

One

THIS SOMETHING  
COME INTO MY LIFE  
(1875-1877)

*One sees those who suffer enveloped in a sort of invisible cloud through which nothing human can pass but it loses all meaning & force: & all the goodwill & sympathy in the world are ineffectual to help. I learnt this lesson when still a boy when I used to be with Annie after Minnie died. And thus though it has not been my fate to lose part of my life by another's death I seem in a fashion to understand what sorrow is.*

Richmond Ritchie to his Sister, Gussie Freshfield  
May 1891

When her sister Minny Stephen died at the end of November 1875 in the agonies of premature labour, Annie Thackeray was staying overnight with Margaret Oliphant in Windsor. Summoned by a telegraph to return to London, the intensity of her grief was fed by feelings of guilt. She had been lost in this dark tunnel once before, after her father had suffered his fatal seizure at Christmas 1863. The loneliness this time was acute. She knew that her duty was to support Minny's husband and child, and the pathos of five-year-old Laura's uncomprehending utterances was heart-breaking – 'Why does not my mommee come?' Annie told Emily Tennyson something of Leslie Stephen's tender courage. '[He] thinks of me & of little Laura & is so gentle & noble. I think she w<sup>d</sup>. be proud of him – as she always was.'<sup>1</sup> She and Leslie were never closer than in these bleak days, but she felt isolated and despairing at times. Months later, writing about Annie to Charles Eliot Norton, Leslie reflected that 'She is left alone of her family, though her mother – strange as it sounds to me – still lives & is apparently likely to outlive many of us.'<sup>2</sup>

And yet, retreating with Leslie to Brighton after the funeral at Kensal Green, Annie was able to experience a strange calm at times, wanting to believe that the healing had begun. 'I have had one or two little nervous attacks but nothing to speak of & Leslie mopes about but nothing to speak of. I think it will take a long time & every minute is a long time now. But I could never never have believed that one could have borne it so well.' She took comfort in traditional faith, imagining Minny joined with her father's dead cousin, Jane Ritchie, 'so plainly walking in the sunshine'. She mapped out an immediate future for herself, planning to return to Brighton for a more sustained period of recovery. And then she turned back to her father's death, persuaded that Minny's illness during her last weeks had some kind of genetic link to the poor health of his own final months, rather than being solely a crisis in her pregnancy. 'I believe it is true that my darling had some illness like Papa's. What should I do now if I had not those she loved.'<sup>3</sup>

When she returned to Brighton, she was accompanied by Richmond Ritchie, the second cousin seventeen years her junior. She continued to be pursued by the same feelings of guilt that followed Thackeray's death, for in both instances she had failed to be present during the final moments. She wrote to her father's American friend, Mrs Baxter, that 'it is my Fate – & she was dead when I came back next day, with tender closed eyes and a face so radiant. It was Papis illness killed her not her little baby, w<sup>h</sup> never was born, some convulsion – We had no parting only she had been so very tender – like a mother.'<sup>4</sup> Brighton seemed dreary once Richmond had returned to Cambridge, where he was a Trinity College undergraduate, but Annie strove to believe that her life would continue to be rich by virtue of her good fortune. 'What suddenly cheered me up just now about everything – was thinking what prizes I have drawn in Life – what dear dear prizes – no one ever had such a life as mine or such love in it.'<sup>5</sup>

Back in London, Annie and Leslie spent the rest of the winter at Southwell Gardens, but before long were planning to move, wanting to escape the sadness of a house in which Minny's influence was everywhere. There seemed no question but that they would continue together under one roof. Minny would have wanted this, and just then it was what both needed. During March and April of 1876 some of the pain eased, and Annie employed her normal strategy at times of loss – she converted the sadnesses into blessings. A sequence of short notes to Jeanie Senior, the social campaigner and sister of author Thomas Hughes, give an insight into her feelings.

I like much [the] best to be treated as usual for now that time has passed & I have had a little silent time to face the truth I can only feel still that I & my Minny cant be separated death cant be wicked it doesnt undo her faithful tender love of years....

I think you know what I mean when I say how overawed I feel at my own blessings, at the thought of Minnys love & tender trust in her old sister. I can only say in my heart to her Darling we can't be not together & then it seems to me as if we were heart to heart somehow. O pray God death is not death there, any more than it is here.<sup>6</sup>

And there was Richmond to divert her. Through that long winter and into the spring, his mix of maturity and youth could always lighten her, and he would come at a moment's notice from Cambridge, 'like new life in the darkness of gloom'.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, what she regarded as a delightful tendency to turn up unexpectedly tended to irritate Leslie, who never really took to Richmond. He always resisted the clannishness of the Ritchies, and probably would have preferred the Thackeray sisters to have lived less in their cousins' pockets.

Money was a worry, for since completing *Miss Angel* in mid-1875, her *roman à clef* about the painter Angelica Kauffmann, Annie had not earned much from her writing, and this new crisis left her in no condition to work freely. There was nothing in progress, and no major project planned. She found herself envying both George Eliot and George Sand for their ability to 'strike up & begin to tune their instruments, specially G. Sand who seems to me to boom & echo all through her prefaces & sweep one into her stupid books so that it doesnt matter how stupid they are'.<sup>8</sup> During February she noted that there was just £35 in the bank, of which £27 had to be set aside for her maid's wages. Well-intentioned measures to control her outgoings did not survive long, including a resolve to reduce the costs of correspondence by taking advantage of the lower postal rate for postcards. She also tried to make savings by planning inexpensive little treats. She told Richmond that 'we will only do nice cheap things no nasty expensive ones.... We will go & see Whistlers pictures too when you come, that is also cheap & within a walk.'<sup>9</sup>

Leslie Stephen was supporting her to a degree that Annie simply did not realise and which, despite his reputation for financial caution, he never thought of denying her. In marrying Minny he had taken on a household which included not just Annie, but on occasion the two little girls to whom the Thackeray sisters acted as honorary step-aunts,

Margie and Anny, the daughters from the marriage of their father's cousin, Edward Thackeray, to their former companion, Amy Crowe. Much later, Leslie described the financial arrangements in the private memoir he wrote for the children of his second marriage. He may be forgiven the tone of self-congratulation, for ever since his marriage to Minny, and until Annie's own marriage, he had met her household costs.

I found it rather unpleasant to tell her of her debts to me. She did not quite approve of this practice. She thought or took for granted that I ought to be as careless as she was herself; and somehow it is not easy to present oneself as a creditor without appearing to be a curmudgeon. Here comes in my boast. I gave up reminding Anny of her debts, and was content to take upon myself much the largest share of the expenses – more, that is, than my proper share. I am always glad of this. From something which Anny said to me the other day, I find that she is still completely ignorant of the fact. She remembered and spoke with more than abundant gratitude of a present which I was afterwards able to give her. I gave her £500 to enable her to buy a house upon her marriage; and she talked about repaying this some day or of her children repaying mine. I mention this here, partly because I wish you to understand that should such a repayment be offered – which, I confess, strikes me as improbable – it is not to be accepted. I am too proud, I hope, to turn any gifts of mine into loans. But I wish chiefly to say that I have no cause of regret for any of my pecuniary relations with Anny. I avoided – I am thankful to say – that rock of offence: and though I may regret faults of temper, I cannot charge myself with a want of liberality.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, as Leslie conceded in a note added in July 1898, Annie would eventually refund him from the proceeds of the Biographical Edition of her father's works. She wanted to give him £800 (which perhaps indicated that she was rather more conscious of her indebtedness than Leslie supposed), but he would only take £400, and only then because Annie insisted upon it.

Late in October 1876 they sold 8 Southwell Gardens for £4,100, having by then moved to a house in Hyde Park Gate South which had been left jointly to Annie and Minny as a legacy from Thackeray's mother, Mrs Carmichael-Smyth. In acknowledgment of his portion of the Thackeray inheritance which came to him through Minny, Leslie

now spent about £900 on the purchase of a house in Lingfield Road, close to Wimbledon Common, with the intention that Annie's mother might be placed there. Isabella Thackeray had lived with carers ever since the severe postnatal depression which followed Minny's birth in 1840, but for how long this Wimbledon house was used for her needs is unclear, for during most of her remaining years she lived with a married couple, Mr and Mrs Thompson, at Leigh-on-Sea, near Southend. It was a curious regime for Leslie, responsible not just for Annie but, when Edward Thackeray was away, for Margie and Anny too, now aged thirteen and eleven. Annie noted that when the girls were with them, 'Leslie used to take them to school every morning'.<sup>11</sup> Ten years later, after Margie had married Gerald Ritchie, Richmond's elder brother, Leslie settled 'quite a sum of money' on the younger sister, a generous gesture which caused Annie to 'cry with pleasure'.<sup>12</sup>

The domestic routine which Leslie and Annie now established together offered her – indeed, offered both of them – a framework of stabilising normality. In the end though, it was Richmond's support and love which saved her, once she saw that only he could supply the conditions for her renewal. The devotion which Annie had formerly lavished on her sister would be transferred to him, for she increasingly had come to value Richmond's family links, a year earlier sending him one of her father's letters to read. 'Do you know the last time I ever saw his dear face he sent me away. I just remember going back & standing by his bedside not thinking him ill, but looking at him & you see after eleven years I find you my dear to talk to about him & to be yourself too.'<sup>13</sup> Flattered, he succumbed to the intoxicating Thackeray genius worn so lightly and yet so authentically by Annie. He was quietly proud of being able to sign his schoolboy letters from Eton as 'Richmond Thackeray Ritchie', and he would have been pleased to realise that his own father had been Thackeray's favourite cousin. The trauma of Minny's death made any embarrassment about how others might view his and Annie's relationship seem trivial, yet there remained the discrepancy between their ages. When they married in August 1877, Annie was forty and Richmond a few days away from being twenty-three. Contemporary proprieties were undeniably shocked.

As the youngest of the four Ritchie brothers, Richmond was adored by his family. He was clever and handsome, reserved and thoughtful, but perhaps underneath it all a little too confidently assured in his views, suggesting complacency sometimes, character traits which resurfaced through his adult life. A formal manner hid real wit and a winning comedic gift, and Annie's droll self-mockery appealed to him. When he was a schoolboy she treated him as a young adult, and Edward

Lyttelton remembered him at Eton as a boy ‘old before his years’,<sup>14</sup> something which his school photographs tend to confirm. There was every reason to expect a brilliant future for him. He had been only eight when he won a King’s Scholarship to Eton in July 1863, and was awarded the coveted Newcastle Medal in his final school year. His family called him Witz or Wizz, as did his own children later. President of the Eton Literary Society and a member of ‘Pop’ – the membership of which was determined by the boys themselves – Richmond went on to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he joined Hallam and Lionel Tennyson in their father’s and Thackeray’s old college. The expectations were great.

Howard Sturgis, his Eton and Cambridge contemporary, would remember Richmond as being ‘endowed from boyhood with the strength, the self-reliance, the maturity of taste and judgment which the rest of us hardly acquire with wrinkles and grey hairs. Nothing ripens the intelligence so early as that terrible ironic perception of the tears and laughter in things, which is called a sense of humour. Richmond Ritchie possessed that in an eminent degree, and had, moreover, one of the surest and most brilliant minds I have ever known.’<sup>15</sup> Sturgis was highly susceptible to Richmond’s charm, though as Richmond’s star rose his admiration was offered from a distance. When his ultimate appointment as Permanent Under Secretary at the India Office came through in 1909, Sturgis shyly offered congratulations. ‘I follow your career from afar, like a little astronomer watching a comet through a telescope, but with a much warmer & more personal interest.... I should like to think that my little fluttered handkerchief, or thrown up hat has given you pleasure.’<sup>16</sup> He never forgot the affection of their undergraduate days, and Richmond’s capacity ‘to make me laugh, helplessly, rolling on the floor & begging him not to be so funny. Can you fancy that?’<sup>17</sup>

Thackeray had once been much amused to discover the boy of eight engrossed in *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*. But he was not just intellectually precocious. In September 1869, aged fifteen, and accompanied by his slightly older brother Gerald, he became the youngest person to climb to the summit of Mont Blanc – a feat recorded by the Alpine Club and which even Leslie must have admired. But in later life, the enormous demands of the India Office meant that his time for leisure was limited, though he was a successful golfer and keen bicyclist. He became a victim of Ménière’s disease – probably many of the flu-like symptoms which plagued him derived from this debilitating condition which affects balance – and the constant stress of his work took its toll.



*Richmond Ritchie as a boy*

The months from about mid-1876 shaped the future relationship of Richmond and Annie, though at first she regarded her own feelings as having the kind of purity with which a mother loves her child. She wrote to him that ‘loving people is the one thing of all things that seems to prove something beyond us in life – If anything is true, it is true that sincere & unselfish love does belong to the best & holiest of the impulses of life. I daresay to us both sometimes my foolish maternal



*Richmond Ritchie at Eton. He is standing in the front, on the right.*

sort of sentiment may have seemed absurd.<sup>18</sup> Margaret Oliphant thought that by the beginning of May Annie was at last ‘looking very much herself’.<sup>19</sup> All through the late spring and early summer, simple, everyday activities could in a moment sweep her back into the comforting safeties of the past. Out shopping for hats with Laura, Annie gazed into the milliner’s looking-glass. ‘It was like some extraordinary dream suddenly to see myself in a glass with a crown of pink roses, for an instant it seemed as if everything had gone back years & years. Its just like one of the dreams I have.’<sup>20</sup> Richmond pronounced on her health with all the wisdom of his twenty-one years. ‘Of course you must try to get into a habit of seeing other people and helping them as you did before; only you must take care and not overdo yourself.’<sup>21</sup>

Before accompanying Leslie to Kensal Green to see Minny’s headstone put in position, Annie wrote to Pinkie Ritchie, her favourite amongst Richmond’s sisters, picturing a free spirit happy near the Tennysons’ Farringford home at Freshwater on the Isle of Wight. Were the horrors of the last months merely an illusion? The practical business required at the cemetery reminded her that it was all too real. ‘I can



imagine you quite well in the kind dear green glades. It seems to me as if there somehow my Minnie was still alive to me & all seems like a dream when I fly off in my mind to Ff<sup>d</sup> & the big window & my dear Lady [Tennyson] in her corner. Give her my kiss.... I am now going to see my dear stone laid & to speak to the gardener about the ivy.<sup>22</sup> She was even managing a little work now. Her constant concern for Leslie's comfort is touching, for when she planned a short visit away she asked Mrs Oliphant whether Laura and her father might go to her in Windsor during her own absence. 'I shall be so much happier if I think he is in y<sup>f</sup>. kind keeping that it will make all the difference in my pleasure.' In this same letter she refers to Margaret Oliphant's current serialisation in the *Cornhill*, clearly finding meaningful associations in the story. 'I read Carita last night – O how well you write. There is not one vestige of us in it but it haunted me & haunted me.'<sup>23</sup>

In early June Annie visited the Elton family home at Clevedon, near Bristol, the location where many years before Thackeray had realised what Jane Brookfield meant to him. The wife of one of his oldest friends from Cambridge days, Jane had provided a focus for Thackeray's emotional outpourings until William Brookfield summarily put an end to the friendship. Annie first sought out her aunt Jane Shawe in Clifton, for her behaviour was beginning to cause concern. Clevedon was like a magic place, the pleasure which she experienced there on the terrace having an almost visionary intensity. She yearned for her father and her sister, but they were gone. The thought of Richmond offered a more immediate reality.

Aunt Jane [Shawe] had got some mysterious fancy that I had said she had £70 in the savings bank & that I was counting on it – poor dear its distracting to think of such a waste of life & generous feeling & power of affection. She is exactly like L<sup>y</sup> Sarah Francis in Old Kensington only much more dreary – But this isnt what I wanted to tell you about but something Oh! so lovely, a rainbow sort of Tennyson poem starting into life – w<sup>h</sup>. is the terrace at Clevedon Court – the sweetest quaintest most exquisite thing with a fountain dropping into a marble basin with long rows of pink drowsy poppy heads, with a sight of all the summer in the valley & all the silver in the sea & the old grey ivy gables tumbling & piling in the hollow (Excuse the authoress). Darling, I longed for you & I wished so I had come with Papa & Minnie.<sup>24</sup>

She and Richmond were now exchanging love letters, though neither might have recognised them to be such. But there was something

decidedly clandestine about their behaviour. Richmond was treating her letters secretively, preserving them carefully in a bureau bought from a pawnbroker for £3, and discreetly destroying envelopes, perhaps fearing his relatives' irritation at the evidence of their on-going correspondence. In one letter, he conjures up conventional lovers' images on returning to Cambridge from a country visit –

all your letters are comfortably installed in an absurdly small receptacle which has got a special key and if you are alarmed you may have it in your keeping. However I did resolutely burn a pile of envelopes and the ashes are still reproaching me in the little grate with little sparks running about like fairy good wishes.... [W]e drove back through the sunset and the stars blazed and a little crescent moon hung ever so high up; and I had only just time to rush to my school; and after that I thought of you and went to bed and to a sound sound sleep instead of writing.<sup>25</sup>

Annie, Leslie and Laura spent most of July at Coniston, in the Lake District, staying near Leslie's old friend Victor Marshall from where Annie paid more than one visit to Ruskin. She admired the simplicity of Ruskin's style of life, and his 'lovely little aesthetic encampment here. They are all as kind as they can be in fits of delight over scraps, not the lake & the mountains but a gooseberry or a feather off a chicken's head or something of the sort...., Ruskin has beautiful old bibles & missals & above all such nice strawberries at his house. He says if you can draw a strawberry you can draw anything.'<sup>26</sup>

The tranquillity of the surroundings made her feel Minny's absence acutely. 'It would have made Minny O so happy to be here and every little flower & cloud & tint seemed to ache for her.'<sup>27</sup> She was also missing Richmond, and made arrangements for a number of his family to come to Coniston to take summer lodgings. 'I think I shall wait till you come to feel it all tho' I see how sweet & fair & fresh & exquisite everything is.' Mrs Ritchie and Richmond eventually joined them, together with his unmarried sisters Pinkie and Elinor. In sending birthday greetings to another of Richmond's sisters, Blanche Warre Cornish, she admitted to having been suddenly struck by Laura's resemblance to Thackeray, a consoling sign of heredity and what Thomas Hardy calls 'the family face'. 'This morning as I was looking at her asleep she made a little face that was so like Papa, it came over me with a happy sort of ache to think that the children carry about some positive real true identity of the dear still dearer ones whose life they live & still are. No children can ever ever be to

me what their parents are & have been, but how much Ah how much, I never knew till now. I am very glad I had a little talk with my Min about it once.’<sup>28</sup>

She sent a note to Ruskin at Brantwood during the morning of 28 July, inviting him to call. Later came his reply, which Annie carefully kept and pasted into a leather-bound book which in 1890 she presented to Richmond to remind him of that precious time. The original diary entry for that same day she would later cut out and paste in her journal, its record of another vivid dream the reason for its preservation. ‘Last night I dreamt that it was Papa’s funeral over again. There was a strange clanging music. I stood by the grave & people came & shook me by the hand, & somehow they took his hand too. I mean to think no more of Death till it comes. If I die I hope L: will marry somebody – Julia Marshall perhaps.’<sup>29</sup> She did not die, but she would leave Leslie and he would get married again, though not to Julia Marshall.

Annie also kept another small portion of her diary for the end of November, when Richmond came to be with her for the anniversary of Minny’s death. It was always going to be an important time, and it seems that they moved towards a common understanding of what their future might be.

*27 November* Went to the station and waited ½ an hour for R who was very very very glad to see me. Caroline dined. and then R. & I had a long and most interesting conversation.

*28 November* R basely deserted me and went to Eton to play football. I trolled over the S.K.M with Miss Villis protégés and was very ill and had to go to bed. R payed me a little visit [*This was the anniversary of Minny’s death*]

*29 November* On the sofa but very happy. R spending the day out. He went to the play in the evening leaving me again stranded.

*30 November* R went and was very very very sorry to go away. He enjoyed his visit very much and so did I.

Through the course of this first sad year, the endearments in their letters had grown ever more affectionate; ‘dearest’ becomes ‘darling’, and by December he is addressing Annie as ‘sweetheart’. The year ended far more calmly than Annie can ever have felt possible at its start. On New Year’s Day she went with Leslie and Laura to stay for a week with Dr and Mrs Jackson, Julia Duckworth’s parents, at Frant, near Tunbridge Wells. Saxonbury was a lovely house, surrounded by woodland. Annie was much taken with Julia’s mother, ill though she was, for she ‘seemed to be much more alive than anyone else [and]

inspired one with new interest in ones own life & belief in goodness'. Her instinctive and unsophisticated sympathies, together with a love of friends and family, chimed happily with Annie's views about what was important. 'She loved her children passionately & she loved her friends fervently & Poets & the Past & she was not religious but Religion somehow was so intense so tender & merry & unworldly. M<sup>rs</sup>. Jackson would be carried down of an evening & we would all dine by lamplight & go into the dark morning room where we all sat round & talked & she quoted Poetry & Leslie responded.'<sup>30</sup> The next day came exciting news that Fitzjames Stephen, Leslie's brother, had been given a baronetcy, followed on 3 January by a letter from Richmond 'about what Willy said'. Presumably, Richmond had discussed his possible future with his eldest brother, but we do not learn what advice he received. Later that day, Leslie, on good form, recited Thackeray's poem 'The Chronicle of the Drum' to them all. It had been a happy visit. Back in London, Annie took time to have 'a long talk with Leslie'; again, this must have been about her future, and how Richmond might feature in it. It is impossible to know whether marriage was yet part of their plans.

At the end of a fortnight in the Alps, where he always found solace and refreshment, Leslie urged Annie to keep to a measured regime, knowing how easily she could overreach herself. 'Never on any account whatever go out before luncheon & never allow anybody to come in – just sit at home & be idle. Always take a short walk after lunch, whoever comes to see you & don't go out to dinner. If you will stick to that (making no exceptions) for the next six months, you will thank me for the advice.'<sup>31</sup> During this month, Richmond prepared for an examination at Trinity, and once it was over came to London and took Annie for a walk in the dark. Leslie returned from the Alps on 30 January, and just two days after Annie and Richmond's night-time walk, he witnessed the 'catastrophe' of them kissing in the drawing-room at Hyde Park Gate South. Accounts of this event and its aftermath have always drawn on Leslie's highly partial recollections, where, as he freely admits, his principal concerns were selfish ones, tinged by jealousy. He hated the idea of Annie marrying 'perhaps, as Julia suggested to me, partly because all men are jealous and I might feel that I was being put at a lower level in Anny's affections; I certainly thought that it would make a widening gulf between us; I hated it because men at least always hate a marriage between a young man and a much older woman; and I hated it because the most obvious result would be the breaking up of my own household'.<sup>32</sup> But what upset him most was a feeling that he had been compromised: he had seen the

kiss and felt bound to insist upon a resolution to the situation. Leslie's distaste also reveals an underlying prudishness, for the overt affection which this particular relationship had reached made him require Annie 'to make up her mind one way or other'. Perhaps he expected a different outcome, but his ultimatum resulted in Annie telling him that same afternoon that she and Richmond were engaged. On 31 January, Leslie and Julia Duckworth talked to Richmond, presumably exploring his prospects if marriage was to be a realistic proposition in the near future. Leslie was now determined that the marriage should advance quickly, Annie's age meaning that time was not on her side. 'Soon afterwards I read in the paper that there was to be a competition for certain public offices. I wrote to Richmond, suggesting that this was a good chance for obtaining something to marry upon. He entered accordingly and won a clerkship in the India Office.'

In fact, things did not move quite as fast as this suggests. Nothing was made public for some months, and the engagement – if it really was as formal as that – was not widely known within the family. Richmond's mother and Jane Brookfield called, and they were probably told. Annie admitted to feeling 'quite overdone'. After so many months of uncertain feelings the sudden change in her prospects seemed to bring her close to breakdown again. It was convenient that Julia Duckworth was Annie and Leslie's immediate neighbour, and only too ready to minister to Annie who moved in with her for some weeks. It was all very comforting. 'Came to sofa, tea, jelly care.'<sup>33</sup> A stay of a few days extended itself from early February until the beginning of April, and Annie was able to work once more. It was the decisive period of recuperation, at the end of which she could tell Mrs Oliphant of her return to normal life, and of the good health of Leslie and Laura – 'she is very well & so is Leslie, & so am I at last. I came home really yesterday for I had been staying on at Julia Duckworths & it is so nice to be free again & able to walk & talk & come & go without always thinking about my health.'<sup>34</sup>

Annie lost another old friend when Jeanie Senior died on 24 March after a long illness. There had been sickbed visits, and Jeanie's courage was inspirational. 'Seeing her did me good for it was all sunset & gentle & I could cry & sit by her bed in the window. She has a grey room full of Azaleas & all her hair shines & her face looks like an angels & little Harry Hughes was deep in an arm chair reading Vanity Fair.'<sup>35</sup> Annie was deeply affected to observe an alternative means of dying, so unlike the cruel suddenness of Minny's going. 'She died at 7 o'clock on Saturday as she lived, loving them sparing them – no crepe she said for me no mourning only flowers. Carry me away on Monday.'<sup>36</sup>

In April she spent some days with the Rothschilds at Mentmore Towers in Bedfordshire, and wrote to Richmond on notepaper borrowed from Hannah Rothschild, having removed what she could of the black-edged border. 'The more I think of it the more I feel as if a day might come when people will think of death with love & blessing & gratitude for the past & with less sorrow & gloom.' She gloried in the signs of the burgeoning spring when she walked out. And at night, she found it an easy transition from thinking about Minny to contemplation of Richmond, for there he was, mystically transfigured in the heavens and the flashing stars. He was looking out from his Cambridge window at just that same moment, surely?

There was a great field full of lambs & hares yesterday & chestnut trees in bud w<sup>h</sup>. put me more in mind of Minnie than all the gloom that ever was massed together.... I did like it so – & then last night, when the day was over I woke up about one o'clock & my room was full of smoke & I got up & opened the window wide & then it was you I seemed to see for all the stars were lighted up & a silver crescent was dropping & a sort of faint flame seemed to come from the horizon.... It was so lovely & you do like starlight nights dont you – Oh I hope you looked out of window last night.<sup>37</sup>

Duty cut short her visit, and she returned to London having been told by Jane Brookfield that Laura was unwell and Leslie 'very low'. The needs of others would always come first.

Much as the prospect of the change to his own circumstances distressed him, once Annie had made her decision Leslie fought her corner, for several of the Ritchies were implacably opposed to Richmond's marrying a woman so much older than himself. Mrs Ritchie had a different concern, for although she loved Annie dearly she feared for her son's glittering Cambridge prospects. Annie removed herself to Freshwater, Richmond returned to Cambridge, and Leslie worked on the Ritchies. This was perhaps the most unhappy part of the business for him, finding himself accused of precipitating the engagement and of encouraging Richmond to give up Cambridge for a civil service position. 'They complained of me for ruining his degree by suggesting the public office: though if he had neglected the chance the marriage might have been indefinitely postponed greatly to Anny's injury. The fact was that if they hated the marriage, I positively loathed it. I could not speak of it to Julia without exploding in denunciations.' He might easily have stood aside and let the relationship drift towards collapse; his refusal to do so speaks well of his commitment to Annie's best

interests. Julia doubtless softened his views, for having Annie as a house guest for two months had shown her that Minny's death was not the real source of Annie's present malaise. This very different emotional crisis required a different solution.

The best of Leslie emerges in the surviving correspondence. If his personal objections to the marriage remained, not least to Richmond as a suitable husband for Annie – 'I would do anything in the world for her, but I cannot and shall not feel close to her after she has taken up with that boy'<sup>38</sup> – the painful honesty of his letters to Annie show him disinterestedly advising on her own best actions. The news came through on 1 May that Richmond had been successful in the civil service examinations, and Annie and Jane Brookfield sought Sir Henry Cole's advice about which office Richmond might try for. Until she heard his views, Annie was un-persuaded that work of this kind was the right thing for a man of Richmond's talents, but Cole convinced her both as to its value and social standing. He did not favour the Post Office – 'tiresome humdrum drudgery'; he felt that the Record Office certainly had its attractions for a studious, serious man with its interesting documents offering opportunities for literary work; but for someone of Richmond's capabilities 'he should unhesitatingly recommend the India Office or the Home Office. In the India Office there are all sorts of wide interests stirring, a man can make his own mark in a little time.'<sup>39</sup> Once he had pointed out that it was answerable to a senior government member – for it was responsible for the administration of the most powerful regions within the Empire – Annie registered its 'different social standing'.

Richmond required no further prompting, and three days later sent a telegram to Freshwater announcing an opening at the India Office. Mrs Ritchie's agreement that he should give up Cambridge for this opportunity was essential if the marriage was to proceed. Having already argued so strongly for this course of action, Leslie maintained his resolve, prompting his conflict with the Ritchies. There was still a part of Annie which contemplated delay, doubtless because she was conscious of Richmond leaving Cambridge for her, but Leslie was adamant.

I have an extreme repugnance to talking about R. with you, because I hate all talk about such feelings & because in this case my sympathy is so imperfect that I am afraid of being hurried into some remark wh. would shock you. It is useless to ask what you & he ought to have done & I wont think more about it than I can help. But as matters are, I do urge you in spite of all your protestations to the contrary, to be married as soon as possible.

I say so first, because a year hence you will be in no better position than you are now, or at least the difference in your position will be infinitesimal, & quite useless to take into account. Assuming that you are to marry at all, I can see no shadow of a reason for putting it off.

But 2ndly, the intervening time would be most trying. You would have all the Ritchies at you, worrying & pestering & talking nonsense & piling up scenes. You will always be proposing to unsettle everything that has been settled, & in short, it will be a year of worry & excitement – than wh. nothing can be worse for you. Why prolong anything so unpleasant? If you could give it up altogether, well & good – I should be delighted; but short of that I would do it at once.<sup>40</sup>

He also disabused her of any thoughts of delaying her departure on his account, or of establishing a joint home. ‘I really dread the strain upon my temper, if I am to have Richmond always about the house & Ritchies buzzing in & out & ranting interviews & thrilling explanations & all the rest of it. The sort of divided allegiance wh. you will owe to R. & to me would be really irritating.... It is very awkward to be always a third person, & especially an unsympathetic 3d person.’ He might have expressed it better, especially as Annie had been the third person during all the years of his marriage to Minny, but that was not in his thoughts when he wrote so frankly about Richmond, who was quite a different proposition. Then he played his trump card. ‘I wish you to do whatever will make you happy & I should think myself unfaithful to Minny if your happiness were not one of my first objects in life.’

Annie took his objection to Richmond’s presence rather to heart, feeling that she ought to look at once for her own house, for she had not grasped that Leslie had been looking ahead and imagining the married couple living with him into some indeterminate future. The idea of her immediate departure was almost worse.

You seem to fancy that I expect to be so much bored by R & you, that I would rather have you out of the house. At least, that is the only way in wh. I can account for your plan of taking a house. I object to the plan altogether, because I entirely deny the truth of your assumption. I should be deeply annoyed at your leaving me before your marriage.... I really could not bear it. No, you must stay with me till you marry. I ask it of you as a special favour & I will be as





*William, Blanche, and Gussie Ritchie, about 1860.*

good as I can in regard to Richmond. The separation would vex me far more than his presence. I would rather even that he lodged with us till his marriage than that you went away from me.... I implore you not to think of parting from me till the parting is necessary. That would really make me feel as if I were not fulfilling my duty to Minny.<sup>41</sup>

She felt thankful, having no wish to upset Leslie any more than her decision to marry had already distressed him. What cheered her most was the knowledge that people were at last speaking the truth to each other. Whether others approved of it or not was almost a secondary matter. 'I feel suddenly quite relieved & sleepy & peaceful & the sea has begun to flow & the hedges to give pleasure & your ladyship to realise the blessing w<sup>h</sup>. is hers.'<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, Leslie was fighting their battle, and eventually triumphed on 11 May, a long day producing two letters and resulting in a noble victory which could only have given him considerable personal anguish. In the longer first letter, written during the morning, he assured Annie that she must ignore the objections of other people, including his own. 'You ought to decide it entirely upon the considerations of your own happiness & Richmond's & to leave my fancies out of sight altogether & also the fancies of R's family.' He was concerned that some of the Ritchies, principally Richmond's sisters Gussie and Blanche, were urging delay, for he feared that Annie's health would not withstand 'a year more of uncertainty & vexation with the Ritchies.... They are young & talk as if years were of no importance. They delight in making scenes, wh. is a simple torture of your nerves.' Leslie insisted that Annie should remain objective.

Make up your mind, of course, but leave us to give it effect & to deal with Mrs R. & Gussie & Blanche & the whole kit of them. What you & R decide upon will be accepted by me as fine. I will then do all the fighting for you & the sentimentalizing & the discussion of ways & means & all the rest of it. Dearest Anny, I ask this as a right. I feel that I have inherited Minny's position & your father's. I wish that I had their power of making you happy; but at least you must let me do what they would have done had they been with us still.

He could not have come up with words that were more persuasive.

Later that day he talked to Mrs Ritchie, and his idea that Richmond might continue to work for his degree away from Cambridge seemed to clinch things for her, prompting his second letter of quiet triumph.

[M]atters have much changed since I wrote. I have seen Mrs Ritchie, who is incomparably the most sensible of the lot. She talked pleasantly about you & will do everything that is wanted. I have no doubt that she will consent to anything that you & Richmond may determine. She said that she

should allow him his £200 a year & was otherwise perfectly judicious in her remarks.... I shall only say that I think he had better go in for his degree or, at least, promise to consider it, because it will please his mother & might be useful.<sup>43</sup>

Annie was sitting quietly in Watts's Freshwater studio listening to Thoby Prinsep talking of his early life in India when the clinching telegram arrived from Richmond – 'Mother consents I am appointed to the India Office'.<sup>44</sup> She went to share her news with Jane Senior's mother in her cottage at Colwell Bay, and with the Tennysons at Farringford – 'they were all very kind'. The effectiveness of Leslie's work behind the scenes is borne out by Mrs Ritchie's own letter, which was wholly loving and generous towards Annie. If lingering anxieties remained, there could be no doubt but that Annie's happiness was assured by this particular endorsement.

Well darling I suppose it is all settled. I am sure you know by y<sup>r</sup>. self that I have many conflicting feelings but this is certain & uppermost that I love you most dearly and that I know you will be the dearest & most loving wife my Richmond could have won for himself – & that I most earnestly pray & hope that your love for each other which has certainly been well tested will keep you as it has now brought you to the same level as it were. The dear fellow has been two days with us and is very happy & radiant – I had a talk with Leslie yesterday and he was very kind & full of love for you and solicitude for y<sup>r</sup>. welfare.... We have not yet heard when R. will have to begin at the India Office but I am sure I can get him leave to finish this term at Cambridge & he will then have resided long enough to take his degree.... Of course he cant take such a good place as I hoped he would when he began his College career but he says himself that if he is able to go on reading he ought to be in the 1<sup>st</sup>. class.... This will hardly bring you nearer to us than you are already, and have been for many years that you have been like a sister to the girls and a daughter to me.<sup>45</sup>

Even Leslie mellowed, and later in the month he gave a more considered assessment of Richmond's virtues to Charles Eliot Norton, who had been a regular correspondent ever since Leslie's first trip to America in 1863.

He is many years her junior – a fact wh. is the only objection to the marriage, for he is a thoroughly able & honourable

man & devotedly attached to her. The story of their affection is a long one, and I have seen this coming for many months, though it is only of late that I saw it to be inevitable

People will of course be surprised & probably some will be displeased. Women are not allowed to do such unusual things without criticism. On the other hand, the unusualness is in itself a proof of the strength of the feelings wh. have brought it about; & upon that side I have no fears. I am as certain as I can be of anything that the marriage will be as happy as mutual affection can make it. That is of course the great thing – almost the only thing.<sup>46</sup>

News of the engagement spread quickly – it was probably already a poorly-kept secret – and within days letters arrived in great numbers. Some people had to be told in person, and once Annie left Freshwater she went to explain things to Margie and Anny. It would have been a poignant meeting, as was her visit to Wimbledon to her mother on 26 May. And then Richmond arrived, Annie recording in her journal for 29 May ‘1<sup>st</sup> HAPPY DAY’. She meant two things by this. Recent uncertainties were behind her, and her lonely vigil since Minny’s death was at last ending.

Even her anxiety about others’ prejudices was dissipating, and she told Pinkie Ritchie, whose support had always been strongest, that

I had a horrid bout of purgatory & doubt but the moment I saw him a sort of conviction of blessed peace & reality came over me & he too said that he had been afraid I meant to put off & off & so slide away for ever.... Dear my worst doubts were for him. For me I never could pretend to have any except indeed some very insignificant ones as to what people may think.

She had already sent Pinkie the briefest of notes from Freshwater, on this one occasion permitting herself a selfish thought. ‘O my darling I can only cry because I am so happy.... O my dearest it ought to be you not me – no I wont say that but only God bless you my own Pinnie & give you the love and happiness you give to others.’<sup>47</sup> To Nina Lehmann she quietly rejoiced at ‘this something come into my life wh. seems to make it full of gratitude & reality’, even as she wondered at the sacrifice that Richmond was making for her. ‘I do feel so sorry for Richmond sometimes yet I cant when I see him, he is so happy & singleminded & it does seem such a miracle.’<sup>48</sup> She wrote to

Browning's friend, Joseph Milsand, just days after the engagement was made public. 'When my sister died I had no more courage left to refuse the familiar comfort & help of his presence & most youthful affection .... I do not think Richmond will care less for an old wife than he has done for his old cousin & in that case I think he will be happy. I am sure I am.'<sup>49</sup> Perhaps she was right to be sensitive, for when the news spread into the gossip columns the one thing that was stressed was their ages. One regional paper was unable to resist malice. 'The chief fault of the gentleman is that he is twenty years [*sic*] the junior of the lady, and all London is shaking its head at the alliance and talking of the blunders of love in consequence.'<sup>50</sup>

Annie knew that it would be difficult to win the blessing of Charlotte Ritchie, whose attachment to her Ritchie nephews and nieces stretched back to the time when they had been sent in turn from India to her charge in Paris. In 1874 she had scolded Annie in Florence for monopolising Richmond's attentions, voicing the family doubts which only now were being resolved. Knowing that news of the engagement would be bitter-sweet for Charlotte, Annie nevertheless yearned for her approval. 'It seems like a sunrise after the long darkness & my heart is very full of him & of all that I have here & there too. Dearest you will write & say god bless us and when I die I think it will seem as if no one had been so blessed as I with such wonderful love – indeed he looks happy & says he is happier than he has ever been and people do not seem so shocked as I expected but on the contrary every one is kind & full of sympathy.'<sup>51</sup> Richmond sent Charlotte his own eloquent testimony to the saving power of Annie's love, compared with which the difference in their ages – so much a matter of concern for others – was of no importance. In that she was able to offer him 'a real life', Richmond had felt himself as much in need of rescue as did Annie herself.

I am sure that if at Florence you had known our hearts, you would not have wished for any alteration in them, and now I am equally sure that when you see our happiness, if without seeing you cannot believe, you will rejoice as much as anybody in our happiness. How anyone who knows Annie can fail to envy me in my blessed fortune I cannot see. Willie the other night said 'You are going to marry the most charming creature alive, and you cant expect to have everything'. But for Annie it is different – I can quite understand and even sympathise with people who fear for her; all I can say in answer to their doubts is that myself I

have such entire faith in our mutual love that my heart is quite secure from all apprehension....

For myself I can only say that for the first time for years my heart is perfectly light. I may have for a while sometimes forgotten, but the anxiety was always there waiting. It is all over however, thank God, and I can begin to think of leading a real life. Annie is as happy as I am, if not happier as her anxiety was far worse than mine: but she cannot help having misgivings of the opinion of the world at large. As for the happiness of those who really love her and her happiness, I tell her that it is doubting their love if she thinks it possible they should not rejoice with her rejoicing.<sup>52</sup>

In the years to come, as they both grew older, he may have reflected on this blithe confidence. The difficulties would inevitably come, and the marriage was tested. As Annie moved towards old age, he found himself enjoying the company of other, younger women. But as he sets out on the journey there are no doubts, and after a morning in the gardens of Kings College he candidly confronts the matter of her age. '[E]ven when I am bothered about you most, the blessing is still there; and the feeling that there is nothing to hold on to and cling by has gone right away out of my life – and my blessing goes on till you die. There is no reason to think that if you live to be as old as Methuselah, my feeling for you will alter; or as far as altering goes, if you die.'<sup>53</sup>

As the letters of congratulation arrived, many people expressed delight that at last Annie had someone to care for her, and some made a point of saying that Minny would have wished it. Richmond's youngest sister Elinor was enthusiastic, feeling that it was 'rather glorious' that he was able to do this. Meta Gaskell, elder daughter of the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, wittily likened him to the most doting of Thackeray's creations, though Richmond might not have found the allusion flattering. 'You will make the very dearest, sweetest, tenderest wife possible; and M<sup>r</sup>. Ritchie is indeed a happy and lucky man. As for tales that I have heard of him: if I did not count it blasphemy, I should liken his devotion to Dobbin's!'<sup>54</sup> Annie told her father's old friend, William Synge, that Richmond 'is years & years younger than I am but who has cared [for] me so long & with such wonderful fidelity & unchangeableness that I have no courage to say no to the happiness it will be to us both to belong to each other.... I have wondered & wondered what my Father would have said – I think perhaps – if he had known all – he might have agreed.'<sup>55</sup> Fitzjames Stephen rejoiced that Annie had come to know 'the greatest happiness of life. I think

that to see you happily married would have been the one thing which could have increased dear Minnie's happiness if she had been spared to us all.'<sup>56</sup> To Mrs Oliphant, Annie managed to compress all of the troubled history of the last months and years into a few lines, with just a hint that this joyful outcome might not protect Richmond from some regret in the years to come. 'That night as I sat by the fire with you I thought shall I speak about it & I couldnt & then you know what his wonderful tender fidelity has been all this time & now that it is settled – I dont quite know how by Richmond himself & Leslie & dearest most generous M<sup>rs</sup>. Ritchie who has only thought of him & of me in all this – Now that it is settled I can only pray that he may never be sorry. He is so happy now & I am too thankful for words. My Minnie would have understood how it has come about.'<sup>57</sup>

Annie came finally to believe that it was the right choice for Richmond, reflecting on something which Charles Eliot Norton had written to Leslie, 'how a happy marriage could make life again & bind all that was shaken together once more, & dearest I do indeed feel this & as if for Richmond too there had been so much reality in his love for me that if he had left me & married someone else, what he might have gained in youth he might have lost in truth of feeling'.<sup>58</sup> But Leslie himself remained a worry for her. Though their common and established bonds could not be broken, she felt as if she was deserting him, and that inevitably she was hurting him. And there was Julia too, whose care had helped Annie towards recovery. Since Herbert Duckworth's death in 1870, Julia had devoted herself to her young children and guarded the dignity of her widowhood. Her friendship with Leslie had grown in recent months, to the extent that at the beginning of February, having startled himself with the sudden recognition that he loved her, Leslie made a declaration to Julia, though it took a year for her to agree to marry him. At one level Annie and Leslie were oddly similar, each uncertain about the likely outcome of a wished-for relationship, the possibility of happiness seeming so elusive and fragile. Shortly before her engagement was at last made public, it was of Leslie and Julia that Annie thought first, almost as if she feared that her own happiness was to be gained at their expense.

Darling I went to see Julia after you went away – I ended by crying this time not for us – but because it is so sad for her & Leslie & she doesnt know what to do – She said they envied us so this morning, & Leslie said that isnt parting & that we both looked so happy.... Im afraid Leslie is very very unhappy he says Julia has healed his wound but she cannot

put back the blood.... Dearest as I think of you my heart overflows with thankful happiness. There is Leslie more lonely than I was & his happiness seems so precarious, there is Julia not knowing how to help him.<sup>59</sup>

As wedding presents began to arrive and 'that horrible bugbear of parting' with Leslie began to approach, she found that she was not alone in dreading the separation. They had shared a house for ten years, and there had developed between them deep bonds of trust founded in the honesty of their friendship. Living apart would not weaken this loyalty, but they must have feared that something of what Minny had meant to them would become ever more impalpable if they were not together to share in the common memories. When he had told Norton of Annie's engagement, Leslie was frank about his own position. 'So long as Anny lived with me, I seemed to preserve part at least of the new element wh. came into my life with my marriage. When she goes, I shall have a terrible gap between me & the past.'<sup>60</sup> A fortnight before the wedding, Norton wrote to Annie with his good wishes, regretting only 'the new loneliness that it would bring to Leslie'.<sup>61</sup>

Leslie spent his summer holiday that year at Coniston with Laura and his sister, but as he prepared to interrupt it to be alone with Annie for a last few days before she started her new life he feared that even this time would be denied him. There is something childishly wilful about his clinging for as long as possible to the mood of melancholy content in which he and Annie had learned to rub along since Minny's death.

I hear rumours from Julia that Mrs R & Pinkie are to come to stay with us from Tuesday. Now I do object most strongly & it is the last time I shall be able to object to anybody coming to see you. Therefore I think my wishes ought to be respected. I object selfishly because their presence will effectively keep me away from Julia, whom I am longing to see. I object on your account & my own, because I really think these days ought to be as quiet as possible. You should not be flurried & hurried & over emotioned by wellmeaning friends. I should like to have a chance of talking to you occasionally in peace & comfort & I cannot do it when P. is sighing in the background & Mrs R. talking affectionate platitudes all over the house.

Surely they might just as well go to Stanhope Gardens instead of pigging together in our back-cupboards. If you can possibly get rid of them, I shall be most grateful.<sup>62</sup>



In the next breath petulance is swept aside as he presses £500 on her in order to buy a property, 'if not for the house, then towards expenses at starting'.

Annie and Richmond were married at Kensington's ancient parish church, St Mary Abbot's, early in the morning on 2 August, 'one of the many bank holiday couples'.<sup>63</sup> Lionel Tennyson was best man. It was a simple, happy affair with a deliberate absence of fuss, about which Annie herself tells us hardly anything at all. Fortunately, there are accounts by Henry Bradshaw and Pinkie to give a flavour of the occasion. A week or so later Bradshaw wrote to George Smith, the friend and publisher of both Thackerays, father and daughter. 'The bride looked more charming than ever (you must know that she won my heart the very first moment I ever saw her). There was no ceremony, no wedding breakfast, and the result was that instead of being a very dull and miserable affair, as weddings too often are, it was one of the liveliest I have ever known.'<sup>64</sup> Pinkie found an appropriate lightness of touch to capture the mix of informality and intimacy which reflected Annie's own personality and her capacity for giving simple happiness to others. Mrs Brookfield arrived too late, Leslie embodied gloomy resignation and Julia made few concessions to her customary severe mourning, but Annie was oblivious of anything but the mystery of this moment which had been given to her.

It was a dear little wedding, with just the amount of true friends that ought to have been there. Annie and Richmond seemed as utterly lost in each other and unconscious of anybody listening to them as if they had gone off by themselves, but then, the Service did barely last four minutes. Was it an omen that Annie, for the first time in her life, was before her time? It was hard on Mrs. Brookfield to find the Service just over.... Annie looked delightful and quite calm, I thought. Her gown was very becoming, made all in one sweep and tight-fitting, but her bonnet of muslin and lace rather trying. Richmond looked to me a perfect bridegroom, strong and tender, and when they joined hands they seemed to enjoy a long romantic 'shake hands!' One thing struck me, the contrast between Richmond's best man at the right hand, and Annie's supporters on the left – poor Leslie, who looked very deplorable, and Julia Duckworth, who wore the thickest black velvet dress and heavy black veil, and gave the gloomiest, most tragic aspect to her side of the chancel.... I placed myself as Annie's bridesmaid at the side of the children, who were most pathetically upset at the

emotional scene; dear Margie's teeth chattering, little Annie sucking lozenges to stifle her sobs, Stella Duckworth with her mother's tragic mask, and Margaret Cornish with tears streaming down her cheeks. However they all became happy on being given champagne by Richmond.<sup>65</sup>

There would be a more extended wedding tour later in the year, but for now the only time that could be spared for a honeymoon was a few days at Newlands Corner, near Guildford. Then Richmond began to travel daily up to Waterloo to the India Office, while Annie stayed for another week or two in the Surrey countryside, revisiting places which had become familiar during Leslie and Minny's marriage. They also managed a few days in Sussex staying near Julia's parents at Frant, Richmond still commuting. Leslie returned from Coniston, and they all met up. Annie could not help but register how, by Richmond's side and in comparison with Leslie and Julia's kind but serious manner, she began to feel what being a young married person might be like. 'Leslie came to the station to meet us.... It seemed so strange to watch him & Julia flitting down the little street together, & then I looked round & there was my dear young Richmond in absurd tender delightful spirits.'<sup>66</sup> Towards the end of the Surrey leg of their stay she had heard from a Godalming neighbour, George Eliot, who asked Annie to visit her when she was back in town again, 'for I have been long wishing that some sign of remembrance from you would fall to my share. No one has thought of your twofold self with more sympathy than "meine Kleinigkeit" or with more earnest desire that you may have the best sort of happiness.'<sup>67</sup>

About three weeks after the wedding, and shortly before Annie left for town to look at a possible house in Young Street which Jane Brookfield had discovered, she had one of the vivid dreams which came to her at the important moments in her life. She wrote of it to Gussie Freshfield, Richmond's eldest sister, reflecting on these first days of marriage, confident at last that she had done the right thing.

Last night I dreamt that we hadnt been married & that I said to Minnie – no I wont do it Im afraid of what people will say, its too great a responsibility, Ill go & you must tell Richmond Im gone & you mustnt tell anyone & then I went away with a curious ache & scorn, it was so strange & vivid. Dearest Gussie I woke up & I went to the window & looked out at the dawn & felt this much – that even if ever we are less happy w<sup>h</sup>. I don't expect for one instant – we shan't ever love each other less or feel that we were not honest people.<sup>68</sup>