

# Hannah

*Jan Borrie*

She closed her eyes; and in sweet slumber lying  
her spirit tiptoed from its lodging place.  
It's folly to shrink in fear, if this be dying;  
for death looked lovely in her lovely face.

*Petrarch*

Hannah feels old. She feels she has been walking in circles on tired feet forever.

She knows she has forgotten many things and there are many more things she never learned.

She has reached the point where nothing in her life can be verified, nothing in her past. There is no one left who can testify to the things she has seen and done.

She cannot prove her own existence before this moment, she cannot be sure of what she has done and said and what she has only dreamed; what she has seen and what she has simply borrowed from other people's lives, from memories with stronger, clearer walls than her own.

Hannah has lived so many years, walking in circles, and she doesn't recognise the stranger's shape in the mirror. Her memory wants her to see, and still delivers to her in sleep, the face of a young woman who hopes never to live to grow old.

But Hannah is old, the mirror reminds her, and she wonders how many more laps she must do.

She has not stopped seeing or discovering but she is losing interest. After all, nothing is remarkable when it is clear you are circling yourself.

She is ready to die now; she is looking for a place to go, a pleasant place to close her weary eyes. She wonders whether she will float away on the river, in her garden, in a green space, among trees, in the day or the night. She tries to secure a memory of her own—one she can be sure is of her in a favourite place. Hannah thinks a final moment of symbolism will be nice, if only for herself to appreciate.



Hannah is not unhappy, not bitter, not lonely. But she feels old. Her feet are tired and she cannot see why it is important to stay any longer. She is not going to kill herself, as such, but she is old enough and she has walked far enough to be able to decide.

When she thinks of the right place she will lie down and close her eyes and let herself drift into the sleep of the final separation. She will meet her maker, or whatever else comes to her first, but she will not wake again in this body.



Hannah wonders for a moment if her behaviour is normal. She likes to think people like her the world over are keeping their eyes open for a pleasant place, a favourite place, a place of some significance, if only to them. She likes to think when she passes them in the street and sees them looking around they are making up their minds, keeping an eye open for a place to close their life.

Hannah does not care if she is not normal, if she is alone. Who will mind now if she dies?

She cannot remember her beginning, but she wants to draw clear lines around the ending.



Hannah has decided on the river. She realises it has twice the symbolism: the memories she has found and that she is sure belong to her, feature the river and she believes she was never unhappy beside it; but the river itself is a symbol—unintended—as it winds by the town and out from the range across the flat, marshy plain to the sea. She hopes it is not too clichéd and prepares to leave.



Hannah discovers although the river looks brown from the bridge in the town, up close the water is clear.

Hannah is wearing her favourite dress: lemon with mauve and red roses. She has freed her swollen feet and aching legs from the prickly stockings that drag on her skin and constrict her tender veins. She has unknotted her single braid of hair and it falls in silver-white threads about her face.

*Literature and Aesthetics*

She catches her reflection in the water and for an instant she looks too beautiful and too young to die. But it is just a reflection and she feels old inside.

It is late in the day in a quiet spot upstream from the town. The river bends slightly in front of her, the sand under her feet is coarse, soothing, as it cools, shaded from the hot afternoon sun.

The scrub around Hannah pulls the fading light into soft folds against the river and the noises of the closing day seem far off—encouraging whispers.

Hannah is pleased if she passes on to some other place, this will be her last memory of this one. She is sure now she is right to leave like this, rather than to be taken from sleep in her dark room, undiscovered for days, or in the street, suddenly, and surrounded by embarrassed strangers.

Hannah cannot remember her beginning but she has taken control of the ending.



Hannah feels the water disperse with her weight. She is so pleased to be off her aching feet for the last time as she floats on her back.

She sees the paling sky, its colour bleached away, and she listens to the secret sounds of the water in her ears.

Hannah takes a long, slow look around her—but the moment of indecision has passed.

She hears herself sigh and imagines the sound of her breath carrying along the river, through the town and beyond, as a soft breeze that dimples the smooth surface of the water and tickles the dangling branches of weeping willows along the bank, and is gone.

She closes her eyes—exhausted—and reaches for the sleep of the final separation. The current plays with the folds of her dress and with her hair, splaying it like a veil about her head. Her last breath is a weary note that whispers through the reeds and the rocks at the water's edge.

Hannah is not unhappy, not bitter, not lonely. She feels the first wave of sleep and her weight in the river becomes light.

Hannah leaves then, knowing there is nothing more she needed to learn.