

**WHERE AM I? OR, A
STRANGER
HERE MYSELF**

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Where am I? or, A stranger here myself by Denis Mackail

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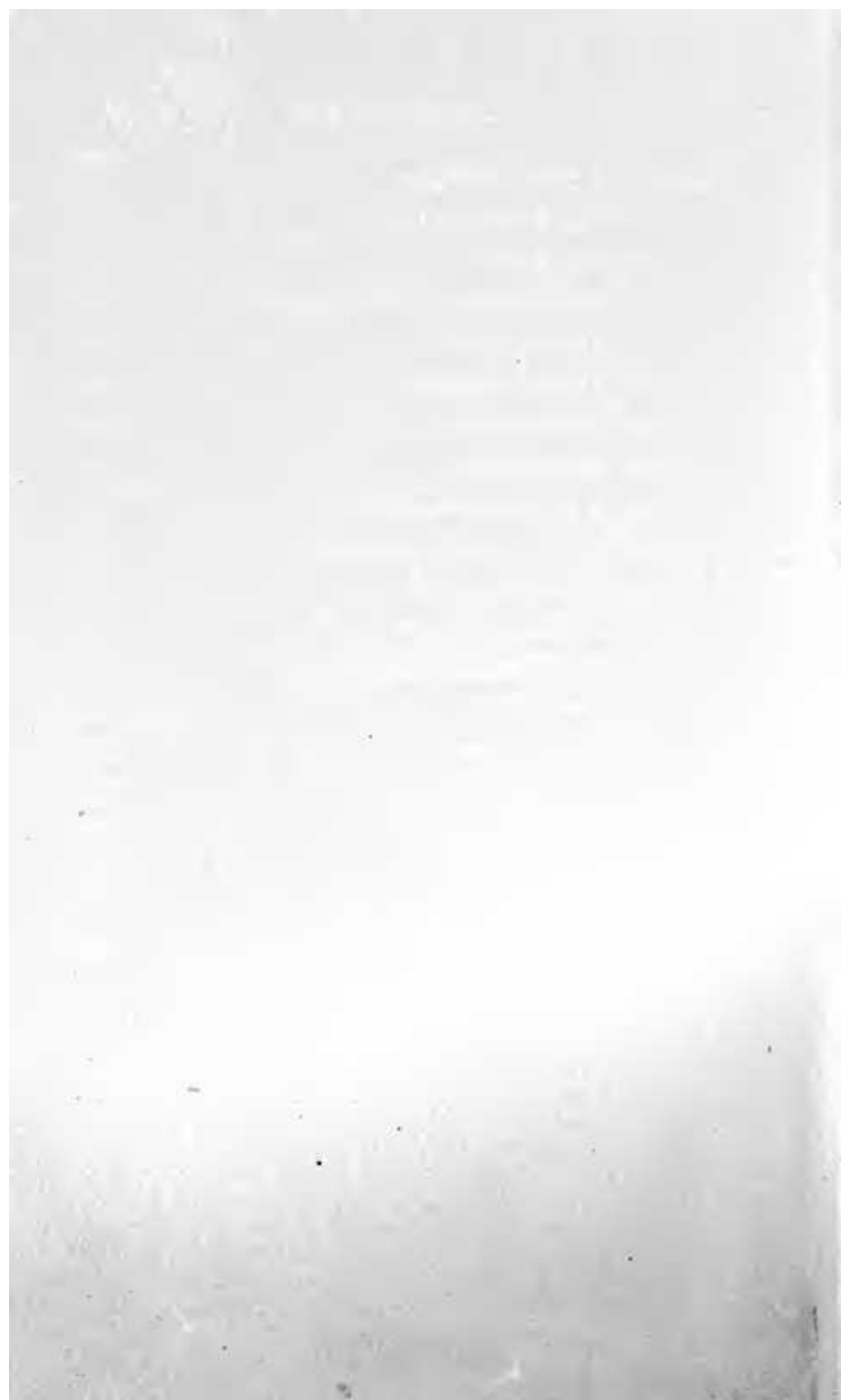
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CHAPTER I

A NURSERY WINDOW

THE window of the nursery in which I had somehow found myself looked over a London side street. To the right, a few hundred yards away, horse-omnibuses rumbled along a main thoroughfare, where already a shop that now sprawls all over the neighbourhood had begun (though this was as nothing yet) to expand. To the left, and almost at once, the side street itself expanded into a Square; which is the nearest that I have yet come to living in one, though I seem to have written about them a good deal. Almost immediately opposite there was another nursery window, with children, though older than myself, whom it appeared that I knew. They, and my elder sister, would sometimes breathe on their respective panes and write messages, of a simple nature, in reverse. However, as I wasn't only younger but was taking a curiously long time to learn my letters, I was unable to interpret them myself.

That would have been in the winter, of course, when windows were shut—unless my memory is up to some very queer trick again, I could swear that during at least one cold snap we were hermetically sealed in with strips of brown paper pasted along the sides, tops, and bottoms of both sashes—and breath would condense visibly at once. It was in the winter, too, that everyone's water-supply used to freeze—here, however, the clock has come round—and that the turncock would plant little stand-pipes, wrapped with straw, in the street, from which pails or jugs could be filled. Just as it was in the winter, or when dusk came before six o'clock, that I could watch the approach of the lamp-lighter, bearing fire at the end of a pole; adding a glimmer—or it would hardly seem more now—to each lamp as he passed; and then striding once more on his way.

Gas lamps, of course. Just a flame in the shape of a fish-tail. Today, from a much higher window, I look down on a street still supposedly gas-lit, though by what is also supposed to be a much better method. But there is no lamp-lighter. Instead, there are little electric batteries, and ingenious contrivances, with still more ingenious self-adjustment to sunset and sunrise, which in theory perform all the work. In practice, as I cannot help noticing—unless, of course, there is another black-out—some of the lamps are on all day, others fail to come on at night, while others, again, either burn right round the clock or never light up at all. Never