It is that - my loneliness in this house. *(1,8)*

And I clenched my hands again, so that the skin stretched, streams of blood rose and plunged. *(2,17)* But when I closed my eyes, they vanished - like the liquid mirror, the black frame of the door, the scarlet blouse flung upon the floor like an abandoned flag. *(3,29)* They all dropped from me, disappeared. *(4,6)* I was alone. *(5,3)* Yes, I whimpered, it is that I am alone, and then gave myself up to a fit of furious pillow-beating, kicking, everything but crying. *(6,24)*

From childhood experience, I knew this to be sweetly exhausting. *(7,10)*

It was exhausting still, but no longer sweetly so. *(8,9)* The silence that followed, the stillness, brought my limbs to rest, and my hot face turned at last to the evening breeze coming in at the window, but I realized, also, with new-found maturity, that it was when one's wildest passions were over, one's greatest furies calmed, when the body lay worn and nearly senseless, that one grew most keenly aware of the crepitations of the mind, the strange coldness of the heart, like an expanse of new ice upon which thoughts streaked, distant and dark, haunting one's awareness. *(9,89)*

I listened to the throb of my pulse. *(10,8)* I tried to think of it as the rhythm of a stream which would, if I permitted it, carry me backwards, through scenes and events, flashes of light, cries in the garden, sudden laughter, sudden gusts of wind, to the source of this disturbance. *(11,44)* It carried me back, yes, and I thought of Gautama wiping his fingers before he drank his tea, and from there back to my white dog rolling over on his back and inviting me to scratch the rough, sticky fur on his stomach - but no further. *(12,46)*

There it stuck, was dammed, and I continued to repeat to myself, meaninglessly, the fond names I had had for my pet. *(13,22)*

Childless women do develop fanatic attachments.

---

Note: *The first figure in the bracket after each sentence denotes the no. of the sentence in the passage, followed by no. of words in that sentence. The same pattern is followed throughout.*
to their pets, they say. (14,11) It is no less a relationship than that of a woman and her child, no less worthy of reverence, and agonized remembrance. (15,22) I shall never forget, I promised, with parted lips and clasped hands, never, and was immediately made aware of the moments trickling past. (16,23) There was no such thing as never. (17,7) Only now. (18,2) And yesterday. (19,2) Tomorrow? (20,1) Did I need to think of that? (21,7) I twisted away from tomorrow, because I knew how closely linked to the chain of time was the inevitable order of attachment, its disintegration, and then, the deluge. (22,28)

2 (PP. 171-173)

'Where are you now?' (1,4)

It is a question that crosses, vividly, my bleak mind, crosses it slowly as a tired bird struggling through the grey gauze of the evening sky. (2,26) My mind is tired, I am tired. (3,7) I have thought too much, remembered too much. (4,8) Time ought to appear short to me now, doled out by a niggardly god, far too little of it for one who is starved for time. (5,26) But, upon reflection, I find that it is not so, that it stretches, stretches endlessly, and as I grope slowly down the corridor of days and nights, fearing mortally the unexpected climax, the sudden finality that lurks in some suspicious shadow on my way, I find it excruciatingly long, tortuously slow. (6,51)

'Will the summer never end? (7,5) Will the monsoon never come?' (8,5)

'It is only May yet, Maya.' (9,6)

'Only May!' (10,2)

What weeks, what months must pass before that first spitting, spiteful, longed for and passionately blessed fall of rain. (11,19) Rain would mean a break in the dust-choked passage of heat-struck days, it would mean a climax, of a kind. (12,20) But it is only May. (13,5) And I bow my head with an unendurable sense of tongue-thickening, eye-veiling depression, as I sit on my little chair and stare and stare at the only cool thing in my vicinity - the floor, its squares of soft grey and dim black and sleep white, cool, flat, serene squares of marble. (14,51) One is like a piece
of sky overcast by rain-clouds, and shadow swallows hurtle across it so swiftly that speed itself is transfixed and held immobile, and the birds are suspended in mid-air, in mid-marble. (15,35) Another consists of dark blobs of flotsam floating on a leaden sea. (16,12) A third is a window-pane, washed with streaming rain. (17,9) I know them all by heart, each one of them, for I have stared at them hour upon hour upon hour, till they are sisters in a dream to me, a noon-time dream, dreamt in drugged sleep and only half-remembered in red-eyed wakefulness. (18,43)

Only a dream. (19,3) An illusion. (20,2) Maya - my very name means nothing, is nothing but an illusion. (21,11)

And when I rush to the window, or to the mirror that reflects the window, I see no rain, no clouded sky, no promise, no sweetness, but only the summer heat, the summer sky, dust-clouded and sun-sodden, beneath which trees, plants, grass that was once green, now droop as though withered by lightning. (22,53) The dust-winds sweep across the compound, sulphur-yellow, and drag the bougainvillaeaS against the baking walls. (23,15) Their thorns scratch upon the bricks. (24,6) I hear them screech, sigh and sag. (25,7) And I, who am nothing but an illusion, with them can do nothing but also screech, sigh and then sag. (26,20)

3 (PP. 187,188)

'Dust-storm! (1,2) Dust-storm!' (2,2)

The servants ran shouting through the rooms, wildly excited, looking with the alarmed eyes of the summer-somnolent shocked into wakefulness, to see if any window or door had been left open, or were now thrust open to admit the rush of stinging dust. (3,43) They carried long bamboo poles in their hands with which to bang shut the ventilators high up under the ceiling which had not, after all, crushed down upon us but was kept aloft by the hard-muscled arms of the dust-heavy, heat-heavy air. (4,42) The servants were quick - they had experience. (5,7) Quicker was the storm - vaster in experience. (6,7) Such storms had blown since the time when the earth was desert and no living thing, no creeping, crawling beasts, plants or cells stirred upon that great plain. (7,28) Such storms would sweep the earth and erase the last traces of these huge masses of creeping, crawling, toiling,
struggling cell-conglomerations that now wracked the earth. (8,26) When the time came for annihilation. (9,6)

Had it come? (10,3) I ran to the window, the balls of my feet turned to truckles. (11,13) No, this was a beginning and not an end. (12,9) Storm. (13,1) Motion. (14,1) Speed. (15,1) Living. (16,1) I beat upon the window as the dancer, waiting to go on stage, pounds the earth with uncontrollable feet once the hypnotic drumming begins. (17,24) What agony in ecstasy, what pain in magnificence. (18,8) I moaned luxuriously, straining my body towards that maniac motion, ho and furious, coming cloud upon cloud upon cloud, obliterating vision, obliterating, for that period, life - the life of dying things, of drooping plants, of screaming trees, making room for the truly eternal that would emerge thereafter. (19,47) I moaned with pity for having missed the splendid beginning, the tingling thrill of seeing it creep across the landscape, blotting out houses, trees, gate-posts, a forgotten bucket stranded upon the lawn that sent out one desperate flash, blinding, then went out and was lost, finally engulfing our own house, my own soul. (20,53)

Now I stood in the midst of it, I exulted, and raised my arms to return its impassioned embrace. (21,19) If the closed windows protected me from its whiplash and scorpion sting, it still allowed me the sensation of standing waistdeep, feet-first in the centre of the churning broil, of having plunged with grabbing hands and rapacious teeth into the heart of a gigantic melon, ruby-red, juice-jammed and womb-warm from its baking sand-bed. (22,52) Red, red, ruby-red was the dust - as though I were looking at it through lowered lids. (23,16) But no, my eyes were open, wide. (24,7) I was gazing through scarlet-coloured glasses that were occasionally rose-red, and ranged freely from nicotine-yellow to iodine-brown as well, and from burnt orange to livid pink, like one's most private flesh laid bare. (25,33) The time of faded flowers, of strangled lives, of parched vision, of hesitation and despair was over. (26,17) Here was a turmoil, a wild chiaroscuro of oven-hot colours that churned over and over in a heat-swelled bubble around me. (27,21) It revolved around me, about me, it was mine, mine, this life was mine. (28,14)