

This Freedom

A. S. M. Hutchinson

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THIS FREEDOM

BY

A. S. M. HUTCHINSON

"With a great sum obtained I this freedom."--ACTS xxii, 28.

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PART ONE--HOUSE OF MEN

CHAPTER I

Rosalie's earliest apprehension of the world was of a mysterious and extraordinary world that revolved entirely about her father and that entirely and completely belonged to her father. Under her father, all males had proprietary rights in the world and dominion over it; no females owned any part of the world or could do anything with it. All the males in this world--her father, and Robert and Harold her brothers, and all the other boys and men one sometimes saw--did mysterious and extraordinary things; and all the females in this world--her mother, and Anna and Flora and Hilda her sisters, and Ellen the cook and Gertrude the maid--did ordinary and unexciting and generally rather tiresome things. All the males were like story books to Rosalie: you never knew what they were going to do next; and all the females were like lesson books: they just went on and on and on.

Rosalie always stared at men when she saw them. Extraordinary and wonderful creatures who could do what they liked and were always doing mysterious and wonderful things, especially and above all her father.

Being with her father was like being with a magician or like watching a conjuror on the stage. You never knew what he was going to do next. Whatever he suddenly did was never surprising in the sense of being startling, for (this cannot be emphasised too much) nothing her father did was ever surprising to Rosalie; but it was surprising in the sense of being absorbingly wonderful and enthralling. Even better than reading when she first began to read, and far better than anything in the world before the mysteries in books were discoverable, Rosalie liked to sit and stare at her father and think how wonderful he was and wonder what extraordinary thing he would do next. Everything belonged to him. The whole of life was ordered with a view to what he would think about it. The whole of life was continually thrown off its balance and whirled into the most entrancing convulsions by sudden activities of this most wonderful man.

Entrancing convulsions! Wonderful, wonderful father with a bull after him! Why, that was her very earliest recollection of him! That showed you how wonderful he was! Father, seen for the first time (as it were) flying before a bull! Bounding wildly across a field towards her with a bull after him! Wonderful father! Did her mother ever rush along in front of a bull? Never. Was it possible to imagine any of the women she knew rushing before a bull? It was not possible. To see a woman rushing before a bull would have alarmed Rosalie for she would have felt it was unnatural; but for her father to be bounding wildly along in front of a bull seemed to her perfectly natural and ordinary and she was not in the least alarmed; only, as always, enthralled.

Her father, while Rosalie watched him, was not in great danger. He came ballooning along towards Rosalie, not running as ordinarily fit and efficient men run, but progressing by a series of enormous leaps and bounds, arms and legs spread-eagling, and at each leap and bound always seeming to Rosalie to spring as high in the air as he sprung forward over the ground. It would not have surprised Rosalie, who was then about four, to see one of these stupendous leaps continue in a whirling flight through mid-air and her father come hurtling over the gate and drop with an enormous plunk at her feet like a huge dead bird, as a partridge once had come plunk over the hedge and out of the sky when she was in a lane adjacent to a shooting party. It would not have surprised her in the least. Nothing her father did ever surprised Rosalie. The world was his and the fulness thereof, and he did what he liked with it.

Arrived, however, from the bull, not as a ballooning bird out of the sky, but as a headlong avalanche over the gate, Rosalie's father tottered to a felled tree trunk, and sat there heaving, and groaned aloud, "Infernal parish; hateful parish; forsaken parish!"

Rosalie, wonderingly regarding him, said, "Mother says dinner is waiting for you, father."

Her mother and her sisters and the servants and the entire female establishment of the universe seemed to Rosalie always to be waiting for something from her father, or for her father himself, or waiting for or upon some male other than her father. That was another of the leading principles that Rosalie first came to know in her world. Not only were the males, paramourly her father, able

to do what they liked and always doing wonderful and mysterious things, but everything that the females did either had some relation to a male or was directly for, about, or on behalf of a male.

Getting Robert off to school in the morning, for instance. That was another early picture.

There would be Robert, eating; and there was the entire female population of the rectory feverishly attending upon Robert while he ate. Six females, intensely and as if their lives depended upon it, occupied with one male. Three girls--Anna about sixteen, Flora fourteen, Hilda twelve--and three grown women, all exhaustingly occupied in pushing out of the house one heavy and obstinate male aged about ten! Rosalie used to stand and watch entranced. How wonderful he was! Where did he go to when at last he was pushed off? What happened to him? What did he do?

There he is, eating; there they are, ministering. Entrancing and mysterious spectacle!

Robert, very solid and heavy and very heated and agitated, would be seated at the table shoving porridge into himself against the clock. One of his legs, unnaturally flexed backward and outward, is in the possession of Rosalie's mother who is on her knees mending a hole in his stocking. The other leg, similarly contorted, is on the lap of Ellen the cook, who with very violent tugs, as if she were lashing a box, is lacing a boot on to it. Behind Robert is Anna, who is pressing his head down with one hand and washing the back of his neck with the other. In front of him across the table is Hilda, staring before her with bemused eyes and moving lips and rapidly counting on drumming fingers. Hilda is doing his sums for him. Beside him on his right side, apparently engaged in throttling him, is Gertrude the maid. Gertrude the maid is trying to tear off him a grimed collar and put on him a clean collar. Facing Gertrude on his other side is Flora. Flora is bawling his history in his ear.

Everybody is working for Robert; everybody is working at top speed for him, and everybody is loudly soliciting his attention.

"Oh, do give over wriggling, master Robert!" (The boot-fastener.)

"'Simon de Montford, Hubert de Burgh, and Peter de Roche.' Well, say it then, you dreadful little idiot!" (The history crammer.)

"Oh, master Robert, do please keep up!" (The collar fastener.)

"Keep down, will you!" (The neck washer.)

"Four sixes are twenty-four and six you carried thirty!" (The arithmetician.)

"Robert, you must turn your foot further round!" (The stocking-darner.)

"'The Barons were now incensed. The Barons were now incensed. The Barons were now incensed.' Say it, you ghastly little stupid!"

"Do they make you do these by fractions or by decimals?... Well, what do you know, then?"

Entrancing spectacle!

Now the discovery is by everybody simultaneously made and simultaneously announced that Robert is already later in starting than he has ever been (he always was) and immediately Rosalie would become witness of the last and most violent skirmish in this devoted attendance. Everybody rushes around hunting for things and pushing them on to Robert and pushing Robert, festooned with them, towards the door. Where was his cap? Where was his satchel? Where was his lunch? Where were his books? Who had seen his atlas? Who had seen his pencil box? Who had seen his gymnasium belt? Was his bicycle ready? Was his coat on his bicycle? Was that button on his coat?

With these alarms at their height and the excursions attendant on them at their busiest, another splendid male would enter the room and immediately there was, as Rosalie always saw, a transference of attendance to him and a violent altercation between him and the first splendid male. This new splendid male is Rosalie's other brother, Harold. Harold was eighteen and him also the entire female population of the rectory combined to push out of the rectory every morning. Harold was due to be pushed off half an hour later than Robert, and as he was a greater and more splendid male than Robert (though infinitely lesser than her father) so the place to which he was pushed off was far more mysterious and enthralling than the place to which Robert was pushed off. A school Rosalie could dimly understand. But a bank! Why Harold should go to sit on a bank all day, and why he should ride on a bicycle to Ashborough to find a bank when there were banks all around the rectory, and even in the garden itself, Rosalie never could imagine. Mysterious Harold! Anna had told her that men kept money in banks; but Rosalie had never found money in a bank though she had looked; yet banks--of all extraordinary places--were where men chose to put their money! Mysterious men! And Harold could find these banks and find this money though he never took a trowel or a spade and was always shingly clean with a very high collar and very long cuffs. Wonderful, wonderful Harold!

Robert was due to be pushed off half an hour before Harold was due to be pushed off, but he never was; the two splendid creatures always clashed and there was always between them, because they clashed, a violent scene which Rosalie would not have missed for worlds. A meeting of two males, so utterly unlike a meeting of two females, was invariably of the most entrancingly noisy or violent description. When ladies came to the rectory to see her mother they sat in the drawing-room and sipped tea and spoke in thin voices; but when men came to see her father and went into the study, there was very loud talking and often a row. Yes, and once in the village street, Rosalie had seen two men stand up and thump one another with their fists and fall down and get up and thump again. When two women, her sisters or others, quarrelled, they only shrilled, and went on and on shrilling. It was impossible to imagine the collision of two women producing anything so exciting and splendid as invariably was produced by the collision of two males.

As now----

In comes Harold in great heat and hurry (as men always were) with

his splendid button boots in one hand and an immense pair of shining cuffs in the other hand.

"Haven't you gone yet, you lazy young brute?"

"No, I haven't, you lazy old brute!"

Agitated feminine cries of "Robert! Robert! You are not to speak to Harold like that."

"Well, he spoke to me like that."

"Yes, and I'll do a jolly sight more than speak to you in a minute if you don't get out of it. Get out of it, do you hear?"

"Shan't!"

"Robert! Robert! Harold! Harold!"

"Well, get him out of it, or he'll be sorry for it. Why is he always here when I'm supposed to be having my breakfast? Not a thing ready, as usual. Look here, where I'm supposed to sit--flannel and soap! That's washing his filthy neck, I suppose. Filthy young brute! Why don't you wash your neck, pig?"

"Why do you wear girl's boots with buttons, pig?"

Commotion. Enthralling commotion. Half the female assemblage hustle the splendid creature Robert out of the door and down the hall and on to his bicycle; half the female assemblage cover his retreat and block the dash after him of the still more splendid Harold; all the female assemblage, battle having been prevented and one splendid male despatched, combine to minister to the requirements of the second splendid male now demanding attention.

Busy scene. Enthralling spectacle. There he is, eating; shoving sausages into himself against the clock just as Robert had shovelled porridge into himself against the clock. One ministrant is sewing a button on to his boot, another with blotting paper and hot iron is removing a stain from his coat, divested for the purpose; one is pouring out his coffee, another is cutting his bread, a third is watching for his newspaper by the postman. And suddenly he whirls everything into a whirlpool just as men, if Rosalie watches them long enough, always whirl everything into a whirlpool.

"Oh, my goodness, the pump!"

Chorus, "The pump?"

"The bicycle pump! Has that young brute taken the bicycle pump?"

"Yes, he took it. I saw it."

Commotion.

"Catch him across the field! Catch him across the field! Where are my boots? Where the devil are my boots? Well, never mind the infernal button. How am I going to get to the bank with a flat tyre? Can't some one catch him across the field instead of all standing

there staring?"

Away they go! Rosalie, seeking a good place for the glorious spectacle, is knocked over in the stampede for the door. Nobody minds Rosalie. Rosalie doesn't mind--anything to see this entrancing sight! Away they go, flying over the meadow, shouting, scrambling, falling. Out after them plunges Harold, shirt-sleeved, one boot half on, hobbling, leaping, bawling. Glorious to watch him! He outruns them all; he outbellows them all. Of course he does. He is a man. He is one of those splendid, wonderful, mysterious creatures to whom, subject only to Rosalie's father, the entire world belongs. Look at him, bounding, bawling! Wonderful, wonderful Harold!

But Robert is wonderful too. If it had been Anna or Flora or Hilda gone off with the pump, she would have been easily caught. Not Robert. Wonderful and mysterious Robert, wonderfully and mysteriously pedalling at incredible speed, is not caught. The hunt dejectedly trails back. The business of pushing Harold out of the house is devotedly resumed.

And again--enthraling spectacle--just as the reign of Robert was terminated by the accession of Harold, so the dominion of Harold is overthrown by the accession of father. Harold is crowded about with ministrants. Nobody can leave him for a minute. Rosalie's father appears. Everybody leaves Harold simultaneously, abruptly, and as if by magic. Rosalie's father appears. Everybody disappears. Wonderful father! Everybody melts away: but Harold does not melt away. Courageous Harold! Everybody melts; only Harold is left, and Rosalie watching; and immediately, as always, the magnificent males clash with sound and fury.

Rosalie's father scowls upon Harold and delivers his morning greeting. No "Good morning, dear," as her mother would have said. "Aren't you gone yet?" like a bark from a kennel.

"Just going."

Wonderful father! A moment before there had been not the remotest sign of Harold ever going. Now Harold is very anxious to go. He is very anxious to go but, like Robert, he will not abandon the field without defiance of the authority next above his own. While he collects his things he whistles. Rosalie shudders (but deliciously as one in old Rome watching the gladiators).

"Do you see the clock, sir?"

"Yes."

"Well, quicken yourself, sir. Quicken yourself."

"The clock's fast."

"It is not fast, sir. And let me add that the clock with which you could keep time of a morning, or of any hour in the day, would have to be an uncommonly slow clock."

Harold with elaborate unconcern adjusts his trouser clips. "I should have thought that was more a matter for the Bank to complain of, if necessary. I may be wrong, of course----"

"You may be wrong, sir, because in my experience you almost invariably are wrong and never more so than when you lad-di-dah that you are right. You may be wrong, but let me tell you what you may not be. You may not be impertinent to me, sir. You may not lad-di-dah me, sir."

"Father, I really do not see why at my age I should be hounded out of the house like this every morning."

"You are hounded out, as you elegantly express it, because morning after morning, owing to your disgustingly slothful habits, you clash with me, sir. My breakfast is delayed because you clash with me, and the house is delayed because you clash with me, and the whole parish is delayed because you clash with me."

"Perhaps you're not aware that Robert clashes with me."

"Dash Robert! Are you going or are you not going?"

He goes.

"Bring back the paper."

He brings it back.

Wonderful father!

Rosalie's father gives a tug at the bell cord that would have dislocated the neck of a horse. The cord comes away in his hand. He hurls it across the room.

Glorious father!

There was a most frightful storm one night and Rosalie, in Anna's bed with Flora crowded in also and Hilda shivering in her nightgown beside them, too young to be frightened but with her sister's fright beginning to communicate itself to her, said, "Ask father to go and stop it."

"Fool!" cried Flora. "How could father stop the storm?"

Why not?

CHAPTER II

Flora's sharp and astounding reply to that question of Rosalie's was recalled by Rosalie, with hurt surprise at Flora's sharpness and ignorance, when, shortly afterwards, she found in a book a man who could, and actually did, stop a storm. This was a man called

Prospero in a book called "The Tempest."

She was never--that Rosalie--the conventional wonder-child of fiction who reads before ten all that its author probably never read before thirty; but she could read when she was six and she read widely and curiously, choosing her entertainment, from her father's bookshelves, solely by the method of reading every book that had pictures.

There was but one picture to "The Tempest," a frontispiece, but it sufficed, and at the period when Rosalie believed the ownership of the world to be vested in her father and under him in all males, "The Tempest," because it reflected that condition, was the greatest joy of all the joys the bookshelves discovered to her. She read it over and over again. It presented life exactly as life presented itself to the round eyes of Rosalie: all males doing always noisy and violent and important and enthralling things, with Prospero, her father, by far the most important of all; and women scarcely appearing and doing only what the men told them to do. Miranda's appearances in the story were indifferently skipped by Rosalie; the noisy action and language in the wreck, and the noisy action and language of the drunkards in the wood were what she liked, and all the magic arts of Prospero were what she thoroughly appreciated and understood. That was life as she knew it.

Rosalie's father, when Rosalie thought the world belonged to him and revolved about him, was tall and cleanshaven and of complexion a dark and burning red. When he was excited or angry his face used to burn as the embers in the study fire burned when Rosalie pressed the bellows against them. He had thick black eyebrows and a most powerful nose. His nose jutted from his face like a projection from a cliff beneath a clump of bushes. He had been at Cambridge and he was most ferociously fond of Cambridge. One of the most fearful scenes Rosalie ever witnessed was on one boat-race day when Harold appeared with a piece of Oxford ribbon in his buttonhole. It was at breakfast, the family for some reason or other most unusually all taking breakfast together. Rosalie's father first jocularly bantered Harold on his choice of colour, and everybody--anxious as always to please and placate the owner of the world--laughed with father against Harold. But Harold did not laugh. Harold smouldered resentment and defiance, and out of his smouldering began to maintain "from what chaps had said" that Oxford was altogether and in every way a much better place than Cambridge. In every branch of athletics there were better athletes, growled Harold, at Oxford.

Rosalie has been watching the embers in her father's face glowing to dark-red heat. Everybody had been watching them except Harold who, though addressing his father, had been mumbling "what chaps had said" to his plate.

"Athletes!" cried Rosalie's father suddenly in a very terrible voice. "Athletes! And what about scholars, sir?"

Harold informed his plate that he wasn't talking about scholars.

Rosalie's father raised a marmalade jar and thumped it down upon the table so that it cracked. "Then what the dickens right have you to talk at all, sir? How dare you try to compare Oxford with Cambridge when you know no more about either than you know of

Jupiter or Mars? Athletes!" He went off into record of University contests, cricket scores, running times, football scores, as if his whole life had been devoted to collecting them. They all showed Cambridge first and Oxford beaten and he hurled each one at Harold's head with a thundering, "What about that, sir?" after it. He leapt to scholarship and reeled off scholarships and scholars and schools, and professors and endowments and prize men, as if he had been an educational year-book gifted with speech and with particularly loud and violent speech. He spoke of the colleges of Cambridge, and with every college and every particular glory of every college demanded of the unfortunate Harold, "What have you got in Oxford against that, sir?"

It was awful. It was far more frightening than the night of the storm. Nobody ate. Nobody drank. Everybody shuddered and tried by every means to avoid catching father's rolling eye and thereby attracting the direct blast of the tempest. Rosalie, who of course, being a completely negligible quantity in the rectory, is not included in the everybody, simply stared, more awed and enthralled than ever before. And with much reason. As he declaimed of the glories of the colleges of Cambridge there was perceptible in her father's voice a most curious crack or break. It became more noticeable and more frequent. He suddenly and most astoundingly cried out, "Cambridge! Cambridge!" and threw his arms out before him on the table, and buried his head on them, and sobbed out, "Cambridge! My youth! My youth! My God, my God, my youth!"

Somehow or other they all slipped out of the room and left him there,--all except Rosalie who remained in her high chair staring upon her father, and upon his shoulders that heaved up and down, and upon the coffee from an overturned cup that oozed slowly along the tablecloth.

Extraordinary father!

Rosalie's father had been a wrangler and one of the brilliant men of his year at Cambridge. All manner of brilliance was expected for him and of him. He unexpectedly went into the Church and as unexpectedly married.

His bride was the daughter of a clergyman, a widower, who kept a small private school in Devonshire. She helped her father to run the school (an impoverished business which, begun exclusively for the "sons of gentlemen," had slid down into paying court to tradesmen in order to get the sons of tradesmen) and she maintained him in the very indifferent health he suffered. Harold Aubyn, the brilliant wrangler with the brilliant future, who had begun his brilliance by unexpectedly entering the Church, and continued it by unexpectedly marrying while on a holiday in the little Devonshire town where he had gone to ponder his future (a little unbalanced by the unpremeditated plunge into Holy Orders) further continued his brilliance by unexpectedly finding himself the assistant master in his father-in-law's second-rate and failing school. The daughter would not leave her father; the suitor would not leave his darling; the brilliant young wrangler who at Cambridge used to dream of waking to find himself famous awoke instead to find himself six years buried in a now third-rate and moribund school in a moribund Devonshire town. He had a father-in-law now permanent invalid, bedridden. He had four children and another, Robert, on the way.

It was his father-in-law's death that awoke him; and he awoke characteristically. The old man dead! Come, that was one burden lifted, one shackle removed! The school finally went smash at the same time. Never mind! Another burden gone! Another shackle lifted! Dash the school! How he hated the school! How he loathed and detested the lumping boys! How he loathed and abominated teaching them simple arithmetic (he the wrangler!) and history that was a string of dates, and geography that was a string of capes and bays, and Latin as far as the conjugations (he the wrangler!) how he loathed and abominated it! Now a fresh start! Hurrah!

That was like Rosalie's father--in those days. That way blew the cold fit and the hot fit--then.

The magnificent fresh start after the magnificent escape from the morass of the moribund father-in-law and the moribund school and the moribund Devonshire town proved to be but a stagger down into morass heavier and more devastating of ambition. He always jumped blindly and wildly into things. Blindly and wildly into the Church, blindly and wildly into marriage, blindly and wildly into the school, blindly and wildly, one might say, into fatherhood on a lavish scale. Blindly and wildly--the magnificent fresh start--into the rectory in which Rosalie was born.

It was "a bit in the wilds" (of Suffolk); "a bit of a tight fit" (L200 a year) and a bit or two or three other drawbacks; but it was thousands of miles from Devonshire and from the school and schooling, that was the great thing; and it was a jolly big rectory with a ripping big garden; and above all and beyond everything it was just going to be a jumping-off place while he looked around for something suitable to his talents and while he got in touch again with his old friends of the brilliant years.

It was just going to be a jumping-off place, but he never jumped off from it; a place from which to look around for something suitable, but instead he sunk in it up to his chin; a place from which to get in touch again with his friends of the brilliant years, but his friends were all doing brilliant things and much too busy at their brilliance to open up with one who had missed fire.

The parish of St. Mary's, Ibbotsfield, had an enormous rectory, falling to pieces; an enormous church, crumbling away; an enormous area, purely agricultural; and a cure of a very few hundred agricultural souls, enormously-scattered. Years and years before, prior to railways, prior to mechanical reapers and thrashers, and prior to everything that took men to cities or whirled them and their produce farther in an hour than they ever could have gone in a week, Ibbotsfield and its surrounding villages and hamlets were a reproach to the moral conditions of the day in that they had no sufficiently enormous church. Well-intentioned persons removed this reproach, adding in their zeal an enormous rectory; and the time they chose for their beneficent and lavish action was precisely the time when Ibbotsfield, through its principal land-owners, was stoutly rejecting the monstrous idea of encouraging a stinking, roaring, dangerous railway in their direction, and combining together by all means in their power to keep the roaring, dangerous atrocity as far away from them as possible.

It thus, and by like influences, happened that, whereas one generation of the devoutly intentioned sat stolidly under the reproach of an enormous and thickly populated area without a church, later generations with the same stolidity sat under the reproach of an enormous church, an enormous rectory and an infinitesimal stipend, in an area which a man might walk all day without meeting any other man.

But the devout of the day, not having to live in this rectory or preach in this church or laboriously trudge about this area, did not unduly worry themselves with this reproach.

That was (in his turn) the lookout of the Rev. Harold Aubyn--also his outlook.

He is to be imagined, in those days when Rosalie first came to know him and to think of him as Prospero, as a terribly lonely man. He stalked fatiguingly about the countryside in search of his parishioners, and his parishioners were suspicious of him and disliked his fierce, thrusting nose, and he returned from them embittered with them and hating them. He genuinely longed to be friendly with them and on terms of Hail, fellow, well met, with them; but they exasperated him because they could not meet him either on his own quick intellectual level or upon his own quick and very sensitive emotional level. They could not respond to his humour and they could not respond, in the way he thought they ought to respond, to his sympathy.

He once found a man--a farm labourer--who in conversation disclosed a surprising interest in the traces of early and mediaeval habitation of the country. The discovery delighted him. In the catalogue of a secondhand bookseller of Ipswich he noticed the "Excursions in the County of Suffolk," two volumes for three shillings, and he wrote and had them posted to the man. For days he eagerly looked in the post for the grateful and delighted letter that in similar circumstances he himself would have written. He composed in his mind the phrases of the letter and warmed in spirit over anticipation of reading them. No letter arrived.

When he came into the rectory from visiting he was always asking, "Has that man Bolas from Hailsham called?" Bolas never called. He furiously began to loathe Bolas. He was furious with himself for having "lowered himself" to Bolas. Bolas in his ignorance no doubt thought the books were a cheap charity of cast-off lumber. Uncouth clod! Stupid clod! Uncouth parish! Hateful, loathsome parish! For weeks he kept away from Hailsham and the possible vicinity of Bolas. One day he met him. Bolas passed with no more than a "Good day, Mr. Aubyn." He could have killed the man. He swung round and pushed his dark face and jutting nose into the face of Bolas. "Did you ever get some books I sent you?"

"Ou, ay, to be sure, they books----"

He rushed with savage strides away from the man. All the way home he savagely said to himself, aloud, keeping time to it with his feet, "Uncouth clod, ill-mannered clod, horrible, hateful place! Uncouth clods, hateful clods, horrible, hateful place!"

That was his attitude to his parishioners. They could not come up to the level of his sensibilities; he could not get down to the

level of theirs.

With the few gentle families that composed the society of Ibbotsfield he was little better accommodated. They led contented, well-ordered lives, busy about their gardens, busy about their duties, busy about their amusements. His life was ill-ordered and he was never busy about anything: he was always either neglecting what had to be done or doing it, late, with a ferocious and exhausting energy that caused him to groan over it and detest it while he did it. In the general level of his life he was below the standard of his neighbours and knew that he was below it; in the sudden bounds and flights of his intellect and of his imagination he was immeasurably above the intellects of his neighbours and knew that he was immeasurably above them. Therefore, and in both moods, he commonly hated and despised them. "Fools, fools! Unread, pompous, petty!"

At the rectory, among his family, he seemed to himself to be surrounded by incompetent women and herds of children.

He was a terribly lonely man when Rosalie first came to know him and thought of him as Prospero. He is to be imagined in those days as a fierce, flying, futile figure scudding about on the face of the parish and in the vast gaunt spaces of the rectory, with his burning face and his jutting nose, trying to get away from people, hungering to meet sympathetic people; trying to get way from himself, hungering after the things that his self had lost. In his young manhood he was known for moods of intense reserve alternated by fits of tremendous gaiety and boisterous high spirits. ("A fresh start! Hurrah!" when release from the school came. "What does anything matter? Now we're really off at last! Hurrah! Hurrah!") In his set manhood, when Rosalie knew him, there were substituted for the fits of boisterous spirits, paroxysms of violent outburst against his lot. "Infernal parish! Hateful parish! Forsaken parish!" after the ignominy of flight before the bull. "Blow the dinner! Dash the dinner! Blow the dinner!" after wrestling a soggy steak from his pocket and hurling it half a mile through the air. These and that single but terrible occasion of "Cambridge! Cambridge! My youth! My God, my God, my youth!"

A terribly lonely man.

CHAPTER III

The Aubyn family occupied only a portion of the enormous rectory. There was a whole floor upstairs, and there were several rooms on the ground and first floors, that were never used, were unfurnished except for odds and ends of lumber left behind by the previous vicar, and were never entered. Rosalie once explored them all, systematically though very fearfully, and also very excitedly. She was searching for some one, for two people.

In the household she knew her father and her mother, her brothers and sisters and the servants; but there were two mysterious inhabitants of whom she often heard but whom she never saw and never could find. It used to frighten her sometimes, lying awake at night, or creeping about the house of an evening, to think of those two mysterious people hidden away somewhere and perhaps likely to pounce on her out of the dark. What did they eat? Where did they live? What did they do? What were they?

One of these two eerie and invisible people was heard of from her father. Several times Rosalie had heard him, when talking to persons not of the family, speak of "my wife." The other eerie and invisible creature was heard of from her mother: "My husband."

Where were they? Of all the mysterious things which Rosalie used to wonder over in those days, this undiscoverable "wife" and "husband" were the most mysterious of all, and more mysterious than ever after that day on which, walking on tiptoe for fear of coming upon them suddenly, holding her breath and pausing in fearful apprehension before entering the untenanted rooms upstairs, she explored the whole house in search of them. She got to know all sorts of little odds and ends about them; that the wife felt the cold very much, for instance, for she had heard her father say so; and that the husband did not like mutton, for her mother told that to Mr. Grant the butcher: and she was often hot on their tracks for she had heard her father say, "My wife is upstairs" and had rushed upstairs and searched; and her mother say, "My husband is in the garden," and had run into the garden and hunted. But all these clues only deepened the mystery. They were never to be found.

It was mysterious.

Then one day the wife (she heard) fell ill, and through her great concern about that--for she was profoundly interested in these people and used to feel awfully sorry for them, hidden away like that perhaps with no fire and nothing to eat but mutton--the mystery was explained.

With the family she was going towards church one Sunday morning and she heard her father tell a lady that "my wife" was not very well that morning and couldn't come. Rosalie during the service prayed very earnestly for the wife's recovery and took the opportunity of praying also that she might be permitted to see the wife "if she is not very frightening, O Lord, and the husband too, if possible, for Jesus Christ's sake, amen."

And at lunch, having thought of nothing else all the morning, there was suddenly shot out of her the question, "Father, is your wife any better now?"

Rosalie commonly never spoke at all at meals; and as to speaking to her father, though it is obvious she must have had some sort of intercourse with him, this famous question (a standing joke in the house for years) was the single direct speech of those early years she ever could remember. She spoke to her father when she was bidden to speak in the form of messages, generally about meals being ready, or relative to shopping commissions he had been asked to execute; but he was far too wonderful, powerful and mysterious

for conversation with him on her own initiative. "Father, is your wife any better now?" stood out in her later recollection, alone and lonely starting.

There was from all the company an astounded stare and astounded gasp; all the table sitting with astounded eyes, forks suspended in mid-air, mouths half open in astonishment, and Rosalie sitting in her high chair wonderingly regarding their wonderment. What were they staring at?

There was then an enormous howl of laughter, led by Rosalie's father, and repeated, and louder than before, because it was so very unusual for the family to be laughing in accord with father. Gertrude, the maid, fled hysterically from the room and laughter howled back from the kitchen.

Rosalie's father said, "You'd better go and ask your mother." Her mother had stayed in bed that day with a chill.

Robert "undid" Rosalie--a wooden rod with a fixed knob at one end went through the arms of her high chair and was fastened by a removable knob at the other end--and Rosalie slid down very gravely, and with their laughter still echoing trod upstairs to her mother's bedside and related what she had been told to ask, and, on inquiry, why she had asked it. "I only said 'Father, is your wife any better now?'" and on further inquiry explained her long searching after the undiscoverable pair.

Rosalie's mother laughed also then, but had a sudden wetness in her eyes. She put her arms about Rosalie and pressed her to her bosom and cried, "Oh, my poor darling!" and explained the tremendous mystery. Wife and husband, Rosalie's mother explained, were the names used by other people for her father and her mother. A man and a woman loved one another very, very dearly ("as I loved your dear father") and then they lived together in a dear house of their own and then God gave them dear little children of their own to live with them, said Rosalie's mother.

This thoroughly satisfied Rosalie and completely entranced her, especially about the presentation of the dear little children. She would have supposed that naturally it thoroughly satisfied Anna and Harold and Flora and the others; and the point of interest rests here, that Rosalie's mother also believed that this explanation of marriage and procreation completely satisfied Anna at sixteen and Harold in the Bank at eighteen. She never gave them any other explanation of the phenomenon of birth; and it is to be supposed that, just as she instructed them that God sent the dear little children, so she believed that God, at the right time, in some mysterious way, communicated the matter to them in greater detail. Years and years afterwards, Flora told Rosalie that when Rosalie was born all the children were sent away to stay with a neighbour and not allowed to return till Rosalie's mother, downstairs, was able to show them the dear little sister that God had surprisingly delivered at the house, as it were in a parcel.

One is given pain by a state of affairs so monstrous; but one suffers that pain proudly because one belongs, proudly, to a day in which nothing but stark truth may go from mother to child, not even fairy stories, not even Bible stories. Rosalie's mother is gone and her

kind is no more, and in the graces and the manners of this day's generation one perceives, proudly, the inestimable benefits of the passing of her kind. Lamentable specimen of her kind, she had no interests other than her home and her husband and her children and the pleasures and the treasures and the friends of her husband and her children. She belonged to that dark age when duty towards others was the guiding principle of moral life; she came only to the threshold of this enlightened age in which duty to oneself is known to be the paramount and first and last consideration of life as it should be lived.

Rosalie's mother, whose name had been Anna Escott, kept at the bottom of a drawer five most exquisite little miniatures. They were in a case of faded blue plush, and they had been in that case and at the bottom of one drawer or another ever since the girl Anna Escott, aged twenty, had placed them in the case, then exquisitely blue and new and soft, and given up painting miniatures forever, in order to devote her whole time to looking after her invalid father and the failing preparatory school that was his livelihood.

Rosalie was herself nearly thirty when she first saw the miniatures. She was come back to the rectory from the pursuits that then occupied her to visit, rather impatiently and rather vexedly, her mother on what proved to be her death bed. She was tidying her mother's drawers, impatient with the amazing collection of rubbish they contained and hating herself for being impatient, while her mother, on the bed, patiently watched her; and she came upon the case and opened it and stared in astonishment and admiration at the beauty of the five miniatures.

She asked her mother and her mother told her she had painted them. "I used to do that when I was a girl," said Rosalie's mother.

All Rosalie's impatience was drowned and utterly engulfed in a most dreadful flood of emotion. She set down the case on the bed and flung herself on her knees beside her mother and clasped her arms about her.

"Oh, mother, mother! Oh, beloved little mother!" But that is out of its place.

Yes, that girl Anna Escott, who had an exquisite talent, and all sorts of fond dreams of its development, gave it up wholly and entirely and forever when her mother died and her father said, "I would like you, Anna dear, to give up your painting and come and look after me and the school now."

Anna said, "Of course I will, Papa. It's my duty. Of course I will."

Girls did that, and parents and husbands asked them to do that, in the days when Rosalie's mother was a girl.

Rosalie's mother gave away everything, first to her father, then to her husband, then to her children. She believed the whole of the Bible, literally, as it is written, from the first word of Genesis to the last word of Revelations. She taught it as literal, final and initial truth to all her children, and one knows how wickedly wrong it is now considered to teach children that the Bible-stories are true. She taught them the whole of the Bible from books called

"Line Upon Line," and "The Child's Bible," and in stories of her own making, and from the Bible itself. Regrettably, the ignorantly imposed-upon children loved it! Till each child was eight she taught them everything at her knee. All the nursery rhymes, and all the Bible, and reading out of "Step by Step," and then "Reading Without Tears," and then, in advancing series, the "Royal Readers," and writing, first holding their hands, and then--first in pencil and afterwards with pens having three huge blobs to teach you how to place your fingers properly--in copybooks graded from enormous lines which had brick-red covers to astoundingly narrow little lines enclosing pious and moral maxims which had severe grey covers; and the multiplication tables and then simple arithmetic; and General Knowledge out of "The Child's Guide to Knowledge," which asked you "What is sago?" and required you to reply by heart, "Sago is a dried, granulated substance prepared from the pith of several different palms." "Where are these palms found?" "These palms are found in the East Indies."

Likewise history out of Mrs. Markham and "Little Arthur"; also, at a ridiculously early age, how to tell the time and how to know the coinage of the realm and its values; also, whether girl or boy, the making of kettle-holders by threading brightly coloured wools through little squares of canvas; also very many pieces of poetry: "Oft had I heard of Lucy Grey," and "It was the Schooner Hesperus" and hymns--also learnt by heart and sung while Rosalie's mother played the piano--"We are but little children weak," and "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild."

All these things were taught at her knee to each child in turn by Rosalie's mother, and each was taught out of the self-same books, miraculously preserved by Rosalie's mother; the backs of most of them carefully stitched and re-stitched, and marked all through by the dates of each child's daily lesson, written in pencil by Rosalie's mother. The dates ranged from 1869 when Harold was being taught and when the books were fresh and clean, and Rosalie's mother fresh and ardent with her first-born, to 1884, when Rosalie was being taught, and the books very old and thumbed and most terribly crowded with pencil marks, and Rosalie's mother no longer fresh but rather worn, but teaching as fondly and earnestly as ever, because it was her duty. Literally at the knee of Rosalie's mother these things were taught. On her knee with one of her arms about you for the Bible teaching; and standing at her knee, hands behind you, for the teaching of most of the rest. Yes, that was the early education, and the manner of the education, of Rosalie and of her brothers and sisters, and one perceives with indignation the spectacle of a mother wasting her time like that and wasting her children's time like that.

Rosalie's mother did everything in the house and she was always doing something in the house--for somebody else. She never rested and she was always worried. Her brows were always wrinkled with the feverish concentration of one anxiously doing one thing while anxiously thinking of another thing waiting to be done. She had a driven and a hunted look.

Now Rosalie's father had a driving and a hunting look.

Rosalie's father in his youth threw away everything. Rosalie's mother throughout the whole of her life gave away everything. Rosalie's

father was a tragic figure dwelling in a house of bondage; but he was at least a tragic king, ruling his house and venting his griefs upon his house. Rosalie's mother was a tragic figure and she was a tragic slave in the house of bondage. The life of Rosalie's father was a tragedy, but a tragedy in some measure relieved because he knew it was a tragedy and could wave his arms and shout and smash things and hurl beefsteaks through the air because of the tragedy of it. But the life of Rosalie's mother was an infinitely deeper tragedy because she never knew or suspected that it was a tragedy.

Still, that is so often the difference between the tragedy of a woman and the tragedy of a man.

CHAPTER IV

The very great difference between her father and her mother maintained in Rosalie that early perception of the wondrousness of her father. She loved her mother, but in the atmosphere surrounding her mother there was often flurry and worry and there was nothing whatever in her mother to mystify and entrance by sudden and violent eruptions of the miraculous. She did not love her father for he was entirely too remote and awe-ful for love, but he entranced her with his marvellousness. This maintained in her also her perception of the altogether greater superiority of all males over all females.

Rosalie came into her family rather like a new little girl first entering a boarding school. When she was about four, and first beginning to realise herself, the next in age to her was Robert, who not only was at the immense distance of ten, but was of the male sex and therefore had a controlling interest in the world. Then was Hilda who was twelve, then Flora fourteen, then Anna towering away in sixteen, and then Harold utterly removed in the enormous heights of eighteen, second only to Rosalie's father in ownership of the world and often awfully disputing that supreme ownership.

So they were all immeasurably older than Rosalie; and they were not only immeasurably older but, which counted for much more, they all had their fixed and recognised places in their world just as girls of several terms' experience have their recognised places in their school, and for Rosalie there seemed to be no place at all, just as for new girls there is no place. Her brothers and sisters all had their fixed and recognised places, their interests, their occupations, their friendships: they all knew their own places and each other's places; they had learnt to respect and admit each other's places; they knew the weight of one another's hand in those places; they were accustomed to one another; they tolerated one another.

It was all very strange and wonderful and mysterious to Rosalie.

She was, as it were, pitchforked into this established and regulated order and to find a place for her was like trying to fit a new spoke into a revolving wheel. It cannot be done; and with Rosalie it could not be done. The established wheel went on revolving in its established orbit and the new spoke, which was Rosalie, lay outside and watched it revolve. Intrusions within the circumference of the wheel commonly resulted in a sharp knock from one of the spokes. No one was in any degree unkind to Rosalie, but there was no proper place for her and everybody's will was in authority over her will. She rather got in the way. To be with her was not to enjoy her company or to enjoy battle with her and the putting of her company to flight. To be with her was to have to look after her, and in the community of the rectory, every member, when Rosalie came, was fully occupied in look-ing after itself and defending itself from the predatory excursions of any other member.

What happened was that in time, just as a slight and negligible body cannot be in the sphere of a powerful motion without being affected by it, so Rosalie began to move sympathetically to the wheel but on her own axis. She moved round with the wheel but she was not of the wheel and she never became really incorporated with the wheel. The spokes were revolving with incredible rapidity when she first, began to notice them and they always remained relatively faster. There she was, sitting and watching and wondering; and the twig grows as it is bent or as it is left to bend. She looked on and absorbed things; and the first and by far the deepest of her settled perceptions was that, though she was subject to all powers, all girls and women were themselves subject to the power of all boys and men.

Up to the age of eighteen, six years represents an enormous gulf in the relative ages of brothers and sisters. You have only to figure it out in the case of Rosalie to realise how far behind she was always left, and why, though one of a family of six, she occupied a position outside the group and was a watcher of them rather than a sharer with them. She was four when Robert the next above her was ten, which is a baby against a sturdy and well-developed giant; when she was eight Robert was fourteen, which is a greater gulf than the first; when she was twelve Robert was eighteen which, from eighteen's point of view, is as the difference between an aged man and an infant; and when she was sixteen Robert was twenty-two, which is a schoolgirl against one of the oldest and most experienced periods of life. She came in as a new little girl in a big school; when she had been there eight years--counting from four, when first she was conscious of arrival--she was still relatively the same: there she was, twelve, with Robert eighteen and the others twenty, twenty-two, twenty-four and twenty-six.

But there she is at eight when she had had four years' experience from the day of first seeing her father leaping before the bull and thinking it was perfectly natural that he should leap before the bull. She had learnt a tremendous lot in that second four years. She knew at eight that the world did not belong to her father and that on that night of the storm Flora was right to call her a fool for believing that he could stop the storm. She knew he was not nearly so wonderful as she used to think he was; but he was still enormously wonderful and, which she thought rather curious, she began to see that he rather liked showing her how wonderful he was. He could sharpen a pencil wonderfully, and he could eat a herring

wonderfully. The thing discovered was that he was very proud of how wonderfully he could sharpen a pencil or eat a herring. Strange father!

"Who sharpened that pencil? Your mother? H'nf! I should think so! No woman can sharpen a pencil. Now look at me. Watch. I hold it in my left hand, see? Arm supported against my body. Now look how I cut at it. Bold, strong strokes, see? No niggling at it as if a mouse was nibbling it; long, bold sweeps, slashes. See! Look at that. Ah, drat! That's because I was holding it down for you to see. Watch again. There! There, that's the way to sharpen a pencil. Look at that. Do you see that long, firm point? See how clean and long those strokes are? That's the way to sharpen a pencil. Show that to your mother."

He was as pleased with himself and as proud as if he had turned the pencil into gold.

Funny father!

Or how to eat a herring.

"Herrings! Well, a herring is one of the most delicious fish, if it's eaten properly. There's a right way to eat a herring and a wrong way. Now watch me and I'll show you how to eat a herring. Rosalie, watch."

"Rosalie, dear," (from her mother) "watch while your father shows you how to eat a herring."

All eyes on father demonstrating how to eat a herring!

And Rosalie used to notice this about the watching eyes. Her mother's eyes--most anxiously and nervously upon the operation, as if watching a thing she would soon be called upon to perform and would not be able to perform; the eyes of Robert (14) sulkily; of Flora (18) admiringly (it was getting to be a complaint in the family circle that Flora "sucked up" to father); the eyes of Anna (20) wearily; the eyes of Harold (22) contemptuously.

The herrings (a very frequent dish at the rectory, so much cheaper than meat) came headless to the table. First father nipped off the tail with a firm, neat stroke. Then he deftly slit the herring down the stomach. It fell into two exact perfectly divided halves. Then he lifted out the backbone, not one scrap of flesh adhering to it, and laid it on the side of his plate. Then four firm pressures of his knife and the little lateral bones were exactly removed and exactly laid on the backbone. Next a precise insertion of his fork and out came the silvery strip known to Rosalie as "the swimming thing" and was laid in its turn upon the bones, exactly, neatly, as if it were a game of spillikins. "Now pepper. Plenty of pepper for the roe, you see. There. Now."

And in about six mouthfuls father's plate would be as clean as when it was brought in, decorated rather than marred by the exquisitely neat pile of the backbone, the tail, the little bones, and the silvery swimming thing. "There! Delicious! That's the way to eat a herring"; and he would direct a glance at the plate of Rosalie's mother. Rosalie's mother made a herring into the most frightful

mess it was possible to imagine. She spent the whole of her time in removing bones from her mouth; and her plate, when she was half-way though, looked to contain the mangled remains of about two dozen herrings. "Very few women know how to eat a herring," Rosalie's father would say.

Wonderful father! How to sharpen a pencil, how to eat a herring, how to do up a parcel, how to undo a parcel, how to cut your finger nails, how to sit with regard to the light when you wrote or read, how to tie a knot, how to untie a knot. Clever father, natty father!

Yes, still enormously wonderful father; but also rather strangely proud of being wonderful father. Rosalie now was constantly being struck by that. It began to give her rather a funny sensation. She couldn't describe the sensation or interpret it, but it was a feeling, when father was glowing with pride over one of these things he did so wonderfully well--a feeling of being rather uncomfortable, shy, ashamed--something like that. She contracted the habit when father beamed and glowed and looked around for applause of giving a sudden little blink.

And it was the same in regard to Robert and the same in regard to Harold. Robert at the height of his exhibitions of his wonderfulness caused the funny feeling and the blink in her; and Harold at the height of his exhibitions of his wonderfulness caused the funny feeling and the blink in her. And the wonderfulness of Robert was always being shown off by Robert, and the wonderfulness of Harold was always being shown off by Harold. Men liked showing off how wonderful they were....

When Rosalie was about nine, she one day was permitted to have Lily Waters in to tea with her. Lily Waters was the Doctor's little girl, also nine. For a great treat they had tea together out of Rosalie's doll's tea service in the room called the schoolroom. Robert came home unusually early from school and came into the schoolroom and began to do wonderful things before the two little girls. He spoke in a very loud voice while he did them. He stood on a footstool on his head and clapped his boots together. He held his breath for seventy-five seconds by the clock. He took off his coat and made Lily and Rosalie tie a piece of string around his biceps and then he jerked up his arm and snapped the string. Wonderful Robert! Lily screamed with delight and clapped her hands, and the more she screamed and clapped, the louder Robert talked. He did still more wonderful things. He held a cork to the flame of a match and then blacked his nose and blacked a moustache with the cork. He did a most frightfully daring and dangerous thing. He produced the stump of a cigarette from his pocket and lit it and blew smoke through his nose. Wonderful Robert! Lily went into ecstasies of delight. Rosalie also went into ecstasies but also strongly experienced that funny feeling. While Robert held his breath till his eyes bulged and till his face was crimson, and while he danced about with his nose blacked, and while he held the cigarette in his fingers and puffed smoke through his nose--while he did these things Rosalie glanced at Lily (squealing) and felt that funny feeling of being rather shy, uncomfortable, ashamed; something like that; and blinked. Wonderful though Robert was, she felt somehow rather glad when at last he went.

And just the same with Harold. At supper one night, Rosalie's father

not being present, Harold talked and talked and talked about a call he had paid at the house of some ladies in Ashborough. Wonderful Harold, to pay a call all by himself! It appeared that he had been the only man there, and when Rosalie's mother said, "I wonder you didn't feel shy, Harold," he said with a funny sort of "Haw" sound in his voice, "Not in the least. Haw! Why on earth should I feel shy? Haw." He had evidently very much entertained the party. The more he talked about it the more Rosalie noticed the funny "Haw." "They must have been very glad you came," Rosalie's mother said.

Harold put the first and second fingers of his right hand on his collar and gave it a pull up. "I rather--haw--think they were," Harold said. "Haw."

Rosalie gave that blink.

Years afterwards, when she was grown up, a grown man boastfully said something in her presence, and in a flash were recalled father dissecting a herring, Robert holding his breath till he nearly burst, Harold hitching up his collar and with the "haw" sound saying, "I rather think they were." In a flash those childhood scenes, and instantly with them interpretation of the funny feeling and the blink that they had caused: they had been the rooting in her of a new perception added to the impregnably rooted impression of the wonder and power of men,--the perception that men knew they were wonderful and powerful and liked to show off how wonderful and powerful they were.

They were superior creatures but they were apt to be rather make-you-blinky creatures; that was the new perception.

On the day after her eighth birthday, the birthday itself being a treat and a holiday, Rosalie began to do lessons with Hilda. Hilda, at sixteen, had "finished her education" as had Anna and Flora at the same age. Harold, who had been a boarder at a Grammar School, had stayed there till he was eighteen; and Robert, ultimately, continued at Helmsbury Grammar School till he was eighteen. It was apparent--and it was another manifestation of the greater importance of males--that boys had more education to finish, or were permitted longer to finish it, than girls.

The school at which Anna, Flora and Hilda thus in the eight years between leaving their mother's knee at eight and completing their education at sixteen, learnt everything it was possible to know, was kept by two very thin ladies called (ungrammatically) the Miss Pockets. The Miss Pockets were daughters of the former vicar of St. Mary's and inhabitant of the rectory, and on their father dying and Mr. Aubyn coming, they established themselves in a prim villa near-by and did what they called "took in pupils." They were very thin, they had very long thin noses, they were always very cold, and from the sharp end of the long thin nose of the elder Miss Pocket there always depended, much fascinating Rosalie, a shining bead of moisture.

Rosalie's chief recollection of the Miss Pockets was of being constantly met by them as she approached the age of eight, and of them always, on these occasions, fondling icy hands about her neck and saying to her father or her mother, "And when will our new little pupil be coming to us?"

But no direct reply was ever given to this question, either by Rosalie's mother, who was always made to look uncomfortable when it was asked by the Miss Pockets, or by Rosalie's father who always seemed to jut out his nose at it and make the Miss Pockets look thinner and colder than ever.

On the morning of her eighth birthday, Rosalie received from the Miss Pockets by post an illuminated text provided with a piece of red cord for hanging on the wall and inquiring, rather abruptly,

"Who Hath Believed Our Report?"

Rosalie thought at first this was a plaintive question directly from the Miss Pockets in their capacity as school-teachers and therefore as licensed makers of reports; but immediately afterwards saw "Isaiah" printed under it in discreet characters--

"Who Hath Believed our Report?"

--Isaiah."

and concluded that it was Isaiah who had believed it. On the back was written in the tall, thin handwriting of the Miss Pockets, "To our dear little pupil Rosalie, on her eighth birthday, from Agnes and Lydia Pocket."

In the afternoon, the Miss Pockets called at the rectory and there was evidently some high mystery about their visit. Rosalie was in the study looking for a drawing pin wherewith to affix her illuminated card to the wall. Hilda ran in. "The Miss Pockets. Where's father? Come out," and Rosalie was hurriedly run out and shut into the dining-room, leaving the vindication of Isaiah in the matter of the report on the table. Opening the door to a chink, Rosalie saw the Miss Pockets, shivering, the permanent decoration on the nose of the elder Miss Pocket very conspicuous and agitatedly swinging, ushered into the study, and presently her father follow his jutting nose into the study after them, and very shortly after that the Miss Pockets driven out as it were by the jutting nose and looking thinner and colder than ever before. Miss Lydia Pocket, who had lost the appendage to her nose and looked curiously undressed and indelicate without it, was saying feebly, "But it was understood. We always thought it was understood."

They shuddered away; and when Rosalie went into the study immediately afterwards to recover her card, there was upon the word Isaiah, as though somebody had literally thrown doubt upon his belief of the report, a large damp spot.

On the following day, Rosalie began lessons with Hilda.

CHAPTER V

The lessons with Hilda period lasted till Rosalie was twelve. "Take her off your mother's hands. That's what you've left school for," was her father's instruction to Hilda; and so there was Rosalie, put out from her mother's knee to the schoolroom like a small new ship out from the haven to the bay; and there was that small mind of hers come in to the company of Hilda and of Flora and of Anna with the obsession that men were infinitely more important and much more wonderful than women. She knew now that the world did not belong to men in the literal sense, but belonged, as her mother had instructed her, to God; but she knew with the abundant evidence of all that went on about her that everything in the world was done for men and that women were largely occupied in doing it; and she knew, from the same testimony, that men were much more interesting to watch than women, rather in the way that dogs were much more interesting than cats. Men, like dogs, were much more satisfactory: that was it. Her mind was throwing out feelers towards the wonders of the world and this was the feeler that was most developed. She came to her sisters very highly sensitive to the difference between men and women. And her sisters showed her the difference.

Anna was twenty then. Anna had "finished her education" four years ago. She had left school "to help your mother in the house"; and when Flora, two years later, finished her education and left school for the same purpose, she found Anna grooved in the business of helping her mother in the house and she was not in the least anxious to help Anna out of the grooves and herself become imbedded in them.

This annoyed Anna.

Rosalie used to hear Anna say to Flora a dozen times a day, "I really don't see why you should be the one to do nothing but amuse yourself all day long. I really don't."

Flora used to say, "Well, you've always done it"--whatever the duty in dispute might be--"so why on earth should I?"

Then either Anna's face would give a twitch and she would walk out of the room, or her face would get very red and there would be a row.

Or sometimes Flora to Anna's "I really don't see why--" would say enticingly, "Don't you?"

"No, I don't."

"Then ask the Pope," and Flora would give a mocking laugh and run away out of the reach of Anna's fury.

The sting in this was that Anna was suspected of having Roman Catholic tendencies.

Flora was very pretty and had a gay, bold way. Anna was not pretty. She had a great habit of compressing her lips, especially in encounters with Flora, and somehow her face gave the impression that her lips always were compressed. That was the expression it

normally had; it was only when Rosalie saw Anna actually compress her lips that she realised they had not been compressed before. It was as though she was always annoyed about something and then, when she compressed her lips, a little more annoyed than usual. She had also a permanent affliction which much puzzled Rosalie. Young men friends of Harold's frequently called at the rectory, and one afternoon, when two of them called, Anna was the only one at home to entertain them (except Rosalie). Flora and Hilda rushed into the drawing-room, directly they came in, and shortly afterwards Rosalie saw Anna come out. Anna stood in the hall quite a long time with her lips compressed, and then went into the dining-room and sat down, but almost at once got up again and went back into the drawing-room, and Rosalie heard Flora call out, "You can't join in now, Anna. You can't join in now. We're in the middle of it." Shrieks of laughter were going on. When the young men went, Flora and Hilda, who had their hats on, walked away with them. Anna was left at the door. When the girls came back Anna said to Flora, "I do think you might have told me you'd arranged to go with them to see it."

Flora said, "Oh, darling, I thought the Pope had told you."

They had the worst row Rosalie had ever heard them have. Anna did not come down to supper. After supper, when Rosalie was in the room with only Harold and her father and mother, her mother spoke of the scene there had been between Anna and Flora and it was then that Rosalie heard for the first time of Anna's most strange affliction. Harold said, "Of course, the fact of the matter is that ever since Flora left school, Anna's had her nose put out of joint."

Rosalie felt most awfully sorry for Anna. Often after that she used to stare at Anna's nose and the more so because there was nothing visible the matter with it. Anna's nose was a singularly long and straight nose; now if it had been Flora's nose that was out of joint!--for Flora's nose turned up in a very odd way. Rosalie slept in Anna's room and that same night, Anna's disjunct nose and every other part of her face and head being covered with the clothes when Rosalie went up to bed, Rosalie, unable to sleep for curiosity and sympathy, got out of bed and lit the candle and went across to look at Anna's nose, and very gently felt it with her finger. Absolutely nothing amiss to be seen or felt! But the lashes of Anna's eyes were wet and there were stains of tears upon the upper side of the mysterious nose. It was true, then, for obviously it hurt. And yet no sign!

Rosalie got back into bed feeling of her own nose rather anxiously.

Rosalie used formerly to sleep in Hilda's room and Flora with Anna, but she was changed one day by her sisters (without being consulted or given any reason) and the new arrangement was continued. Anna was very devotional. She used to say enormously long prayers night and morning. She prayed in the middle of the night also, Rosalie used to think at first, awakened and hearing her voice, but later found out that Anna was talking in her sleep, a thing that was mysterious to Rosalie and frightening. The room of Flora and Hilda, adjoined Anna's and often at night, when Rosalie was awakened by Anna undressing and lay watching her at her immense prayers, the chattering voices of Flora and Hilda could be heard through the wall and shrieks of high laughter. At that, Anna's shoulders used

to shudder beneath her nightgown and she used to twist herself lower on her knees. For some reason this also used rather to frighten Rosalie.

Sometimes, but very seldom, Flora and Hilda used to quarrel; sometimes, and more often, Hilda and Anna; nearly every day, as it seemed to Rosalie, Anna and Flora. Rosalie got to dislike these quarrels very much. They went on and on and on; that was the disturbing unpleasantness of them. The parties to them would sit in a room and simply keep it up forever, not arguing all the time, but between long pauses suddenly coming out with things at one another; or they wouldn't speak to one another sometimes for days together, and all sorts of small enterprises of Rosalie's were interfered with by these ruptures of relations. Innumerable things in Rosalie's life seemed to her to depend on the mutual good will of two quarrellers; many books, some old toys, walks, combined games with Carlo who was Anna's and Rover who was Flora's; innumerable delights with such seemed to be unexpectedly stopped because of "Oh, no, if you prefer to be with Anna you can stay with Anna"; or, "Oh, no. If you like Flora's paints so much you can use Flora's brushes; these are my brushes." A quarrel would in any case produce a strained atmosphere in which everything became unnatural and this strained atmosphere went on and on and on.

And the thing that Rosalie noticed was the complete difference between these quarrels of her sisters and the quarrels between Harold and Robert. Robert was rising between the years of fourteen and eighteen in those days and Harold between twenty-two and twenty-six. Most violent quarrels sometimes sprung up between them but they were physically violent, that was the point, and after swift and appalling fury, and terrible kicks from Robert and horrifying thumps from Harold they were astonishingly soon over and done with and forgotten. On one awful day, Rosalie saw Robert and Harold rolling on the floor together. Robert bumped Harold's head three most frightful bumps on the floor and said between his teeth, "There! There! There!" Harold twisted himself up and hurled Robert half across the room and then rushed at him and punched him with punches that made Robert go, "Ur! Ur! Ur!"

Rosalie, at her age, ought to have cried with grief and dismay or to have run away screaming; but instead she only watched with awe. With terrified awe, as with the terrified awe that an encounter of tigers or of elephants at the Zoo might arouse; but with awe and no sort of grief as her sole emotion. Men were different. There it was again! They did these fearful things, and these fearful things were much more satisfactory to behold, not nearly so disturbing and aggravating to watch, as the interminable bickerings of the quarrels of her sisters.

Her brothers' quarrels were entirely different in all their aspects. In the quarrels of her sisters, one or the other invariably cried if the bickering went far enough. These two men, though Robert especially might have been excused for bellowing, just solidly and only, with fearful gasps, thumped and clutched and strove. Not a tear! Her sisters' quarrels were always carried by one or the other to her mother or her father. How extraordinarily different Robert and Harold! Their sole anxiety was that neither father nor mother should be told! If any one threatened to tell, the two, sinking their private heat, would immediately band together against

the talebearer. Extraordinary men! To that particularly ferocious struggle that has been described, Anna and Hilda had been attracted by the din, when Robert, overpowered, was receiving terrible chastisement, and with cries and prayers had somehow separated them. Behold, the very first coherent thing these two men did was, while they still panted and glared upon one another, to unite in a mutual threat.

"And look out you don't go telling father or mother," panted Harold to the girls.

"Yes, mind you jolly well don't," panted Robert.

Anna said she certainly would.

Both the extraordinary creatures unitedly rounded on Anna. It might have been thought that the battle had been, not between them, but between them and the sisters who had saved them one from another. Astounding men!

And most astounding of all to Rosalie was that at supper, little more than an hour later, Harold and Robert presented themselves as on exceptionally good terms of friendship. They talked and laughed together. They had a long exchange of views about some football teams. Harold laid down the law about the principle of four three-quarters in Rugby football instead of three and Robert listened as to an oracle. They had not been so friendly for weeks. And an hour before-! Yes, men were different.

And Rosalie found that her sisters, too, knew how different and how superior men were. Flora and Hilda seemed to Rosalie always to be talking about men. Flora used to come into the schoolroom while Rosalie was at her lessons and talk to Hilda. Rosalie was very fond of her lessons and Hilda was an uncommonly good teacher and took a great interest in leading Rosalie along the paths she had herself so recently followed. But directly Flora came in, Hilda's interest was entirely diverted to what Flora had to say and to what she had to say to Flora, and it was always about men,--boys or men. Rosalie would at once be put to learning passages or working out exercises and Flora and Hilda would go over to the window and talk. They talked mostly in whispers with their heads close together; they laughed a good deal; they showed one another letters. Often they came over to the table and wrote letters. And they used to look up from their whisperings and say, "Go on with your lessons, Rosalie."

But it was very difficult to go on while they whispered and laughed and it was also very troublesome to have Hilda's most interesting explanations suddenly cut short by the entrance of Flora. Rosalie began to have the habit of saying "Oh, dear!" and going "Tchk!" with her tongue when Flora came in. Also restlessly to say "Oh, dear!" and go "Tchk!" when the whisperings and the laughing about men went on and distracted her attention while she tried to do her exercises.

A new aspect of men began to grow out of this. Rosalie began to feel rather aggrieved against boys and men. They interfered.

And this went further. Just as boys and men spoil lessons so they began to spoil walks. While Hilda attended the Miss Pockets' school and Rosalie was taught by her mother, it was always her mother with

whom Rosalie took walks. Anna "never cared to go out" and Flora, whose position in the house was more like that of Harold and Robert, did much as she liked, and "dragging Rosalie about for walks" as she expressed it, was not one of the things she liked. Rosalie therefore went out with her mother until Hilda took her off her mother's hands, when the taking off included not only education but exercise. At the beginning, Hilda showed herself as enthusiastic and as entertaining a walker as she was teacher. She was ready for jolly scrambles through woods and over fields, she was as keen as Rosalie on damming little watercourses, and exploring woodland tracts, and other similar delights, and she had a most splendid knowledge of the names of plants and flowers and birds and insects and delighted to tell them to Rosalie. Rosalie had loved the walks with her mother, always holding her dear hand, but she loved much more, though in a different way, the walks with Hilda.

Then men began, in Rosalie's private phrase, to "ruin" the walks.

First Flora took to joining the walks and she and Hilda talked and talked together and always, as it seemed, about men, and Rosalie just trailed along with them, their heads miles above hers and their conversation equally out of her reach. But even that was not so bad as it became. At least there were only her sisters and sometimes they did talk to her, or sometimes one or other would break off from their chatter and cry "Oh, poor Rosalie! We've not been taking the least notice of you, have we? Now, what would you like to do?" And perhaps they would run races, or perhaps explore, or perhaps tell her a story, and Rosalie's spirits would come bursting out from their dulness and all would be splendid.

Not so when on the walks men, from being talked of, began to be met.

There were at Robert's Grammar School certain young men who were in no way connected with the school but were the "private pupils" of the headmaster and were reading for the universities. One day Hilda started for the walk in her church hat and Flora also in her church hat and her church gloves. They walked very fast; Rosalie could hardly keep up. And then at a corner of a lane they suddenly started to walk very slowly indeed, and suddenly again at a stile, two of these young men were met.

The young men raised their hats much farther than Rosalie had ever seen a man raise his hat and one of them said, "Well, you have come then?"

Flora said, "Well, we just happened to be strolling along this way." Then she said, "You needn't imagine we came to see you!" which Rosalie thought very rude; but the young men seemed to like it and all of them laughed a great deal.

Presently they all started to walk together, Hilda and Flora in the middle and one of the young men on either side. The walk lasted much later than the walks usually lasted and the whole way Rosalie trailed along behind; and on the whole afternoon the only words addressed to Rosalie by her sisters came just as, the young men having taken their leave a mile away, they were turning in at the rectory gate. Flora then said, "Rosalie, darling, don't tell mother or father or any one that we met any one." And Hilda said, "Yes,

remember, Rosalie, you're not to say anything about that."

After that, the young men were met, and the four walked, and Rosalie trailed, nearly every day.

One of these young men was called Mr. Chalton and the other Mr. Ricks. Like all men, and even more so, they were splendid and wonderful. They had silver cigarette cases and smoked a lot, and they wore most handsome waistcoats and ties, and some of their conversation that came back to Rosalie, trailing behind, was of very wonderful and exciting things they had done or were going to do. Mr. Holland, the headmaster of the Grammar School, was the terror of Robert's life, but it appeared that Mr. Chalton and Mr. Ricks were not in the least afraid of Mr. Holland, and they talked a great deal of what they would do to him if he ever tried to interfere with them and a great deal of what they did do in the way of utterly disregarding him. They were undeniably splendid and wonderful, but they utterly ruined Rosalie's walks and they greatly intensified Rosalie's new feelings towards men and boys,—that men and boys were a great nuisance and spoilt things.

Time went along. Other young men were met. In the holidays, quite a number of young men came for their vacations to their homes in Ibbotsfield and the surrounding district. Certain of these, unlike the Grammar School private pupils, called openly at the rectory on one pretext or another, but they were nevertheless also met secretly by Flora and Hilda, ruined the walks precisely as Messrs. Chalton and Ricks had first ruined them, and were on no account to be mentioned by Rosalie to her father or mother.

The reason for this secrecy was never explained to Rosalie and the secrecy oppressed Rosalie. It took not only the form of being a thing she was not able to tell to her mother, and Rosalie was in the habit of telling everything she did to her mother, but it took also the form of mysterious and vaguely alarming perils during the walks. An immense watchfulness was kept up against chance encounters with people. One of the party would often cry, "Look! Who's this?" and the young men would separate from the girls and appear as if they were walking by themselves. Sometimes they would break right away and run off and not be met again. Very often Rosalie would be sent on ahead to a turning and told to come back at once if anybody was to be seen and then would be examined as to who the person was. Sometimes she was posted to keep watch while the girls and the young men slipped off somewhere, over a gate or into a barn. She got to know by sometimes rushing in with warnings that Flora and Hilda on these occasions smoked the young men's cigarettes. Then when they got home, they would rush up to their room and wash their teeth and put scent on themselves. And invariably when the young men took their leave at the end of a walk there would be long and close whisperings in which were always to be heard the words, "Well, say you were--" or "Look here, we'll say we were--" and generally, "Go away, Rosalie. There's nothing for you to listen to."

It all had the effect of making Rosalie feel unhappy and rather frightened. She sometimes asked, "Why mustn't I say anything to mother?" She was always told, and only told, "Because father doesn't like us meeting men."

No reason why father should not like them meeting men was ever given, and Rosalie, ceaselessly disturbed by the concealment, could never imagine what the reason could be. There could be no reason that she could imagine; and she was thus immensely taken aback when one evening at supper her father made a most surprising statement: "The girls have no chance of ever meeting men in this infernal place."

Amazing!

Rosalie's father had been abusing Ibbotsfield and everything that pertained to Ibbotsfield. Some question of expenses had started him. He was storming in his wild way, addressing himself to Rosalie's mother but haranguing at large to all, everybody sitting in silence and with oppressed faces, avoiding looking at one another and avoiding especially the eyes of father. They were literally ground down with poverty, Rosalie's father was saying. He didn't know what was going to happen to them all. "It's all this place, this infernal, buried-alive place. The girls ought to be moving about and seeing people. How can they? Very well. My mind's made up. There's my brother Tom in India. He could have one of the girls. There's your sister Mrs. Pounce in London. She's Rosalie's godmother. What's she ever done for Rosalie? Very well. My mind's made up. I shall write to Tom and I shall write to Belle. I shall tell them how we are situated. It's humiliating to have to tell them but what's humiliation? I'm accustomed to humiliation. Ever since we came here, I have eaten the bread and drunk the water of humiliation. Now the children are growing up to share it. What can they do in this loathsome and forsaken and miserable place? What chance have the girls got? Can you tell me that?"

He glared at Rosalie's mother. It was clear that he regarded her as to blame. Rosalie thought that her dear mother must be to blame. Her mother looked so beaten and frightened. There was glistening in her eyes. Rosalie's heart felt utterly desolated for her mother. She wished like anything she could say something for her dear mother. Then most amazingly the chance to say something came.

"Can you tell me that?" cried Rosalie's father. "What chance have the girls of ever meeting men in this infernal place?"

Rosalie burst out, "Oh, but father, nearly every day--"

"Rosalie, don't interrupt!" cried Flora very sharply.

"Rosalie, be quiet!" cried Hilda.

Father glared and then went on and on.

It was the beginning of a chain of most startling upheavals. It was also, and the upheavals were also, a new manifestation to Rosalie of the all-importance of men. After supper, in the first place, Flora and Hilda, taking Rosalie very severely to task for her perilous outburst, explained to her that the men they met were not the kind of men that father meant they ought to meet. It was necessary, it was essential, they explained, for every girl to meet men she could marry. That was what every girl had to do. Men--surely you understand that, Rosalie--had all the money and everything and met girls and asked them to marry. Those men sometimes met on walks,

you little stupid, were too young and had no money yet. "There, that's enough," they explained. "Anyhow, we shan't be meeting them much more. One of us is probably going to India; you heard what father said, didn't you?... Well, of course you can't understand properly. You will when you're grown up. Surely that's quite enough for you to understand at present.... How can a woman live if she doesn't marry, stupid? She must have money to live and it is men who have the money.... Well, of course they do because they earn it; look at Harold; and Robert will have money when he's a little older.... Well, how can women? Now, I said that's enough and it is enough."

It was enough and most satisfactorily enough for one purpose. It was the first explanation of men as a race apart from women that Rosalie had ever received and it precisely bore out all that she had conceived about them. It affirmed her perception of the wonder and greatness of men as compared with women. It intensified that perception.

Wonderful men! Marvellous and most fortunate men!

And then the chain of most startling upheavals began. Father wrote to Uncle Tom in India. Father wrote to Aunt Belle, Mrs. Pyke Pounce, in London. What he wrote was not to be known by Rosalie, outside the rectory wheel. The others knew, for father, with enormous pride at his wonderful epistolary style in his voice, was heard reading the letter to them. But the others, of course, knew also what Rosalie never realised, the grinding poverty of the rectory. She knew no other life than the herrings, the makeshifts, and the general shabbiness of the rectory. It was not till long afterwards that, looking back, she realised the pinching and the screwing that served--almost--to make ends meet.

So father wrote. India was far, London was near. Aunt Belle's reply came while the letter to Uncle Tom was still upon the sea. Such a reply! Wonderful father to win such a reply from Aunt Belle! "You see what it is to be able to write a telling and forceful letter!" cried father. Such an exciting reply! Aunt Belle was coming on a visit "to talk it over and see what she could do."

Aunt Belle came.

CHAPTER VI

Oh, a red carpet, a red carpet for Aunt Belle, Mrs. Pyke Pounce, to come into the story! And if at the end of the red carpet there could be an "At Home" in the splendid drawing-room of Aunt Belle, Mrs. Pyke Pounce, at Pilchester Square, Notting Hill, an At Home with about sixty-five ladies crammed into it, all of them wives of most successful and well-off men, mostly retired from the Indian

Army and the Indian Civil Service, and all of them chattering ecstatically, and nibbling, and pluming themselves, and tinkling their teacups, and Aunt Belle, Mrs. Pyke Pounce, enthroned in their midst, and owning everything and seeming to own her five and sixty guests, and chattering and nibbling and pluming and tinkling more ecstatically than any; and then if there could come into them beautiful cousin Laetitia (when about fifteen) with sleek black hair beautifully ribboned behind, and with pale, fine brow, and wearing the sweetest white frock, and if she could move delightfully about among her mother's guests, and then play the sweetest little trifle on the pianoforte to the delighted murmurs of the five and sixty guests of her mother ("She's under Pflunk. The great Pflunk!"); and then if there could come in from the City Uncle Pyke, Colonel Pyke Pounce, R.E., (retired) now director of several highly important companies, and if Uncle Pyke, Colonel Pyke Pounce, R.E., could stand on the hearthrug with his massy jowl and his determined stomach, and grunt, and rattle the money in his pockets, and grunt again; and if then there could come in the new parlour maid of Aunt Belle, Mrs. Pyke Pounce, with her tallness and her deftness and her slight, very slight, insolence of air, and all the five and sixty gazing upon her as haughty but envious patricians gazing upon a slave, and when she had gone swishing out if Aunt Belle, Mrs. Pyke Pounce, could tell all the sixty and five of her tallness, her deftness and her slight, very slight, insolence of manner----

Oh, if there could be this and these and a fine red carpet, how exactly and how fittingly would Aunt Belle, Mrs. Pyke Pounce, step upon the scene!

"Dear thing!" That was Rosalie's portrait and thought of her in long after years. Dear thing! The drawing-room of her crowded triumphs is now the shabby drawing-room of a second-rate boarding house; the jolly horse bus she used so commandingly to stop in the Holland Park Avenue and so regally to enter (whip-waving driver, cap-touching conductor) long has given place to a thundering motor saloon that stops wheresoever it listeth and wherein Aunt Belles and old-clothes women fight to hang by a strap.

Dear thing! Her ownership of five and sixty guests is exchanged for ownership of not more than seven and fifty inches of cold earth in Brompton Cemetery. She is passed and Uncle Pyke, Colonel Pyke Pounce, R.E., is grunted past to lay himself beside her. They are passed. Up-reared upon her and upon him is a stupendous granite chunk (in a way not unlike Uncle Pyke on his hearthrug) erected by their sorrowing daughter. She is passed; she came into Rosalie's life and Rosalie crossed her life and she never forgave Rosalie.

Dear thing! Lie lightly on her, stones!

She came to the rectory "to talk it over and see what can be done" for a week's visit, and she stepped out of the cab, all the family assembled to greet her, a new and most surprising figure such as Rosalie had never seen before. She was dressed in startling fashions of a most wonderful richness, and she had immense plumes in her hat that nodded when she moved and trembled when she stood still, and she was herself either always nodding with glittering animation or straightening her back and quivering as if straining at a leash and just about to burst it and go off. She was like Rosalie's mother and yet not a bit like her. She was older and yet terribly

brisker and stronger. Those were the days when frosted Christmas cards were of the artistic marvels of the age, and Aunt Belle beside Rosalie's mother somehow made Rosalie think of a frosted card beside one of the plain cards. When Rosalie's mother was in a room you often might not know she was there; but when Aunt Belle was in a room there seemed to be no one there except Aunt Belle. She began to talk, in a voice as high as the house, while she was still descending from the cab on her arrival, and the only time Rosalie ever saw her not talking was during service in Church on Sunday, when she was alternately glittering or whispering or else bending down so extraordinarily low that Rosalie thought she was going to lie prone upon the floor.

Dear thing! She was so kind to Rosalie and so kind to them all, and yet---And yet they all, except Rosalie who was too small (then) to appreciate the resented quality in Aunt Belle's kindness, and Rosalie's mother who was too gentle to resent anything, and yet they all, save Rosalie and her mother, loathed and abominated Aunt Belle. It was her way of doing things. She gave kind gifts, but it was the way she gave them. She admired everything and everybody in the rectory, but it was the way she admired. She said most kind and affectionate things, but it was her way of saying them.

"Why, how very nice indeed!" That was her insistent comment upon everything in the rectory. But the tone was, "How very nice indeed--for you."

That was the trouble. That was what made Harold (who at twenty-six was getting very like his father) hurl about a thousand miles over the garden wall the three apples Aunt Belle gave him as his share of the "very best apples from the Army and Navy Stores" which she brought down with other "goodies" for "the dear children"; and made, him grit his teeth after she had been in the house two days and cry, "Dash her! Poor relations; that's how she treats us! I'm dashed if I'm a poor relation. I'm earning three pound ten a week at the Bank and I bet that appalling old Uncle Pyke didn't get it or anything like it at my age!"

Dear thing! "She meant it kindly." That was the sweet apologetic excuse with which Rosalie's mother followed the track of the storms Aunt Belle aroused and with which she sought to abate them. "She means it kindly. She means it kindly, dear."

It should be Aunt Belle's epitaph. It ought to be graven upon that granite chunk in Brompton Cemetery. "She meant it kindly!"

Issuing from the cab, Aunt Belle began by kissing Rosalie's mother in a most astonishing series of kisses that whizzed from cheek to cheek so that it was a miracle to Rosalie that the two noses did not collide and her dear mother's be knocked right off; and then most enthusiastically kissed all the family, applying to each the phrase with which she began on Harold "Well, well, so this is Harold!" (As if it were the most astounding and unexpected thing in the world that it was Harold.) "So this is Harold! Why, what a great big clever fellow, and what a comfort to your dear mother, I am sure!" And then gazed rapturously upon the house and said to Rosalie's mother and to them all, "Well, well, what a very, very nice house, to be sure!"

("For you!")

She meant it kindly. Her manner of talking about herself and about her possessions was not that of bragging or of conscious superiority; it was, to the whole rectory family, and to all poorer than herself wherever she met them, that of one entertaining a party of children--of a kind lady telling stories to a group of round-eyed infants. When she first had tea on the afternoon of her arrival, she gazed upon the silver teapot as it was carried in and exclaimed, "Well, well, what a very, very handsome teapot! And hot-water jug to match! How very, very nice! Now how ever do you think I keep my water hot at tea? I have a very nice service all in silver gilt! It looks just like gold! And there's a kettle to match with a spirit flame under it. The maid brings in the kettle boiling and we just light the spirit with a match and there it is gently boiling all the time!"

Dusk drew in and the lamps were lit. "Lamps!" ecstatically exclaimed Aunt Belle! "How nice! And Hilda keeps the lamps clean, does she? What a dear, helpful girl and how very, very bright and nice they are! Now what do you think? In my house, everywhere, even in the kitchen, we've got this new electric light! Your kind uncle Pyke had it put in for me. Installed, as they call it. Now, just fancy, all you have is a little brass knob by each door, and you just touch a little switch, and there's your light! No matches, no trouble, just click! and there you are. Of course it was very expensive, but your Uncle Pyke insisted upon my having it. He always will insist upon my having everything of the best."

Dear thing! The echo of her ceaseless tongue brings her exactly to life again--glittering, chattering, pluming, presenting, praising--her servants! her house! her parties! her friends! her daughter! her husband!--Oh, yes, a red carpet! a red carpet for Aunt Belle, Mrs. Pyke Pounce, to come into the story, and so (at the end of her visit) into Rosalie's life like this:

"And Rosalie is going away to school! To a boarding school in London where there will be ever so many very nice playmates of her own age, and such romps, and such good wholesome food, and such nice, kind, clever mistresses! Why, what a lucky, lucky girl! There, Rosalie, what do you think of that? You are my godchild, and I and your kind uncle Pyke are going to send you to school and pay for your education because of course we are well off and can afford it and your dear mother and father can't. There! Now isn't that delightful? Come and give me a nice kiss then. The dear child!"

Tremendous moment! Supernal upheaval! First and greatest upheaval of the chain of upheavals! Rosalie was to go away to school!

That was at the rectory breakfast table on the last morning of the visit, and that was Aunt Belle, Mrs. Pyke Pounce, coming into Rosalie's life. "Come and give me a kiss then"; that was kind, kind Aunt Belle, inviting acknowledgment of her kindness and the kindness of Uncle Pyke (with a cheque) and the kindness of Cousin Laetitia (with a box of beautiful cast-off clothes that would do beautifully for Rosalie's school outfit). "The dear child!" That was Aunt Belle's acknowledgment of Rosalie's most dutiful and most affectionate and most delighted kiss. (Most amazed and excited and rather fearful Rosalie! Going to school! Going away to a boarding

school in London!)

"The dear child!" Such a warm and loving kiss from Rosalie! And time was to prove it the kiss of Judas! Yes, in a few years, "I've done everything for you!" Aunt Belle was to cry. "Everything! And this is the return I get!"

CHAPTER VII

Next, in its turn, and exactly a fortnight before the beginning of the term at which Rosalie was to join the boarding school in London, came the letter from Uncle Tom in India, and with it the beginning of the second upheaval in the chain of upheavals.

All of this upheaval was very bewildering to Rosalie. She never understood it properly. At the beginning it had nothing at all to do with Anna, and yet Anna from the very first reading of Uncle Tom's letter--All that Rosalie understood of it was this.

First the letter came. Tremendous excitement! Father in wild excitement, Flora and Hilda in frantic excitement, everyone in highest excitement. Father read the letter aloud at breakfast to Rosalie's mother and to the girls. Such a splendid letter, said father. Really, Tom was a splendid fellow, said father. He had wronged Tom. He had thought Tom selfish in his wealthy indifference. By Jove, Tom wasn't. "By Jove, the way Tom wrote almost brought tears to your eyes. Listen to this. Listen, mother. Listen, you girls."

Uncle Tom, said the letter, would by all means, old man, have one of the girls. He'd no idea that things were so bad with you. Poor old man! Why didn't you tell us before? He was sending home a small draft to Field and Company, his bankers, to help towards the girl's outfit and her passage money. "'Which girl shall you send?' you ask. Well, it's no good asking us, old man. You must decide that for yourselves. She'll be abundantly welcome, whichever it is, and we can promise her a jolly good time. We are at Simla most of the year. If you want my advice which girl to send, send the pretti--"

Father stopped reading.

Rosalie was staring at Anna. Anna's face, which had been pale, suddenly went crimson. The suddenness and the violence of it was extraordinary. One moment she had been pale. In the next, she was burning red. It was exactly as if a crimson paint had suddenly been dashed over the whole of her face. It was extraordinary. Whatever was it? That nose of hers, perhaps? a sudden frightful twinge like Rosalie once had had a sudden most awful jump in a tooth? But Anna didn't say anything and no one but Rosalie seemed to notice it. They were all intent upon father. So intent! Flora's eyes were simply

shining!

And Flora's eyes soon after that were shining more than ever. She was wild with excitement. Rosalie heard the news just before tea. Flora was going to India to Uncle Tom!

"Oh," cried Flora, "I'm so excited I simply don't know what to do with myself!" It was all arranged. Father had settled it. She was to go in about six weeks' time. Very shortly she was to go up to London with father and buy heaps of clothes and all sorts of things. They were going to stay at a hotel. "Not with Aunt Belle, thank goodness!" said Flora. "At a hotel! Fancy that!" Mother wasn't going and Flora was glad mother wasn't going. She would have a much better time with father. Father had decided everything. He had decided that mother couldn't leave him in the rectory with all the housekeeping to look after, and the change would do him good, and Aunt Belle would be able to help with the shopping. They were going to see some theatres and all kinds of things and were going to have a most splendid time and then, soon afterwards--India! "Oh I shall go mad with excitement in a minute!" cried Flora.

The next thing was in the evening. Rosalie, searching for her mother to ask her something, could not find her. She went into her mother's bedroom and there was the most surprising thing. There was Anna on her knees by her mother and her head on her mother's lap and Anna was sobbing; and she was crying in her sobs, "But it's my right! I'm the eldest. It's my right!"

Rosalie stood there, unnoticed, amazed. Whatever was it?

Rosalie's mother stroked Anna's head and spoke very softly, "My darling! My darling!" She said, "My darling, your father has decided. Your father knows best. Men always know best, my darling."

"It's my right, mother. It's my right. It's always Flora. Oh, why should it always be Flora?"

"Dear Anna. Poor Anna. You must be reasonable, dear Anna. We women must always be reasonable. Don't you see that your father thinks of me? He thinks my eldest girl--my dear eldest girl--ought to stay at home to look after her mother. It's on my account, dear Anna. He thinks of me."

"Oh, mother, what's the good of telling me that? A lot he thinks of you or ever has! Why is he going up to London with Flora when it's your place to go? A lot he thinks of you! You say we must be reasonable. You can be. You've been unselfish all your life. I can't be. Not in this. I've never had a pleasure in my life; I've never had a chance; I've never had anything done for me. Ever since I can remember it's always been Flora, Flora, Flora. Now there's this. I'm getting on, mother. I'm nearly twenty-four. What have I got to look forward to? Flora's younger, Flora's different. She'll have lots of chances of enjoying herself. This is my right. It's my right, mother."

"My dear Anna. My eldest girl. My first dear, sweet girlie. How could I do without you? How happy we've been. How happy we will be."

Rosalie crept away.

After a time, Flora and her father went away on the great visit to London. They were to be away over two Sundays. A clergyman was coming from Ashborough to take service at the church. Rosalie's father went off in spirits as high and youthful as the spirits of Flora. For days before he was quite a different man. Everybody was asked to choose a present which he would bring back. Everybody chose with much excitement and chaffing except Anna, who said she could not think of anything. At meals, father kept on saying how he wished he could regularly make a point of getting up to town for a bit, it made all the difference being able to get away from this infernal place for a bit. When herrings were on the table, he actually came round and did her herring for Rosalie's mother and Rosalie's mother was able to eat the whole of it and said how delicious it was and how clever father was.

It was all splendid. Rosalie had never known such a jolly spirit in the house. The only thing that spoilt Rosalie's happiness in the new jolly spirit was the nights in Anna's room. Anna was most frightening to Rosalie. She prayed now longer than ever, her shoulders moving beneath her nightgown as if she was shuddering all the time she prayed. And at night she talked more than ever in her sleep; also she used to get out of bed at night and walk about the room and talk aloud to herself. It was frightening.

Then Flora and father were in London and tremendous long letters came from Flora to her mother and to all: they were buying heaps of dresses and underclothes and white drill coats and skirts and a riding habit and goodness knows what all. "A regular trousseau!" wrote Flora with about seventeen marks of exclamation after the word. And all they were seeing--they had been to the Lyceum Theatre and seen Mr. Henry Irving and Miss Ellen Terry and to the Savoy and seen "The Mikado." Every moment of the day was taken up and half the night. Oh, this was a change from Ibbotsfield!

Anna would never listen to the letters. When they were read out, she either would put her fingers in her ears or go out of the room. And yet, curiously, she often later in the day would say in a funny constricted voice, "Let me see Flora's letter. Give it to me, will you please?" And would take it away and read it by herself.

Anna was stranger and stranger in her manner and in her behaviour at night. Rosalie came quite to dread the nights. Anna began to pray out loud. She used to pray over and over again the same thing: "It's not that I'm jealous, O Lord. O purge my heart of jealousy. It is that I see what could be and what ought to be for me and what never will be for me. I've nothing to look forward to, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing. It is hard for women. O God, thou knowest how hard it is for women."

It was frightening.

Then came the second Sunday of the absence in London. In the night of Saturday, Rosalie was again awakened by the sounds of Anna and again heard her praying and again heard "It is hard for women. O God, thou knowest how hard it is for women."

She had heard it so often! Anna seemed to have stopped praying.

There was a light in the room and Rosalie saw that Anna, on her knees, had her head and arms thrown forward on the bed more as if she were asleep than praying. "It is hard for women." Rosalie had heard Anna say that so often. And she was going to be a woman one day. And she had always known that men were the important and wonderful people of the world. Now Anna said that for women it was hard and that God knew it was hard. Why? She peered across again. Anna certainly had done her prayers. She said, "Anna. Anna. Why is it hard for women?"

Anna started to her knees and turned her body round. "Rosalie! Why are you awake? You've no right to be awake."

"No, but I am. I woke up. Anna, why is it hard for women?"

"You weren't meant to hear. You couldn't understand."

"But I would like to know, Anna."

Anna got up and came across to Rosalie's bed; and by her manner, and by her voice, and by the tall white figure she was, frightened Rosalie. She said, "Go to sleep. You can sleep. Why don't you when you can? One day perhaps you'll be like me and can't."

It reminded Rosalie of "Sleep on now and take your rest" in the Bible, and frightened her. Anna said, "It's hard for women because men can do what they like but women can't." She turned away. She stood still and said with her back to Rosalie, "I've got a longing here." Her hands were clasped and she brought them up and struck them against her breast with a thud. "And I always have had and I always will have. Here. Burning. Aching. And when you've got a longing like that you must--you must--" Then she said very violently, "I hate men. I hate them. I hate them." Then she went very quickly to the candlestick on the dressing table and fumbled with it to blow it out, and it fell on the ground and broke and the room was black.

The next day was Sunday. Anna said she would not go to Church as she had a headache. Rosalie had been invited to spend the day with the little girl of Colonel and Mrs. Measures and she had lunch and tea there and then came home. The path from the gate to the house was bounded by a thick hedge. On the right was the rectory paddock and through the hedge Rosalie saw that something very strange was going on in the paddock. Away in the corner where there was a little copse with a pond in the middle was a crowd of people, some men from the village and her mother and Robert and some others. Whatever was it? While she peered, Harold came running out of the group towards the house. His coat was off, and his waistcoat; and his shirt and trousers looked funny and he ran funnily. He came near Rosalie and she saw that he was dripping wet. Had he fallen in the pond? Then two men came round from the back of the house carrying something, and Harold ran to them and they all ran with the thing to the pond. It looked like the door of the shed they were carrying. Rosalie scrambled through the hedge and ran towards the pond. Some one called out "Here's Rosalie." Hilda came out from among the people and waved her arms and called out, "Go back! Go back! You're not to come here, Rosalie! You're not to come here!" Rosalie stood still.

People were stooping. They had the door on the ground and Harold and a man were stooping and walking backwards over the door, carrying something. Presently there was more stooping, and then Harold and Robert and three men were carrying the door between them and walking as if the door were very heavy. Whatever was happening? Hilda came running to Rosalie. She was crying. "Rosalie, you're to keep away. You're not to come into the house yet. I'll tell you when you can come. Go and stay in the garden till I tell you."

Rosalie wandered about by the drive. Whatever was the matter? Robert appeared with his bicycle. Harold came out after him. "Go to Ashborough station with it, you understand. See the station master. Tell him it must be sent off at once. Tell him what has happened." Robert was sniffing and nodding. Away went Robert, bending over the handle bar of his bicycle, riding furiously.

Evening began to come on. Rosalie was wandering at the back by the stables when Hilda came out through the kitchen door. "Rosalie, I've been looking for you. Rosalie, Anna is--dead."

They went in through the kitchen. On the big kitchen clothes rail before the fire were clothes of Anna's. They were muddy and sopping wet and steam was rising off them.

Rosalie ran to her mother to cry.

"Ran to her mother to cry." That's a thing not to pass over without a stop. Lucky, lucky Rosalie to have one to whom to take her grief! You can imagine her small heart's twistings by those days of sorrow, of terrifying and mysterious and dreadful things that the child never could clearly have understood; of grief, of mourning; of atmosphere most eerie made of whispers, of tiptoe treading, of shrouded windows, of conversations, as of conspirators, shut off with "Not in front of Rosalie." "Hush, not now. Here's Rosalie."

Yes, twisting stuff that; but in that "ran to her mother to cry"

something that much more dreadfully twists the heart than those. Those were for Rosalie--they are for all--but frets upon the sands of time that each most kind expunging day, flowing from dawn to sunset like a tide, heals and obliterates. There are no common griefs, and death's a common grief, that can be drawn above that tide's highwater mark. But there's that sentence: "Rosalie ran to her mother to cry." That's of the aching voids of life, deep-seated like a cancer, that no tide reaches. That twists the heart to hear it because--O happy Rosalie!--the aching thing in life is not having where you can take your weariness. Your successes, your triumphs, there are a hundred eyes to shine with yours in those. Oh, it is the defeats you want where to tell--some one you can take the defeats to, the failures, the lost things; the lamps that are gone out, the hopes that are ashes, the springs that spring no more, the secret sordid things that eat you up, that hedge you all about, that draw you down. Those! To have some one to tell those to! Yes, there's a thought that comes with living: Let who may receive a man's triumphs; to whom a soul can take its defeats, that one has the imprint of Godhood. They walk near God.

Awfully frightening days followed for Rosalie. There wasn't a room that wasn't dark and frightening with all the blinds down, and

wasn't a voice that wasn't dark and frightening, all in whispers; and then came this that closed them and that was like a finger pressed right down on Rosalie.

There was that Rosalie in the church at the funeral service. She sat at the inner end of the pew with Hilda beside her. The coffin had stood before the altar all night, with the lamps lit all night, and Rosalie believed her father had stayed with it all night. He was struck right down by what had happened, Rosalie's father. She had heard him, when Anna lay on the bed, and he crouched beside her, crying out loud, "I hated my lot! O God, I was blind to this my child that shared my lot!"

Well, there was that Rosalie in the pew beside Hilda, and while she waited for her father to begin (ever and ever so long he was upon his knees at the altar, his back to them) while she waited she turned back the leaves of her prayer book from the burial service and noticed with a curious interest the correctness of the order in which the special services came. There, in its order, was the complete record of life. Rosalie must have had an imagination and she must have had budding then what was a strong characteristic of her afterwards,--a very orderly mind. She appreciated the correctness of the order of the services and she turned them over one by one and could imagine it, like a story: that record of a life. First the service of Baptism; you were born and baptised. Then the Catechism; you were a child and learnt your catechism. Then the Order of Confirmation; you were getting older and were confirmed. Then the marriage service; you were married. Then the Order for the Visitation of the Sick; you were growing old and you were ill. Then the Burial Service; you died. Born, brought up, growing up, married, ill, dead. Yes, it was like a story. Rosalie turned on. The next service was called The Churching of Women. It was new to Rosalie. She had never noticed it before. "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of His goodness to give you safe deliverance..." Rosalie had heard the word deliverance used in the Bible in connection with death. She thought this must be a service special to the burial of a woman--of Anna. She read the small print. "The woman at the usual time after her delivery shall come into the church decently apparelled..." Decently apparelled? Anna was in one of those nightgowns in which Rosalie so often had seen her praying. "... and there shall kneel down in some convenient place." Kneel down? How could she?...

There came upon the book while Rosalie pondered it the long, black-gloved forefinger of Hilda. It turned back the thin leaves to the burial service and then pushed over one or two of the thin leaves and indicated certain places. Then Hilda's new black hat was touching her own new black hat, and Hilda whispered, "Where it says 'brother' and 'his' father will say 'sister' and 'her.' It's written for men, do you see?"

Always for men! Even in the prayer book!

And it was because of men that Anna had drowned herself in the pond. Over and over again Rosalie had thought of that, wondering upon it, shuddering at the thought of men because of it. How she came to know that Anna had not died as ordinary people die, but had drowned herself in the pond she never could remember. No one told her. Rosalie was twelve then but the others were all so much older, and were so accustomed to treating Rosalie as so very much younger,

that the pain and mystery of poor Anna's death was outstandingly of the class of things that were kept within the established wheel of the rectory by "Not in front of Rosalie," or "Hush, here's Rosalie."

The effect was that when Rosalie somehow found out, she felt it to be a guilty knowledge. She was not supposed to know and she felt she ought not to have known. And sharing, but secretly, the others' knowledge that Anna had drowned herself in the pond, she supposed that they equally shared with her her knowledge of why poor Anna had drowned herself in the pond--because of men. She overheard many conversations that assured her in this belief. "Some man we knew nothing about," the conversation used to say. "What else could it have been? Hush, here's Rosalie." And again, after they had all been out of the house to attend what was called the inquest, "You heard what the coroner said--that there was almost invariably something to do with a man in these cases. Poor Anna! Poor darling Anna. If she had only told us. What else could it have been? Harold, hush! Not in front of Rosalie!"

Of course it was nothing else. It was that. It was men. Anna had said so. "I hate men. I hate them." Yes, men had done this to Anna.

Her mind went violently, as it were with a violent clutch of both her hands, as of one in horrible dark, clutching at means of light, to the thought that next week she was to be away at school--to be right away and in the safe middle of lots and lots of girls, and only girls. She had a frightening, a shuddering, at the thought of men who caused these terrible things to be done, who mysteriously and horribly somehow had done this thing to Anna.

The long, black finger poked at the page again. "There. 'This our brother.' Father will say 'This our sister.' Do you see, Rosalie? This our sister."

A shower of tears sprang out of Rosalie's eyes and pattered upon the page.

She wiped them. She set her teeth. A new and most awful concern possessed her. 'This our sister.' Would father remember? When he came to brother would he remember to say sister? And when 'his' would he remember to say 'her?' She searched for the places. A most frightful agitation seized her that father would forget. What would happen if he forgot?

And at the very first place father did forget!

They were come from the church to the grave. They were grouped about that most terrible and frightening pit. Rosalie was clutching her mother's dear hand, and in her other hand held her prayer book. There it was, the first place for the change. Brokenly her father's voice came out upon the air, and at his very first word--the fatal word--Rosalie caught her breath in sharp and agonized dismay.

"Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery...."

She called out--she could not help it--"Father!"

Her mother's hand, squeezing hers, restrained her.

The broken voice went on "... cometh up and is cut down like a flower."

She heaved relief. No one had noticed it. It was all right. No one else had heard the terrible mistake. It was all right. But it was very wrong. Above all other places this was the place that should have been changed. Woman... that is full of misery. How could it ever be Man? Anna, in almost her last words, had said it. "It is hard for women" and that God knew it was hard for them--"O God, thou knowest how hard it is for women."

In the next week she went away to school.

PART TWO--HOUSE OF WOMEN

CHAPTER I

What anybody can have nobody wants; but what only one person can have there's a queue to get.

This is an elementary principle of the frailty of human nature, and knowledge of it, and experience of its mighty truth, used to cause, during the three holiday periods of the year, a standing advertisement to appear on the front page of the Morning Post.

"High-class Ladies' School for the Daughters of Gentlemen of the Professions has UNEXPECTED VACANCY for ONE ONLY pupil at reduced terms--Mrs. Impact, Oakwood House School, St. John's Wood, London."

ONE ONLY pupil! That was the magic touch.

The very first words addressed to Rosalie by a fellow boarder at Oakwood House were from a short, sharp-featured girl of her own age, which then was twelve, who said to her sharply, "You're a One Only. I can see you are. Aren't you a One Only?"

"Well, I'm by myself," said Rosalie, not understanding but most anxious to say the right thing.

"Stupid, you're not," said the sharp girl, "because I'm with you. Did your mother see the advertisement in the Morning Post? The advertisement of this school?"

It happened that Rosalie knew her mother had seen it for Aunt Belle had shown it to her and to them all. "One of the very best schools," Aunt Belle had said. "You see, it's only quite by chance there was a vacancy."

"Yes, she did," said Rosalie.

"She's the cat's grandmother," said the sharp girl. "Never say 'she' for a person's name. Well, if your mother saw the advertisement then you are a One Only at reduced terms, and I knew you were directly I saw you. Now, tell me. Don't blink--unless of course you're an idiot; all idiots blink. Tell me. Was that dress made for you or was it cut down?"

"It was my cousin Laetitia's," said Rosalie.

"Of course it was," returned the sharp girl very triumphantly. "Every One Only's clothes are cut down for her. Poopers! Do you know what a pooper is? A pooper is half a poop and half a pauper. Every One Only's a pooper. Well, now you know what you are. You see that girl over there. Do you know what she is?"

Rosalie said she did not.

"She's a Red Indian."

"Is she?" said Rosalie, much surprised, for the girl did not look in the least like a Red Indian.

"Ask her," said the sharp girl. "Do you know what I am?"

Rosalie shook her head.

"Answer," said the sharp girl.

"No, I don't," said Rosalie.

"I'm a Sultan," said the sharp girl. "All the nice girls are Sultans and the school belongs to them. Do I look nice?"

"Very," said Rosalie, though she did not think so.

"Then why didn't you know I was a Sultan? The school belongs to the Sultans. The One Onlys and the Red Indians are interlopers, especially the One Onlys. Always shudder when you see a Sultan. Shudder now."

Rosalie wriggled her shoulders.

"Again, poop."

Rosalie repeated the wriggle.

"Vanish, poop," said the sharp girl, and herself sprung away with mysterious crouching bounds, her head thrust forward, looking very like Gagool, the witch, in King Solomon's Mines; and was seen by Rosalie to pounce upon another small girl who was probably a One Only and, from her forlorn aspect, certainly a sad and desolated new.

One Onlys, Red Indians, Sultans. They were the three castes into which the girls divided themselves: One Onlys the poopers brought by the advertisement; Red Indians the daughters of parents resident in India; Sultans the proud creatures who paid full fees and took their title from the nickname of the headmistress--the Sultana.

This Oakwood House School in which Rosalie now found herself was one of those very big old houses with a spacious, walled-in garden that probably was occupied in the Fifties somewhere, when St. John's Wood was out in the country, by a wealthy old City merchant who rode in to business two or three times a week, never dreaming that one day London was going to stretch miles beyond St. John's Wood, and his imposing residence go dropping down the scale of fashion eventually to become a school for young ladies who on their crocodile walks would huddle, giggling, along the kerbstone while the dangerous traffic roared up and down the Maida Vale highway.

Those crocodiles! There was a news agent's shop just opposite where the crocodile used to cross when it went out every morning, and one of the great excitements of the walk was to get around the corner and see what the newspaper bills had to tell. There were about forty girls at the school--a crocodile twenty files long--and on the days of sensational events the news from the placards used to come flashing back in emotional little screams from the head of the crocodile, gazing with goggling eyes, to the tail of the crocodile pressing deliriously up behind. "The Maybrick Case"; "Jack the Ripper Again"; "Death of the Duke of Clarence"; "Loss of H.M.S. Victoria"; Rosalie never afterwards could hear those terrific things referred to without recalling instantly the convulsions of the crocodile and experiencing within her own bosom the tumults that contributed their share to the convulsions. She was in the writhing tail of the crocodile when "Jack the Ripper Again" caused it almost to swoon, and she was in its weeping head when "Death of the Duke of Clarence" and "Loss of H.M.S. Victoria" struck its orderly coils into a tangled and hysterical knot.

Mrs. Impact, who kept this school, was a massive and frightening figure of doom who wore always upon her head, and was suspected of sleeping in, a strange erection having the appearance of a straw beehive. She was called the Sultana and her appearance and her habits seemed to Rosalie precisely the appearance and habits that would belong to a sultana. The Sultana appeared virtually never among the girls. The direction of the discipline and education of the pupils was in the hands of the chief of the Sultana's staff of badly paid and much intimidated mistresses. This chief of staff, by name Miss Ough, but called the Vizier, appeared from and disappeared into the quarters occupied by the Sultana, and was popularly supposed to be kept there in a dungeon. If you were near the door through which the Vizier passed from public gaze there was unquestionably to be heard shortly afterwards a metallic clank. This was the portal of the Vizier's dungeon being closed upon her and was very shuddering to hear. The Vizier, moreover, like one long incarcerated, was skeletonized of form, cadaverous and sallow of countenance, and grew upon her face, as all right prisoners in royal custody grow, a thick covering of greyish down.

A second known inhabitant of the Sultana's quarters was Mr. Ponders, her butler, who sometimes slid into the classrooms in a very eerie way with messages and whom Rosalie came to know strangely well; a third, but he did not exactly live in the awful regions, was the Sultana's husband. The Sultana's husband lived in two rooms over the stable. From the front classroom windows he was to be seen every morning disappearing through the front gates at about eleven o'clock; very shiny top hat; very tight tail coat; very tight grey trousers; very tight yellow gloves; very tight grey-yellow moustache;

very tight pasty face; curiously constricted, jerky gait as though his boots, too, were very tight. Precisely the sort of chronic, half-tipsy hanger-on one used to see in billiard rooms or eating cloves in West End bars. By association of ideas with the orientalism of Sultana he was called by the girls the Bashibazook.

Junior to Miss Ough, the vizier, were four or five other mistresses, all known by nicknames. Children are exactly like savages in their horrible sharpness at picking out physical peculiarities and labelling by them. One would imagine these governesses, judged by their nicknames, a deplorable collection of oddities. Actually they must have been a presentable enough and a capable enough set of spinsters, though sicklied o'er by the pale cast of indifferent personalities, indifferently housed, indifferently fed, indifferently paid; all anaemic, all without any prospects whatsoever, all dominated by and domineered over by the masterful personality of the Sultana.

Only one of them contributed to the life of Rosalie and this was "Keggo," Miss Keggs, who taught mathematics. This Keggo was rather like Anna in appearance, Rosalie thought, and was most popular of all the mistresses with the girls, partly because of her bright moments in which she was a human creature and an entertaining creature; partly because of her curiously supine periods in which she would be utterly listless, allow her class to do anything they liked provided they kept perfectly quiet, and would make no attempt whatsoever to correct idleness or to impart the lesson of the hour. Miss Keggs had been known to knock over the inkpot on her desk and sit and watch the ink dripping in a pool on to the floor without making the least attempt even to upstand the vessel. No one knew why Keggo had these moods. But it was known that for her to come into class looking rather flushed was a sign foreshadowing them.

She appeared to take a fancy to Rosalie from the first, and Rosalie to her, probably by reason of the fancied resemblance to Anna. She invited Rosalie to her room and Rosalie loved to go there because the One Onlys were in a very weak and humble minority in Rosalie's first term and were rather hunted by the Sultans who were then particularly strong in numbers and rich in apparel, in pocket money, and in friends. The poor little One Onlys led rather abashed lives and they had no chance at all around the playroom fire where the Sultans stretched their elegant legs and warmed their shapely toes.

One evening in her first few weeks Rosalie had to take an exercise up to Miss Keggs, and Miss Keggs's room was warm, and Miss Keggs like Anna, and Rosalie lingered and was invited to linger; after that Rosalie sought and invented reasons for going up to Miss Keggs's room and Miss Keggs would nearly always say, "Well, you may stay a little, Rosalie, as you're here."

Miss Keggs's room was right at the top of the house where were also the servants' room and the room shared by Miss Downer and Miss Frost. It was a long, narrow room with sloping ceiling and the window high up in the ceiling. In the winter it was warmed with a small oil stove which smelt terribly when you first went in but to the smell of which you almost at once got accustomed. It was curious to Rosalie that even in summer when there was no oil stove there was nearly always a very strong smell in Miss Keggs's room. Miss Keggs used eau de Cologne for bathing her forehead and temples on account of the very bad headaches from which she said she suffered

and the smell was like eau de Cologne but with an unpleasantly harsh strong tang in it, like bad eau de Cologne, Rosalie used to think. However, you almost at once got accustomed to that also. These headaches of Miss Keggs were a symptom of the very bad health from which she suffered, and on the occasions of Rosalie's visits to her room Miss Keggs was very communicative about her ill health. It was the reason, she told Rosalie, why, alone of all the mistresses, she had a room to herself instead of sharing one. The Sultana had granted her that privilege, provided she would use this remote and rather poky attic, because it was so essential she should be quiet and undisturbed.

"Don't you have any medicine, Miss Keggs?" said the small Rosalie, in one part genuinely sympathetic and in the other eager to discuss anything that would prolong her stay by the warm oil stove.

"Nothing does me any good," said Miss Keggs wearily. After a minute she added, "But I really am feeling very bad to-night. Mr. Ponders very kindly gives me some medicine that relieves my bad attacks. I wonder, Rosalie, if you could find your way down to Mr. Ponders and give him this medicine bottle and ask him if he could very kindly oblige me with a little of my medicine?"

"Oh, I'm sure I could, Miss Keggs," cried Rosalie, delighted at the opportunity of doing a service.

Miss Keggs became extraordinarily animated with the feverish animation of one who, having made up her mind after hesitation, furiously tramples hesitation under foot.

"Go right downstairs," directed Miss Keggs, "right down below the hall into the basement. You know the basement stairs?" She proceeded with her directions, detailing them most exactly. She accompanied Rosalie to the door and when Rosalie was a little down the passage sharply called her back. "And, Rosalie! If you should meet any one--if you should meet any one, on no account say where you are going or where you have been. On no account. If it should be known how ill I continue to be, I might be sent away. They might think I am not strong enough to continue my work here. Say you have lost your way if you should be met. You are a new little girl and it is easy to lose your way in this big, rambling house. Keep the bottle in your pocket and remember, Rosalie, on no account to tell. On no account." And so dismissed her.

A creepy business, going down to interview Mr. Ponders! The Sultana's butler was only seen by the girls on momentous and thrilling occasions. He opened the hall door when new little girls arrived with their mothers, and he would sometimes appear in a classroom and walk thrillingly to the mistress and thrillingly whisper. This always meant that for some fortunate girl a parent or an aunt had arrived and that the presence of the fortunate girl was desired by the Sultana. He was a shortish, dingy man with a considerable moustache. As he walked between the desks to deliver his message, his eyes were always glancing from side to side as though furtively in search of something, and always as he left the room he would stand a moment with his hand on the door as though meditating some statement and then suddenly de-termining to disappear without making it. A rather mysterious and thrilling man.

Come into the basement, Rosalie walked as bid along the passage, then to the right and then past two doors to the third, whereon she tapped gently, and when a man's voice said "Come in," quaked rather, and went in. The walls of Mr. Ponders' room were completely surrounded by narrow shelves. Beneath the shelves were the closed doors of low cupboards and on the shelves were ranged many glasses, china and silverware. At one end beneath the window was a sink with two taps, both dripping. On the right-hand side was a fire before which in a wicker armchair sat Mr. Ponders smoking a pipe and reading a newspaper.

"What do you want?" inquired Mr. Ponders.

Rosalie said, "If you please, Mr. Ponders, Miss Keggs is not feeling at all well and would you be so very kind as to give her some of her medicine, please?"

Mr. Ponders rose and regarded Rosalie from the hearthrug. "So it's going to be you coming for the medicine now, is it?" he said. He looked rather a mean little man, standing there; not thrilling as when he appeared in the schoolrooms for there was an unpleasing familiarity in his air, but still decidedly mysterious, for though he smiled and looked snakily at Rosalie, he still glanced from side to side as though furtively looking for something and he still, before committing himself to an action, paused as though meditating a statement and then suddenly performed the action as though he had made up his mind not to speak--yet.

"You're Rosalie, aren't you?" inquired Ponders, putting his hands in his pockets and stretching out his stomach like one much at his ease. "Rosalie Aubyn. You come with your Auntie. What's your Pa?"

"A clergyman, Mr. Ponders."

"Oh, he's a clergyman, is he?" Mr. Ponders's eyes slid from side to side, rather as if he had somewhere in the room some confirmation or some refutation of Rosalie's statement that he could produce if he could catch sight of it, and continued thus to slide with the same suggestion while he playfully put Rosalie through a further examination relative to her "Auntie," her "Ma" and her brothers and sisters. He appeared then to be meditating a question of some other order but instead suddenly straightened himself, withdrew his hands from his pockets and said, "Well, you'd better be running along with the medicine."

He took from Rosalie the bottle Miss Keggs had given her and from his pockets a bunch of keys. In the lock of one of his cupboards he fitted a key, paused a meditative moment, then with a decisive action opened the cupboard and from a tall black bottle very carefully and steadily filled the medicine bottle. The medicine was dark red. It first ran in a fine dark red cloud around the inner shoulders and sides of the bottle and then plunged in a steady stream direct from the larger receptacle to the smaller.

Rosalie, watching, was moved to say, "How well you pour it, Mr. Ponders."

"I've poured a tidy drop in my time," said Mr. Ponders, completing the operation and corking the medicine bottle. He held it towards

Rosalie, paused in his mysteriously deliberative way, and then suddenly handed it to her. "And a tidy fair drop for Miss Keggs at that," he added. He went to the door, again paused as though uncertain whether to open it, then opened it for Rosalie to pass out. "Good night," said Mr. Ponders.

Lucky Mr. Ponders to have for his own a cosy room like that--men, always for some reason, with the best of everything again! Unpleasing Mr. Ponders to look at you like that and to speak to you like that--men, always horrible again! Rosalie, thus thinking, made a swift and unobserved climb to the attics. Miss Keggs must have heard her coming. The door was pulled sharply from Rosalie's hand and there was Miss Keggs and the bottle almost snatched away from Rosalie. "How long you've been! But you've got it! And no one saw you?" Miss Keggs went very swiftly to the washstand and took up a small tumbler. Clear that she wanted her medicine very badly. She toppled in the contents of the bottle, its neck clinking against the glass, the dark red medicine splashing and some spilling, so differently from Mr. Ponders's performance of a far more difficult operation, and with the bottle still in her hand held the glass to her lips and drank deeply.

Yet there was a funny thing about the draught. It seemed to Rosalie that Miss Keggs with that eager draught yet did not swallow at once but only filled her mouth to its capacity. She then swallowed very slowly and with movements of her cheeks as though she was sucking down the medicine and tasting it in every portion of her mouth. Colour came into her cheeks. The medicine certainly appeared to do her immense good.

Miss Keggs's friendliness towards Rosalie was settled and established from that night. Thereafter it became a very regular thing for Rosalie to visit the room of Miss Keggs of an evening; and at intervals, sometimes twice a week, sometimes not three times in a month, to descend to the den of Mr. Ponders for the dark-red medicine which did Miss Keggs so much good and which she always took in that peculiar sucking way from a full mouth, one would be so long sometimes in swallowing a mouthful, beginning a sentence and then drinking and then all that time in swallowing before she completed the sentence, that she several times, by way of apology, explained the reason to Rosalie. "I have to swallow it very slowly like that," explained Miss Keggs, "because that's the way for it to do me good. It's my doctor's orders."

"It seems a business," was Rosalie's comment.

"Yes, it is a business," Miss Keggs agreed.

Rosalie added, "How very lucky it is, Miss Keggs, that Mr. Ponders keeps your medicine."

"Yes, it's certainly very lucky," Miss Keggs agreed.

The effect of her medicine was always to make her very complaisant.

CHAPTER II

One seeks to give only the things in Rosalie's life that contributed to her record, as time judges a record. Of her years at Oakwood House, so far as Oakwood House itself is concerned, only that friendship with Miss Keggs thus contributed. The rest does not matter and may be passed. Rosalie was happy there. It naturally was all very strange at first but she soon shook down and found her place and formed friendships. The thing to notice is this--that even in the strangeness of her first few weeks the place was actively felt by her to be a haven. There is to be recalled that aching desire of hers, when poor Anna lay dead, to get right away from men: men who (though still pre-eminently wonderful) caused her by their showing off to blink and have a, funny feeling; and by their distasteful presence spoilt her walks and her lessons; and by the frightening things they did had brought that frightening death to Anna. Thus had accumulated that aching desire to get right away from men and be only amongst girls; and the feeling remained most lively in Rosalie at the Sultana's, and intensified. Those men! She used to see the Bashibazook and shudder at him; and Mr. Ponders and shudder at him; and sometimes Uncle Pyke, and because of ways he had, feel quite sick to be near him. Men still were wonderful. The Bashibazook, Mr. Ponders, Uncle Pyke, Uncle Pyke's friends--all were infinitely superior and did what they pleased; but, oh, not nice, frightening. It was safe and nice to be only with girls. Girls were in heaps of ways extraordinarily silly and unsatisfactory. Men though not nice, unquestionably did everything better and could do things. Unquestionably theirs was the best time in life. Unquestionably they were to be envied. But--not nice, frightening.

It was like that that her ideas at Oakwood House were shaping.

And all this time, most important and much contributory to the life of Rosalie--Aunt Belle. Tremendous occasions in those years were the visits to the Sultana's of Aunt Belle. Frequently on a Saturday, kind Aunt Belle used to call at Oakwood House for Rosalie and take her to a tea shop for tea. Beautiful cousin Laetitia would accompany her, and kind Aunt Belle would always invite Rosalie to bring with her another little One Only. Kind, kind Aunt Belle! Aunt Belle used to sit by in the tea shop, affectionate and loquacious as ever, while the two schoolgirls stuffed themselves with cakes (not beautiful Laetitia who just nicely sipped a cup of tea and nicely smiled at the two gross appetites) and always kind Aunt Belle brought a small hamper of sweets and cake and apples--"The very best goodies from the Army and Navy Stores, dear child. They know us so well at the Army and Navy Stores. Your Uncle Pyke has a standing deposit account there. We can go in without a penny in our pockets and buy anything we please. Fancy that, dear child!" And always half a crown for Rosalie, as kind Aunt Belle was leaving.

Once in every term, also, Rosalie spent a week-end at the magnificent house in Pilchester Square. Such luxuries! Fire in her bedroom and palatial late dinner! Breakfast in bed on Sunday morning ("Just to let you lie as a little change from school, dear child.") and

Laetitia's maid to do her hair! Rosalie immensely impressed and Aunt Belle immensely gratified at Rosalie's awe and appreciation and gratitude.

A curious manifestation there was of Aunt Belle's attitude in this regard. On that famous visit to the rectory she had treated every one like children. Here, in her own house, while Rosalie was still a child, twelve, thirteen and fourteen, she was treated by Aunt Belle and shown off to by her much as if she were a grown-up woman. About her servants, and about prices, and about dress, and about her dinner parties, Aunt Belle chattered to Rosalie; and about Uncle Pyke, what he liked, and what he didn't like, and what he did in the City, and what he did at his club, and about her hosts of friends and their matrimonial experiences, Aunt Belle chattered to her, confiding in her and telling her all kinds of things she but dimly understood precisely as if she were a grown-up young woman.

Then as Rosalie grew older, sixteen, seventeen and getting on for eighteen, was reversion by Aunt Belle to the rectory manner. The child had been treated as a young woman; the budding maiden was treated precisely as if she were a small child or a small savage to be entertained by mere sight of the wonders all about her in Pilchester Square and by having them explained to her in words of one syllable.

"There, Rosalie," (Rosalie at seventeen) "do you know you're eating with a solid silver spoon! Feel the weight of it! Balance it in your hand, dear child. We usually only use this service for our dinner parties and your uncle Pyke keeps it locked up and carries the key about with him. Show Rosalie the key, Pyke. But I got it out for you to-day because I knew you would like to see real solid silver plate. Dear child!"

Dear thing! Lightly on her, you Brompton Cemetery stones!

Uncle Pyke never would produce the key or whatever he might be asked to show. Uncle Pyke would grunt and go on with his soup with enormous noise as though having a bath in it. Uncle Pyke never spoke at all to Rosalie on these week-end visits except, always, to put her through examination on what she was learning at school. Rosalie, though horribly frightened of Uncle Pyke, always had pretty ready answers to the examination--she did uncommonly well at school--but there never was from Uncle Pyke any other mark of appreciation than a grunt. A grunt! Those Pyke-ish, piggish men! The outstanding characteristic Rosalie came to see in Uncle Pyke and in the other husbands (his cronies) of Aunt Belle's friends was that they thought about nothing else but their food, their wine and their cigars. They disliked having about them anybody who interfered with their enjoyment of their food, their wine and their cigars. They were affectionately regarded by their wives as tame, necessary bears to be fed and warmed and used to sit at the head of the table and awe the servants. That was what Rosalie saw in them--and shuddered at in them. Hogs!

Cousin Laetitia all this time was living at home, attending a very exclusive and expensive day school. Only twelve girls at beautiful Laetitia's school and more masters and mistresses than pupils--mostly "visiting" masters--Italian, French, painting, singing, music, dancing. Laetitia was about two years older than Rosalie. Very

pretty in an elegant, delicate fashion, and growing up decidedly beautiful in a sheltered, hothouse, Rossetti type of beauty. Always very affectionate to Rosalie and glad to see her; not patronising in the way she might have been patronising and yet, as the two grew older, patronising in a conscious effort to dissemble a conscious superiority.

Rosalie never could remember how early in their acquaintance it was she first understood that the great aim of Laetitia's life, and the great aim of Aunt Belle's life for Laetitia, was to "make a good match"; but she seemed to have known it ever since she first heard of Laetitia, certainly at a point of her childhood when too young exactly to understand what "good match" meant. Later on, when Laetitia had left school and was within sight of putting up her hair, "good match" was openly spoken of by Aunt Belle in her crowded drawing-room or alone in company of the two girls and Uncle Pyke.

"And soon dear Laetitia will be making a good match, a splendid match"; and beautiful Laetitia would faintly colour and faintly smile.

There began to come to Rosalie, growing older, an acute and an odd feeling of the physical and mental difference between herself and beautiful Laetitia--a feeling in Laetitia's company that she was a boy, a young man, in the company of one most pronouncedly a young woman. Rosalie was always very plainly dressed by comparison with Laetitia; her voice was much clearer and sharper, her air very vigorous against an air very langorous. Her hands used to feel extraordinarily big when she sat with Laetitia and her wrists extraordinarily bare. She would glance down at her lap sometimes and could have felt a sense of surprise not to see trousers on her legs.

That was how, as they grew older, Rosalie often felt with Laetitia.

Her last term came. She was nearly eighteen. She was going to earn her own living. That was decided. Exactly how was not decided; but Rosalie had decided it. There was an idea that she should remain at the Sultana's as a junior teacher, but that was not Rosalie's idea.

"Oh, don't be a schoolmistress, Rosalie," Keggo had said when Rosalie told of the suggestion (propounded, through the Sultana, by Miss Ough and warmly endorsed by Aunt Belle and grunted upon by Uncle Pyke). "Oh, Rosalie, don't be one of us. Don't you see how we are just drifting, drifting? Don't do anything where you'll just drift, Rosalie."

"No, I'm not going to drift, Keggo," said Rosalie. (Miss Keggs, in the little room, had been "Keggo" a long time then.) "I'm not going to drift. I'm going to have a man's career. I'm going into business! Keggo, that's the mystery of that book I'm always reading that you're always asking me about: 'Lombard Street'--Bagehot's 'Lombard Street.' Oh, Keggo, thrilling."

She began to tell Keggo her stupendous enterprise....

There is in the study of man nothing more curious or more interesting

than the natural bent of an individual mind. An arrow shot to the north and another from the same bow to the south spring not apart more swiftly or more opposedly than the minds of two children brought up from one mother in the same nursery. The natural bent of each impels it. Art this one, science that; to Joe adventure, to Tom a bookish habit. Rosalie's natural bent declared itself in "figures"; in the operations, as she discovered them, of commerce; in the mysterious powers, as they appealed to her, developed in countinghouses and exerted by countinghouses. The romance of commerce! A mind double-edged, with inquisitiveness the one edge and acquisitiveness the other (as certainly Rosalie's) is a sword double-edged that will cut through the tough shell and into the lively heart of anything. No more is required than to give the young mind a glimpse of the lively heart that is there. Rosalie's young mind was already beating with half-fledged wings against the shell about that side of life wherein, in her experience, (of her brothers, of Uncle Pyke, of Uncle Pyke's friends) men did the things that earned them livelihood and gave them independence. Along, by happy chance, buried in dust in the rectory study and found one holiday, came "Lombard Street" and Bagehot, and that was the book and Bagehot was the man to give pinions to those fledgling wings. She saw romance, and thrusted for it, in the business of countinghouses. It was fascinating to her beyond anything the discovery that money was not, as she had always supposed, a thing that you took with one hand and paid away, and lost, with the other. Not at all! It was a thing that, properly handled, you never lost. Enthralling! Thrilling! You invested it and it returned to you; you expended it and propped it up with fascinating things called sinking funds, and, although you had spent it, there it was coming back to you again! It was the most mysterious and wonderful commodity in the world. She got hold of that and she went on from that.

The romance of business! That ships should go out across the seas with one cargo and sell it, not, in effect, for money, but for another and an entirely different cargo; that cheques passing between countries, and cheques circulating about the United Kingdom, should be traded off one against the other in magic conjuring palaces called Clearing Houses with the result that thousands of little streams merged into few great rivers and only differences need be paid; that money (heart and driving-force of all the mysteries) should have within itself the mysterious and astounding quality of ceaselessly reduplicating itself--"the only thing in the world," as Rosalie quaintly put it to Miss Keggs--"the only thing in the world that people, business people, will take care of for you without charging you for storage or for trouble"--that these mysterious and extraordinary things should be thrilled Rosalie as the mysterious and extraordinary things of science or of nature or the mysterious and beautiful things of art or of literature or of music will thrill another.

That natural bent of her mind! That Bagehot that ministered to her natural bent! Fascinated by Banks, fascinated by the Exchange, fascinated by the Pool of London, where, obedient to the behests of the counting-houses, floated the wealth that the countinghouses made, fascinated by these was Rosalie as maidens of her years commonly are fascinated by palaces, by the Tower and by the Abbey. Remember, it is not what their eyes see that fascinates these romantic young misses. A dolt can see the Tower walls and see no more than crumbling bricks and stone. It is what their minds see

that fascinates the ardent creatures. Well, Rosalie's mind saw strange romance in countinghouses.

That Bagehot!

And then must be picked up--and were with time picked up--others of the magic man's enchantments. "Literary Studies," but she passed over that, the burning subject was not there. "Economic Studies"; it much was there. "International Coinage." She read that! It approached the subject of a Universal Money and her thought was, "Why, what a splendid idea to have one coinage that would go everywhere!" And then, opening a new field, and yet a connected field and a field profoundly engrossing to her, "The English Constitution." How laws came; how laws worked; the mysteriousness (her word) within the Council chambers that produced governance as the mysteriousness within the countinghouses produced wealth! The mysterious quality within precedent and necessity and change that reproduced itself in laws as the mysterious quality within money caused money to reproduce itself in wealth; the romance of governance.

It was like that that her interests were shaping.

It was very easy, it was utterly delightful, to tell all this to Keggo. It was not at all easy, it was very terrible, to tell it before Uncle Pyke. It was appalling, it was terrific, to break to the house in Notting Hill that she desired to earn her living, not as a teacher, but in business--like men.

It was at dinner at the glittering table in the splendid dining-room of the magnificent house in Notting Hill, Rosalie there on the half-term week-end of her last term, that the frightful thing was done. At dinner: Uncle Pyke Pounce bathing in his soup; beautiful Laetitia elegantly toying with hers; Aunt Belle beaming over her solid silver spoon at Rosalie. "Try that soup, dear child. It's delicious. My cook makes such delicious soups. Lady Houldsworth Hopper--Sir Humbo Houldsworth Hopper, you know he's in the India Office, you must have heard of him--was dining with us last week and said she had never tasted such delicious soup. It was the same as this. I asked cook specially to make it for you. Now next term, when you are one of the mistresses at Oakwood House and living at their table and you have soup, you'll be able to say--for you must speak up when you are with them, dear child, and not be shy--you'll be able to tell them what delicious soup you always get at your Uncle Colonel Pyke Pounce's. Be sure to mention your Uncle by name, Colonel Pyke Pounce, R.E., not just 'my uncle,' and that he was a great deal in India where he was entirely responsible for the laying of the Puttapong Railway and received an illuminated address from the Rajah of Puttapongpoo, such a fine old fellow, not being allowed of course to take a present, which you have seen many times hanging in his study in his fine house in Pilchester Square, Notting Hill (some of them are sure to have heard of Pilchester Square, though never visited there, of course); your uncle will show you the address again after dinner; that will be nice, won't it, dear? Won't you, Pyke?"

(F-r-r-r-r-rup! from the splendid holder of the illuminated address from the Rajah of Puttapongpoo, bathing in his soup.)

"Be sure to speak up for yourself like that, dear child, and let

them know who you are and that though you are poor and have to earn your living, you have wealthy relations (though of course we are only comfortably off and do not pretend to be rich) and are not at all like ordinary governesses. Be sure to, dear. There; now you've finished that soup and wasn't it delicious, just? You will have another helping, I know you will. A second helping of soup is not usual, dear, and Laetitia or any one at any of our parties would never take it, but it's quite different for you, and I do love to see you enjoy the nice food I get for you. More soup for Miss Aubyn, Parker."

Now for it!

"Aunt, I won't have any more soup. I won't really. It was delicious. Delicious, but really no more. Really. Aunt.... About the governesses there and being one of them. I wanted to say... Aunt, I don't want to be a pupil-teacher. Aunt..."

Fr-r-r-rup! Frr-r-roosh! Woosh! Fr-r-r-roosh!

It is the holder of the illuminated address from the Rajah of Puttapongpoo most terribly and fear-strikingly struggling up out of his soup. "Don't want to be a pupil teacher? Wat d'ye mean? Wat d'ye mean?"

"Why, Rosalie, darling!" It is the exquisitely beautiful daughter of the holder of the illuminated address from the Rajah of Puttapongpoo.

"Never mind them, Rosalie. The dear child! Why, how crimson she is. Let the dear child speak. What is it, dear child?" It is kind Aunt Belle.

"Aunt Belle. Aunt Belle, I don't want to earn my living like that. I want to earn it like--like a man. I want to--well, it's hard to explain--to go to an office like a man--and have my pay every week, like a man--and have a chance to get on like men, like a man. I want to go into the City if I possibly could, or start in some way like going into the City. I know it sounds awful--telling it to you--but girls are doing it, a few. They're just secretaries and clerks, of course. They're just nothing, of course. But, oh, it's something, and I do want it so. To have office hours and a--a desk--and a--an employer and be--be like men. I don't mean, I don't mean a bit, imitate men like all that talk there is now about imitating men. I hate women in stiff collars and shirts and ties and mannishness like that; and indeed I hate--I dislike men--I can't stand them, not in that way, if you understand what I mean--"

".Rosalie!" (Laetitia.)

"Oh, Laetitia, oh, Aunt Belle, I'm only saying that to show I don't mean I want to be--. It is so fearfully difficult to explain, this. But Aunt, you do see what I am trying to mean. It's just a man's work that I mean because I'd love it and because I don't see why--. And it's just that particular kind of work--in the City. Because I believe, I do believe, I would be sharp and good at that work. Figures and things. I love that. I'm quick at that, very quick. And I've read heaps about it--about business I mean--about--"

Uncle Pyke Pounce. Uncle Pyke Pounce, holding his breath because he

is holding his exasperation as one holds one's breath in performance of a delicate task. Uncle Pyke Pounce crimson, purple blotched, infuriated, kept from his food, blowing up at last at the parlour-maid: "Bring in the next course! Bring in the next course! Watyer staring at? Watyer waiting for? Watyer listening to? Rubbish. Pack of rubbish."

The parlour-maid flies out on the gust of the explosion. Rosalie finishes her sentence while the gust inflates again.

"Read heaps about it--about business--about trade and finance and that. It fascinates me."

The gust explodes at her.

"Wat d'yer mean read about it? Read about what?"

"Uncle, about money, about finance and things. I know it's extraordinary I should like such things. But I do. I can't tell why. It's like--like a romance to me, all about money and how it is made and managed. There's a book I found in father's study at home. 'Lombard Street' by Bagehot. That's all about it, isn't it? I can't tell you how I have read it and reread it."

"Never heard of it. 'Lombard Street?' Bagehot? Who's Bagehot?"

"I think he was a banker, Uncle."

"I think he was a fool!"

It comes out of the red and swollen face of the holder of the illuminated address from the Rajah of Puttapongpoo like a plum-stone spat at her across the table. Rosalie blinked. These beastly men! Violent, vulgar, fat, rude beasts! Uncle Pyke the worst of them! But she came back bravely from her flinch. "If he wasn't a banker, he knew all about banking. Oh, that's what I would be more than anything--that's what I do want to be--a banker--in a bank!"

The holder of the illuminated address from the Rajah of Puttapongpoo as if, having expectorated the plum-stone, he desired to expectorate also the taste thereof, spat out an obscene sound of contempt and disgust. "Fah! I say the man, whoever he was, was a fool. And I say this, Miss. I don't often speak sharply, but I say that I think I know another fool--a little fool--at this table. Pah! Enough of it! What's this? Trout?"

Aunt Belle to the rescue! If Uncle Pyke and Aunt Belle had kept house in Seven Dials instead of Notting Hill, Uncle Pyke would have beaten Aunt Belle and Aunt Belle would have taken the blows without flinching and then have wheedled Uncle Pyke with drops of gin. As it was, Uncle Pyke was merely boorish or torpidly savage towards Aunt Belle and Aunt Belle's way with him--as with all combative men--was to rally him with a kind of boisterous chaff and to discharge it at him as an urchin with an armful of snowballs fearfully discharges them at an old gentleman in a silk hat: backing away, that is to say, before an advance and advancing before a retreat. Uncle Pyke usually retreated, either to eat or sleep.

Aunt Belle had blinked, as Rosalie had blinked, at that horrible

epithet "Little fool!" across the table. The lips that uttered it were immediately stuffed with trout and Aunt Belle immediately rushed in in her rallying way to the rescue. "Why, you great, big stupid Uncle Pyke!" cried Aunt Belle vivaciously. "It's you who don't know what you're talking about, you unkind old thing, you. Why, many, many girls, quite nice girls, are going into business now and being secretaries and things and doing very, very well indeed. Why, I declare it would do you good to have a lady secretary yourself in that big, dusty office of yours in the City, never dusted from one year's end to another, I'm sure! Laetitia, wouldn't it do your father good, the cross, grumpy old thing? Give your master some more of the sauce, Parker. Isn't that trout delicate and nice, Pyke? Trout for a pike! And I'm sure very like a nasty, savage old pike the way you tried to gobble up poor Rosalie, the dear child. Now, Rosalie, dear child, I think that's a very, very good idea of yours to go into business. I think it's a splendid idea, and more and more quite nice girls will soon be doing it. Now we'll just see what we can do and we'll make that cross old uncle help and ask all his cross old friends in the City, just to punish him. A young Lady Clerk, or a young Lady Secretary! Now I think that's the very, very thing for you. Just the thing, and a dear, clever child to think of it. Yes!"

Kind, kind Aunt Belle! Victory through Aunt Belle! Accomplishment! A career like a man! Aunt Belle had said it and Aunt Belle would do it! A career like a man! Oh, ecstatic joy! "Lombard Street" had been brought with her in her week-end suitcase. Directly she could get to bed she rushed up to it and took it out and read, and read. It was all underlined. She underlined it more that happy, happy night!

Ah, never underline a book till you are forty. Never memorialise what you were, your lovely innocence, your generous heart, your ardent hopes, lest the memorial be found one day by what you have become. Rosalie, finding that "Lombard Street," unearthed from lumber, in long after years, turned over the pages and from the pages ghosts rushed up and filled the room, and filled the air, and filled her heart, and filled her eyes; and she rent the book across its perished binding and pushed it from her with both her hands on to the fire and on to the flames in the fire.

CHAPTER III

Incredibly soon, so stealthy swift is time, came this last term of Rosalie's at the Sultana's. Time does not play an open game. It's of the cloak and dagger sort. It stalks and pounces. Rosalie was astonished to think she was leaving; and now the time had come she was sorry to be going. Not very sorry; very excited; but having just enough regret to realise, on looking back, that she had been very happy at school and to realise, actively, happiness in this

last term. One knows what it is. It's always like that. One always was happy; one so seldom is. Happiness to be realised needs faint perception of sadness as needs the egg the touch of salt to manifest its flavour. Flashes of entertainment may enliven the most wretched of us; but that's pleasure; that's not happiness. One comes to know the only true and ideal happiness is happiness tintured with faintest, vaguest hint of tears. It is peace; and who knows peace that has not come to it through storm, or knoweth storm ahead, or in storm past hath not lost one that would have shared this peace?

So that girl's last term was (in her words) "tremendously jolly." She was just eighteen, and she was leaving, and responsive to this the harness of the school was drawn off her as at the paddock gate the headstall from a colt. She was out of lessons. She did some teaching of the younger girls. She was on terms with the mistresses. She had the run of Keggo's room.

Such talks in Keggo's room.... She was out from the cove of childhood; she was into the bay of youth; breasting towards the sea of womanhood (that sea that's sailed by stars and by no chart); and she was encountering tides that come to young mariners to perplex them and Keggo could talk about such things with the experience that so enraptures young mariners and of which young mariners are at the same time so confidently contemptuous, so superiorly sceptical. Nearer to press the simile, youth at the feet of experience is as one, experienced, climbing a mountain with the young thing panting behind. "Go on! Go on!" pants the growing young thing. "This is ripping. Go on. Show the way. But I don't want your hand. I can do it easily by myself--better." And one evening while Rosalie stumblingly explained, and eagerly received, and sceptically doubted, "But look here, Keggo," she cried, and stopped and blushed, abashed at her use of the nickname.

Miss Keggs laughed. "Don't mind, Rosalie. Call me Keggo. I like it. It's much more friendly. I'm very fond of you, Rosalie."

They were by the oil stove, Miss Keggs in her wicker armchair, Rosalie on the floor, her back propped against Miss Keggs's knees. One of Miss Keggs's hands was on Rosalie's shoulder and she moved it to touch the girl's face. "Are you fond of me, Rosalie?"

Rosalie turned towards her and spoke impulsively. "Oh, awfully--Keggo."

The woman stooped and kissed the growing young thing, hugging her strongly, pressing her lips upon the lips of Rosalie with a great intensity. "Oh, I shall be sorry when you go, Rosalie."

"We can still be friends, Keggo dear."

Miss Keggs shook her head. "Ships that pass in the night."

"O Keggo!"

Miss Keggs smiled, a wintry smile. "O Rosalie!" she mimicked. She sighed. "Oh, my dear, it's true--true! Don't you remember how the lines go--

'Ships that pass in the night and speak each other in passing;

Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness.'

Just remember that in a few years. You'll hail again perhaps. 'O Keggo!' Or I--it is more likely--wilt hail 'O Rosalie!' Just remember it then." Her hand came down to Rosalie and Rosalie took it. It was so cold; and on her face a strained and beaten look as though hand and face belonged to one that stood most chilled and storm-beat upon the bridge, peering through the storm. Her fingers made no motion responsive to Rosalie's warm touch. She said strangely, as though it was to herself she spoke, "Does it mean anything to you, Rosalie, a vision like that? Can you see a black and violent night and a ship going by full speed, and one labouring, and through the wind and the blackness a hail.--and gone, and the wreck left foundering?"

Ah, that most generous and quickly moved and loving-Rosalie--then! How she twisted to her knees and stretched her arms about that poor Keggo, sitting there--so drooped! How readily into her eyes her young and warm and ardent sympathies pressed the tears, their flowers! How warm her words? How warmly spoken! "O Keggo! Keggo, dear! Keggo, why do you talk like that? How can you? After all the kindness you've shown me, accusing me that I'll forget and not mind. Keggo, you shan't. You mustn't."

Then Keggo responded, catching her arms about Rosalie and straining Rosalie to her as though here was some cable to hold against the driving sea. "O Rosalie!"

And after a little Rosalie said, "You won't again say I ever shall forget, or hail and pass by. Oh, that was cruel, Keggo!"

Keggo was gently crying. "Natural. Natural."

"Unnatural. Horrible. And you? Why do you say such things about yourself? You didn't mean it? It's nothing? How can you ever be a wreck, foundering?"

Keggo dried her eyes and by her voice seemed to put those things right away. "No, nothing. Of course not. Darling girl, only this--you're young--young and so of course you are going by full sail as young things do. Full sail! O happy ship! Rosalie, go on telling. Go on asking. I love it, Rosalie."

She was always "Keggo" after that; and the things that Rosalie told and asked!

Such things! It is to be seen that now there were bursting into blossom out of bud within that Rosalie those seeds planted in her by the extraordinary ideas of her childhood. About men. First and always predominating, about men as compared with women--their wonder, their power, their importance, their infinite superiority; then about men in their relations with women--their rather grand and noisy ways that made Rosalie blink; their interfering presence that spoilt lessons and spoilt walks; those sinister attributes of theirs, arising somehow out of their freedom to do as they liked in the world, that somehow left the world very hard for women. Grotesque ideas, but masterful ideas, masterfully shaping the child mind wherein they germinated; burrowing in clutchy roots; pressing

up in strong young saplings. Agreed the child is father of the man, but much more the girl is mother of the woman. It is the man's part to sow and ride away; conception is the woman's office and that which she receives she tends to cherish and incorporate within her. Of her body that function is her glory; of her mind it is her millstone. Man always rides away, a tent dweller and an Arab, with a horse and with the plains about him; woman is a dweller in a city with a wall, a house dweller, storing her possessions about her in her house, abiding with them, not to be sundered from them.

So with that Rosalie. Those childhood ideas of hers were grotesque ideas but she had received them into her house and they remained with her, shorn of their grotesqueness, as garish furniture may be upholstered in a new pattern, but tincturing her life as the appointments of a room will influence the mood of one that sits therein. Father owned the world--all males had proprietorship in the world under father--all men were worshipful and giants and genii. That was the established perception and those its earliest images. The perception remained, deepening, changing only in hue, as a viscid liquid solidifies and darkens in a vessel over the fire. It remained, persisted. Time but steadied the focus as the wise oculist, seeking for his patient the perfect image, drops lenses in the frame through which the vision chart is viewed. In a little the perfect image is found. There was that Rosalie, come to maidenhood, come to the dizzy edge of leaving school, with the perfect image of her persistent obsession; with the belief no longer that men were magicians having the world for their washpot and women for their footstool, but unquestionably that they "had a better time" than women and that they secured this "better time" by virtue of their independence.

"And, Keggo," (she is explaining it) "I'm going to be like that. I'm going to be what a man can be. Why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't a woman?" She paused and then went on. "Why, that's the thing that's been with me all my life, ever since I can remember. I've always known that men were the creatures. Always. Since I was so high. Oh, I used to have the most ridiculous ideas about them. You'd scream, Keggo. And I've always had the same attitude towards them--towards them as contrasted with women, I mean. First awe, then envy, then, since I've been growing up here, just as having a desirable position in life, as having the desirable position in life, independence, a career, work, freedom, a goal--yes, and a goal that's always and always a little bit in front of you, always something better. That's the thing. That's the thing, Keggo. Just look at the other side. Take a case in point. Take my painful cousin, Laetitia, sweet but in lots of ways very painful. What's her goal? A good match! A good match! Did you ever hear anything so futile and sickening? Sickening in itself, but I'll tell you what's really sickening about it--why, that she'll get it--get her goal and then it's done, over, finished, won. Settle down then and get fat. Oh, I don't want a goal I can win. I want a goal I can't win. One that's always just in front."

She suddenly realised the intensity of her voice and laughed and shook her head sideways and back. She had just recently put her hair up and it still felt funny and tight and the laugh and the shake eased away the tightness of voice and of hair. She said thoughtfully, "You know, I believe I'm rather like a man in many ways, in points of view. It's through always thinking them better, I daresay. The ideas I've had about them!" and she laughed again. She said slowly,

"Though mind you, Keggo, they are better in many ways. They can get away from things. They don't stick about on one thing. And they're violent, not fussing. When they're angry they bawl and hit and it's over and they forget it. They don't just nag on and on. Oh, yes, they're better."

She extended her palms to the oil flame, and watching the X-ray-like effects of the light and shadow upon her fingers, she added indifferently, as one idly letting drop a remark requiring no comment, negligently with the voice of one saying "Tomorrow is Tuesday," or "It's mutton today,"--"Of course they're beasts," she added.

"Of course they're beasts." It was the adjusted image to which she had brought that other perception of men which, running parallel with the perception of their superior position, had permeated her childhood years.

CHAPTER IV

She's left the school! She's living in the splendid house in Pilchester Square looking for a post!

She's found a post! She's private secretary to Mr. Simcox!

She's left the splendid house in Pilchester Square! She's living an independent life! She's going to Mr. Simcox's office, her office, every day, just like a man! She's living on her own salary in a boarding house in Bayswater!

What jumps! One clutches, as at flying papers in a whirlwind, at a stable moment in which to pin her down and describe her as she jumps. One can't. The thing's too breathless. It's a maelstrom. It's an earthquake. It's a deluge. It's a boiling pot. It's youth. What it must be to live it! One thing pouring on to another so that it's impossible anywhere to pick hold of a bit that isn't changing into something else even as it is examined. That's youth all over. Always and all the time all change. What it must be to live it!

What it must be! Why, when youth comes bursting out of tutelage there's not a stable thing beneath its feet nor above its head a sky that stays the same for two hours together! Every stride's a stepping-stone that tilts and throws you; every dawn a sudden midnight even while it breaks, and every night a blinding brilliance when it's darkest. New faces, new places, new dresses, new dishes; new foes, new friends; new tasks, new triumphs; never a pause, never a platform; every day a year and every year a day--not life on a firm round world but life in the heart of a whirling avalanche. How youth can live it! And all the time, all the time while poor, dear youth is hurtling through it, there's age, instead of streaming

sympathy like oil upon those boiling waters, standing in slippers safety, in buttoned dignity, in obese repose, bawling at tumbling youth, "Why can't you settle down! Why can't you settle down! Why do you behave like that? Why can't you do as I do? Why can't you be like your wise and sober Uncle Forty? Or like your good and earnest Auntie Fifty? Why can't you behave like your pious grandmother? Why can't you imitate your noble grandfather? Oh, grrrr-r, why can't you, you impious, unnatural, ill-mannered, irresponsible, irresponsible exasperating young nuisance, you!" Is it any wonder poor youth bawls back, or feels and behaves like bawling back, "How to goodness can I behave like my infernal uncle or my maddening aunt when I'm whirling along head over heels in the middle of a roaring avalanche?"

Oh, poor youth, that all have lived but none remembers!

One clings, *faut au mieux*, to the intention to tell of her life only the things in her life that contributed to her record, as records are judged. There shall be enormous omissions. They shall be excused by vital insertions.

She shall be glimpsed, first, in the splendid house in Pilchester Square, in the desperate business that getting a place for a woman in a business house was when women were in business houses far more rare than are silk hats in the City in 1922. It was desperate. Uncle Pyke and Uncle Pyke's friends were the only channel of opportunity; and Uncle Pyke and Uncle Pyke's friends refused to be a channel of opportunity. They had never heard of such a thing and they desired to bathe in their soup and smack over their wine and not be troubled with such a thing.

Aunt Belle rallied them and baited them and told them they were "great big grumpy things"; and Aunt Belle, in her crowded drawing-room, loved talking about the search for work and did talk about it. "Has to earn her own living," Aunt Belle would chatter, "and is going into business! Oh, yes, ever so many girls who have to earn their own living are going into business now. She'll wear a nice tailormade coat and skirt and carry a little satchel and flick about on the tops of buses, in the City at nine and out again at six and a nice plain wholesome lunch with a glass of milk in a tea shop. Oh, it's wonderful what girls who have to earn their own living do nowadays. Quite right, you know. Quite right, (for them). Come over here, Rosalie. Come over here, dear child, and tell Mrs. Roodle-Hoops what you are going to do. The dear child!"

But nothing done.

Just that glimpse and then comes Mr. Simcox.

Mr. Simcox was first met by Rosalie while walking with Aunt Belle and beautiful cousin Laetitia in the Cromwell Road. He came along carrying a letter in his hand with the obvious air of one who will forget to post it if he puts it in his pocket and probably will forget to do so in any case. He was as obviously "a man of about fifty-six" that curiously precise figure, neither a ten nor a five, always used for men who look as Mr. Simcox looked and always continued to look while Rosalie knew him, and probably always had looked. Men of "about fifty-six"--one never says "about thirty-six" or "about sixty-six"; it would be "about thirty-five" or "about

seventy"--men of "about fifty-six" are almost certainly born at that age and with that appearance and they seem to continue in it to their graves.

Mr. Simcox was like that, and was short and had two little bunchy grey whiskers, and wore always a pepper and salt jacket suit, unbuttoned, the pockets of which always bulged and the skirts of which, containing the pockets, always swayed and flapped. When he talked he was always talking--if that is understood--and when he was busy he was always frantically busy and looking at the clock or at his watch as if it were going to explode at a certain rapidly approaching hour and he must at all costs be through with what he was doing before it did explode. He talked in very rapid jerks, always seeming to be about to come to rest and then instantaneously bounding off again, rather like a man bounding along stepping-stones, red-hot stepping-stones that each time burnt his feet and set him flying off again.

He had been in the Bombay house of a firm of indigo merchants and there had known Aunt Belle and Uncle Pyke. He had retired and settled in London and he now came very briskly up to Aunt Belle, to Rosalie and to beautiful Laetitia, greeting them and bursting into full stream of chatter while he was yet some distance away; and, having been introduced to Rosalie and snatched at her hand precisely as if doing so while shooting in midair between one red-hot stepping-stone and the next, whizzed presently to "I really came out to post a letter" and flapped the letter in the air as if it were a bothersome thing stuck to his fingers and refusing absolutely to be stuffed into a post-box.

"Why, there's a pillar-box just there; you've just passed it," cried Rosalie.

"Why, so there is!" exclaimed Mr. Simcox, jumping round to stare at the pillar-box as if it had stretched out an arm and given him a sudden punch in the back, and then spinning towards Rosalie and staring at her rather as if he suspected her of having put the pillar-box there while he was not looking; and while Mr. Simcox was so exclaiming and so doing Rosalie had said, "Do let me just post it for you. Do let me," and had snapped the obstinate letter from his fingers, and posted it and was back again smiling at Mr. Simcox, whom she rather liked and who reminded her very much of a jack-in-the-box.

Indeed with his quick ways, his shortness, his bushy little grey whiskers and his pepper and salt suit with its flapping pockets, Mr. Simcox was very like one of those funny little jack-in-the-boxes they used to sell. He said to her, regarding her with very apparent pleasure and esteem, "Well, that's very nice of you. That really is very nice of you. And it's most wonderful. It is indeed. Do you know, I must have walked more than a mile looking for a letter-box and I daresay I should have walked another mile and then forgotten it and taken the letter home again." He addressed Aunt Belle: "It's a most astonishing thing, Mrs. Pyke Pounce, but I cannot post a letter. I positively cannot post a single letter. When I say single, I do not mean I can post no letter at all. No, no. Far from it. I mean I can post no letter singly, by itself, solus. My daily correspondence, my office batch, I take out in a bundle, perhaps in a table basket. That is simple. But a single letter--as you see, a

clever young lady like this has to find a box for me or I might carry the thing for days together. Astonishing that, you know. Astonishing, annoying, and mind you, sometimes serious and embarrassing."

"Why, you busy, busy person, you!" cried Aunt Belle with her customary air towards a man of shaking her finger at him. "You very busy person! Fancy a basket full of correspondence! Why what a heap you must have!"

Mr. Simcox said he had indeed a heap. "Sometimes I think more than I can manage."

"Indeed," agreed Aunt Belle, "you don't seem to have much time to spare. Why, I haven't seen you in my drawing-room for quite a month ("You busy little creature, you," expressed without being stated). I expect you're getting very rich and disagreeable." ("You rich little rascal, you!")

Mr. Simcox declared that as to that his business wasn't one to get rich at. "In no sense. Oh, no, in no sense. It keeps me occupied. It gives me an interest. That's all. No more than that." As to Mrs. Pyke Pounce's delightful drawing-room, most certainly he had been there less than a month ago and most certainly he would present himself again on the very next opportunity. To-morrow, was it? He would without fail present himself there tomorrow, "and I hope," said Mr. Simcox, taking his leave, "I hope I may have the pleasure of seeing my postmistress there again." He smiled very cordially at Rosalie and went flapping away up the street at the pace and with the air, not of one who had come out to post a letter and had posted it, but of one who had come out to post a letter, had dropped it, and was flying back to look for it.

"Oh, isn't he an ugly little monster!" cried Aunt Belle, resuming the walk.

"But I think he's nice," said Rosalie. "What is his business, Aunt Belle?"

Aunt Belle hadn't an idea. "He's an agent," said Aunt Belle, "but an agent for what I'm sure I don't know. He's a very mysterious, fussy, funny little person. We knew him in Bombay where he had a very good position, but he retired and what he does now I'm sure I can't say. But he's very busy. You heard him say how busy he is. Rosalie, he might know of something for you. We'll ask him, dear child. The funny, ugly little monster! We'll ask him. He might help."

He did help. A very short while afterwards, Rosalie received the appointment of Private Secretary to Mr. Simcox; twenty-five shillings a week; one pound five shillings a week! Office hours ten to five! Saturdays ten to one! Holiday a fortnight a year! A man's work! A man's weekly salary! A man's office hours! The ecstasy of it! The ecstasy!

The matter with Mr. Simcox was that, in India a man of affairs, in England he found himself a man of no affairs and a man who had "lost touch." On a leave from the Bombay house of the indigo firm he had been prevailed upon by his mother and his maiden sister to remain at home and look after them and he had done it and gone

on doing it, and they had died and he had never married, and he had now no relatives, and by this and by that (as he told Rosalie early in her installation) he had dropped out of friendships and, as he expressed it "lost touch." He owned and occupied one of those enormous houses in Bayswater. It had been his mother's and he lived on in it after her death and the death of his sister, alone with a housekeeper. The housekeeper resided in the vast catacombs of the basement of the enormous house; Mr. Simcox resided in the immense reception rooms, miles above, of the first floor; the three suites above him, scowling gloomily across a square at the twin mausoleums opposite, were unoccupied and un-visited; on the first floor Mr. Simcox had his office. The business done in this office, which Rosalie was now to assist, and why it was done, was in this wise and was thus explained to Rosalie.

Mr. Simcox, more than ever dropped out and more than ever having lost touch after the deaths of his sister and mother, found himself irked more than anything else by the absence of correspondence. He had been accustomed in India to a big receipt of letters--a big dhak, as he called it, using the Hindustani word--now he received no letters at all; and he told Rosalie that when you are in the habit of getting a regular daily post, its gradual falling off and then its complete cessation is one of the most melancholy things that can befall a man. A nice bunch of letters in the morning, he said, is like a cold bath to a young man, a stimulant and an appetiser; and a similar packet by the night delivery is an entertainment to look forward to from sunset till it arrives and the finest possible digestive upon which to go to bed. Mr. Simcox found himself cut off from both these necessities of a congenial life and it depressed him beyond conception. Dressing in the morning he would hear the postman come splendidly rat tating along the square and would hold his breath for that glorious thunder to come echoing up from his own front door--and it never did. Only the sound of the footsteps came, hurrying past--always.

Set to his solitary dinner in the evening, again would come along that glorious, reverberating music, and again Mr. Simcox would hold his breath as it approached and again--! Oh, particularly in the winter, it was awful, Mr. Simcox told Rosalie. Awful; she wouldn't believe how awful it was. In the winter, in the dark nights, there is, Mr. Simcox said, about the sound of the postman banging along the doors something that is the sheer essence of all the mystery, and all the poetry, and all the life, and all the comfort, and all the light and all the warmth in the world. Often on winter nights Mr. Simcox would get up quickly from the table (He couldn't help it) and go tiptoe (Why tiptoe? He didn't know. You had to. It was the mystery and the aching atmosphere of the thing) tiptoe across the room to the window, and draw an inch of the heavy curtain and peer out into the darkness and towards the music. There would be the little round gleam of the postman's lantern, bobbing along as he hurried. And flick! it was gone into a doorway, and rat-tat, flick, and there it was again--coming! Flick, rat-tat! Flick, flick, rat-tat! Coming, coming! Growing larger, growing brighter, growing louder! Next door now. They always get it next door. Flick, rat-tat! What a crasher! You can feel it echo! Flick! Now then! Now then! How it gleams! He's stopped! He's looking at his letters! He's coming in! He is--ah, he's passed; he's gone; it's over; nothing... nothing for here.... Rat-tat! That's next door. The party wall shakes. The lustres on the mantelpiece shake. Mr. Simcox's

hands shake. He sits down, pushes his plate away....

It is absurd; it is ridiculous, of course it is; but it was pathetic, it was moving, as it was received from Mr. Simcox by that young and most warm-hearted Rosalie. Her eyes positively were caused to blink as she listened. She had an exact vision of that funny little jack-in-the-box figure up from the table and tiptoeing across the enormous dining room in his little pepper and salt suit with the pockets swaying, not flapping, as he trod along, and opening that inch of the heavy curtain and pressing out his gaze through the black window pane, and watching the gleam and the flick and then the crash and the gleam again, and then holding his breath and hearing his heart go thump, and then dropping the curtain, and back again, with his hands shaking a little and hearing the lustres tinkle....

Yes, very moving to that Rosalie in her youth and warmth. She had actually to touch her nose (high up, between her eyes) with her handkerchief and she said, "Oh, Mr. Simcox.... Yes, and then what?"

"Then what? Ah! 'Then what' is this." They were seated in Mr. Simcox's great office on the ground floor. The office of a man of many affairs. A very large writing table furnished with every conceivable facility for writing, not only note papers and envelopes racked up in half a dozen sizes, but sealing waxes in several hues, labels, string, "In" basket, "Out" basket, "Pending Decision" basket, all sorts of pens, all sorts of pencils, wafers, clips, scales, letter weights, rulers--the table obviously of a man to whom correspondence was a devotional, an engrossing, an exact art, and an art practised on an expansive, an impressive, and a lordly scale. There were also in the office a very large plain table on which were spread newspapers, a basket containing clippings from newspapers, an immense blue chalk for marking newspapers and a very long, also a very short, pair of scissors for cutting out clippings from newspapers. A range of filing cabinets stood against one wall; a library of directories and catalogues occupied shelves against another wall.

"'Then what' is this," said Mr. Simcox, indicating these impressive appointments of the room with a wave of his hand. "You ask me 'then what?' 'Then what' is all this. 'Then what' has grown now to be you. I'll tell you."

It was this--the oddest, most eccentric notion (not that Rosalie it thought so). Mr. Simcox, cut off from letters, had determined that he must get letters. He would get letters. If the postman would not come of himself (so to speak) then he must be forced to come. And Mr. Simcox set about forcing him to come by answering advertisements. Not employment advertisements; no; the advertisements to which Mr. Simcox re-plied were the advertisements that offered to send you something for nothing--that implored you to permit them to send you something for nothing. They are common objects of the periodical press. Every paper is stuffed with them. "Write for free samples." "Catalogues." "Trial packet sent post free on application." "Write for our beautifully illustrated art brochure." "Descriptive booklet by return." "Write for full particulars." "Free sample bottle sufficient for seven days' trial." "Approval gladly. Postpaid." "Plans and particulars of the sole agents." "Superbly printed art volume on receipt of postcard."

The advertisement columns of every paper are stuffed with them and soon the letter-box of Mr. Simcox was stuffed with them. The postman who never stopped at Mr. Simcox's house now never missed Mr. Simcox's house. He went on a lighter and a brisker man after having dealt with Mr. Simcox's house. The agitation with which his approach was heard was now exchanged for a superb confidence as his approach was heard. The deliveries that for Mr. Simcox had never been deliveries were now, not deliveries, but avalanches. They roared into the letter-box of Mr. Simcox. They cascaded upon the floor of the hall of Mr. Simcox.

A mail thus composed does not perhaps sound interesting. Mr. Simcox, once he had got into the full swing of the thing, discovered it to be profoundly and exhaustively interesting. It possessed in the highest degree the two primary essentials of a really good mail,--surprise and variety. There would always be two or three fascinating little parcels, there would always be two or three handsome packets, there would always be two or three imposing looking letters. No common correspondence could possibly have had the number of attractively boxed gifts, the amount of handsomely printed literary and illustrated matter, and certainly not the unfailing persistency of flow, that constituted the correspondence of Mr. Simcox.

The mine once discovered proved to be a mine inexhaustible and containing lodes or galleries of new and unsuspected wealth. Mr. Simcox took in but two daily papers, and two penny weekly papers, and they might well have sufficed. But an appetite whetted and an eye opened they did not suffice. There thundered from the Bayswater free library a positive babel of cries from advertisers in the score of journals there displayed, howling for Mr. Simcox graciously to permit them to contribute their toll to his letter-box; and there were at the news agents periodicals catering for every specialised class of the community and falling over themselves to put before Mr. Simcox the full range of the mysteries, the luxuries and the necessities of every trade and profession and pursuit, from shipbuilding to cycling and from ironmongery to the ownership of castles, moors, steam yachts and salmon fisheries.

Mr. Simcox, entirely happy, one of the busiest men that might be found in the metropolis, struck out new lines. Hitherto he had received his correspondence interestedly and pleasurably but passively. He began to take it up actively and sharply. He began to write back, either graciously approving or very sharply criticising his samples, his specimens and his free trials; and the advertisers responded voluminously, either abjectly with regret and enclosing further samples for Mr. Simcox's esteemed trial, or abjectly with delight and soliciting the very great favour of utilising Mr. Simcox's esteemed letter for publicity purposes. This, however, Mr. Simcox, courteously but firmly, invariably refused to permit.

The engagement of Rosalie was a development of Mr. Simcox's hobby as natural as the development of any other hobby from rabbit breeding to china collecting. The craze intensifies, the scope is enlarged. To have a secretary made Mr. Simcox's mail and the work that produced his mail even more real than already it had become to him. Following up the personal touch that had been discovered by the criticism of samples, Mr. Simcox had opened up a line that produced the personal touch in most intimate degree: personal touch with schools and

with insurance companies. He created for himself sons, daughters, nephews, nieces, wards. He endowed them, severally, with ages, with backwardness, with brilliancy, with robustness, with delicacy, with qualities that were immature and required development, with absence of qualities that were desirable and required implanting, with unfortunate tendency to qualities that were undesirable and needed repression and nipping in the bud. He placed these children, thus handicapped or endowed, before the principals of selected schools; he desired that terms and full particulars might be placed before him to assist him in the anxious task of right selection. They were placed before him. "Your backward nephew Robin" (to take a single example) engaged the personal attention of preparatory schoolmasters from Devonshire to Cumberland and from Norfolk to Carnarvon. Similarly with insurance companies. Again dependents and friends were created, by the dozen, by Mr. Simcox. Male and female created he them, cumbered with all imaginable risks, and darkly brooding upon all manner of contingencies; and male and female, cumbered and perplexed, they were studied and advised upon by insurance companies earnest beyond measure to show Mr. Simcox what astounding and unparalleled benefits could be obtained for them.

At the time when Rosalie joined him, Mr. Simcox's attention was in much greatest proportion devoted to this development of his pursuit. Under the instruction of a friend, long since dropped out and lost, who had held a considerable position in a leading assurance company, he had acquired a sound working knowledge of the principles and mysteries of insurance. The subject had greatly interested him. In the phrase he used to Rosalie he had "taken it up"; and in the phrase that so often sequels and rounds off a thing suddenly "taken up" he had suddenly "dropped it." He now, by way of the new development of his correspondence, approached it again. It received him as a former habitation receives a returned native. Mr. Simcox (if the metaphor may be pursued) roamed all about the familiar rooms and corridors of the house of the principles and mysteries of insurance. His knowledge of its possibilities enabled him to develop an astonishing ingenuity in creating cases ripe and yearning for the benefits of provision against contingencies, and as he very easily was able to prove to Rosalie, and found immense delight in proving, he had under his finger, that is to say in his exquisitely arranged filing cabinets, also in his head, a range of insurance companies' literature which enabled him to work out for any conceivable case the most suitable office or offices and the finest possible cover for his risks. "Different companies specialize," said Mr. Simcox, "in different classes of risk. A man should no more walk into one of the leading offices just because it happens to be one of the leading offices and there take out his policy or policies than he should walk into and take for occupation the first vacant house he sees, merely because it is, as a house, a good house. It may be a most excellent house but it may not be in the least the house most suitable to his requirements."

Rosalie nodded intelligently. "But how is a man to find out, Mr. Simcox?"

"Why, I suppose only by going round to every company and choosing the best, just as I make out and send around these cases of mine. But of course no one does that--the trouble for one thing, and ignorance for another, and inability to realise their real requirements and to state them clearly if they do realise them for a third. That's

what it is."

Rosalie's intelligent nodding had not ceased. She had a trick, when Mr. Simcox was explaining things to her, of maintaining, with eyes fixed widely upon him, a slow, affirmative movement of her head rather as though she were some engine, and her head the dial, absorbing power from a flow of energy. The dial never indicated repletion. Mr. Simcox delighted to talk to Rosalie, to watch that grave movement of her head, and to hear the short occasional "Why's?" and comments that came like little spurts or quivers as of the engine in initial throbbings pulsing the power it stored.

She was absorbing power. The months were going on. The earlier initiation into Mr. Simcox's business might have had a tinge of disappointment were it not that, whatever the nature of her work, manifestly work it was, paid for, with regular hours, with an office to attend, such as a man might do. The tinge of disappointment, if she had suffered it, would have stung out of the thought: Where, in this manufactured correspondence, in this pretence at a business which was in fact no business at all, where in all this was Lombard Street? Where the romance and mystery of finance? Where the touch with the power that was made in countinghouses and with the exercise of the power exerted from those countinghouses?

But it happened for Rosalie, first, that this thought could not come because she was too busy with the glorious novelty of being in an office and learning office ways; then, when the novelty had worn, that it could not come because a new and a real element arrived to nullify it. In the early days there was no realisation of sham because there was the real business, to herself, of learning business methods and the whole theory and practice of office routine. She could have had no better instructor than Mr. Simcox, she could have had no better training than the handling, the sorting and the filing of his curious and various correspondence. She had become an efficient and a singularly apt and keen office clerk when, more leisured because she had mastered her duties, she might first have had time for realisation that Lombard Street was not here nor all the romance and mystery with which she had invested the power of countinghouses within a thousand miles of this house of most elaborate pretence. And then, at once to prevent that realisation and to dissipate its cause, came Lombard Street to her in Mr. Simcox's new absorption in (to her) the mysteries and the romance and the astounding possibilities of the business of insurance. How the mammoth companies, whose names soon were as household words to Rosalie, accumulated their enormous funds and invested them; how, while provisioning for to-day, they must calculate against liabilities falling due in a to-morrow generations ahead; how they would put their money into property the leases of which would fall in and the estate become marketable again perhaps a hundred years hence, when officers of the company yet unborn would be looking to the prudence of those now reigning to maintain the inflowing tide; how risks were calculated and vital statistics and chances and averages studied--all this, delightedly and delightfully narrated by Mr. Simcox (watching that gravely nodding head and those wide intelligent eyes) was sheer fascination to the mind that had found romance and mystery in "Lombard Street" as commonly romance and mystery are found in poetry and music.

Then one day she took a step towards applying the fascination that

she found.

It was the day of the conversation that has been recorded. How, Rosalie had asked, was the seeker after insurance to find the policies best suited to his case? Rosalie had asked; and had been told--he must go round but he never does; he must know what there is to be had but he never does know; he must realise exactly what he really wants but he never does realise it; and if he does realise it he must be able to state it clearly but he never can state it clearly.

Mr. Simcox, detailing this, permitted himself an amused contempt. The public were ignoramuses, mere children; they knew nothing whatever about insurance.

Rosalie said in a voice consonant with the grave measure of her nods: "Of course, if it was a man, as you said, looking for a house, he'd go to an agent. A house agent would tell him of houses best suited to his needs that he could choose between. Well, there are insurance agents. You've told me about them."

"Ah, but not the same thing, not the same thing," corrected Mr. Simcox. "An insurance agent, the ordinary insurance agent, is agent for a particular company. He only knows what his own company can do and he only wants his own company to do it. That's no good to the kind of man in the position we're speaking of. He wants some one who can tell him what all the companies will do for him. Some one who can hear his case, analyse it, put it before him in the right light and advise him the best way of placing it. That's what he wants. Exactly the same as these letters I send out--as you and I send out, I should say. Why, I've had practical examples of it. There was a young fellow I met at your aunt's house. There've been three or four cases of it for that matter but this happens to be some one you know--"

He proceeded to tell her of a visitor at Aunt Belle's, a young man home on leave from the Indian army and recently married, with whom he had got into conversation on the subject of insurance and had most ably helped. The young man had a certain policy in view. Mr. Simcox had put an infinitely better before him. "If he had come to me before his marriage when he was first taking out a policy in his wife's favour, I could have saved him and gained her hundreds, literally hundreds," said Mr. Simcox. "He'd made a most awful mess of the business. As it was I helped him very considerably. He was very grateful, devilish grateful. He went straight to an agent of the office I recommended and did it."

"There must be hundreds like him that would be grateful," said Rosalie.

"Thousands," said Mr. Simcox. "Tens of thousands. Every single soul who insures, you may say."

"Who got the commission?" said Rosalie.

"The agent, of course," said Mr. Simcox.

"Oh," said Rosalie.

"Why?" said Mr. Simcox.

"Nothing," said Rosalie. "Only 'oh'."

CHAPTER V

There's much virtue in an If, says Touchstone; and there's much virtue in an "Oh"--a wise, a thoughtful, a speculative, a discerning "Oh" such as that "Oh" pronounced by Rosalie to Mr. Simcox's information that agents, and not he, drew the commissions for the insurance policies which, out of his knowledge and experience, he had advised. There followed from that "Oh" its plain outcome: her suggestion to Mr. Simcox of why not make a business, a real business, of expert advice upon insurance, and (out of the make-believe intercourse with schools) a business, a real business, of expert advice upon schools? And there shall follow also from that "Oh" a sweeping use of the intention that has been mentioned to tell only of her life that which contributed to her life. We'll fix her stage from first to last, then see her walk upon it.

This was her stage: Her suggestion was adopted. It has, astonishingly soon, astonishing success. Advice upon insurance, advice upon schools, commissions from each, are found wonderfully to work in together, each bringing clients to the other. Aunt Belle's swarms of friends, their swarms of friends, the swarms of friends of those swarms of friends, and so on, snowball fashion, are the first nucleus of the thing. It succeeds. It grows. Real offices are taken. "Simcox's." Advertisements, clerks, banking-accounts. Appearance of Mr. Sturgiss, partner in Field and Company--"Field's"--the bankers and agents. Field's is a private bank. Its business is principally with persons resident in the East, soldiers, civil servants, tea planters, East India merchants. Field's is in Lombard Street. (Lombard Street!) Later Field's opens a West End office. Field's is frequently asked to advise its clients and their wives on all manner of domestic matters,--schools for their children, holiday homes, homes for clients over on leave, insurance, investment, whatnot, a hundred things. Comes to this Sturgiss, partner in Field's, an idea of great possibilities in this advisory business if developed as might be developed and run as might be run. Tremendously attracted by Rosalie as the person for the job. Makes her an offer. She declines it. Mr. Simcox's death. Sturgiss comes along again. Ends in Rosalie going to Field's. Lombard Street! Room of her own in the big offices. Glass partitioned. Huge mahogany table. Huge mahogany desk. Field's open the West End office, in Pall Mall. More convenient for wives of clients. Rosalie is moved there. Manager of her own side of the business. The war comes. Sturgiss goes out. Other important officers of the bank go out. Her importance increases very much in other sides of the bank's business than her own. Press scents her out and writes her up. "The only woman banker." "Brilliant woman financier." Contributes

articles to the reviews. Very much a leading woman of her day. Very much a most remarkable woman.

That's her stage. Thus she walked upon it:

The beginning part--that tumult of youth, those dizzy jumps that we have seen her in--was frightfully exciting, frightfully absorbing. She was so tremendously absorbed, so terrifically intent, so tremendously eager, that the transition from the Sultana's to Aunt Belle's, and the start with Mr. Simcox, and the transition from Aunt Belle's to independence in the boarding house, was done with scarcely a visit--and then a rather grudging and rather impatient visit--to the rectory home.

No, the absorption was too profound for much of that: indeed, for much of home in any form. Letters came from Rosalie's mother three and four times a week. In the beginning, when fresh left school and at Aunt Belle's, Rosalie always kissed the dear handwriting on the envelope, and kissed the dear signature before returning the letters to their envelopes; and she would sit up late at night writing enormously long and passionately devoted letters in reply. But she wasn't going back; she wasn't going down; no, not even for a week-end, "my own darling and beloved little mother," until she had found an employment and was established on her own feet, "just like one of the boys." Then she would come, oh, wouldn't she just! She would have an annual holiday, "just as men have," and she would come down to the dear, beloved old rectory and she would give her own sweet, adored little mother the most wonderful time she ever could imagine!

Rosalie would sit up late at night writing these most loving letters, pages and pages long; and her mother's letters (which always arrived by the first post) she would carry about with her all day and read again before answering.

And yet....

The fond intention in thus carrying them on her person instead of bestowing them in her writing case was to read them a dozen times in the opportunities the day would afford. And yet... Somehow it was not done. The day of the receipt of the very first letter was generous of such opportunities and at each of them the letter was remembered... but not drawn forth. Rosalie did not attempt to analyse why not. Her repression, each time, of the suggestion that the letter should now be taken out and read again was not a deliberate repression. She merely had a negative impulse towards the action and accepted it; and so negligible was the transaction in her record of her thoughts, so mere a cypher in the petty cash of the day's ledger, that in the evening when, gone up to bed, the letter was at last drawn out and kissed and read and answered, and then kissed and read again, no smallest feeling of remorse was suffered by her to reflect that the intended reading in the dozen opportunities of the day had not been done.

And yet... Was it, perhaps, this mere acceptance of a negative impulse, a cloud no bigger than the size of a man's hand upon the horizon of her generous impulses? There is this to be admitted--that the letters, accumulating, began to bulk inconveniently in her writing case. What a lot dear mother wrote! Room might be made for

them by removing or destroying the letters from friends who had left the Sultana's with her, but about those letters there was a peculiar attraction; they were from other emancipated One Onlys who watched with admiration the progress in her wonderful adventure of brilliant, unconventional Rosalie, and it was nice thus to be watched. Or room for her mother's letters might be made by removing or destroying letters that began to amass directly touching her desire for employment--from city friends of Uncle Pyke, from Mr. Simcox. But, no, unutterably precious those! Unutterably precious, too, of course, those accumulating bundles of letters from her dear mother; but precious on a different plane: they belonged to her heart; it was to her head, to the voice in her that cried "Live your life--your life--yours!" that these others belonged.

She was tingling to that voice one night, turning over the employment letters; and, tingling, put her mother's letters from her case to her box.

Yes, upon the horizon of her generous impulses perhaps the tiniest possible cloud. And then perhaps enlarging. You see, she was so very full of her intentions, of her prospects. She had read somewhere that the perfect letter to one absent from home was a letter stuffed with home gossip,--who had been seen and who was doing what, and what had been had for dinner yesterday and whence obtained. But she did not subscribe to that view. She was from home and her mother's letters were minutest record of the home life; but she began to skip those portions to read "afterwards." One day the usual letter was there at breakfast and she put it away unopened so as to have "a really good, jolly read" of it "afterwards." In a little after that she got the habit of always, and for the same reason (she told herself) keeping the letters till the evening. One day she gave the slightest possible twitch of her brows at seeing the very, very familiar handwriting. She had had a letter only the previous day and two running was not expected: more than that, this previous letter had slightly vexed her by its iteration of the longing to see her and by very many closely written lines of various little troubles. She was a little impatient at the idea of a further edition of it so soon. She forgot to open it that night. She remembered it when she was in bed; but she was in bed then... When, next day, she read the letter it was, again, an iteration of the longing to see her and, again, more, much more, of the little troubles: the residue was of the gossipy gossip that Rosalie already had formed the habit of skipping till "afterwards." Altogether a vexatious letter.

After that, when the letters were frequent, it was frequent for Rosalie to greet the sight of them with just the swiftest, tiniest little contraction of her brows. Nothing at all really. Meaning virtually nothing and of itself absolutely nothing. Possessing a significance only by contrast, as a fine shade in silk or wool will not disclose a pronounced hue until contrasted with another. The contrast here, to give the thing significance, was between that swiftest, tiniest contraction of the brows at the sight of her mother's letters and the eager spring to them, the quick snatching up, and the impulsive pressing to her lips when first those letters began to come. Likewise answering them, that had been an impulsive outpouring and brimming over, now was a very slightly laboured squeezing. The pen, before, had flooded love upon the page. Now the pen halted, paused, and had to think of expressions that would

give pleasure.

The change did not happen at a blow. If it had, Rosalie would have noticed it. It slipped imperceptibly from stage to stage and she did not notice it.

CHAPTER VI

There was a thing she said about men once (in the boarding house now) and often repeated. "They're very fond of saying women are cats," she once said. "Fools! It's men that are the cat tribe: tame cats, tabby cats, wild cats, Cheshire cats, tomcats and stray cats! Aren't they just? And look at them--tame cats are miserable creatures, tabby cats the sloppy creatures, wild cats ferocious creatures, Cheshire cats fool creatures, tomcats disgusting creatures, stray cats--on the whole the stray cats are the least objectionable, they are bearable: at the right time and for a short time."

This characterisation of men as Rosalie, in sequent development of her attitude towards men, had come to regard them was delivered to the girl with whom (for cheapness) her room in the boarding house was shared. Rosalie went from Aunt Belle's to this boarding house to assert and to achieve her greater independence. A man, Rosalie debated, would have gone into bachelor rooms; but young women did not go into bachelor rooms in those days and the singularity of Rosalie's attitude towards life is rather well presented in the fact that she never set herself against conventions inhibitory of her sex merely because they were inhibitory of her sex. When the years brought those violent scenes and emotions of what has been called the suffragette campaign, Rosalie, who might have been expected to be a militant of the militants, took no part nor even interest in it whatever. She did not desire the privileges of men merely because they were the privileges of men; she desired a status which happened to be in the right of men and she went towards it without seeking to change the established order of things, just as, from one field desiring a flower in another field, she would have gone to fetch it without changing her dress.

A man, anxious for full independence, would have gone into bachelor rooms; but young women did not go into bachelor rooms. They achieved their independence perfectly well, and far more cheaply, by going into a boarding house. She therefore, very excitedly, went into a boarding house.

There was no difficulty about leaving Aunt Belle's. Once Rosalie was established in business with Mr. Simcox, tied to business hours, and earning a weekly salary, she no longer occupied in Aunt Belle's house the position of dependence which was in Aunt Belle's house the first, and indeed the only, qualification for all who occupied

her house. Aunt Belle's guests had to be guests: wealthy guests who could be entertained from early morning tea (beautifully served) to bedtime and made graciously to admire; or if poor guests, and particularly poor relations, guests who could be even more impressed and were naturally much more enthusiastically delighted and profoundly admiring. Rosalie, in business, could not be entertained and did not sufficiently admire. She had to have a special early breakfast; she disappeared; she was not in to lunch or tea; she was not sufficiently impressed by what cook had prepared but had rather too much to say about what she had been doing, at dinner; and she excused herself away to early bed on the ground of fatigue or of having certain books to study. Rosalie, in business, was not a guest at all in Aunt Belle's sense of the word: indeed there came an occasion--Rosalie twice in one week late for dinner--when Aunt Belle said awfully, "My house is not a hotel, Rosalie. I cannot have my nice house turned into a hotel."

It was the nearest thing to an unkind word ever spoken by Aunt Belle to Rosalie, and it was so near that it brought Aunt Belle up to Rosalie's bed that night--solicitude in a terrific dressing gown of crimson silk--to express the hope that Rosalie was not crying (she was not; she had been sound asleep) at anything Aunt Belle "might have said." "But you see, dear child, there are the servants to consider, all that delicious soup and all that most tasty turbot au gratin to be kept warm for you, and there is your kind Uncle Pyke to consider; men do not like their meals to be..."

The boarding house, which Rosalie, with qualms as to its reception by Aunt Belle, had for some time been secretly meditating, came easily after that. The boarding house had moreover for Aunt Belle a double attraction. It not only removed Rosalie in her capacity of one threatening to turn Aunt Belle's nice house into a hotel; it also restored Rosalie in her capacity of overwhelmed, grateful and admiring poor relation. Rosalie was now invited from the boarding house just as previously she had been invited from the Sultana's; the table and the appointments of Aunt Belle's house were now lavishly displayed in contrast to the display and the table endured by Rosalie at the boarding house; Aunt Belle was again supremely happy in Rosalie and abundantly kind; dinner each Saturday night was a standing invitation and frequently for these dinners Aunt Belle arranged "a little dinner party for you, dear child, just one or two really nice people that it is nice for you to meet and that you can tell your friends at the boarding house about, dear child."

Aunt Belle helped Rosalie to choose the boarding house and saw that it was "nice." Nice people went there and the proprietress, Miss Kentish, was nice. Miss Kentish had a grey, detachable fringe which became, and re-mained, semi-detached immediately after breakfast, and a mobile front tooth which came out surprisingly far when she talked and went in with a sharp click when she stopped. She had for newcomers a single conversational sentence--"My name is Kentish, though funnily enough we come from Sussex"--and, for all purposes, a single business principle, that of willingness "to come to an arrangement." "I am afraid I cannot remedy your water not being hot at eight o'clock," she would say to a boarder, "but I will gladly come to an arrangement with you. Ten minutes to eight or ten minutes past eight" (click). She would come to an arrangement on anything. She became very fond of Rosalie in course of time and once told

her that though her duties never permitted her to attend church she had "come to an arrangement" with the vicar and felt that she had "come to an arrangement with Our Lord" (click). She came to an arrangement with Rosalie in the matter of tariff, receiving her and a Miss Salmon, who also sought arrangement, as "two friends as one." This was two persons sharing a room at the tariff of a person and a half. Living was very cheap in those days. Rosalie, at the beginning, with Miss Salmon, paid 18/6 a week, and out of the twenty-five shillings paid her, at first, every Friday by Mr. Simcox there remained what seemed to Rosalie great wealth.

She set herself to save on it and her first purpose in thus saving was to accumulate money on which she could draw so as to be able to pay for a room private to herself. That would have taken some time. Her successive increases in her earnings, as Mr. Simcox's hobby developed into a business, brought privacy, and in time what amounted to luxury, by much swifter process. Rosalie was a very long time at the boarding house. From being two friends as one she passed to a small remote room of her own, then to a larger and more accessible room, then to a bed-sitting-room, finally to a very delightful arrangement. There was on the second floor a fine roomy apartment having a dressing-room opening out of it. Rosalie, by then in much favour with Miss Kentish, not only secured the suite but "came to an arrangement" with Miss Kentish by which the furniture and fittings were removed from the rooms and Rosalie permitted to fit, decorate and furnish them herself. Rosalie never knew happier hours than in the furnishing of those two rooms into a little kingdom of her own: she never in all her life knew days as happy as the days there spent.

But at the beginning, two friends as one with Miss Salmon and first contact with life from the angle presented by some twenty various individuals met at meals and in the public rooms. Miss Salmon was a pale, fussy creature with pince-nez in some mysterious way set so far from her eyes that she always appeared to be running after them as if to keep them balanced. Whenever anything of which she did not approve was being said to Miss Salmon or was being done before Miss Salmon, she maintained throughout it, moving about in pursuit of her pince-nez, a rather loud, constant, tuneless humming. When her moment came she would always begin "Well, now" and then swallow forcibly as though the swallowing gave her pain. "Well, now" (gulp). This introduction was always precedent to speech by Miss Salmon, whether after humming or not. Rosalie frequently went to Sunday church service with her and there was an occasion in the Litany on which Miss Salmon, who either had been wandering or sleeping, suddenly came to herself at the correct moment and said: "Well, now"--(gulp)--"We beseech thee to hear us, O Lord."

Miss Salmon was employed as a daily nursery governess by a family resident across the park who, not having room for her, had "come to an arrangement" with Miss Kentish for her accommodation at the boarding house; and with her fussiness, her nose pursuit, her humming and her general ineptitude of habit and of thought, she was as it were a fated companion for Rosalie; and it was the case that all the other inmates of the boarding house were, in regard to Rosalie, equally and in the same sense fated. Miss Salmon and they were fated, or fatal, to Rosalie, in the sense that it would have been well then for Rosalie, as always well for any developing young thing, to have been among companions who drew upon her

sympathies and called for her consideration. The contrary was here presented to her. She was ripe to be intolerant for she was very full of purpose and purpose is a motive power of much impatience. Miss Salmon, who would have made a saint impatient, made Rosalie, who was not a saint, very impatient and the virus of this impatience was that very soon Rosalie made no attempt to conceal it. It seemed to Rosalie that whenever she projected any plan to Miss Salmon--as to "do" a pit at a theatre--or any theory--as that men and not women were manifestly the cat tribe--it seemed to her that Miss Salmon always hummed with the maddening humming denotive of disapproval, and always prefaced stupendously stubborn idiocy with the "Well, now" and the gulp that alone were sufficient to drive enthusiasm crazy.

"Mmmmm--mm. Mmm--mmmm--mm--mm," would go Miss Salmon, following her pince-nez up and down the little bedroom. And then, the pince-nez poised, "Well, now" (gulp).

And Rosalie came to cry, "Oh, never mind. Never mind, for goodness' sake. I know exactly what you're going to say so what is the good of saying it?" Miss Salmon nevertheless would say it, in full measure, pressed down at intervals in solid lumps with reiterated "Well, now" (gulp). And then Rosalie would hum to show she was not listening and thus in time to the position that Rosalie, beyond the ordinary changes of everyday conversation, took not the slightest notice of Miss Salmon but busied herself in their room, or came into it or went out of it, precisely as if Miss Salmon, who with her gulps, her fussiness and her balancing was very much there, was in fact not there at all. When Rosalie for the weekly dinner at Aunt Belle's used to dress in the evening frock of Laetitia's given her for the purpose by Aunt Belle, she used, at first, to say to Miss Salmon, "There, how do I look, Gertrude? Can you see that mend in the lace?"

"Well, now--" (gulp).

Very soon she was dressing (at the common dressing table) with no more regard for Miss Salmon or for the continuous humming of Miss Salmon (signification of Miss Salmon's disapproval of the monopolisation of the dressing table) than if Miss Salmon had been an automaton wound up to balance a pince-nez around the room, to hum, and at intervals to gulp.

This was a small thing, but it was an important small thing. Rosalie was entirely insensible to the opinions and the existence of Miss Salmon, and it followed that she became entirely insensible to the feelings of Miss Salmon. To begin by ignoring a person with whom you are in daily contact is certainly to end by not caring at all what happens to that person. It was the misfortune of Miss Salmon to suffer periodically and acutely from biliousness (which she called neuralgia). In an attack, she took instantly to her bed and lay there flat on her back, absurdly and unnecessarily poisoning her pince-nez, and looking, unquestionably, very unpleasant. Rosalie,--who believed that Miss Salmon on these occasions had overeaten herself, the attacks invariably coinciding with pork in winter and with a fruit trifle known in the boarding house as "Kentish Delight" in the summer, of both of which Miss Salmon was avowedly fond, was at first warmly sympathetic and attentive on their occurrence, anointing the fevered brows with eau-de-Cologne, nipping the

unnecessary pince-nez off the pallid nose, darkening the room, and stealing about on tiptoe. In time her attitude came to be expressed by her reception of the sight of Miss Salmon prone, stricken, yellow, pince-nez, poisoning. "What, again?"

"Well, now----" (Gulp).

But Rosalie would be gone.

And it came to be the same with all the other fellow inmates of the boarding house, alike the men and the women. Rosalie, in a colloquialism of to-day not then coined, "had no use for them." There was in none of them anything that aroused her esteem; there was in each of them, in degree greater or less, much that provoked her scorn. The result was as resulted from Miss Salmon--she did not bother about them; and not bothering about them she suffered an inhibition of her sympathies. To repeat the thing said, her environment here was, as it were, fated or fatal. In her eagerness for her career, her generous emotions were likely to be laid aside and to wither; and the environment of the boarding house in no way drew upon her sympathies.

This was not good for Rosalie.

Moreover, the community of the boarding house served Rosalie ill on another point. She came there with all those grotesque ideas of her childhood on the respective positions of men and women precipitated through her older years to the perception given to Keggo: women were this, women were that; in their commonest characteristics they contrasted very badly with men; men did things better than women; they had by far the better lot in life than women; unquestionably men were the creatures; of course--off-handedly--they were beasts. She came to the boarding house with these ideas and the boarding house presented these ideas to her in living fact and assured her in her ideas. She came there very susceptible to the qualities she believed to be rooted with their sex in men and women and she saw those qualities there at once. The boarding house might have been all her ideas of women and of men taken away by an artist and put into an exact picture. It was her words to Keggo in terms of actual life. Its population, little varying, was always round about twenty; the proportion in sex always in the region of fifteen women to five men. The figures were always constant and the characters, when they changed, seemed always to Rosalie to be constant; the names changed, the personalities did not change. Even the faces did not change: there are certain types of faces that either are produced by permanent residence in boarding houses or that go instinctively to boarding houses for their permanent residence. There is a boarding-house mould. There would always be two husbands with wives and three men without wives. The men were never spoken to by any of the women but with a certain archness which Rosalie detested; and they never spoke to the women but with a certain boisterousness, a kind of rubbing together of the hands and a "Ha! What miserable weather, Mrs. Keeley. How does it suit you? Ha!" which Rosalie equally detested. It was as though the women, leading boarding-house lives, knew that the men (who were never in to lunch and sometimes absent from dinner) did not lead boarding-house lives but secret, dashing and mysterious lives; and as though the men knew that they lived secret, dashing and mysterious lives but condescended to the women who lived only boarding-house lives; and the archness on the

one side and the boisterousness on the other implied tribute and worthiness of tribute. This implication Rosalie also detested.

Men--as she now saw men and women--she dismissed; generally as "of course they're beasts," severally and in the groups to which they belonged, as cats--of the cat tribe--tame cats, wild cats, Cheshire cats, tomcats and stray cats. But she dismissed them. That was her attitude, as it developed, towards men. They had been, in her regard, owners of the earth, possessing and having dominion over the round world and all that therein is, as a stage magician owns and dominates his stage; they had next been wonderful things but apt to be troublesome and braggart things whose braggadocio caused you to blink and have a funny feeling; they had then been sinister and frightening things that caused poor Anna to say it was hard for women; they became, at last, creatures that had the best of life, that is to say the better time in life, not because they merited it, but because it was theirs by tradition and they stepped into it, or were put into it, as naturally as a man child is put into trousers; and they had, when all was reckoned up, the better qualities--largeness, tolerance, directness, explosiveness (as opposed to smouldering-ness)--not, Rosalie thought, because they were males, but because they had the position that males have, just as by the habit of command is given to small boys in the Navy and very young men in the Army the air and the poise of command.

Yes, certainly men were, as they had always been, the creatures; but the eyes that formerly saw them as magicians, as by a savage is seen only the mystery of the moving hands, the tick, and the strike of a clock, now looked inside the case and saw the works. No mystery. No exclusiveness of natural power. Nothing abnormal. Men, on their estimable qualities and position, were what they were merely because, as the works of a watch, thus and thus the wheels were made to go round. Easy. Nothing in it. On the contrary. On the contrary, men were the more despicable in that, dowered as by tradition they were dowered, they yet were--what they were! The eyes that had been caused to blink by Robert blowing smoke through his nose and by Harold pulling up his collar and speaking with a "haw!" sound, blinked from a contempt yet more profound (because now known for contempt) at the exhibition, seen all about her, of men's unlovely side. And she dismissed them. They did not attract her in the smallest degree. All that they had in them to esteem, whether of qualities or of position, they had--here was the parallel--in common with drones in a hive. They had the best of everything; they were blundering, blustering, noisy, careless, buccaneering owners of the world, and to her--as all the roystering swarm to any individual worker bee--to her, negligible. She was a worker bee, busy, purposeful.

There is a special function belonging to drones in a hive. That special function of men in regard to women was repellant to Rosalie. All that pertained to it was repulsive to her. She loathed to think of men in that capacity and she loathed to see women ensnared in that regard by men. Beautiful cousin Laetitia and the "good match" that obviously had been found for her: she detested seeing those two together: it made her feel sick.

Men! By this and by that in passage of time she was in contact with a good number and a good variety of men. There was the frequently changing male contribution to the boarding-house community; there

were clients met in the development of her work at Simcox's; there were the men of the circle of Uncle Pyke Pounce; there were the men of the circle of cousin Laetitia, brought to the little Saturday-dinner parties. A very fair average, a rather wider than the normal average of contact with men; and she dismissed them. They had not any attraction for her at all. If, rarely, she met one whose superficial points were superficially attractive, his contribution to her attitude to men was to make her blink (inwardly) the more, albeit on a different note. That one so exceptionally dowered should find pleasure in, for instance, dalliance of sex! Contemptible! Oh, sickening and contemptible! One Harry Occleve, of Laetitia's circle, so obviously "the good match," was outstandingly such a case. It was thought upon him, scornful and disgusted thought, that made her, walking back from one of the Saturday-evening parties--he was always there--arrange her experiences with men in that analogy between men and cats which, as related, had been delivered to Miss Salmon.

Like a tame cat! She never had met a man she despised so much. You'd think a man like that couldn't help but be above such things as Cousin Laetitia and Aunt Belle made of him. "Occleve." The very name that he owned had a nice sound; and he was brilliantly clever and looked brilliantly clever. He was a barrister and Aunt Belle, who was forever talking about him, had said that evening, just before his arrival, that some famous counsel had declared of him that he was unquestionably the most brilliant of the young men of the day at the Bar. So he was talented, had a great future before him, had a strong, most taking presence, a commanding air, a voice of uncommon charm--and was in bonds to Laetitia! Looked sickly at her! Mouthed fatuous nothings with her! Was obviously marked down to be that "good match" that Laetitia was to make, and was content, was eager, to be the tame cat of her languishing glances and of Aunt Belle's excessive gushings! Was to be seen in a future not distant mated with Laetitia and sharing with her an atmosphere of milk and silk and babies and kisses! Tame cat! What an end to which to bring such qualities! What a desecration of such qualities to set them to win such an end! Tame cat!

But they all were cats of one kind or another. Yes, men are of the cat tribe! Tabby cats--the soft, fattish kind, without any manlike qualities, that seemed to be by far the greater proportion of all the men one saw about in buses and in the streets and met in business; tabby cats--sloppy, old-womanish creatures. Cheshire cats--the kind that grinned out of vacuous minds and that never could speak to a woman without grinning; the unattached men at the boarding house invariably were of the Cheshire-cat cats. Tomcats--the beastly ones with lecherous eyes that looked at you. "Of course they're beasts." It had been a large experience of the tomcat cats that had made her add that final summary of men to Keggo. The Bashibazook, once or twice encountered in her last terms at the Sultana's, though never spoken with, had looked at her in a horrible way, not understood, but felt to be frightening and horrible; Mr. Ponders, on a dreadful occasion after handing over the medicine for Miss Keggs, had horribly said, "Well, now, wouldn't a kiss be nice? I think a nice kiss would be very nice." She had managed to get away without being touched; the nausea in her eyes perhaps had frightened him. It was nausea she felt, not fear, a horrible physical sickness; and finally to round off the "of course they're beasts" of men as then experienced and now to fill up the schedule of tomcat cats the friends of

Uncle Pyke Pounce's circle and Uncle Pyke Pounce himself and the men like the men of his circle--tomcats something past their prime as lechers (but at a hint only more lecherous for that) but in the full prime of their beastliness as guzzlers, who with guzzle eyes eyed their food. She had come across a word in Carlyle's "French Revolution" that instantly brought Uncle Pyke Pounce and his friends to her mind and that always thereafter she applied to the elderly tomcat encountered or passed in the street--"atrabilious." Atrabilious! The very word! She looked it up in the dictionary, was disappointed to find it did not mean exactly what she thought it meant, but gave it her own meaning, and applied it to them. It sounded like them. They had small beady eyes, set in yellow; no apparent eyelids either above or below, just an unblinking eye set in a puffy face like a currant in a slab of cold pudding that gloated or glared at everything and everybody as if it was a thing to be devoured; guzzlers who gloated upon their food and wallowed in their soup, always with little streaks of red veins and blue veins in their faces. Atrabilious! Tomcats!

Wild cats--the roamers, the untamed ones, the ones with cruel and with wicked faces that made you not sick, but frightened; mostly they were dressed in rough clothes, men hanging about the streets who patently were thieves or worse, who looked at you and at once looked all around as if to see if any were about that might protect you; but often dressed in gentle dress and then with the cruel and wicked look more cruel and more wicked, to make your shudder to think of a woman having to belong to that.

Stray cats--on the whole the only really bearable ones; the lonely ones that seemed to have lost something or to be lost, that seemed to need looking after, that made you have a funny tender feeling towards them, a wanting as it were to pick them up and carry them home and be sharp with them because they couldn't take care of themselves, and to be kind to them also because they couldn't take care of themselves; yes, the only bearable ones: Mr. Simcox was precisely one.

All cats, of the cat tribe. There wasn't one you couldn't place. There wasn't one, save dear little Mr. Simcox and the stray cat ones you sometimes saw, that was not in some trait contemptible. The only thing to be said for them was that it was their nature. They were created like that. You just shrugged your shoulders at them and let them go at that, negligible entities. Active disgust was only felt of them when one of their traits was manifested directly towards you; or, much more, when the sight was given of such a one as this Harry Occleve making such an exhibition of himself and enjoying it, delighting in it, asking nothing better than to be philandering with Laetitia, or escorting Laetitia, or gazing at Laetitia. That did make you angry enough with a man to hate a man. It was like seeing a good book--as it might be "Lombard Street"--used to prop a table leg; or a jolly dog--as the dearest Scotch terrier once brought to the boarding house--led for a walk on a leash by an old maiden mistress and wearing a lapdog's flannel coat with ribbon bows at the corner. Her aversion to Harry Occleve was such that, in their rare passages together, she was almost openly rude to him. It seemed there was even no physical quality he had but he used it to abase himself or to make an exhibition of himself. He had noticeably long, strong-looking arms, but the sickening thing to see him once using those arms to hold silk for

Laetitia while she wound it! He had a striking face that she named, from a line in Browning, a "marching" face--"one who never turned his back but marched breast forward"--but to see that face bent fatuously towards Laetitia! There radiated from the corners of his eyes towards his temples those little lines that sailors often have, "horizon tracks," she called them; but to see them deeply marked while he mouthed earnest nothings with Laetitia! There was an odd, nice smell about him, of peat, of tobacco, of soap, of heather with the wind across it, of things like that most agreeably mixed, and actually she had heard Laetitia say to him in the babyish way she spoke to him, "You smoke too much. You do." And he, like a moon calf: "Oh, you're not going to ask me to give up smoking, are you?" And she with a trailing eye and hint of a blush, "Perhaps I shall--some day." And he--a sigh! Positively a love-sick sigh straight out of a novel! Ah, positively she could detest the man! She came to discover it as an odd thing that, while commonly she was entirely indifferent to men, always after a Saturday meeting with Laetitia's Harry she had for quite a day or two an active detestation of them.

But it was the women at the boarding house--to instance the boarding house--the fifteen women, the immense, straggling army of women as they looked to be, when they came trooping in to dinner or went trailing out again, that had Rosalie's sharpest observation and that best pointed her youthful estimates. Unlike men who had fallen woefully from her childhood estimate of them, the women maintained and intensified her early estimate of women. The women in the boarding house showed Rosalie what women come to. A few were emphatically old; the rest, with the single exception of Miss Salmon, were emphatically not old; on the other hand they were emphatically not young. They were at pains to let you see they were not old and the pains they were at rather dreadfully (to Rosalie) emphasised the fact that they were not young. The thing about them, the warning, the proof that they exhibited of all Rosalie's ideas about the inferiority of women, was that they were, in her phrase, derelicts--not wanted; abandoned; homeless; or they would not be here. Yes, derelict; and what was worse, derelict not in the sense of desuetude of powers or of powers outworn, but with the suggestion of never having had any powers, of having been always the mere vessels of another's powers--some man's; and now, with that power withdrawn--the man, whether father, brother, lover or husband, gone--derelict as a ship, abandoned of crew, rudderless and dismasted, is derelict; as an obscure habitation, cold of hearth, crazy of walls, abandoned to decay, is derelict. She summed them all up as having arrived at what they were precisely because in their earlier years they had been what in her childhood she had supposed women to be: inferior creatures at the disposal and for the benefit and service of men. What a warning never to be that! There they were--manless. And therefore derelict. And because derelict for such a reason, therefore testimony to a social condition that was abominable, and because seen to be abominable never, never herself should enfold. Never! Manless. Husbandless. There they were, the straggling mob of them,--deserted by husbands, semi-detached from husbands, relict of husbands fallen out with a stitch in the side in the race for husbands. Urh!

She was very young, Rosalie.

"Despised and rejected of men," she said to Miss Salmon, holding

forth in their bedroom on her subject. "That's what I call them. Despised and rejected of men. Oh, don't hum louder than ever. It's not irreverent to say that. It describes a condition, that's all, and I'm using it because it describes this condition, their condition, exactly. It does. You can hum; but it does. They've never done anything, they've never meant to do anything, they've never tried to do anything except hang round after some man. That's all. They've either caught him and now lost him; or they've missed him and now go on missing him. That's their lives. That's nearly any woman's life. It's not going to be mine. If anything were wanted to make the whole idea of marriage and all that repulsive to me--and nothing is wanted--that would. Despised and rejected of men! I used to think and to say I intended to be like a man and to do a man's work and have a man's share. I tell you that even getting so close to a man as that--I mean as close as intentional emulation of him--even getting as close as that makes me feel sick now. It's my own life I'm going to have, my own place, my own share; not modelled on any one else's. If it were conceivable that I ever met a man I cared tuppence about--but it isn't conceivable; that's a quality that's been left clean out of me, thank goodness--but if it were conceivable, what I'd offer would be just to share; to go on living my own way and he his--Oh, your humming! I mean after marriage, of course; I think this free-love business they talk about is even more detestable than the lawful kind--just animalism. That's all I'd do. Me my life; he his life; meeting, as equals, when it was convenient to meet. I'd like to bring all these poets and people who write about love into our dining-room to see those people. That'd teach them!

Man's love is of his life a thing apart;
'Tis woman's whole existence.

What an existence!"

"Well, now--" (gulp).

CHAPTER VII

"You have pretended to dislike and to despise men, but it was a pretence to deceive me and you are a liar."

This was the astounding opening of an astounding letter, pages and pages, to Rosalie from Miss Salmon. Pages and pages, having the appearance, each one, of a battlefield or of a riot: a welter of thick, black underscores strewn about like coffins or like corpses, and a bristling pin-cushionful (black pins) of notes of exclamation leaping about like war-dancing Zulus or staggering about like drunken or like wounded men. A welter you had to pick your way through with epithets rushing against you at every step like units of a surging mob hounding and charging against an unfortunate pedestrian caught in the trouble.

Miss Salmon had two months before introduced "a gentleman friend" to the boarding house. He was a clerk in some big business firm. His name was Upsmith and he bore upon a fattish face a troubled, beseeching look, rather as though something internal and not to be mentioned was severely incommoding him and might at any moment become acute. Miss Salmon called him Boo, which Rosalie considered grotesque but not unsuitable, and it was communicated to the boarding house that the twain were at a mysterious point of affinity called, not an engagement, but an understanding.

Rosalie had by this time taken the second step in her upward progression of comfort in the boarding house. She had moved into a separate room, leaving Miss Salmon to become half of another two friends as one, and she and Miss Salmon therefore saw much less of each other. But Rosalie still sat at the same table as Miss Salmon at dinner and there Mr. Upsmith joined them.

The thing may be hurried along to its astounding conclusion in the astounding letter. It was not in itself an event of any sort of moment to Rosalie. She was in no way outraged by being called a liar. There is no hurt at all in being called a liar when you know you are not a liar. The accusation has sting only if you are a liar; and indeed it is comforting evidence of some inner self within us that only when we have ourselves debased that inner self become we open to wounds from without. That citadel is never taken by storm; only by treachery. No, the significance of the astounding letter reposed in the fact that her reception of it opened to Rosalie a glimpse of a quality rising beneath her to carry her forward as a wave beneath a swimmer. It has been perceived in her but Rosalie had not perceived it.

A great triumph and a great happiness swelled within Miss Salmon with the arrival of Mr. Upsmith and with the circulation about the boarding house that there was an understanding between herself and Mr. Upsmith. Her humming took on a loud, defiant quality, as of triumph; she pursued her pince-nez with a certain eagerness, as of confidence of balance and certitude of capture. Her note and her air seemed to say that she was Boo's and Boo hers and she gloried in it with that exalted and yet something fearful glory that is to be seen, pathetically, on the faces of very plain young women, or of distinctly ageing young women, who have got a Boo but for whom the Boos of this world are elusive to capture and slippery to hold. The look is to be seen a dozen times on any Sunday afternoon when the young couples are out.

At dinner time Miss Salmon would talk much to Boo in whispers and then would look up and hum across at Rosalie in triumph, as of one that knew things that Rosalie could not know and that had a thing that Rosalie did not possess. Mr. Upsmith looked also much at Rosalie, in no triumph, but in an apparent great excess of his unfortunate complaint. He stared, troubled and beseeching, at her at meals, and he stared, troubled and beseeching, at her when he encountered her away from meals. The longer he sojourned in the boarding house the more troubled and beseeching, when Rosalie happened to notice him, did his fattish countenance appear to become. That was all. There scarcely ever was exchanged between them even the courtesies customary between dwellers beneath the same roof; they never, that Rosalie could remember, were a minute alone together and yet on a

day in an August, Miss Salmon a week away on a month at the seaside with the family to which she was nursery governess, Rosalie was being told in the violent opening sentence of one letter that she had pretended to despise and dislike men but had only done it to deceive Miss Salmon and was a liar; and in the impassioned sentences of another which had been enclosed and had fallen and to which bewildered she stooped and then read, that the heart of Boo was at her feet ("your proud, sweet little feet that I would kiss in my adorance") that he had adored her ever since he had first set eyes on her, that he treasured "like pearls before swine" every encouragement she had given him from her divine eyes and from her proud little lips, that he had had no sleep for a fortnight and felt he would go mad unless he wrote these few lines (nine pages), that he earned "good money," and that he was, in conclusion, to which Rosalie amazedly skipped, "ever and ever and imperishably always her imperishably adoring Boo."

Two days previously Rosalie had received, but not read, another slightly mysterious letter. It had been in her receptacle in the letter rack in the hall, addressed to her in an unfamiliar writing and deposited by hand, not through the post. It had begun "Dear Miss Salmon, re our friendship I have to inform you--" Rosalie had turned to the end, "B. Upsmith." She had replaced it in its envelope, written upon the envelope, "This is evidently for you, but addressed to me, as you see--R." and had placed it in another stamped wrapper to be forwarded by Miss Kentish. She had only thought of it as in funny style for a love letter, proper no doubt to the niceties of an "understanding." And what had happened was that the vile, egregious, and infamous Boo, writing to break off one understanding and establish another, had placed them in the wrong envelopes. The outpourings of his bursting heart to Rosalie had been received by Miss Salmon; the information "re our friendship" had gone to Rosalie.

Of itself, as has been said, the whole incident was nothing at all in the life of Rosalie. It came with the crash, but only startling and quite harmless crash, of an unexpected clap of thunder, and it passed as completely and as passively, doing no damage, leaving no mark. Miss Salmon never returned to the boarding house; the vile, egregious and infamous Boo haply incisively informed by Miss Salmon of what he had done, incontinently, and without speech to Rosalie, fled from the boarding house. They were gone, they were nothing to Rosalie; the correspondence was destroyed, it was nothing to Rosalie.

But the significance of the matter was here. There was in Miss Salmon's letter to Rosalie one paragraph that Rosalie read a second time. She had received the letter when coming in just before dinner. Not at all injured nor in any way discommoded by the hurtling epithets, the terrific underscores intended to be as bludgeons, or the leaping exclamatory notes set there for stabs, she had put the thing away in a drawer and gone down to her meal. The passage alluded to came more than once into her mind. When she was about to get into bed that night she destroyed the letter, first reading that paragraph, and only that, again. Sole in the violent welter of those sheets it had no underscores nor any exclamations. It was added as a postscript. It said:

"Well, now; Boo and I met the first time in a crowd watching a horse that had fallen down. It kicked and I stepped back quickly

and trod on his foot. It made him put his hands on my arms and I looked around to apologise and there was his dear face smiling at me, although in great pain, for I had trodden on a corn he has; and I knew at once it was the face I had looked for and longed for all my life and had found at last; and I loved him from the first and we went out of the crowd and talked. Well, now; I clung to him in all our happy, happy months together, in a way you can never understand, because I loved him, and because I am not the sort that men like because I am only plain, and I knew that if ever he left me I could never get another. Well, now; you have taken him away from me. You could get dozens and dozens of men to love you, but you have taken mine, and I never, never can get another."

The thoughts of Rosalie, not sequent, but going about and amounting thusly, were thus: "That is very pathetic. That is horribly sad and pathetic. Coming at the end like that and without any strokes and flourishes, it is as if she was exhausted of her hate and rage and just put out an utterly tired hand and set this here like a sigh. That's pathetic, the mere look of it and that thought of it. And then what she says. The dreadfully simple naivete of the beginning of it. Staring at a fallen horse in the street. It's just where they would be, both of them. They'd stand there for hours and just stare and stare. And then she steps back on his foot and there's 'his dear face' smiling at her; ah, it's pathetic, it's poignant! I can see it absolutely. Yes, I can. As if I were in the crowd around the horse, watching them. There they are, the horse between us, and all the doltish, staring faces round about; and their two dull and stupid faces; and as their eyes meet that sudden look upon their foolish faces, as of irradiation out of heaven, that would make a clown's face beautiful and cause the hardest heart to twist. But it doesn't cause mine to twist. That's the odd thing. I remember perfectly when a thing like that would have given me a little blinky kind of feeling. I've always been awfully quick to notice things like that. I've often seen them. Quite recently, so little, I believe, as a year ago, things like that, things like this, would have moved me a lot. They somehow do not now. That frightful ending of hers: 'You could get dozens and dozens of men to love you, but you have taken mine and I can never, never get another.' That is most terribly pathetic. I think that is the most poignant thing I have ever heard. Well, I can realise its utter pathos; I can realise it but I cannot feel it. It does not move me. 'And I never, never can get another.' It's frightful. I could cry. But I do not a bit want to cry. I must have somehow changed. I am not a bit sorry if I have changed. I would be sorry to go back and be as, if I have changed, I must have been--sentimental. I have changed. I believe I can look back and see it. About the time I left the Sultana's, mother's letters, and keeping them and answering them, began to be--yes they did begin to be a little, tiny bit of a nuisance to me. Yes, it was beginning then, this. And I expect earlier, if I worked it out. There's nothing in it to regret. It's just a growing out of a thing. It's not, when I see a thing that's pathetic, that I've grown blunt or blind and can't see it for pathetic. It's just--I know what it is--it's just that it doesn't appeal to me in the same way. It's like seeing a dish of most tempting food in front of you, not that I ever remember my mouth, as they say, watering at anything; but say strawberries and cream--I'm fond of strawberries and cream--it's like seeing a dish of strawberries and cream in front of you, and knowing it's good and knowing it's delicious, and knowing you're awfully fond of it--and just not

being hungry; turning away and leaving it there, not because it's not everything that it ought to be, but just because--you don't want it. I should say that's how it is with me about these--these pathetic things. I know they're pathetic. I don't want them."

That is how it was, how it had become, with Rosalie. That was just her first recognition of it, as the swimmer, intent on his own making of his progression, recognises not, till he has been borne some distance by it, the current that also is carrying him along.

Visits home to the Rectory were further manifestations to her of this arising symptom.

There were appeals that should have arisen to her out of her home; and they did arise; and she recognised them; but they did not appeal to her--not in the old way. She went home very rarely for occasional week-ends, always for her annual holidays, always for Christmas; and the discovery she made was that she liked her home very much better when she was away from it than when she was in it. When a visit was in prospect she desired her home, that is to say her mother, most frightfully. But when the visit was in being the joy she had promised herself she would spread somehow was not at her command; the love she had yearned to show somehow was chilled within her and not forthcoming. It was the tempting dish in a new illustration--rushing eagerly to it, avid of its delights; coming to it and finding, after all, one was not hungry.

Strange!

Her mother was ageing rapidly. She could have wept to see the ageing signs; but somehow, seeing them, did not weep; was not moved; received the impression but was not sensitive to it; felt the tug but did not respond to the pull. Rather, indeed, was apt to be a little impatient. Returned to London and to her engrossing work and longed to be back with her mother; came back to her mother--and was not hungry.

Strange!

Then she began to analyse the strangeness of it and found it was not, after all, so strange; at least it was not a thing to be distressed about, nor bearing conviction of unnatural qualities, of hardness, of unkindness. There was a line she knew that came in a verse:

There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
The earth, and every common thing
To me did seem Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore.
Turn wheresoe'er I may
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

"The things which I have seen I now can see no more." That was the line. "The things which used to appeal to me now appeal no more--or rather not quite in the same way. I think I used to be very sentimental. It is stupid and useless to be sentimental. People must grow old. There's nothing sad in that. It is natural. It is life. It is life

and one must accept life. The unnatural thing, the foolish and wrong thing, is to remain a sentimental child for ever, with a child's ready foolish tears at what are common, necessary facts of life. I can be much kinder, much more really kind, by seeing things clearly--and in their right perspective than by occluding them with false compassions. I am always my dear, my darling mother's devoted daughter, ever at her disposal, and she knows it and loves me for it. When I am to her or to any friend but as ships that pass in the night--Keggo's phrase--then let me take myself to task."

Keggo's phrase! Keggo was being intermittently seen at this time and these thoughts of Rosalie's were very close to the occasion when finally she lost sight of Keggo. It could be said like this--that Keggo here made a contribution to Rosalie's life that passed Rosalie on her way.

They had kept touch for quite a time after their separation as governess and pupil. They then lost touch.

"Why, it must be more than a year!" cried Rosalie, suddenly encountering Miss Keggs near the Marble Arch one evening and delightedly greeting her. It was in the summer and Rosalie had gone out from the boarding house after dinner for some fresh air in the park. She was enormously glad to see Keggo again and carried her greeting straight on into excuses for her share in their long sundering. "More than a year! You know, the fact is, Keggo, that when I first left the Sultana's, and for quite a time afterwards, I used to gush. I did! I was so frightfully full of all I was doing and it was all so new and so wonderful and I was so excited about it that it was sheer letting off steam--gush--to write you reams and reams of letters about it as I used to do. Then it got normal and the--the tumultuousness of it wore off and I was just--I am, you know--just absolutely absorbed in it and there was no more steam to let off; all the energy went into the work, I suppose. So gradually, I suppose, without quite realising it, I gave up writing. But, oh, if you knew how glad I am to see you now!"

Miss Keggs to all this presented only a fixed smile. A smile belongs much more to the eyes than to the lips. The lips, but not the eyes, can counterfeit a smile. False coin is "uttered" as they say in law; and the lips utter. Not so the eyes. All metal that the mouth issues is to be tested there. The expression in Miss Keggs's eyes was not at all in consonance with that of her mouth. The expression of her eyes was rather oddly vacant as you may see on the face of a person who is apparently attending to what you are saying but really is listening to another conversation in the same room. "Not listening" as it is called. "An absent look" as they say.

Nevertheless she joined dove-tailed response to Rosalie's words. "To tell you the truth," said Miss Keggs, speaking very slowly and repeating the preamble. "To tell you the truth I wouldn't have received your letters if you had written them."

"You wouldn't? Why not?"

"To tell you the truth--" there had been a pause before she first spoke; a pause again before this reply and then again a beginning with this phrase about which there was nothing odd in itself but

something odd in the manner of its use by Miss Keggs. "To tell you the truth, I've left the school."

"Left the Sultana's!"

Miss Keggs nodded with slow inclinations, like grave bows, of her head.

"Whatever for? Keggo, when, why?" And then Rosalie, impelled by some apprehension that suddenly pressed her, put a quick hand on Keggo's arm and cried sharply, "Keggo! There is something very strange about you. What has happened to you? Something has happened. You can't keep it from me."

But Keggo could. At that quick gesture of suspicion of Rosalie's, animation sprung to meet it as a cat, at a sudden start, will leap from profound slumber to a place of safety and to arched defence. Miss Keggs, in their first exchanges, might have been as one drowsily answering questions from a bed. She was suddenly, in her instant casting away of her absent air, as that one flinging away the bedclothes and leaping upright to the floor. What had she been saying? She had been quite lost in something she was thinking of when Rosalie came up. She scarcely had recollected her. She had been very, very ill with "this influenza" and still was only convalescent. Why, how very, very glad she was to see her dear Rosalie again! And how Rosalie had developed!

"Why, Rosalie, you are beautiful! You are! And you don't blush or simper to hear it! Yes, you are beautiful."

There was a little room in a street somewhere off the Harrow Road that Miss Keggs now occupied. It was a forbidding street. It was one of those derelict streets frequent in certain quarters of London, in Holloway, in Kentish Town, in Kilburn and all over South London, all about which life teems and roars but where, along their own pavements, no life is. They are most characteristic of themselves, these streets, when, as often to be seen, there is no soul along them but a sad drab that is an itinerant singer that drifts along wailing, at every few paces shuffling her body in complete turns to scan the windows she has passed and the immediate windows on either hand. She has no home and these are not homes to which she wails. There is no flicker of life at any window. She's a sad drab, repulsive within; and they are sad drabs, not nice within. At night, but not before dusk, forlorn things flicker in and out of them like drab ghosts had on the strings of a puppet show. By day there sometimes is an old man crawling in or crawling out; sometimes a woman, always with a parcel or a net bag, fleeting along, expressionless. The high houses, all of one pattern, appear to have no pattern. They are like dead walls and the place they enclose like a vault, and the itinerant drab like a thing in drab ceremonies (they trail the dust) that ought to be dead wailing for entrance to things, tombed in those walls, that are dead. There is no life at all in these streets. There is nothing active or positive. There is just passivity and negation. There is just nothingness. They are not habitations, which connote life; they are repositories, which connote desuetude. They are the repositories of creatures, not that have done with life, for the sheer fact of living acknowledges service to life, but with whom life has done.

These came to be Rosalie's thoughts of this street--Limpen Street--but they could not have been hers when she was first going there to spend evenings with Miss Keggs, for it was in her earlier visits there to Keggo that she cried there. When she could cry for pure compassion for another she was still too--too ardent for Limpen Street to be seen as it has been presented. From the first it affected her disagreeably but she would have felt, then, a sympathy for its state, and a belief that it could be aroused out of its state, and a wish so to arouse it; and in her earlier visits she had ardently this sympathy, but it was raised to a profound compassion; this belief, but it was a conviction; and this wish, but it was a resolution, in regard to Keggo.

For Keggo was drinking.

Keggo had been drinking for years and years and now Keggo had walled herself away in Limpen Street to drink and drink, still secretly with the sharp cunning of the secret drinker, but now with cunning only necessary when of her own wish she met the world. At the Sultana's, (only Mr. Ponders in her secret, and in her pay; "that vile man" as, after the revelation, she always spoke of him to Rosalie) at the Sultana's and in all her life of that period she was, as it were, as one whose life is threatened, dwelling among spies; that breastplate of her cunning never could be laid off then; now, as one threatened, but secure in a castle, the breastplate only was needed when sallies forth were made. There was at the Sultana's the need of constant care to inhibit her cravings; there now was none to save her--unless Rosalie did.

There is no need at all to tell all this and all that by which Rosalie was led to this most terrible discovery and Keggo impelled to her most painful revelation. There was deceit and its exposure; lies and their crumpling in the hand; mystifications and their sinister interpretations; contingencies and their ugly dissolutions. These would be all beastly to tell. Beastly is a vile word but this is a vile thing. There was about it all, all the time, a tainted and unwholesome atmosphere. There was always in the little room in Limpen Street that strange disagreeable smell of bad eau-de-Cologne that always had hung about the little room at the Sultana's.

Beastly things....

But they were not felt to be beastly by Rosalie, then. They are said here to be beastly, for they were beastly, only in excuse for Rosalie afterwards. They only were to her, then, intensely sad, most deeply pitiful, intensely increasing of her love for Keggo as pure love is increased by seeing its object in tortures that may not be helped because they will not be confessed. If only Keggo would tell her! Once or twice she said to Keggo, speaking with an entreaty that must have made obvious to Keggo her knowledge, "Keggo, haven't you something to tell me; something that you'd like to tell me?" The occasion was always when she was leaving after a visit that had found Keggo very unwell, very dejected of spirits, and that Keggo had at last terminated by saying, "I think perhaps you had better go, Rosalie. I think perhaps I'd be better lying down." But Keggo's answer always was, "Something to tell you? No, nothing at all! What should I have to tell you?"

And then one day something said brought them very near to the matter

between them. Miss Keggs came nearer yet. She said, "The fact is, Rosalie, I sometimes get so I simply cannot make an effort, the smallest effort. I believe when I'm like that if a thousand pounds were offered me for the going out and asking of it, and God knows I want it badly enough, I simply could not make the effort to do it. I'd simply let it pass and know that I was letting it pass and not care. That's how it's got with me, how it is sometimes with me, Rosalie."

Rosalie said with extraordinary emphasis, leaning forward on the chair in which she sat facing Keggo. "Why is it, Keggo?"

If Keggo had answered, the thing would not have happened. Keggo did not answer. She was sitting with her hands crossed, one palm upon the other, and resting on her lap, her eyes to the ground. Quite a long time passed. Rosalie said, "You're drinking, aren't you, Keggo?"

"Yes, drinking, Rosalie."

"Oh, Keggo!"

It was then that Rosalie cried.

CHAPTER VIII

She cried. Her sympathies, though drying and slower now to be aroused, still then were such that she could weep for pity. It is a glimpse of her not to be seen again. There was she on her knees by Keggo, and with her arms about Keggo's waist, and with her head on Keggo's lap, crying for Keggo; and in the pauses of Keggo's unfolding of her story entreating her, as one that cried responses to a litany, "Don't mind, Keggo! Keggo, don't mind now! Dear Keggo, poor Keggo, it's all right now."

And presently all the tale told: what Mr. Ponders' medicine was; and all the humiliation suffered in keeping in with "that vile man"; and that vile man's betrayal of her to the Sultana, and her dismissal; and all the earlier dreadfulness of her first steps down into her dreadful malady; and all the dreadful secrecy of all those years; and all the horrible humiliation secretly to get her poison; and all the horrible humiliations when her poison got. All the dark tale of that presently told; and her head bowed down to Rosalie's, and Rosalie's wet face against her face, and her face also wet; and just her murmurs, murmured at intervals, as though her heart that had discharged its grievous load ran slowly now, slowly to rise and then to well with, "God bless you, Rosalie; oh, Rosalie, God bless you"; and for a long time just seated thus, cheek to cheek, hand to hand, heart to heart; weakness bound about with strength, sorrow in pity's arms, travail in sanctuary....

It is desired that one should try to see that picture. Its counterpart was not again in the life of Rosalie, hardening.

There were, after that, such happy evenings in Keggo's room. Keggo, with one to help her, fighting for herself; Rosalie, with one to help, elevated upon that high happiness that comes with fighting for another. For a short time there seemed to be no lapses in Keggo's struggle. When they came (as Rosalie knew afterwards) the practised cunning of years of secrecy had no difficulty in concealing them from the unsuspecting eyes of Rosalie. Ill that it was so! Rosalie was harder when came the lapse that cunning could not hide. She did not cry. Her eyes were hard. She said with thin lips, "Why, even all this time you have been deceiving me!" the which egged on, in that vile way in which exchanges of a quarrel are as knives sharpening one against the other, Keggo's enflamed retort, "The more fool you! Little fool!"

But at first, while the lapses were few and the cunning was equal to them, only a closer friendship was set afoot between the woman that was grown and the woman that was burgeoning, and there were such very happy evenings in the room in Limpen Street. Such jolly talks.

There was one talk that, forgotten with the very evening of its passage, afterwards very strongly returned to Rosalie and abode with her. It had in it rather vital things for Rosalie.

She loved to talk about her work with intelligent and sympathetic Keggo, and she had been on this occasion expounding to her the mysteries and interest of life insurance: in particular explaining the "romance" of vital statistics; in particular, again, the curious fact that, though women in the United Kingdom largely outnumbered men, many more male children were born than female. The disproportion "the other way about" in maturity, said Rosalie, was because the death rate among men was much higher--due to risks of their occupations. "A certain number of house painters," said Rosalie sagely, "fall off ladders every year and are killed; women don't paint houses, so they don't fall off ladders and get killed. Similarly on railways, Keggo. The death rate among railway men is much higher in proportion, over an average, than the rate in any other occupation. Porters doing shunting, for instance, are always getting killed. Well, women don't shunt trains so they don't get killed while shunting trains, so there you are again, so to speak. The thing in a nutshell, Keggo, is that, by contrast, men lead dangerous lives."

Keggo, who always was very alert in response, was here very long in responding. Then she responded an extraordinary thing that Rosalie afterwards remembered. She said slowly, "Oh, but Rosalie, it's very dangerous to be a woman."

Rosalie questioned her.

Keggo said, "Rosalie, you've great ideas, and I think very shrewd and very striking ideas, about the difference between men and women, but there's this difference I think you haven't thought of--the danger that women carry in themselves; right in them, here"--she had a hand against her breast and she pressed it there--"born in them, inerradicable, and that men have not. Men go into dangers but

they come out of them and go home to tea. That's what it is with men, Rosalie. They can always get out. They can always come back. They never belong to a thing, body and soul and heart and mind. Rosalie, women do. That's their danger. That's why it is so very, very dangerous being a woman. Women can't come back. They can't, Rosalie. Look at me. They take to a thing and it becomes a craze, it becomes an obsession, it becomes a drug. Look at me. They take to a thing--anything; a poison like mine, or a pursuit like some one else's, or an idea like some other's, or a--a career in life like, like yours, Rosalie,--they take to it and go deep enough, and they're its; they never will get away from it, they never, never will be able to come out of it. Never."

She was extraordinarily vehement. It was embarrassing for Rosalie. Rosalie desired to contest, as vehemently, these theories. She did not believe them a bit. They were founded, she felt, on the tragedy of Keggo's own case. Keggo was unfairly, though very naturally, arguing from the particular to the general, from the personal to the abstract. But how could she reply to Keggo, "Of course you say that?"

She was silent; but she betrayed perhaps her thoughts in a gesture, her difficulty in some expression of her face.

Keggo said very intensely, "But, Rosalie, if you only knew! With me it's drink and you'll say--. But I say to you, Rosalie, never, never let anything get the mastery of you. With me it's drink and you'll say that is a matter altogether different, with which parallels are not to be drawn. Oh, do not believe it, Rosalie. A woman should in all things be desperately temperate--watchfully, desperately temperate. A man--nearly every man--seems somehow to have his life and all his interests in compartments. He can be immersed in one while he is in it, and can get out of it and distribute himself over his others and close it and forget it. Rosalie, a woman can't. Men have hobbies. They don't have attachments; they have detachments. They detach themselves and turn to a thing and they detach themselves from it and turn back again. Rosalie, women don't turn to a thing; they go to it. They don't have hobbies, they have obsessions. They don't trifle, they plunge. They cannot sip, they drain. It's in their bone. They never would have occupied the place they do occupy if it were not that from the beginning they have given themselves over, or they were given over, to mastery. They are the weaker vessel. Rosalie, I tell you this, when a woman gives herself, forgets moderation and gives herself to anything, she is its captive for ever. She may think she can come back, but she can't come back. For a woman there is no comeback. They don't issue return tickets to women. For women there is only departure; there is no return."

Rosalie said, "Keggo, I think I could argue, but I won't. But what I can't imagine is the application of it in hundreds of cases--in by far the great majority of cases. Take mine. You're not warning me, are you? I don't see the possibility--"

Keggo said, "Darling, I'm not warning you and yet I am. I am warning you because you are a woman; and because you are a woman you are susceptible to danger. It's what I've said; it's what I would have you remember for a day perhaps to come, that it is dangerous being a woman. I'm not warning you, because there's nothing to--well,

but isn't there? You've got a theory of life and you are bent upon a career in life. There's--"

Rosalie cried, "Well, but there you are, Keggo. No comeback, no return tickets--well, I don't want to come back; I don't want a return ticket."

"You might. You never know. Suppose you ever did?"

"But you can't suppose it. Why ever should I?"

"Suppose you wanted to marry?"

Rosalie laughed. The thing immediately lost reality. "Well, suppose the incredible. Suppose I did. There'd be no comeback wanted there. I could perfectly well marry and still keep my theory of life; I could perfectly well marry and still keep on in my career--and most certainly I would still keep on. Why, that is my theory of life, as you call it, or a very outstanding principle of it. There's nothing to me more detestable in the whole business than the idea that because a woman marries she therefore must give up her work. That's what is the reason the boarding house and every boarding house and every home and street and city swarms with derelicts--with derelict women--just because their lives are all planned as blind alley occupations, marriage at the end of the alley, no need to do anything, no need to be anything because it's only a blind alley you're in. When you reach the end--you reach the end! That's it, Keggo. You reach the end. You're a woman, therefore for you--the end!"

She laughed again. She was returning Keggo's vehemence without embarrassment upon the subject that had made return difficult. She cried, "I've got you now, Keggo. I really have. You say they don't issue return tickets to women. No. Perhaps they don't; but I'll tell you where they book them all to--from the cradle to a terminus."

Keggo smiled and would have spoken. But Rosalie was pleased with her adroit turning of metaphors. She repeated "To a terminus. Well, I've booked beyond, Keggo." She laughed again. "And then the idea of marriage for me! I've granted the preposterous just for the sake of the argument and just to floor the argument. But you know, you know perfectly well from all our talks, even so far back as at the Sultana's, that it's simply too grotesque! Marriage, for me! Why, if a million men came to me on their bended knees, each with a million pounds on their backs you know perfectly well that I'd just feel sick. Tame cats, tabby cats, tomcats, Cheshire cats, wild cats, stray cats,--I'm not going to set up a cats' home. No thanks."

So Rosalie had the laugh of that evening.

CHAPTER IX

But this was not to continue. Keggo began to lapse; Rosalie began to weary of helping Keggo. She had herself to think of. Those who go down in life, whether by age or by misfortune, are prone, engulfed, to cry to those ascending, "You could help me!" There is a correct answer to this. It is, "I have done (or I do) a great deal for you. I cannot do more. It is not fair to ask me to do more. I have a duty to myself. I have myself to think of." Our generation endorses this.

Rosalie had herself to think of. By stages that need not be detailed, they are the common facts of life, the thing passes from that picture of those two with Rosalie's strong young arms about the other to a new picture, the last, between them.

The stages show Rosalie's enormous, ardent plans for the rescue and rehabilitation of Keggo, and they show the projection and the failure of the plans. They show work found for Keggo (through Simcox's scholastic side) and lost and found again and again lost and still again. They show Keggo's remorse and they show Rosalie's forgiveness. They show it repeated and repeated. They show by degrees the gradual, and then the rapid, staling of Rosalie's fond sympathies. They show her finally, immersed in her own purposeful interests, discovering to herself feelings in regard to Keggo on a plane with feelings discovered to herself in regard to her mother. It has been written: "Her mother was ageing rapidly. Rosalie could have wept to see the ageing signs; but somehow, seeing them, did not weep; was not moved; received the impression but was not sensitive to it; felt the tug but did not respond to the pull. Rather, indeed, was apt to be a little impatient." It is not necessary to expand. Keggo was fast going downhill. Rosalie could have wept to see the downhill signs; but somehow, seeing them, did not weep; was not moved... rather, indeed... impatient. She had herself to think of.

Youth's an excuse for youth as childhood's an excuse for childishness. Youth, still, like childhood, but unlike maturity, can be lost in its emotions, absorbed in them to the exclusion of all else, abandoned to them with all else pitched away as a swimmer discards his every stitch and joyously plunges in the stream. Youth is not accountable for its actions then: it is too happy or it is too sad. One oughtn't to blame youth, immersed.

There was outstandingly one such day of absorption in delight, of abandonment to ecstasy for Rosalie, and it was the day on which she made her third advance in the social grade of Miss Kentish's boarding house and moved into the two rooms en suite, furnished and decorated by herself to her own taste. She awoke to this great day, long anticipated; and with the vigorous action of throwing off the clothes and jumping out of bed, she plunged into it and was lost in it. The excitement and the elation of taking possession of that enchanting, that significant apartment of her own! She was excited; she was elated. Moving in was the cumulative excitement of all the long-drawn, anxious excitements of peering round the antique dealers and picking up the bits of furniture and of placing them and moving them a shade to this side and then a shade to that till was found the one and only exact position that suited them and that they suited; and the terrible excitements of watching the decorators at work, her scheme developing beneath their hands,

and the awful knowledge that now it was being done it was done for good or bad--no altering it now!--and the agonizing excitements of putting down the carpets--how can you tell exactly how a carpet is going to look until you see it actually down upon its floor and between its walls?--and the increasing excitement all the time of the knowledge that everything was harmonising and was looking just as in dreams of the ideal it had been made to look; and now all ready! The bed-sitting-room slept in last night for the last time; the two utterly perfect rooms and all that their possession connoted, to be occupied that evening for the first time! Yes, in all the tumultuous pride and engrossment of that, there was no place--how could there be place?--for tiresome things of other people's worlds, if such should offer.

And in this tremendous day there was stuff more tremendous yet. This also was the day on whose evening was made the tremendous tribute to her work and to her talent, the evening of the dazzling offer that, like a door swung open on a treasure house, disclosed to her new fields to which her career had brought her, new triumphs that her career, in its stride, might make her own--the evening when Mr. Sturgiss of Field's Bank leant across the dinner table in his house (at his request only she and himself left in the room) and said in his quiet voice, "Well, look here--to come to the point--the reason I've got you up here to-night--it's this: we want you, Field and Company, the Bank, we want you to join us. We want you in Lombard Street."

Lombard Street!

Cumulative also was this thrill, for it had begun some few days previously when Mr. Sturgiss, calling at Simcox's for a chat with Mr. Simcox, an old friend, had come into her room and after mysteriously fidgetting with business and conversational trifles, had issued the invitation to dinner at his house at Cricklewood in language mysteriously couched. "My wife would like to meet you," said Mr. Sturgiss. "She's heard a lot from me, and from Field, of what an astonishingly clever young person we think you and she'd--she'd like to meet you. And more than that." Mr. Sturgiss's halting speech suddenly became direct and definitive like a flag that had been fluttering suddenly streaming upon the breeze. "And more than that. The fact is, there's a proposition I want to put up to you. A proposition. We could go into it quietly and discuss it. I rather think it would interest you. I'm sure it will. You'll come? Good. I'm very glad. Very glad."

A proposition! From Mr. Sturgiss! Of Field and Company! What could it be?

But Rosalie was not of the sort to tread the succeeding days on the enchanted air of fond surmises. She told herself that the mysterious proposition might be everything or might be nothing: the fact that outstood was that she had brought her aspirations to this--that a partner in a London bank recognised in her stuff sufficient to invite her to a confidential meeting, there to go into something with her "quietly together," to meet together over something and "discuss it." She had determined to establish herself and she was establishing herself. And was it not an omen propitious and significant that this recognition of her parts was to fall on the very day on which the exercise of those parts brought her into the

dignity and comfort of that delicious, that significant apartment of her own?

This solid stuff, and no mere daydreams, was the delight absorbing her and the ecstasy to which she was abandoned when that great day came. In the morning she put the last of her possessions, the equipment of her dressing table, into the new apartment; after the day spent at Simcox's, she returned to dress for the first time before the noble cheval glass purchased for the bedroom. She decided to go up in a hat; it could be removed or not for dinner as Mrs. Sturgiss might seem to indicate. She put on an evening bodice of black silk and net with a simple skirt in keeping. She gave last approving glances about the delightful rooms and set out, immersed in eager happiness, for Cricklewood.

One of those old red buses that vied with the white Putney buses as being the best horsed on the London routes took her there. Up the Edgware Road; past the junction with the Harrow Road that led to Keggo's street--she only had for it the thought that it was weeks since she had seen Keggo, almost months; along broad Maida Vale and past the turning that led to the Sultana's with the corner where often the crocodile had huddled--and she was so engrossed in her happy achievements that she passed it without thinking of it. The bus terminated its journey at the foot of Shoot Up Hill. Rosalie, called upon to alight, came out of her thoughts into her surroundings. She realised that she must have passed Crocodile Corner without noticing and the realisation caused her to give a little note of amused indifference. The indifference was not directed precisely at the Sultana's; it was at the idea, which came to her, that, normally to human predilections, she ought to have given--ought now to give--a sentimental thought to memories of the Sultana years. Well, she did not. Funny! Yes, it was funny. As she sometimes thought of her mother and of all her home ties; of Miss Salmon and that cry of hers of never being able to find another lover; of Keggo now so seldom seen and known to be going from bad to worse,--so with memories of Crocodile Corner and the Sultana's, she could see and appreciate the call of all these attachments, but somehow, seeing and appreciating, did not respond to them. What a very curious attitude! It was not unfeeling for she could feel. It was not insensibility for she was sensitive to such things. Sensitive! No, a better word than that. She was in such matters sensible. She saw, as one should see, these things in their right perspective. They were touching (as of her mother) or they were sad (as of Keggo) or they were appealing (as the happy schoolgirl memories) but they must not touch or sadden or appeal too closely. They must be estimated in their degree and in their place; they must not be assumed, be shouldered, be permitted to cumber. No good could be done to them by encumbrance with them. That was the point. What good could it do them? No good. Yes, that was sensible.

She abated, in these thoughts, nothing of the eagerness with which she was living this great day--the day whose points of suspension (on which it tumultuously revolved) were the taking over of the significant apartment from which she had just come and the entering upon the significant invitation to which now her feet were taking her. These thoughts, this analysis of her attitude to sentimental appeals, she tossed upon her eager happiness that was her being as an airball tossed upon laughing breath that yet is used, breathing, to support life. And she was aware that this was so. And she enjoyed

a flash of approval of herself that it could be so; it was admirable, it was sensible, thus to be able to detach and look upon a portion of her mind while her main mind deflected not a shade from its occupation with the main chance. That faculty was perhaps the secret of her success, the quality, that, in exercise, had brought her to the significant apartment and to the significant invitation.

She was at the gate of Mr. Sturgiss's house and she most happily passed up the short drive, ascended the steps and rang the bell.

Mr. Sturgiss's house was almost on the summit of Shoot Up Hill. It was one of those houses standing a few miles along the main thoroughfares out of London that, now in decay or displaced by busy shops, packed villas, or monstrous flats, were then the distinctly impressive residences of distinctly well-to-do business people. Mr. Sturgiss was a distinctly well-to-do business person. The house, double-fronted, had that third sitting-room which confers such an immense superiority over houses of but two sitting-rooms--"Such a convenience in so many ways" as those newly promoted from two to three nowadays remark with languid triumph to visitors still immured in two. Houses--new, two sitting-roomed houses--extended beyond it and around it, and now stretch miles beyond and about, but Mrs. Sturgiss told Rosalie that when they first came there they actually had cows grazing and horses ploughing in fields adjoining their garden.

Mrs. Sturgiss told Rosalie this while personally attending Rosalie's removal of her hat (it was "no hat"; Rosalie felt so glad she had come dressed for either indication) and Mrs. Sturgiss sighed pleasantly as she said it. "Things are going ahead at such a pace now!" said Mrs. Sturgiss. "It's all very different from what it used to be. Why, the very fact of your coming here, not as my guest but as my husband's, 'on business!' The idea of women being in business, or even knowing anything about business, when I was a girl, why, I can't tell you how, how positively shocking it would have been considered."

Rosalie laughed. She liked Mrs. Sturgiss, who was motherly and seemed to have her own dear mother's gentle ways--this personally attending her in her bedroom, for instance. "Oh, there are getting to be heaps of women in business now, Mrs. Sturgiss," she smiled.

Mrs. Sturgiss returned brightly, "Oh, I know it. I know it well." She paused and her voice had a thoughtful note. "But even then.... Use the long mirror, my dear; the light is better. Even then, there can be few as,--as much in it as you. You know, my husband has an immense idea of your abilities. He has spoken of you so much. Do you know, you are a great surprise to me, now I see you. I could only imagine from all John's idea of you a rather terrible looking blue-stocking, as we used to call the clever women." She came and stood by Rosalie, regarding the image in the glass that Rosalie regarded. She said simply, "But you are beautiful."

A very odd feeling, akin to tears--but for what on earth tears?--quicken in Rosalie. She turned sharply from the mirror. "I am quite ready now." She pretended she had not heard.

Mrs. Sturgiss said, "My dear, do you like it, being what you are?"

It was a great rescue for Rosalie to be able to spring away from that odd feeling (in her bosom and in her throat) by swift animation. "Oh, I love it. I simply love it. It is everything to me, everything in the world!"

Mrs. Sturgiss opened the door. "No, you go first, my dear. But if I had had a dear girl, such as you, I would have wished her to stay with me at home."

She had made with her hand the gesture of her wish that Rosalie should precede her from the room. Rosalie impulsively touched the extended fingers. "But, Mrs. Sturgiss, don't you see, that's just it, the idea there is now. If you had had a daughter and she had stayed at home--well, let that go, while you were with her. But when you died and left her, what would there be--don't you see it?--what would there be for her then?"

Mrs. Sturgiss pressed the warm young hand. "But I would have left her married, a dear wife and a dear mother."

"Oh, that!" cried Rosalie and her stronger personality carried off the exchanges in a laugh. Mrs. Sturgiss thought the expression and the tone meant, happily, that marriage might happen to any one, in the market as much as in the home. Rosalie, with all the fierce contempt that her "Oh, that!" conveyed to her secret self, was ridden strongly away from emotionalism in the conversation. Her thought as they went downstairs was, "If I were to instruct her in the cat-men! Her horror!"

There was downstairs a surprise that was very annoying, but that was made to produce compensations. An unexpected fourth person, presuming--so Rosalie was given to understand--on a long standing, indefinite invitation, had dropped in to dinner. She recognised him directly they entered the drawing-room and could not stop the emblem of a swift vexation about her mouth and in her eyes. He caught it, she was sure; and she hoped he did. It was Harry Occleve--Laetitia's futile slave! He had already informed his host that he knew her. She greeted him with a mere touch of her hand, a touch made cold by intent, and with "With a free evening off one would have expected you would spend it with Laetitia," said disdainfully. It was a rude and inept thing to say (in the tone she said it) for the feeble creature, as she stigmatised him, had not yet screwed his fatuous idolatry to the point of proposal of marriage. But she intended it to be rude and to discomfort him and she was glad to see some twinge at the flick pass across his face. She hated his presence there. The presence of any man, in the capacity of a monkey to entertain and to be entertained, was always, not to put too fine a point upon it, repulsive to her. This man was of all men obnoxious to her. When he approached her for their brief greeting (she turned instantly away at its conclusion) she savoured immediately that odd, nice smell there was about him, of mingled soap and peat and fresh tobacco smoke and tweed; and that annoyed her. It was a reminder, emanated from him and therefore not to be escaped, of a distinction he had different from, and above common men. She always granted him his distinction of looks, of air, of talent. It was why she so much disdained him. To be dowered so well and so fatuously to betray his dowry! Tame cat!

But she made him, through the meal, pay compensations for

his presence. At the table of Aunt Belle, in his presence she was accustomed to sit largely silent. Beautiful Laetitia was there the star; and while he mouthed and languished in that star's rays Aunt Belle and Uncle Pyke, (stealing about him to capture him as a farmer and his wife with mincing steps and tempting morsel towards a fatted calf) fawned, flattered and deferred to him, he returning it. There was no place for her, and she would have shuddered to have held a place, in that society for mutual admiration. She sat apart. She was very much the poor relation (Aunt Belle could not comprehend her business success and Uncle Pyke would not admit it) and especially odious to her was the Occleve's polite interest in her direction when Aunt Belle, poor-relating her, would turn to her from coquettish raillery of him with, "Dear child, you're eating nothing." He would smile towards her and, fatuously anxious to please, offer some remark that might draw her into the conversation. She never would be so drawn. She scarcely ever exchanged words with him. She made herself to be unconscious of his presence. He was so occupied with his adoration of Laetitia that to be insensible of his presence was easy. When sometimes she glanced towards him it was with the thought, "Fancy being one of the rising young men at the Bar, being the rising young man--the Bar, with silk and ermine and, why not? the Woolsack before you--and being that, doing that! Fatted calf; dilly, dilly, come and be killed, goose; tame cat!"

Here, at the table of Mr. Sturgiss, it was very different. Intolerable that he should be here, but she was able to make him provide her compensation for his presumption. For the first time in her life, she found herself with sufficient interest in a man to enjoy, nay, to seek, a triumph over him. And she had that triumph. She was as certain as that she sat there that Mr. Sturgiss, in the period before her arrival in the drawing-room, had been telling him of her abilities and of his high regard for her. There was an interest in his look at her across the table that assured her he had been informed. There was, much more, a conviction within her, from Mr. Sturgiss's manner and from his choice of subjects--confined almost entirely and to the absolute exclusion of Mrs. Sturgiss to the political situation and to markets, exchanges and the general tendency in the City--and particularly from the openings in these subjects with which continuously he presented her--a conviction arising out of these that Mr. Sturgiss, proud of her, of his discovery of her, was bent upon showing her off to his second guest, bent upon proving to his second guest what unquestionably he had said to him about her.

She most admirably responded. If she were indeed the subject of a challenge she most admirably flattered her backer. She is not to be imagined as a pundit excavating from within herself slabs of profound wisdom, nor yet as a pupil astoundingly instructing her masters, nor even as one of Mrs. Sturgiss's blue stockings, packed with surprising lore. Rosalie was nothing so foolishly impossible, but she displayed herself knowledgeable. She was profoundly interested in the matters under notice and therefore (for it follows) she was interesting in her contributions to them; she was fascinated--the old fascination of "Lombard Street" and of "The English Constitution" now intensified as desire intensifies by gratification--and therefore she fascinated; she was never silly--Rosalie could not be silly--but she was frequently in her remarks ingenuous, but her ingenuousness, causing Mr. Sturgiss more than once to laugh delightedly (Occleve,

curiously grave, no doubt because surprised, did not laugh) was born out of a shrewd touch towards the heart of the matter, as the best schoolboy howlers are never the work of the dullard but of him that has perceptions. Of her in her childhood it has been said that she was never the wonder-child of fiction who at ten has read all that its author probably had not read at thirty. So now of her budding maturity she was not the wonder-woman of fiction, causing by her brilliance her hearers, like Cortez's men, to stare at each other with a wild surmise. No, nothing so unlikely. But she was intelligent and she was ardent; and there are not boundaries to the distance one may go with that equipment. She was admirable and she felt that she was effective. She had a consciousness of confidence amounting almost to a feeling of being tuned up and now let go; to a feeling of power, as of inspiration. And this strange animation that she had, came, she knew, from the triumph over that man, from the feeling, stated grimly, that she was giving him one.

It is much more important, all that, than, when it came, the great reason of the great invitation that had brought Rosalie to take part in it. The great reason already has been disclosed--Mr. Sturgiss, bending across the tablecloth, they two left alone, "Well, look here--to come to the point--the reason why I've got you up here tonight--it's this: we want you--Field and Company, the Bank,--we want you to come to us--we want you in Lombard Street."

She was beautiful to see in her proud happiness at that. Startled and tremulous, she was; like some lovely fawn burst from thicket and at breathless poise upon the crest of unsuspected pastures; within her eyes the cloud of dreams passing like veils upon the gleam of her first ecstasy; upon her face, shadowed as she sinks somewhat back, the tide of colour (her rosy joy) flooding above her sudden pallor; her lips slightly parted; her hand that had been plucking at the cloth caught to her bosom where her heart had leapt.

It may be left at that. It is enough; too much. What, in the reconstruction of a life, are, in retrospect, its triumphs but empty shards, drained and discarded, the litter of a picnic party that has fed and passed along?

Mr. Sturgiss bent farther across the tablecloth, expanding his proposal: She knew, said he, what he represented, what the firm was. Field and Company. A private bank. Well, the days of private banks were drawing in. These huge joint-stock leviathans swallowing them up like pike among the troutlings. But not swallowing up Field and Company! Not much! If the old private houses were tumbling into the joint-stock maw, the greater the chances for those that stood out and remained. The private banks were tumbling in because they stood rooted in the old, solid, stolid banking business and the leviathans came along and pounced while they dozed. There was no dozing at Field's. They were very much awake. They were enterprising.

"Look at this very matter between us. The idea of bringing a woman into a bank! Even old Field himself was startled at first. Why? In America, women are entering banking seriously and successfully. They're going to in England. At Field's. You." He wasn't proposing to bring her in for fun or for a chance that might turn up, like the man who picked up a dog biscuit from the road on the chance that some one would give him a dog before it got mildewed; no, he was bringing her in to develop an enterprise that should be the

parent of other and greater enterprises. Her knowledge of insurance, her knowledge of schools, these, with her sex, on the one side of the counter and all their clients--the Anglo-Indian crowd who were the backbone of the business--on the other side of the counter. Field's, for cash, and, while it was drawing, for advice, was always the first port of call of the wives and the mothers home from India, to say nothing of the husbands and the fathers,--"well, Field's, you, shall be the fount of all that domestic advice that is just what all those people, cut off from home, are constantly and distractingly in need of." She didn't suppose, as it was, that Field's did no more, for them than bank their money? Field's were their agents. Field's saw that they booked their passages, and that their baggage got aboard; and when they arrived this end or the other, or when they broke their journeys coming or going, Field's representatives were there to meet them and take over all their baggage troubles for them. "Very well. Now Field's--you--are going to look after their domestic troubles for them--find them rooms, find them houses, find them schools for their children. When people know what we can do for them, people will come to us to bank with us because we can do it. When people come to us to bank with us--we go ahead."

Mr. Sturgiss ended and drew back and looked at her. He lit a cigarette and took a sip at his coffee. "We thought of offering you three--" he set down his cup and looked at her again--"four hundred a year."

She declined the post. She was girlish, and delighted him, in her expression of her enormous sense of the compliment he paid her; she was a woman of uncommon purposefulness, and increased his admiration for her by the directness and decision with which uncompromisingly she said him no. She owed a loyalty which she could never fully pay to Simcox's, to Mr. Simcox; that was the beginning and the end of her refusal. Simcox's was her own, her idea, her child that daily she saw growing and that daily absorbed her more: that was the material that filled in and stiffened out the joints of her refusal. "But if you knew how proud I am, Mr. Sturgiss! You don't mind my refusing?"

He laughed and rose to take her to the drawing-room. "I don't mind a bit. This is only what they call preliminary overtures. I shall ask you again. We mean to have you."

Between the two rooms he said, "Yes, mean to. It's a big thing. I'm certain of it. We shall keep it open for you. We shan't fill it." He put his hand on the drawing-room door and opened it. "We can't."

She went in radiant.

She was on the red bus again, going home. She had stayed but the briefest time after dinner. She was too elevated, too buoyant, too possessed possibly to remain in company; excitedly desirous to be alone with her excited thoughts,--especially to be alone with them in that significant apartment of hers. Significant! Why upon the very day of entering it had come this most triumphant sign of its significance! Significant!...

She had a front seat on the outside of the omnibus. She gazed before her along a path of night that the lamps jewelled in chains of gold, and streamed along it her tumultuous thoughts, terrible

as an army with banners. It was very strange, and it vexed her, robbing her of her proud consciousness of them, that there obtruded among them, as one plucking at her skirt--as captain of them she rode before them--the figure of Laetitia's Harry. Similarly he had obtruded and been like to spoil the pleasure of her visit; but he had been made to provide compensations and he obtruded now only in rebirth of a passage with him that, rehearsed again, much pleased her even while, annoyed, she cut him down.

Taking her leave, she had been seen from the threshold by Mr. Sturgiss and by Laetitia's Harry. It was pitchy dark, emerging from the brightness of the interior, and he had stepped with her to conduct her to the gate. "It was an extraordinary coincidence, meeting you here," he had said.

She did not reply. His voice was most strangely grave for an observation so trite; he might have been speaking some deeply meditated thing, profound, heavy with meaning, charged with fate. Fatuous! It was extraordinary that there was not an action of his but aroused her animosity. This vibrant gravity of tone--an organ used for a jig, just as his gifts were used for his Laetitia moon-calfings--caused newly a disturbance within her against him. She would have liked to whistle or in some equal way to express indifference to his presence.

They were at the gate and he stooped to the latch and appeared to have some trouble with it. "Sturgiss has been telling me what a wonderful person you are."

Again that immense gravity of tone. She was astonished at the sudden surge of her animosity that it caused within her. She had desired to express indifference. She desired now to assail. She made a sneer of her voice. "I should have thought you had ears for the wonder of no one but Laetitia."

"Why do you say that?"

She felt her lip curl with her malevolence. "To see you raise your eyes and hear you breathe 'Ah, Laetitia!'"

He opened the gate and she passed out, tingling.

It astounded her to find herself a hundred yards gone from the house, nay, now upon the bus a mile and more away, recalling it, trembling and with her breath quickened. It was as if she had been engaged in a contest of wills, very fierce; nay, in a contest physical, a wrestling. She had not known, she told herself, that it was possible to hate so. That man! These men! She put her eye upon the bus driver, strapped on his perch so near to her that she could have touched him, and absurdly in her repugnance of his sex hated him and shrank farther away from him.

It was enormously, sickeningly real to her, her repugnance. Even on detached consideration of her ridiculous shrinking from the bus driver she could not have laughed at it. People who had an uncontrollable antipathy to cats did not laugh at the grotesque puerilities to which it carried them. Nor she at her antipathy. "Of course they're beasts." Yes, the right word! It was the beastliness of sex that bottomed her loathing.

She could not have laughed; but she could and did with a conscious intention of her will put that intruder on her animation finally out of her mind. This very joyous uplifting of her spirit, was it not because, in this world dominated by men, based for its fundamental principle upon play of sex as commerce is based upon the principle of barter, she was assured of position, of privilege, and of power that raised her independent of such conventions and such laws?

She was her own! All her proud joys, her glad imaginings, her delighted hopes, arose amain and anew, tuned to this cumulative paeon as a nourish of trumpets at the climax of a proclamation. She was intoxicated on her happiness.

They were come to the lighted shops and the crowded pavements. The bus drew up at the thronged corner adjacent to the divigation of the Harrow Road and she leaned over and watched the scene, smilingly (for sheer happiness) looking down upon it, as smilingly (for her triumphant altitude) she felt that she looked down upon the world. She would not have changed place with any life living or that could be lived; she was so much abandoned to her happiness that she made the intention she would sit up in her significant apartment all that night, not to lose a moment of it. She grudged that even sleep upon her happiness should intrude.

There came one in the traffic beneath her that caught her attention: a woman whom people stood aside to let pass and turned to look upon with grins; two or three urchins danced about the woman, pointing at her and calling at her. Her dress was disordered, muddy all up one side as if she had fallen; her face flushed; her hat awry; her hair escaped and wisped about her eyes and on her shoulders. She was drunk. An obscene and horrible spectacle, the mock of her beholders. A horrible woman.

It was Keggo.

Rosalie caught her breath. She made to rise but did not rise. Keggo stopped and lifted all around a vacant gaze. Her eyes met Rosalie's straight above her. She lurched a step and stopped and swayed and looked again, battling perhaps with hints within her fummy brain of recognition. Rosalie made again to rise to go to her and again did not rise. The bus moved forward. That wretched woman, making as if to pursue her aroused be-fuddlement, turned about to follow and came a few steps, lurching like a ship that foundered. The light blazed down upon her upturned face. She lurched into some shadow and, as wreckage swallowed up in the trough of the sea, her face was gone.

Lurching... as a ship... that foundered. There was in Rosalie's mind some dim memory struggling. Lurching... as a ship... in the darkness... in the night. And her face... seen and gone... as a ship... labouring... as a ship...

Ah!

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing; Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness.

It came to Rosalie complete and word for word; and with perfect clearness, as though she saw and sensed them, all its attendant

circumstances: the attic room at the Sultana's, the strange smell mingled with the smell of the oil lamp, Keggo in the wicker chair, she beside her, her head against Keggo's knee; and Keggo's voice reciting the lines and her young, protesting, loving cry, "O Keggo!"

She saw it, sensed it, heard it--and stonily regarded it. A thing to weep at, she knew it; but did not weep. A thing to stab her, it ought to; but did not stab. What good could she do? Suppose she had got up and gone down; suppose she now got up and went down and went back? What good? All sentimentality that. Be sensible! If a thousand pounds would do Keggo any good, and if she had a thousand pounds, freely and gladly she would give the last penny of it. But to get down, to have got down, what could she have done? Why should she worry about her? Keggo had had her chance. Everybody had their chance. She now had hers. Why should she...

She never saw Keggo again.

CHAPTER X

She had not good health in the week immediately following that great day. She did not feel well. She did not look very well. Mr. Simcox, profoundly sympathetic to every mood of her who was at once his protege and his support, told her he thought she had been overdoing it. She seized upon that excuse and tried to persuade herself that perhaps she had; or, which amounted to the same thing, that she was suffering from the revulsion of those huge excitements. But she did not persuade herself. Her malaise, whatever it was, was not of that kind. Its manifestations were not in lassitude or sense of disability. They were in a curious dis-ease whose occasion was not to be defined; in a consuming restlessness beneath whose goad even the significant apartment had not power to charm and hold her; in a certain feverishness whose exsiccative heat, leaving her palms and temples cool (she sometimes felt them and had surprise) caused inwardly a dry burning that made her long for quiet places.

She could not settle to anything. Her limbs, and they had their way, desired not to rest; her mind, and it deposed her captaincy, would cast no anchor.

Mr. Simcox, as the week drew on, suggested a weekend at home. It had occurred to her, very attractively, but she had negatived it. Aunt Belle (before the idea had come to her) had written an invitation to one of the Saturday dinners in which she had "most particularly, my dear child" desired her presence. Something most delightful was going to happen and she must be there. She had accepted and she later told herself she did not like to refuse. She knew, instantly as she read, what was the identity of this delightful thing that was to happen and she decided, with a sharp turn within her of some emotion, that certainly she would be there. To whet her scorn! She

was thereafter much aggravated that her drifting mind, against her wish, swayed constantly towards it sometimes with that same sharp turn of that same emotion (nameless to her and without meaning) always with aggravation of her restlessness, of her fever, of her dis-ease. When came Mr. Simcox's suggestion of the week-end at home she decided, as swiftly as she had first accepted, to revoke her acceptance. She would not be there! She would not--waste her scorn!

Impatient for movement, she that evening went to the splendid house in Pilchester Square to tell her withdrawal. This most exasperating dis-ease of hers! Now that she was come to change her mind she did not want to change her mind. It was like going to the dentist with an aching tooth. On his doorstep the tooth does not ache. Her governance of herself was by her malaise so shaken that positively, as she came into Aunt Belle's presence, she did not know whether she was going to withdraw or to confirm her acceptance of the invitation.

Most comfortingly, Aunt Belle saved her the decision. "My dear child! How unexpected! How opportune! I was just writing to you. Our little dinner is put off! Sit here while I tell you. Now would you like anything, dear child? A piece of cake? Some nice fruit? To please me. Really, no? Well, now; our dinner that I so especially wanted you for--did you guess?"

She began to tell.

She told what Rosalie had perfectly well known. The delightful thing expected to happen was Harry Occliffe's proposal of marriage to darling Laetitia. There had been certain signs and portents. They had come at last. Their meaning was perfectly clear. There was not the least doubt that at the next meeting Harry would ask Laetitia's hand. Not the shadow of a doubt! Aunt Belle knew all the signs! Every woman of Aunt Belle's experience knew them, dear child. So Harry had been asked for this dinner; a meaningly written letter, dear child, to encourage him, the dear, poor fellow! And had accepted, in terms so meaning too, the dear, devoted fellow. Then--

"But, Aunt Belle--"

"Listen, dear child. Then he suddenly wrote saying he found he had made a mistake--"

"Made a mistake!" The words went out from Rosalie in a small cry.

"Dear child, it is nothing. How sweet to be so concerned! It is nothing, it is the best of signs. Made a mistake that he was disengaged for Saturday. The dear, devoted fellow was so absurdly vague about it. Unavoidable circumstances prevented him; that was all; his writing and all the appearance of his letter so delightfully distracted! How amused we were, your Uncle Pyke and I! How amused, and how we felt for the dear, devoted fellow! Screwing up his courage! How we remembered our own courtship! You should hear your Uncle Pyke tell how he had to screw up his courage to propose to me and how many times it failed him and he fled. Dear, child, you've no idea how ridiculous these poor men are in their love! How timorous! How they suffer! The dear, poor fellows. Your Uncle Pyke wrote him at once a most kind and meaning letter--accepting his

unforeseen circumstances (he had to, of course) and positively fixing him for Monday instead. 'Laetitia is expecting you,' your Uncle Pyke wrote. The dear fellow! How happy it will make him! So it is Monday, dear child. Monday, instead. We do so want you to be there. I do so want you, and so does my darling, to be the first to congratulate her. And you shall be a bridesmaid! Won't that be nice? Kiss me, dear child. I shall never forget your sweet concern before I told you his excuse meant nothing. Dear child, you look startled yet."

There was only a faint voice that came to Rosalie's lips. "Really nothing, Aunt Belle?"

"Dear child, nothing at all."

She went down to the Rectory on Saturday and found herself more glad to be there and to be with her mother than she had ever been. When she greeted her mother, "Kiss me again, dear, small mother," she cried and put her cheek against her mother's and held it there some moments, rather fiercely and with her eyes closed, as though there were in that contact some febrifuge that abated her inward fever, some mooring whereto, adrift, her mind made fast.

What beset her? What was the matter with her? What worked within her? Feverishly she inquired of herself, seeking to analyse her case; but she could by no means inform herself; her case was not within what diagnosis she could summon. What? Near as she could get she had the feeling, nay, the wild longing, to get out: out of what? She did not know. To get away: away from what? She could not say.

She found in herself a great and an unusual tenderness towards the home life. Only her mother and her father were now at home. Harold was at a branch of his bank in Shanghai. Robert was in Canada. Flora was in India, married, with two small children. Hilda was in Devonshire, married to a doctor. These things had happened, these flights been winged, and she had taken but the smallest interest in them. She had had her own af-fairs. She had had herself to think of. She had lost touch with her brothers and sisters. She scarcely ever thought about them. Now she wanted very much to hear about them. What news of them was there? How were they getting on? She did want--she could fix that much of her state, or it presented a relief for her state--she did want to feel that she belonged to them and they to her. She noticed with a large whelming of pity how very small her mother seemed to have grown. She was always small, but now--much smaller, fallen in, very fragile. She noticed with a quick pang how all her father's violent blackness of hair, and violent red of colouring, and violent glint of eye and violent energy of gesture were faded, greyed, dimmed, devitalized to a hue and to an air that was all one and lustreless, as if he had gone in a pond covered, not with duckweed but with lichen, and had come out, not dripping, but limp and shrouded head to foot in scaly grey. Was it possible that all this had been so when she was last here? She had not noticed it. She noticed that both her dear mother and her father walked on the flat soles of their feet, and touched articles of furniture as they trod, heavily, across the room. A most frightful tenderness towards them possessed her. She wanted like anything to show them devotion and, most frightfully, to receive from them signs of devotion to her--to be able to feel she

was theirs, and they hers. She wanted it terribly.

But what else did she want? What? They gave her, all the home talk, but soon it flagged and whatever in her desired satisfaction still gnawed within her and was unsatisfied; she ministered to them and they were pleased but they seemed very quickly tired; they had their accustomed hours and habits, and whatever it was in her that found relief in solicitude still tossed within her and was not relieved. What beset her? What?

Monday came. She was at this dinner, this festival for the consummation and celebration of the betrothal of beautiful Laetitia and Laetitia's darling Harry. That sick dis-ease of hers had wonderfully vanished when she came into the house, when she was hugged fit to crack her to Aunt Belle's bosom with "Dear child! Dear child! He's just arrived! He's with your uncle downstairs. Look at Laetitia! Lovely! Isn't she lovely? Kiss me again, again, dear child!" When she was floated to by Laetitia, exquisitely arrayed, pink and white, doll-faced, doll-headed, squeaking with coquettish glee, "Rosalie! Darling! Isn't this awful? Imagine it for me, Rosalie! It oughtn't to have been planned like this, ought it? Do tell darling mamma it ought not to have been! I'm trembling. Wouldn't you be?"

Yes, gone that sick dis-ease. How at this spectacle suffer dis-ease, or any other disturbance of the emotions save only disgust, contempt at such a horrid preparation for such a horrid rite. Excited responsiveness to their most friendly excitation was not needed in her for it was not expected. "The shy, quiet thing you always are, dear child," Aunt Belle often used to say to her and said now. (And within the week was to beat her breast in that same drawing-room and cry with an exceeding bitter cry, "Shy! We thought her shy! Sly! Sly! Sly to the tips of her fingers, the wicked girl!")

So she need respond with no more than her normal quiet smile, her normal tone, in their presence, of poor-relation deference and awe. So behind that mask could curl her lip and shudder in the refinements of her views at this most horrid preparation for this most horrid rite. And did. That dis-ease strangely fled, there came to her the swift belief that here, and she had not known it!--was that dis-ease's cause. It was the anticipation of this exhibition of all the things she hated most, of the most glaring presentiment of outrage of all her strongest principles. This Laetitia, embodiment of useless woman-hood, launching herself on that disgusting dependence on a man that soon would strand her among the derelicts; and that Laetitia's Harry, that might have been a man among men, coming to the apotheosis of his languishing to--oh, wreathed, fatted calf with gilded horns!

Yes, it was this had vexed her so; and suddenly informed of the seat of her injury she turned upon it disgust and scorn such as never before had she felt (and she, had felt it always) for the whole order of things for which it stood. She felt her very blood run acid, causing her to twist, in her acid contempt for the subservience of women, and most of all for that Laetitia's subservience, floated on that ghastly coquetry like a shifting cargo that in the first gale will capsize the ship; she felt her very temples throb, and almost thought they must be heard, in her fierce detestation of all the masculinity of men and most of all--yes, with a flash of eye she could not stay and hoped that he could see--that fatuous

Harry's masculinity.

He came into the room--looked pale--poor calf!--and went, with a nervous halt in his walk--sick fool!--to his Laetitia; and looked across at Rosalie and made a half-step to her; and she thought with all her force, to send it to him, her last words to him: that most malevolent, "to see you raise your eyes and hear you breathe, 'Ah, Laetitia!"; and surely sent it, for on that half-step towards her he stopped, hesitated, and turned and engaged Laetitia again.

She had told herself, leaving the Sturgiss's house that night a week ago, that she had not believed it possible to hate a man so. Now! Why that was not hate; that, compared with the inimity that now consumed her, was a mere chill indifference. And it had made her tremble! She was rigid now. Stiff with hate! He personified for her all in life against which she was in rebellion, all in life that her soul abhorred; and while, in the moments before dinner, grunting Uncle Pyke and rallying Aunt Belle and coquetting Laetitia crowded about him, leaving her alone and far apart, she, for the reason that it gave to her hate, and for the example that stood before her eyes, reviewed again her theories of life and again pledged herself in their support....

"Dinner is served." That group went laughing to the door, she followed. "No, no, my boy. Don't stand on ceremony. Pass along as we come. Why, hang it, man, we regard you as one of the family! Ha! ha! haw!" Down the stairs in a body, she following. There is, from their conversation, something the wreathed calf is to get from his coat to bring to show them, a letter or a token or something. The dining-room is to the front on the ground floor. The coats hang in the hall, a narrow passage there, that runs back to Uncle Pyke's study. They are down. "Shall I get it now?" "Yes, bring it along; bring it along, my boy." "And Rosalie" (Aunt Belle), "my fan, dear child. Dear child, I left it on the table in Uncle Pyke's den. You will? Dear child!"

They pass in. The gilded calf turns from them for what it is he is to fetch from his coat; she slips by him to the study and takes up the fan and comes with it again.

It is dim in the passage. A condition on which generous Uncle Pyke years before installed this wonderful electric light that you flick on and flick off as you require it was that it should always be flicked off when you did not require it. Now as Rosalie came from the study the passage was lit only by the shaft of light that gleamed from the dining-room door; its only sound Aunt Belle's noisy chatter from the waiting table.

He was fumbling at the coats, standing there sharply outlined against the stream of light, his face cut on it in a perfect silhouette. She had to pass him. That hateful he. She was seized with a fit of that same trembling that had shaken her after the passage between them at the gate on Shoot Up Hill. It shook her now, dreadfully. Her knees trembled. She felt faint. Awful to hate so! She was quite close, almost touching him. It was necessary he should move, forward or back, to give her room. But he did not move. His hands, outstretched before him on the coats, and sharp against the light, appeared to her to be shaking; but that was the hallucination of this frightful trembling that possessed her. She tried to say, "If

you please--," but, dreadfully, had no voice; but made some sound; and he, most slowly, drew back. It was before him that she had to pass.

She advanced; and felt, as if she saw it, the intensity of the gaze of his eyes upon her; and saw, as if the place were light and her look not averted, his "marching" face and those lines radiating to his temples (horizon tracks) where the faint touch of greyness was; and suddenly had upon her senses, with an extraordinary pungency, causing them to swim, that odd, nice smell there was about him of mingled peat and soap and fresh tobacco, of tweed and heather and the sea.

She caught her breath...

The thing's too poignant for the words a man has.

She was caught in his arms, terribly enfolding her. He was crying in her ears, passionately, triumphantly, "Rosalie! Rosalie!" She was in his arms. Those long, strong arms of his were round her; and she was caught against his heart, her face upturned to his, his face against her own; and she was swooning, falling through incredible spaces, drowning in incredible seas, sinking through incredible blackness; and in her ears his voice, coming to her in her extremity like the beat of a wing in the night, like the first pulsing roll of music enormously remote, "Rosalie! Rosalie!"

The thing's too poignant for the words one has. This girl's extremity was very great, not to be set in words. Words cannot bring to earth that which, ethereal, defies our comprehension as life and death defy it and, like life and death, to our comprehension only sublimely IS. Words only can say her spirit, bursting from bondage, streamed up to cleave to his; how tell the anguish, how the ecstasy? Words only can say her spirit, like a live part of her drawn out of her, seemed to be rushing upwards from her body to her lips; words cannot tell the anguish that was bliss, the rapture that was pain. Only can say that she was in his arms, her heart to his, his lips against her own, and cannot tell--

But also it is to be accounted to her for her extremity that herein all her life's habit was delivered over by her to betrayal.

CHAPTER XI

He was saying, "We must go in. Can you go in?" She breathed, "I can."

That dinner! That after-dinner in the drawing-room upstairs! It is a nightmare to be imagined, not to be described. Imagine walking from the darkness and the frightful secret of the passage into the

blazing dazzle and the glittering eyes of the resplendent dinner party! They, in Harry's absence, have been exchanging the last private nods and flashes. "Soon! Soon!" they have been nodding to one another. Uncle Pyke, licking his chops anticipatorily of his bath in his soup, has been licking them also in relish of working off his daughter in this excellent match; Aunt Belle, kind, kind Aunt Belle, with a last satisfied eye about the appointments of the table, has patted her Laetitia's hand and conveyed to her, "Soon, soon, darling; soon, soon!" Beautiful Laetitia has given a gentle, glad squeeze to the patting hand and smiled a lovely, happy, certain smile. "Soon! Soon!" has gone the jolly signal--and it is not going to be soon, nor late; it is never, never going to happen; and worse than never happen!

Worse than never happen! That's it. That is the awful knowledge of awful guilt with which Rosalie sits there and freezes in guilty agony at every pause in the conversation and could scream to notice how the pauses grow longer and longer, more frequent and more frequent yet. There's a frightful constraint, a chilly, creepy dreadfulness steals about the party. They go upstairs--Aunt Belle and Rosalie and beautiful Laetitia--and the constraint goes with them. They sit and stare and hardly a word said. Something's up! What's up? What's the matter with everything? Why is everything hanging like this! What's up? And the men come in--Uncle Pyke swollen with food, swollen with indigestion, swollen with baffled perplexity and ferocious irritation; and Harry--she dare not look at Harry--and the thing is worse, the awfulness more awful. Glances go shooting round the awful silences--Uncle Pyke's atrabilious eye in the burning fiery furnace of his swollen face is a stupendous note of interrogation directed upon Aunt Belle; Aunt Belle's eyebrows arch to scalp and appear likely to disappear into her scalp and remain there in the effort to express, "I don't know! I can't imagine!"; Laetitia--Laetitia's eyes upon her mother are as a spaniel's upon one devouring meat at table.

Frightfulness more frightful, awfulness more awful; in Rosalie almost now beyond control the desire to scream, or to burst into tears or wildly into laughter. Then she knows herself upon her feet and hears her voice: "Aunt Belle. I must go, I think. I think I am very tired to-night."

They suffer her to go.

That's all a nightmare; but, when the door is closed upon them, like a nightmare gone. She was alone upon the staircase and then down in the hall--by those coats!--and, as though no ghastly interval had been, the amazing and beloved moment was returned to her. Out of a nightmare into a dream! She stood in her dream a moment--two moments--three--by the hall door. Who till that evening never had thought of love, astonishingly was invested with all love's darling cunning. She felt somehow he would see her again before she left; and love's dear cunning told her right. He came swiftly down the stairs. She never knew on what pretext he had left the room. He came to her. Love loves these snatched moments and always makes them snatched to breathlessness. She opened the door and must be gone. She said to him, speaking first, "Oh, we were vile in there! How vile we were!"

It was, the intimacy and the abruptness of it, the perfect

comprehension that their thoughts were shared, as if they had known and loved for years.

He caught her hand. "My conspirator! My secret-sharer!"

She gave him her heart in her eyes.

He said, "To-morrow, I will come to you."

She disengaged her hand.

He gave a swift look all about and caught her in his arms. "You must tell me, my Rosalie. Tell me."

She breathed, "You knew, before I knew, that I loved you."

When she was home and got to her room she undressed, suffering her clothes to lie as they slipped from her. She got into bed, moving there and then lying there as one in trance.

Cataclysm! All she had been, all she had determined--all, all gone; all nothing, surrendered all. At a touch, in a moment, without a cry, without a shot, without a stroke, all her life's habit swept away. All she had been, all she'd designed, all she had built within herself and walled about herself, all she had scorned, all that with a violent antipathy she had shuddered from or with curled lip spurned away,--all, all betrayed, breached, mined, calamitously riven, tumultously sundered, burst away.

She turned her face to the pillow and began to cry--most frightfully.

It was very terrible for Rosalie.

PART THREE--HOUSE OF CHILDREN

CHAPTER I

There's none so sick as, brought to bed, that robust he that ever has scorned sickness; nor any sinner like a saint suddenly gone from saintliness to sin; and there can be no love like love suddenly leapt from repression into being.

Rosalie, that had abhorred the very name of love, now finding love was quite consumed by love. She loved him so! Even to herself she never could express how tremendous a thing to her their love was. She used deliberately to call it to her mind (as the new, rapt possessor of a jewel going specially to the case to peep and gloat again) and when she called it up like that, or when, in the midst of occupation, her mind secretly opened a door and she turned and saw it there, a surge, physically felt, passed through her, and

she would nearly gasp, her breath taken by this new, this rapturous element, as the bather's at his first plunge in the cold, the splendid sea.

She loved him so! She looked at him with eyes, not of an inexperienced girl blinded by love, but of one cynically familiar with the traits of common men, intolerantly prejudiced, sharply susceptible to every note or motion of displeasing quality; and her eyes told her heart, and what is much more told her mind, that nothing but sheer perfection was here. Harry was brilliantly talented, Harry was in face and form one that took the eye among a hundred men. But she had known all that and freely granted him all that before. What she found as she came to know him, and when they were married what she continued to find, was simply, that he was perfect. He was perfect in every way and there was no way in which, inclining neither to the too much nor the too little, he was not perfect.

The labour of a catalogue of her Harry's virtues is thus discounted. Name a virtue in a man and it was Harry's. Declare too much perfection is as ill to live with as too much fault, and it is precisely just before too much is reached that Harry's dowry stopped. Suggest she was blind to defects, and it is to be answered that there was no man who knew him that ever had a thought against him (except Uncle Pyke, Colonel Pyke Pounce, R.E., who, justifiably, was warned by his physician never to think upon the monster lest apoplexy should supervene) nor any fellow man in his profession (and that is the supreme test) that ever grudged him his success. Disgruntled barristers, morosely brooding upon the fall of plums into other mouths than theirs, always said, when it was Harry's mouth: "Ah, Occliffe; yes, but he's different. No one grudges Harry Occliffe what he gets."

Different! In Rosalie's fond, fondest love for him she often used to hug her love by making that catalogue of all his parts that has been shown not to be necessary. And it was the little, tiny things wherein he differed from common men that especially she cherished. By the deepest part of her nature terribly susceptible to the grosser manifestations of the male habit, it was extraordinarily wonderful and delicious to her that Harry of these had none. In an age much given to easy freedom of language it will not be appreciated, it perhaps will cause the pair of them to be sneered at, but it demands mention as illuminating a characteristic of hers (and of his), that she had, for instance, especial delight in the fact that Harry never even swore. The impossible test in the matter of self-command is when a man hits his thumb with a hammer. What does a bishop say when he does that? But she saw Harry catch his thumb a proper crack hanging a picture in the house they took, and, "Mice and Mumps!" cried Harry, and dropped the hammer and the picture, and jumped off the stepladder, and did a hop, and wrung his hand, and laughed at her and wrung his hand and laughed again. "Mice and Mumps!"

"Mice and Mumps!" It always seemed to her to characterise and to epitomise him, that grotesque expression. It always made her laugh; and the more serious the accident or the dilemma that brought it to Harry's lips, the more, by pathos, one was forced to laugh and the seriousness thereby dissipated into an affair not serious at all. Yes, that was the point of it and the reason it epitomised him. There was none of life's dilemmas--little dilemmas that irritate

ordinary people or in which ordinary people display themselves pusillanimous; or tragic dilemmas that find ordinary people wanting and leave them in vacillation and despair--there was none of any sort that Harry, receiving with his comic, "Mice and Mumps! Mice and Mumps, old girl!" did not receive with the assurance to her that, though this was a nuisance, he had metal and to spare to settle such; that, though this was a catastrophe, a facer, he'd too much courage, too much high, brave spirit for it to discommode him; there was no fight in such, he was captain of such, trust him!

"One who never turned his back but marched breast forward."

That was Harry!

"Mice and Mumps!" On the evening of the day following that astounding betrothal of theirs, affianced as it were at a blow--a day spent together in the park complete, without a break for food or thought of occupation--on the evening of that day he must go, he declared, to the horrific castle in Pilchester Square and break the awful news, proclaim his villainy.

She was terrified. "They'll kill you, Harry. Write."

"No, no. I've been a howling cad. It's true, a howling cad, not of guile, but of these astounding things that have happened to us outside ourselves, but nevertheless a howling cad as such conduct is judged, and will be judged. So I must go through it. I must. That's certain. I couldn't hide behind a letter. They are entitled to tell me to my face what they think of me. They must have their right. Oh, yes, I've got to give them that. To-night. Now."

A howling cad, but of forces outside themselves ("Too quick for me," he had explained), not of guile.

He had explained, in those enchanted hours in the park, that it was really by resolve to do the right thing, and not to do the caddish thing, that he had presented himself the howling cad that they would hold him. That night at the Sturgiss's at Cricklewood had charged him ("Oh, Rosalie, like bursting awake to breathe from suffocation in a dream.") what for many days, only looking at her, never speaking to her, suffering her not veiled contempt, he had felt as one feels a premonition that is insistent but that cannot be defined--that night had charged him that he loved her. He was no way definitely committed to poor Laetitia. Was he more wrong if, now knowing his heart was elsewhere, he maintained and carried to its consummation the intimacy between Laetitia and himself, or if he stopped while yet he had not gone too far? He had decided to break while yet it might, be broken. There was an invitation from Mrs. Pyke Pounce he had accepted. He wrote, endeavouring to give a meaning to his words, excusing himself from it.

She murmured, "I remember." ("Nothing in it, dear child; nothing in it!")

There came back a letter from Colonel Pyke Pounce in which Colonel Pyke Pounce also had endeavoured to give a meaning to his words, and had succeeded. Now Harry knew his problem of moral conduct in a fiercer form; now, resolving to do what he told himself was the right thing and not the caddish thing, he took the step that made

him be the howling cad that they would think him. ("But, Rosalie, gave me you!")

He had resolved that he must accept the invitation, present himself at the house--and let the hour decide. As the situation revealed itself so he would accept it. If it was made clear to him, as the Pyke Pounce letter much gave him to believe, that proposal for Laetitia's hand was expected of him, he would "do the right thing" and stand by what his behaviour apparently had led them to expect; if the way still seemed open, the door not shut behind him, he would very frankly explain to Laetitia's grisly father that he thought it best his visits to the house from now should cease. The hour should decide! But there was in the hour, when it came, one terrible, one lovely element that he never had expected to be there. In all his visits to the house Rosalie never had been met on any other day than Saturday. This dinner was on the Monday, and arriving to face and carry through his ordeal, he was startled, he was utterly shaken to see her there. ("To see my darling there.")

O forces outside themselves! "When you had to pass me in the passage nothing mattered then--except I could not let you pass."

So it was that now, the right thing not having been done on that night, the right thing in this new position must be done to-day. They were entitled to tell him to his face what they thought of him and they must have their right. That was his view and he would not abate it.

"They'll kill you, Harry."

They had come by this to the corner of Pilchester Square and there he bade her wait. She said again, part laughing, most in fear, "They'll kill you."

"I've got to give them the chance to do their best."

And off he went, strongly, erect. One who never... but marched breast forward.

Waiting for him, she really was terrified for him. Ferocious Uncle Pyke! Terrific Aunt Belle! Swollen and infuriated Uncle Pyke! Bitter and outraged Aunt Belle!

In twenty minutes came the crash of a slammed front door that clearly and terribly was Uncle Pyke Pounce slamming it as if he would hurl it through its portals and crash it on to Harry down the steps.

Harry reappeared, uncommonly grave.

She put out a hand to him, dreadfully anxious.

"Mice and Mumps!" said Harry. "Mice and Mumps!"

You couldn't help laughing! But also, squeezing the strong arm beneath which he tucked her hand, you felt, with such a thrill, from that grotesque expression, and from his face as he said it, that this, like every forward thing, had in it nothing that could discommode that high, brave spirit: no fight in such; he was captain of such, trust him!

Thus also her delight in another form, and yet in the same form, in that grotesque expression, when it was ejaculated as his sole expletive when he caught his thumb that frightful crack while hanging a picture in what was to be his study in their newly taken house.

Any other man in the world, even a bishop, would have sworn; would have sworn no doubt harmlessly and with an honest heartiness to which the most pious prude could not have taken exception. Agreed! But the point was--that Harry didn't!

She loved him so! She insisted she must bind up the thumb with her pocket handkerchief, and did, Harry protesting; and for years, still loving him with the old, first love, she often would be reminded by the picture of the incident and of her joy in it.

Yes, the only expletive she ever heard him use; and, lo, in that very room, years on, he seated beneath that very picture, she was to come to him with news (and hers the guilt of it) that for the first time was to strike him between the joints of his harness, visibly ageing him as she spoke, and for the first time cause him to groan his pain. She was to glance at the picture as she spoke and very terribly its merry association to be recalled to her. She was to recall him young, gay, tremendously splendid, wringing his damaged hand, laughing, "Mice and Mumps!" She was to see him, grey ascendant upon the raven of his hair, shrinking down in his seat, wilting as one slowly collapsing after a stunning blow, and at her news (and hers the guilt of it) to hear his voice go, not exclamatorily, but in a thick mutter, as one dazed, bewildered, in a fog, "My God, my God, my God, my God!"

How could one ever have foreseen that?

CHAPTER II

She loved him so! On that first day together in the park she told him everything about herself, about all her ideas and theories and principles, particularly where these touched his sex, even about that terrible fit of crying of hers in bed an hour after she had left him. And Harry understood everything and agreed with her in everything. O rapturous affinity!

They met early when business London was rushing to business. They stayed late, with no thought of food or of their occupations, till business London was returning, and night, in lamps below and stars above, was setting out its sentinels.

She told him everything; and even if she had wished not to open all her heart, there would have been the immense selection of everything--every single thing about herself--from which to choose

to tell him. For there never had been such a betrothal as theirs; done at a blow with no single intimate thing ever before passed between them! Her very first words to him as they met, her greeting of him as they came together, showed how preposterous and never-before-imagined was their affiancement. "You know, it's incredible," she greeted him. "It's incredible, it's grotesque, it's flatly impossible--I've never before seen you except in your dress clothes or at afternoon tea!"

Harry took both her hands in his. "But I think I've wanted you," said Harry, "ever since I was in long clothes. I know I've wanted you ever since first I saw you."

One knows another, in her place, would have bantered this off in that modern attitude towards love which is a horror, boisterously expressed, of admitting love as an emotion. Rosalie, that had scorned the very name of love, and that, because betrayed by love, had turned her face to her pillow and cried most frightfully, received it with a sound that was between a sigh and a catching of her breath. She loved him so!

And then they talked; and the thing between them, that had come so wonderfully, was so wonderful that they were as it were transfigured by it, as awe and spirituality and mysticism would fill the dwellers in a house visited by a miracle of God. So wonderful, that conversation, they would have felt, was not possibly a word for all that occupied them in those rapturous hours: not conversation, no,--a sublime engagement of their spirits wherein (possessing the keys of all the wonders), seas, continents and worlds of thoughts were traversed by them, in every clime most exquisite affinity discovered.

As at a blow they had become affianced, so, with no stage between, but in immediate sequence perfectly natural to them both, the natural repercussion of the blow, they talked immediately of betrothal's consummation, of marriage, of their marriage.

About marriage Rosalie had immensely much to tell Harry. It was what she had principally to say, and this is how and why and what she told him.

When from her first terrible dismay--that frightful crying, her face turned to the pillow--she had recovered; when to the lovely ardour of her love--stealing about her, soothing her, in the night; bursting upon her, ravishing her, in the morning--she had passed on; she remembered her second line of her defences and she fell back upon it. "If ever I fell in love," she had often said, alike to Keggo and to Miss Salmon, "if such an impossible thing ever were to happen to me, I'd marry as marriage should be. I'd enter a partnership. I would live my life; he would live his life; together, when we wanted to, when we were off duty, so to speak, we would live our life. A partnership, a mutually free and independent partnership."

The second line of her defences! Oh, strong and reassuring thought! Of course, of course the first line, breached and swept away, had never really mattered. Foolish to have wept for it! It was built against love and she knew now, by her darling and her terrible experience, that against love----! Nay, in that whelming admission's very tide, sweeping upon her from envisagement of Harry and bearing

her deliciously upon its flood, there had come a thought as strong with wine as that was sweet with honey. Built against love! Why, in seeking to build against love, to shut away love from her life, was she not perpetrating against herself the very act--denial of anything a free life might have--that it was her life's first principle to oppose? A man's place, a man's part, everything that a man by conventional dowry is given, hers should be as freely as a man's it is! That was her aim; that at once the basis of her standpoint and the target of her shaft; and lo, at the very outset of her independence, she had sought to deny herself that which (as now she knew) was life's most lovely gift. She was steadfast, and she was caparisoned, to obtain and to possess the things that, of her sex, commonly a woman might not have, and she was shutting herself from that which, if it offers, not all the man-owned world can deny the woman lowliest in office, heaviest in chains, deepest in servitude!

O senselessness! She could see, as looking upon an individuality not her own, that foolish girl that for such had turned her face to her pillow and cried out her heart; and at that very moment, and no other, of smiling pity for that mistaken grief, there came to Rosalie a sudden sense of womanhood attained; of much increase of years and wisdom; of growth of stature; of transportation, as from one world to another, from the character and the presence that had been hers to a personality and a body that looked down upon that other as, tenderly, a mother upon the innocence of her small child.

That poor, brave, foolish Rosalie that was! Did she protest, that foolish girl, that she was right in what had been her attitude to love? Did she with would-be bitterness recall those views laid down upon the women in the boarding house--that they were derelicts precisely through this love business, abandoned of men, relict of men, footsore and fallen in pursuit of men?

Ah, small, misguided creature! The principles were right but all askew the application. Love! Consider other attributes of life. Consider learning; consider food. Learning and food--were they not bounties of life's treasure, to be absorbed and used for sustenance in order, by their nourishment, to give to live this life more fully? Why, so with love! Derelicts, those women, because receiving love (that loveliest gift of all!) not as a means but as an end--the end of all: that attained, everything attained; that won, all finished. That was it! That the misapplication! Learning, or food, or love--the same with all! How dead the life that only lived in scholarship; how gross the life that only lived to eat; how derelict that she that only lived to love, to marry--then ceased to live!

And equally, O small, misguided girl, how starved the life that has no books; how weak the frame that has no food; ah, dear (thus smiled she to herself), how dead the life that knows not love!

The second line of her defences! Nay, as now through this mature and happy cogitation she saw it, the first and last and only line! In her aloneness, in that girl's single life, there had been nothing against which to defend. She had fought phantoms, that girl; resisted shadows. Now was the necessity, now the test; and now, because with Harry, because she loved him so, because he was every way and in all things perfect, now should be the triumphant exposition.

And she told Harry: marriage that should be a partnership--not an absorption by the greater of the less; not one part active and the other passive; one giving, the other receiving; one maintaining, the other maintained; none of these, but instead a perfect partnering, a perfect equality that should be equality of place, equality of privilege, equality of duty, equality of freedom. "Harry, each with work and with a career. Harry, each living an own life as every man, away from home, shutting his front door upon that home and off to work, leads an own and separate life. Harry--"

Oh, wonderful beneath this imperturbable sky, amongst these common, passive things--these paths, those trees, that grass, this bench--within this seclusion of that murmurous investment of this city, the ceaseless roar of London, standing like patient walls, eternal and indifferent, about her quietudes. Oh, wonderful in these accustomed and insensible surroundings thus to be calling "Harry," as he were brother, him that a day and night away virtually was unmet; to be exposing, as to a gracious patron, all her mind's treasury of thought; to be revealing, as in confessional, her inmost places of her heart; to be receiving, as by transfusion, the glow of affirmation on her way and in her trust. Oh, wonderful!

Wonderful, because remember for her that she was still beneath the shock of her dismay at her betrayal of herself; still breathless at that rout from her prepared positions; not yet assured her banners were unsullied in their withdrawal to her second line; not yet convinced it was no rout but a withdrawal, wise and strategical, ranks unbroken, to the true point of her defence.

Do try to imagine her, tremulous in this her vital enterprise, tremulous in this wonder that her armies found. It is very desirable to remember what can be remembered for that girl.

CHAPTER III

Harry assured her! Harry convinced her! Harry was here upon the battlements, come with her in her retirement, joined with her as her ally. All her ideas were his ideas. He, too, had these new views of marriage. He said they always had been his. He hated, as she hated, that old dependence notion: all the privileges the man's, the woman's all the duties. That was detestable to him, said Harry. Marriage in his view--

"I'll tell you this," was one thing Harry said. "I'll show it to you this way, Rosalie. I don't exactly know what a reciprocating machine is, but I know what it sounds like, and what it sounds like is what a marriage ought to be,--a perfect fitting together, a perfect harmonising, a perfect joining of two perfect halves that everywhere reciprocate."

The word delighted her. A reciprocating machine! Yes, yes! Each an own part; each with own and separate interests; and their parts, and the production arising out of their interests--their individual selves--approached together, by free will, to join towards a mutual benefit, a shared endeavour, a common advancement, a single end.

She was desperately in earnest and so was he. There was a mill near his people's home in Sussex, a water mill, and his illustration by it of the design they had showed her how earnestly her own ideas were his. There were two wheels to this mill, Harry told her, one on either side. Each ran in its own stream, each was entirely independent of the other; they worked alone, but each helped the other's work; the mill joined them and they joined to make the mill.

That was it!

And she was not talking any generalities, and Harry was not, either. They weren't, either of them, playing with this idea of mutual independence. There would "of course" be a business basis to it, Rosalie said. She was earning her own income and she would pay her half of the upkeep of their home together. It was a stipulation that she advanced with a definite fear that here, at last, she might be taking Harry from his depth; that by natural instinct of generosity, or by instinct of immemorial custom to endow the wife with all the husband's worldly goods, he would here reveal a flaw in his till now flawless duplication of the views that were her own.

But Harry (the never failing rapture of it!) was every way without spot or blemish. He was looking straight and close into her eyes while she put forward this, and there moved not the least dissentient shade across his own while he received it. She need have had no fear. He said, "I agree absolutely with that, Rosalie. There's only one point--" and his expansion of this point wholly entranced her because it established conditions even more matter-of-fact and businesslike than her own broad principle.

"There's only one point," Harry said. "It can't be half and half in terms of actual bisection. Look, Rosalie, in this matter of running the home we're making a contract between two parties and--don't forget I'm a lawyer--it has to be an equable and just contract, and to be that it has to be based for each party's liability--Do you like me to use the law jargon?"

She nodded. "I do, I do!" This was frightfully, entrancingly serious for her. This was a survey of the fortifications of her second line of her defences. "I do, I do!"

"Well, has to be based for each party's liability on each party's interest, on the extent to which each party is involved. I'm making more--an uncommon good bit more--than you are, Rosalie. My interest, therefore my liability, that is, my share, has to be allowed to be proportionately the more. Put it in another way. We're going to run an establishment as an establishment might be run by two or more people of different incomes who wish to join forces for mutual pleasure, two or three relatives, two or three friends. Well, there's a regular principle governing that kind of arrangement. You don't all pay the same. If you did, you'd reduce the scale of living to

the level of what the poorest can afford, and half the idea of the combination is to enjoy a very much better scale. No, you run the show on the level the wealthiest is willing to go to, and to the total charge each one contributes in the proportion of his income. If one party has a thousand a year and the other five hundred, and the thousand-pounder wants to live at the rate of nine hundred a year, he pays six hundred and the other three hundred. Each is paying his just share--that's the point. That's how we'd arrange it, Rosalie."

She loved him so! If that were said a thousand times (as already perhaps too often for the robust) it still would not approach the volume of its swelling in the heart of Rosalie, for that was ceaseless. His attitude in this matter now between them, as in every matter, might have been the perfect agreement with her own view that it was and yet might so have been presented as to be much antipathetic to her. His attitude might have made her feel she ought to say, "Thank you, Harry, for agreeing to that"; it might have had the note, "I know exactly how you feel about marriage; I want to make every-thing just as you wish." Quicksands! Principles to be received as grants, bases of her defences to be accepted as concessions! Quicksands! At either attitude, as at a foreign flavour in a cup, she would have drawn back, suspicious; at either sense within herself, of winning a favour, of accepting a hazard, she would have taken alarm, dismayed. But it was why she loved him so that here, as everywhere, his standpoint was her standpoint's own reflection. She was, as she would have said, deadly in earnest; deadly in earnest to a depth that she could let go to absurdity and never know it for absurdity; and so was he.

Approving this plan of computation of the share that each would pay, "It would have to be done strictly," she said, "as though it were strictly business. And--you don't know, perhaps--I'm making, or soon shall be, just on five hundred a year."

He smiled the nice smile of his she loved, more with his eyes than with his lips. "I'm afraid mine's a good bit more than that. Money's rather pushed at you at the Bar once it starts. You'd have to put up with that."

Her fondness in her eyes reflected him. "I know how famous you are getting. I'd not be stupid about that, Harry. It would be the just share, each according to our means; that's understood. Only, for me, it would have to be the just share, that's what I'm saying; not a matter of form, a strict proportion."

"If you liked," said Harry, "we'd give the figures to the costs clerk at my chambers and let him work the contributions out."

"Absurd!" she might have laughed; and as an absurdity he might, with a laugh, have presented it. But quite gravely he made the suggestion, and quite gravely, after a moment's grave thought, "I don't think that would be necessary," she returned.

His earnestness in this thing so vital to her matched her own, and therefore she loved him; and he yet could bring to it lightly a touch which, though light, yet was profoundly based; and therefore, newly, she loved him. She knew she talked with immense profligacy of words in her endeavour to make clear the principles this second

line of her defences must maintain. "Each with work and with a career, each with an own and separate life." She kept repeating that. "Equal in work and in responsibility, Harry, and therefore equal in place, in privilege, in freedom."

And Harry, with a light touch but a grave air, a happy setting for a profound meaning, put it in a sentence. "Things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another," said Harry.

She loved him so!

But there ought here to be explained for her what, loving him so and he so loving her, she could not have known for herself. This plan of maintaining their establishment by contribution of share and share was maintained by Rosalie from the beginning--to the end. She never had cause to doubt that in all the earnestness of that close conversation Harry was utterly sincere. She often recalled that steady gaze with no dissentient shade across it with which his eyes received her statement of her case and knew that only truth was in that gaze. He did believe what she believed. It only was afterwards she discovered that also he believed that, both for her and him, the thing would mellow down as mellows down the year, her heady Aprils burnt in June, her burning Junes assuaging to September; that it would pass; that time--

Yes, it must be explained. It was not active in his mind, this reservation. It was passive, underlying, subconscious, as beneath vigour's incredulity of death lies passively admission of death's final certitude. He believed what she believed; but he believed it as are believed infinity and eternity: wherein mankind, believing, reposes upon that limitation of the human mind which cannot conceive infinity but sees ultimately an end, and can pretend eternity through myriad years but feels ultimately a termination. Harry believed what she believed but only by stabilisation of a man's inherent articles of faith. He was of the male kind; and observe, by an incident, what inherent processes of thought the male kind has:

When they were looking over the house which ultimately they took--an all ways most desirable house in Montpelier Crescent, Knightsbridge--Rosalie had only a single objection: it was far too big.

"Miles too big," cried Rosalie, coming up to the second floor where Harry had preceded her. "What are you doing there, Harry? Miles too big, I was saying. It really is. Of course I realise you must have a house suitable to your fame but--What are you doing, Harry?"

"Fame, yes," breathed Harry, desperately occupied. "I've turned on this tap and I can't turn it off again. Eternal fame. After me the deluge!"

She was looking around. "But, Harry, really! Look at this floor. Two more huge rooms. What can we--"

"Mice and Mumps!" groaned Harry, straining at the tap. "Mice and Mumps!"

He came to her wiping his hands on his handkerchief. "Too big! Look here, supposing this house isn't washed away by that tap. Suppose

it's still standing here tomorrow. Take a broad, courageous view of the thing. Suppose this isn't the beginning of the Great Flood of London, and that we're going to live in a house and not an ark. Well, what you've got to remember is that we're not coming in here for a week. We've got to look ahead. Take these two rooms. Why, you can see what they're for, what they've been. Opening into one another, and those little bars on the windows, and that protected fireplace. Nurseries. Day nursery and night nursery."

Rosalie laughed.

CHAPTER IV

That's all done. The thing traverses the waters of the years, as across seas a ship, and makes presently a new shore, a new clime, wherein are met occasions new and strange, not anticipated by Rosalie.

Here is one.

Habitant in the new continent across these years, she is wife and, though she had laughed, is mother, and on a day is with her Harry, and Harry is saying, not at all with any hardness in his voice, but very gravely:

"I have a right to a home."

She replies, as grave as he, as one debating a matter that is weighty but that is before the arbitrament, not of feeling, but of reason, "Harry, you have a home."

A gesture of his head, much comprehensive, is made by him: "Is this a home?"

"It's where we live."

"Ah, where we live, Rosalie!"

She did not reply to this. Himself, and not she, spoke next; but his note was as though she had answered and he were speaking in his turn. "I have a right to a home. The children have a right to a home."

She said, "Then, Harry, give yourself a home. Give the children a home."

He said, "Rosalie, I am a man."

She answered, "Harry, I am a woman."

Harry was smoking and he drew an inhalation from his pipe with a long sibilant sound: her answer was very well understood by him.

No, she never had anticipated this.

Yet might not she have seen? Astounding how in life one's suddenly engulfed in depths and never has perceived the shoals from which they led; suddenly entombed in night and never has perceived the gradual declination of the day! Why, when she looked back, so far away as in those days of choosing their house had been in seed this thing that now was come to fruit. And she had watched it grow from seed to seedling, and on to bud and blossom, and never had suspected.

But had she not? Then it was curious, she knew, that, alone of all her thoughts, all her beliefs, all her theories, her observations and her deductions from her observations, curious that of them all only a certain observation, made when choosing their house, she never had told to Harry.

Choosing their house! She had gone back to her rooms from the third day of their house-hunting gently amused at an addition to her compendium of lore on the male habit. It was in a way like the cat idea; at least it was, like that, reversal of a common opinion on distinguishing traits as between men and women. It went in her mind like this and, because it arose out of Harry, she laughed softly to herself as like this she shaped it:

"They say a woman marries for a home. Wrong, wrong! It's man that marries for a home--a home that, having got it, superficially he cares little enough about, and superficially uses as a good place to get away from; but that's just how he uses his business, how he uses everything. Oh, he wants it, he wants it, and he marries for it far more than a woman wants it or marries for it. How plain it is! A man marries to settle down, a woman for just precisely the opposite: to break up; to get away from the constraints of daughterhood and of Miss-hood, as a schoolgirl, holiday-bound, from the constraints of school; to enlarge her life, not to restrict it; to aerate her life, not to compose it. Why, it's inherent in a man, the desire for a home; it's in his bones. Look at little boys playing--it's caves and tents and wigwams they delight to play at; a place they can in part discover and in part construct, and then arrange their things in, and then go off exploring and then, all the time, be coming back to the delicious cave and creep in and block up the door! Girls don't play at that; they play at shops and being grown up, at nursing dolls and not themselves being nursed. But that's your man--a hunter with a cave, and the return to the cave the best part of the hunting. That's what he marries for--a home; a pitch of his own; a place to bring his things to and wherein to keep his things; an establishment; a solid, anchored base; a place where he can have his wife and his children and his dogs and his books and his servants and his treasures and his slippers and his ease, and can feel, comfortably, that she and they and it are his,--his mysterious cave with the door blocked up, his base, his moorings, his settled and abiding centre. Dear Harry!"

"Dear Harry" because all this had come to her while with secret, fond amusement she had watched Harry delightedly and entrancedly fussing about the houses they explored. The boy with a cave! The man with a home! She liked the idea of a new home, and a home with

Harry, but, given outstanding features obviously essential, almost any home would have satisfied her. She was animated and interested in the choosing, but not with Harry's interest and animation. Hers were the feelings with which she had established herself in the two-room suite at the boarding house. There any two rooms would have done; here any pleasant house would do. It was not the rooms; it was the significance of her entry into their possession. It was not the house; it was the significance of all connoted by the house. The rooms had been a stepping-off place to independence larger and to triumphs new; the house was a stepping-off place to independence, to triumphs, to battle of life and to joy of life, lifted upon a plane high above her old world as the stars, as bright and keen as they.

But for Harry it was a stepping-in place.

It was Harry that fussed and examined and measured and opened and shut and tested and tried and must have this and must have that. It was Harry who saw everything with the eye that was going to see it and live with it permanently and for all time. It was Harry who invested every square yard of every interior with the attributes that should be there when they therein were domiciled. Harry who said, "This front door! Rosalie, we're going to have a front door that will hit you in the eye and make you say 'Mice and Mumps, there's a distinguished couple that live behind a door like that!' None of your wretched browns and greens and blacks and reds for our door, Rosalie! We'll have a yellow front door, gamboge. I've seen it on a house in Westminster. I'll take you there. You wait till you see it. Imagine it, Rosalie, beneath that lovely old fanlight overhead. And then yellow window boxes tinted to match in every window and crammed with flowers. It'll be a house you'll run to get into directly you catch sight of it. Then inside here, in the hall, there'll be the thickest rugs money can buy and the brightest light and the warmest stove. You'll step in and shut the yellow door and, 'Mice and Mumps,' you'll say, 'this is home!' Now, look here; here'll be my study; I'll have bookshelves built in all round there and there and there. Pictures there. This nook--I'll fix a little cupboard there and keep my tools in. I'll spend half my time our first weeks pottering about with a hammer and a pair of pliers. This place just here on the landing. Looks like a dungeon. We'll knock out a window there and fit it up with hot and cold water as a cloak room. Now here's your room, your--"

"My study," she had interpolated, a little apprehensive lest for her private room he should use another word.

"Yes, your study, rather. Each of us with our own study! A lark, eh? And Rosalie, in mine there'll be a special chair for you and in yours a special chair for me. We'll stroll in on each other's work--"

She loved him for that. "Like two men in chambers," she said.

His reply was, "We'll rip out this fireplace and put you in one in oak; the walls something between gold and brown, eh? Now come into the drawing-room. This'll be the room. Let's start with the hearth and imagine it's winter. This is where we'll have tea the days when I get back in time--"

"And when I get back in time."

"Of course, I'd forgotten that. Why, then whichever of us is back first will be all ready with the tea and waiting to welcome the other. Can't you see the room? Warm, shadowed, glowing here and there, here and there gleaming, and the tea table shining? Won't it be a place to rush back to? I say, Rosalie, it's going to be rather wonderful, isn't it?"

Dear Harry! Yes, men that married for a home.

So she had known that from the start; and, the significant thing (as later perceived) she never had mentioned it to Harry. There was not a line of her life, as lived before she knew him, that she had not revealed to him; there was not a passage of her life, when joined to his, that was not handed to him to write upon; but this, that she knew he'd married for a home, was never revealed, never inscribed upon the tablets submitted daily for his annotation.

Yes, significant!

But how could its significance have been perceived? Look here, there had been a night--a thousand years ago!--when a girl had turned her face to her pillow and cried, most frightfully. Significant! Why, that girl's world had lain in atoms at the significance of that girl's grief. And she that now looked back had been born out of those tears, as the first woman drawn from the side of the first man, and fondly had chid that child that no significance was there at all. There was none. There was nothing to fear. A natural joy of life that had been stifled had been embraced, a shattered world had been remoulded on foundations firmer and, ah, nearer to the heart's desire. Significant! It had been so disproved that not more possibly could fears arise from those, her lovely dissipations of those fears, than from its watchful mother's reassuring candle and her soothing words new terrors to a frightened child at night.

Then how, she used to ask herself, could significance have been perceived in not admitting Harry to her smiling thought on men and home? Significance--then? Nay, memory bear witness, much, much the contrary! Bear witness, memory, it was that very thought of Harry as boy with cave, as man with home, had suddenly suffused her with...

"Dear Harry!" she had thought, and with the thought...

Anna! That cry of Anna's upon that frightening night, striking her hands against her bosom, "I have a longing--here!" Never till then its meaning nor even thought upon its meaning.

Then! Upon that thought--"Dear Harry!"--had come, with a catch at the breath as at an obscure twinge of pain, a tremor of the sense that was its meaning: thereafter flooding all her being as floods a flood a pasture. A longing to be mother, Anna's longing was! A longing to be mother, to hold a tiny scrap against her breast; to have her heart, bursting for such release, torn out by baby fingers; to have her design of God, insufferably overpacked within her by the remorseless pressure of instinct through a million ages, relieved, discharged, fulfilled by motherhood. Poor Anna! Ah, piteous! "Oh, God, thou knowest how hard it is to be a woman." Poor, piteous Anna, and poor, piteous every woman that, made vessel of this yearning,

must have it unfulfilled.

Not she!

The coronet of love, denied poor Anna, was hers. He'd said "These rooms--the nurseries"; the crown of love; and she had laughed!

Oh, stubborn still! Oh, still not cognisant of nature's dower to her sex. To wear the coronet and to refuse the crown! To be wife and not to be mother! To think of baby fingers and to think to put away the offer of their baby clutch!

That girl that turned her face to her pillow and began to cry, most frightfully, cried next again when she again lay abed and had a tiny scrap, an ugly, exquisite, grotesque, miraculous scrap, a baby boy, a baby man, along her arm and watched it there. Those had been passionate and rending tears; these did not even flow. Those burned her eyes; these stood within her eyes a lovely welling up of pride and adoration, drawn from her by this newly risen wonder as by the sun at his arising moisture in lovely mists is drawn from earth.

Motherhood! When later he was christened, she and Harry named him Hugh; but it was a caressing diminutive she made out of his name by which he was always known. Her tiny son! His tiny arms hugged you as never tiny arms possibly could have hugged before and so she called him "Huggo."

"Harry, if you could feel how he's hugging me! It's absurd he can have such strength! It's ridiculous he can love me so! And how can he possibly know that hugging's a sign of love? Harry, how can he? Take him and hold him up like that and see if he hugs you the same. He is! He is! Isn't he?"

"Mice and Mumps," said Harry, "he is; he's throttling me, the tiger."

"Ah, give him back, I'm jealous. There's never, never been a hugger like him since the world began. He's Huggo. That's his name. Creature straight out of heaven, you're Huggo."

Her love for infant Huggo so maternal; her unity with Harry so exquisitely one; how could she have known were to be met across the waters of the years occasions new and strange, as that already shown, or, onward yet a further voyage, as this?

The matter between them touched the same as when, "I have a right to a home; the children have a right to a home," Harry had said. But their tones not the same; in Harry's voice a quality of dulness as of one reciting a lesson too often conned yet never understood; in hers a certain weariness as with instruction too often given.

They had been talking a very long time. Harry hadn't any arguments. He just kept coming back and coming back to the one thing. He said again, the twentieth time, in that dull voice, "We are responsible for the children. We have a duty towards them."

The twentieth time! She made a gesture, not impatient, just tired, that was of repletion with this thing. "Ah, you say 'we' have a duty. You say 'we'; but, Harry, you mean me. Why I a duty more than

you? Why am I the accused?"

Harry's dull note: "Because you are a woman." Ineffable weariness was in the murmur that was her reply. "Ah, my God, that reason!" No, she had never anticipated this.

CHAPTER V

How did it happen? Within her face abode the explanation of how it happened.

There was a mirage in her face.

If she were taken (for a moment) when she had been married ten years, her age thirty-two, and then taken again when she was forty-six, when she had done, when, in 1922, she said, "I have done," and her story ceases, it is material to a portrait of her that in those fourteen years her appearance did not greatly change. Events inscribed it; but these writings were in two scripts, rendered in the two natures that were hers, and, as it were, a balance was maintained between them; there remained constant the aspect that her face presented to the world; constant, that is to say, the spirit that looked out of her face.

That girl that at the door of the great house in Pilchester Square had breathed, "You knew, before I knew, that I loved you," had been called beautiful. This woman that now was wife and now was mother was beautiful with that girl's beauty and with her own, matured of years, set upon it. That girl, shaded in her colouring, commonly was sombre in her hue, but with a quick, impetuous spirit beneath her flesh that, flashing, somehow lightened all her tints; this woman, albeit dark, had somehow about her a deep golden hue as of dusk in a deep wood beheld against a sunset. Her face had always had a boyish look and still, with years, was boyish. There was a mirage in her face. The stranger glanced and saw a mother--extraordinarily shielding and maternal and benignant things; and looked again and saw a boy--astonishingly reckless and impetuous and rather boyish, hard and mutinous things. Or glanced and saw a boy, perhaps laughing and eager, perhaps obstinate and petulant; and looked again and only much tenderness was there.

There was a mirage in her face; and with its changes her voice changed. When she was a boy her voice was April; when she was a mother September was her voice.

There were two natures in her and those were their reflections; two lodestars set above her that by turns brightened and drew her gaze; two lodestones set within her that claimed her banners as claim the moon and earth the inconstant sea; one of head, one of heart; one of choice, one of dower; one of will, one of nature.

In that tenth year her married life there stood for the mother in her face three children: Huggo who then was nine; Dora, whom she called Doda because in her first prattle this heart's delight of hers—"A baby girl! A beloved one, Harry, to be daughter to me, and to be a tiny woman with me as little girls always are, and then budding up beside me and being myself to me again, my baby girl, my daughter, my woman-bud, my heart's own heart!"--had thus pronounced her name, who then was seven; and last Benjamin, then five, whom she named Benjamin because, come third, come after cognizance of conflict within herself, come after resentment of his coming--called Benjamin because, come out of such, there were such happy tears, such tender, thank-God, charged with meaning tears to greet him, the one the last of three, the little tiny one, so wee beside the lusty, toddling others. Benjamin she told Harry he must be named; Benji she always called him.

Huggo and Doda and Benji! Her children! Her darling ones, her lovely ones! Love's crown; and, what was more, worn in the persons of these darling joys of hers (when they were growing up to nine and seven and five years old) in signal, almost arrogant in her disdain of precedent to the contrary, that woman might be mother and yet work freely in the markets of the world precisely as man is father but follows a career.

Children! There had been a time when, speaking from the boy that would stand mutinous and reckless in her face, and with her April voice, she had expressed her view on parentage in terms of the old resentment at the old disability, encountered, bedrocked, wherever into life she struck a new trail; in terms of the old inversion of an old conceit wherever with her principles she touched conventional opinion. The catlike attributes, the marriage for a home, here the familiar saw on parenthood--

"They talk about hostages to fortune," she had expressed her idea, "they talk about a man with young children as having given hostages to fortune. You know, it's quite absurd. He doesn't. I don't say a man to whom the support of children is a financial anxiety hasn't, by begetting them, placed himself in a position of captivity to fortune, or to the future, or whatever you like to call it. He very much has. He's backed a bill that any day may fall due and find him without means to meet it; he's let himself in for blackmail, always over him a threat. But I'm talking about men above the struggle line. They don't, in their children, give hostages. It's the woman does that. Men don't give nor forfeit anything. It's the woman gives and forfeits. Why, when his friends meet a man who was last met a bachelor a couple or three years ago, what change do they see in him? They don't see any change at all. There isn't any change to see. He has to tell them; and he always tells them rather sheepishly or rather boisterously. 'I'm married, you know,' he says. 'Yes, rather. Man alive, I've got two kids!' The other says, 'My aunt!'--more probably he says 'My God!'--'My God, fancy you!' And they both laugh--laugh!

"Hostages to fortune! To a man and amongst men it's just a joke. It's no joke to a woman. Do you suppose a married girl, meeting old friends, has to tell them she's a mother, or, if she had to tell them, would tell them like that? Can't they see it at a glance? Isn't she changed? Isn't she, subtly perhaps, but unmistakably,

altogether different from the unfettered thing she used to be? Of course she is. How otherwise? She's given hostages to fortune and she's paying; she's being bled. She's giving up things, she's not going out so much, she's not reading so much, she's not playing so much, she's not interested so much in what used to interest her. How can she? There's the children. How can she? She's given hostages to fortune. Oh, happy is the man that hath children for they are as arrows in the quiver of a giant. But it's the woman is the arrowbearer! It's the woman pays."

Lo, there had come to this intolerance the longing--"Here!"--that Anna's bosom had, the urge to hold a tiny scrap against her breast, to have her heart, bursting for such release, torn out by baby fingers. It had o'erborne the other. She had thrown herself upon its flood; not yielded to it as one drawn in by rising waters, but tempestuously engulfed by it and borne away upon it as swallowed up and borne away in Harry's arms when "Rosalie! Rosalie!" he had cried to her.

That which the subsidence revealed, adoringly she called her Huggo.

There was a mirage in her face. When, turned again towards the star to which she showed her boyish and impetuous look, and, following, she felt again the call that set the mother in her face, she this time reasoned. That idea that, having children, it was the woman who gave hostages to fortune! Deadly and cruelly true it was, but only by convention. Why should it be so? Why should motherhood that was the crown of love, of woman's life, be paid for in coin that no man was called upon to pay? Unjust; and need not be! She perfectly well had carried on her work with Huggo. Sleeping was the adored creature's chief lot in life. If she had ever thought (which she never had) of giving up her work and staying at home on his account, what could she have done but twirl her thumbs and watch him sleep and in his lovely lively hours superintend the nurse who required no superintendence? As it was she was about him in the delicious exercises of transporting him from cot through toilet and refreshment to readiness to take the air. His lordship was

off in his lordship's perambulator by nine o'clock every morning. She did not herself leave, with Harry, till shortly before ten. There, in instance, was an hour at home with not the smallest benefit to Huggo. It would have been the same, had she remained at home, with three in four of all the other hours. Ridiculous to lay down that a mother, having a good nurse and a well-ordered house and a husband out all day, must tie herself there, abandoning her own life, to attend her children! Children! Darlings of her own! Ease for this yearning in her heart, assumption of this lovely glory that was her natural right! Yes, she had proved love not to be incompatible with her freedom; she would show motherhood as beautifully could be joined.

It seemed to her a blessing upon, and an assurance in, her purpose that in the precious person of a little daughter came the embodiment of this reasoning and of this design. A baby girl! A tiny woman-bud to be a woman with her in the house of Harry and of Huggo! A woman treasury into which she could pour her woman love! Her self's own self, whose earliest speech chose for herself her name--her Doda!

It all worked splendidly. Winged on the eager pinions of their

individual lives these two nested their joined life in a home that for every inmate was a perfect home; perfect for a husband, perfect for a wife, perfect for the babies, perfect for the servants. The peace of every home in civilized society rests ultimately on the kitchen, and the peace of half the homes known to Harry and to Rosalie was in constant rupture by upheavals thence. Not so behind the gamboge door. Rosalie always granted it to men that, as was commonly said, servants worked better for men. Men kept out of the irrational creatures' way; that was about it. The conduct of her life gave her the like advantage. Giving her orders before she left the house, she was out all day and never unexpectedly in. Positively the servants welcomed her on her return at five o'clock!

The babies, to whom then she flew, were with a perfect nurse. Harry had helped in her appointment. She had come one evening, early in the life of Huggo, when a change had to be made from the nurse who specialised only up to the point then reached by Huggo, and she had presented herself to them, seated together in Harry's study, a short body, one shape and a solid shape from her shoulders to her shoes, who announced her name as Muffett.

"Miss Muffett, I hope," said Harry gravely.

"Unmarried, sir," said Muffett with equal gravity and with a sudden drop and then recovery of her stature as though some one had knocked her behind the knees.

"There's nothing to do," said Harry when she had gone, "but to buy her a turret and engage her"; and there was nothing to do, when she was installed, but enjoy the babies and delight in them just as a man enjoys and delights in his tiny ones,--in the early mornings before Rosalie left for her work, in the evenings when she returned home.

It all worked splendidly. In those early years, when two were in the nursery and as yet no third, there wasn't a sign that Harry who had married for a home ever could say, "I have a right to a home." He had, and he was often saying so, the most perfect home. He came not home of a night to a wife peevisish with domestic frets and solitary confinement and avid he should hear the tale of them, nor yet to one that butterflied the day long between idleness and pleasures and gave him what was left. He came nightly to a home that his wife sought as eagerly as he sought, a place of rest well-earned and peace well-earned. That was it! "Things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other." They had discovered and had removed the worm of disparity that eats away the heart of countless marriages. They not infrequently had friends in to dinner, not infrequently dined at the tables of friends, made a point of not infrequently attending a theatre or a concert; but however the evening had been passed--and the evenings alone were always agreed to be the best evenings of all--there was none but they ended sitting together, not in the drawing-room, but in Harry's study or in hers, just talking happiness. Equal in endeavour, they were thereby made equal on every plane and in every taste. A reciprocating machine. That was it!

At least that was how, profoundly satisfied with it, she thought it was.

Then Benji came.

CHAPTER VI

There were attendant upon the expectation and the coming of Benji certain processes of mind that had not been with Huggo or with Doda. When it was in prospect she had vexation, sometimes a sense of injury, that again her work was to be interrupted. It would make no difference to Harry. It happened that the days of her trial were timed to fall on the date when a criminal prosecution of sensational public interest was due for hearing at the Old Bailey. Harry, for the defence, had added immensely to his brilliant reputation when seeing it through the preliminary stages before the magistrate. The Old Bailey proceedings were to be the greatest event, thus far, in his career. He had told her--how proud and delighted to hear it she had been!--that if he pulled it off (and he had set his heart on pulling it off) he would really begin to think about "taking silk."

Well, but she also had her heart, in no single or sensational climax of her work, but in its every phase and every hour. It absorbed her. Two years earlier Mr. Simcox had begun disturbing signs of health that, begun, developed rapidly. His brisk activity went out of him. His walk had the odd suggestion of one carrying a load. His perky air went dull. His mind was like a flagging watch, run down. He could not concent

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