At this we all laughed loudly, and I reached for the gin and noticed with horror and dismay that it was half gone, more than half gone. Sudden pressing memories of what I had never quite forgotten came upon me, and I looked at my watch and said that wasn’t it time they all went off to see their Fellini film. They were not at all easy to dislodge, having sunk down very thoroughly and chattily into my parents’ extra-comfortable old deep chairs, where they had an air of being held like animals in the warmth of the central heating; they waved their arms and said they would rather stay and talk, and I almost hoped they might, and might indeed have sunk back into my chair myself, taking as ever the short term view, the easy quiet way, when Alex suddenly had a thought. I knew what it was as soon as he sat upright and looked worried and uneasy: he thought that I had been hurt by what they had said about Hurt, as I well might have been though in fact was not. I knew, however, as soon as I saw the reflection of this possibility upon his face, that they would go: and go they did, scrupulous as ever about personal relationships, just as they were unscrupulous about gin. I kept them talking for five minutes on the threshold, gazing anxiously from one to the other; pretty, tendril-haired Dick; hatchet-headed Alex, with his stooping stork shoulders and pale, cross, nail-chewing, eye-twitching, beautiful Lydia Reynolds, in her dirty Aquascutum macintosh. I wondered if I could ask any of them to stay and share my ordeal, and it crossed my mind later that they would actually have enjoyed such a request, all three of them together: they would have leaped with alacrity at the prospect of such a sordid, stirring, copy-providing evening. But then, my thoughts obscured by need, I did not see it that way, and I let them go and see Fellini without me.

Margaret Drabble, *The Millstone*, 1965