

For Men

It's really terribly unfair. It's been so calm here. So agreeable. Now Jean. I've tried to forget the past. I've blotted her out. I don't want any more pain. I have taught myself to live in the present. And now this. It's like waking from an anaesthetic to an unfriendly face. That's why I've positively liked getting old. Age helps one to forget that which is best forgotten. In some perverse way, I've enjoyed the course of nature, the falling away of petty ambitions, the withering of ridiculous pride. And physical decay has seemed natural and inescapable. I think I can say I've welcomed the inevitable cheerfully. I lived frugally, I ate simply, allowed myself, on doctor's orders, one glass of red wine a day, bought the occasional CD and second-hand book. I repaired my clothes and never wore the same pair of shoes two days running. My one indulgence was to buy, from time to time, my favourite cologne. I scrimped and saved and for what purpose? So that I could afford, without strain and without charity, a decent room of my own in this house, shared with men and women, some of whom had been my colleagues, and so be cared for and allowed to enjoy a dignified and tranquil senility. Now she arrives and shatters everything. I don't want to face my failures. It seems so unfair. X

For Women

x Jean I had my first child late. I was – how old was I? – over thirty. A week or so after Christopher was born, I was offered Mimi at the Met. I accepted. I hadn't performed for almost a year. Although, of course, I knew the role, I thought I'd better do some work on it. So, I asked Mona Ross to put me through my paces. She arrived, dear Mona, such a lovely voice in her day and afterwards a wonderful teacher, she burst in full of good cheer as usual, sat at my Steinway, played an arpeggio or two and then struck a chord. I drew breath. I tried to sing but no sound came out.

She struck the note again, with her forefinger, she always had beautifully manicured nails, I remember, I couldn't take my eyes off her finger hammering out the note again and again. My mouth was open and although I tried as hard as I could, I wasn't able to produce any sound at all except for a sort of choking silence. I have never known such terror in all my life. Doctors were summoned. I went to see Norman Hunt. He couldn't find anything wrong with my cords. I just simply couldn't sing. I even saw a psychiatrist. A Professor Brittan. He said it was probably something to do with post-natal depression and that given a month or two all would be well. But it wasn't. Not in a month or two, not in a year or two, not after Emma was born, never again. So there's no point in trying to persuade me to perform in the Birthday Gala. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't. I can't sing. I haven't been able to sing for years and years. And that's all there is to it. My gift deserted me. X