

VERSION

When Ann Lee returned again carrying two hats, Mrs Logan admitted that there had indeed been something to wait for. These were the hats one dreamed about – no, even in a dream one had never directly beheld them; they glimmered rather on the margin of one's dreams. With trembling hands she reached out in Ann Lee's direction to receive them. Ann Lee smiled deprecatingly upon her and them, then went away to fetch some more.

Lulu Logan snatched off the hat she was wearing and let it slide unnoticed from the brocaded seat of the chair where she had flung it and bowl away across the floor. Letty snatched off hers too, out of sympathy, and, each one occupying a mirror, they tried on every single hat Ann Lee brought them; passing each one reverently and regretfully across to one another, as though they had been crowns. It was very solemn. Ann Lee stood against the curtain of the archway, looking at them gently and pitifully with her long pale eyes. Her hands hung down by her sides; she was not the sort of person who needs to finger the folds of a curtain, touch the back of a chair, or play with a necklace. If Mrs Logan and her friend Miss Ames had had either eyes, minds, or taste for the comparison, they might have said that she seemed to grow from the floor like a lily. Their faces flushed; soon they were flaming in the insidious warmth of the shop. 'Oh, *damn* my face!' groaned Miss Ames into the mirror, pressing her hands to her cheeks, looking out at herself crimsonly from beneath the trembling shadow of an osprey.

How could Lulu ever have imagined herself in a gold turban? In a gold turban, when there were hats like these? But she had never known that there were hats like these, though she had tried on hats in practically every shop in London that she considered fit to call a shop. Life was still to prove itself a thing of revelations, even for Mrs Dick Logan. In a trembling voice she said that she would certainly have *this* one, and she thought she simply must have *this*, and 'Give me back the blue one, darling!' she called across to Letty.

Then a sword of cold air stabbed into the shop, and Lulu and Letty jumped, exclaimed and shivered. The outer door was open and a man was standing on the threshold, blatant in the light against the foggy dusk behind him. Above the suave folds of his dazzling scarf his face was stung to scarlet by the cold; he stood there timid and aggressive; abject in his impulse to retreat, blustering in his determination to resist it. The two ladies stood at gaze in the classic pose of indignation of discovered nymphs. Then they both turned to Ann Lee, with a sense that something had been outraged that went deeper than chastity. The man was not a husband; he belonged to neither of them.

Elizabeth Bowen. "Ann Lee's" [1926], in *Collected Stories*. London: Vintage Classics, 1980, pp. 105-6.