

## Prose Passages

### Passage 1

The Arabs told us that the Turkish column - Jemal Pasha's lancer regiment - was already entering Tafas. When we got within sight, we found they had taken the village (from which sounded an occasional shot) and were halted about it. Small pyres of smoke were going up from between the houses. On the rising ground to this side, knee deep in the thistles, stood a remnant of old men, women and children, telling terrible stories of what had happened when the Turks rushed in an hour before.

We lay on watch, and saw the enemy force march away from their assembly ground behind the houses. They headed in good order toward Miskin, the lancers in front and rear, composite formations of infantry disposed in column with machine-gun support as flank guards, guns and a mass of transport in the centre. We opened fire on the head of their line when it showed itself beyond the houses. They turned two field guns upon us, for reply. The shrapnel was as usual over-fused, and passed safely above our heads.

Nuri came with Pisani. Before their ranks rode Auda abu Tayi, expectant, and Tallal, nearly frantic with the tales his people poured out of the sufferings of the village. The last Turks were now quitting it. We slipped down behind them to end Tallal's suspense, while our infantry took position and fired strongly with the Hotchkiss; Pisani advanced his half-battery among them; so that the French high explosive threw the rearguard into confusion.

The village lay still under its slow wreaths of white smoke, as we rode near, on our guard. Some grey heaps seemed to hide in the long grass, embracing the ground in the close way of corpses. We looked away from these, knowing they were dead; but from one a little figure tottered off, as if to escape us. It was a child, three or four years old, whose dirty smock was stained red over one shoulder and side, with blood from a large half-fibrous wound, perhaps a lance thrust, just where neck and body joined.

The child ran a few steps, then stood and cried to us in a tone of astonishing strength (all else being very silent), 'Don't hit me, Baba.' Abd el Aziz, choking out something - this was his village, and she might be of his family - flung himself off his camel, and stumbled, kneeling, in the grass beside the child. His suddenness frightened her, for she threw up her arms and tried to scream; but, instead, dropped in a little heap, while the blood rushed out again over her clothes; then, I think, she died.

T.E. Lawrence, *Revolt in the Desert*

## Passage 2

I had been about ten days at the front when it happened. The whole experience of being hit by a bullet is very interesting and I think it is worth describing in detail.

It was at the corner of the parapet, at five o'clock in the morning. This was always a dangerous time, because we had the dawn at our backs, and if you stuck your head above the parapet it was clearly outlined against the sky. I was talking to the sentries preparatory to changing the guard. Suddenly, in the very middle of saying something, I felt – it was very hard to describe what I felt, though I remember it with the utmost vividness.

Roughly speaking it was the sensation of being *at the centre* of an explosion. There seemed to be a loud bang and a blinding flash of light all round me, and I felt a tremendous shock – no pain, only a violent shock, such as you get from an electric terminal; with it a sense of utter weakness, a feeling of being stricken and shrivelled up to nothing. The sandbags in front of me receded into immense distance. I fancy you would feel much the same if you were struck by lightning. I knew immediately that I was hit, but because of the seeming bang and flash I thought it was a rifle nearby that had gone off accidentally and shot me. All this happened in a space of time much less than a second. The next moment my knees crumpled up and I was falling, my head hitting the ground with a violent bang, which to my relief, did not hurt. I had a numb, dazed feeling, a consciousness of being very badly hurt, but no pain in the ordinary sense.

The American sentry I had been talking to had started forward. 'Gosh! Are you hit?' People gathered round. There was the usual fuss - 'Lift him up! Where's he hit? Get his shirt open!' etc., etc. The American called for a knife to cut my shirt open. I knew that there was one in my pocket and tried to get it out, but discovered that my right arm was paralysed. Not being in pain, I felt a vague satisfaction. This ought to please my wife, I thought; she had always wanted me to be wounded, which would save me from being killed when the great battle came. It was only now that it occurred to me to wonder where I was hit, and how badly; I could feel nothing, but I was conscious that the bullet had struck me somewhere in the front of my body. When I tried to speak I found that I had no voice, only a faint squeak, but at the second attempt I managed to ask where I was hit. In the throat, they said, Harry Webb, our stretcher-bearer, had brought a bandage and one of the little bottles of alcohol they gave us for field-dressings. As they lifted me up a lot of blood poured out of my mouth, and I heard a Spaniard behind me say that the bullet had gone clear through my neck. I felt the alcohol, which at ordinary times would sting like the devil, splash on to the wound as a pleasant coolness.

George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*.

### Passage 3

The small locomotive engine, Number 4, came clanking, stumbling down from Selston with seven full wagons. It appeared round the corner with loud threats of speed, but the colt that it startled from among the gorse bushes, which still flickered indistinctly in the raw afternoon, out-distanced it at a canter. A woman, walking up the railway line to Underwood, drew back into the hedge, held her basket aside, and watched the engine advancing. The wagons thumped heavily past, one by one, with slow inevitable movement, as she stood insignificantly trapped between the jolting black wagons and the hedge; then they curved away towards the coppice where the withered oak leaves dropped noiselessly, while the birds, pulling at the scarlet rosehips beside the track, made off into the dusk that had already crept into the spinney.

In the open, the smoke from the engine sank and cleaved to the rough grass. The fields were dreary and forsaken, and in the marshy strip that led to the reedy pit-pond, the fowls had already abandoned their run among the alder trees, to roost in the tarred fowl-house. Just beyond rose the dark tapering chimneys of Brinsley Colliery. The two wheels were spinning fast up against the sky, and the winding engine rapped out its little spasms. The miners were being turned up from the pit.

The engine whistled as it came into the wide bay of railway lines beside the colliery, where rows of trucks stood in harbour. Miners, single, trailing and in groups, passed like shadows diverging home. At the edge of the ribbed level of sidings squat a low cottage, three steps down from the cinder track. A large bony vine clutched at the house, as if to claw down the tiled roof. Round the bricked yard a few wintry primroses. Beyond, the long garden sloped down to the bush-covered brook. There were some twiggy apple trees, winter-crack trees, and ragged cabbages. Beside the path hung dishevelled pink chrysanthemums, like pink cloths hung on bushes. A woman came stooping out of the felt-covered fowl-house, half-way down the garden.

She was a tall woman of imperious mien, handsome, with definite black eyebrows. Her smooth black hair was parted exactly. For a few moments she stood steadily watching the miners as they passed along the railway. Then she turned towards the brook. Her face was calm and set, her mouth was closed with disillusionment. After a moment she called: "John!"

There was no answer. She waited, and then said distinctly: "Where are you?" "Here!" replied a child's sulky voice from among the bushes.

#### Passage 4

Mr Head awakened to discover that the room was full of moonlight. He sat up and stared at the floor boards - the colour of silver -and then at the ticking on his pillow, which might have been brocade. After a second, he saw half of the moon five feet away in his shaving mirror, paused as if it were waiting for his permission to enter. It rolled forward and cast a dignifying light on everything. The straight chair against the wall looked stiff and attentive as if it were awaiting an order and Mr. Head's trousers, hanging to the back of it, had an almost noble air, like the garment some great man had just flung to his servant; but the face on the moon was a grave one. It gazed across the room and out the window where it floated over the horse stall and appeared to contemplate itself with the look of a young man who sees his old age before him.

Mr. Head could have said to it that age was a choice blessing and that only with years does a man enter into that calm understanding of life that makes him a suitable guide for the young. This, at least, had been his own experience.

He sat up and grasped the iron posts at the foot of his bed and raised himself until he could see the face on the alarm clock which sat on an overturned bucket beside the chair. The hour was two in the morning. The alarm on the clock did not work but he was not dependent on any mechanical means to awaken him. Sixty years had not dulled his responses; his physical reactions, like his moral ones, were guided by his will and strong character, and these could be seen plainly in his features.

His eyes were alert but quiet. In the miraculous moonlight they had a look of composure and of ancient wisdom -- as if they belonged to one of the great guides of men. He might have been Virgil summoned in the middle of the night to go to Dante, or better, the angel Raphael, awakened by a blast of God's light to fly to the side of Tobias. The only dark spot in the room was Nelson's straw pallet, underneath the shadow of the window.

The child Nelson was hunched over on his side, his knees under his chin and his heels under his bottom. His new suit and hat were in the boxes that they had been sent in. These were on the floor at the foot of the pallet where he could get his hands on them as soon as he woke up.

Mr. Head lay back down, feeling entirely confident that he could carry out the moral mission of the coming day. He meant to be up before Nelson and to have the breakfast cooking by the time he awakened. They would have to leave the house at four to get to the railroad junction by five-thirty. The train was to stop for them and they had to be there on time for this train was stopping merely to accommodate them.

This would be the boy's first trip to the city though he claimed it would be his second because he had been born there.

## Passage 5

What could she tell him?

The conditions of their life up here were harder than any she could have imagined at home because they were so different. Even the openness she had longed for was a frightening thing. There had been a comfort in crowdedness and old age grime and clutter that she only appreciated when it was gone. If it was easy here to lose yourself in the immensities of the land, under a sky that opened too far in the direction of infinity, you could also do it (every woman knew this) in a space no longer than five paces from wall to wall; to find yourself barging about the hut like a trapped bird, clutching at whatever came to hand, a warm teapot, a startled child, a shirt with the smell of sweat on it, to steady yourself against the cyclone that had blown up in the gap between you and the nearest teapot, and threatened to sweep you right out the door into a world where nothing, not a flat iron, not the names of your children on your lips, could hold you down against the vast upward expanse of your breath.

She had known such occasions, often, often. The children saw them in her and kept clear. It was the fearful loneliness of the place that most affected her – the absence of ghosts.

Till they arrived no other lives had been lived here. It made the air that much thinner, harder to breathe. She had not understood, till she came to a place where it was lacking, the extent to which her sense of the world had to do with the presence of those who had been there before, leaving signs of their passing and spaces still warm with breath – a threshold worn with the coming and going of feet, hedges between fields that went back a thousand years, and the names even further; most of all, the names on headstones which were their names, under which lay the bones that had made their bones and given them breath.

They would be the first dead here. It made death that much lonelier, and life lonelier too.

What she was homesick for, not always, but on some days, in some weathers, were the two little graves she had had to leave down there on the Downs, in the newly dug black soil under the big, foreign trees, with no one to visit them. That had been the real break; deeper than leaving Airdrie, or crossing the sea in the knowledge that she could never go back.

Time and again, in her loneliness, even with her other children about her, she went and stood there among the rusty fallen spikes and monkey-puzzle light, gazing down at the rain-streaked stones with the names and dates, hoping to look up and find that he too had come. But it had never happened. If he came there on occasions, and she thought he did, their times never coincided. All this was something they did not speak about, because there was too much space, up here, between words, even the simplest, as there was between objects.

But that was another of the changes. She felt sometimes as now, that they stood together there beside the two little humped places in the ground.

## Passage 6

If you listen, you can hear it.

The city, it sings.

If you stand quietly, at the foot of a garden, in the middle of a street, on the roof of a house.

It's clearest at night, when the sound cuts more sharply across the surface of things, when the song reaches out to a place inside you.

It's a wordless song, for the most, but it's a song all the same, and nobody hearing it could doubt what it sings. And the song sings the loudest when you pick out each note.

The low soothing hum of air-conditioners, fanning out the heat and the smells of shops and cafés and offices across the city, winding up and winding down, long breaths layered upon each other, a lullaby hum for tired streets.

The rush of traffic still cutting across flyovers, even in the dark house a constant crush of sound, tyres rolling across tarmac and engines rumbling, loose drains and manhole covers clack-clacking like cast-iron castanets.

Road-menders mending, choosing the hours of least interruption, rupturing the cold night air with drills and jack-hammers and pneumatic pumps, hard sweating beneath the fizzing hiss of floodlights, shouting to each other like drummers in rock bands calling out rhythms, pasting new skin on the veins of the city.

Restless machines in the workshops and factories with endless shifts, turning and pumping and steaming and sparking, pressing and rolling and weaving and printing, the hard crash and ring and clatter lifting out of echo-high buildings and sifting into the night, an unaudited product beside the paper and cloth and steel and bread, the packed and the bound and the made.

Lorries reversing, right round the arc of industrial parks, gateways, easing up ramps, shrill-calling their presence while forklift trucks gas and prang around them, heaping and stacking and loading.

And all the alarms, calling for help, each district and quarter, each street and estate, each every way you turn has alarms going off, coming on, going off, coming on, a hammered ring like a lightning drum-roll, like a mesmeric bell-toll, the false and the real as loud as each other, crying their needs to the night like an understaffed orphanage, babies waawaa-ing in darkened wards.

Sung sirens, sliding though the streets, streaking blue light from distress to distress, the slow wail weaving urgency through the darkest of the dark hours, a lament lifted high, held above the rooftops and fading away, lifted high, flashing past, fading away.

And all these things sing constant, the machines and the sirens, the cars blurting and rumbling all headlong, the hoots and the shouts and the hums and the crackles, all come together and rouse like a choir, sinking and rising with the turn of the wind, the counter and solo, the harmony humming expecting more voices.

So listen.

Listen, and there is more to hear.

## Passage 7

Letting herself breathe easy now, Pecola covered her head with the quilt. The sick feeling, which she had tried to prevent by holding in her stomach, came quickly in spite of her precaution. There surged in her the desire to heave, but as always, she knew she would not.

“Please, God,” she whispered into the palm of her hand. “Please make me disappear.” She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left.

Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear. So what was the point? They were everything. Everything was there, in them. All of those pictures, all of those faces. She had long ago given up the idea of running away to see new pictures, new faces, as Sammy had so often done. He never took her, and he never thought about his going ahead of time, so it was never planned. It wouldn’t have worked anyway. As long as she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Somehow she belonged to them. Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk. The first letter of her last name forced her to sit in the front of the room always. But what about Marie Appolonaire? Marie was in front of her, but she shared a desk with Luke Angelino. Her teachers had always treated her this way. They tried never to glance at her, and called on her only when everyone was required to respond. She also knew that when one of the girls at school wanted to be particularly insulting to a boy, or wanted to get an immediate response from him, she could say, “Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove!” and never fail to get peals of laughter from those in earshot, and mock anger from the accused.

It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights – if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they’d say, “Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes.”

## Passage 8

Deep in the night it started to rain and it poured down steadily while the ghetto-dwellers raged. The rain didn't last long but it turned the tracks into mud. It watered our fury. Chanting ancient war songs, brandishing pikes and machetes, gangs materialised in the darkness. They stamped through the mud. At the main road, they fell on cars and buses. They attacked police vehicles. They looted shops. Then everyone began looting, burning, and overturning things. Mum, carrying me, was driven on by the frantic crowd. Along the main road she put me down in order to tighten her wrapper, in full preparation for the worst, when a caterwauling mass of people came pounding towards us. They ran right between us. They separated me from my mother.

I wandered through the violent terrain, listening to the laughter of mischievous spirits. There was a crescent moon in the sky, darkness over the houses, broken bottles and splintered wood on the road. I wandered barefoot. Fires sprouted over rubbish heaps, men were dragged out of cars, thick smoke billowed from houses. Stumbling along, looking for Mum, I found myself in a dark street. There was a solitary candle burning on a stand near an abandoned house. I heard a deep chanting that made the street tremble. Shadows stormed past, giving off a stench of sweat and rage. Drums vibrated in the air. A cat cried out as if it had been thrown on to the fire. Then a gigantic Masquerade burst out of the road, with plumes of smoke billowing from its head. I gave a frightened cry and hid behind the stall. The Masquerade was terrifying and fiery, its funereal roar filled the street with an ancient silence. I watched it in horror. I watched it by its shadow of a great tree burning, as it danced in an empty street.

Then the darkness filled with its attendants. They were stout men with glistening faces. They held on to the luminous ropes attached to the towering figure. Dancing wildly, it dragged them towards the rioting. When it strode past, sundering the air, I crept out of my hiding place. Swirling with hallucinations, I started back towards the main road. Then suddenly several women, smelling of bitter herbs, appeared out of the darkness. They bore down on me, and swooped me up into the bristling night.

## Passage 9

The morning was still dark. A dull yellow light brooded over the houses and the river; and the sky seemed to be descending. It was slushy underfoot; and only streaks and patches of snow lay on the roofs, on the parapets of the quay and on the area railings. The lamps were still burning redly in the murky air and, across the river, the palace of the Four Courts stood out menacingly against the heavy sky.

She was walking on before him with Mr Bartell D'Arcy, her shoes in a brown parcel tucked under one arm and her hands holding her skirt up from the slush. She had no longer any grace of attitude but Gabriel's eyes were still bright with happiness. The blood went bounding along his veins; and the thoughts went rioting through his brain, proud, joyful, tender, valorous.

She was walking on before him so lightly and so erect that he longed to run after her noiselessly, catch her by the shoulders and say something foolish and affectionate into her ear. She seemed to him so frail that he longed to defend her against something and then to be alone with her. Moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory. A heliotrope envelope was lying beside his breakfast-cup and he was caressing it with his hand. Birds were twittering in the ivy and the sunny web of the curtain was shimmering along the floor: he could not eat for happiness. They were standing on the crowded platform and he was placing a ticket inside the warm palm of her glove. He was standing with her in the cold, looking in through a grated window at a man making bottles in a roaring furnace. It was very cold. Her face, fragrant in the cold air, was quite close to his; and suddenly she called out to the man at the furnace:

- Is the fire hot, sir?

But the man could not hear her with the noise of the furnace. It was just as well. He might have answered rudely.

A wave of yet more tender joy escaped from his heart and went coursing in warm flood along his arteries. Like the tender fires of stars moments of their life together, that no one knew of or would ever know of, broke upon and illumined his memory. He longed to recall to her those moments, to make her forget the years of their dull ecstasy. For the years, he felt, had not quenched his soul or hers. Their children, his writing, her household cares had not quenched all their souls' tender fire. In one letter that he had written to her then he had said: *Why is it that words like these seem to me so dull and cold? Is it because there is no word tender enough to be your name?*

Like distant music these words that he had written years before were borne towards him from the past. He longed to be alone with her. When the others had gone away, when he and she were in the room in the hotel, then they would be alone together. He would call her softly:

- Gretta!

Perhaps she would not hear at once: she would be undressing. Then something in his voice would strike her. She would turn and look at him...

## Passage 10

I sit on the breakfast bar with my feet on the back of the sofa, listening, hoping to hear footsteps walking away on the other side of the door. I check the soles of my trainers. They're clean but I kick them off anyway, spin on my bottom and dangle my legs in the kitchenette. On the wall above the fridge is a photo of a girl in a hairy coat on the platform of Liverpool Street Station; boxes and a rectangular suitcase hide her feet. She stands next to a ticket collector; the zigzag ribbons in her cornrowed hair are level with the peak of his cap. She runs from the top to the bottom of the photo like a streak of golden syrup. Like a baby after fifteen rounds of peek-a-boo, my reaction refuses to lessen, because something should be done - a letter to the Queen, a reordering of the universe, a petition on Downing Street, a judicial review for people like me, to give us more time, so I coulda known her then when she was a girl, before she was my mother.

I have other pictures. They're with Auntie Harriet for safekeeping. It's for the best. The past, the future, they need protecting. You owe it to yourself to pay attention to the new memories you're creating. Listen up. Focus. Tomorrow is yesterday soon enough and you don't want to be relying on photographs of dead people. They're tricky and need careful handling. Don't get maudlin, staring at them for long stretches every anniversary. Now and then is better, and even then go easy. Don't exceed five minutes or before you know it your recollections get duller but the photographs get sharper, then they erase your memories, and when they're gone you're fucked because memories don't have negatives. The pattern of a loved one's hair blowing through an open window is vulnerable to fading. The journey of a smile can vanish overnight.

I listen to all the sounds that make up peace and quiet. Just when the calm gets too loud Nutty Shirley shakes a box of cat biscuits and taps the side of a cat food can with a knife. *Here kitty-kitty* she calls, in the kind voice she only uses for animals.

*Donna Daley-Clarke*

## Passage 11

The ceremony of the passport control, followed by the abrupt change in the scale of things – the new toy landscape after Dover – set his thoughts wandering in the direction of his youth as a young secretary of Embassy in an England which he loved and hated with all the emotional polarity of his race. How would she withstand this cataclysm? Would she just founder? He trembled for her – she seems so exhausted and done for, with her governments of little yellowing men, faded to sepia of socialism, the beige of bureaucracy. And Egypt, so corrupt, so vulnerable, was at their mercy, in their hands ... Long ago he had made a painstaking analysis of the national character in order to help in the education of his Ambassador, dear old Abdel Sami Pasha. But it had been altogether too literary, and indeed altogether too wise. He had distinguished three strains in the English character which came, he was sure, from Saxons, Jutes or Normans – each Englishman had a predominance of one or other strain in his make-up. That is why one had to be so careful in one's dealings with them. The Saxon strain made them bullies and pirates, the Jutish toadies and sanctimonious hypocrites, while the Norman strain bred a welcome quixotry which was capable of rising like a north wind and predominating over the other two. Poor Sami had read the whole memorandum with attention, but without understanding a word. Then he said, "But you have not said that they are rich. Without that ..."

The long struggle against his English infatuation had coloured his whole life: it had even imperilled his precious national sentiment. How would they ever drive them out of Egypt, how would they ever become free? But then, would it make sense to replace them with Germans or Italians? His glance softened as he saw the diminutive dolls' houses flashing by outside the window, saw the dove-grey land unrolling its peaceful surges of arable and crop, like swaying of an autumn sea. Yes, this country had marked him, and his little Princess used often to tease him by saying that he even dreamed in English. Damn them, the English! He compressed his lips and wagged his head reproachfully. He lit a slender gold tipped cigarette and blew a puny cloud of smoke high into the air, as if it would dispel these womanish failings of sentiment! Womanish! The very word reminded him that the whole of his love-life and his miraculously happy marriage had been tinged by London. He hoped that Selim had not forgotten to book the suite at Brown's Hotel – the Princess loved Brown's and always sent the porter a Christmas card from Cairo.

*Lawrence Durrell*