almost immediately after dinner, Beatrice confessing that she was very tired, I rather self-consciously took a pewter candlestick from its stand in the lower hall and guided her up-stairs. And I found myself weakly unable to bid her good night without a fond proprietary emphasis on the treasures of the Long Chamber, its ancient oaken chests and still more ancient powdering-table, its carved bed and woven counterpane, even the long mirror, faintly time-blurred, in which we had been told that Anne Burleigh, the first mistress of the house, used once to contemplate her charming face and towering head-dress.

“Then, of course, it contains her image still.” Beatrice’s smiling, confident glance seemed to penetrate with singular ease the delicate clouds with which two centuries had lightly flecked the glass. “I shall see it, of course, after she gets used to me. I wonder if this was her room?”

“That is one of the thousand things we don’t know,” I lamented. “But it may well have been. It is the finest, we think, of all the rooms. Judge Timothy’s lovely young wife *should* have had it!”

“Don’t you think it’s almost heartless to have preserved her mere possessions,” Beatrice admonished me, “and yet allow the memories of her life to be so scattered? We must gather them up and piece them together!”

“Reconstruction ought not to be too difficult in her case,” I laughed. “I imagine she was a simple creature.”

It was our household custom to breakfast in our rooms, and after that to pursue our independent occupations throughout the greater part of the day. But Beatrice’s proof-sheets and documents, which were of the most inordinate bulk, and which further depressingly renewed themselves by express every few days, often consumed her evenings likewise. It had struck me that we might achieve an arid semblance of friendly intercourse if she would assign to me some clerkly and mechanical part of her labors. But I saw from her look that it was as though I had asked a priestess to delegate to me her hieratic function. Her fealty to her dingy religion of ink and paper and chemical symbols was inflexible. And unreasoning, I thought, since it had cost her the look of freshness and vigor she had worn on coming to us. The thing was consuming her—her altered face told the story. Two weeks, indeed, after she had come, I realized that we had not yet had a comfortable talk together. What, after all, did I know of this new Beatrice, except that her highly decorative presence justified our otherwise empty splendor, and that for her own part

she was working herself into an illness. She had come to us, she said, for rest and country peace and a season of friendship, but it was patent to the point of irony that she was profiting by none of these. And I did confess to myself, I remember, a secret hurt that there were so many days when she was unable, or ostensibly so, to join us at the hour of frank idleness when we took our tea under the oak-tree on the lawn, and when we always, sooner or later, fell to talking of our somewhat shadowy guest.

“Is it I whom Mrs. Vesper is avoiding?” Anthony asked, rather wistfully, one afternoon. “I’ll admit I didn’t seize her tone directly she arrived, but I have it now—completely! She would find me irreproachable if she would only mingle with us a little. How comforting it would be if she had a human liking for tennis and riding!”

“My dear Anthony, I don’t think she knows you are under the same roof, except when she sees you at dinner,” I assured him. “But she’s under the thrall of an inhuman husband who is overworking her from the other end of the world and practically denying us any share in her.”

“Are you so sure it’s overwork,” David demanded, “and not the beginning of typhoid? She does look downright ill, you know. My own impulse would be to send for a doctor. Could there be anything unwholesome about the house—any eighteenth-century germ that has escaped our scourings?”

We all brooded for a moment on the possibility this opened.

“Do you think distraction would help her?” Anthony asked. “Because I have it here!”—he tapped his breast-pocket, triumphantly. “I’ve patched together in the last few days a good part of the history of Burleigh House. I had meant not to tell you yet, but secrecy is consuming me.”

“Dole the stories out to us one at a time,” David lazily suggested, his interest half-paralyzed by the sheer weight of the August atmosphere. “We’ll inaugurate a series of Nights—if not a Thousand and One, then as many as you please. And you’ll begin to-night, of course. Can you go as far back as Judge Timothy?”

“Yes—if you would rather begin there. Though I hadn’t planned—”

“Then it’s settled,” I interrupted. And this was indeed so precisely I what we had all been thirstily waiting for that I thought it a sufficient pretext for disturbing Beatrice on the spot. Moreover, David’s hints had freshly stimulated my own smoldering anxiety in regard to my friend. I had been too passive—I should have forced her to spare herself. The unnamable fears that I had felt on the day of her arrival recurred and pierced me.

In the Long Chamber I found her rather wearily putting away her I work for the day. She stood by her table, a slender, drooping figure with a sheaf of fluttering papers in her hand, and faced me—still without the look of affectionate welcome I had so missed of late; merely with a sweet patience and courtesy. I should perhaps have approached my end by gentle, gradual arts, but my concern for her abruptly overflowed in unconsidered words. I begged her to admit to me that she wasn’t well, that I might insist on proper care for her. I blamed bitterly my own laxity in allowing her to wear herself out as she had done. The publication of her husband’s book on a certain day could not, I urged, be a matter so imperative that she must sacrifice her youth, her life, to it. By every obligation of our old friendship I implored her to intrust herself to me—and I laid especial stress on my responsibility to her absent husband.

“You were all vigor and loveliness when you came to us,” I reminded her. “And now—now—you are so changed!”

She looked at me in a half-startled fashion as I said this, and a dim, ambiguous smile trembled on her lips.

“Yes—he will find me changed.” She spoke thoughtfully, but quite without emphasis. “But that is something I must face alone.”

If she had said no more than this she would have left me with the impression that the distant Dr. Vesper was a subtler Bluebeard. And indeed a look of secrecy and dread that I now for the first time caught flowing darkly over her candid face was wretchedly that of the wife who has opened the forbidden door and is haunted by the intolerable knowledge that must shortly betray her. Could it, after all, be a worse than physical suffering that was draining her eyes of their look of life? She had begun to move uneasily about, and I felt that she would have been glad to have me leave her. But unable longer to endure the intervening shield, I made a desperate effort to demolish it, to force her reluctant confidence; and with hot cheeks and trembling voice I stammered crude, disconnected sentences on the frequent failure of men to understand women and situations, . . . on the indulgence with which we were forced to regard many masculine traits.

“Oh, you have thought that?” she interrupted me, almost shrilly— “that my husband caused me suffering? Why, Molly, I supposed you knew, that *everybody* knew, how utterly, stainlessly good he is. It is I, oh, always I, who fall short.” She took my hand gently. “You must not go until I have told you how it is.” And we sat down together.

Much of what she then told me I did indeed already know, but under a different complexion from that with which she now invested it—how at nineteen she had married Edward Vesper almost frivolously, with no sense of sacredness, lightly assuming—though this was, of course, true enough—that she was bestowing a blessing by becoming the wife of the man for whom she felt a merely childlike affection. How, afterward, she had discovered that the marriage had been urged, hurried, by her poor, desperate mother, who, with four younger children, was at the end of everything; and how Dr. Vesper’s money had supported them all ever since. . . .

“Then I saw,” Beatrice slowly went on, after a little, though I saw what the words were costing her, “how narrowly my own foolish ignorance had saved me from baseness. I had married for my own advantage a man who gave me perfect love. Facing this, I saw that from that moment I was bound to give more than I had ever dreamed of giving. And that, if I couldn’t love my husband as he so wonderfully loved me, I must at least offer him the most sedulous counterfeit I could muster. That the least abatement of unremitting devotion would be treachery. . . . Well, that has been my life, and always, until now, I have known that no woman could do more—”

She would have gone on, the momentum of an impulsive confidence is so great, but at that point the maid came in search of me, announcing dinner. So, after a violent flurry of dressing, Beatrice and I contrived, ten minutes later, to be with the others in the dining-room. The disclosure she had made to me, with its intensely characteristic light on the apparent enigmas of her marriage, seemed for the time to have loosed a painful restraint. She talked with gentle gaiety, exchanging swift jests with the imperturbable Anthony, for whom I knew she had come to have a genuine liking, and seeming humanly at home with all of us, rather than driven, as one could fancy her latterly to have been, by some invisible harriers.

It even seemed natural and expected when, after dinner, Beatrice, who had so often spent her evenings alone, chose to seat herself at the old spinet and coax from it a few dim spectral chords.

“There’s the prelude for your story, Anthony,” David remarked when she had finished.

“It’s a perfect one,” Anthony declared. “Those are, of course, the very sounds with which Anne Burleigh beguiled her solemn days.”

had caught a note in his voice that awed me a little. “Anne Burleigh—you’re to tell us of her! Then it won’t, of course, be a cheerful story. Why is it that it has always been she, rather than any of the others, for whom our hearts have vaguely ached?”

“Cheerful? But of course not,” Anthony rejoined with energy. “It can’t be that you wanted me to discover simple tales of domestic lethargy. That isn’t the sort of thing that leaves its impress on a family—and a house. That wouldn’t be a story.”

Then, as we urged him to begin, he altered his tone and turned to David a serious face. “You’ll have to understand,” he said, “that I’m taking a great liberty—with you and with your ancestors. This story that I’ve made out and that I’ll repeat to you is, as a matter of fact, very largely—inferred. It’s by no means an explicit tradition. But the inference seems to me so plain—and after living here in the house it is, oddly, so credible—and, well, you must forgive me, if, after all, you prefer to leave the inference unformulated.”

None of us spoke; and I let my sewing drop in my lap.

“As you know,” Anthony began, “Judge Timothy Burleigh married Anne Steele when she was seventeen. A year or two afterward, when they were living in this new and splendid Burleigh House, Sophia Steele, the young wife’s sister, came to pay a visit. In this young girl’s diary, which tells so much else, and which I’ve had the astonishing fortune to discover, she records her impression of her sister, who looked ‘very maidenly, though the wife of so great a man and the mistress of so fine a house.’ But I won’t read you her crabbed little sentences—you can see them for yourselves later; I’ll simply try to make a connected story. . . .

“Judge Timothy does not appear to have markedly played the lover to his charming little bride, but Sophia heard him praise her for her obedience, saying that it was the prime virtue in a wife. I had supposed that the housewives of that day had exacting responsibilities, but possibly because it was so fine a thing to be the Judge’s wife, or else because her youth exempted her, little Mistress Burleigh seems to have had abundant leisure. She would play the spinet for hours at a time or she would sit with her baby boy—”

“The boy must have been Colonel Jonathan,” David, who has always been rather too fond of facts, interposed. “Anne Burleigh had but one child.”

“You see her, don’t you, as I do,” Anthony went on, “forlorn little Maeterlinckian heroine, treated as a child by her husband and practising rigidly the submission he exacted of her? It must have been a dull household, in spite of the splendid entertaining that took place at intervals, or sister Sophia wouldn’t have had so much leisure to write in her diary. And it must have been an unnatural one, or—the climax wouldn’t have flamed so suddenly. Something had to happen in such a house—and it did happen, as I make out, when a young relative of the Burleighs from Virginia came North to seek advancement in the law through his distinguished relative, the Judge. This young man, Brian Calvert, was asked to Burleigh House as a guest. It is very plain that he was keenly admired from the first by little sister Sophia, who meticulously describes his height and beauty and ‘merry manners.’ The Judge, I imagine, did not diffuse much merriment through the house. But the Virginian probably didn’t see little Sophia; his attention was too completely and frankly absorbed. So she stayed apart, a sad, involuntary little spy, not critical or even fully comprehending, but vaguely and innocently envious, I gather, of an unknown mysterious thing with which the air about her had suddenly become surcharged. Anne Burleigh herself, poor child, was doubtless almost as far from understanding what had befallen her. At all events, there seems to have been no concealment. Anne and Calvert spent long days together, sitting under the trees in the garden. No one knows whether he said a word of love to her—I could almost believe that he did not. But the young, innocent creatures were none the less firmly

in the grasp of the elemental force that was about to shatter them. It may have been love of the kind that absolutely cannot yield to reason, and that could never adapt itself to a slow cooling and decline—”

“Of course, they had to die,” Beatrice Vesper broke in. “One cannot love like that—and live.”

Her voice held somber secrets. It was as though she were speaking of something intimately real. I tried to see her face, but the shadow veiled it.

Anthony paused for a moment as though he, too, were amazed at her interruption. “Yes,” he said, “there had to be a tragic issue. . . . The happenings of a certain day were told long after, but vaguely, in Sophia’s journal. Perhaps the child herself only suspected. . . . One day Brian Calvert was ill and remained in his room. When evening came Anne suggested taking some supper to him. The Judge reminded her, and rather ungently, that such an errand was for a servant to perform. . . . An hour later she burst into her sister’s bedroom in a passion of fear. She had for the first time eluded and disobeyed her husband, taking to Calvert’s room a porringer of gruel that she had made herself. The Judge, whom she doubtless supposed busy with his books, heard her step, followed her, and, entering the room a moment later, discovered her in Calvert’s arms. I am sure they had never kissed before, but to her husband this was no extenuation. The Judge forced Anne from the room. Listening outside, she heard the sound of swords—and more—and worse. . . . Brian Calvert was never seen again. Anne Burleigh herself fell ill, and a few months later she died.”

I felt that we had heard as much as we could bear, but David did not understand my signal, and advanced his literal and perfectly reasonable inquiry:

“Are you sure that Calvert was killed?”

“Entirely sure,” Anthony said, a little dryly, “though there isn’t a shadow of proof. Can you imagine such a husband hesitating or failing of his purpose?”

“You believe that they fought each other in this house?” David went on, in his solemn effort to realize the thing. “And there is no record of it? But where can it have been? You don’t know that, of course?”

“Yes, I know,” Anthony admitted, slowly. “It was in the guest-room. They called it the Long Chamber.”

“The Long Chamber!” David repeated. And he turned toward Beatrice his honest, unperceiving eyes.

Beatrice had been sitting motionless. Now she rose hastily. “Why should you feel it tragic that he died?” she demanded, almost with brusqueness, but without looking at any one of us. “He would have chosen it. It was no unwilling death—that much I know.” Her voice, usually so calm, was roughened with agitation. “I have stayed too long,” she added. “I am very tired and should have gone earlier. But the story held us so.

She was gone before I had found words to detain her, and we all sat silent. Then Anthony said:

“I felt it before I had half finished the story. I know it now. *She has seen Calvert’s ghost!*”

“That’s preposterous!” David exclaimed.

“Because you haven’t seen it yourself?” our friend inquired, quietly. “But, my dear David, have you ever slept in that room? And in any case what would the ghost of that young lover have to say to you?”

“Or to Beatrice Vesper, for that matter?” I added.

Anthony shrugged his shoulders. “Who knows?” he said. “I admit that if it were the usual family specter, I can’t conceive her risking a second encounter. But Calvert’s apparition—that

might perhaps be less formidable. . . . Still, it's all much queerer than I like—and I'm not even sure I want her to tell."

David began to be troubled. "Molly, you know her. We don't. Is she so infernally secretive? Could she see a ghost in our house without telling us? And why shouldn't she tell?"

I sat brooding, conscious that I was trembling a response to every lightest breath of air. There were secrets about; the troubled atmosphere was heavy with them. Something had happened to Beatrice, as any one but my dear dull David could have seen. But since we three were so blindly in the dark, how and whence could it have come? Anthony was, of course, uncommonly astute, yet I had no curiosity as to the guesses I saw him shrewdly elaborating. He did not know Beatrice's sound, unassailable simplicity as I knew it.

We were all, indeed, unnaturally alert, tensely awaiting we knew not what, so that when the door-bell rang we all started as though the sound had some portentous significance—holding our breath, fairly, until the maid came in with an envelope which she said was for Mrs. Vesper.

"It's a cable," I said. "I'll take it up to her."

A half-hour must have passed since she had gone up-stairs, yet when I knocked she came to her door fully dressed. When she saw the envelope she asked me to stay until she had read the message—which was, she told me, a moment later, from her husband. He was sailing and would arrive in a week.

With a sense of relief that was almost disloyal I welcomed this definite, prosaic event. At least it would dissipate the vapors that had gathered. "Can't we send for him to come directly here?" I suggested. "Must you meet him in New York when it is so hot and you're not really well?"

She laid her hand gently on my arm, instinctively trying to soften the harsh abruptness of what she was about to say.

"Why shouldn't I tell you? I shall never see him again."

The words sounded so unreasoning that I felt myself growing literally cold. "But, dear Beatrice—it was such a little time ago—in this very room—that you told me—"

"Of his goodness and his love. And of the obligations they imposed on me. But now—if I can't fully meet them—if I'm not the same—"

Her phrases were still without meaning to me. I tried vaguely to protest. "But your courage—"

"Oh, I had courage—for a lifetime. But I was mercifully blindfolded. Now, when I *know*—"

Anthony's confident statement recurred to me, precipitating dim suspicions, intimations, of my own.

"Beatrice, what is it that you have learned to know?" I demanded, firmly. "What is it that you have—seen?"

She cast a quick glance toward the old mirror, dull-rimmed, garlanded, in which she had gaily told me that she expected to see Anne Burleigh's child—like face. "Seen?" she repeated. "Oh, dear Molly, it's not alone what I have *seen*. . . . But there is something that lives on here, in this room, of which I merely knew the name. . . . I have felt it almost from the first moment. And there have been hours when I have so shared in it—when I have lived with an intensity I had never dreamed of—"

"Beatrice,"—I pressed her for something more definite—"you have seen Anne Burleigh?"

"Oh, it's not she who has left the deathless element," Beatrice said. "It's the man who loved her, who loved so well that he did not need to live. You see his love was so complete that it gained an earthly immortality of its own. It is here—now. I did not know such things could be. And, oh, Molly, I have tried *not* to know! You have seen how I have struggled to fill up my time

and thought with work. I have not welcomed this other new thing, I have shrunk from it. But it has seized me and stripped my eyes and dazzled them—and I know what love can be.”

“Brian Calvert has taught you!” I could not help the words. And, in spite of me, they sounded like an accusation.

“If it were only a lesson I could unlearn,” she answered, quietly. “If I could only forget the sweet terror of it all.”

“The terror of dreams and visions? But, dear Beatrice, that fades and vanishes.”

“It is already vanished. But not before it has changed me past all helping. You can see how, after this, I can never—*pretend* to love.”

I did not try to press her further, for I hoped that the next day, when Anthony’s story would be less vivid to us all, I could prevail on the desperation of her attitude. I did insist, however, that she should not spend the night alone, and she consented, after a little, that I should sleep with her. Or so, at least, we termed it. But my patient vigil told me plainly enough that poor Beatrice slept no more than I. It is true that I assumed—though how could I be sure?—that I had dispelled her disturbing phantasms. I did not, though I lay there expectant at her side, feel the clutch at my own heart of Brian Calvert’s strangely inextinguishable love; and though in the first few pale moments of dawn I saw Beatrice’s strained eyes bent steadily on Anne Burleigh’s garlanded mirror, to me its unrevealing surface presented merely a reticent blur.

It did not surprise me when, an hour later, Beatrice told me that she must leave Burleigh House that morning. And indeed it seemed that to let her go—out of the reach of the ghostliness that had so preyed upon her sensitive spirit—was, at that critical moment, the best that I could do for her. Yet, strangely, even after all that she had told me, I did not guess into what utter darkness she was going. Immune as I then believed myself to spectral invasions of my own serenity, I did not know at that time, nor until long after, how the reverberations of spent lives may sometimes sound so loud as to muffle the merely human cry. All that Beatrice Vesper saw and felt as she sat in the Long Chamber and battled ineffectually with the insistent presence, or presences, that may have abided within the distances of the dim, garlanded mirror, is still, I know, beyond my vain conjecture. And there are certain bare and almost intolerable facts that seem indeed to close the door on such imaginings. . . . For Edward Vesper never saw his wife again, and a month after Beatrice’s going word came to me that she was dead. We have closed the Long Chamber for all time.