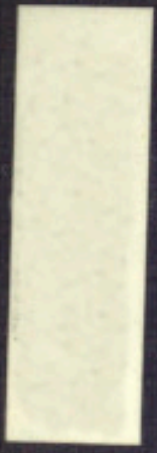
# MARY LEE



GEOFFREY DENNIS

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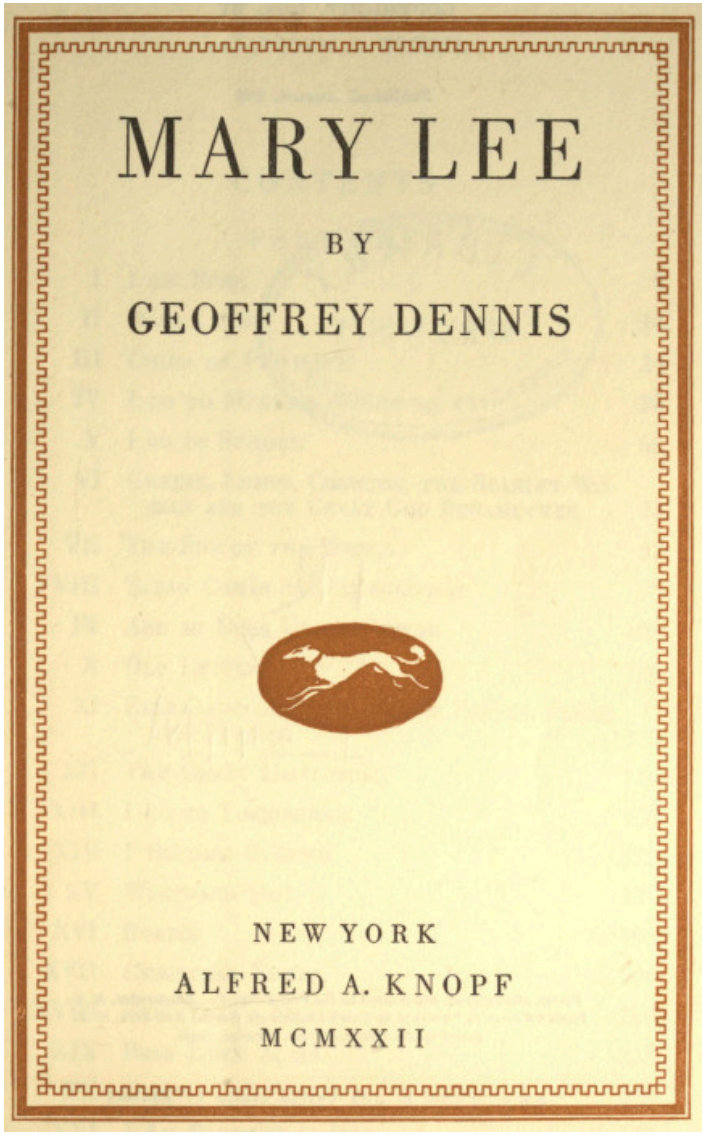
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# MARY LEE

*NEW BORZOI NOVELS*
*FALL, 1922*

THE QUEST
*Pío Baroja*
THE ROOM
*G. B. Stern*
ONE OF OURS
*Willa Cather*
A LOVELY DAY
*Henry Céard*
MARY LEE
*Geoffrey Dennis*
TUTORS' LANE
*Wilmarth Lewis*
THE PROMISED ISLE
*Laurids Bruun*
THE RETURN
*Walter de la Mare*
THE BRIGHT SHAWL
*Joseph Hergesheimer*
THE MOTH DECIDES
*Edward Alden Jewell*
INDIAN SUMMER
*Emily Grant Hutchings*



# MARY LEE

BY

GEOFFREY DENNIS

NEW YORK

ALFRED A. KNOPF

MCMXXII

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**BY**

## GEOFFREY DENNIS



**NEW YORK**
**ALFRED A. KNOPF**
**MCMXXII**

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# PART ONE

## CHAPTER I: I AM BORN

I was born at Tawborough on March the Second, 1848.

It seems to have been a great year in the history books. Fires of revolution sweeping over Europe; half the capitals aflame. From Prague to Palermo, from Paris to Pesth, the peoples rising against their rulers. Wars and rumours of wars; civil strife everywhere. Radicals in Prussia, revolutionaries in Italy, rebels in Austria, republicans in France. Even in old England we had our chartists.

All such troubles failed to touch Tawborough. What did she know of it all, or care if she knew? She was a good old peaceful English country town, with her own day's work to do. The great world might go its way for all she cared—a wild and noisy way it seemed. She would go hers.

Not that Tawborough had always been without a say in England's affairs. She had indeed a long and honourable history. At the dawn of time there was a settlement in the marshes where the little stream of Yeo empties itself into the Taw: a primitive village of wattled huts, known to the Britons as Artavia. The Phœnicians record the name for us, and describe the

place as a great mart for their commerce. Here the tin of the western mines was bartered against the rich products of the East: camphire and calamus, spikenard and saffron, fine linen and purple silk. This was the origin of Tawborough market, which is the first in Devonshire to this day. Artavia seems to have been an important seat of the old British worship. The see of the Arch-Druid of the West was near at hand in the Valley of the Rocks at Lynton; from the sacred oak-groves above the Taw on a clear day the Druids could see the fires of the great altar on the Promontory of Hercules—Hartland Point they call it now.

Religion, indeed, in one way or another, seems to have coloured most of the big events of the town's history. The next great fight was between pagans and Christian men.

It was the foeman from the North, threatening the men of Wessex with desolation. One day the terrified townsfolk heard clanging in their ears the great ivory horns of the Northmen, and beheld the blood-red banners sailing up the Taw. One of the standards had upon it a Raven. Then the Englishmen knew their foe for the wild Hubba, King of the Vikings; since the Raven floated always at his mast. The banner was of crimson. It had been worked by the King's three sisters in a noontide and blessed by a strange Icelandic wizard, who endowed the Raven sewn upon it with this magical gift: that she clapped her wings to announce success to the Viking arms, and drooped them to presage failure. Never till this day had the black wings drooped; they drooped this winter's morning. So the English took heart. Odin, Earl of Devon, sallied forth from Kenwith Castle,

defeated and slew King Hubba, and captured the magic banner. Then came peace for a while. King Alfred, full of piety, came to Tawborough and set up the great Mound by the Castle. King Athelstan gave the town a charter, and housed himself in a magnificent palace at Umberleigh hard by.

In the wake of the Normans came the religious orders. The Cluniacs built a monastery in the town, the Benedictines another at Pilton just outside. With the monks came light and learning, better lives and milder ways. Tawborough became rich and prosperous. Her trade excelled that of Bristol. Her fair and market were famous "tyme out of mynde." For many years the Taw—that "greate, hugy, mighty, perylous and dredful water"—became a highway for the ships of all nations.

When the New World was found, Englishmen sailed west for glory. Devon led the way, Tawborough men among the foremost, and Tawborough ships did valiant deeds against the Invincible Armada. Those were the great days of England. The townsfolk were all for the new religion. Spaniard and Papist were twin-children of the devil. A murrain on both! They favoured the Puritan party in the civil wars, stood out against the rest of the county, and shouted for the Parliament. Though when the Royalists took the town and gay Prince Charles made it his headquarters, the townspeople were charmed with His Merry Highness; and he, as he told Lord Clarendon, with them. All the courtiers were of the same mind. Lord Clarendon himself declared that Tawborough was "a very fine sweet town as ever I saw," while Lady Fanshawe thought that the cherry pies they made there "with their sort of cream" were the best things that man, or woman, could eat. Gay

John Gay, who wrote the Beggar's Opera, showed to the world the fair and likeable character of his native town, which at heart, however, was always of the godly serious-minded quality, Puritan to the core. No town in England gave a warmer welcome to the poor Huguenots, who were flying from King Lewis. One Sunday morning as the townsfolk were coming forth from Church they saw against the sky—not this time the scarlet banners of the North—the brown sails of an old French schooner, bearing up the Taw a band of exiled French Puritans, weary and wretched after their voyage. Tawborough found every one of them a home. In return the grateful Frenchmen taught the natives new ways of cloth-weaving, which sent the fame of Tawborough Bays through all the land.

Later came a change, a new century, the reign of King Coal; and Tawborough, like many another historic Western town, sank into comparative decay. What did the new industrial cities know of such as her, or care if they knew? For her part, she was indifferent to their ignorance or their indifference alike. She was a good old English country town with her own day's work to do. Troubles, invasions, vicissitudes had assailed her before. New blood, Saxon, Danish, Norman, Huguenot had coursed through her veins. Her dead had buried their dead. The people pass, the place alone is abiding.... Abiding, yet not eternal; for there comes the day when the old earth will fall into the sun.... Meanwhile, Town Tawborough had her daily life to live, her townsfolk had theirs.

Two of them, indeed, were living theirs with plenty of zest, somewhere in the first quarter of the

nineteenth century. Jael and Hannah Vickary were the daughters of an old sea-captain, Ebenezer Vickary of Torribridge. He and his brother had three or four vessels of their own, trading with the Indies in sugar and molasses, or with the Spanish Main, as it then still was, in logwood and mahogany. The brother died in Cuba of the yellow fever. Soon afterwards Ebenezer gave up the sea, settled down in Tawborough, and died in his time. He left his two daughters enough money to live upon in the quiet style of those days, together with a big dwelling house by the old North Gate. Here Jael and Hannah Vickary lived alone, with an old servant whose years were unknown and unnumbered, and whose wages were six pounds a year. They had a few friends and visitors, faithful women of the Parish Church, chief among whom were the Other Six of "the Seven Old Maids of Tawborough." By a strange coincidence seven female children had been born in Tawborough on August the First 1785, all of whom had risen to be devout handmaidens of the Lord in the work of the Parish Church, shining lights around the central figure of the Vicar, and all of whom had dwindled into a sure spinsterhood. "We are the wise virgins," said Jael Vickary, their leader and spiritual chief, in whom the scorn of all menfolk except the Vicar (who had a meek wife and twelve children) amounted to a prophet's passion. This passion was shared in various degrees by the Other Six, to wit: Miss Lucy Clarke, Miss Fanny Baker, Miss Keturah Crabb, Miss Sarah Tombstone, and last but not least the Heavenly Twins, the Misses Glory and Salvation Clinker. The Twins were the only regular visitors at Northgate House. There were a few others, no relatives among them. Jael and Hannah had indeed an elder brother, John: Ebenezer's only son. He had gone to London as

a boy, worked his way up in a wholesale sugar house in the City, and become passing rich. His sisters were kept aware of his existence only by receiving occasional presents and more occasional letters. He never married. Thus it was that his death, if nothing so crude as a self-acknowledged source of financial hope to Miss Jael, would nevertheless have been borne by her with true Christian fortitude.

If alike in a salt and shrewdness of personality unknown to our end of the century, in most ways the two sisters differed as much as two human beings can. Miss Jael was hard, Miss Hannah kindly; Miss Jael stern, Miss Hannah gentle; Miss Jael was feared, Miss Hannah loved. Though Hannah was less than eighteen months her sister's junior, this unbridgeable gulf enabled Miss Jael throughout life to refer to Miss Hannah as "a young woman," and to treat her accordingly. Then, behold, in the year 1822, when both were nearer forty than thirty, the Young Woman brazenly gave ear to the suit of one Edward Lee, an old sea-captain, who had sailed under her father, and was twenty years her senior. Jael mocked (Why did he choose her? asked her heart bitterly); yet stayed on at Northgate House, when Captain Lee came to live there, to bully and bludgeon the dear old man into his grave. This procedure took but five years. The old man died, leaving to his widow two little girls and a boy: Rachel, Martha and Christian.

In the godlier activities of Tawborough life Jael and her widowed sister were leading lights, with the parish church as General Headquarters of their operations. Miss Jael was the vicar's right-hand *man*. She ran his poor club, his guild, his Dorcas-meeting, effacing completely the meek many-childrened little lady of the Rectory. He thought her a queen among

women, a tower set upon a rock.

All this was in the twenties and thirties of the century, ere yet the Church of England had taken her earliest step on the swift steep path to Rome. The same wave of evangelical fervour that had swelled Wesley's great following had strengthened also the Church from which they broke away. This fervour, whether Methodist or Established, did not however go nearly far enough for certain pious souls, especially in the West country, who formed themselves into little bodies for the Worship of God in the strictest and simplest Gospel fashion. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer." They called themselves the Saints, or more modestly the Brethren. Outsiders called them the Plymouth Brethren—they flourished in the great seaport—or more profanely, the Plymouth Rocks. They were drawn from all communions and no communion, if principally from the Established Church; from all classes and conditions, the humbler trades-folk perhaps predominating. In Tawborough they were especially active. From the days of the primitive Druids away through the long story of missionaries and monks, seafaring Protestants and Huguenot exiles, here was a town that took her religion neat. She preferred the good Calvin flavouring, and thus it was that the Plymouth evangel sent up a savoury smell in her nostrils. There were literally hundreds of converts. The Parish Church lost some of its leading members. Arose the cry "The Church in danger!"; and of all who responded, most valiant was the Vicar's right-hand man. She stemmed the tide of deserters with loins girt for battle. Like St. Paul, she breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the new sect. She encouraged the faithful, visited the wavering,

anathematized deserters. To crown her efforts she counselled the vicar to summon a great Church Defence Meeting in the Parish Room, to rally and re-affirm the confidence of the faithful. The Vicar agreed. The hour of commencement saw a right goodly and godly assembly foregathered together. On the platform sat a Canon of Exeter, the old Marquess of Exmoor, several county bigwigs, the Mayor and the Churchwardens. Seven o'clock struck, the Vicar was about to open the proceedings, everything was ready—except—except that two honoured places on the platform (in those days a place on a platform was for a woman an honour indeed) were not yet occupied. Miss Vickary and her sister were late. The Vicar hesitated. There was a distinguished company, true: but start the meeting without its guiding spirit—never! Give her five minutes.... Some one handed the Vicar an envelope. He opened it, read through the contents, and fainted then and there.

How the reverend gentleman was brought round from his swoon by the joint endeavours of the Canon, the Marquess, two Churchwardens, nine ladies and a bottle of sal-volatile; how the great Church Defence Meeting fizzled to an inglorious end; and how Jael Vickary and Hannah Lee were baptized in the Taw in the presence of three thousand five hundred spectators, there is no need to relate here. The facts were well enough known to the older generation in the town. Some say that the Vicar made a last despairing effort to retain his apostate right-hand man; that, with tears in his eyes, he went down on his knees before her. If so, as Hannah wickedly said, he was the only man who ever did so, and in any case he achieved nothing. On the contrary The Great Betrayal encouraged wholesale desertions.

The Other Six deserted *en masse*.

Henceforward Jael Vickary's life was occupied with two main things: building up the new sect, and bringing up her sister's family. She filled the vacant post of father with thoroughness and vigour. Her method was the rod, or to be accurate the thorned stick, and a horrible weapon it was. Hannah approved the method in moderation, though she could never have applied it herself. Much of her life, indeed, was spent in protecting her children from her sister. Rachel, the eldest, was best beloved. She was a sweet, gentle child; bright, tender and gay. Martha was quieter, even morose. Christian was a peevish child, weak and ailing from birth. With no husband to help her, and her sister on the scold from morn till night, Hannah Lee's life was not an easy one. She gave her two daughters the best schooling in Devonshire, as schooling for girls went in those days; so that when they grew up they were able to take positions as governesses in the best families of the county. Rachel went to Woolthy Hall to teach Guy, the Lord Tawborough's five year old heir. Martha was employed by the Groves, of Grove House near Exeter, to begin the education of their daughter. The two girls' attainments and appearance explained their good fortune. Rachel in particular was a refined and attractive young woman, with bright eyes, a peerless skin, and a gentle winning expression. Dressed oftenest in a dove-coloured cotton robe, she had a Quakerish charm, simple yet sure.

Hannah was left alone at Tawborough with Jael and young Christian. As the years passed, life turned greyer. When the Devon and Three Counties' Bank collapsed, nearly half the household income disappeared. Jael's imperiousness grew with her

years, while her temper soured. Christian was in a decline, dying slowly before his mother's eyes. Then came Martha's marriage. She had fallen in with one Simeon Greeber, a retired chemist, who lived over at Torribridge—the Taw's twin-river's port, and Tawborough's immemorial rival. This Greeber was the local leader of the extreme wing of the Saints, the Close or Exclusive Brethren; a man twice Martha Lee's age, and one who filled her aunt and her mother with a special sense of dislike and mistrust. Against their will she married him, gave up her excellent post with the Grove family, and went to live at Torribridge.

Hannah's consolation was always Rachel, whom she loved most dearly. Then, in its turn, came Rachel's marriage.

At Woolthy Hall the young governess had come into contact with Lord Tawborough's cousin, Mr. Philip Traies, who was a frequent if not welcome guest. He had served in the Navy, but had left the service under doubtful circumstances. He had led a scandalous life and earned a reputation to match it. A clear-cut handsome mouth set in a proud aristocratic face, a fine bearing, a fine speech, and an honoured name, deluded many and were his own undoing. In ill odour with his family and his Maker, he decided to come to terms with the latter. At the age of forty, he joined the Plymouth Brethren. When the Devil turns saint he does a very sharp round-about, and no withered Anglo-Indian colonel who communed with the Saints in his dotage to ensure himself as gay a time in the next world as he had passed in this, ever excelled Mr. Philip Traies in fervour and piety. He worshipped occasionally with the Tawborough Saints, who were duly honoured.

Sometimes here, and sometimes at his cousin's, he met Rachel Lee, at this time a girl of twenty-one. He bestowed upon her the favour of eager kindly patronage, as such men will; though if she were beneath him in station, and his equal in manners and good looks, she was far above him in everything else: goodness and purity and wholeness of heart. Quite how it happened nobody knew; but one day Rachel came home from Woolthy Hall, and said to her mother, "I am going to marry Mr. Philip Traies."

Hannah entreated. A "good" match with a bad man had no attraction for her. She pleaded with Rachel. Aunt Jael would not stoop to plead; she gave her niece instead a plain outline of Mr. Philip Traies' past.

"I know," said the girl, and murmured something about "reforming" him.

Neither mother nor aunt achieved her surrender. Pleading and plain-speaking did nothing, nor ever do. The wedding took place at the registry office, as in those days the Brethren's Meeting Houses were not licensed for solemnization of marriages, and neither bride nor bridegroom would enter a church or chapel: temples of Antichrist. Hannah sat through the ceremony with a queer sense of foreboding, of sickness, and coming sorrow; an order of sentiment which, as a sensible Devon woman with no tomfool tombstone fancies ever in her head, in sixty years she had not known. Immediately after the ceremony, at the registry office door, the bridegroom suddenly loosened himself from the bride's arm, and walked sharply away without saying a word. Nobody knew why. Everybody stared. The wedding breakfast at Northgate House began without him. They waited;

he did not come. After an hour the tension became unbearable. The guests whispered in groups; Rachel and her mother bore already on their brows the sorrow of the years to come. Aunt Jael's face was a gloomy triumphant "I told you so." Pastries were nibbled, wine was sipped; the joy-feast continued. After nearly two hours a bell rang, and the bridegroom appeared.

"Your explanation?" asked Hannah. Rachel dared not look.

"Oh, I had another woman to see. A glass of sherry please. Besides, it amused me."

He took her away to his house at Torquay. Their married life was wretched from the start. Among many evil passions these two predominated in Mr. Philip Traies: desire and cruelty. Here was a lovely and gentle girl who would satisfy both. The first was soon appeased (shattering love in her heart once and for all), the second never. Cruelty is insatiable. With this man it was a devouring passion. It is doubtful perhaps if he was sane. Taunts, foulness, sneers.... He starved her sometimes, taunted her with her lowlier birth, engaged the servants on the condition of ill-treating their mistress, dismissed them if they wavered. All the time he talked religion. The knees of his elegant trousers were threadbare with prayer. He could fit a text to every taunt. Then a baby-boy came to cheer the sinking heart. A few hours after the child was born, when the young mother lay in the agony and weakness she alone can know, Mr. Philip Traies entered the room—with a gentler word to-day surely?—no, with this: "So this is how you keep your fine promises to make a good lady of the house, a busy housewife and the rest of it"—he raised

his voice savagely—"idling in bed at four in the afternoon. *Get up, you idle bitch!*" Leaning over the end-rail, he spat in her face.

The baby soon died. He taunted her with nursing it badly; and doubled every cruelty he knew save blows.

"Strike me," she said once.

Her patience was a fool's, a saint's, a loving woman's; her goodness, if not her spirits, unfailing. In writing home she made the best of things. But her heart was broken, her spirit wasting away.

"Why did you marry me?" she asked.

"To break your spirit," was the amused reply.

"Then your marriage has fulfilled its purpose," she said wearily. "My spirit is broken. Now I can go home."

That night she wrote to Hannah. The letter is faded, and stained with three women's tears, wife's, mother's, daughter's. "Dearest Mother," she wrote, "I am ill and weary. Another little child is coming, but I may not live for it to be born. I can leave him without failing in my wife's duty now, for the end is very near. I am coming home to die. Your loving broken-hearted Daughter."

Next day she packed for home.

"Deserting me, are you? Fine Jezebel ways! A good Christian wifely thing to do, I'm sure. I thought we were proud of doing our duty."

His sneers did not move her now. She was going

home to die.

Northgate House was a dismal place to return to. It was a wet cheerless winter. Hannah was tired and heart-sore. Christian was dying. Jael was evil-tempered, scolding harshly: her comfort to her mother and daughter was still "I told you so." Rachel went straight to bed. In a few days Christian died, a sickly pitiful boy of twenty. "It is the Lord's will," said his mother. Hannah had everything to do, for Simeon Greeber would not let Martha come over from Torribridge, and Jael took to her bed with a convenient fit of the ague. Faith in the eternal love of God was Hannah's only stay. Always, ever, "It was the Lord's will." This sufficed her, though the times were bitter. The day after Christian's funeral was wet and wintry: March the Second 1848. Rachel was twenty-four. Three years ago she had been a happy healthy girl. Now she was a dying broken woman. The morning of that day she gave birth to a daughter. Then she was very weak. Her eyes closed, yet she seemed to see something.

"What do you see, Rachel, my dear?" asked her mother.

The spirit was already half away, looking through the golden gates of Heaven.

"There is a little angel born. I see her in God's cradle. *My* little angel, God's little angel. I shall be with her always—though far away. I see ... the King in His beauty ... I behold the land ... that is very far off."

Her face was radiant as a lover's, yet sad as Love is. Hannah could not reply. The dying woman seemed to sleep. Her mother watched. An hour passed. Rachel opened her eyes.

"Mother."

"Yes, my dear."

"Love my little baby for me; and—tell *him*—I forgive him." The eyes closed, this time for ever.

My poor mother.

---

## CHAPTER II: BEAR LAWN

My first memory in this life is of a moving. I am sitting in a high chair, kept in by a stick placed through a hole in each arm. I am surrounded by the utmost disarray. In front of me is an old sponge-bath, crammed full of knick-knacks and drawing-room ornaments. I stretch out my hands yearningly, acquisitively, and make signs of wrenching from its offensive gaolerlike position the stick which bars my way. My Grandmother coaxes me to keep it in, and uses the words she is to use so often later on—words which will punctuate my daily life in days to come:

"Don't 'ee do it, my dear. Sit 'ee still and give no trouble. Ye'll tumble and hurt yourself, so leave the stick alone. Don't 'ee do it."

"If she don't, I'll take it out myself and lay it about her," comes another voice, which is to punctuate as regularly and much more raucously my early doings. And Aunt Jael shakes her fist, and lowers at me.

Perhaps I don't really remember the trifling incident.

Most likely I only remember that I remember. It is a photograph of a photograph, smudged by the fingers of Time. Yet I see as clearly as ever the dark room in disarray, my Grandmother kind and coaxing, Aunt Jael threatening and harsh. The memory is clearer because Time has not blurred but rather sharpened it. I grew up the gauge of an unequal battle between Grandmother and Great-Aunt. Moving-day is merely the moment in which my infant intelligence first caught news of the struggle.

At this time I must have been about three years old, for it was some three years after my mother's death that we moved from the High Street, at the time when—I think it was in 1852—the old North Gate was removed, and our house pulled down. Our new house was Number Eight, Bear Lawn. The Lawn was a biggish patch of grass with houses on both sides. At the far end from the road it merged into a steep grassy bank, crowned with poplars, which allowed no egress. At the near end a big iron gate barred us off from the plebeian houses of Bear Street, to which the Lawn mansions felt themselves notably superior.

The Lawn lay to the right of the street some little way out of the town. In reality it was an old barrack-square, "converted." The houses on each side of it were barracks put up during the French Revolutionary Wars. When Boney was beaten and the soldiers sent away, an enterprising builder turned the barracks into two terraces of houses, and sowed the barrack-square with grass seed. Bear Lawn became one of the most elegant quarters of Tawborough, a quiet preserve of genteel habitation; though the houses never quite lost their barrack quality. They were too square and bare and big to be truly genteel. And too roomy.

Number Eight was one of the squarest and barest.

It was gloomy. How far the aspect it will always bear in my mind may be a reflection of the dark and unhappy days I spent there, and how far it was real, I cannot ever say. It was a house of big empty corridors, dark bare spaces, and an incommunicable dreariness that somehow stilled you as you crossed the doorstep. There was none of the cosy warmth that makes so many dark old houses a homely joy to the senses and a warm fragrance for the memory. It had the silence in it that only large empty spaces can create, did not seem inhabited, and smelt of coffins, I used to think. Even in summer there was a suggestion of damp and cold and bleakness, and always there was the silence which made me wait—and listen.

Downstairs there were three big rooms: Aunt Jael's, the dining-room and the kitchen. Aunt Jael's was the front one. The door was always unlocked, yet the key was left on the outside of the door, and I was forbidden to enter. Like Mrs. Bluebeard (of whom I had never heard) or our first mother Eve (in the knowledge of whom I grew to understanding), I felt that prohibition made perfect; and the forbidden room attracted me beyond all others. I visited it usually in the afternoon, when the thunder and trumpets of Aunt Jael's after-dinner doze in the dining-room announced that the road was clear. The blinds were always drawn, winter and summer alike; and the windows closed. The room seemed filled with a dull yellowish kind of mist, the ochre-coloured blind toning the darkness, and just permitting you to see a yellowish carpet and dull yellowish furniture. A row of dismal plants, standing in saucers on the floor, filled the bay window. There

was a great oak sideboard, stuffed with Aunt Jael's preserves and pickles; though it was long before I had the courage and the opportunity to ransack it thoroughly. The walls were covered with spears and daggers, trophies of the Gospel in distant lands. In a corner reposed the supreme trophy, a huge wooden god, sitting with arms akimbo. His votaries (until salvation, in the person of Brother Immanuel Greeber, had turned them from their ways) dwelt, I believe, in the Society Islands; though he looked for all the world like a Buddha, with his painless impenetrable eyes and his smile of changeless calm. In his dark unwholesome corner he dominated the room. The yellow mist was incense in his nostrils.

The middle room we called the dining-room, though Aunt Jael favoured "back parlour." Here we lived and prayed and ate, and here a large part of this story took place. The window overlooked our small backyard, which being flanked by out-houses gave little light; so this room too was dark, though not as dark as Aunt Jael's, since the blinds were not usually drawn. It was more barely furnished. There was the table, a chiffonier, a side-board, a bookcase, and two principal chairs: a "gentleman's" armchair to the left of the fireplace, with two big arms; and a "lady's," armless, to the right. One was comfortable, the other was not. One was Aunt Jael's, the other was my Grandmother's. There were four bedrooms on the first floor, and I must note their strategic positions. Aunt Jael's was the first on the right, my own the second; we were over the dining-room and surveyed the backyard. My Grandmother's chamber, the first on the left, and the spare-room beyond it overlooked the Lawn. At the half-landing above was Mrs. Cheese's bedroom, while the top of the house consisted of an enormous whitewashed attic, lighted

by an unwashed skylight and suffused by a cold bluish gloom that contrasted queerly with the foggy yellow of the front room downstairs yet excelled it in silent cheerlessness. Here I would spend hours, or whole days, either of my own free will, that I might moon and mope to my heart's content, and talk aloud to myself without fear of mocking audience; or perforce, banished by the frequent judgment of Aunt Jael.

It was our moving into this house that supplies my first earthly memory. My first important—dramatic, historic—remembrance must date from several months later, when I was nearly four years old. The scene was our evening reading of the Word. We were sitting in our usual positions round the dining-room fire after supper.

To the left of the chimney-piece, in the big black horsehair chair—the comfortable one, the one with sides and arms—sat my Great-Aunt Jael. This was her permanent post. From this coign of vantage she issued ukases, thundered commands, hurled anathemas and brandished her sceptre—that thorned stick of whose grim and governmental qualities I have the fullest knowledge of any soul (or body) on earth. She was a short, stout, stocky, strong-looking woman, yet bent; when walking, bent sometimes almost double. Leaning on her awful stick, she looked the old witch she was. Peaky black cap surmounting beetling black brows and bright black eyes, wrinkled swarthy skin, beaky nose, a hard mouth whiskered like a man's, and a harder chin: feature for feature, she was the witch of the picture-books. All her dresses, silk, serge or bombazine, were black. On the night I speak of, an ordinary week-night, she was dressed in her oldest serge. The great

Holy Bible on her knees might have been some unholy wizard's tome.

To the right of the chimney-piece sat my Grandmother. She resembled her sister in feature; the character of the face was as different as is heaven from hell. This indeed was the very quality of the difference, and I had a fancy that they were the *same* face, one given to God, the other sold to Satan. My Grandmother had the same beaky nose and nut-cracker face. Her mouth and chin were firm, but kind instead of cruel. Her skin was milk-white instead of swarthy, her caps were of white lace. Her eyes were as bright as my Great-Aunt's, but bright with kindliness instead of menace. Her whole face spoke of goodwill to others and perfect peace. It was a sweet old face. I love it still.

In the middle, facing the fire, sat Mrs. Cheese. She was a farmer's daughter and widow from near South Molton; and looked it. She was short, fat and ruddy; a few years younger than her mistresses, perhaps at this time a woman of sixty.

I myself crouched on a little stool between Mrs. Cheese and Aunt Jael; but nearer the latter, that I might be watched, and cuffed, with ease. On this particular evening, my heart was hot with rage against Aunt Jael, who had flogged me and locked me in the attic: I don't remember what for. She ordered me more sternly than usual not to dare to move my eyes from her face as she read the nightly portion from the Word of God. To-night it was from her favourite Proverbs, the thirtieth chapter: the words of Agur the son of Jakeh, *even* the prophecy; the words the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal.

Aunt Jael read, or rather declaimed the Word, in a harsh staccato way; not without a certain power, especially in the dourer passages of Proverbs or the dismaller in Job or Lamentations. In one of her favourite Psalms, the eighteenth or the sixty-eighth, reeking with battle and revenge, and bespattered with the blood of the enemies of Jehovah, her voice would rise to a dark triumphal shout, terrible as an army with banners. This evening I looked sullenly at the floor as she boomed forth the words of Agur, determined *not* to fix my eyes on her face at any rate until Stick coaxed me. Suddenly my eyes were transfixed to the floor. A gigantic cockroach was crawling about near my feet. I wanted to cry out but managed to contain myself until, behold, the creature crawled away from my left foot towards the leg of Aunt Jael's chair, reached the chair leg, began to climb it with resolution. I watched, half in fascination, half in fear. It reached the level of the horsehair upholstery. Aunt Jael had reached verse thirteen.

"Their eyelids are lifted up." She looked meaningly at me.

Fortunately my eyelids were by this time well lifted up, as the beetle was now half way up the chair, approaching the awful place where Aunt Jael's shoulder touched the upholstery. No—yes: it crawled on to the arm, and mounted her sleeve right up to the shoulder. Righteous revenge for her cruelty and harshness counselled silence. "Let her suffer," I said to myself, "let the cockroach do his worst." Fear of interrupting gave like counsel. On the other side spoke the prickings of conscience and pity, and above all a wild desire to scream.

Aunt Jael read on, innocent of the unbidden guest upon her shoulder. "The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid—"

"Ay, and the way of a beetle with a Great-Aunt," I could have shouted. The beast, after a moment's hesitation and survey, had now turned along the shoulder to the neck. The warm hairy flesh of Aunt Jael's neck was but six inches away.

"The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; The conies are but a feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rocks; The locusts have no King, yet go they forth all of them by bands; The spider taketh hold with her hands—"

"Yes," I shrieked—in a moment shot through with terror, joy, relief; suffused by a new beatific sense of speaking historic words—"and the beetle taketh hold with his claws!" As I uttered the words the insect crawled from her collar on to the very flesh of her neck. She understood, with Spartan calm took hold of him, squashed him carefully between her thumb and forefinger and threw him on the fire, where he sizzled sickeningly.

"Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife."

There the chapter ended. She slammed the book and turned on me.

"You have forced wrath, Child. I shall bring forth strife."

And despite my Grandmother's entreaties, she led me

from the room by the nose, which she pulled unmercifully: though no blood was brought forth. Out in the passage she gave me a cruel beating with the thorned stick, till I screamed for mercy, and my Grandmother intervened.

"'Tis cruel, Jael. The child cried out about the beetle for *your* sake."

"Sake or no sake, she cried out unseemly and irreverent. That's all I look at."

I was sore in body and sorer in heart. I had screamed out to warn Aunt Jael of the insect's approach, and now I was flogged for my pains. I knew in my own heart that what Grandmother had pleaded was not in point of fact quite true, I knew I had been secretly glad to see the creature making for Aunt Jael's skin, and for this reason had kept silence for so long. The physical instinct to scream had merely been stronger in the end than my resolution to say nothing. In a dim sort of way I realized this, and saw that my Grandmother's plea was unwarranted. But I saw more clearly that the common-sense of the position was that I had done Aunt Jael a good turn, and that the flogging was—in the light of the facts as she (not the Lord or I) knew them—mean and undeserved. I brooded revenge, as always. Aunt Jael's beatings were always more or less cruel, always more or less unjust; this I knew with a child's instinct, distorted and exaggerated no doubt by wretchedness and pride. So always I planned revenge, which sooner or later brought on the next flogging.

This time, however, my revenge was undetected. Next morning I came downstairs just as Mrs. Cheese was beginning to lay the table for breakfast. There were two separate sets of everything—breakfast-

ware, dinner-services, tea-things, plate, knives and forks, even cruets—Grandmother's and Aunt Jael's, which the latter insisted on keeping rigorously separate. So, every day for breakfast or tea there would be two cups and saucers and plates with the gold pattern for my Grandmother and me, and one solitary cup and saucer and plate of Willow-pattern for my Great-Aunt. She had her own tea-pot too, a great fluted thing in old silver-plate, which could have held tea for a dozen; but never a taste of tea was poured forth from it for any one else, save on occasions so rare that I can number them on the fingers of my hand. So there was no mistaking the utensil with which, in which, from which, or out of which Aunt Jael would partake of nourishment. I was wandering round the table when I noticed, at first with fright, then, when I ascertained that it was dead, with interest and purpose, a large beetle much the same as its fumigated brother of the night before, lying on its back, claws heavenward. A divine idea possessed me. I picked it up, squashed it between my thumb and forefinger in the true Aunt Jaelian manner, and smeared the loathsome substance all over my Great-Aunt's teaspoon and the inside of her cup. It was an act of genius, that rare thing: the Revenge Perfect. "With the beetle hast thou slain," I said solemnly out loud, "by the beetle shalt thou perish."

"Perish" was a poetic flight, as Aunt Jael entirely failed to notice the mess in her cup, which she filled with tea from her exclusive pot, or the mess on her spoon, with which she stirred lustily. She drank three cupfuls, and belched as blandly as usual. Now I saw the imperfection of my revenge perfect. In idea and execution it had been superb, and to see her guzzling down the embeetled tea was very sweet. But she did

not *know* she was drinking it—this was the eternal thorn that mars the everlasting rose. I had, however, the compensation of safety. All through breakfast, I looked meek and forgiving. Aunt Jael relented.

"Here, child, have a drink of tea out of my cup; 'twill do 'ee more good than the milk-and-water stuff your Grandma always gives 'ee."

"No, thank you, Aunt," I replied. And I triumphed in my heart.

Fate was about to triumph over me. Beetle had led to beating, and I had used beetle (with tea-cup) for revenge. Now Fate used tea-cup for triumph. It befell at tea-time, I think the same day. My arm was on the table-cloth, and, before I knew what I was doing, it (and Fate) had swept Aunt Jael's own old blue exclusive willow-pattern cup on to the floor, where it lay in a thousand avenging fragments. A brutal cuff full in the face changed fear and remorse into rage.

"Careless little slut!" she shouted. "What are 'ee biding there for staring like a half-daft sheep?—Say you're sorry, say you're sorry."

"I was sorry," I faltered, "but I'm not now."

This was the first brave thing I ever did, so brave that I hold my breath now to think of it. I shrank from some monstrous blow.

No blow came; partly because my Grandmother looked warningly ready to interfere, partly because my Great-Aunt had decided on another punishment, the only one I feared worse than blows.

"Oh, not sorry, eh, careless little slut?—"

"Stop it, Jael, I tell 'ee," broke in my Grandmother. "The child must try to be more careful and handy, and she's to say she's sorry, but—"

"Say she's sorry?" echoed Aunt Jael. "But she's just said she's not. 'I'm not sorry *now*' quoth she! Not sorry, not sorry, young huzzy, do 'ee know where Not-sorry goes? Do 'ee? I'll tell 'ee: straight to Hell. Obstinacy in sin is the worst sin, and its reward is Hell. Hell, child, where your body will be scorched with flames and racked with awful torments. Devils will twist and twease your flesh, and 'twill be for ever too. You've done a wrong thing, and your nasty proud soul is too wicked to say you're sorry. You spurn the chance of repentance, the free offer of God A'mighty, made through me His servant. You shall suffer eternal punishment."

I quailed. At four the fear of that word had fallen on my soul. She knew it: the beady eyes gleamed.

"No hope, no escape. Flames, pains, coals of fire, coals of fire! Ha, ha, ha!" (Here she cackled.) "Not sorry, eh? Very like you'll be sorry then, when you look across the gulf and see all your dear ones in Abraham's bosom. No hope of ever joining them. Torture for all eternity. Have you thought what the word Eternity means, child? You're young in your sins as yet, but you know that well enough, ha, ha, ha!" (She chuckled again, three hard little cackling noises they always were, cruel enough.) "It means that you will suffer the torments of the lake of fire that is burning with brimstone, not for a mere thousand thousand years, but for ever and ever and ever—"

I was less than four years old, and I could bear it no longer. I flew to my Grandmother's arm for safety,

sobbing brokenly, half-wild for fear.

Aunt Jael leaned back, content, pleased with the success of her punishment, and sure of heaven. Though if there be the Hell she raved of, it is for such as her.

My Grandmother comforted me. She was torn, I suppose, between two feelings. Her faith told her that what her sister said was true, her heart that it was cruel. I felt somehow even then that this was the nature of my Grandmother's struggle. The good heart turns away from cruelty, even when it speaks with all the authority of true religion, and so my Grandmother always turned away. She compromised: said nothing to Aunt Jael, while she comforted me; while soothing the victim, did not scold the scolder.

"Don't cry my dearie, and don't 'ee be frightened. Nought can harm 'ee. Your good aunt is right. 'Tis true that Hell is terrible, 'tis true that you're a sinful child, and 'tis true that you'll be going to the cruel place, if you have no sorrow and repentance in your heart. You broke your Aunt's fine cup; run to her now, tell her you're sorry. Only then can you be saved from the wrath of Jehovah, freed by repentance, cleansed by love of Christ. And even as Hell is awful, so is Heaven good. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. Run to your Aunt. Say: 'I'm sorry, Aunt.'"

I hesitated. Like my Grandmother's, my four-year-old heart found it had to decide between two calls. The call of fear was, "Say you're sorry, and escape surely from Hell." The call of hate was "Why? She is a bad cruel woman; and you're not sorry at all, you're glad you've smashed her evil cup."

"Besides," added the Tempter, "as you're not sorry, it would be lying to say you are."

I hung doubtfully. At length I pouted, "I don't want to."

"But true repentance," said my Grandmother, "means doing things you don't want to."

I said nothing.

"Mary, child—" my Grandmother paused a moment, "there is a bright angel in heaven who wants you to give way—your dear mother. I seem to hear her speaking to me now, and telling me so."

It is hard for me to explain the power that word had over me from my earliest days. I had a dear angelic vision of kind eyes and two white shining wings. I would shut my eyes in bed at night and see her. Sometimes she seemed to come very near, sometimes she would seem to bend over me and kiss me. Now, as my Grandmother finished speaking, I seemed to see her near. I ran across the room to the old arm-chair.

"I'm sorry, Great-Aunt," I said.

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## CHAPTER III: CHILD OF PRIVILEGE

Such a life and such a household encouraged unchildlike emotions. I was puzzled far too soon in

life by the puzzle of all life. I could not reconcile the wrath of Jehovah with the love of Christ, or the harshness of my Great-Aunt with the kindness of my Grandmother, which was the near and earthly form of that discrepancy. The world was a mysterious battlefield between Wrath and Love, as No. 8 Bear Lawn was a nearer and more familiar battle-place between Aunt Jael and Grandmother. Hell versus Heaven was another aspect of the battle. These two words were part of our daily life. They helped to make the two battles seem but one; for all the innumerable struggles between Aunt Jael and my Grandmother were conducted in the words and in the ways of our religion.

Our whole life was indeed our religion, or rather our religion was our life. From morn till night our daily life at Bear Lawn was an incessant preparation for our eternal life above. First we said our own private bedside prayers and read our "bedroom portions" of the Word. Then down in the dining-room after breakfast, Aunt Jael read the Word and prayed aloud for half-an-hour or more; the same after supper in the evening. Then, last thing at night, my Grandmother came to my room and prayed with me by my bedside. We lived in the world of our faith in a complete and intense way almost beyond the understanding of a modern household, however God-fearing. The promises of the faith, the unsearchable riches of Christ, the hope of God, the fear of Hell were our mealtime topics. Sin, as personified by me, was a fruitful subject. Both my Grandmother and Aunt Jael returned to it unwearied, the former mournfully because she loved me, the latter with a rough relish because she loved me not.

The main principles of our faith may be summed up

in a few capital-letter words. First, there was THE LORD: the God whom all men worship: Who is One. My child's difficulty was that He seemed to be Two. There was Aunt Jael's God, a Prince of battles, revenge and judgment, dipping His foot in the blood of enemies and the tongue of His dogs in the same; a King terrible in anger, dark as a thundercloud; Jehovah, the great I AM. There was my Grandmother's God, a loving Heavenly Father, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, pitying His children like a Father, Whose mercy was from everlasting to everlasting, Whose loving kindness was for ever.

"I will avenge," thundered Aunt Jael from her horsehair throne.

"God is Love," replied my Grandmother.

There was the WORLD, a comprehensive word which covered all concerts, entertainments, parties—whatever they might be, for I cannot say I knew—all merrymakings, junketings, outings, pleasures, joys; all books save *the* Book; all affection save for things above; all finery, furbelows, feathers, frills; smart clothes, love of money, lollipops, light conversation and unheavenly thoughts. Everything was of this world worldly which did not savour strongly of the next. There was the FLESH or the World made manifest in our bodies. It existed to be "mortified," chiefly by dancing attendance on Aunt Jael. Not to be up and about, getting Aunt Jael's morning cup-of-tea was fleshly, though it does not seem to have been fleshly to drink the same. Then there was the DEVIL, styled Personal, whom Mrs. Cheese in a fit of regrettable blasphemy once identified with Some One Else, and though the blasphemy shocked, I cannot truly say it pained me.

"She'm the very Dow'l hissel, th' ole biddy," said our bonds-woman one day after an encounter in the kitchen in which "th' ole biddy" had brandished big words, and had ended by brandishing the frying-pan also before leaving the beaten Mrs. Cheese to blaspheme, and later to be soothed by th' ole biddy's sister.

Then there was the BEAST, the *so-called* Pope of Rome: and his Mistress, that great WHORE that sitteth upon many waters, that Woman sitting upon a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns, that Strumpet arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations, upon whose forehead was her name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH—known also, in cravener circles, as the Roman Catholic Church. Beast and Whore were inextricably mixed up in my mind: an amorphous twin mass of scarlet and monstrous horror. I hated them with the passionate hate of ignorance, religion and mystery.

There were the ELECT, the Saints, the Few, God's Chosen Ones. There was the ROOM they worshipped in, the BLOOD which redeemed them, the GRACE which sustained them, and the eternal Rest or REWARD on High they aspired to. There was the WAY they reached it, the PLAN of Salvation which shewed them the Way, and the BOOK in which the Plan was to be found.

The Book! We read it aloud together twice a day, and privately many times. We delved into its pages early and late, in season and out of season. They say that

the old Cromwellians were men of one book; No. 8 Bear Lawn was a house of one book with very vengeance, for Aunt Jael would suffer no trumpery sugar-tales such as "The Pilgrim's Progress"—a book which many even of the staunchest Puritans stooped, I have learnt later, to peruse. There were other books in the dining-room bookcase—works of devotion, exhortation and exposition that I shall speak of later—but until I was ten years old, my Grandmother and Aunt decided I should read no other word whatsoever save *The* Book. Looking back, I do not regret their decision.

Day and night we searched the Scriptures. Aunt Jael and Grandmother discussed them interminably, and sometimes I dared to join in. Our preferences varied, and were the best index of our characters. Aunt Jael's favourite book was without doubt the Proverbs. Its salt old wisdom found echo in her mind. Its continual exhortations to chasten and to correct, nor ever to spare the rod, because of the crying of the chastened one, appealed to her nearly. They were quoted at me daily; usually, alas, as the prelude to offensive action with the thorned stick. Job was another favourite, and the din and bloodshed of the Books of Kings. Jeremiah, prophesying vengeance and horror, was her best-loved Prophet. Parts of Isaiah found favour too, most of all the thirty-fourth chapter where the prophet sings of the wild terrors that shall fill the day of the Lord's vengeance, when the screech-owl shall make her resting place in Zion and the vultures be gathered together. Of the Psalms she read most the forty-sixth, "God is our refuge and strength!" and the sixty-eighth, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered." Ah, she was an Old Testament woman. "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" was a dispensation she could follow better than "Love your

enemies." The law of Moses was more acceptable in her sight than the Law of Christ, Jehovah's word from the mountain than the Sermon on the Mount. The Epistle to the Romans, where Saint Paul scolds and scourges the saints of the Imperial City, was her favourite New Testament book. She loved the whole Bible, however, and knew it better than any one I have ever met except my Grandmother. She kept all the commandments, except perhaps the tenth. For she coveted Miss Salvation Clinker's fine white teeth. Her own were few—and black.

My Grandmother was a New Testament woman. She loved the Gospels best: the story of Jesus. She knew —and lived—better than any one the Sermon on the Mount, but came most often to St. John: the third chapter, "God so loved the world"; the tenth, "I am the Good Shepherd"; and the fifteenth, "I am the True Vine." She read through the Epistles every week, quoting most often from I Corinthians XIII—the Charity chapter—and the Epistles of John. In the Old Testament, she loved best the Psalms. She knew them of course by heart, as did I. The twenty-third and the hundred-and-third meant most to her. Aunt Jael's favourite, the savage sixty-eighth, was alien to her whole faith. She would not say she disliked it—to dislike a word or a letter of God's Word would have been sin. She obeyed the ten commandments that God gave to Moses and the two greater ones that Christ gave to the questioning scribe. She loved the Lord, and she loved her neighbours as herself. She was the only Christian I have ever met.

My own early loves in the Book I can record faithfully. From the age of four to the age of twelve, I always used the same copy; a large musty old Bible

that had belonged to my Mother, though not too large to hold comfortably in both hands. It was heavily marked.

There were three different kinds of mark: in ordinary black lead pencil, to show chapters I was studying with Grandmother and Aunt Jael, or portions I had to learn by heart; in blue crayon to indicate well-liked places; in red crayon to mark the passages I loved best of all. That old Bible is open before me now as I write: the red marks are faded a little, but they still tell me what I liked best in those far-off days, and (nearly always) like best still.

My preferences fell under three main heads. First, the bright-coloured stories of the beginning of the Bible, the wondrous lives of the men who began the world: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and Benjamin; with Princes such as Chedorlaomer the King of Elam, Tidal King of nations, and Pharaoh, full of dreams. There were revengeful women and some who suffered revenge: Hagar turned forth by Sarah into the wilderness of Beersheba; Lot's wife on whom God took vengeance and turned into a pillar of salt, and Potiphar's, who took vengeance on Joseph. There were mysterious places: Eden and Egypt, Ur of the Chaldees, the Wilderness and the Cities of the Plain, the land of Canaan flowing with milk and honey, and the slime pits of Siddim into which the Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fell. Wonders of earth and heaven: the Tower of Babel, the Serpent in the garden, the Tree of Knowledge; the Creation, the Plagues and the Flood; the Ark of refuge and the fugitive Dove.

My second bent was for the mournful places of the

Word; a morbid taste, but then so was I. The gloom of Job and the menace of Lamentations and the Woes of Matthew XXIV seemed to belong to our forbidding house. Up in the dim blueness of the attic I would declaim aloud the twenty-fourth chapter, where Christ spoke of the signs of His coming: wars and rumours of wars, famine and pestilence and earthquakes:

"Wheresoever the carcase is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

In my weak childish treble it must have sounded comic, though nobody ever laughed except, maybe, the God above the attic skylight. More even than gloom, I love pure sorrow: Ecclesiastes, where the Preacher talks of the sadness of all life, the eternal misery of Man; and the story of the Passion, the Son of Man Who tasted human bitterness and death. The subtlety of the Preacher may have been beyond me; it needs no wit but a child's understanding of English words to feel his unplumbable woe in her heart. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities: all is vanity. While Gethsemane saw the whole world's sorrow in a night-time.

My third, and chief, happiness was in the words. Passages there are of sounding wrath or matchless imagery. I did not understand them, for they pass all understanding. But I loved them, plastered them marginally with three thicknesses of red crayon, cried them aloud. I have counted, and the books with most markings are these four: The Psalms, the Song of Solomon, Isaiah, and The Revelation. In the last I revelled with a pure ecstasy of awe: in the sixth chapter, where the sun becomes black as sack-cloth of hair, and the moon as blood; in the twenty-first,

which tells of the City of Heaven, a city of pure gold, like unto clear glass, the foundations of whose rocks are garnished with jasper and sapphire and chalcedony and emerald and sardonyx and sardius and chrysolyte and beryl and topaz and chrysoprasus and jacinth and amethyst, whose light is the Lamb; most of all in the seventh chapter: "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they? *These are they which came out of great tribulation* and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

My Psalms, as I called them, as against Grandmother's or Aunt Jael's protégés, were the hundred-and-thirty-seventh, *By the waters of Babylon*, and the twenty-fourth, *Who is the King of glory?*

However much I might write about the Book, it would fail to fill the place in this record that it filled in our lives, of which it moulded the very moods. Aunt Jael as lover of the Mosaic law and student of the Proverbs, was herself stern lawgiver and sayer of dark sayings. She ruled. Ruled my Grandmother (nearly always and in nearly everything, though there were exceptions); ruled me (except in one or two awful occasions I shall tell of); ruled Mrs. Cheese (until the latter's Exodus); ruled the household, ruled the Meeting, and could have ruled the whole world with a due sense of her fitness for the post. The old armchair was her throne, the thorned stick her sceptre. As a woman she had, as I can see now, many high qualities. She did her duty as she saw it; was honourable and straightforward. She loved the truth, especially when it was unpalatable to other people. She had a deep fund of common-sense. She was a thrifty, hard-headed, sensible house-wife; and, as I said before, observed with zeal some nine of the

Commandments. But of kinder or more endearing qualities I remember none. No doubt some of the child's bitterness and the child's bias remain with me still—perhaps it is merely vain to imagine that I hold the scales evenly and do not let prejudice weight memory—but I look across many years and see, as I believe the world saw, a hard bad old woman. Heaven, they say, forgives those who love much; maybe it forgives also those who are little loved, for they need forgiveness most. Aunt Jael started life hard, but I feel certain that the hardness was made a hundredfold harder because no love—no lover—had ever come her way. Bitter because she had no family of her own, she strove to embitter her sister's. Cheated of the two things we women need most—lordship and love—in revenge she lorded it over everybody, and loved not a soul in the world. Not but what she could have wedded many a time if she'd felt so inclined, including some as "others" didn't mind stooping to take though they were her leavings; not but what—in short, to all the tragical-comical backward boastings of the unchosen woman she would treat us at times. It was one of her few weaknesses, and I have since wondered if, failing to deceive six-year-old me, she succeeded in deceiving herself. During a tirade of this kind, I always fell a-musing what "Uncle Jael" would have been like. I decided he would wear smoked black glasses, like the man who came to tune our old piano; because I once fancied that Aunt Jael's eyes had rested upon the latter with a suspicion of unwonted coyness. This must have been a freak of my imagination, if not of Aunt Jael's after-dinner brandy. "For two good qualities," she used to say, "I thank and praise the Lord. That he has preserved me all my life from all wanton sentiment; and that it has pleased Him to

make me the most fearless and outspoken woman in this town."

What I have said about my Grandmother's pastures in the Bible shows what manner of woman she was. Yet not quite completely. She was gentle and forgiving, and the most unselfish human being I have ever met, or ever shall; but this and more. She was as shrewd a housewife as her sister; a woman of common-sense and plain seeing. Nor was she weak or meek. She gave in to Aunt Jael, certainly; but on principle, that is through strength rather than weakness. And whenever she chose to fight ungloved, she would usually beat her sister. I was the chief battle-ground. When Aunt Jael's abuse or ill-treatment of me became too outrageous, Grandmother would show fight, and on her day could leave Aunt Jael drubbed and apologetic upon the stricken field. But if my Grandmother thus defended me to Aunt Jael, she never had a good word to say of me to myself, or to the Lord. Every night at my bedside she poured out my wickedness before my Maker; and in all her life she only praised me once. With rare instinct she refused to water the plant of self-righteousness which she saw ready to flourish in me like the bay-tree. In her mild way she could be as outspoken as her sister; indeed what with the two of them and Mrs. Cheese, who "called a spade a spade, and a pasnip a pasnip," ours was a stark outspoken house, a dark palace of Plain Speaking. Despite all my Grandmother's loveliness of character, she lacked one thing. Demonstrative affection, warm clinging love, the encircling arm, the kiss, the gentle madness, the dear embrace,—things I did not know the existence of till a later unforgettable moment, though they were the mystery, the hunger, never perfectly visualized,

never in the heart understood, that till that moment I was seeking always to solve, to satisfy; the thing I cried for passionately without knowing what thing it was—these had no meaning for her, no place ever in her life. The nearest she had known was in her love for my mother. Did they kiss? I wonder. In all the years of her love and goodness to me, she never once kissed me upon the mouth, nor hugged me, nor let me hug her; nor said the word for which my little wild heart was waiting. For so good and affectionate a woman she was strangely phlegmatic. As she did not embrace in love, nor did she weep in sorrow. Even when my mother died, her eyes, she told me, were dimmed for a moment only. It was the Lord's will: wherefore weep? Yet I have seen her shedding tears of joy over a missionary chronicle which told of the conversion of some African negro. She had tears, that is, for the Lord; as her strongest love was for Him. Humans mattered much; but less. Thus I was lonely.

To give a picture of myself in those early days I find harder, though once again the Bible helps. I liked the imaginative old stories of Genesis, I liked the sad and gloomy books, I liked mysterious words; that is, I was imaginative, morbid, and fond of the unknown and the beautiful: much what any other child brought up under the same circumstances would have been. If not a remarkable, and certainly not a clever child, I was no less certainly out-of-the-ordinary. With my morbid environment it was inevitable. I was serious, solemn and sensitive beyond what any child should be. In fact my oddness really amounted to this, that I was unchildlike—chiefly because I was unhappy. If ever there were a moping miserable little guy, it was I. I had no companions of my own age whatever, nor up till just

before the time I left Tawborough for Torribridge had I ever been alone with any other child for half an hour in my life. Aunt Jael forbade intercourse with worldly children, and my Grandmother agreed. They were an unknown race. All my companions were old women; the youngest, Mrs. Cheese, was sixty. I was never allowed to play with the Lawn children, indeed never allowed to play with anybody or "at" anything. I was kept indoors all day long to mope about in the gloomy house.

The distractions allowed were two: searching the Scriptures, and plain sewing. At six in the morning I got up, and, from the age of five or six onwards, made my own bed and dusted my bedroom. Then I went into Aunt Jael's room, and helped her to dress. Aunt Jael was usually in an evil temper first thing, and the only coin in which she repaid my services was hard words and harder bangs. It was a painful half-hour passed in an atmosphere of laces and buttons, hooks and eyes, blows and maledictions. Sometimes if I failed to do her boots up quickly enough, she would kick me. The next duty was helping Mrs. Cheese and Grandmother with the breakfast, which was eaten at half past seven punctually. After breakfast, prayers; then I dusted the dining-room; then from nine to eleven, two wretched hours with Aunt Jael styled Lessons, a hotchpotch of Proverbs, pothooks and multiplication-tables, served up with the usual seasoning of cuffs and imprecations. Every day I cried wretchedly, though tears brought nothing but the stick—and tears again. From eleven to twelve I sewed with my Grandmother; at noon we had dinner. After dinner Grandmother usually studied the Word in her bedroom, while Aunt Jael snored in her chair: I was left to moon about the house alone, with no

plaything, no books, no companions; no resources whatever but my own imagination. I would sit for hours in the great blue attic, talking to myself, inventing imaginary scenes in which I triumphed over Aunt Jael and humbled her before the world, or reciting from the Word, or often merely weeping. After supper, came prayers and reading the Word; then bedside prayers with my Grandmother; then bed, which was not a much happier place, as I dreamt often, usually nightmares of hell and eternity, Satan and Aunt Jael.

It was a dreary life. I was a dreary little girl, and I must have looked it. No photograph was ever taken to perpetuate the prim, sulky, pale Quakerish little object I am told I was. My odd appearance was not helped by decent clothes. There was to be no indulgence of the Flesh, and I was dressed with due unbecomingness, always in the same way. I wore a dark green corduroy blouse and skirt, and a little corduroy bonnet to match, bedecked with a gaunt duck's feather. For winter I had an ugly black overcoat with a cape. I had black woollen mittens and square hobnailed boots.

I had no martyr's idea of myself, however, no exquisite self-pity, and any trace of such that may appear here is to be laid at the door of the authoress aged fifty, not of her chrysalis aged five. All I knew was that I was miserable. I had a child's sure instinct for injustice. I knew it was unjust that Aunt Jael should beat and abuse me all day long. I hated her bitterly, and hate makes no one happier. Lovelessness is even worse than hate, and the two beset me. My Grandmother loved me tenderly no doubt, but her ways were not my ways. She had no understanding of what I longed for. I wanted

somebody—I only half guessed this, not daring to believe the visualization when it suggested itself—in whose bosom I could bury my face and cry for pure happiness. I would whimper myself to sleep thinking of my mother. Sometimes I seemed to see her as an angel. She looked kind and radiant, and comforted me. When my Grandmother caught me crying for my mother, I would say it was because of Aunt Jael's latest flogging.

Fear ruled me. The Devil and Hell frightened me terribly, and Eternity more. The thought of living for ever and ever and ever, the attempt of my child's mind to picture everlastingness, to visualize my own soul living through the pathless spaces of a billion years, and to be still no nearer the end than at the beginning,—this morbid unceasing trick of my imagination filled me with an ecstasy of fear, that froze and numbed my brain. I would sit up in bed too terrified to scream, voiceless with fear. My heart beat wildly. The realization that there was no hope, no way out—oh, heart, none ever—that because I was once born I must live for all eternity, seized my body and brain alike. I would jump out of bed, cry brokenly "God, God" in wild agony of soul, until, at last, the terror passed. Then, in a strange way, the blood rushed warmly back into my brain, and a languorous feeling of ease succeeded the terror of a moment before. Sometimes I was wicked and foolish enough to suffer the horror of thus "thinking Eternity out" for the sake of the luxurious backwash of comfort and physical peace which followed. But most often the terror came imperiously, and I could not escape it. I would be looking at the stars, I would think of their ineffable distances, then from eternity in space my mind would be dragged as by some devil to eternity in time, and I would have to live through

the terror of the attempt—against my own will as it were—to think out, to live out, the meaning of living for ever. It is the worst agony the poor human soul can know; for a child, unnameable. There is no escape. The soul must go through the agony of the whole visualization—it may only be seconds, though it seems (perhaps is) Eternity Itself—right to the moment when the brain and body can abide the horror no longer, and from the very depths the soul cries out to "God."

A happy healthy child would know nothing of such bogeys; but I was neither. I was puny and ailing; I rarely went out of doors. Market on a Friday morning, Meeting on Sundays, and an afternoon walk once in a long while constituted my record of outings. The only real advantage I gained from this unhappy and unhealthy life was the development of a quite unusual power of instinct and intuition. Shut up all day long with no companions but the same three faces, I could read every mood and movement of them with unerring skill. Like the savage, or any one else who lives in an abnormally narrow world, I felt things rather than knew them. And the thing I felt and knew most sorely was that I was wretched. And when Aunt Jael moralized and said, "You are a privileged child indeed," I felt and knew that she was lying.

"Your holy kinsfolk, your saintly mother, your godly surroundings, your exceptional chances of grace, all show you to be a Child of Privilege."

All this, from the earliest days that I could understand, was usual enough. One day, however, when I was about five, she paused here with an air of special importance that I scented at once, then

proceeded, "Your Grandmother and I have come to a decision, Child. Everything points out that the Lord has chosen you for special privileges, and special works for Him. If you were a boy, Child, the way would be clear. We should train you for the Ministry of His Word. Yet the way has been made plain. Your Grandmother and I have decided, after much seeking of the Lord in prayer, that your lot is to be cast—(she looked towards my Grandmother for confirmation, and concluded majestically)—*in the field of foreign labour*. You will bear witness to the Lord among the heathen. 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel, for lo! I am with you alway'!"

I looked appealingly towards my Grandmother. "Yes," she said, "I think it is the Lord's will."

So that was my life work. I was to spend Eternity as a missionary.

"You are indeed a Child of Privilege," Aunt Jael was booming.

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## CHAPTER IV: I GO TO MEETING

On Lord's Day, March the Sixth 1853, being the first Sabbath after my fifth birthday, I was taken to Meeting.

Meeting!—one social sphere my Grandmother and Great-Aunt knew; their one earthly club, set, milieu; company of saints, little flock of the elect,

assembling together of the chosen of God from Eternity!

I awoke to find Grandmother standing by my bed; which was unusual, for I always woke myself.

"'Tis a great and notable day, my dear; the day you are to join with the Lord's people in prayer and praise. I want to pray with 'ee."

I got out of my bed, and when she had put around me the old red dressing gown, we knelt down together by the bedside, and the Lord was besought to vouchsafe that my first public acquaintance with His People might be abundantly blessed to me. After breakfast I was sent upstairs to my bedroom to meditate apart for an hour before Meeting; an exercise ordained henceforward every Sunday of my life.

About a quarter-past-ten we sallied forth, Mary in green corduroy between Grandmother in her Sunday black and Aunt Jael with her go-to-Meeting blue-velvet-ribboned bonnet. I should now behold the inside of the Room, antechamber of Heaven; I should join in public worship with the Saints. Curiosity alone did not stir me; in some vague exalted way, I hoped to get nearer to the Lord.

The Room was a bare little tabernacle in a side-street, built in the Noah's Ark style dear also to Methodism. Grandmother took my hand as we mounted the steps from the street; we passed into the Holy Place. I received at once the curious effect of a light bluish mist which, though brighter, reminded me of the thick blue gloom of my attic, and which was caused by the light blue distempered brick of the walls and ceiling. There were eight windows in the

Room, which was many times larger than our parlour and by far the largest place I had ever entered; each consisted of twenty-four small square panes, six in the perpendicular by four breadthways, a source for years to come of endless countings and pattern-weavings and mystical mathematical tricks. There were two of these windows at each end of the room, and two down each side. All eight were set so high as almost to merge into the ceiling. The curious result was that while near the floor it was comparatively dark, the upper part of the room was very light. A symbol, I thought; for Earth is dark, but Heaven bright. Aunt Jael led the way up a druggeted sort of aisle to the front row where we alone sat: the family's immemorial place, though purchased by no worldly pew-rent. In the first rush of newness I but dimly apprehended the benches of black-clad figures we had passed. Immediately in front of us stood the Lord's Table, covered with spotless white damask, and laden with two tall bottles of wine, two great pewter tankards, and two cottage-loaves on plates. Beyond the Table was a low raised dais from which the Gospel was preached at the evening meetings for unbelievers; never used at the Breakings of Bread, for all Saints are equal, and none may stand above his fellows. On either side of the Table, however, respectively to our right and left were the (unofficial) seats of the mighty: Mr. Pentecost Dodderidge and Brother Brawn on one side, Brother Quappleworthy and Brother Browning on the other. On the wall at the far end was a clock, loudly audible in the abysmal silences of prayer.

I did not absorb all the details at a first glance; nor do I really remember the particular texts, expositions and hymns of that initiatory day. What I do always retain and rehearse in my mind is rather one "Type"

meeting, from first silence to final benediction; an ideal combination of many different Lord's Days, in which I have unconsciously fitted together Brothers, events, homilies, each in most typical essence.

This morning meeting, the Breaking of Bread, was the meeting par excellence. The Breaking of the Bread and the drinking of wine were the central acts of a tense and devout program of prayer, of reading and exposition of the Word, and of hymn-singing, unaccompanied by any choir or instrument of music. Only Saints were bidden, i. e., those who had testified aloud to the saving grace of the body and the blood, and had taken up their Cross in public baptism. We were no ordinary Dissenting chapel, where "All are welcome":—the more the merrier, more grist to the mill, more pennies on the plate, more souls for the Kingdom. Only the Lord's own chosen testified people were deemed worthy of this solemn privilege of eating His sacred Body and drinking His sacred Blood; and only they were admitted. The only exceptions were a few children, like myself, who could not be left at home by their elders. A few non-privileged adults very occasionally came: old friends of the Meeting who for some reason of reluctance or uncertainty were untestified and unbaptized, or strangers, drawn by sympathy or curiosity; but earthen platter and pewter mug were zealously snatched away if such alien hands essayed to grasp them. (So too was the collecting-box. I have seen visitors with outstretched arm and generous shilling gasp with surprise as the money-box was drawn rudely out of their reach. Unlike worldlywise church or chapel, we would touch none but hallowed gold. The collection was as close a privilege as the communion.)

On an average morning we were fifty or sixty strong; more women than men, more old than young, more wan than hale, more humble than high. With dough of small shopkeepers, masons, artisans, gardeners, old women with pathetic private incomes, washerwomen, charwomen, servants, we had leaven of more comfortable middle-class people like Grandmother and Aunt Jael, or "better" folk still like Mr. Pentecost Dodderidge, or best of all dear Brother Quappleworthy, our graduate of the University of Oxford, our cousin by marriage with a peer of England! Believers in the aristocratic principle would have noted with satisfaction that from this blue-blooded minority were drawn almost all the "Leading Saints."

We were a community. The better-to-do helped the poor, and remembered that all were equal before God. Odd folk and sane folk, stupid folk and wise folk: with all their failings, a more gentle, worthy, sincere and trustful company of followers of Jesus of Nazareth could not have been found in this whole world or century. The fault they were farthest from is the one the fool most often imputes: hypocrisy. They were, of course, a varied company; it takes all sorts to make a Meeting.

Our Leading Brothers were Mr. Pentecost Dodderidge, with Brothers Brawn, Browning, Briggs, Quappleworthy, Quick, and Quaint. The last was only included just to round things off and to justify Mr. Pentecost's holy pleasantry "The Lord is watching us: let us mind our B's and Q's," for he was really quite an obscure brother who rarely broke silence, and then to pray so pessimistically that he can never have expected his petitions to be heard, let alone

answered.

To be Leading Brother implied merely this: to stand out of the ruck of silent members, either in prayer or exposition of the Word. Many an obscure Brother, however, who would never have risked his hand at prayer or exposition occasionally blurted into a morning's modest fame by announcing a hymn. A stir of special interest was always felt in the Meeting on such occasions, and it was whispered that "the Lord was notably working in Brother So-and-So." Giving out a hymn was after all not so mean a performance. Every line of every verse was slowly enunciated by the chooser before we began to sing. The church and chapel habit of reading out only the first verse (or even line!) struck me as very odd and meagre when I first encountered it many years later. Prayer, however, was the favourite form of self-expression. All the Leading Saints were "powerful in prayer."

Exposition either followed or accompanied the reading of a portion of the Word. It was our "sermon." Our five regular expounders were Mr. Pentecost, Brothers Quappleworthy (the chief), Brawn, Browning and Briggs.

Though in theory we allowed no official ruler of the synagogue, in practice Mr. Pentecost Dodderidge was our Great High Priest. He alone was spoken of as Mister. He alone was immune from error and criticism. It is hard for me to reconstruct his personality now, when my own mentality is so different from when I knew him, when he prayed for me, blessed me, took me on his knees. It is still harder to convey to this generation the reverence in which his venerable white hairs were held. The world in which he ruled, the Saints' world, may have

been small; but within its pale, through all England, he was revered as the holiest child of man. And we of the Tawborough Meeting possessed him for ourselves: in his old age he ceased to travel, and left us but little. We shone in the reflected glory of his presence; knew ourselves the Meeting of Meetings, called blessed of the Lord. He lived by prayer alone: the anonymous gifts of money on which he chiefly lived came to him whence he did not know, except that they came from God. In the old ancestral house another famous Pentecost Dodderidge had built he still lived; in one hallowed room he welcomed all who came to him for their souls' good; another was fitted as a workshop, and here till after his eightieth year he spent a portion of every day at the lathe. He could preach in eight languages, in five of them fluently. He never rose later than four and devoted the three hours before breakfast to "knee-drill," i. e., incessant prayer. He baptized believers in the river Taw till his eightieth year. One memorable immersion of which I shall speak later took place when he had turned eighty-four. His one kink was a trick of godly epigrams and holy repartees, cunningly led up to, of which he was as nearly vain as he could be. I remember Aunt Jael once saying to him in our dining-room at Bear Lawn:

"Your 'Life' should be written, Mr. Pentecost."

"But it is being written, dear sister," he replied. "It will be published in the morning."

"Published? Where?"

"Beyond the sky. The author is the Lord Jesus Christ. The ink is His precious Blood."

Another day my Grandmother asked him if he would

begin to remember me in his prayers.

"I cannot," he replied gently.

"Cannot?" faltered my Grandmother.

"No, I cannot *begin* to pray for her. I have begun already."

For all his eminence Pentecost took no preponderating share in worship, nor ever made himself like the "Ministering Brothers" of some other meetings, who prayed almost all the prayers, chose almost all the hymns, gave one long sermon-like piece of exposition, and officiated alone at the Lord's Table—for all the world like a dissenting parson in his chapel or a priest in his church.

Second in importance stood Brother Brawn, a fat, doddering, bleating, weak-at-the-knees old bachelor and Christian; the maid-of-all-work of the Meeting, who distributed the offertory, paid the caretaker, saw to the heating and cleaning of the room, and bought the bread and wine. With his white waggly little beard and gentle animal features he looked absurdly like a goat, and ba-a-a-d just like one too. He had two little homilies only, which he and we knew by heart; one on 'Ell and the other on Mysteries, often given one after the other to form a continuous whole. Some of the Saints, I fear, dared to think these holy discourses dull. Not so Miss Salvation Clinker, who declared that "ivry word wat falls from 'is blessed lips is a purl uv great price."

Brother Quappleworthy, who stood equal in importance, was a striking contrast. He was our intellect, our light of learning, our peer's cousin-in-law. His erudition in real Hebrew and real Greek

ranked with Brother Brawn's devotion, if a little lower than Pentecostal saintliness. Sneer we never so smugly at the filthiness of mere book knowledge, not one of us but was somehow elated to hear that favourite phrase: "Now in the original Greek—" His supplications, if acceptable to many, were perhaps too much of a muchness. It was all "Yea Lord, Nay Lord, Oh Lord, Ah Lord, If Lord...."

After Brother Quappleworthy, Brother Browning was our most frequent speaker. He came to Meeting accompanied by his little boy Marcus, the most youthful person present save me, but not, alas, by his spouse, who belonged, alas, to that pernicious sect of Bible Christians whom he (seven times alas) did occasionally himself frequent.

There was Brother Briggs, by vocation an oilman's handyman, whose face always shone with oil of happiness and hope, whose utterances were charged with an uncontrollable optimism and joy, a ringing, shouting, h-less content with the universe. The learned would call it cosmic expansiveness. Beside him Walt Whitman was a prophet of despair, Mark Tapley a misanthrope. His favourite word was "bewtivul" and he used it without mercy. There was Brother Quaint, the gloomy pray-er. There was Brother Lard, who emitted from his mouth periodic noises—signs of bad manners and digestion—which it is unusual to mention on paper: endemic endeavours that punctuated the subtlest exposition of Quappleworthy, the dreariest prayer of Quaint's, and added a spice of charm and unexpectedness to the whole service. I enjoyed them coarsely; with solemn face, pious unawareness. One joyous occasion I remember when Brother Quappleworthy was beginning the eighth chapter of the Revelation in his

most impressive style. At the words "There was silence in heaven about the space of half-an-hour," he paused dramatically to illustrate, as it were, the meaning. Then, after five seconds of rapt silence, Brother Lard trumpeted forth: long, loud, luscious, lingering; a diapason of swaying sound and chronic indigestion. To the eternal credit of my Grandmother and Great-aunt, I record it that they smiled.... There was Brother Marks, a thin unhappy-looking man, wearing large black-rimmed spectacles, who mourned in a far corner apart, and never uttered a word or even joined in the hymns. I thought him a sinister figure; his goggles repelled me; I associated him by some vague but authentic impulse with the Personal Devil.

The Sisters were of course less important than the Brothers. "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak." Above all the others towered Sister Vickary and Sister Lee. My Grandmother was universally loved. Before Aunt Jael the whole meeting quailed. Brother Briggs grovelled. Brother Brawn obeyed, Brother Quappleworthy deferred. She herself deferred to Pentecost Dodderidge alone; indeed the veneration she felt for the venerable instrument of her conversion, her Ananias of Damascus, was touching in so masterful a soul. In the ledgers of the Lord, I make bold to guess, it stands to her credit. In the counsels of the elders she was supreme; she was the wise woman of the Proverbs. No decision affecting the welfare of the flock could be taken by Pentecost or Brawn without the assent of the Shepherdess, as the former called her, perhaps not unmindful of her crook. No meeting felt it had the right—or courage—to begin without her presence. When it was over, she walked out first, bowing to right and left like an

Empress as she stalked the length of the Room. She had as much common-sense as any other three Saints added together. Not a soul of them loved her.

* * * * * * *

We arrived each Lord's day about twenty-five past ten. When all were assembled, there was a period of five or ten minutes' absolute silence, broken only by the strident ticking of the clock. Some pairs of eyes were closed in silent prayer, others stared straight before them at some heavenly object of reflection.

Up rose Brother Browning. "Let us sing together to the glory of the Lord hymn number one-four-two: '*We praise Thee, O Jehovah!*'" There was a turning of leaves, for at this time most of us possessed hymn-books, though a few of the older generation, including Aunt Jael, viewed all hymn-books as snares of the Devil, and bore witness against the fleshly innovation by still singing always from memory. Brother Browning read aloud the whole hymn:

We praise Thee, O Jehovah!
  We know, whate'er betide,
Thy name, "*Jehovah Jireh*,"
  Secures, "Thou wilt provide."

We praise Thee, O Jehovah!
  Our banner gladly raise;
"*Jehovah Nissi!*" rally us
  For conflict, victory, praise.

We praise Thee, O Jehovah!
  In every trouble near;
"*Jehovah Shalom*"—God is peace,—
  Dispels each doubt and fear.

We praise Thee, O Jehovah!
And, clothed in righteousness,
"*Jehovah*" great "*Tskidkenu*!"
Complete, we gladly bless.

We praise Thee, O Jehovah!
Thou wilt for Israel care!
"*Jehovah Shammah*," precious thought!
Henceforth "The Lord is there."

We sang sitting. Oh, inharmonious howl! Some Brother—usually Brother Schulz, who was fancied to possess musical talent—pitched the key and set the time as he fancied. The latter was always funereally slow, the former more often than not much too high or too low to be persevered with. Not that that mattered. Somebody would merely switch off into another key anything from a semitone to an octave higher or lower as the case might be: switching part of the way back again if the change proved too drastic. The consequence of this go-as-you-please policy was that a hymn would sometimes be sung in four different times and seven or eight different keys. Above all the holy din you could hear Brother Briggs bawling forth his joy in the Lord; higher still the awful metallic howl of Sister Yeo.

When the hymn was done there was another space of complete silence till the spirit moved Brother Quappleworthy to utterance. Once on his feet, he found his two Bibles, English and Greek, rather difficult to wield, especially as his reading from the Word hardly ever consisted of one solid chapter read straight through, but of snippets of two or three verses each from half-a-dozen different books, connected only by their (imagined) relevance to the topic he had in mind: grace or trustfulness or hope or

sin. We all followed him in our own Bibles: so that his Reading had orchestral accompaniment of zealous page-rustlings. "Let us read together in the Book of Genesis, that sixth chapter and those fifth, sixth and seventh verses ... and now let us turn to the Book of Job, the fifth chapter and the thirteenth verse ... and now a verse in that sweet Second Epistle of Peter, the second chapter and that fourth verse...."

After we had rustled backwards and forwards for a few minutes, Brother Quappleworthy closed first one Bible and then the other with two emphatic snaps, and put them under his left arm, leaving his right hand free to gesticulate,—more especially the right forefinger, which ever and anon he brandished to exhort, to emphasize, to warn, to wheedle. "Well, brethren, the upshot and outcome of all that we have read is—ah—manifest. It is—ah—this. He alone saved us from the pit. He alone, not—ah—another. He saved *us*—miserable sinners, grovelling worms—us and none others. Far be it from us ever to think ourselves worthy of such grace and favour! Far otherwise!—but so He willed. Our souls—your soul, ah, my soul—would have gone into eternal darkness save for Him, the Lord,—Κὐριος [Greek: Kyrios]—how I love it in the old Greek! He alone, brethren, can—ah—renew our natures; and can—ah—shape better desires for our natures when renewed—can show us the more excellent way!..."

After a new silence, the spirit would move Brother Brawn to clamber to his feet, and give us his changeless utterance on "'Ell" or "Mysteries." I give it with a word for word accuracy I cannot often vouch for. His *er-er* was a bleating sort of stammer much less elegant than Brother Quappleworthy's *ah*.

"My mind, brethren, 'as bin—er—er dwellin' much all through the mornin' on the subject of *'Ell*. On the torments and 'orrors that all the 'eathen and unsaved will taste down there below, yes, and are tastin' at this very minnit as we are praisin' the Lord 'ere in this Rume. Torments and—er—er—er—'orrors. You know. I know. And they torments are for *all* the sinners an' unsaved: ivry wan uv them, not for *some* jis', as I've 'eard folk say. No for all, *all*, *ALL*, *A L L*. You mark my words. *All* the *'eathen* shall be *'urled* to *'Ell*, *whether* they've *'eard* or *whether* they *'aven't*!" (This last sentence he sing-songed with violent emphasis, clapping his hands together at the syllables I have marked) "O Yes! I can imagine 'em wallering in the brimstone and sulphur. I know. *We* shall be wi' Lazarus in Abraham's—er—er—bosom, and *they* will be down the fiery gulf, down in the fiery pit. So, brethren, let us be ready for the Lord, let us make sure uv *our* place in the bosom, not the pit. Bosom for us! BOSOM! We must watch and er—er—pray. We must. I'm sure we must."

A pause. He shifted his feet clumsily. His thick lips moved stupidly as he made mental preparations for Part Two.

"My mind, brethren, 'as been—er—er—dwellin' much on another subjict this mornin', the subjict of Mysteries. It has; I'm sure it has. There are two mysteries. There is the mystery of godliness, that's one; and the mystery of iniquity, that's two. It all 'appened at the Fall. The Fall was when the mystery of godliness became the mystery of iniquity; an' the mystery of iniquity became the mystery of godliness; all mixmuddled up together as you mid say. It became 'ard to-er—er—tell 'em apart. 'Tis only 'Is chosen ones as can do it—that's you and me,

brethren—and 'tain't orwis easy for us. Let us try to know one from the other, and if we tries our 'ardest, the Lord will 'elp us to. Yes 'E will. I'm sure 'E will."

After Brother Brawn, the beginning of the meeting was well over. We knew that the great moments were drawing near. A deeper silence filled the little room: the hush of pure holiness. There was a prayer or two, and then we sang the Bread hymn. Usually this one:

Through Thy precious body broken
*In*side the veil.
Oh, what words to sinners spoken—
*In*side the veil.
Precious, as the blood that bought us;
Perfect, as the love that sought us;
Holy, as the Lamb that brought us;
*In*side the veil.

When we see Thy love unshaken,
*Out*side the camp.
Scorn'd by man, by God forsaken,
*Out*side the camp.
Thy loved cross alone can charm us;
Shame doth now no more alarm us;
Glad we follow, nought can harm us;
*Out*side the camp.

Lamb of God! through Thee we enter
*In*side the veil.
Cleansed by Thee, we boldly venture
*In*side the veil.
Not a stain; a new creation;
Ours is such a full salvation!
Low we bow in adoration,
*In*side the veil.

Unto Thee, the homeless stranger,
*Out*side the camp.
Forth we hasten, fear no danger,
*Out*side the camp.
Thy reproach far richer treasure
Than all Egypt's boasted pleasure;
Drawn by love that knows no measure,
*Out*side the camp.

Soon Thy saints shall all be gathered,
*In*side the veil.
All at home, no more be scattered,
*In*side the veil.
Nought from Thee our hearts shall sever,
We shall see Thee, grieve Thee never;
"Praise the Lamb!" shall sound for ever
*In*side the veil.

We sang it to a slow drawling tune, incommunicably dreary.

Pentecost arose, white and priestly. "Little children, every time I come to this Table, I come with a joy, a peace and a gratitude that are ever new. My heart is too full of love for my Saviour for any words of mine to tell you. Let us bear in mind, little children, rather His own precious words: This is my Body, which is given for you."

As he ceased, Brother Brawn arose from his seat at the right of the Table, took each of the loaves, held them sacrificially aloft, broke them in twain. One plate he himself passed round among the Saints, Brother Browning the other. I watched with evergreen curiosity and reverence how each Saint broke off a piece of bread and with closed eyes slowly munched it away. Once in a way the impious

thought seized me that 'twas all farce, mummery, tomfoolery: this chewing of dough. The next instant I would flush crimson to have let such wickedness find place for an instant in my mind: I would look and behold the rapture on the munching faces; and understand beyond all doubting that here was something mystical, magical, holy. I could see that those who took bread obtained thereby some supernal joy that I was too young or too sinful to share. It could not be tomfoolery if it gave you the rapture I could see on the faces around me. Besides, Jesus had ordained it.

Another silence—the middle space of the double sacrifice—ere we sang the Wine hymn:

It is the blood, it is the blood,
Which has atonement made;
It is the blood which once for all
Our ransom price has paid.

It was the blood, the mark of blood
The people's houses bore;
And when that mark by God was seen
His angel passed the door.

Not *water*, then, nor *water* now,
Has ever saved a soul;
Not Jewish rites, but Jesus' stripes
Can make the wounded whole.

"I see the blood," "I see the blood,"
A voice from Heaven cries,
The soul that owns this token true,
And trusts it, never dies.

For He who suffered once for all,

That we might life obtain,
Will never leave His Father's throne
To shed that blood again.

Brother Quick, in a low voice trembling with passion, prayed that God would make us worthy of this chief experience.

There was a moment of the holiest and most breathless silence I have ever known. I have stood alone at midnight when no birds sang, no leaf stirred, and the autumn stars shone silently through the unwhispering roof of a dark Russian forest. I have stood on the summit of the Great Gable and gazed at the wild soundless mountains all around, in that wild soundless moment before the dawn arrives. But never except in the Romish Mass, at that multitudinous most sacred moment when the heart stops beating, have I tasted so awful a silence as this, when the Spirit of God moved in the hearts of our little company. I did not greet Him in mine—not yet.

Brother Brawn uncorked the two bottles of wine and filled the tankards. The rapture on the faces round me was tenser than after the Bread: especially, I thought, in Pentecost's and my Grandmother's. The longing to share it possessed me more and more every day as I grew up. I hoped that at a very tender age I too might break the bread and drink the wine.

The third and last stage of the Meeting usually began with an utterance from Brother Briggs. If everything before had led up to the communion, Brother Briggs led on from it. He bellowed so loud that at times the roof rang. "Aw, my dear brethering, after the cup us all 'ave tasted, there be only one thing I'ze goin' to zay—Praise the Lawd, O my Sowl! Praise ye the Lawd! I'm only a pore hignorrint zinner, but I knaws

this yer: That Jesus zhed 'Is bled vur me, and that 'tis uv 'Is precious bled as I've bin a-privil'ged to drink this mornin'. 'E 'ath 'olpen hus! O 'ow I luv that word *hus*! O 'ow I luv that word *hus*! Turn wi' me to the gauspel accordin' to St. Matthew, chapter eight verse zeventeen: 'Imself took our infirmities and bare our zickness. Praise 'Im, zes I, praise 'Im! Let ivry thing that 'ath breath praise the Lawd! Bewtivul! Bewtivul!

"Us shud orwis be praisin' 'Im, brethering, and us shud orwis be 'appy in 'Is love. Orwis 'appy! If us be un'appy, 'tis along of this yer—that us 'ave bin drinkin' of zum voul stream, instead uv they vountains uv 'Is love. And us *are* 'appy, arn't us, brethering? As I luke round at 'ee, all brothers and zisters, and zee what triumphs and trophies of grace ye all be, I zes to missel', and I cries aloud to 'eaven: Praise ye the Lawd! Bewtivul!

"'E 'ave dragged us up out of a *nor*ribull pit, a *nor*ribull pit, out o' the moiry clay, and shed 'Is blid that us may live wi' 'Im vur iver and ivermore. Turn wi' me to the blessid gauspel according to St. Jan, the sixth chapter and vivty-zixth verse, and 'earken to vat my Lawd zes there: 'E that eateth my flesh, 'e zes, an' drinketh my blid, dwelleth in me, 'e zes, an' I in 'im. O 'ow I luv that word *'Im*.' O 'ow I luv that word *'Im*! O the blessed thought: to dwell for iver in 'Im, an 'Im in us! Bewtivul! Bewtivul! Bewtivul!..."

Then would he bellow forth and would we sing "He sitteth o'er the waterfloods" or "I hear the Accuser Roar":—

I hear the Accuser roar
Of ills that I have done,
I know them well, and thousands more—
Jehovah findeth none.

Sin, Satan, Death, press near
To harass and appal;
Let but my risen Lord appear,
Backward they go and fall.

Before, behind, around,
They set their fierce array,
To fight and force me from my ground,
Along Emmanuel's way.

I meet them face to face,
Through Jesus' conquest blest,
March in the triumph of His grace,
Right onward to my rest.

There, in His Book, I bear
A more than conqu'ror's name,
A soldier, son, and fellow-heir
Who fought and overcame.

Bless, bless the Conqueror slain—
Slain in His victory;
Who lived, Who died, Who lives again,
For thee, dear Saint, for thee!

Brother Brawn made the Announcements. On that first occasion, I remember, he made some reference to me ("One of tender years worshipping with us for the first time"), to my dedication to the Lord, and to his hopes that I might be made meet therefor.

Everybody stared. I flushed, with infant conceit rather than pious ecstasy: it was my first appearance in public. After Announcements, the Offertory. This was taken in a large square box divided into four slit compartments labelled in white painted capitals: MINISTRY, FOREIGN FIELD, POOR, EXPENSES. My

Grandmother was always much exercised in her giving. Her own inclinations were more towards Poor and Foreign Field, but she felt she ought not to neglect less showy and alluring Expenses nor coyer, more elusive Ministry. She would compromise between duty and pleasure by putting a sixpence in all four, with perhaps an extra copper or two in Poor; of her modest income giving half-a-crown to the Lord at this morning service alone. Aunt Jael with a rather larger income (and no Mary to support) never gave more than a shilling between all four compartments. She also had a *penchant* for Expenses: I suppose it pleased her—waywardly—as the least human of the four.

(This fourfold collecting-box allowed a pleasurable width of choice, but a quite different consideration had led to its introduction and the supersession of the cloth bag formerly in use. During a period of several years a lump of sugar had been put in the bag every Lord's day at Breaking of Bread, and though clouds of prayer were offered up to soften the heart of the sinner-Saint who played this weekly prank upon his Meeting and his Maker, they were all of no avail. He (or she) hardened his heart; every Lord's day the bag was found to contain yet another impious lump. Stare Brother Brawn never so stark at every giving hand, the sinner remained undetected in his sweet career. It was finally suggested by Aunt Jael that a new type of box, with but a narrow slit for the coins to pass through, would baffle the evil-doer. The choice-of-beneficiare partisans united with her, and they evolved between them this fourfold enormity, with its meat-dish dimensions and its four defensive slits. Vain precautions! Idle hopes! All the sugar-sinner did was to insert a much smaller piece than before; usually in Foreign Field. It was a marvel

to the Saints how he squeezed it through; a tragedy how he persevered in his sin.)

After the Offertory came perhaps another hymn and prayer; then the End. We all stood up and sang the following:

When we will be
Where we would be,
When we shall be
What we should be,
Things that are not
Now, nor could be,
Then shall be—*ee*
*Our own!*

While we remained standing, Pentecost raised his hands in benediction. And so to dinner.

* * * * * * *

Breaking of Bread, though the principal service, was only one of five each Lord's Day at the Room, all of which I attended regularly before I was seven. There was but an hour at home for dinner ere I set forth for Lord's Day School at half past one, which lasted for an hour and was followed immediately by the Young Persons' Prayer-Meeting. I got home for tea, after which we all sallied forth to the Gospel Address for Unbelievers, usually delivered by Brother Browning, two hours long and dreary beyond belief, in a ghostly atmosphere of guttering candle-light. This was followed by another Prayer-Meeting, followed again, at least in the summer months, by the Street Testimony, when we all repaired to the Strand, and gathered together a mixed circle of friends and curious and scoffers—like the Salvation Army in the next generation. Even this was not the end; for at

home there was Reading and prayers, just as on week-days. If I were more deadly-tired than usual after that awful Sunday, Aunt Jael would spin the prayer out and choose a specially long chapter. Most Sundays I went to bed half sick with fatigue, my head aching, hardly able to undress.

Smiling was forbidden, and I had little reason to break the rule. Tears, however, were allowed, and I shed them in plenty.

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If Breaking of Bread was not our only Meeting, nor was our Room the only Meeting in the town. I knew of four others. First, the Grosvenor Street Branch Meeting, offspring of ours, in the special care of Brother Quappleworthy, who preached there on Sunday evenings. Salvation always derided my Grandmother and Aunt for calling it Grow-vner Street. "I'm no scholard," she said, "but tidden common-sense to mispernounce like that. Gross-veener 'tis, and Gross-veener ollers 'twill be!"

Second, there was the Close, Exclusive or Darbyite Meeting, ruled over by one Mr. Nicodemus Shufflebottom, a giant-tall man with a flat white face, who reminded me of a walking tombstone. The Exclusives or Darbyites regarded us, I suppose, much as we regarded the rest of Christendom; as walkers in darkness. We regarded them as wandering sheep, foolish perhaps, rather than sinful. "Those brethren," Mr. Pentecost described them, "whose consciences lead them to refuse my fellowship and to deprive me of theirs." I never went to their Tawborough Meeting while I was a child.

Third, there was Brother Obadiah Tizzard's Upper

Room for Celibate Saints, a kind of loft in which half-a-dozen old maids and two or three bachelors met together for meditation and breaking of bread. All were singular as all were single. Their service was one of silent hymnless worship interspersed by personal quarrels; silence broken by backchat. The last word as well as the first was with Salvation. Glory did duty for Brother Lard; less vulgar if more incessant. All were sustained by the conviction of their unique fidelity to scripture. "We break bread in an upper room," said Glory to my Grandmother time and again on Tuesday afternoons, "as did Jesus with the Twelve. We are poor an' 'umble: an' so was Jesus. We are not wed, an' no more was Jesus. We shall go to heaven pure: an' so did Jesus."

Fourth, there was Ebenezer. The name was applied indifferently to the meeting-room itself or to the one gentleman who attended it. He was the Meeting, the whole Meeting, and nothing but the Meeting. He sat on a bench for silent prayer all alone by himself, got up and read the Word aloud to himself, mounted on a little dais and lengthily harangued himself, handed round the bread and wine to himself, and (for all I know) took the collection from and appropriated it to himself. Ebenezer had once belonged to our Meeting, but in some occult way we had displeased him, and he left us for Mr. Nicodemus Shufflebottom, leaving him also in turn for the straiter ways of Brother Obadiah Tizzard. Him even too he left finally, to worship God in his own way all alone. I doubt if he was really mad: odd only, and nearer to Heaven than Hanwell. His real name, if he had one, I never knew.

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Perhaps I have said too much of the Meeting; for though the one great piece of the whole outer world I saw during many years, it was never more than that: something I saw. I was never *of* it, as of Eight Bear Lawn. It never helped to fashion my child's life or longings, nor touched at any time the *inside* life I led: the real Mary.

One other thing stands clearly apart in my memory as taking place that first Lord's Day.

Alone together at my bedside my Grandmother confirmed my dedication to the Lord's service. She told me of her vision, renewed that day as she had drunk the sacred wine, that I should serve Him as a Missionary in the foreign field with glory and honour. She told me of the trials and tribulations I should have to face; but that if a faithful steward, I should find my reward in heaven. Then she read aloud my favourite seventh Chapter of Revelation. When she came to the fourteenth verse, *These are they which came out of great tribulation*, I could keep silence no longer. I cried to her to stop. Words had already a magical effect on me, and could throw me into ecstasy. All through my childhood "tribulation" was big magic. Now it threw me into a trance of disordered emotion and delight.

"O Grandmother," I cried, "I will! I will! I will serve Jesus for ever! I am longing to go through tribulation, through lovely lovely tribulation!"

I broke into crying and laughing. I hungered to suffer, to embrace, kiss, adore, go mad, abase myself, throw myself on the floor before her feet, love, hold, possess, be possessed, mingle.... Why could she not put her arms around me, seize me, comfort me, crush me?

For one imperceptible moment my child's soul *understood*. The moment passed; too swift to be retained, even remembered.

Had I been dreaming? What was it all?... Yes, I had wanted something, something that Grandmother could not give, could not take.

"You're overwrought and tired, my dear," she was saying. "What you want is a good sleep."

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# CHAPTER V: I GO TO SCHOOL

Next morning Grandmother and I sallied forth. It was a bright spring day, with a high wind blowing. We went down Bear Street and along Boutport Street to where it joins the High Street; and just beyond, on the far side of the road, saw the old ivy-coloured house whose door was to be my portal of worldly understanding.

My future instructresses, the Misses Glory and Salvation Clinker, were our only regular visitors at Bear Lawn. They were third cousins of a sort, though a social grade or two lower than ourselves, I apprehended,—more Devonshirey, "commoner" than we. Tuesday after Tuesday they came to our house for a long-established weekly afternoon of tea and godly discoursing. Glory was a tall, thin, bony old woman, with a bleary far-away stare. She wore a faded black serge dress, whereon the only ornaments were dribble-marks in front, which spread fan-wise

from her chin to her waist; and a tiny black bonnet, tied round her chin sometimes by a ribbon, oftener by a piece of string, at one whimsical period by a strip of carefully-prepared bacon-rind. She spoke little, chiefly of Death and the New Jerusalem, though a perpetual clicking noise—represented most nearly by er-er-er, and variously explained—always kept you aware of her presence. "*Life*," ran her favourite aphorism, "*is but one long prercession o' deathbeds*." She was quite mad, very gentle, wrapped in gloom, and beatifically happy. Er-er-er-er was unbroken and continuous. You could have used her for a metronome.

Salvation was a saner, a coarser type: a noisy, aggressive woman, whose chief subject of conversation was herself; a pious shrew with a big appetite and a nagging tongue. She always ate an enormous tea, though Aunt Jael, of whom alone in the world she was frightened, would sometimes keep her hunger roughly in check. Glory, on the other hand, always brought special provisions of her own, and at tea-time made her own exclusive preparations. First she went into the far corner, where she had deposited a net-bag full of parcels. From this she abstracted a saucepan, a little spirit-lamp, a box of rusks shaped like half moons, a bottle of goat's milk, a porringer and a great wooden spoon. She put the lamp on the floor, lighted it, boiled the milk in the little saucepan, threw in six or eight of the rusks and stirred with the wooden spoon until she produced a steaming mush. She didn't eat this, nor yet did she drink it; neither word describes the fearful and wonderful fashion in which she imbibed, absorbed, inhaled, appropriated it. Of every spoonful she managed to acquire perhaps a quarter; the other three-quarters strolled gently down her chin. As she

was short-sighted, and as when she ate she ignored her food and looked steadily ahead at the glories of the New Jerusalem, she often missed the spoon altogether. The noise she made was notable. Hence Aunt Jael always refused to allow her to eat at our table, and consigned her to "Glory's corner."

Though I saw the Clinkers in our house Tuesday after Tuesday, I had never yet beheld them in their own. My eyes fastened on the brass door plate:

The Misses Clinker

ELEMENTARY EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT

For the Daughters

of Gentlemen.

The top line was in elegant copy-book writing.

"Look, Grandmother," I cried, "Misses is spelt wrong. Why do they put M-i-*f*-s-e-s? It's silly." I resented the absurd "s". My faith in the infallibility of the twin Gamaliels at whose feet I was to sit was dashed on their very doorstep. Could the blind lead the blind?

"Why, 'tis often written that way," rejoined my Grandmother, "'tis an old way of writing a double S. You've plenty to learn, you see."

If the first line was offensive to common-sense, the remainder of the notice challenged mere truth. Elementary you could not gainsay, but Educational Establishment for a description of that frowsy den and those two ignorant old maids was florid rather than faithful, while Gentlemen as a term to connote the male parents of the clientèle was—even in the

most dim and democratic sense of that unpopular word—just false. Finally, there were sons as well as daughters: some three or four of the fifteen pupils who comprised the school.

Salvation opened the door, grinning an aggressive welcome, but we were officially received by Glory. "Welcome! Welcome to this place!" she cried impressively. I saw that the sisters' rôles were here reversed. Glory was as unkempt as ever, the "black" serge she wore shades greener than her Tuesday afternoon one, and quite four inches higher one side than the other. As next-worldly and bleary-eyed as in our house, her part here was the part of a Principal: Principal of an Educational Establishment for the Daughters (yea and Sons) of Gentlemen. Salvation, screech she never so loudly, was in this schoolroom but second fiddle.

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The schoolroom was an old-fashioned kitchen. The day's dinner was cooked before our eyes on a spit before the fire; the pupils acted as turnspits. The room was low, smoke-begrimed and dingy; the windows opaque with dirt. On the filthy walls were a print of the Duke of Wellington (?), all nose and sternness, an old Map of the World on Mercator's Projection with the possessions of the Spanish crown yellow, and the possessions of the British crown red, and many framed texts worked in white and blue wool. One huge text, worked in many colours, stood over the doorway: A ROD FOR THE FOOL'S BACK. Prov: xxvi. v. 3. There were two classes, on different sides of the room. I was put with the younger. They were all new faces, except one or two that I had seen the day before at the Room. They were, indeed, the

first children I had ever spoken to. In grown-up parlance the pupils would have been dubbed lower-middle class, though Marcus Browning, whom I knew by sight because he lived in the Lawn in a house just opposite ours, was as middle-middle class as Aunt Jael and my Grandmother. I felt these distinctions perfectly, and regarded one Susan Durgles, a lank untidily-dressed fluffy-haired child of seven or eight, and the leading spirit in our class, with that feeling of quiet disdain which the sureness of higher caste can alone bestow: her father was a mere cobbler in Green Lane, and while I looked at her as though I knew it, she looked back lovingly as though she knew I did. Between Susan and myself sat a pale thin child, Seth Baker, who had St. Vitus' dance. I had never seen anything of the sort before, and stared more through curiosity than pity as his slate and slate-pencil shook in his hand.

The first lesson was Rithmetick with Miss Glory called (vulgarly) by Miss Salvation Figurin'. With her best far-away look Miss Glory peered forth into eternity: "If eggs be twenty-eight a shilling" (they *were* in those days, at any rate in Spring) "how many be you agwain to get for, er-er-er-one poun' three shillin' and vourpence ha' penny?"

Up shot the grimy hand of little Seth Baker. "Please'm, please'm," appealingly. He was always first and always right, but the rest of us were not suffered to dodge the labour of calculation, as Miss Glory would oftenest ignore Seth and drop on weaker members of the flock, myself or Susan Durgles.

"Now then, Susan Durgles. 'Ee heard the question. How many then-er-er-er-er-er-?"

"Please'm, I-er-er-er-er-er-don't know."

This shameless mockery was allowed to go unpunished. My mind strove to picture Aunt Jael coping with a like impertinence. I imagined the black wrath, the awful hand upon my shoulder. With what new weapon would she scourge me? Scorpions, perhaps, if obtainable.

During our mental arithmetic lesson, the advanced students at the other end of the room were receiving combined instruction from the deputy-principal in crochet-work and carikter-formation. Miss Salvation was shouting technical advice of the stitch, slip, three treble, four chain, and draw-through-the-first-loop-on-the-hook order, together with more general instructions how to earn the joys of heaven and eschew the fires of hell.

After a while the sisters changed places, and my efforts were transferred from high finance to handwriting, called (whimsically) by Miss Glory, Penmanship. Miss Salvation distributed dirty dog-eared copy books. I was set to work on the last page, the Z page, of an otherwise completed and wholly filthy book, to reproduce fourteen times in zealous copper-plate: "Zeal of Thy House hath eaten me up." Meanwhile Miss Salvation transferred to us her godly bawling as to the way we should, or chiefly, shouldn't go: interlarding this with fragments of more specialized holy information, which being entirely useless I have never forgotten; e. g., which was the longest verse in the Word of God, and which was the shortest; the number of books in the Old Testament, and in the New; that "straightway" was the private and particular word of St. Mark, while "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet" was the chosen cliché of St. Matthew.

Miss Glory took turn with us again for the third lesson: Reading. Our book was of course *The* Book. One mouldy old Bible was passed round, and we read in turn from its brown-spotted and damp-smelling pages. I think it was my first or second day that it fell to my turn to read from the eighteenth chapter of the Book of Genesis, where the Lord appeared unto Abraham in the plains of Mamre, and Abraham said unto the Lord concerning the destruction of Sodom, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? I knew the passage well, and read with relish and excitement the diminuendo Peradventures.

"Good, my child, good. Your readin' is a credit to your dear Grannie and your dear Great-Aunt. You read it fine, as to the manner born."

For the first time in my life the enchanting incense of praise filled my nostrils. I flushed, and while others read of Lot at the gate of Sodom and what-not else, I ceased to listen. My heart was beating to this refrain: You read it fine—as to the manner born. So I was good for something, for all Aunt Jael's daily blows and curses, my Grandmother's nightly She-is-weak-Lord-and-sinful petitions. I read fine!

The first day Mrs. Cheese called for me; but afterwards I was entrusted to Marcus Browning as escort. He was two years older: "a good child, not like some I could name" (Aunt Jael), "Born of Saints" (Grandmother), and possessed of the more fleshly merit of also living on the Lawn. We spoke little together.

The event I remember best of my first days at the Elementary Educational Establishment was a fight. Susan Durgles was for ever making fun of poor little

Seth Baker's affliction. One day when Miss Glory and Miss Salvation were both out of the room Susan went a little too far.

"Look to 'im, look to 'im!" she mocked. "He looks like wan o' thase yer weather-cocks what wag and wobble about on the church steeple. Goes like this, do he? Ha, ha. Can't help hisself, can't he, palaverin' li'l wretch?" She flapped her hands in Seth's walrus way, and nodded her head convulsively in mocking imitation of poor little St. Vitus.

He was a meek child, but this time he could stand it no longer. "Dirty cobbler's lass!" he cried, and banged Susan full in the face with his small clenched fist. A regular fight began. My sympathies were wholly pro-Seth. Was not Susan the sneerer, the tormenter, the tyrant, the Aunt Jael, and Seth the harried one, the oppressed one, the victim, the *me*?

Seth punched and lunged and butted with his head. Susan slapped and shoved and scratched. The boy kicked in payment for the scratching, and the girl tore at his hair to get even for the kicks. Fair play and fair-weather methods went by the board. Rules are for the ring; when ultimate things are at stake, a child's sneer at her schoolfellow's deformity to be repaid, a nation's existence to be lost or won in war, then red tooth and claw tear the paper conventions of sport asunder, and each side fights to win. Miss Glory returned to witness a bleeding and bedraggled pair still scuffling savagely. Not one of the rest of us had dared or wished to intervene. Very properly Miss Glory decided that we were the guiltier ones, and while the two principals amid tears of gradual forgiveness were hustled away to soap and water, we lookers-on had to stand up on our forms for one

solemn hour with our hands behind our backs while Miss Glory preached us a sermon; the text being Matthew five, nine.

A brighter feature of school-life was the frequent sweetmeats brought, passed round and devoured. There were chocolate drops, sticks of Spanish, peppermint humbugs, jujubes, lollipops and toffees. I had never tasted such dainties before.

"Wude 'ee like a sweetie?" asked Susan Durgles one day.

"Yes please," said I.

"Quite sure, are 'ee?"

"Yes please. Please give me one."

"Nit likely, nit likely," she sneered.

"But why?" I flushed, not understanding.

"Why? And a very gude raison fer why. 'Cause 'ee gobble up other volks' sweeties fast enough, but you'm not so slippy about bringin' any of yer own fer *me* to eat, are 'ee? Nit likely."

I felt as though she had struck me in the face. All the other children were looking and listening. It was not that I ever had any sweets of my own which I consumed in greed and secret, it was not that I had any money, or hope of money, for buying any. The sting of Susan's words lay in this: that I ought to have seen and pondered on the fact that while I took all that was offered me I offered nothing in return. I was in the wrong, and therefore all the angrier.

"You wait!" I cried. My tone was not too confident, for in a second's rapid survey I could not see the how

or the wherewithal of obtaining sweets to fling at Susan. It must however have been confident enough to inspire her with a lively sense of joys to come.

"I didn't mean nort. Only my li'l joke. Have a lollipop —or two."

On the way home I left Marcus Browning in silence, and evolved plans. Suppose I were to ask Aunt Jael to give me a penny! My heart beat at the thought. I rehearsed to myself my opening "Please Aunt Jael" a score of times. Such rehearsings, inspired by my timidity, served always to increase it. Then I remembered a bottle of acid-drops in the medicine cupboard in the bedroom. Dare I beg a few? Or *take* a few? suggested the Tempter, take being His pretty word for steal. This was the easier plan, but I shunned its dishonesty. I would ask her *first*. Or ask even for the penny, I decided, if at the moment I found courage enough.

All the way through dinner I put off making my appeal. Several times I moistened my lips and came to the very brink, where the glimpsed precipice of Aunt Jael's wrath drove me back. Yet brave the precipice I must, or tumble into the abyss of Susan's scorn on the morrow.

At last I blundered in, heart beating and face flushed: "Please may I have a penny?"

"A penny?"

"To buy some sweets."

"Highty-tighty! Don't you get enough to eat here? Never heard of such a thing. Your Grandmother and I never had pence for sweetmeats and such trash. Be off with you."

"But—"

"No buts here." The thorned stick stamped the floor. Grandmother concurred.

Fair means had failed. I would try foul. By her meanness she had forced me to help myself to her acid-drops. My guilt be on her head.

I waited until she was well away into her after-dinner doze, and Grandmother safely closeted for her afternoon's study of the Word. Then I stole softly up to Aunt Jael's bedroom. Her physic-cupboard was on the far side of the bed. It had a sliding door; inside there were four shelves, the bottom shelf dedicated to Aunt Jael's night-needs. At every watch she fed. Once or twice I had slept with her, and discovered that though she had rusks and beef-tea just before getting into bed (soon after a heavy supper) and rusks and a cup of green tea while she was dressing (just before a heavy breakfast), yet she got out of bed twice during the night to brew herself a potion and chew old crusts or gingerbread-nuts or rusks. The bottom shelf was complete with every accessory of these four bedroom feasts: spirit lamp, matches, saucepan, cups; green tea, Ceylon tea, beef-tea, meat extract, herbs of divers properties and powers; gin, cowslip wine, elderberry wine, brandy; with many tins devoted to gingerbreads, half-moon rusks (bought at the same baker's as Miss Glory's), seed-cake, Abernethy biscuits, and old crusts rebaked in the oven. The upper shelves bristled with medicine bottles and jars. These were grouped methodically according to the ills they combated. There was a cough-and-colds corner. For burns scalds and chaps, bruises weals and wens, there was poor-man's-friend, a great jar of goose grease, and a small white pot of

mixed whitening, most drastic of all; often my Grandmother used it on my body after a bad beating, fitly borrowing Aunt Jael's whiting to ease the marks of Aunt Jael's stick. The particular galaxy of bottles from which Grandmother had oftenest to beg and borrow for me consisted of various telling encouragements and exhortations to those like myself whose mills ground slowly and withal exceedingly small. Castor oil, Epsom salts, senna pods, fennel seeds and roots of jalep: I knew them all. It was to King Senna I answered swiftliest (five pods to be soaked in a tumbler of water for a few hours, and drunk last thing before retiring to bed); to replenish this jar meant frequent visits to the druggist's, for which my Grandmother paid. To pods she added prayers. Whenever the last thing before retiring chanced to be the tepid tumblerful, the last thing but one was always a supplication to Heaven to speed the parting dose. "O Lord," pleaded my Grandmother on her knees, "Bless the means! Bless the means, Lord; and if it be Thy will grant her relief!" But Aunt Jael relied on worldly remedies exclusively. Her medicine cupboard was her shield and buckler, and like the cupboard in the front room downstairs, ministered to her pride of possession also. And the night-life made possible by that festive bottom shelf! O 'twas a Prince of Cupboards, a vineyard planted with bottles.

Today I had eyes for one bottle only. I reached it down, and regarded the precious objects which would confound the sneers of Susan. Thief! said a voice within, as I tipped the bottle up and curved my other hand to receive.

Susan's sneers! urged the Tempter. How just they are, and how they wound you! I hung doubtfully; the

acid-drops' fate and my own trembled in the balance. I remembered how Aunt Jael counted everything. For a certainty every acid drop was counted; she would miss the meanest couple, and then the sequel! No, I dare not.

The moment my indecision was over, I was braver. Once I had decided I dare not eat any, I dared to reflect how pleasant they *would have been* to eat. It was the bravery of cowardice, that valour that is the better part of discretion. I smelt the bottle's mouth long and longingly. Suddenly the fair odour inspired in me a new idea. I would just suck the drops, and then put them back. They were of the shiny sort, which judicious sucking would hardly change; not your dangerous powdery acid drops, which merest touch of the tongue transforms. I set to sucking as evenly as possible, so that none would look smaller than the rest. They were delicious, and I enjoyed recompense for my noble decision not to steal. Suddenly my heart stood still. The door-handle turned. To fling the bottle into its place in the cupboard, and slide the cupboard door to, was the work of a fevered moment. Aunt Jael entered. She must surely have seen. My guilt was clear, for all the look of meekness I sought to wear. She had her suspicions too of what the guilt was: she seized my arm and ducked her nose down to my mouth to confirm them. Acid-drops have a tell-tale odour, unique, unmistakable. My smell bewrayed me. Out of my own mouth I stood convicted.

"I thought as much,"—even for her the words came grimly—"how many have you stolen?"

"None, Aunt Jael."

There coursed through my veins the perverse

exultant delight of her who utters a great white lie. Not for anything would I have told a downright falsehood. Here was an answer true as Truth herself —sucking is not stealing—yet by the look (and smell) of things plainly false. Aunt Jael darkened.

"I-have-not-stolen-one. I-have-not-eaten-one," I repeated, noddingly.

"Liar, black little liar!" she shouted. "The rope-end at last; you'll taste it now."

She rummaged under the bed. As she barred the egress by the foot of the bedstead, I scrambled over the bed, gained the door, and fled to the attic. She was after me at once, wielding the famous weapon, a good yard of stout old ship's rope, a relic of Grandfather Lee or maybe Great-Grandfather Vickary. In the middle of the attic stood a large elliptical table. Round and round it she chased me. It was a defiance I had never shown before. She was appalled. I was appalled. Defiance was a quality she never encountered, and now for meek miserable little me to show it! Her features were a livid blue-black. She lashed out with the rope frequently; I dodged and ducked. The attic was wide enough for me to elude her reach. In a corner I should have had no chance; so Knight of the Round Table was the part I played. Once the rope grazed my shoulder. After ten minutes perhaps, the part of slasher at emptiness had become so undignified that Aunt Jael suddenly stopped. A ruse? A minute's rest before a last wild spring for victory? No; for she could hardly breathe. Then she gave me a long cruel stare, eyes saying *I Will Repay*: for all my defiance I cowered. She went out, slammed the door behind her, and stumped heavily down the uncarpeted attic-stairs.

The heat of battle over, my spirits sank. Why had I defied her? There was no ultimate escape. For every gesture of defiance, every moment of that round-the-table chase, she would repay me a hundredfold. Yet what else could I have done? If I had owned up to *stealing* her sweets and thus (perhaps) incurred a lesser wrath, I should have owned up to something I had not done. I should have lied. I had told the truth instead, and my only reward was a clear conscience. (I was staring, as so often, at the great blue picture on the wall, whose deep violet blue seemed to be toned down by the cold grey-blue of the room; an old print of some tropical sea with a volcano belching forth fire, smoke and lava in the background,—the Caribbean Sea perhaps, with one of the Mexican craters, or the Mediterranean with Vesuvius; a gaudy gorgeous thing such as sailors buy on their travels.)

I waited over an hour before risking a descent. When I turned the half-landing by Mrs. Cheese's bedroom door, I sprang back. There beneath me, sitting on the stairs, her feet on the main landing just outside her bedroom door, was Aunt Jael. A small table was drawn up to the foot of the stairs. A good tea was spread thereon; she was eating and drinking heartily. I spied the rope by her side; she heard my footsteps above her, and her hand closed on it. I went back. She meant grim business. Still, she could not stay there all night. I sat down outside the attic door and listened. Mrs. Cheese cleared away her tea things, grumbling; Grandmother came up to her, gently remonstrating. She stayed on. Darkness set in. I heard her stamp the floor for Mrs. Cheese to bring her supper. After all, she might stay there for the night: knowing her will to be not weaker than mine, I put my self in her place, and I felt almost sure she

would. I was hungry, and there would be no escape. Escape I must. How? My first plan was that Mrs. Cheese—Aunt Jael would have to get up to let her pass, I reflected, since either one of them was as broad as the attic staircase—should bring me something to eat when she came upstairs to bed. Then I could survive till the morrow, sleep on the attic floor, and confound Aunt Jael. I would show her who had the stronger will. The weak point of this notion was that I could not shout instructions to Mrs. Cheese to bring me something to eat, nor rely on her doing it unprompted. A more desperate plan suggested itself, and before I had time to shrink back, I put it into action.

I slid down the banisters and took a flying vault safely over Aunt Jael's head and the little supper table in front of her. If there had been a big open space beyond, all might have been well. Unfortunately the banister that surrounded the sort of well in which you saw the ground floor began only a yard beyond Aunt Jael's door; my flying feet knocked against it, and I fell; I was hurt badly, and could not get up. In a second Aunt Jael was up, and at me with the rope, savagely. She saw I was in pain and helpless, so lammed the more brutally. I screamed. Grandmother came running upstairs, and with a strength and daring she rarely used wrenched the rope from her sister's hands.

I limped downstairs.

"Before you eat, child, confess your lie, and apologize to your aunt for telling it." Grandmother was unwontedly stern.

"What lie?" I did not flinch.

"Smell her! Smell her!" shouted Aunt Jael.

"Mary, in all her life your mother told not one single lie."

"It's not a lie," feebly. "I swear it," pitiably.

At last Grandmother succeeded where Aunt Jael had failed (this was a little sub-triumph in my defeat). I told the true version and for all the Tempter's hints I knew that my Grandmother was right that evening when in our bedside prayer she pleaded, "Forgive her, Lord; in her heart she lied!"

Next day, I learnt from Mrs. Cheese that the bottle of acid drops had been flung by Aunt Jael into the ashpit. I rescued it, and pocketed the contents, which were stuck together like a coarse hard sponge, emerald bright. There were thirty-seven in all. By the distribution of this lordly largesse I rose high in the esteem of the school. A pocket full of acid drops: my position was assured. None doubted their virginity, all consumed them with zest. Thus did I triumph over Susan Durgles, who sucked humbly; humblier, had she known that another had sucked before her.

* * * * * * *

School took but a small place in my life. The music-lessons I began to take at home were much more to me: for piano-playing was a worldly luxury some generous whim of Aunt Jael's supplied. Her reward was her own loud announcement, whenever topics even remotely musical were mentioned, "*I* pay for the child's music." These lessons, and a very occasional dress and hat—once a pair of mittens—were all she contributed to my upkeep in all those years. I am glad it was never more. She had no call

to do it, she often explained. Well and good: I had no call to be beholden to her. All my expenses, nothing heavy, but heavy enough for a light purse, were borne by my Grandmother: and thus at the end of their lives, Aunt Jael had three times as much to bequeath as her sister. Grandmother accepted five pounds a year from my great-uncle John on my behalf, refusing his offer of more, and taking nothing of what my father's relatives had proposed from the beginning. Yet she would have laughed, and the mirthless Saints would have laughed, if you had called her proud. Meanwhile, because of these music lessons, Aunt Jael cried her generosity from the house-tops. I little cared: I was grateful. I could soon play all the simpler tunes in Hoyle's Anthems.

My life was still entirely spent in the Bear Lawn household; I was never allowed to see anything of the other schoolchildren, Saints or no Saints, beyond school hours. None ever crossed our threshold, nor I theirs. I watched the daily struggle between the two old women, Grandmother and Great-aunt. I read the Word. I prayed, and I lived wild lives within myself. I was for ever visualizing, thinking out dramas in which I and those I knew would figure, living in a self-fashioned self-fancied future, deciding on lines of conduct in innumerable situations I invented. At this time my imaginings did not run, as with megalomaniac little boys, to ambitious futures for myself: great sounding deeds done before admiring multitudes. My castle building was conditioned by the narrow humble life I knew. The stuff of my dreams was my own hates and loves.

At this early time my surest emotions were I think three: hate of my tyrant aunt; longing for some one to love and some one to love me; fear of eternity and

hell. I would play with these terrible ideas sometimes with the cheerfulness natural to six-years-old, more often with the despondency more natural to myself. Hate achieved no triumph of hate even, would eat itself out miserably and everlastingly in my visions as hate always. Longing was never appeased; love would never come to me. Fear was justified of her child.

A cheerful vision I conjured up was Aunt Jael on bended knee before me, making a hoarse and humble appeal to be forgiven for her wrong-doings, to be shriven of her many sins. I revelled in the delightful picture. How I dealt with it depended on my mood. If it was soon after a beating (a real-life beating) my conduct would be just, stern, inexorable. "Go to, thou vixen, thy judgment awaits thee!"; and I would deliver her over to the tormentors. If beatings of late had been few or frail, and a sentimental rather than revengeful mood held me, then I would act with a high Olympian generosity, imagination's sweetest revenge, and lifting her gently to her feet would say "Thy sins are forgiven thee—Go, and sin no more!"

I often tried to create an imaginary person to love, some one I could embrace and be embraced by. Once I got as far as picturing a face for perfect loving, but I found that it was the spirit, the soul, the person who gave you love, and my perfect face (a dark young girl's) though I named it Ruth Isabel, remained a face and a name only. There was no real Ruth Isabel behind the face; so she faded away. I had one success, one consolation. By a hard effort—closed eyes, clenched fists and fervid prayer to God—I could sometimes picture my dead mother so vividly, that I could literally feel and return her embraces. She was clad always in white; her face was warm, and

glowed. "Kiss me, Mary," I could make the vision say, though whensoever I put out my hungry arms to draw her closer to my breast, the vision fled.

Of my chief fears, hell and eternity, the first was always terrible—I pictured it in all the luxurious completeness of horror Brother Brawn described—yet I had this comfort: I believed in the Lord, and He could save me. But save me for what? He rescued me from hell to grant me eternity in heaven, and from His boon there was none to rescue me. *Eternal life!* Once my brain attempted to grapple with everlastingness and to think out the full frightful meaning of *living for ever*, I sickened with fear. There was no escape: ever: anywhere. A terror, unanswerable, unpitying, controlled me. One way out of it, one mad child's trick to cheat Infinity was to convince myself I had never been born. "You're not real!" I would say to myself, "You're only dreaming you're alive. You're a dream of God's. You have never really lived, so you can never really die. So you escape eternity. You cannot live for ever, if you are not alive at all!"

This belief I helped by staring into my own eyes in the glass, my face close up to its reflection. After a minute or two, a tense expectancy would seize me. I was elated, exhilarated.

"Mary, what are you, who are you?" I cried to the face in the mirror.

My own voice sounded strange and far away, belonged to some one else, proved that *I* had no voice, that there was no real me, that I was Another's dream.

"What are you? What are you?"

The exhilaration and the expectancy grew. I was on the brink of solving the mystery of all life: my child's mind would find what the universe was, what *I* was.... The exaltation was almost more than I could bear. I kissed wildly the reflection of my own mouth in the mirror. Suddenly, imperceptibly, elusively, the great hope vanished. There was a swift reaction in my mind and body, and I half swooned away on to a chair.

In other moods my picturings were completely black. I saw my future as an unbroken series of savage triumphs for Aunt Jael. She discovered new and horrible beatings. I should be left quite alone with her: Grandmother would die. She would flog me from morn till night, always brutally, always unjustly. Or I would think of love as a thing I should never, never know. I pictured myself a lonely old woman, loved by none, loving none. Or, if I thought of hell, I doubted my salvation, and suffered in imagination all its pains. Or, with eternity, the fiction that I was not alive failed me dismally. I pictured myself sitting for ever on a throne near God, bearded and omnipotent. A billion years rolled away, I was still no nearer the end, no nearer escape from my soul, from life, from me. Sometimes I shrieked. My cries rent heaven. God motioned the golden harps to cease and consigned me to the torments of hell. I was borne downwards at incredible speed by two bright angels who, as we got lower and lower, took on the shape of devils. They cast me shrieking into the lake of fire and brimstone. Sometimes in heaven I could keep my agony mute. This was no better. Amid the angels' psalmody there rang in my heart like a beaten bell: *For ever, for ever, for ever!*—taunting me into a supreme feverish effort to think *For ever* out. Then came the last moment, the crisis of

hypnotized fear, as my finite mind flung itself against the iron door of the Infinite. The struggle lasted but a few seconds, or I should have gone mad. Then the warm back-rush of physical relief as the blood poured back into my brain.

I came to believe there were two persons in myself, two distinct souls in my body. It was my way of accounting for the two strangely different manners of thought I experienced. I thought and felt things in an ordinary, conscious, methodical way—the self-argumentative, cunning, careful little girl that most often I was. At other times, ideas, promptings, wishes, beliefs came to me in quite different fashion —or not so much to me as from within me, from some inner source of my being. They coursed through my blood and stormed my brain; they were blind, warm, intuitive; supernatural, sudden. There is no one word in my vocabulary, still less was there in those seven-year-old days, to define or explain this distinction. It was no matter of Reason with Common-sense on the one hand, and Conscience or Instinct on the other. Conscience—"God knocking at your heart's door," Grandmother called it—is a very incomplete description; at most it could apply only to the good promptings of the other Self. For the reverse reason Instinct will not suffice. It was no question of two modes of thought or feeling, but of two persons inhabiting my body. The Mary Lee every one saw and knew was the two of them taken together. I called them Me and the Other Me. I felt the difference between them in a physical way. With the more usual self, my blood flowed gently, my pulse was normal. The other self marched through my flesh like an army with banners; the hand of this more mysterious me literally knocked at my heart; she came from some deep inmost place and vanished

as swiftly as she came. She went; my pulse flagged.

My loneliness too encouraged the sociable idea that there were two people inside me—Two's company, one's none! In bed or blue attic, duologues were better than monologues: but as a rule I could not arrange these, because Other Me blew where she listed; I could never fix her for a talk as I chose. She came with some sudden word or warning, prompting or precept—and was gone. When I was bent on some moment's peccadillo, she—he?—would come, whisper "It is wrong"; for one moment the whispering voice was my voice, the voice of another Me, a new person and soul whose being seemed to flood my veins. She fled, and I was alone again. The way I tried to formulate the experience was this: One is my normal human sinful Self, is Me, Mary; Two is the Spirit of God possessing me, the movement in me of the divine, the indwelling spirit, the Holy Ghost made manifest in my flesh. I saw it all as a special privilege, a new proof that the Lord had set me apart.

Sometimes the two selves battled for mastery. I thought that one thing was the right course to follow, and felt that another was. I knew it was the *feeling* I ought to obey, though sometimes I was not positive of its divine, Other Me, Apostolic quality. In such cases my plan was to count thirty-seven—aloud as a rule—and if at the end of my count the impulse was still in me, I obeyed it. The test itself was of course of *Other* origin. "In cases of doubt, count thirty-seven" came to me one day with a warm lilt of authority I did not question. I adopted it as my sacred number for all emergencies. When Aunt Jael was flogging me—I remember well how it helped me in that rope-end beating after I had sucked the

sweets—I would shut my eyes and see if I could count thirty-seven between each stroke. Success depended on my rate—and hers; in any case the mere endeavour seemed to lessen the pain.

Note, too, that there were thirty-seven acid drops in the fatal bottle, and that my favourite psalm, number 137, was on page 537 of my old Bible:—Heavenly proofs of the pure metal of my golden number.

(Note: This chapter in my notes fills exactly 37 pages!-M. L.)

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## CHAPTER VI: CHEESE, LUMPS, CREWJOE, THE SCARLET WOMAN AND THE GREAT GOD BENAMUCKEE

That rope-end beating was a bad one, but I can remember worse. The worst one of all came a year or so later, when I was about seven years old, and formed part of a series of events that stands out with peculiar clearness in my memory.

It all began with porridge lumps.

One morning Aunt Jael went into the kitchen before breakfast, and began stirring at the porridge pan and looking for something to grumble at.

"Lumps!" she cried angrily. "Lumps! What's this

mean? 'Tis a pity if a woman of sixty don't know how to cook a panful of porridge. Or too idle to stir it, most likely. Lumps! Lumps!"

Mrs. Cheese lost her temper: the end desired.

"What d'ye expect? Do 'ee think I cude see to the stuff while I'm trapsing up and downstairs to yer bedrume all the time waiting on 'ee 'and an' foot, an' you thumpin' and bangin' away wi' yer stick ivry blissid minute? I can't be in two places at once, and I ain't agwain ter try. Lumps indade! I've 'ad enuff o'n. You do'n yersell, ol' lady."

Whereupon did Aunt Jael aim the lid of the pan at Mrs. Cheese's head, which it just managed to miss. A frying-pan full of half-cooked potatoes lay to the wronged one's hand for retort perfect. She mastered the dear temptation when she saw my Grandmother quietly edging up toward Aunt Jael; found vent instead in bitter irony. Sarcasm hits surer than sauce-pan-lids, and harder.

"Behavin' like a true Brethering, aren't us? Like a meek bleatin' Christyun lamb as doesn't know it's weaned? I tells yer straight, Miss Vickary, I crosses your doorstep this same day. Ye'll be done wi' yer lumps termorrer."

Grandmother contrived to calm her down till she consented to stay after all; and, with more difficulty, to close her sister's mouth.

Mrs. Cheese, however, was not the one to sit down under a saucepan lid, and I think it was revenge, joining forces with a long-repressed love for a good "tell," which prompted her to close the kitchen door that afternoon when the dinner things were put

away, and to sit down to tell me a story. She had once begun to speak to me of fairies, and Aunt Jael's reproof was too violent and too recent for her to have forgotten. Rather it was that she remembered it, and rejoiced, as she posed me the unfamiliar sweet question:

"Wude 'ee like me to tell 'ee a story?"

"Yes, please, Mrs. Cheese." I cocked my ear. Far away in the dining-room the dread one snored.

"Wall then. This tale is all about what a sailor-man did. Even '*er*" (she jerked her finger in the proper direction) "cude say nothin' agin it, for 'tis all true. 'Tis true gospel, I'll be blummed if tidn': tho', Dear Lawr, some o' the things is that wunnerful that if a body had told me, and I did'n *knaw* fer certain that 'twas all true, and all written 'pon a buke that the party wrote hisself, I shude 'a zed they was lyin', I shude railly. 'Tis'n everybody, you knaws, as lives a life like we, always quiet and peaceful like, always the same ol' place. There's many volk, sailor chaps and sich like fer the bettermos' part, that has middlin' excitin' times in these yer vorrin parts, and zees the most wunnerful things. Wall, this one chap in partic'lar lived for thirty year all alone on a desert island with not another soul to pass the time o' day with, thirty years I tell 'ee if 'twas a day. Robinson Crewjoe 'is name was—"

"Why?"

"'Cos fer why? 'Cos that's what 'e were caaled, o' course, silly mump'ead! Anyway, there 'twas. Some say 'e 'ad 'is wife and childer to the island with 'im, and they talks of the Zwiss Vamily Robinson, but 'tisn't true anyway; first 'cos 'e weren't alone in an

island if there was other folk with 'im, second 'cos he wasn't a Zwiss, or any sort o' them vurriners, third because 'e 'adn't got no vamily, 'cept for 'is ol' vamily at 'ome that is, as tried to stop'n runnin' away to sea, 'is ol' father and 'is ol' mother—"

"What did his father do?"

"Didn't *du* nort."

"I mean like Brother Briggs is an oilman and Brother Quaint keeps a baker's shop—"

"Oh I don't know thikky. 'Tis some 'undreds o' years agone since it all first 'appened, you knows. 'Owsomever—" And so on: the whole imperial tale.

When in later years I read the book for myself I found how accurately she had stressed the salient points. The father of young Robinson, always growlin' and scoldin' like some others she cude mention; the young raskel himself with whom these methods were not entirely displaced; the flight to sea; the ship doing battle with Turks and Portugeeses and Vrenchies and Spanyerds; the wreck on the desert island, young Robinson alone being saved; his infinite resource, practical, mechanical, architectural, culinary, dietetic; his ills, moral and physical.—Every known pain of the body he suffered, finding some slight alleviation, it is true, in the miniature Aunt Jaelian physic-cupboard from the all providing Wreck. His worst affliction was a malady—the Blues or Deliverums—at once moral and physical, a kind of soul's nightmare accompanied by sharp "abdominable pains." All around him, as he writhed in agony, roared an islandful of wild beasts; tigers and jeraffs and hullyfints and camyels and

drumming-dairies—

"What's that?" I remember asking.

"Wull, either 'tis camyels wi' one 'ump to the back, or else 'tis camyels what 'ave one 'ump and drummy-dairies two; 'tis one or 'tother—and bears and munkeys and girt sarpints what they caal boy-constructors, I don't knaw fer why:—a regler munadgery like Tobbery Vair—and birds too. The pore chap 'ad one particler parrit or cocky-two as they caals 'un, what 'e taught to 'oller out: 'Pore ol' Robinson Crewjoe! pore ol' Robinson Crewjoe!' 'Tis true what I tell 'ee, my dear, 'tis true's I zit yer."

Nor did I doubt it. The notion of an invented story was one I could not have conceived.

The narrative came particularly near home with the arrival of the savages, and the domestication and conversion of Man Vriday—"or Man Zaturday maybe—I know 'tis one o' the days o' the wake." Robinson saw that he could atone for his own unholy past by snatching this black-skinned brand from the burning. I listened eagerly, with conscious professional interest; the snatching of black-skinned brands was the very work for which the Lord had set me apart.

"And so he praiched the Gospel to 'im, and shewed 'im all the mercies o' God A'mighty."

"But *could* he, Mrs. Cheese? Was he a Saint, was he one of the Elect?"

"I don't knaw fer certin'. Don't rekellect it ackshilly zaying 'pon the buke that 'e was a Plymith Brethering in so many worrds as the sayin' is. A Methody maybe. But that's neither 'ere nor there."

"But it is, it's *very* important," I cried, "it's everything!"

"'Owsomever, 'e taught this yer Man Vriday ter pray ter the Lord. That's gude nuff. 'You goes down on yer knees, and you prays to Im,' 'e zes. 'Why that's jis' what we do too,' zes Man Vriday, to *our* God'—meanin' a girt idol set up on a hill in the other island 'e com'd from, zummat like the girt idol o' Miss Vickary's in the corner there in that ol' front-room uv 'ern. 'Us valls vlat on our vaces before un,' 'e zes, 'and us 'owls out O-o-o-o Benamuckee! O-o-o-o Benamuckee!' that bein' the god's name, as yer mid say. Tis a fac', I'll ait vire an smoke if tid'n."

"Did he convert him?" anxiously.

"Zome zay 'e did, but I shudn' 'ardly think 'tis true, fer Man Vriday turns to ol' Robinson Crewjoe—'e was an ol' chap now, you knaws, 'aving been there the bettermos' part o' thirty years—and 'e zes to 'im, zes 'e, 'I don't zee much odds to't, master. You prays to your God up i' the sky, and you zes 'O God' and we prays to our god up i' the mountain, and we zes 'O Benamuckee.' He'm a great god too, a mighty great god like yourn; I don't zee much odds to't, master,' 'e zes. So if 'e did convert 'im, it was a middlin' stiff job, I reck'n. And I ain't afraid ter zay that ol' Robinson was a middlin' big fule ter try. If a vorrin savage is so big a fule as to lay down flat on 'is stummick and 'oller out 'O-o-o-o Benamuckee' and sich like jibberish, 'e's a bigger fule still as tries to make 'im mend 'is ways. Missyunaries can't du much gude wi' such fules as they—"

Blasphemy supreme. The listener behind the door could restrain herself no longer. Aunt Jael stumped in.

"Well?"

"Wull?" said the *raconteuse*, bold and unabashed. She had the morning's score to settle.

"Well? Well this: '*ee* talked about notice this morning, madam. Now I give 'ee notice."

"Du yer, Miss Vickary, du yer? Wull, I don't take it then. I'm Missis Lee's servant as much as I'm yourn. You only pays 'alf my money, tho' you may du six-vivths o' the mistressin'. An' 'tis no lies I've been tellin'; 'tis all true gauspel—"

"Order!" stamped the thorned stick. "'Ee leave a week to-day. Silence!" (For repartee was ready.) "And for you, Child, there's no excuse. None. You knew. You knew your sin sitting listening all through that pack of lies—"

"'Tiz *not* lies!" cried Mrs. Cheese. "'Tis true's I stand yer," for she had risen to face the adversary. "Can't the poor lil chil' listen to a trew story? Thank the Lawr there aren't many little children in Tobbry cooped up like 'er is, as can't move her lil finger wi'out gettin' cussed and banged; I ain't got no patience wi't, and there's plenty uv other volks as I cude mention as 'ave passed a few remarks too—"

"Silence!" shouted Aunt Jael, furiously stamping the stone floor two-to-the-second with her stick.

In came my Grandmother, drawn by the tumult. At once both Aunt Jael and Mrs. Cheese began defending themselves: the first word with neutrals counts for much. To Mrs. Cheese: "Miss Vickary first"; to Aunt Jael: "Speak, sister."

"I've caught her telling the child a long lying

rigmarole about savages and idolatry—"

"'Tis not lies! 'Tis truth!" blazed the other, "and don't yer let the pore chil' be punished for listenin', Missis Lee."

Grandmother apportioned blame: for me "You knew you ought not to have listened"; for Mrs. Cheese "Be more careful in what you talk about, and don't forget your manners with Miss Vickary"; for Aunt Jael "There's not much harm been done, Sister; no need whatever to carry on so."

Aunt Jael was infuriated. The balance of Grandmother's judgment was obviously against her; the fact that her younger sister was judging at all was against the first principles of the household, a slight to her position—and to all those sixty-nine years' of an eighteen-months' seniority.

"There!" looked Mrs. Cheese and I, and though neither of us smiled nor spoke, Victory sang in our eyes. My triumph was short. She struck me with her clenched fist; my shoulder received all she owed to Mrs. Cheese and Grandmother as well. So brutal and unexpected was the blow that it stirred me to a spontaneous and venomous cry: "Ugh, I *hate* you."

Fear and forethought which shrouded and bowdlerized most of my remarks when angry had no time to give me pause. "I hate you!" I repeated savagely.

Silence, Sensation, Crisis. Who would resolve it? How?

Grandmother spoke first: "Hush, child, hush. Your Aunt is angry, but you are beside yourself. Jael, I'm

ashamed; to strike like that! But 'hate,' child: the Devil speaks in you. Think, do you mean it?"

"Not quite, no, not—not so bad as that," I faltered convincingly, not from contrition, but to ward off, if might be, another blow, which in the logic of things lay near ahead.

"H'm. 'Tis as well as not. It all comes to this, young minx: You're bad all through; the Devil's in 'ee all the time. Your Grandmother and I have always forbidden 'ee tales of fairies and such like. 'Ee knew, and 'ee listened. Were 'ee wrong—or were 'ee not? I correct 'ee, and all I get for years of care is that 'ee spit out hate. Are 'ee sinful—or are 'ee not?"

I looked at Grandmother: I must take care not to alienate supporters. I looked at Aunt Jael: that blow must be exorcised. "Yes."

She thirsted for super-victory. "Repeat: 'Yes, Aunt Jael, I was sinful and wrong.'"

"Yes, Aunt Jael, I was sinful and wrong."

"And so when I reproved 'ee for being wrong and gave 'ee a well deserved blow, I was right?"

No reply. Her brow darkened. Blow nearer again.

"Come now, quick about it: 'ee were wrong?"

"Yes, Aunt Jael."

"And I was right."

No reply. She half raised her stick—not fist this time—but noting Grandmother's eye, restrained herself with an effort. Both belligerents played still for neutral sympathy. She must be moderate, as

Salvation said of her scholastic fees.

"Now, child, I'll give 'ee five minutes. If by that time 'ee haven't looked me in the face and repeated twice "Ee were right, Aunt Jael, and I'm very sorry,' then I'll bang 'ee till 'ee won't be able to sit down. Now then."

She leaned against the table, eyeing the clock. Mrs. Cheese sat silent, but ready I could see for intervention. That was Grandmother's look too. Both were ready to ward off the soon-to-be-uplifted stick. Aunt Jael feared this, and was uneasy. She broke the silence after about two minutes.

"I warn 'ee. For your own good, mark. 'Tis no odds to me: I'd as lief thrash you. Don't 'ee know your Proverbs, child: 'Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy rod spare for his crying.' *I'll* not spare for your crying. And 'ee'll be free from me for a spell, for 'ee'll dwell up in the attic for a few days all alone to give 'ee time to think over your sins. Now then. What d'ye say to that?"

"What do I say?" I shouted. "I say this: '*It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop than with a brawling woman in a wide house!*' Don't 'ee know your Proverbs, Aunt Jael?"

The supreme defiance of my childhood; the aptest quotation of my life. Never before nor after was I so great. There was no hope now, the beating would equal my deserts, and I had doubtless alienated my best ally. Even so, there mingled with my fear delight in my retort-perfect. It was worth living to have said that; I must be brave and show that it was worth dying for.

For a moment my boldness had staggered her; for a moment only. Then she brought down the great stick with a crash on my shoulder that sent me reeling against the dresser. Grandmother snatched at the stick; she flung her roughly aside, and sent her tottering against the flour-bin with a savage shove.

"How dare you? How dare you knock my Grandmother about? You bad, cruel old woman!"

"There's perlice in this town, Miss Vick'ry, you'm forgetting."

"Jael!"

For answer to the three of us, she struck me brutally twice, once on the leg, and once on my ear, which began to bleed. The two others made a joint rush for the stick.

"Jael, you're beside yourself."

"'Old 'ard, ol' biddy."

I had one idea: flight. There was a nightmare sort of struggle now in progress, swaying first toward one side of the kitchen, then toward another: three black-bodiced old ladies in a Rugby football scrum, Aunt Jael and Mrs. Cheese, as far as one could see, scuffling for the stick, and Grandmother half-scuffling for the stick also, scuffling also to prevent the other two from scuffling each other to death: at once participant and peacemaker, and certainly not blessed. Past this black swaying mass I dashed, along the hall, hatless out on to the Lawn, and on into the forbidden street outside the Lawn gates.

I ran blindly; where, I did not know. It was a sultry day; my aches and bruises began to tell, and I had to

slow down before my rage was worked away. I was wild and rebellious, not only against Aunt Jael, but against God Who allowed her to treat me so. I was walking slowly now. I looked about me; stared at a new brick building on the other side of the road, crossed to read the notice-board outside. "Roman Catholic Church!" Aunt Jael had spoken of this;—this monster we had weakly allowed to be erected in our midst, this Popish temple, this Satan's Synagogue.

"Go in!" said Instinct. This was puzzling: the suggestion was clearly sinful, yet here it came with the authority of my trusted better self. Well, I would commit the sin, the sin deadlier than the seven, the sin crying to heaven for vengeance, the sin against the Holy Ghost! No modern mind could grasp the sense of supreme ultimate wickedness with which my deliberate contact with the Scarlet Woman filled me, for there is no live anti-Popery left among us today. As I pushed open the red baize door, my heart beat fast. Here indeed was defiance to Aunt Jael and to God Who permitted her. I was making a personal call on the Devil in his own private residence. I should have been much less surprised than frightened to find him inside the chapel, seated on a throne of fire; tail, hoofs and all. What should I find? I trembled with emotion.

My first impressions were of the darkness and the smell. This curious odour was doubtless the "insects" against which Miss Salvation thundered; that burnt-offering which cunningly combined cruelty with idolatry. It was an interesting smell; I thought of the paint-and-Bibles odour of our Room. Much of the character of churches, as of books, is discovered in their smell: it is by my nose rather than my mind that I can best recall the rich doctrinal differences

between Calvinistic Methodists, and (say) Particular Baptists. You may smell out a Tipper—or a Bunker—or a Believer in the Divine Revelation of Joanna Southcote—with blindfold eyes; and the odour of an English Roman Catholic Church is, I think, the most distinctive of them all. So too its darkness. How unlike the bare lightness of the Room. This Papistry reminded me of Aunt Jael's front parlour with its perpetual yellow darkness, its little heathen images and its great wooden god. Everywhere there were images and idols, though I was disappointed—and surprised—not to see more sensational symbols of evil. I dared not begin to *think* so, though I *felt* already that this mysterious place gave (somehow) pleasure.

"Habitation of devils and cage of every unclean and hateful bird": our phrases did not fit here,—but perhaps I should soon behold a Sign. A young man came in and knelt before one of the idols: a mother and baby-boy, the Mary Mother and the Son of God. I watched him on his knees before the graven image, Man Vriday on his knees before God Benamuckee. I had a wild notion of crying aloud; I would then and there testify to the true God. But I could not—something held me back—the incense, the holiness, the young man's face, pale and kind and pure.... I looked away. In the side aisle were two or three old women in prayer. How like our old-lady Saints were these Papist women! However different their souls, how alike their clothes and faces! The one nearest me reminded me at once of my Grandmother. Kneeling with her eyes closed and her lips moving in prayer, she looked strangely like the dear devout face I watched each night at bedside prayers. Said Reason: this is an old Papist sinner, a lost soul, an eldest beautiful daughter of Antichrist, who hath

glorified herself and lived deliciously, whose sins have reached unto heaven, whose iniquities God hath remembered. Said Instinct, which came from the Lord: "She is good." (Perhaps she was one of those two or three Papists who were going to heaven, as Grandmother said, despite all.) The kind old face, rapt, adoring, the lips praying as my Grandmother prayed; the pale clean sorrowful young man too; above all, the rich sacramental stillness—these things *of course* were wrong. In the swifter more intuitive way I knew that they were right, and that *I* was wrong. I was baffled; and frightened. These impressions come back to me dimmed maybe, or rather, over-clarified by the notions of later years; but however vaguely and childishly, they are what I surely felt. I had come into this place to commit sin: I knew now that I was committing sin by having come here in such a spirit. I had known it was sacrilege to hold communion with the evil thing; now the sacrilege seemed to be in the mood in which I had come here. For Papist temple or no, God was somewhere here. The dark incensed holiness of this unholy place was sapping my faith and will. I must fly.

And my revenge? I had forgotten that. I slunk out feebly, fleeing from the church and fleeing too from new thoughts I dare not think. I ran to stop myself thinking.

There was no alternative but home. They must be wondering where I was, searching perhaps. They would be anxious; Aunt Jael's conscience, I hoped, would be smiting her. It was already near dusk when I slipped through the Lawn gates. When I reached the door my fear grew again; but I was too tired to wander further. Beatings or no beatings, I would go

into Aunt Jael's own front room, curl myself up in the armchair; the place was so strictly forbidden that she would never dream of searching for me there. The key, as always, stood in the door; mean and purposeful temptation. It was not far from supper-time, and with the blind drawn the room was pretty well dark. I lay back in the armchair and looked around me at the yellow darkness, at the great oak cupboard, the blanched plants in their row of saucers on the floor, the walls covered with spears and clubs, the mantelpiece littered with gods. There straight ahead, high on his walnut whatnot, the great idol blinked down at me.

Here, here was my revenge! The notion stormed me. Dare I? Dare I go down on my knees and worship the graven image? 'Twas a fine way of getting even: to kneel on the floor of her sacred room, and there perform that idolatry which was for her the nameless sin, through even talking of which today's trouble had begun. It would be getting even with God too. If He allowed cruelty and injustice to go on, if He let me be treated as I was, if He failed to deal fairly and faithfully between Aunt Jael and me, if He came short in His duty to Himself and myself; then in my turn I would fail in my duty to Him, I would break His commandments. From the second the notion came, I knew I should obey; though it puzzled me to hear what seemed to be the Tempter's voice speaking for the second time today with the voice of God. To give the Right every chance, and as a sop to fear, I would count a slow and impartial thirty-seven. If at the end of my count the desire to sin was still there, I should have no choice but to obey: the deed must have been predestined, foreordained. Slowly I counted, trying desperately not to influence the decision, and keeping an even balance between

wickedness and fear: ... thirty-five ... thirty-six ... thirty-seven. Yes. The idol still leered invitation; worship him I must. Yet fear numbed me as I sank on my knees; so I made this pitiful pretence, that I was only pretending to do it, not really performing idolatry, but just making believe that I was. (In a way this was true.)

Aloud I piped feebly in faint shameful voice: "O-o-o-o Benamuckee," but dare not face the idol yet. In my heart I screamed, "O God, God, I'm not doing this *really*. Strike me not dead, show no vengeance, spare me, O Lord. 'Tis all make-believe, that I'm worshiping this idol. Thou knowest it. Spare me, spare me!" Every second I expected some dread sign, waited God's stroke. Surely it must come. Here was I—a Christian child, Saint of Saints, dedicated to preach the gospel to the heathen, who in their blindness bowed down to wood and stone—doing the self-same thing, and with no blindness for an excuse. Jehovah would bare His terrible right arm in one swift gesture of supreme revenge—lightning, thunder-bolt, death —only let the stroke come quickly! I waited through a moment of abject fear. Nothing happened; nothing. Was God—? I dare not ask myself the question I dared not formulate.

The first moment passed. I grew less fearful. I grew bold. I felt confident in the instinct that had prompted me, morbidly delighted with the quality of my sin, mighty in its importance and in my own. I felt I was the central spot in the universe: all the worlds were standing still to gaze upon my wickedness. God did nothing. He gave no sign. I took courage; I abandoned all pretence that I was pretending, and flung myself prostrate on the carpet.

"O-o-o-o-Benamuckee! O-o-o-o-Benamuckee!" with all the fervour of true prayer.

Still no sign. By now I was not afraid, but rather disappointed. Why had the Omniscient and Omnipotent left me unpunished, unreproved, unscathed? Swiftly the answer rushed to my brain—I counted a desperate thirty-seven, but the notion stuck—He gave no heed because He so utterly despised me. He saw nothing in me but a miserable play-acting little worm, too mean even for punishment. It was true, and in the same moment I despised myself. "O-o-o-o" died lamely on my lips. As I got up from my knees I dared not look around me for fear some one was watching my folly and shame. Had anybody seen? And what harm had I done to Aunt Jael, the source of all my misery, the real author of all my folly? None. First by going into a house of idolatry, and now by performing it myself, I was wreaking no hurt on her, while imperilling my own eternal soul. I was a fool.

Then came the day's third notion. Cupboard, cupboard!—rifle it! Open, look, steal! This massive piece of oak excelled the physic cupboard in mystery, while equalling it in Aunt Jael's affections. Its contents were largely unknown: I knew it housed a jar of ginger, and in benignant mood Aunt Jael would make it yield a box of Smyrna figs, from which she doled me one or two for senna's sake—as dainty supplement or shy substitute. Like the door of the room itself, the door of the rich cupboard stood always key in lock. Once before I had reached this point of handling the key; today, the day of many sins, I took the one step further, and opened to my gaze a new world of jars, pots, boxes and bags. I opened my campaign on a jar of French plums, the

jar massive stone and broad-necked, the plums large black and luscious. I had eaten perhaps my sixth (one of my unlucky numbers), when—a sound—and I half dropped the jar in fright. The door, there was a noise at the door; the handle turned, it was opening. An opening door is the thief's nightmare; I dared not get up from my knees. The noise ceased; I peered through the darkness. Then the atoms of *seen* atmosphere that sometimes fill a half-darkened room played me a cruel trick. They shaped into a great leering face—half Aunt Jael, half Benamuckee;—it peered round the door, it mocked, it sneered. I was petrified with fear, and for something to hold clutched fiercely at the stone jar. Was the face real? Look, it was fading away. Then, without any manner of doubt, the door softly shut. So the face was real, and I knew its owner.

What new tortures would she find to meet the score I was running up? Why had she withdrawn? Ah, she had gone for the ship's rope, was coming back to give me the last flogging of all, the one that would kill me. A few minutes passed. As in the Papist chapel, and again during my idol-worship, I waited for a great something to happen. Nothing happened. I attended a sign. No sign came.

I must venture forth; sooner or later I had to face the music. I had no stomach left for plums. I put the jar back, locked the cupboard door, and stole softly out into the hall. Far away along the passage I could see Mrs. Cheese bustling about in the kitchen; it must be supper-time. She was still in the house therefore; she had ignored her notice and survived the *mêlée* in which I had seen her last. I turned the key softly behind me, then stole to the house front-door, which I noisily opened and shut, to pretend I had just come

in.

I walked straight into the dining-room.

Aunt Jael *smiled*. I had foreseen many things, but not this. She said nothing. This proved that the face at the door was hers. A grim smile.

"At last!" said my Grandmother. "It was wrong to run away and scare us like this. I'll talk to you afterwards upstairs. Have your supper now, as you've had no tea. Then to bed."

I ate. Aunt Jael sat and smiled. A grim smile.

Upstairs in my bedroom Grandmother asked me where I had been. "I walked about the town" satisfied her. She rebuked my initial sin in encouraging Mrs. Cheese, my second in insulting Aunt Jael, my third in running away; she anointed my sores, first on the ear, second on the calf, third on the shoulder where the first ruffianly stroke had fallen; she prayed with me, and said good-night.

* * * * * * *

Alone in bed I went over the day's events: from porridge pan to plums, from lumps to Aunt Jael's smile. Suddenly, causelessly in the way one finds in a dream lost objects whose hiding place is long forgotten—I saw the stone cover of the plum jar lying in the middle of the front-room carpet. Remembrance followed vision, and I knew I had hastily put the jar away without it. At all events the cover must be restored; if by any wild chance the face at the door had not been Aunt Jael's this tell-tale object would anyhow give me away if she should find it; if the face *were* hers the cover would be fine "evidence."

I got up. I always lay awake till after midnight; Aunt Jael and Grandmother were long ago in bed. The day's horrible excitements had made me more cowardly than usual. The darkness frightened me, the creaking stairs frightened me, my conscience frightened me. Shapes loomed everywhere. The pillar at the foot of the banisters towered down on me like some avenging ghost. At last I reached the front-room door; I turned the key slowly and carefully; it clanged unpiteously in the silence. I peeped in. The moonlight piercing through the drawn blind lit up ghoulishly the god's evil face. I stared a moment; his features *moved*; and I fled in frantic terror.

Though the object I sought was but a couple of yards away, I could not for all the world have dared a single step nearer. I shut the door and, praying fervently all the way, crept up to bed again. I would go and pick up the cover of the jar first thing in the morning; Aunt Jael never went in till after breakfast; the daylight I could dare.

# CHAPTER VII: THE END OF THE WORLD

All night I did not sleep. Conscience busy with the day past and fear anxious for the day ahead gave me quite enough to think about, and I was feverish and overwrought. As soon after daylight as I dared I set forth downstairs. It was early enough for me to retrieve the tell-tale object before Aunt Jael was astir and light enough for me to brave Lord Benamuckee. At the foot of the stairs I met Aunt Jael, fully dressed, nearly two hours before ordinary time; smiling.

"Good morning, child. You're up betimes."

I did not dare a *tu quoque*, but uttered a feeble tale about helping Mrs. Cheese to clean the boots, Friday being her busiest day.

Aunt Jael, by a singular coincidence, had risen in the same helping spirit, and the two of us burst upon the astonished Mrs. Cheese in the midst of her first matutinal movements. Though I was by now quite certain that the face at the door had been Aunt Jael's, this did not prevent my wishing to restore the jar-cover to its place. It was preparing for the best, so to speak, on the faint off-chance that I was deluded. Meanwhile her smile prepared me for the worst. It was more complex than a blow, for it portended blows to come and added to their evil charm by heralding them afar off. Aunt Jael's floggings had at least this merit, that as a rule they came suddenly;

the stick was across my back before I knew where I was.

I walked out of the kitchen, straight through to the front room door. Before touching the handle, I took a glance down the length of the hall. Yes, there she stood at the kitchen door, watching me like a hawk. At breakfast, hope pointed out one more chance. I would gobble down my food, and essay a dash for my objective just as I was leaving for school. I ate as fast as I could; she at once ate faster. I got up, she got up too. There was no chance, and she even saw me to the house-door as I set out for school. In the game we were playing, no word was spoken. Her weapon was her smile, which was the proof too that she was winning.

On my way to school, as I thought now of this latest menace, now of yesterday's deeds, I admitted that here at last was a case when I *deserved* punishment. "I hate you"—entering a House of Sin, and approving it almost—breach of the third commandment—common theft—a white lie to Grandmother as to where I had been—what an awful record for one day! Truly I was a queen of sinners. Perhaps God saw fit to humble me in the exaltation of my sin by scorning direct vengeance Himself (three times I had waited for the sign), and had chosen as the vehicle of His vengeance Aunt Jael, my every-day inglamorous tyrant. In any case vengeance was certain; the sultry thunder-weather of the new day seemed to announce it.

Soon after I got to school, it began to grow dark, then very dark. It was one of those rare occasions when the pitch-black of utter darkness falls in the day-time; I only remember one other in nearly fifty

years. Miss Glory wondered; Miss Salvation exclaimed; we children cowered. I alone had an inkling of what the portent really betokened. It was the Sign. Now that I felt certain once again that the moment of my doom was at hand, all the exquisite extreme fear of yesterday came back.

It was swiftly too dark to read. Panic set in. All the children, from both classes, clustered round Glory. She, not Salvation, was the refuge and strength which instinct pointed out on this Last Day. The situation was worthy of her prophet's soul: to her was assigned the awful honour of ushering in Eternity, and announcing the sure signs of the beginning of the end. She stood up, gaunt, prophetic, towering far above the children who clustered round her, waved one hand towards the heavens, and chanted forth:

"The End, little children, is here! Fear not! Repent! 'And the fourth angel sounded and the third part o' the sun was smitten, and the third part o' the moon and the third part o' the stars; so as the third part o' them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part uv it, and the night likewise.' The End is here! The bottomless pit is opened, then cometh forth smoke out o' the pit, and the sun and the air are darkened. Out o' the smoke come great locusts upon the earth, great locusts—" Some of the children shrieked.

Now at one stride came utter darkness. Salvation fell on her knees in a corner apart, yelling and howling to the Lord to save her. "O Lord, Lord, remember us as is chosen, remember, Lord. Smite the ungodly, Lord, smite 'em all, but spare the righteous, spare the righteous! Strike the goats with thy angur, but zave

the pore sheep; smite the zinners, but zave Thy own Zaints! Oh, aw, ow! Zave, Lord, zave!"

While this pitiable object yelled away, and the children cried, Miss Glory's solemn voice chanted on, awaiting God's stroke. I the Papist, the idolater, the liar, the thief—this visitation was for *me*. And if it was the end of the whole world too, as I believed, I was the cause, and I should be the first victim.

"Plagues, locusts, scorpions, the pit, the great tribulation! Life is death, me children: *'tis one long prercession o' death beds*. Listen, hearken. First the darkness, now 'tis the thunders and lightin's that is at hand. Watch, oh, my children, watch; pray and fear not. 'Tis the end o' the Worrld, I tell 'ee, the end o' the Worrld." And all the children clutched at her in a frightened desperate ring, so that they should all go to heaven or hell together. I could just distinguish the group a few feet away; it looked in the darkness like a swarm of giant insects. Miss Salvation was pleading and howling away for a heaven to herself, and hell for all folk else. Still I waited; the slowness of God's stroke was half its terror. It was too hard to bear.

Then, far more suddenly than it came, the darkness lifted. With returning light came confidence. I breathed freely. Once again respite. Fear, prime instigator of goodness, lost his hold as the shadows faded. I began to *expect* escape; to think, after so many favours, that I was privileged, and could take the risk of wrongdoing. I was a chartered libertine.

When I got back to Bear Lawn before dinner, no sign of Aunt Jael. There was still a chance then to put things right if it was not too late. I stole into the front room. There, in the middle of the floor, just as I

had seemed to see it in bed, lay the stone jar-cover. Good fortune once again. After all Aunt Jael could know nothing. Those smiles were innocent; their menace must have been born of my disordered mind. Anyway, here was yet another stroke of luck. But, alas, these perpetual escapes emboldened me. Fear is the guardian of virtue, safety the guide to sin. God's repeated forgivenesses for my sins inspired in me security rather than gratitude: a feeling that I could sin safely.

So why not another French plum? Only just one,—or two. Before fixing the cover on the jar, it was natural enough just to taste. I knelt down to open the cupboard. I tilted the heavy jar to look down into it and make my choice. In a second I dropped it with a wild frenzied shriek, wrung from the depths of my heart. Staring at me from inside the jar, painted there in great letters of shining fire, lay the Sign:

THOU GOD SEEST ME.

The King of Terrors had got hold of me, and I shrieked and shrieked again. I writhed on the floor like a wild thing, clasping now my side, now my knees and again my forehead in all the pitiful gestures of terror. I cut my hand against the broken fragments of the jar that lay scattered on the floor. I licked at the blood. Now the air seemed filled with those awful letters, in blood-red capitals everywhere. I shut my eyes: against the blackness the letters stood forth more bright and terrible than ever: THOU GOD SEEST ME. He saw, the Almighty saw. God had given me rope and I had hanged myself. It had needed this miracle to bring me to a sense of my sins: this Sign whereby the Lord God wrote with His own finger in letters of fire in the plum-jar; the earthen vessel of

my sin. This was but the beginning of terrors. "Tis the End o' the World, I tell 'ee, the End o' the World," rang my brain. I waited the next sign: a stealthy sound—the door, the door!—then again that face, leering, mocking, horrible. It was Aunt Jael—no, it was Benamuckee—it changed again, it was the Devil himself! I fainted away.

In the "mental illness" that followed I came near to losing my life and nearer still to losing my reason. For many days I was unconscious, and then for long weeks I lay in bed under my Grandmother's loving care. In my delirium I must have told her everything. Sometimes I can recall that fevered time; it comes back to me in the swift evanescent way that one remembers a dream long afterwards, and it is one long hideous nightmare. I live again those dark delirious days when I knew myself for a lost soul flying in terror from God, the Devil, the Pope, Aunt Jael, Benamuckee and Eternity, who menaced me in turn with their various and particular terrors, in all the formless frightfulness of dreams. The pursuit was everlasting. An evil black shadow prowled close at my heels with pitiless, unbroken stride. The face, which kept forcing me against my will to turn round to look at it as I ran, changed from time to time. First I thought my pursuer was Aunt Jael, brandishing a huge stick studded with thorns and spikes of inhuman size. As I looked, hate of the coarse old face rose within me: then the face changed, I thought, into God's; stern, just and terrible, seeking me out to stifle the wicked hate in my heart. Now again it was the Pope, horned and horrible, seeking to avenge my sacrilege in his temple, and now Benamuckee, hastening to devour me for having repented of my idolatry and deserted his shrine. I ran, it seemed, for ever. I had no strength left, and fear alone worked

my weary limbs. Now the face was formless: a black shapeless mass without limbs or features was pursuing me. He was the grimmest of them all, and followed for ever and ever. I knew the formless face; it was the last worst terror, Eternity Himself! Sometimes, as my Grandmother told me long afterwards, I shrieked in my delirium till my voice failed me and I could shriek no more.

Perhaps it was at such moments that the dream changed. I thought that I was God, with all the labour and responsibility of creation upon my soul. Every clod of earth that went to make the world I had to go and fetch from some far-away corner in utmost Space; I staggered with them, in it seemed a million journeys, to the central place where with infinite labour I had to piece them all together one by one. When I came to making the first man, my conscience—God's conscience—smote me: "Think and ponder well: if you fashion but one man, it is you who must bear the guilt for all the awful sorrows and wretchedness of the millions of men who will come after, it is you who will be responsible for all the agony of eternal life you are conferring upon a new race." I shut my ears to the voice (Who is God's conscience?—the Devil?), hardened my heart, and created mankind. Then as I beheld his fall, and all the unhurrying centuries of woe and pain and cruelty and sorrow that followed, and knew that every one of those creatures I had called forth was damned into everlastingness without hope of happiness or death; suddenly on me too, on me the Lord God, there fell the terror of the Everlasting. All the fear I knew so well as Mary Lee was now a hundred times intensified when I was God. I too, the Almighty, was a victim on the wheel of Space and Time; and as my brain pictured the awful horrible loneliness that

would face me for ever watching the birth and death of all the stars and half-a-million worlds, and knowing there was no escape, I made a wild despairing attempt to fling myself headlong over the edge of Space and commit soul-murder if I could. I flung myself over what seemed to be the margin of the universe; I was falling, falling—then arms restored me;—and Grandmother saved me just in time, and put poor delirious brain-sick little God back into bed.

I was in bed for many weeks; it was three or four months before I went back to school. The permanent effect of my illness was an increased nervousness I have never shaken off. To this day, whenever a door opens suddenly without warning, my heart stands still, and try as I may not to see it, the vision of a cruel mocking face comes back. The most immediate effect was that I became a "better" child. My Grandmother's daily gentleness and sacrifice during those long long days, made me resolve to be more like her; and I prayed God fervently to make me so. I saw too, for all Aunt Jael's provocations and harsh treatment, that I had been wrong and wicked. I numbered my sins one by one and repented of each and all. A miracle had been wrought to save me: the finger of the Almighty had sketched in letters of flame the reminder that *HE SAW ME*. He had intervened miraculously and directly, to secure my spiritual state. I determined to be worthy of this signal proof of God's special favour. By a sacrifice not easy to exaggerate I managed to see that Aunt Jael might have been God's "instrument" throughout: perhaps the idea was more possible since now, during my recovery, she treated me far better than at any time before: kept a sharp hold on her tongue, indulged in no recriminations or abuse, and bought

me a bottle of barley-sugar. I saw nothing more of that curious mocking smile that had helped to haunt me into delirium. Once or twice I thought she had a guilty look, especially once when Grandmother made some reference to the plum-jar. Was it possible? Never. For if so, *how*? No; it was the Lord's doing.

Mrs. Cheese had left. I gathered from Grandmother that there had been a stormy scene, Mrs. Cheese accusing Aunt Jael of directly and deliberately causing my illness, and Aunt Jael ordering Mrs. Cheese out of the house then and there. She refused to go till she had helped my Grandmother to see me through the worst days.

In the stead of Mrs. Cheese arose a dim unapostolic succession of fickle and fleeting bondswomen. Most of them were Saints. All of them quarrelled with Aunt Jael. Their average sojourn with us was perhaps ten months, which in those stable and old-fashioned days would equal (say) two weeks in this era of quick-change kitchen-maids and kaleidoscopic cooks.

There was Prudence, rightly so-called, for although she skimmed each morning the milk the dairyman had left overnight, she cautiously concealed her jugful of cream in the remotest corner of the least-used scullery cupboard. Aunt Jael, however, was on the watch. She thought the milk woefully thin, and Prudence's explanations still thinner. Then one morning she found the prudent one busy at early dawn, spoon in hand, her little jug half-full; caught in the very act.

There were Charlotte, Annie, Miriam, Ethel, May, Jane, Sarah, Bessie, Ann, Mary, the Elizas (two), Kate, Keturah, Deborah, Selina, and Sukie: I am not

sure of their strict order of precedence. Nor do I remember their life with us half so well as the manner of their leaving it. The climax came variously. Charlotte told me what I now know to have been dirty stories. Annie told Aunt Jael herself a very dirty story indeed—precisely what she thought of her (Aunt Jael); Miriam spat in her (Aunt Jael's) porridge, Kate when attacked with a shovel hit back with a floury rolling-pin, Bessie stole a shilling, Ann (Anglican) giggled during prayers, Jane —or may be this was Sarah—brought unsaved "followers" into the house, Selina did no work; one of the Elizas swore and the other was a Baptist. May and Keturah were fetched away by indignant parents. Deborah disappeared. One only died a natural death—Mary, my namesake, who left us to get married.

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## CHAPTER VIII: SATAN COMES TO TAWBOROUGH

"Yes," said Miss Glory shaking her head gravely one Tuesday afternoon. "I fear 'tis true. Satan hisself is coming to this town."

"Oh," said Aunt Jael, "I should have thought he was here already."

"The ole Devil hisself," continued Glory, staring far into space and ignoring Aunt Jael.

"Now what do you think you mean?" snapped my

Great-Aunt.

"She means the ole Devil hisself, which is what she said," interposed Salvation, hoping to raise ill feeling.

"Peace, sister! All I means is this 'ere. God A'mighty meant us to travel on our two legs or by the four legs of four-footed beasts. 'Tis only the Devil as can want to go any other way. We know 'ausses, an' donkeys, and mules too for the matter o' that, but when it comes to carriages and truck loads o' folk being pulled along as quick as a flash of lightning by an ole artifishul animal belchin' up steam and fire, like the n'orrible pit it is, 'tis some'at a thought too queer for an ole Christian woman like myself and for God A'mighty too I should think. No wonder there are orwis actsodents—act o' God, *I* calls 'un. I've heard tell of these 'ere railway trains in vorrin parts, but I never did think we should see 'un in North Devun. But 'tis true I fear; Salvation went across the bridge to see with 'er own two eyes, and saw a pair o' lines as the wicked thing runs along on, and bills and notices all braggin' about it. There didn't used to be no sich things, and there didn't ought to be now; 'tis all the Devil's works and there'll be a judgment on them as 'elps 'em, a swift an' n'orrible judgment, you mark my words."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried my Aunt. "'Ee may both like to know that I sold that field o' mine, down beyond the meadow, to this railway company. There! Got a middling good price for it too, as all the Meeting will soon learn from yer two wagging tongues. Judgment indeed! Poor ignorant old fool. 'Tis a sensible invention, and the Lord permits it. Be you daft? 'Ee just show me a scripture that's against railway trains!"

"An' 'ee just show me one that's *for* 'un!" cried Salvation.

"I'm sorry, Jael," said Glory, ignoring her sister as always, "but I assure 'ee I didn't know when I spake they solemn words. 'Tis a very seldom thing for me to speak out, but I feels deep. Even if 'tissen the spirit of Satan that's moving in these 'ere railway trains, what's the *good* of 'un anyway? Will the worrld be any happier, will there be a single sinner the more as repenteth? Will there be less poor folk in the worrld and less souls going to 'Ell? You wake up in a hundred years and see if these 'ere railway trains 'ave brought the kingdom 'o God on earth! There's no two ways about it, the worrld is getting wickeder, and these new invenshuns a sign. Things bain't what they used to be, and they'm gettin' worse."

"That field, Sister Jael," added Salvation, with gleaming teeth, "that field you sold was a field of blood. Alcedama! There'll be a judgment, a n'orrible judgment, you mark my words."

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A few weeks later Aunt Jael heaped coals of fire by asking the Sisters to accompany us to the official ceremony of the Devil's arrival in Tawborough. All, I suppose, who had sold land to the Company were invited to this function. Aunt Jael had a white ticket giving right of admission to the uncovered platform at which the Devil would draw up—"the Company's railway station" as the ticket grandly called it. It was a preliminary trip from Crediton to Tawborough, before the general opening for traffic: a kind of dress rehearsal.

The day, July 12th, 1854, stands clear in my

memory. It was the chief purely secular event of my childhood, the only time before I was a grown woman that I went to any assembling together of people other than the Lord's. I marvelled to see how numerous they were, and I remember the dim suspicion that haunted me throughout the day, and never completely left me afterwards, that perhaps, despite Brother Brawn, not quite *all* of them were being 'urld to 'Ell. They did not seem aware of it, and the moments when I did not doubt their fate were filled with pity.

The day was to be treated as a holiday. Glory was persuaded by Aunt Jael to announce that there would be no school. I was up betimes, wakened by the bells of the parish church, which rang a merry peal, and by the firing of guns. It was one of those fresh glorious summer mornings which promise delight, and do not leave the memory. Soon after breakfast the Clinkers arrived in a carriage. Glory with brand new bacon-rind strings to her bonnet, Salvation ominously cheerful, confident of some awful disaster. Grandmother, Aunt Jael and I were ready waiting, and the five of us drove to the scene of action. I felt elated and important, perched up on the box, as we drove slowly along streets thronged with crowds in their Sunday best. Every one appeared in high spirits; I conjectured that those who shared Miss Glory's gloomy views must all have stayed at home. The crowds became denser as we approached the railway station, a kind of long wooden platform with a high covering. It looked like a very odd top-heavy sort of shed. A few feet below the platform and close beside it ran two parallel metal lines on which the Thing would arrive. A high triumphal arch covered with green-stuff and laurel leaves and bedecked with flags, the first I had ever

seen, English, French and Turkish ("Our Allies": There was a war, said some one), spanned the line. The platform was crowded with people, and very gay and worldly they looked. Our little company of Saints tried to cling together, and I held tight to my Grandmother's hand, but the crowd was too close all round for us to look as separate as we tried to feel. Quite near was a body of gentlemen dressed in ermine and rich surprising costumes and furs and wigs and cocked hats, and holding mysterious gold and silver weapons. Some, said my Grandmother, were the Mayor and Corporation, others were Oddfellows and Freemasons. I had not the least idea what these words might mean, and was too busy staring to ask which were which. My heart was filled with envy of those portly gentlemen and their gorgeous robes; a hankering envy as real as any sentiment I have ever felt.

As the time of arrival drew near the excitement and jostling on the platform increased. One lady fainted; "A jidgment," commented Miss Salvation.

I overheard some saying the train would never arrive, others that It would be hours or even days late; others again that It would arrive to time and confound all doubters. Excitement rose to a pitch of frenzy when two galloping horsemen drew up at the platform and announced that within five minutes It would be here. Only half of It however would arrive, as the back portion had somehow got detached and left behind at Umberleigh: "The Devil losing his tail," said Miss Salvation. When about two minutes later a tall gentleman near us shouted excitedly that he sighted It afar off, there was such a tiptoeing and straining and squashing and peering that I could have cried with vexation at being so small. My

Grandmother lifted me for a moment, and I had a perfect view of the monstrous beast as it drew near. The first carriage was belching fire and smoke from a funnel—just as Glory had said—and the carriages behind it, brown scaly looking things, were like the links in a hell-dragon's tail. The fear seized me for a swift moment that perhaps after all she was right. Then the people broke into deafening cheers and hurrahs, and waved handkerchiefs and funny little flags. Aunt Jael and Grandmother stood impassive, but excited a little in spite of themselves. Glory and Salvation set their mouths, and determined to hold out. As the great engine puffed past us I was trembling with excitement. It was the purest magic.

When the Thing stopped we were about in the middle of its length, opposite the second carriage, or link of the tail. We were all pressed back to make room for the great people who were emerging. The majority were gentlemen, a few grandly and mysteriously dressed like ours, more Corporations and Oddfellows and Freemasons I supposed, but most of them, including some very angry-looking gentlemen, whispered to be His Worship the Mayor of Exeter and the Aldermen of that ancient city, in plain clothes. Alas, all their toggery had been left behind in the back half of the train which had been shed at Umberleigh.

A very stylish gentleman dressed in black came forward in front of everybody else: Chairman of the Company, I heard whispered—whatever that might mean. He shook hands with several of our dressed-up gentlemen, and then one of the latter, a fat man with a wig and white curls, read to the stylish gentleman from a long roll of paper a very long and very dry speech congratulating him on bringing the railway

train to Tawborough and describing his person in very flattering terms. The stylish gentleman made a speech (without roll of paper) in response; it was much shorter, but about as dry.

Then some of the dressed-up members of our side came forward in a body and poured out corn and oil and wine, very solemnly. When the wine had been spilled, a solemn man dressed like a high priest (the Provincial Grand Chaplain of the Order of Freemasons, I discover forty years later from the files of a local paper) lifted up his hands and prayed over the Oblation. So people who were not Saints prayed!

The next thing I remember was our dressed-up people and the visitors moving off the platform to form themselves into a procession to march round the town, and all the rest of us repairing to witness it. In the stampede that ensued Aunt Jael tripped over a beam that was lying on the platform, and went flying.

"A jidgment," began Salvation, triumphant at last; when she tripped on the beam and went flying too—which *was* a "jidgment."

We were only just in time to get a good view of the procession, as it took Aunt Jael and Miss Salvation some time to limp along. All the Mayors and Oddfellows and Corporations and Freemasons were there, carrying symbols and rods and devices; there were soldiers, Mounted Rifles and officers gay with swords; shipwrights in white trousers, and clergymen in black; uninteresting looking people in ordinary clothes who had no more right to be there, I thought, than I had; and at least four bands of music. The glamour of martial music and brilliant costumes raised me to a pitch of ecstasy and envy; from that

moment blare and pomp filled a great place in my hankerings and hopes.

After the procession we took a walk round the streets, which were crowded with people from all North Devon. There were flags at nearly every window. A great triumphal arch was erected in the middle of the bridge inscribed "Success to the North Devon Railway." The High Street was one series of festoons, from upper storey windows of one side to upper storey windows of the other. One said "God Save the Queen," another "Prosperity to our Town," and another which puzzled me a good deal, hanging from the windows of what I now know to have been the local newspaper office, declared in huge red bunting capitals

THE PRESS,
THE RAILROAD OF CIVILIZATION.

We got home to dinner tired and excited. Glory and Salvation left to attend a Tea in the North Walk given by the tradespeople to six hundred poor people, amongst whom the Clinkers had hastened to number themselves.

"It may be the Lord's way after all," said Miss Glory. "God moves in a mysterious way."

Aunt Jael and Grandmother had been asked to take tickets (not gratis) to a great banquet in the Corn Market, but whether for economy's or godliness' sake, decided not to go. I gather from the old local paper before me that they did not miss much; for despite the giant "railway cake," a wonderful affair covered with viaducts and trains and bridges all made of icing sugar, and despite the vicar who ably "performed the devotions of the table," the dinner is

candidly described as "poor" and the caterer roundly trounced for her failure.

Soon the railway passed into the realm of ordinary accepted things. The Meeting was at first a little exercised about its attitude. A few, including Brother Brawn, agreed with Glory and Salvation that it was the Devil's works. The majority, including my Grandmother, took the pious and common-sense view that since the Lord permitted the thing it must be His Will, and prayed that he would bless and sanctify it to His own use and glory.

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## CHAPTER IX: AND SO DOES UNCLE SIMEON

August the First, 1855, was the seventieth birthday of Aunt Jael.

Moreover, as the Old Maids of Tawborough were seven, six other ladies completed their seventieth year on this self-same day, to wit: Miss Sarah Tombstone, Miss Keturah Crabb, Miss Lucy Clarke, Miss Fanny Baker, with the Misses Glory and Salvation Clinker. When Aunt Jael decided on the astonishing plan of a great dinner party to celebrate the day, by the very nature of things the Other Six figured at the head of her list of prospective guests.

Who else should be invited? This question was

lengthily discussed with Grandmother, discussed of course in Aunt Jael's way; i. e. she decreed, Grandmother agreed. The party was to be a representative one, with a worldly element and a spiritual element, a rich element and a poor element, a this-world element and a next-world element. There were four main divisions: first, the Other Six; second The Saints (selected); third, old friends; and fourth—a grudging fourth—relations.

Of the Saints, Aunt Jael invited Mr. Pentecost Dodderidge, the Lord's instrument for her own spiritual regeneration forty years before; Brother Brawn and Brother and Mrs. Quappleworthy; and Brother Quick, he who had once proposed to young Jael Vickary, then the Belle of Tawborough—though Grandmother always averred that his shot at Aunt Jael was at best a ricochet.

After much discussion and more prayer, the Lord guided Aunt Jael's mind to but one solitary Old Friend; a Mr. Royle, churchwarden at the Parish Church, the only friend dating from Jael Vickary's young unsaved days with whom she had kept up, if indeed decorous chats in the market when they chanced to meet might be so considered; for he never came to the house.

Relations were a simpler problem. There were no close ones except the elder brother of my Great-Aunt and Grandmother, my unknown Uncle John, who was too rheumaticky to travel down from London even if Aunt Jael had had a mind to invite him or he to accept her invitation; and my mother's sister and Grandmother's only surviving child, Aunt Martha of Torribridge, with her husband, Uncle Simeon Greeber, whom I had never seen; there was some

feud between Aunt Jael and Uncle Simeon, dating from before I can remember, sufficiently formidable to prevent his crossing our threshold for many years, although he lived but eight miles away. Aunt Martha, however, paid us fairly frequent visits. She was a pale thin, indeterminate-looking woman, who impressed me so little that I was often unable to conjure up her face in my imagination; a vague, tired face, in which Grandmother's gentleness had run to feebleness. When her husband was unpleasant with her, which according to Aunt Jael was pretty often, she submitted feebly; when Aunt Jael spent the whole of one of her afternoon visits to Bear Lawn abusing her, she listened feebly. For this one occasion, however, Aunt Jael decided to sacrifice her dislikes to that ancient law by which the family must be represented at all major festivals and feeds. For some time, too, Aunt Martha had been insisting, with all the feebleness of which she was capable, on Mr. Greeber's longing for a reconciliation with his revered aunt by marriage. So he too was invited. The only other askable relative was a niece-in-law of my Grandmother's, the daughter of old Captain Lee's only sister, now a fat widow of forty-five, Mrs. Paradine Pratt. She lived over at Croyde, on three hundred pounds a year of her own; was a Congregationalist, and fond of cats.

The final list thus comprised: Old Maids of Tawborough (including the hostess), seven; Saints, five; Old Friend, one; Relations, three. Total with Grandmother and myself, eighteen. Never before had such a multitude assembled within our doors.

The problems of space and food were next envisaged. The sacred front-room was to be thrown open; there the guests would be entertained before and after the

meal. Dinner would of course be served in the back-parlour; by putting the two spare leaves into the table and tacking a smaller table on at one end, Aunt Jael calculated that there would be adequate eating-space and breathing-space for all.

"'Twill be a tight fit though. You, child, will have your meal in the kitchen."

"Then so will I," said my Grandmother.

Aunt Jael was taken aback. She was silent for a moment, casting about for another unreasonable suggestion with which Grandmother would have to disagree; the old trick by which she always strove to pretend that the guilt of cantankerousness was my Grandmother's.

"Glory, of course, will be in her usual stool in the corner."

"Now, sister, don't be foolish—"

"There you go! Disagreeing with everything I say. Whose party is it, mine or yours?..."

Miriam—Miriam who used the Great One's porridge plate as spittoon—was our cook at the time. Sister Briggs, humble little Brother Briggs' humbler little wife, was called in for the day itself as extra hand. "Proud to do it, I know," said Aunt Jael, "and glad of the meal she'll get and the pickings she'll carry away." Aunt Jael held with no nonsense of class-equality, no "all women-are-equal" twaddle. Spiritually the Briggses ranked far above unsaved emperors, or kings who broke not bread. Spiritually, but not socially. So while Brother Brawn and Sister Quappleworthy were summoned to the seats of the

mighty in the parlour, Sister Briggs, their co-heiress in salvation, came to the scullery to wash-up at the price of her dinner, a silver shilling and pickings.

Vast preparations went forward: a record Friday's marketing, a record scrubbing and cleaning, a record bustle and fuss.

The great day dawned. Both armchairs had been removed from the back-parlour to the front-parlour to increase the table-space in one and the sitting accommodation in the other. In her familiar chair, therefore, though in an unfamiliar setting, my Great-Aunt sat enthroned: robed in her best black silk, crowned with a splendid cap all of white lace and blue velvet ribbon that I had not seen before, and armed with that stout sceptre I had seen (and felt) from my youth up.

The first arrivals were Aunt Martha and her husband. They came over early from Torribridge, and had arranged to spend the whole day and stay the night with us. I was curious to see Mr. Greeber, as I had never seen an uncle before. Aunt Jael's dislike of him whetted my curiosity, and also of course prejudiced me in his favour. Any such preconceived sympathy fled from me the moment I set eyes on him. Can I have foreseen, half-consciously, that this was the creature to be responsible for the wretchedest moments and the worst emotions of my life? Anyhow, I remember with photographic accuracy every look, every gesture, as he minced through the doorway behind Aunt Martha, springing softly up and down on the ball of the toe, moving quite noiselessly. He was a thin little man, narrow shouldered, small-made in every limb. His face was pallid, without a trace of blood showing in the

cheeks. He had a mass of curious honey-coloured hair, that you would have thought picturesque, if it had crowned the head of a pretty woman or a lovely boy. Of the same hue was his pointed little beard. His mouth I did not specially notice till he began speaking, when he moistened his lips with his tongue between every few words and showed how pale and thin and absolutely bloodless they were. His eyes changed a good deal. For a moment, as when they rested on mine and read there my instant dislike, they answered with a moment's stare of hard cruelty, such as blue eyes alone can give; most of the time they rolled shiftily about, chiefly heavenward. His gestures were exaggerated; he bent his head forward, poked it absurdly to one side, and gave a sickly smile —intended to be winning—whenever he spoke. With his soft overdone politeness, his pointed little beard, his gestures, he looked like the traditional Frenchman of caricature; except for his eyes, which whether for the moment cruel or pious, had nothing in common with that amiable creature. He was unhealthy and unpleasant in some undefined way new to my experience. Aunt Jael had a sound judgment after all.

He advanced to greet her, oozingly.

"Good day, good day, dear Miss Vickary. One rejoices that the Lord has watched over you these three-score years and ten; one is thankful, thankful indeed. M'yes. Your kindness, too, in extending one your invitation—believe me, one will not readily forget it! And you too, dear Mrs. Lee, one is pleased to see you, to be sure. So this is the little one! One is well pleased to meet one's little niece."

He chucked me under the chin, saw the expression in

my eyes, and never tried the playful experiment again. It was hate at first sight, and he knew it.

Aunt Jael's voice sounded gruff—and honest—enough after the unctuous flow. "Well, good day to 'ee, Simeon Greeber, and make yourself welcome." (Meaning: "You know I dislike you and always shall. Still, now that for once in a way you are in my house, I shall try to put up with you.")

A slight pause, while his eyes wandered piously round the room, encountering everywhere spears, clubs, tomahawks, idols, charms. "What interesting objects! Trophies of the Gospel, one may surmise! Why, surely not, surely not, can that great heathen image in the corner be the same, the selfsame one, as was brought back by one's dear late cousin, Immanuel Greeber, Immanuel Greeber of Tiverton, one's well-loved cousin Immanuel?"

Benamuckee stared impassively. "Yes," said Aunt Jael. "It is the same."

"Ah, what a symbol of folly, what a sign of darkness! The field of foreign labour is, of course, your own special interest in the Lord's work, both yours and dear Mrs. Lee's, is it not? That is *well* known."

"Yes," replied my Grandmother, "as you know, the child here is dedicated to the Lord's work among the heathen." I puffed inwardly.

"What an honour, ah, what an honour! For oneself, one confesses, the home field comes nearest to one's heart; to one's earnest, if humble endeavours. M'yes. There is sad darkness far away, in the heathen continents and pagan isles, one knows, one knows: but here in England among one's nominal Christians,

there is, alas, greater darkness still. Ah, these half-believers, these almost-persuaded Christians!—Once one was one oneself. So one knows. One was a Baptist, as you know, dear Sisters; one hardened one's heart against the ministrations of the Saints. Then one blessed day, the scales fell from one's eyes —one saw the error of one's ways—and one joined the one true flock."

I disliked him curiously as he murmured and whispered away in a soft treacly flow punctuated only by sticky lip-moistenings and heavenward sniffs; this miracle-man who never ever used the best beloved pronoun of all the human race.

His utterance was cut short by new arrivals. Grandmother received them in the hall, saw to the hat and coat doffing, and ushered them into the throne-room. I noted the slight variations in my Great-Aunt's manner as she motioned the different guests to chairs and accepted their congratulations and good wishes. With Mr. Pentecost Dodderidge she was regal.

"Thank 'ee, we are old friends, you and I. Yes, thanks be to the Lord. I'm well enough. And you? How are 'ee?"

"I am burdened this morning," he said, with that kingly glance all round him to see that all his subjects were attentive, which we knew to herald some pearl of godly epigram. "Yes, I am burdened this morning."

"Burdened?" echoed Aunt Jael.

"Burdened?" echoed my Grandmother.

"Yes, dear sisters. 'He daily *loadeth* us with benefits.'

Psalm sixty-eight, nineteen."

This was the old patriarch's immemorial trick: to make some statement that was certain to provoke query, and then to explain its apparent paradox by swift quotation from the word of God. A later generation might think his method crude, his texts subtly irrelevant; but there is no question that the Saints, including my Grandmother and Great-Aunt, admired the godly wit and treasured all the texts. So when "the pilgrim patriarch of Tawborough" came up to me in the corner from which I was staring at him, I felt a high sense of pleasure and importance.

"Well, well, and how is this little sapling in the Lord's vineyard?" Paternally, pontifically, he patted my head.

"Well enough, thank 'ee," replied my Grandmother for me, "but not always a good little handmaiden for Him. She likes better to waste her time sitting and doing nothing than mending her socks or studying the Word. She could testify by a happier frame of mind and busier fingers in the house and by speaking more freely of the things of the Lord. Would you not urge her, Brother, even at this tender age to do *something* for the Master?"

"No, I would not." Query invited, epigram looming ahead.

"Then what would you do?" asked my Grandmother.

"I would recommend her to do '*all things*' for the Master. Titus, two, nine."

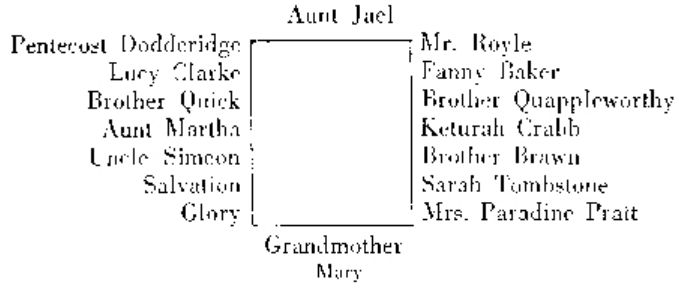
Mr. Royle stumped in, a fat short old man, with a cheerful unsaintly countenance and a general air of

wealth and prosperity that I could put down to nothing definite except a heavy gold watch chain which spanned the upper slopes of his enormous stomach. His only rival in this particular quarter of the body was Mrs. Paradine Pratt. These two alone, who wandered wearily outside the fold in the darkness of Congregationalism and the Church of England, had contrived to put on plenteous flesh. Was there some subtle hostility, I recollect asking myself, between corpulence and conversion?

The before-dinner conversation was preoccupied and scanty. Brother Quappleworthy came alone, as Sister Quappleworthy was "not—ah—too well."

The company repaired to the dining-room. Mr. Pentecost Dodderidge pronounced the Blessing, and we all sat down to do justice to that mighty meal. How odd this great assembly seemed in our austere room, now for once looking reasonably well filled; I could see that the experience was as odd to most of the guests as it was to me. Great feasts were not within the ordered course of their spare and godly lives. There was a certain constraint around the table, quite unmistakable, marked by loud and sudden silences.

This is how we sat:



(Note that the masculine element was stronger, both in quality and quantity, at Aunt Jael's end of the table than at ours. I was put on the music stool, by my Grandmother's side at the doorway end of the table, flanked by Glory on the left. Salvation had pleaded for a place by dear beloved Brother Brawn; Aunt Jael condescended so far as to place them nearly opposite each other, but Brother Brawn was too nervous of his exposed right flank to allow his utterances to be a feast of good things. He could not forget the piece Miss Crabb had—long ago—bitten out of his beard.)

It was a royal spread. In the old West Country fashion, of course—no new-fangled foreign nonsense or London messes. First appeared a great roast goose, a very queen of geese, turning the scale at fifteen pounds if an ounce. Her entourage included green peas, a vegetable marrow with white sauce, gravy, and an onion stuffing beyond the power of my poor pen to praise. Aunt Jael carved the monster, apportioning of course the choicest tit-bits to herself, the next choicest to Mr. Royle and Pentecost Dodderidge, the next choicest to Brother Quappleworthy, and so on; the quality of your portion varying with your position in Aunt Jael's esteem. Thus I had a rather gristly piece of leg, and Miss Salvation some scraggy side-issues with that part more politely imagined in the mind's eye than mentioned on paper. The second course was a great squab pie, made on Aunt Jael's own recipe: slices of apple and second-cooked mutton alternately, six layers deep, a sprinkling of shredded onion, with plenty of salt and Demerara sugar, pepper and cloves, a covering of delicious pie-crust. The third meat course (cold) comprised a fine ham and one of Mrs. Cheese's special beef and ham rolls covered

with bread crumbs and as big as a large polony: with pickled onions (Aunt Jael's) and pickled plums (Grandmother's), to help them down. For Sweets, which honest folk call pudding, you could choose between dear little cherry tartlets, made in our best shell-shaped patty-pans, all crinkled-edged; or stewed raspberries and black currants with junket and Devonshire cream, this fourfold alternative being my choice and (to this day) my own private notion of what they eat in heaven. On, on the banquet rolled: Cheddar cheese, biscuits, nuts, pomegranates, and home-made apple ginger. In contrast with Aunt Jael's closeness and our every-day plain living, this sardanapalan spread was the more sensational. The drinks were sherry, raspberry vinegar and water.

My Great-Aunt was in a rarely serene mood, enthroned far away at the head of the table, with white-haired Pentecost on her right hand and bald-headed Mr. Royle on her left. Salvation chewed enjoyingly; the fork method of picking your teeth at table struck me, uninstructed as I was, as somehow unsuitable for an important social gathering. She remarked in a noisy whisper to Glory that it was just as well we'd begun at last as she was feeling "turrible leer."[1] Mrs. Paradine panted as she ate; her damp and diminutive handkerchief was applied incessantly, often only just in time to prevent a trickling on to her immense bombazine bosom. I spied Uncle Simeon with a higher quality of curiosity. He knew I was watching him. In return he began craftily eyeing me when I was looking elsewhere: I pretended I was unaware of his scrutiny. In this specially feminine habit I was already an adept; and I feel sure I deceived Uncle Simeon, who stared his fill. When, however, I took my turn at staring, and he tried the same pretence, he failed

utterly to deceive me, for I could see his eyelids twitch, while the faintest flush came to his pallid cheeks.

I cannot pretend to remember much of the conversation, though I could invent it and be near enough the truth. The awkward silences were still apparent. My explanation of it is this: that everybody present (for all but two were Saints) was quite unused to meet together except for godly discoursings. Though it was the creed they believed (and practised) to testify of holy things in season and out of season, yet all dimly felt that today was somehow exceptional, that it was neither necessary nor suitable to preach to each other over roast goose and squab pie Christ and Him crucified. Yet what other topics had they? Hence the uneasy quiet, which the clatter of knives and forks and the orchestration accompanying Miss Glory's curious methods of absorbing nourishment only seemed to heighten. What a slobbering and sipping and a spluttering and a splashing! The liquid mush consisting of tiny morsels of goose-meat (chopped up by Grandmother) and scraps of soft bread mixed with stuffing and sauce and soaked in gravy, which she was now administering to herself with her wooden spoon, offered good scope for her talent; though being of a greater consistency than her usual goat's milk and rusks, it did not allow her to display her supreme effects. Even so, she made herself heard by her far-away hostess. A warning look shot from the table-head:—"Quieter there, or to the corner yer go!" it said.

For a moment Glory subsided, but this made the general silence only more obvious and painful. Aunt Jael realized that though good eating is the object of

a dinner, good talk is the condition of a successful one. She stooped to conquer, broke the last canon of hostship, and as the great squab pie was placed before her, praised it blatantly. The success was instantaneous. Echoes of praise rang up the table. "Ay indeed!—a fine one that!—you're right, Sister Vickary!"—and what not. Two tributes distinguished themselves, as you might expect.

"There's squab pie *and* squab pie," said Miss Salvation. "This *is* squab pie," and, last of all, when every one else had tired of eulogy, the still small voice: "One wonders if one ever tasted anything one liked so well."

Tongues were at last set wagging. Different recipes were discussed and their respective merits compared. Some thought the mutton should be fresh, others that second-cooked gave the best flavour; some that moist white sugar cooked better than Demerara, others that you should use hardly any sugar at all, as a squab pie wasn't a sweet pie after all, now was it? Some thought it was, however: the idea of cooking apples without sugar, mutton or no mutton! Then the puff-paste issue was raised, and here the gentlemen joined in, as this was a question of taste rather than technique. Gradually the conversation veered to the wider topic of food in general; and before long every one present was exchanging tender confidences in that most intimate form of self-revelation: "one's" favourite things to eat. Even Grandmother joined in. I alone said nothing, being under strictest orders "to be seen and not heard." (I felt the restraint keenly, for I was proud of my own catalogue, viz:—Devonshire cream, whortleberry jam, mussels, tripe and treacle; then pancakes, potato-pie (the browned part), sage stuffing, seed-cake, junket, crab, apple-

dumpling, bread-and-butter-pudding, especially the "outside," brawn, cockles, and black-currant jam.)

I must have been reflecting on my own pets rather than hearkening to the praise of other people's, for the conversation had changed, and they were discussing "degrees." One of my favourite psalms, the 121st, *I will lift up mine eyes to the hills*, was described in the Bible as "A Song of Degrees," and I had always wondered what they were.

"Degrees, degrees? That means puttin' letters after yer name, does it? Wull, then"—Salvation fumbled in her reticule, always a veritable mine of papers, letters, photographs of herself, and other *pièces d'identité* (as though she lived under the fear of perpetual arrest) and produced triumphantly an addressed envelope—"There now!" It was passed round that all might read this legend:

Miss Salvation Clinker,
Sinner Saved by Grace,
High Street,
Tawborough,
N. Devon.

"What *splendid* testimony for the postman, zes I, what *splendid* testimony for the postman!"

"But—" Brother Quappleworthy alone dared a "but," for had not he alone among the Saints achieved the honour of putting real letters after your name? He smiled; with maybe a dash of quiet superiority, with just a seasoning of annoyance, just a nice Christian seasoning, mark you, nothing more. "But—is that a *real* degree, sister?"

"Rale degree? 'Course 'tis: S.S.G.—*Sinner Saved by*

*Grace*. None o' yer cheap truck: S.S.G.!"

"Yes, yes; but like B.A. for instance, dear sister?"

"B.A.? I'm a B.A. too."

"*You* a B.A.?" echoed voices.

"Yes: Born Again!" shouting.

"Quite so, quite so, please God so are we all. But I am talking of earthly degrees."

"Are yer? Wull, I'm a-talking uv 'eavenly ones!"

"There's B.B. too," put in little Lucy Clarke, nervously seeking to pour oil on troubled waters, "two B's arter your name, I think it is, tho' mebbe I'm wrong."

"Two B's or not two B's!" observed Mr. Royle, and laughed loudly when he found that no one else did. I wondered why. I doubt if any one present saw the point except my Great-Aunt and Grandmother and Brother Quappleworthy. It was many years before I did.

"Good, sir, good," said the latter worldlily, "a quotation from the works of Shakespeare, if I mistake not."

"Shakespeare!" shrieked Miss Salvation, as though uttering some lewd word, "I'm surprised at 'ee, 'avin' the chick to mention such a sinner's name in a Christian 'ouse; an 'eathen play-actin' sinner, now wallerin' in everlastin' torment for his sins."

"How do *you* know he is?" asked my Grandmother quietly.

"And 'ow du 'ee know 'e isn't? A Papis' too."

Blessed are the peacemakers, so Lucy Clarke tried again.

"I don't think 'tis B.B. at all after all; 'tis D.D., two D's arter your name in a manner o' spaikin'."

"Yes, it's D.D.," said Aunt Jael. "All the big preachers in the Establishment print it after their names; not but what their preaching is poor enough. Letters after your name don't put either a tongue into your head or the knowledge of God into your heart. I've no patience with D.D.'s."

"None," echoed the table.

"Not so," corrected Mr. Pentecost Dodderidge. "It is a great pity there are so few D.D.'s."

"Surely not!" exclaimed the table, awaiting pearls.

"Yes, we want more *D*own in the *D*ust. Psalm one hundred and nineteen, verse twenty-five. Then we would also have more 'quickened according to Thy Word.'"

A pause, forced by the awkward finality of the patriarch's utterance.

"Er—let me see," said Mr. Royle to Brother Quappleworthy, "you are an M.A. of the University of Oxford, are you not, sir?"

"Yes," was the reply, spoken with just a seasoning of pardonable pride, just a Christian seasoning, mark you, nothing more. "Yes" (confidentially) "as a matter of fact I am. I took my degree, second-class honours, in the classics: 'Greats' as we say—"

"Did yer?" interrogated Salvation (for pride is a deadly sin and a weed that must be checked, lest it

grow apace). "Wull, *I* took *my* degree in summat greater, in God's great Scheme o' Salvation, and *I* passed with first-class honners, glory be! Unuvursity uv Oxvurrd eh? My schoolin' 'as been in the Unuvursity uv *God*!"

* * * * * * *

After that I recollect nothing clearly till all the guests, save Uncle Simeon and Aunt Martha, were gone, and late in the evening we sat talking in the unfamiliar idol-haunted dusk of the front parlour. I can feel again as I write the heat of that stuffy August night, and hear Aunt Jael's and Uncle Simeon's voices engaged in the talk that is stamped indelibly on my mind. I recall the scene most intimately when the same external circumstances recur. The heavy-laden atmosphere of a hot August evening, at that still murmurous moment when twilight is yielding to night—the smell, the touch, the impalpable *feel* of the atmosphere—always brings back to me every phase and pulse of my feelings as I sat listening to the warfare of deep raucous voice and soft honeyed one. The memory of the senses far transcends the memory of the mind. Memory in its most intimate possessions is physical.

Though mental too. In this particular instance, quite apart from any physical aid to memory that atmosphere brings, I remember, verbally, almost all that was said. It is odd that while for stretches of whole months I can often fill in but the dimmest background of my early days, at other times I retain the fullest details of a long and intricate conversation, with the gestures of the speakers and the very words they used. The explanation is to be found partly, I think, in the extreme monotony of my

life and the uncommonly vivid impression which any break in the monotony always made; so that this record tends to be a stringing-together of the odd and outstanding events rather than an even and continuous narration of my "early life"; for it was a life of landmarks. But the chief explanation of the uncanny degree to which I remember certain particular scenes lies in my nightly "rehearsals." If there had been any scene or words of special interest in the day's round—if I had observed a new phenomenon (such as a Madonna or a gold watch-chain)—if I had heard a new word (like University) or had new light shed on an old one (like Degrees)—if in short the day had yielded any new fact or idea, the same night saw it deliberately stored in my mind; a treasure-house—a lumber-room—which stood open to all comers. Every night, as soon as I was in bed and my Grandmother had blown out the candle and closed the door behind her, I began. I thought my way through the day, from the moment I had risen onwards. Every new notion or notable event, I recalled, re-lived, and received into the fellowship of things I knew, felt and remembered; into myself. I had also weekly, monthly and yearly revisions.

This seventieth birthday of Aunt Jael's was a red-letter day. My emotions as I lay awake watching with memory's eye that curious dinner party, with its wealth of new food, new faces, new situations, new sensations and new talk, were of the same order as those of a playgoer who lives over in his mind the pleasures of a new and brilliant drama he has witnessed. New persons and new conversations were my favourite acquisitions; these were in the strict sense dramatic, and they approached most nearly the other habit of my inner life—my visualizings and imaginings—of which indeed they furnished the raw

material. I would only memorize conversations from the point at which they began to interest me; hence, even when I remember them best, they begin suddenly, and causelessly.

So it was with the conversation on that memorable evening. I fancy Aunt Jael and Uncle Simeon had already been talking for some time—probably on the things of the Lord, which were not new and not dramatic—but I recall nothing until Uncle Simeon was well set in a review of his life; his holy, if humble life.

"M'yes, ah yes, the Lord found it good to try one's faith; from the very day on which one saw the error of one's ways, and the scales fell from one's eyes, and one closed with God's gracious offer, from that very day the Lord found it good to extend His hand in chastisement and to visit one with trials and afflictions. One bowed one's head: but it was a sore trial for one's faith, one's earnest, if humble, faith. First one's sister passed away, one's dear sister Rosa. Then came one's business troubles, one's ill health, one's grave illness. Last of all one's dear old father went before—"

"Your brother too," interrupted my Great-Aunt. "You don't mention him; and he was the best of the Greebers, from all accounts."

"Ah, surely not, surely not?" ignoring the main point of the interruption, "what of Immanuel Greeber, who gave you these glorious trophies of the field of missionary labour, one's well-loved cousin Immanuel?"

"There was some mystery about his death," pursued she, ignoring red-herring missionaries. "They never

really knew how he died. Immanuel told *me*. He went to lie down in his bed one afternoon, saying he felt sick, and within the hour he was dead."

"Ah, yes," sighed Uncle Simeon, passing his hand over his brow in anguish, "one had not spoken of him; one could not; one's love was too tender. Heart-failure, one thought oneself. M'yes." His head m'yessed sadly to and fro.

"More like something he'd been eating," suggested my Grandmother.

"Too sudden for that," objected Aunt Jael. "No bad food could kill you so sudden. 'Twas something a deal quicker than bad food; more mysterious, folk said."

"Poison," said I.

I was staggered at the sound of my own voice. All day I had been mute, observing so obediently Aunt Jael's "To be seen and not heard" mandate that she had been almost annoyed. Listening was more remunerative than talking; it yielded the wealth for my lonely talks with myself. I think it was that in my interest in this mysterious death I forgot I was not alone; and so uttered aloud the word "Poison" that leapt absurdly to my mind.

The effect on Uncle Simeon's face amazed me.

His look of meek head-nodding sorrow gave place to one of such unmistakable *guilt* that the most monstrous suspicions seized me; nor did they disappear when guilt changed to fear, then fear to hate; still less when hate in its turn gave place to the meek accustomed mask. Mask it was, for I had seen him deliberately twitch the muscles of his face back

into position. From that moment, and with no other evidence than a few seconds' change of expression, in which my eyes might have been deceiving me, I believed him a murderer.

Grandmother and Aunt Jael saw nothing of this. The first was too short-sighted—the room was nearly dark, and no candle had been lighted—the second was too busy for the moment rating me for breaking laws and talking "outrageous nonsense" to keep her eyes on him.

This gave him time to twitch the muscles of his brain and tongue back into position also.

"Anyway, whatever the sad cause of his earthly death, one may rejoice that he went to be with the Lord."

"Yes, and that he left all his money to you. Leastways there was no will found, and you were next of kin. That helped to console you a little, maybe."

"Miss Vickary!"

"Yes, more than a little, too. It left you enough to close your shop in Bristol and do nothing ever since."

"Nothing, Miss Vickary, nothing? All one's years of hard, if humble, toil in the Lord's vineyard, one's ministrations to the Saints—nothing? And poor Joseph's wealth, it was but a modest sum—"

"So modest no one's ever heard. It's mock poverty yours, and you know it."

"But one's humble manner of life should show—"

"Folk as are mean aren't always poor."

"Aunt!" pleaded Martha feebly.

"Mean; dear Miss Vickary, may you one day regret that unjust word. Far be it from one to speak of all that one has given to the gospel work in Torribridge, of all that one has lent to the Lord. Yet what are worldly riches? One cares only for the unsearchable riches of Christ. What are the earthly gifts one may have given away? One has given to many a greater gift far. Not only the knowledge of Salvation, but a Christian deed here, a helping hand there—"

"Open sepulchre! Helping hand—like when Rachel and Christian lay dying, and you forbade Martha to leave Torribridge even for a few hours to come and help her mother. Let your wife's mother half kill herself, and her brother and sister crawl into their graves before you'd let her move. 'Couldn't spare her' from the side of yer 'dear little son'—ugly little brat, I'm glad you've not brought him here today."

Now there was a spice of righteous protest in the meek voice. "Pray what has one's poor little son done to be so spoken of? Or one's dear wife to hear him so spoken of?"

Martha was silently wiping her eyes. Aunt Jael, struggling with temper, made no reply.

"Or oneself to see one's wife so wounded? One has never forgiven oneself for not realizing till alas too late how near the end dear Rachel and dear Christian were; but at the time one's little baby-boy was ailing, and Martha none too strong. One was selfish, perhaps."

"Ay." Temper rising.

"One failed in one's duty to dear Mrs. Lee, because of

one's jealous care of one's dear child and wife."

"Fiddlesticks! I know some of your goings-on. Poor Martha!"

"Poor Martha? One fails to understand. *If* Martha had been treated as poor Rachel's husband treated her; *if* she had suffered cruelty—adultery—vileness—sin; *if* one were hounding her to her grave as he hounded poor Rachel; *if* one had killed her and broken her heart, and then sneered that one could not pay to bury her—"

"The brute," cried Aunt Jael, sidetracked.

His crude attempt to transfer her rising wrath on to the head of another had succeeded. He knew the quality of the memories he evoked.

"The brute; the cruel, fleshly scoundrel!"

"Hush, Aunt," whispered Aunt Martha, "after all it is the Child's father."

I coloured violently, and my heart beat fast. The unfamiliar phrase "Rachel's husband" had conveyed nothing. Now I was throbbing with excitement, curiosity and shame.

"Well, let her know the truth."

"O Mother, plead with Aunt not to talk so!" Aunt Martha was trying to stifle the topic on to which her husband had so successfully emptied the vials of Aunt Jael's wrath. He gave her a "you wait till afterwards" glance that told me a good deal, concentrated though I was on this other overshadowing thing.

"I don't know," said my Grandmother, "leave your

Aunt be. The child will have to know it some day; and 'tis the truth." She sighed.

"There you are! If a child has the wickedest beast of a man on earth for her father, the sooner she knows it the better, so that she may mend her ways and turn out a bit different herself. She has more than a spice of his ways about her already. She'd best be told every jot and tittle of the whole story. No one's too young to hear the truth. 'Tis your task though, Hannah. You tell her, if you think fit. But not tonight, it's past the child's bed-time. Be off now! To bed!"

I undressed feverishly, that I might be the sooner in bed to go through all I had heard. I recited hymns rapidly to myself so that I should not think at all till I could do so properly and at peace.

Grandmother came in for her nightly prayer.

"Grandmother, is it true? My father. Who is he? What did he do? Tell me, is it true?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Did he do—all those wicked things?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Will you tell me everything?"

"Yes, my dear, if the Lord so wills. Let us approach the throne of grace and discover His good pleasure."

Down on my knees by her side I watched her as she asked the Almighty whether He willed that the story of my father and mother should be told me. Grandmother was always fair. She did not try to

influence the Lord's decision, as Aunt Jael might have done, by giving undue weight in her supplications to the arguments either for or against.

"Dost Thou will that at this tender age she should learn of these sorrows, that they may be sanctified to her for Thy name's sake; or dost Thou ordain that I should wait yet awhile before I speak?"

We waited the Answer. I knew it would be "Yes," I knew it with the sudden instinct that so often served me. Prayer and intuition were indeed sharply commingled in my mind. One was your speaking to God, the other God speaking to you. God is swifter; instinct is swifter than prayer; answer than question.

"Tell the child now? So be it, Lord; since such is the answer that Thou hast vouchsafed."

Then she prayed that the story might be richly blessed to me, and that he whom it chiefly concerned might be given, despite all, contrite heart and true forgiveness.

When she left me to myself and darkness, I was repeating to myself the stinging words I had heard. Cruelty, adultery, vileness, sin—the fleshly scoundrel—he had hounded my mother to her grave, broken her heart—killed her. *He my father.* I had a father then. It is proof of the gaps in my many-sided visualizings day after day and night after night that I had never thought of this, never even wondered whether I had a father or not.

I did not know how to wait till the morrow. Perhaps they were talking about it downstairs; I jumped out of bed, crept halfway down the stairs, and listened. The front-room door was shut, and though I soon

heard that a duologue between Aunt Jael and Uncle Simeon was in progress, I could make out only a few words here and there. My imagination constructed a conversation connected with myself, and somehow too at the same time with Torribridge and Aunt Martha and studies. I did not think much of it at the time, as my ears were hungry for "father" and "mother" only—"Rachel" and "Rachel's husband."

I went back to bed. Early next day Uncle Simeon and Aunt Martha returned to Torribridge.

**FOOTNOTE:**

[1] Empty.

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## CHAPTER X: OLD LETTERS

Next day after dinner, when Aunt Jael had settled down for her doze, Grandmother called me upstairs to her bedroom, pulled out an old brown tin box from under the bed, unlocked it, and drew forth a large brown paper packet. We sat down, and she told me my mother's story.

"Your father belonged to a different class from us, my dear, quite to the gentlefolk of the county. Your mother met him at his cousin's, Lord Tawborough's, when she was governess there.

"This Lord Tawborough died a few years ago. The boy who now bears that name is a lad of maybe

seventeen or eighteen, who I expect knows nothing about it at all, although he was very fond of your mother when she taught him as a little boy."

"Shall I ever see him?"

"No, my dear, no. You are in a different walk of life. Young squires don't come to visit us. Not that his father ever had any false pride; I know he was always very kind to me. He came to Rachel's funeral, and never had his cousin—your father, that is—inside his house after the trouble. He wanted to help us too in educating you, but I said No. I would not touch money belonging in any way to *him*, though I've forgiven him long ago, as I trust the Lord has. He thought I was too independent, but maybe he understood all the same. I've heard that the young boy is as good-hearted as his father. He lives at the family house over near Torribridge; he's just going up to Oxford, I believe, like his father, or maybe 'tis Cambridge—"

"What is Oxford-and-Cambridge? Brother Quappleworthy was there."

"They're two big colleges, or universities as they call them, where the gentlefolk go. Anyway, his father was always kind to us and ashamed of his cousin. He said to me when he called to see us after your dear mother's death that he felt guilty because Rachel met her husband in his house. However, there 'tis, they were married. I never took to him and your Aunt Jael could never abide the sight of him. 'Twas a cruel time. I can't tell you all now, my dearie, though one day you may know. But I'm going to read you some of the letters she wrote. Here they all are, I've not had the heart to touch this package since they were tied up ten years ago. She wasn't happy from the

start, though she wrote brave letters home. We first got to know how it was with her through your great-uncle, her uncle John. She'd stayed once or twice with him in London, as a little girl, and he loved her dearly. We have never seen much of him since he first went away over fifty years ago. He and Jael don't get on together; he's an invalid too, and not able to take a journey. After your dear mother died he let me see all her letters to him, and I copied them out. Here is one of the first, written just three or four months after she was married, the 'long letter' I call it:"

THE WHITE HOUSE.
TORQUAY,
August 14th, 1845.

Dear Uncle John,—

Thank you for you kind letter of sympathy. Yes, I am an unhappy woman, and unhappy for life.

Perhaps it will simplify matters for me to say that he is in a very precarious mental condition. The doctor tells me he has every symptom of softening of the brain. Though the disease may not culminate for several years. He says my one object must be to keep him quiet and not oppose or excite him in any way, as that would always tend to hasten the climax, and would make things very trying for myself, especially just now; for I must tell you that something will be happening to me, about next

February I think. Last week he had a dreadful turn, and said the most cruel things, shouting and sneering at me like one demented. I went off then to the doctor, really thinking myself he was there and then going or gone out of his mind. He told me what I have said, and through all subsequent improvement adheres to the same opinion; he is very kind and sympathizing to me, calls it, "a painful and extraordinary case," and tells me not to be upset when he gets into this state with me—that it is an almost invariable symptom of the disease for the patient to set upon his wife and bring against her outrageous accusations of every sort, that I must not contradict him in whatever he says, but rather "assume contrition for faults you have not committed, regarding him as an invalid that cannot be dealt with by ordinary rules." I must tell you that I have begun to doubt all this, I don't mean the doctor but my husband. He has a nervous weakness, it is true, but exaggerates this when he goes to see the doctor by getting himself into a state, then the doctor says he has softening of the brain and that will excuse all his ill-treatment to me.

That is not all, the two youths, Maurice and Trevor who are living in the house and whom he calls his

"cousins," are really *his illegitimate sons*, he told me so outright and mocked at me when I blushed. They swear and shout at me, and he encourages them. With all this he is the leader at the Room, the meeting of the Close Brethren we go to. The Saints don't seem to like him very much. I think they know something of his goings on. My dear uncle, I charge you not to speak of all this; I should not on *any* account like mother to know it, it could do no good for her to worry. He may keep like this for years, or perhaps I might be taken away to the Lord first.

I was glad of your loving letter; had begun to think there must be one awaiting me (from the style of your previous one) before yesterday morning confirmed it. They raise objection however at the Post Office, saying it is against the rules for residents to have them left there, so I suppose you must address to me here. Philip seems never to expect me to show him my letters. I did one a few weeks ago, in which there was some business message or statement. So you will always be safe in writing direct. It is one of his peculiarities that though he has often thrown at me my depth, "keeping matters to myself," "telling him nothing," etc. etc., yet from the very first he declined to see my letters. I used

even to press him to do so but he replied one day, "I take no interest in letters from people I don't know, still less from common people" (among whom my relations are included). Then if I tried reading him any specially interesting extracts he would say it wearied him or would assure me I had read or told him all that before. Since he said one day, "Dear me, what shopkeeper's talk!" I have quite given up intruding my correspondence on him. At rock bottom it is a sort of jealousy. Some husbands seem to have the idea that their wives should throw to the winds all old ties and relationships.

As to my going home now; it is utterly out of the question. All other objections apart, I could not now take the journey. Then as to having Mother here, as things are (even if he would allow it), the worry of it would do me more harm than her presence could do me good. There might be an actual outbreak on his part, and Maurice and Trevor would give her an experience such as I would spare her at all costs. What could she do for me? Later on, I should have a nurse and of course a doctor, the kind one I spoke of, the one Philip consults. You rather mistake me as to the possible *end* these matters may bring. I don't mean that I should be more likely to

die from what has been taking place, simply that from natural causes it is a thing that has to be faced at such a time. Many women *do*, who have all the love and devotion they can require, and I have all along felt (not forebodingly or morbidly, but as a matter of fact) that such an event might be of more than ordinary risk in my case. I am not very strong, and always lacking in power of endurance, and then I am so wretchedly unhappy and lonely. All my trouble and despondency will lessen the natural clinging to life and give me instead a longing to be at rest beyond it all, as far as self only is concerned. But on the other hand if the baby lives, that will be sufficient counteractive against my giving-away tendency. I shall feel more than a mother in ordinary case could do that I *must* try to live for its sake. Any other issue I am content to leave in God's hands but cannot face the thought of leaving the child behind me—*with him*. So if I should be taken, don't trouble yourself with the thought that my end has been hastened by these things that ought not to have been. For the Lord, I believe, has taken special care of me and given me more health of body than I could under ordinary circumstances have expected, to meet the extra strain laid on mind

and spirit. So we may trust surely by what has gone before that He will uphold me all through with special health and strength. "He setteth His rough wind in the day of His east wind" has been constantly before me of late.

I shall not leave my husband as long as it can anyhow be avoided. Death is to me a far more welcome thought to face than being a trouble or a burden for my friends. There are troubles in which sympathy makes all the difference, but between husband and wife it is different, and the quieter one can keep things the better. Uncle, dear, don't you see that the sting and real heart-bitterness a woman must feel at wrong and unkindness from the one from whom she has expected only love and protection, can never be healed or soothed by proclaiming it to the world at large or by leaving him? It may be pride or self-respect that makes me shrink from the thought of such a thing, but have no scruples as to your responsibility in keeping it quiet, since I told you I have no *bodily* fear of him, and he knows it. Suppose you tell mother or any one else, if they share your view they can but repeat the same arguments, and if repeated twenty times my feelings and instincts remain the same. Say nothing, uncle,

for my sake if not for his—for mother's too. It is true if I came away he could not rail at me but still that is only the outward expression of what is within and which distance would not alter, and with the baby it will be easier to bear. I shall have something to live for and comfort myself with, and considering his condition I cannot see that it would be *right* to leave him unless I am in danger of my life. It is a wife's duty to endure. I have thought of speaking to Mr. Frean, a leading Brother at the meetings and a very kind man. I think a fear of exposure in this quarter would have more weight with him. While he can afford to set at nought the opinions of my friends and relatives at a safe distance, he clings very tenaciously to his religious position. I should have sympathy there. I think they know I have something to put up with and they show me great kindness and would show more if I availed myself of it. Philip remarked one day it was strange that "his wife should be popular at the Room while *he* never had been!"

On one point your anxiety is needless. I have what I wish for in the shape of nourishment. Was never a large or extravagant eater, but what I want I have. Was reflecting only a day or two ago that this is the

*one* point on which he uniformly shows me consideration. In fact, I think he does this on purpose to salve his conscience, and to have something to throw back at me. Once when I said "Oh, Philip, don't be so unkind to me," he replied, "Unkind? Damn you, I don't see what you have to complain of, you're living on the fat of the land, better than with your shopkeeper friends." Sometimes, you know, I believe he imagines he loves me; perhaps he does as much as he would any wife, but I have told him he does not know what love is. Love!

The only thing which sometimes nearly drives me to the breaking point is this; he praises my amiability, meekness, wifeliness, obedience, and says "you are different from most women who are always either nagging and answering back or gloomy and sulky." I am "so much better than he ever expected." When he talks like that I feel stirred up to say some pretty plain things to him, and clear my mind at all costs, but then if I do I might excite him and bring on a fit of apoplexy or paralysis as the doctor said. If I say the least little word he holds this over my head. I wonder now, after only a few short months, why I ever married him. I have spoilt my whole life. Two years ago, I was a happy

young woman; and now— Don't write to him, don't threaten him, and don't come near here, it can do no good. Good-bye, Uncle dear.

Your ever loving
RACHEL.

My Grandmother paused. I know what I thought—I can live my feelings again at this moment, forty years later.

"At the time," said my Grandmother, "Rachel said very little to me. I knew it was difficult, but not as unhappy as it was. In the March of the next year a baby boy was born. You're not old enough, my dear, to know what it is to be a mother when her baby comes; a man should be good and kind to his wife more than at any time, and thank the Lord most of 'em are. *He* was wicked. May the Lord in his mercy forgive him. Still, the baby made her happier. Here is a letter she wrote to me a month or two after it was born."

THE WHITE HOUSE.
TORQUAY,
May 20th, 1846.

My Dearest Mother,—

Thank you for all the loving sympathy from all. Am getting on well, though the heat has been trying me greatly. I came downstairs yesterday. I cannot stand a minute without help, as the lying in bed has made me so weak. Baby is doing first-rate, grows more engaging

every day. It was rather too bad of you to rejoice in my disappointment, especially as the little girl was to have been named after my dear mother. What is the supposed advantage you see in a boy? Why is a boy thought more of than a girl? Perhaps you are proud of having a grandson; I certainly have centred all my ideas on a girl; I have always had an idea that the child I should have that would be most like me, and *who would do what I might have done if I had been happier*, would be a girl. I feel so still; though I can't tell you why.

But this is a dear little man and I should not like to spare him now he has come. He never squeals but stares the whole time; the doctor says he is big enough for five or six months old. After the miserable state I've been in, I rather wondered whether his brain would be right, but he is certainly "all there," and a bit over, if it comes to that. He is very sharp. But he is very good at night and has slept seven hours right off for five nights past. He notices everything, his little eyes will dance round after any one who notices him and when the door one day suddenly rattled with the wind he turned his eyes towards it with a look of inquiry and astonishment. Some wagging ends on Nurse's cap are a

source of unfailing interest. He has not a flaw or even a sore upon him, has a nice little round, comfortable, sensible face, just plump enough to be well conditioned but not coarse. I think he is something like Martha. He has nice eyes, dark blue, which when closed take rather a Japanese curve, the Traies' snub nose, a pretty little mouth, large hands, very long fingers with pretty little filbert nails. He is more like his father than anybody in face. He is full of pretty little antics, will clasp his hands as if in prayer, or shade one over his eyes with a thumb extended, exactly like "saying grace." Will labour hard sometimes to stuff both fists into his mouth at once, it is amusing to see his wriggles and struggles, getting quite angry, till at last he gets hold of some knuckle or thumb and settles down to enjoy it. He wants his milk very irregularly, but so far I've kept pace with him.... We have not yet decided on his name. Not Philip, I think, for I don't like the "big Bessie, little Bessie, old George, young George" plan. I should like Harold or Edgar, or perhaps Christian—by the way I'm sorry to hear that Chrissie is still so weak, give him my best love. Do you know that baby's birth made me *want* to like Philip more than ever? I told him so the other day, he just *sneered*.

It's hard, mother, isn't it? But I must not worry you, or make you think he is really treating me so very badly, he sees that I get all the food and nourishment I need. Don't believe all Uncle John says!

Here I must conclude as I'm not yet strong enough to write more. Give my love to Aunt Jael, and to Hannah, and my respects to Mr. Greeber, when you write. With my dearest love to you mother, I remain

Your loving
RACHEL.

"Here is one she wrote to her Uncle about the same time:"

THE WHITE HOUSE.
TORQUAY,
June 24th, 1846.

My dearest Uncle John,—

Many thanks for your kind and prompt reply to my note. My reason for requiring a promise was that I feared that on knowing how things stood you might be unwilling still to do nothing, as I know you have even as much of the outspoken Vickary disposition as Aunt Jael! You will be sorry if not surprised when I tell you that my husband leads me a more trying life than ever. I cannot repeat

or write the words he uses or the things he abuses his position as a husband to do. My little boy is the only earthly comfort I have, and but for him and the dear Lord I don't think I could have borne up at all. I have kept it carefully from my own family all along, it is not my fault that mother knows as much as she does. I hate her to have to hear my troubles. Then, too, I've excused things on the ground of disease, for his mind is disordered, but still he is nothing like so far gone but that he could behave better if he chose. I am surer than ever that he deceives the doctor so that he can use the bad view of his health which the doctor takes, as a cloak for all his cruelty. 'Tis very good of you to assure me of your help but I will still try to stay with him, and so far he has not used actual bodily violence. He has gone the length of threatening it, of lifting up his foot as though to kick me and shaking his fist in my face but stopped short each time, saying he was "not such a —— fool as to give me a chance of getting the law for him!" I will promise this: to make your silence conditioned on his behaviour not getting worse. That may have some effect on him. But mother *must* not be worried. In any case it would not be worth while to try to come here to see him, he has

threatened he will set the dogs on them if he finds any of my relatives "prowling about the place."

Don't worry about me. Now that I have my little boy to kiss and comfort me I can put up with everything.

Your loving niece,
RACHEL.

"And here is another to me:"

THE WHITE HOUSE,
TORQUAY.
Aug. 20th, 1846.

My dear Mother,—

Many thanks for kindly sending on the vests, they are (both sizes) a nice easy fit, and I'm very pleased with them. I am feeling better, though Torquay is very relaxing and in the summer, at times, unbearable.

Now that Uncle John seems to have told you all it is no good pretending any longer that I am anything but absolutely wretched. Believe me, mother, it was not dishonesty but for your sake only that I said so little. Now it is getting so bad that I should not have been able to keep it from you longer. They are all behaving disgracefully, worse than ever. Not only all the family, the two boys

Maurice and Trevor, I mean, but all the servants too, and the very errand lads who come to the house are encouraged to be insulting. I'm really afraid to go about the house and when keeping in my own immediate quarters am shouted at and annoyed from stairs and windows. He and Maurice attacked me together last week, or rather he called Maurice to join in, and the two called forth the most unprovoked and outrageous insolence while the scullery maid shrieked with delight and clapped her hands at the fun. Another day, the cook threw a cabbage root at me when I went into the kitchen, hitting me on the neck. Mr. Traies' only redress when I turned to him was "That's nothing, you shouldn't go into quarters where you're not wanted. A wife in her kitchen, indeed! what *are* we coming to?" It is something sickening the whole time; I know I shall go mad before long. Have run right out of the house twice lately but the poor child drags me back. I don't know that you can do anything beyond plainly speaking your mind, or threatening to expose him right and left if that would do any good. There certainly ought to be some law to prevent a woman being hounded out of her life by the very servants in the house. If I say

the least word or attempt to expostulate he puts his hand up to his forehead, begins to moan and say "the doctor said I was on no account to have opposition, he said it might bring on a fit, indeed I think it is coming." The wretched man—is there no law in England to save a woman from cruelty far worse than the things for which she can get the courts for her? Last week, he actually laughed in my face, "Your heart is breaking I suppose," he sneered. I said "Yes," looking him straight in the face. "It's a damned long time about it," he said. Yet I can do nothing; *that* is not cruelty! I do wish he would do me some real bodily harm that would give me a hold over him as long as he didn't permanently incapacitate me. I have thought of asking Brother Frean at the Meeting to find me a safe temporary lodging where I could go, and say I would not return until he dismissed these insolent maids. That would be at least one point gained. But until he sent Maurice away there would be no real improvement. You cannot imagine, mother the filthy things he says, and *does* before me. They have made a complete tool of the new servant too. She has been very unsatisfactory in every way, refusing to get up in the morning and shouting at me. However she

kept within bounds till I gave her a week's notice last Wednesday. Immediately he came and raved and sneered at me: "Come, come, the mistress of the house dismissing a housemaid, surely this is going a little *too* far," and he ordered her to stay. Since then she has behaved shamefully, they all of course upholding and cheering her, making her presents, etc. Today I have proved her having stolen some silk handkerchiefs of mine, in even this he upholds her. "Freely ye have received, freely give," he said! Yesterday it reached the climax. The whole pack were howling at me, he, looking on and mocking and encouraging them. Then Maurice tripped me up as I was going out of the room, and I went full length on the floor. In my weak state, I nearly fainted. *He laughed.* I still want to hold out; I will never leave him unless it is to come home and die. All I have to comfort me is your sympathy, my little baby and the love of Christ.

In haste, your loving daughter,
RACHEL.

My throat was very dry, I could not trust myself to speak.

"Soon after," went on my Grandmother, "the little baby boy died, and then we persuaded her to take a

holiday. At least we put it to her that we thought we hoped it might be bringing her away from him for good. She came home, spending November and December of 1846 with us at home in the old house in the High Street, and then went to her Uncle John's in London for the first few weeks of '47. When your mother left her uncle, she came to us again for a few days and then decided to go back to her husband. Jael was against it, but she was sure it was her duty to the Lord, and I would not persuade her though my heart sank when she left us. He behaved worse than before. The last few months at Torquay were beyond her endurance and she began to sink away. Now here is a letter your great-uncle wrote me just before she left him, when things had reached their worst."

Messrs Vibart & Vickary,
MINCING LANE,
LONDON.
Jan. 3rd, 1848.

Dear Hannah,—

I have been out of patience with you as you will know. Since last March when she stayed with you and you allowed her to go back to the fellow. If I don't hear definitely that she has left him within the next ten days, infirm though I am, I shall take the coach to Exeter and on to Torquay taking a friend with me, and if we have any trouble whatever with Traies he will get such a thrashing that he will not be able to appear in public for some time. If ever there was a cruel, damned scoundrel who

deserved shooting he does, and should not in the least mind putting a few bullets into him. What annoys me more than anything is that you should encourage the poor girl, agreeing with her that it is her Christian duty to remain there all this time and put up with such diabolical cruelty; worst of all now that there is another child on the way.

Let me know at once that she has left him or I shall act without delay.

Your affectionate brother
John.

"And here is the last letter she ever wrote me herself. It was snowing the day it reached me:"

THE WHITE HOUSE.
TORQUAY,
Jany 7th, 1848.

My dearest Mother,—

Your kind and loving letter came yesterday. Well, mother dear, I have given in. I have decided to go away. I am weaker now, broken in body and spirit, and if I stay here with his taunts and ill-treatment *I shall go mad or die*. In any case I think it is the latter; but now that there is a child coming, for its sake I must go where I shall have more peace. My

> life is a broken failure. Four short years ago what a happy girl I was at the Hall with kind people around me, a loving little boy as my daily companion, and I was a credit and pride to you all. I know you never wanted me to marry him. I chose my way and I have failed utterly. Yes I know, mother, I know with a positive assurance that I could have loved a good and loving husband as much as any woman in the world; it was *in* me. Well, it is no good talking of that now, for I have not very long before me now. Today I told him I was leaving him for the last time. He mocked in his usual sort of way, but I am beyond minding that. He is too much of a coward, I have come to know, to prevent my leaving by physical force. I hope to get away tomorrow, and am already halfway through my packing, so expect me very soon.
>
> Your loving
> RACHEL.

My Grandmother spoke in a calm way, much sadder than any sobbing or crying. Here for the only time she put her handkerchief to her eyes for a moment. "Just at the time your dear mother came back to us to die, my little boy Christian was dying too. The day after we buried him you were born, then seven days later your mother died. Your Great-Aunt was a good sister to me, she took turns at sitting with your mother every night; saw the friends who called and

wrote all the letters. Here is a copy of what she wrote to your Great-Uncle:

NORTHGATE HOUSE,
HIGH STREET,
TAWBOROUGH.
March 2nd, 1848.

Dear Brother,—

You will be glad of a line to tell you a fine girl was born this morning at half past five; the baby is doing splendidly, but Rachel is very weak. Nurse and doctor are in constant attendance. Hannah stays with her all the time and doesn't go downstairs. With young Christian just buried the Lord is trying us hard. We are truly passing through the waters of affliction. Hannah is too busy to write herself or I should not be writing to you, the first time I think for nearly thirty years.

Your affectionate sister,
JAEL VICKARY.

"Here is your Great-Uncle's reply, addressed to me:"

LONDON.

*In haste.*

Dear Hannah,—

Do everything possible for dear Rachel as regards nursing and doctors that money can command. I

pay everything.

JOHN.

"And two more letters your Great-Aunt wrote to your Great-Uncle will tell how your dear mother died:"

NORTHGATE HOUSE,
HIGH STREET,
TAWBOROUGH.
March 8th, 1848.

Dear Brother,—

I write again to give you news of Rachel. Upon receiving your kind note we decided on calling in Doctor Little but I don't think he can do more than Dr. Le Mesurier has, he has been unremitting in attention but there will be nothing to regret in having had further advice. Nurse Baker looks after the baby, she is a very nice child and is doing well. Hannah is wonderfully sustained, she sat with Rachel last night, I was with her the night before. It would make things very much easier if Martha would come over from Torribridge but Mr. Greeber, her husband, will not allow it, pleading their own child who is as healthy as he is ugly and now quite a year old. Rachel has been wandering today, sewing and arranging garments for the child. She suffers badly. The doctor thinks it is peritonitis. I fear it will be but a few days more, it

wrings my heart to write it.

I have just taken the liberty of writing a note to Lord Tawborough to ask him to use his influence with his cousin that the child may remain to be brought up by us in case of Rachel being removed from this world. He replies he will insist on it. It has comforted Rachel greatly. I wrote to Mr. Traies a few lines on the day she was confined to state the fact of a girl being born and that his wife was not doing too well, commencing "Dear Sir" (being civil). I am glad it was done, although he did not respond; we have done our part and shall not write to him again until she ceases to be his wife. Oh brother, when I think of how the wretched man has hounded her and brought her down in health and strength to an early grave (for the doctor says she had not the strength to go through her confinement because of the harass and ill-treatment that preceded) I feel he will have a recompense even in this world for his cruelty ... God's vengeance is sure, and He will avenge. The doctor now says twenty-four hours will decide. We give her Valentine's extract of milk and ice which she takes every half hour ... nothing has been left undone. May God bless the means and give us grace to bear His will.

Regret you are not well enough to travel. If you had been well enough to come I need not say that for Hannah's and Rachel's sake I would have let by gones be by gones, so with our united love, I remain,

Your affectionate sister,
JAEL VICKARY.

NORTHGATE HOUSE,
HIGH STREET,
TAWBOROUGH.
March 9th, 1848.

Dear Brother,—

Dear Rachel was unconscious all the night but didn't seem to suffer. She gradually sank and peacefully departed at a quarter past ten. I know you will not be able to come to the funeral but we know all your love to your beloved niece during her life. Hannah scarcely realizes it as yet. Dear Rachel wished the baby to be called Mary. She gave a few directions most calmly and quietly, and wished the text, if we had cards, to be "Made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light," or else "These are they which came out of great tribulation." Hannah is hearing up well, sustained by the Lord's grace. *Thy will be done.*

With our united love,
Your affectionate sister,

JAEL VICKARY.

* * * * * * *

"And so she died," concluded my Grandmother, "and left you to me."

I wanted to hear more. "And the man?"

"What man?"

"My—father." It was one of the hardest things I ever did to utter that word. I felt foolish, flushed, and somehow wicked. The word was unfamiliar, and it was vile.

"Well, I wrote him a letter saying I forgave him for everything—"

"Forgave him, Grandmother!" I cried. "That was wicked!"

"I forgave him as I hoped the Lord would too. I just told him in the letter about her funeral and how it had passed off."

"Did he write back?"

"Yes, and in all his life there was nothing so cruel as the reply he sent me. Here it is. I know the foreign note-paper; for he went abroad straight away to avoid the scandal and trouble, though the Saints at Torquay publicly expelled him from their Meeting when they knew the facts. Listen:—

HOTEL MEURICE, PARIS.
March 31st, 1848.

*Madam,—*

Your letter apprehending me of my

> late wife's funeral has been forwarded to me. If you imagine this thinly veiled hint that I should bear the funeral expenses will succeed, you are singularly mistaken. For such a wife, nominally Christian, who deserted her husband, I propose to do nothing of the kind. You may sue me at law, of course; but pause for a moment: *would your dead daughter have wished you to?*
>
> Yours truly,
> PHILIP A. G. TRAIES.

"May God in His mercy forgive him for writing that. It took me years to be able to. I have never heard from him since. I heard he sold the house in Torquay and lives mostly abroad. That, my dearie, is the end of a long story. Always love the memory of your dear, good mother and try if you can to forgive your father, for whatever he has done, he is your father."

"I will never forgive him, it would be wrong to forgive people who have done things to you like that. Never!"

"It's the only true forgiveness, my dear, to forgive those who wrong you cruelly."

"I shall forgive every one in the world; but him, never."

* * * * * * *

I don't think these events are told out of their place. It was at this stage of my life that all these past doings entered *my* life; it is here they should be told. For me they took place now; from now onwards they

influenced my life and thoughts. Of the impressions I received, pity and love for my mother, and hate and loathing for my father ranked equally. I thought of her still as an angel, but her eyes were sadder. As for him, I vowed to myself that afternoon, that some day in some way I would avenge my mother. How I kept that vow is another story; till then this resolve had a constant place in my life and imagination. It did a good deal to embitter a view of the world already gloomy enough for ten years old.

These were not the only emotions rushing through my heart that afternoon. There was admiration and love of my Grandmother; how greatly she had suffered, how little she complained, how heroically she forgave. There was a new reluctant respect for Aunt Jael; and a quickening affection for all who had been good to my mother, chiefly for Great-Uncle John, who in two short hours had been transformed for me from a shadowy name into a warm and noble reality; for others also who took a lesser part, such as the kind people where she had been governess and the little boy who loved her; for Brother Frean and the sympathetic Saints at Torquay. While I sat biting my nails and thinking a hundred new things, some kind, some sad, some hideous and bitter, Grandmother was still rummaging among the letters.

"Why, here's a bundle of those she wrote when she was at Woolthy Hall, in her first happy days there. Listen, my dear, I'll read you the first she wrote:"—

Woolthy Hall,
North Devon.
Friday.

Dearest Mother,—

I hope you got my first note saying I had arrived safely. I am very happy here, I have a nice little room to myself commanding a lovely view of the Park. I went to see Lord Tawborough in his study the same night that I arrived, and he was very kind. There will be no invidious treatment here, of the kind you hear governesses sometimes have to put up with. The work will be pleasant, the little boy took to me at once. He has brown eyes and a frank little face, rather solemn for his age, indeed I think he likes reading books too much and not too little. The meals are of course very good and I never felt better. Yesterday we went a carriage drive to Northbury, and picked primroses in the woods there, five huge bunches. The spring is a lovely time. It makes me happy because it is the beginning of the year and promises so much, just as I am at a new beginning of my life here, feeling sure I shall have a very happy time. Send the cotton blouses and straw hat, for there's a fine summer ahead!

With love to Aunt Jael and very much to your dear self from

Your loving
RACHEL.

As Grandmother finished reading, I sobbed as though

my heart would break, for that happy letter was the saddest of them all. I have read somewhere that with old letters, the happier they are, the more full of hope and life the writers, the more vivid and intense and joyful the sense of the present time the more melancholy they are to read in later years. The hopes then so warm and fresh seem now so far away. Men and women who when they wrote were hoping and planning are now but hollow-eyed and rotting dust. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity.

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## CHAPTER XI: EXTRAORDINARY MEETING FOR PRAYER, PRAISE AND PURGING

For some time all had not been well among the Saints. There was evidence of worldliness, backsliding, apostasy and sin. The Devil was active in our midst.

Certain Saints, after tasting for years the privilege of fellowship, had left us: for chapel, or church, or nowhere. Others were becoming irregular in their attendance or took part in our devotions without fervour. There was moral backsliding too: chambering and wantonness. Blind Joe Packe had been discovered by Brother Quappleworthy in a drunken stupor on the floor of the attic in which he lived, when the latter was paying him one of his customary visits of Bible-reading and exhortation.

There walked abroad also a vaguer, darker sin than drink that I did not clearly apprehend, of which certain of the younger Brothers who were "keeping company" with certain of the younger Sisters were whispered to be guilty. The most flagrant example, I gathered from a shrouded conversation between Grandmother and Aunt Jael, was Sister Lucy Fry, who had a baby, but no husband. I thought this a curiosity rather than a crime. For whatever reason, it aroused a sharp difference of opinion; Aunt Jael denounced the awfulness of Lucy's sin, Grandmother urged that she was more sinned against than sinning.

Then Sister Prideaux had been to some concert or "theatre" during a holiday at Exeter. The precise nature of the godless entertainment was not ascertained. Nor was it clear how the news had reached us, though most thought it was wormed out of Sister Quappleworthy by Sister Yeo. The latter openly taxed Miss Prideaux with it.

"So you went to the theayter did you, over to Exeter? Next time you're there I suppose you'll be a-going to the *Cathedril*!"

Then there were the parliamentary elections in which some of the Saints had been taking an unsaintly interest, voting for and championing this candidate or that; a form of meddling with this world's affairs which Pentecost regarded with special disfavour. Indeed Rumour had it that one or two of the younger Brethren took part in the famous polling-day brawl in the vegetable market. Several of even the most prominent Saints expressed preferences. Brother Browning being a draper was Radical, Brother Quappleworthy being an intellectual was Whig, Brother Briggs being an oilman was Tory.

Aunt Jael was an unbenevolent neutral. "They're all much of a muchness and none of 'em any good to folk, neither in the next world nor in this either. In our family, *if* we had been anything at all, we'd always have been Whig—except the child's mother. She was Tory, or liked to think she was. All the gentlefolk belonged to the Tories, and that was always enough for Rachel."

I was henceforward a fanatical Tory, though I had not the dimmest notion what it meant, except that it was somehow connected with London and the Parliament. Aunt Jael refused to explain; Grandmother said it was not worth explaining.

Brother Brawn related how on the occasion of a visit from some canvassers he had struck a blow for righteousness. "They knocked at my front door," he told Aunt Jael, "folk as I'd never spoken to avore, nor so much as seen; 'Good mornin' sir,' said one of them, a tall, thin man with spectacles he was, 'whose side are you on? Davie and Potts[2] I trust.' 'No,' I said, 'I'm on the side of the Laur Jesus Christ,' and I slammed the door in their faces. 'Twas a word in season."

About this time there was an epidemic of minor illnesses, which Grandmother said could only be the hand of the Lord extended in chastisement for sins which the suffering ones had committed. More modern folk would have sought explanation in low vitality, indoor habits or bad drainage, but point was given to my Grandmother's contention by the fact that Sister Prideaux and Lucy Fry, prominent among the sinners, were about this time laid low with illness —the latter not unnaturally. Her own attack of bronchitis, she attributed to the selfish indulgence

she had shown of late in perpetually studying her own favourite portions of the Word and neglecting (comparatively) those she favoured less.

Worst of all, that piece of sugar which for nineteen years—the period is always the same in my memory—had been placed in our offertory as an insult to the Lord had now for two Sundays past become *four* pieces, one in each of the four partitions, a little bit of sugar for Expenses, a little bit of sugar for Foreign Field, a little bit of sugar for Ministry, a little bit of sugar for Poor. It had been serious enough years ago when the box with the narrow slits had been substituted for the bag, and the sinner had merely retaliated by putting a small piece through one of the slits instead of a large lump down the gaping abyss of the bag. But now—four pieces, one in each partition,—what deftness in utter sin! What zeal in ill-doing! Who was this wolf in sheep's clothing, this sinner who could sit at the Lord's table for nineteen years and harden his heart Lord's day after Lord's day by offering this mockery of an oblation to his Saviour? Who was this evil spirit slim-fingered enough to perform this fourfold naughtiness, and yet remain undetected, unguessed? We all peered at our neighbours. Brother Brawn even began following the box in its voyage round the Meeting, instead of merely handing it to the first giver and taking it from the last; for all his spying he could find nothing. Was *he* the man?

Thus in devious ways was the Devil active in our midst. He must be exorcised.

Sister Yeo's idea of a Special Extraordinary Meeting to chase him out was finally adopted. All the Saints should assemble on a week night to pray for help,

and for the discovery, confession and true repentance of all the various sinners; to purge the repentant of their sins and to praise the Lord for pardoning them; to purge the Meeting itself of the stubborn and unrepentant—to cast them into the outer darkness. There should be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

A preliminary meeting to decide on procedure and agenda was held in our dining-room. The committee which assembled was chosen by Aunt Jael and consisted of herself, Grandmother, Pentecost, Brothers Quappleworthy (despite theatre-going sister-in-law and known electioneering lapses), Brawn and Browning. Also, at Pentecost's special plea—"'Twill be a sacrifice of self, I know, dear Sister Vickary; that is why I urge it"—Sister Yeo was admitted. As soon as all the committee had arrived I was bundled out of the room, so I knew nothing of what was to happen except what I gathered from ear-straining on the staircase, and chance conversation between Grandmother and Aunt Jael afterwards. I gathered this much: that the Extraordinary Meeting was to be preceded by a Tea.

To this same Tea on a memorable Saturday afternoon we proceeded; Grandmother, Aunt Jael, Mrs. Cheese and I. It is the only single occasion in my memory when the Saints met together for public eating. In nothing did we differ more from the general body of nonconformists with their socials, bun-fights, feastings, reunions, conversazioni and congregational guzzles.

The Room presented an unusual sight. There were four long trestle tables covered with white cloths and laden with food, with forms drawn up beside them. The Saints, dressed in their Sunday best, were

standing about in groups when we arrived. Aunt Jael, puffed with the energies of her walk, sat down at once on the end of a bench. Her weight sent the other end soaring gaily into the air while she landed on the floor with a most notable thud. The form banged back, not into position, but with a swirling movement on to a plate of bread and butter.

There is proof of the awful respect in which Aunt Jael was held in this: that not a soul dared to smile as she sat there on her broad posterior. For a moment or two no one even dared to help her to her feet, fearing an outburst, for people like Aunt Jael are most dangerous when you try to help them out of a predicament. Then by a sudden gregarious instinct every one ran forward together in a sheep-like mass, and bore Aunt Jael—red, antagonistic and threatening—to her feet.

After a blessing had been asked by Pentecost, we sat down to tea. I recall ham, bath-buns and potted-meat sandwiches. After tea the tables were cleared, the trestles packed away and the crockery and cutlery, all of which had been lent, were put back uncleansed in clothes-baskets in which they had been brought by the owners; for the Room possessed no washing-up facilities. The forms were then rearranged as for Breaking of Bread. Pentecost sat in his accustomed place at the right of the Table as you faced it; we in our usual front row; Brother Briggs to the right, Brother Quick to the left, Brother Marks, the old Personal Devil of my imagination, far away in his goggled corner. In the pulpit or dais, which was only used for the evening gospel meeting, were ranged Brother Quappleworthy—in the centre, in charge of proceedings—Brother Brawn on the right and Brother Browning on the left. Precedence and

position had been arranged at the committee meeting in our dining-room, when Brother Quappleworthy had been chosen as chairman. The whole staging was as for a meeting in the secular meaning of the word. Indeed I remember feeling that the whole affair was a sort of excitement or entertainment rather than a religious service. This feeling vanished like dew with the dawn when Pentecost stood up and in a short prayer of exceeding solemnity craved the Lord's blessing on our proceedings. The keynote was SIN, its detection, confession, atonement; "and Sin, Lord, is a terrible thing."

Brother Quappleworthy rose to deal with the business before the house. "First now, brethren, there's the question of those Saints who have absented themselves from our—ah—mutual ministrations, those backsliders who have left the Lord's table for other so-called Christian bodies or the walks of open indifference and—er—infidelity." Brawn and Browning murmured agreement.

Sister Yeo's voice rang out accusing and metallic: "You're a fine one, Brother Browning, to um-um-er, and to sit in judgment on others. First cast out the beam from thine own eye! What of your own wedded wife who goes openly to the Bible Christian chapel, and 'as done these fifteen years; a source of stumbling and error to all the weaker brethren." (Sensation.)

"Silence, Sister," cried Brother Quappleworthy, "none may speak here to accuse others, only to accuse self."

"True," murmured the Meeting, and the Chairman resumed his discourse. "A list has been—ah—prayerfully prepared of all the Saints who have

withheld themselves from fellowship for a space of time. Do all our Brothers and Sisters agree that they be struck off our roll of grace? Shall we say 'Ay' as we call each name? Brother Mogridge."

"Ay," arose murmurously.

"Sister Mogridge."

"Ay."

"Sister Polly Mogridge."

"Ay."

"Brother Richardson."

"Ay."

"Sister Petter."

This time our tongues (I say "our" because I had joined unctuously in the Ay's) stopped short just in time as we remembered that Sister Petter was present. We all turned towards her. Her hand was over her eyes, and she was weeping.

"Sister Petter," called Brother Quappleworthy in a solemn voice. "You who scoffed to unbelievers of the ministrations of the Saints, *You*, I say!..."

"Lord forgive me," she moaned. "Oh Lord forgive me."

Pentecost arose with beaming face. "There's joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." He went over to her and put his hand on her shoulder saying, "Sister, be of good cheer, the Lord hath forgiven thy sin."

"Amen," said we all.

Drink and theatre-going and elections and illnesses were all dealt with then in their turn; I remember them hazily. When the denouncing voice uttered the name Lucy Fry, I woke up into the most wide-awake interest, for a *visible* hush descended on the Meeting.

Brother Quappleworthy had lost his usual urbanity: "Sin of sins, abomination of abominations." His face was hard and fanatical.

My eyes kept straying to the place where Lucy sat. She was a young fresh-faced country girl. Tonight her rosy cheeks were pale, her eyes drawn and she sobbed quietly but continually as her shame was exposed before us.

"Sister, repentest thou? Stand up, I say! Repent!"

It was too much. The poor girl fainted. They bore her out insensible. "Her first time out of doors," I heard it whispered, "since the child was born."

A feeling of pity was evident among the Saints. Brother Quappleworthy realized this and was determined to crush it. "Remember, brethren, it is a sin too grave, too vile for God to wink at. No dallying with sin! I put it to you that Sister Fry be excluded from fellowship. A fleshly sinner must not pollute the Lord's table."

"Chase her out, Lord," cried Brother Brawn, "this adulterous woman!"

"No," said Brother Browning, nervously, bravely. "She repents; the Lord will be for mercy." The three Brothers fell to disputing on the dais, and the discussion spread to the whole body of the Saints till there was a veritable hubbub in the Room. Brother Quappleworthy quelled it by calling out in a loud

voice: "The Lord will show His will by means of a vote. Now those brethren who think it right that Sister Lucy Fry, the self-confessed sinner, be excluded from the Lord's table put up their hands."

Thirty-six hands were counted.

"Now those brethren who think that she, the sinning woman, should remain in fellowship."

Twenty hands only were shown. Thus by sixteen votes the Lord, who is merciful, voted against poor Lucy.

Then a surprising thing happened. My Grandmother, for the only time in my experience, stood up: "I have one question, brethren. Who is the man?"

No one had thought of that. No one does.

There was a whispering. It was confirmed that Lucy's guilty partner—whatever that might mean—was not a Saint and that nothing could therefore be done.

Brother Quappleworthy with sure dramatic instinct had reserved till the last the super-sin: Sugar. "This work of Satan persevered in over so long a period in a human heart ... For nineteen years ..." and so on. He wound up by conjuring the sinner to confess, to repent ere it was too late.

There was no response to his appeal, and a flat and rather foolish silence ensued. Then Pentecost Dodderidge prayed lengthily and earnestly that the sinner might be moved to reveal himself. Then another long fruitless silence.

Pentecost arose again, solemn and determined: "Brethren, we must slay the Evil One working in one poor sinner's heart, now, this evening—now or

never. No one shall leave this room until the guilty one has confessed, not if we stay here for forty days and forty nights. Let us pray silently that he may be moved."

A new silence followed, but this time I was somehow expectant. The minutes, however, dragged on, five, ten, fifteen; I watched the crawling clock. Surely it could not last for ever, surely the patience of the sinner must be worn out by our unending vigil.

There was a noise of some one moving. Every one opened their eyes and looked up. It was only Pentecost Dodderidge on his feet again. "The Lord hath made it plain to me. He saith 'I will send a sign and then the sinner will confess.'" Hardly had he sat down than there was a great pelting of hail on the roof which continued for two or three minutes. With the noise no one heard Brother Marks, my spectacled Personal Devil, until he stood in front of the Lord's Table facing us all with a countenance of ghost-like white.

What followed I could never have believed had I not seen it with my own eyes. He took a dark blue paper package from one pocket and emptied it on one side of the Lord's Table; a shower of sugar came forth: little white lumps, the sort with which he had fooled us—preserving sugar the grocers call it, the sort with which jam is made. Then he took out from his other pocket a little cloth bag and poured out into a separate heap on the other side of the Lord's Table a shining heap of golden coins. Then he knelt down in front of us all and sobbed and groaned and rocked himself to and fro in an extreme agony that was terrible to see.

No one knew what to do, no one except Pentecost,

who went up to him and lifted him to his feet; "Jesus forgives thee," he said, "let all of us praise His Holy Name."

The whole Meeting sprang to its feet, and burst forth into a hymn of praise. A solemn fast was declared for seven days, and we sang the Good-night Hymn:

Good night, dear saints, adieu! adieu!
Still in God's way delight;
May grace and truth abide with you—
Good night, dear saints, good night.

When we ascend to realms above,
And view the glorious sight,
We'll sing of His redeeming love,
And never say Good night.

Good night, dear saints, adieu! adieu!
Still in God's way delight;
May grace and truth abide with you—
Good night, dear saints, good night.

**FOOTNOTE:**

[2] Colonel Ferguson-Davie of Crediton and Mr. George Potts of Trafalgar Lawn, Tawborough, the two candidates successfully returned for the Borough at the Election of 1859.

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## CHAPTER XII: THE GREAT DISCLOSURE

Soon after this, somewhere about my tenth birthday, in the early spring of 1858, an important relaxation in my rule of life was made. I was allowed, under strict limitations, to go out on the Lawn for a certain period every afternoon, and to mix with the children

there.

In view of my Great-Aunt's principle, namely, to make my life as harsh and pleasureless as possible, and of my Grandmother's steadfast prayers and endeavours to keep me pure and unspotted from the world, this was a big concession. The reason was my health. Grandmother saw that I never got out of doors half enough, and that a couple of hours' play with other children in the open air would be likely to make me brighter in spirit and to bring colour to my cheeks. One Lord's Day, as we were walking home from Breaking of Bread, I overheard Brother Browning: "If you don't take care she will not be long for this world,"—nodding his head sadly, sagely and surreptitiously in my direction. Anyway, the amazing happened, and with stern negative injunctions from Aunt Jael not to abuse the new privilege, nor to play "monkey tricks," for which I should be well "warmed," and with more positive and more terrible instructions from my Grandmother to use my opportunity among the other children to "testify to my Lord," I was launched on the sea of secular society, the world of the Great Unsaved.

Except for what little I saw of them at the Misses Clinkers' I had no acquaintance with other children, nor any knowledge of their "play." While in the obedient orbit of my own imagination, I was bold, none bolder, in the situations I created, the climaxes I achieved, the high astounding terms with which I threatened the attic walls; face to face with flesh-and-blood children of my own age, I soon found I was shy to a degree, until they were out of my sight, and I was alone again, when they joined the ever-lengthening cast of my puppet show, and, like everybody else, did as they were bid. Not that I was

shy of grown-ups; it was the fruit of my upbringing that I was at ease with any one but my equals.

It was a horrible ordeal, that first afternoon, when I stepped through our garden gate on to the Lawn. I walked unsteadily, not daring to look towards the grass slope at the higher end, where all the Lawn children were assembled in a group. "Waiting for you! Staring at you!" said self-consciousness; and fear echoed. I flushed crimson. I was half sick with shyness. It seemed to my imagination that every child was staring at me with a hundred eyes—they knew, they knew! Marcus had heralded the fact, had played Baptist to my coming—they were all assembled here to stare, to flout, to mock. How I wished the earth would open and swallow me up or that the Lord would carry me away in a great cloud to Heaven. I dared not fly back into our garden: that way lay eternal derision. Yet my legs would not carry me forward to the group of children who stood there staring at me without mercy, without pity, with the callous fixity of stars. I was filled with blind confusion, and prayed feverishly for a miraculous escape.

Miracle, in the body of Marcus, saved me. He came forward from the group.

"Hello, Mary Lee, we've been talking about you." (Of course they had.) "I've told everybody you're allowed to play on the Lawn now, but we don't know which League you ought to belong to."

"What do you mean? What's a League?"

"Well, all Lawn children are in two sides for games and everything. Leagues means that. If your father and mother go to Church, you belong to the Church

League, if they go to Chapel, you belong to the Chapel League."

"I see." Secular distinction based on religious ones was a principle I understood.

"Yes, but you're not one or the other. Brethren aren't Church, are they? And they aren't *really* Chapel."

"You're a Brethren too."

"Not like you are. Mother goes to the Bible Christian Chapel, and father really belongs there too, for all he goes to your meeting. So I count as Chapel."

"What do Papists count as?"

"There aren't any. If there were any and if they were allowed to go about, they'd be like you, neither one thing nor the other."

"Like me indeed! Papists like Brethren! Saints like sinners!"

"Not really, not like that; Brethren are more like Chapel, I know. Besides *I* want you to belong to our League, but—Joe Jones says you're not to. There's a meeting about it tomorrow. All our rules and sports and everything are decided at the meeting we have—not like Brethren meetings—usually up at the top of the bank, near the big poplar. Joe Jones sits on the wall, and he's our president. I'll let you know what happens about you afterwards. Till then I don't think you'd better play with us. *I* don't mind, but the others say you'd better not. If Joe Jones caught you! *I* don't like Joe Jones,—don't you ever whisper that, it's a terrible secret—but he doesn't like you, and he's the top dog."

Joe Jones, topmost of dogs, Autocrat of the Lawn, pimpled despot against whose evil pleasure little could prevail, was a good deal older than the rest of the children, by whom he was obeyed and feared. From what Marcus said his heavy hand was against me from the start. I knew why. He lived next door to us at Number Six, with an invalid, widowed mother (whom I had only seen once or twice in my life, as she was kept indoors by some mysterious infirmity which some described as grief and others drink) and his sister Lena, a big freckled flaxen girl about a year younger than himself. We rarely saw any of the three, and our household of course had nothing to do with theirs (Church of England, strict). But one morning as I was walking up the Lawn path on my way from school, Lena had called out to me over the privet hedge.

"Hello, you!"—and then something else, including a word I did not know, though instinct told me it was bad. The obscenity of the traditional filth words lies as much in their sound as in their signification. She repeated the words several times, combining artistic pleasure of mouthing the abomination with sheer joy of wickedness in shocking me and staining my imagination.

I went straight indoors and appealed to the dictionary. No help there; Lena Jones had wider verbal resources than Doctor Johnson. Grandmother would be sure to know. I went to that dear blameless old soul with the foul word on my lips.

"What does —— mean?"

"Nothing good, my dear," she replied calmly, imperturbably, without a trace of the flush that would have appeared in the cheeks of ninety-nine

parents out of a hundred. "Nothing good, my dear. Where did you hear it?"

"Lena Jones—just now."

Grandmother walked out of the house and rang the next-door bell. What passed between her and the grief- (or gin-) stricken Mrs. Jones I do not know, but the results were, first, that Lena was sent away to a boarding-school, where I have no doubt she added suitably to the virgin vocabulary of her companions; second, that Joe, taking up the cudgels for his sister's honour, became suddenly and most unfavourably aware of my existence. He would threaten me if I passed him on my way to school, when I would cower to Marcus for protection. Once he chased me with a cricket bat. And now that at last I was near to gaining the status of "one of the Lawn children," he was going to revenge himself by standing in my way. With the Lawn community a word from Joe Jones could make or mar. If he forbade the others to speak to me, they would not dare to; if he ordered them to persecute or tease me, they would obey. He was the typical bully ruling with the rod of fear by the right of size. He was the typical plague-spot too, polluting the whole life of the little community.

For the Lawn was, in the true sense, a community. The well-defined bournes that were set to the oblong patch of greensward—the steep, poplar-crowned grass bank at one end, surmounted by a wall over which you looked down into a back lane and a stable some twenty feet below you; at the opposite end that marched with the street the high brick wall with one ceremonious gate in the middle for only egress to the outside world; then the two rows of houses the full length of both sides—gave to it a separate and self-

contained character; the charm and magical selfishness of an island. All the children who lived in the Lawn houses played there, and played nowhere else. Though divided into two mutually hostile leagues, they felt themselves to be one blood and one people as against the strange world without the gates. Of this community Joe Jones was the uncrowned King. Like the early Teutonic monarchs he was limited in power by the folk-moot, or primitive parliament of all his subjects. Questions of Lawn politics were decided at democratic meetings under the poplars at the top of the grass bank. There were equal suffrage, decisions by majorities, and the feminine vote. Unfortunately Joe Jones had the casting vote, and as there prevailed the show-of-hands instead of the secret ballot, a look from his awful eye influenced a good many other votes as well. In short, the Lawn, like all other democracies, was, as wise old Aristotle saw, always near the verge of tyranny. At the tribal meetings were discussed and decided sports and competitions, penalties and punishments, ostracisms and taboos; unpopular proposals were consigned to Limbo, unpopular persons to Coventry. In all doings that allowed of "sides"—cricket, nuts-in-May, most ball games, tug of war, tick, Red Indians, clumps (what were they, these mysteries?)—the two leagues, Marcus told me, were arrayed in battle against each other.

The Church League was of course led by Joe Jones, seconded, until her departure for wider spheres of maleficence, by his devoted sister Lena. Then there were Kitty and Molly Prince, also fatherless. Their late parent was a "Rural Dean," and they were thus our social élite (Mr. Jones, Senior, had been a mere butcher;—nay, pork-butcher even, said the slanderers, with a fine feeling for social shades).

Kitty and Molly were dull, stupid girls. Molly was as sallow as a dried apple; Kitty lisped; they were always dressed in brown, with large brown velvet bows in their hats. There was a dim George Smith; a loud-voiced Ted King, Joe Jones' principal ally, with his two sisters Cissie and Trixie. I hate them vaguely to this day, that silly giggling pair with their silly giggling names. I do not forget or forgive that they wore nice clothes, and mocked cruelly at mine. About this time, Aunt Jael had my hair shorn—it was my one good feature, and Aunt Jael knew that I knew it, and decreed that I must "mortify the flesh" accordingly—and sent me out into a mocking world in school and Lawn, with my face full of shame and my hair clipped to the head like a boy's. How those King girls sneered and giggled, and how I loathed them. Finally there was little John Blackmore, of whom it was whispered abroad that "his father died before he was born." The import of this fact was dimly apprehended, but Lawn opinion was unanimous in regarding it as something unique and special, something sufficient to endow little Johnny Blackmore with an air of quite exotic velvet-trousered mystery. He was a gentle, dark-eyed, olive-skinned child, and the only member of the Establishment party I could abide. He shared the fatherlessness which was common to his League—the Kings were an exception—and which probably accounted for their eminence in ill-behaviour. Another coincidence was that all the members of the Church League, except George Smith, lived on our side of the Lawn, i. e. the same side as my Grandmother's house. In defiance of Number Eight, Fort of Plymouth, halting-place for heaven, they called it "the Church side!"

The leader of the Chapel League was Laurie

Prideaux, whose father kept the big grocer's shop in High Street; a tall, pretty, picture-book boy with golden curls, a Wesleyan Methodist, and I think the nicest of all the Lawn children, with whom his influence was second to Joe Jones' only, and for good instead of evil. The power of one was because he was liked, of the other because he was feared: those two forms of power that hold sway everywhere —Aunt Jael and Grandmother, Old Testament God and New Testament Christ; fear and love. If there was any weeping, Laurie was there to comfort it; any injustice, Laurie would champion it. Against Joe Jones he was my rod and my staff. His second-in-command was Marcus, Marcus who hovered on the marge between Bible Christianhood, which qualified him for admission to the Lawn, and Plymouth Brethrenism, which qualified him for admission to Heaven only. He was a nice boy, Marcus, for all the uncertainty of his theological position, and I remember him as one of the few bright faces of my early life. The strength of Lawn Dissent lay in the unnumbered Boldero family, a seething brood of Congregationalists, who lived over the way in the corner house opposite Number Eight. Only five of them were of appropriate age to possess present membership of the Lawn—Sam, Dora, Daisy, Bill and Zoë—but on either side of the five stretched fading vistas of babes and grown-ups. Dora was clever, Daisy good-natured, fat, dull and bow-legged, Zoë fat only, Sam and Bill rough, stupid and friendly. Finally there were Cyril and Eva Tompkins—twins; Baptists: a spiteful couple who vied with the Kings in mocking me.

To sum up. On the whole, despite Joe Jones, the boys were kinder than the girls; a first impression which life, in the lump, has borne out; and on the

whole, despite the Tompkinses, the Chapel League was the nicer of the two; the brainier also, despite the Boldero boys, and Johnny Blackmore, who was the shining intellect of the Establishment. Though I have no longer the faintest hostility to the Anglican Communion, I find inside me a dim ineradicable notion of some moral superiority, some higher worth, however slight, which I concede to the Nonconformists; and I trace it back to my first experience of the two. If I bow my head in reverent humility before the Dissenters of England, I know that the real reason is because Laurie and Marcus and the happy Bolderos were such, while Joe and Lena and the Kings and the Princes—Beware of Kings! Put not your trust in Princes!—were not.

Church League and Chapel League, and I could belong to neither! My first feeling should have been sorrow that among that score of young souls there was not one single sure inheritor of glory; I fear it was pride instead; in my heart I rejoiced as the Pharisee, that I was not as other children, and that in me alone had the light shined forth. Yet at the same moment, parallel but contradictory, I found this question in my heart: why am I not as other children? Why cannot I mix with them as one of them, and belong to their Leagues and joys? After all, my right to belong to the Church League was about as good as Marcus' Chapel pretensions: had not Grandmother and Aunt Jael both been Churchwomen once? Or again, if Marcus, who was at least half a Saint, was allowed to belong to the Chapel League, then why not I, who was only half a Saint more? I had for a moment a rebellious notion of forming a new League of my own, a Saints' League, a Plymouth League, a League of the Elect; but reflection soon showed me that one member was

barely enough. Could I convert others though? The notion warmed my heart, the more luxuriously because though at root ambitious, it seemed so virtuous and noble. Missionary zeal would further personal ambition. In testifying to the Lord, I would raise up unto Him followers who should be *my* followers too; forming at one and the same time the Lord's League and *my* League. There burned together in me for a queer exalted moment the red flame of ambition and the pure white fire of faith; burning together in Mary as in Mahomet; as in the souls of the great captains of religion. The fires died down; till there burned within me just the candle flicker of this humble hope: that the morrow's meeting would suffer me to join the Lawn at all, as the lowliest novice in whichever League would take me.

Next day after tea, I watched from afar the deliberations of the assembly that was handling my fate.

Some one shouted my name; I approached and appeared before the tribe. On the wall that surmounted the mound of justice sat Joseph Jones, surrounded by his earls and churls. I observed his pimples, his ginger hair, his fish-like bulging eyes.

"Come here. Stand straight. Look at me."

I obeyed. He faced me. The tribe surrounded me.

"Your name?"

"Mary Lee."

"You're allowed now to come out and play on the Lawn?"

"Yes."

"You can't just play and do as you like, you know. There are Laws of the Lawn. And there are two Leagues, and you must belong to one of them."

This sounded encouraging; he was not going to stand in my way after all.

"I know," I said. "Which shall I belong to?"

"We'll see. Let me see, which are you, Church or Chapel?" He was too dull to conceal the wolf in the sheep-like blandness of his voice. Well, I would fight for my footing.

"Neither. You know that."

"Neither?" incredulously. "How do you mean?"

"I belong to the Brethren, the Saints. That's neither Church nor Chapel."

"Well then, you can't belong to the Church League or the Chapel League, can you, if you aren't either? Of course you can't. We're *sorry*, but you can't belong to the Lawn at all. Still" (generously) "we'll let you walk about." He dismissed me with a nod. I did not move.

"But—"

"Now shut up. No damned chatter. You should belong to a decent religion."

"It is a decent religion," I cried. "Don't you talk so; it is my Grandmother's. 'Tis as good as any of yours, and a lot better. And 'tis not a good enough reason for keeping me out."

The Lord of the Lawn was not accustomed to being addressed thus. He darkened—or rather flushed; gingerheads cannot darken.

"If you want another reason, 'tis because you are a dirty little tell-tale sneak."

"Hear, hear! Sneak, Sneak!" Chorus of Kings and Princes.

"I'm *not* a sneak. I'm *not* a sneak, and I don't want to belong to your miserable Lawn. I'm a Saint anyway, and better than you churches and chapels."

I turned and moved away. "Saint, Saint, look at the Saint! The sneaking Saint, the saintly sneak. The Brethering kid. Plymouth Brethering, good old Plymouth Rocks. Three cheers for the Plymouth Rocks!" Church and Dissent mingled in this hostile chorus that pursued me to our gate.

"Look at the corduroy skirt, he, he, he!—just like workman's trousers," was the last thing I heard. My cheeks burned with rage and shame.

I ran up to the attic to sob and mope in peace. I was Hagar once again, turned out into the wilderness alone. Every child's hand was against me. I sobbed away, until at last the luxury of extreme grief brought its comfort. Mine was the chief sorrow under the heavens, it was unique in its injustice; I was the unhappiest little girl in all the world. I regained a measure of happiness.

After this experience, I went out on to the Lawn as little as possible; which achieved the result of Aunt Jael driving me there.

I could take no part in games, but after a while I became a kind of furtive hanger-on in the outskirts at the frequent "Meetings" of the Lawn, at which the division into Leagues did not usually persist. I only dared approach the company when Joe Jones was

absent, which, however, inclined to be more and more usual as he became absorbed in gay adult adventures in the world outside the Lawn gates. The moment Joe was gone, and Laurie Prideaux had stepped without question into the shoes of leadership, the bullies who, under Joe's encouraging eye, would have driven me off, were silent and left me alone, obeying with slavish care the whim of the new Autocrat. So I stood away, just a little outside the ring of children, and listened.

Under Laurie's influence, the meetings were more concerned with affairs of universal moment and abstract truth than with the intrigues and vendettas so dear to Joseph Jones. Is the moon bigger than the sun? How far away are the stars? Does it really hurt the jelly-fish like the big yellow ones you see at Ilfracombe and Croyde, if you cut them in two with your spade? Do fish feel pain? Is the donkey the same as an ass, or is ass the female of donkey? What is the earliest date in the year you can have raspberries in the garden, or thrush's—or black-bird's —or cuckoo's eggs out in the country? What is the farthest a cricket-ball has ever been thrown? and will there be a war between England and the French Empire? With any insoluble question, i. e. a question to which nobody brought an answer which the meeting regarded as final, the procedure adopted was for every one present to refer it to his or her father or mother, and to report the result at the next meeting. Much valuable information was gleaned by this means. The final decision was by a majority of votes. Then if five parents said the moon was bigger than the sun, and only four that the sun was bigger than the moon, then the moon *was* bigger than the sun. Voting was by parents. Thus the Bolderos counted as one vote only; which was not unjust, for

the brood, who were inclined, under Dora's orders, to stand or fall together, would otherwise have swamped the meetings; as indeed they frequently did when the question was not one which had been referred back to parental omniscience.

One day the supreme problem was raised. Joe Jones was not present, but perhaps he had inspired the discussion. It came breathlessly, with the swift tornado-strength of great ideas. Every one of us knew at once that we were face to face with something bigger than we had ever encountered before. Into our camp of innocence it fell like a bursting bombshell, scattering wonder in all directions. Of the innocence I feel pretty sure; I do not believe a single child knew.

"They are *born*, of course," said one, sagely.

"Yes; but *how*?"

"Storks bring them," said little Ethel Prideaux. "On my panorama, there is a picture of a big white stork carrying a baby in its beak, and it puts it down the chimney."

"Where does it get it?" objected Marcus. "Besides storks are only in Holland and places abroad; there aren't any left in England, and there are babies in England just the same."

"I think it has something to do with gooseberry bushes," said Trixie King. "I overheard my Auntie saying so."

"Well, we have nothing but flowers in our garden," said Billy Boldero, "and there are twelve in our family, and no gooseberry bushes."

"It is neither storks nor gooseberries," said Dora Boldero, aged thirteen, importantly. "These are only fairy tales for children. The real reason" (she lowered her voice impressively) "is this. Doctors bring them. Whenever we have a baby born" (at least an annual event in the Boldero ménage) "the doctor comes. He always brings with him a Black Bag. *That's it!*" (Sensation.)

Marcus was the first to recover. Even Black Bag was inadequate as First Cause.

"Yes, but where does he get the baby first, before he puts it in the bag to bring? He must get it somewhere."

"From the gooseberry bush, of course," said Trixie King, in a bold effort to recover her position. "I expect there is a special garden behind doctors' houses where they grow."

"But if there isn't?" objected Marcus pitilessly. "Doctor Le Mesurier has no garden at all, neither has Doctor Hale."

"No," said Laurie Prideaux. "And I don't believe the Black Bag story one bit. Because if it were that, the doctor could take the bag anywhere, and give whoever he liked a baby, just whenever he liked. And he can't, I know. Anybody can't have a baby just when they like. Mother says Mrs. Pile at Number Three has wanted one for years. Besides, any one can't have one. Only mothers have babies."

"*And* fathers," said some one.

"Fathers and mothers together; there must be both. At least there always *is* both."

"Except—" We all looked awkwardly at Johnny Blackmore, the posthumous one. He flushed slightly under his olive skin.

"No, I had a father too; he *was* my father, though he died before I was born."

"Well, if your father can die before you are born, what makes him your father? What does 'being your father' mean?" We were getting to fundamentals.

"Can a mother die too before her baby is born?"

Nobody could answer this. Somehow it *seemed* more improbable. Besides, we had no motherless counterpart of Johnny Blackmore to support the notion.

"Whether they die or whether they don't," said Laurie, summing up, "all that we've found out so far is that there must be a father and there must be a mother; a gentleman and a lady, that is, who are married. They must be married."

"No, they needn't be," I cried eagerly. "Sister Lucy Fry at our Meeting is not married, and she has a baby four months old!"

The sensational character of my information allowed my first utterance in a Lawn assembly to pass unreproved. There was an impressed silence. Everybody waited for more.

"It is not often, I don't think," I went on. "It was a mistake of some kind, and a sin too. Much prayer was offered up, and Aunt Jael nearly had her turned out of fellowship. It is *wrong* to have a baby if you are not married. Wrong, but not impossible."

"That's important," said Marcus, "but we've really

found nothing out. How are they made? What makes them come?"

"The Lord," said I, sententiously. This was a falling off.

"I know. But *how*?"

Marcus was final. "This is a thing that has got to be asked at home. Tomorrow evening at half-past-five you will all report what you have found out. It is a thing we ought to know. We shall have to have children ourselves one day."

"I don't like to athk," simpered Kitty Prince. "Mother'd not like me to I'm thure."

Perhaps she really knew, though more likely vague instinct coloured her reluctance.

It was a reluctance I did not share. The meeting was about to disperse, and I was resolving in my mind the words I should use when asking my Grandmother, wondering what her answer might be, when "There's Joe coming in at the gate," was shouted, "let's ask him."

We crowded round him as he approached.

"Well, what is it, kids?" he said, in his royal cocksure way.

Laurie told him. He smiled: an evil important smile.

"And nobody knows anything," concluded Laurie.

"Don't they?" leered Joe, looking around to see that all the Lawn children were listening, and no one else. "Don't they. *I* know."

He told us. He told us with a detail that left no room for doubt and a foulness that smote our cheeks with shame.

"It is not true." I kept whispering to myself. My cheeks burned, and I was shaking all over. Against myself, I believed him. It was horrible enough to be true.

He gave us fatherhood as it appeared to him. When he came to the mother's sacrifice of pain, and desecrated it with filthy leering words, I could bear it no longer, and eluding all attempts to stop me, I fled wildly into the house, and upstairs to my Grandmother.

She looked up from the Word, surprised in her calm fashion.

"What is it, my dear?"

I told her. "O Grandmother, it is not as cruel as that, is it? It is not true? Tell me it is not true!"

"It is true, my dear."

"And does it hurt like that?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Why—why isn't there some easier way? So horrible the first part, and then so cruel. It is wrong."

"It's the Lord's will, my dear. It always has been and always will be. Meanwhile, you are not to go on the Lawn again till I have spoken to your Aunt. I must seek the Lord's guidance. Leave me to lay it before Him."

The look on Aunt Jael's face at supper-time soon

banished the far terrors of motherhood: Grandmother had clearly told her all. It was unjust, of course: it was no crime on my part to have heard something—and something true—to which I could not help listening, which I had not sought to hear, and which terrified me now that I had heard it. It was unjust that she was angry. But there 'twas.

All through supper she said nothing. I feared to receive her wrath, yet I could not bear that visit should be delayed till the morrow, which would mean a sleepless night of visualizing. As we rose from our knees after evening worship, Aunt Jael turned a grim eye on me and spoke.

"I shall write to Simeon Greeber tomorrow."

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## CHAPTER XIII: I GO TO TORRIBRIDGE

I knew what that meant. It had been hinted at on several occasions since the birthday party. I was to go to Torribridge to live with Uncle Simeon.

I disliked Uncle Simeon, and did not want to leave my Grandmother. On the other hand I longed to see the world, and to get away from Aunt Jael. I must show her how glad I was at the prospect.

"You mean you're going to write to him about my going to live there?"

I said it in a cool pleased fashion, then at once regretted I had done so, for I knew Aunt Jael well enough to see that the pain the punishment she proposed would cause me was a more important thing than saving me from baneful Lawn influence; if I showed her too plainly I was glad to go to Torribridge, which on the whole I fancied I was, she might cancel the plan without more ado.

So I repeated: "You mean you're going to write to him about my going to live there?"—but this time my voice had a note of mournfulness; Aunt Jael sat up and stared. She failed to see through me, however; could not probe the depths of my cunning, as I the depths of her ill-will.

Grandmother comforted me: ""Twill be a change, my dear. Your Aunt and I think 'twill be a good and useful change for you. Your Aunt Martha will teach you many new things. Don't 'ee be tearful, my child: the Lord will watch over you."

Two days later Uncle Simeon arrived to take me. Pasty faced, white-livered, cringing little wretch, with his honeyed smile and honey-coloured hair. He sniffed as always.

"Good day, dear Miss Vickary. Good morning, dear Mrs. Lee. You too, dear little one. One is well pleased to see all one's kinsfolk looking so well in mind and body, well pleased indeed! One scarce knows how to express oneself. But one can give thanks, ah yes, one can give thanks."

We sat down to dinner. Food punctuated but did not check his flow of eloquence. He got the food on to his fork, but did not lift it. Instead he ducked his head and snatched, tearing the food from the fork as

a wolf warm flesh from a bone. His eyes glistened as Mrs. Cheese placed a steaming mutton-pie before Aunt Jael.

"Your daughter, dear Mrs. Lee? Yes, dear Martha was well, when one left her this morning, and—D. V.—still is. She sends her fond greeting to you both. One took leave of her with a heavy heart, though 'tis only for a day, for one's love is so jealous, one's absences so rare. One took the eleven o'clock railway-train from Torribridge.... There were two ladies in the compartment with one. One was glad, ay glad indeed, to observe that ere the train started, they both whipped out their Bibles. One entered into earnest conversation with them. One was overjoyed, if surprised, to find that, although they were Baptists, they were good Christians."

"There are many such," interposed my Grandmother. "Don't 'ee be narrow, Simeon Greeber."

"Maybe, maybe, dear Mrs. Lee. God gives grace in unlikely places. Be that as it may, however, at Instow both ladies got out, and a gentleman entered the carriage, a man of means from his appearance, one would say. One remembered that he was but a sinner. One remembered the heavenly injunction: In season and out of season. One spoke a quiet word to him as to the Gospel plan. One was polite, if earnest. Alas, the poor sinner answered roughly. The Devil spoke in him. He used an evil word one's modesty forbids one to repeat. But in the Lord's service one must endure much. One suffered, but one forgave. Tonight he will be remembered in one's prayers. One was pained, hurt, wounded, grieved—but angry,—no! Anger is not the sin which doth most easily beset one." (What was? I wondered. Gluttony perhaps, I

thought, as I watched his staccato snatches at a big second helping of the mutton-pie.) "One looked again at the face of the handsome sinner opposite. A voice spoke within one: 'Be not weary in well doing,' but a second effort at godly conversation yielded, alas, no better result. One had done one's duty, and for the rest of the journey one reflected on the different Eternities facing the poor sinner's soul and one's own. The railway train reached Tawborough in the Lord's good time, and here one is, rejoiced to see all one's dear relatives ... rejoiced indeed...."

The moment Mrs. Cheese had cleared away the table-cloth, Aunt Jael was curt: "To business, to business!" And to me, "You're not wanted. Make yourself scarce."

I went upstairs to the spare bedroom, meaning to sit on a settee by the window and daydream away the time. I opened the window. The dining-room downstairs must have been open too, for I could hear Aunt Jael's voice booming away. "Eight shillings" and "Child" I heard. I should never have tried to overhear, but now I found I could hear without trying—by the window here, whither I had come quite by accident. I could not help hearing if I tried —perhaps I had been *led* to the window-seat by the Lord, perhaps it was providential, perhaps I *ought* to listen. Besides, Mrs. Cheese did it: I caught her red-handed listening outside the door one day when Aunt Jael and Grandmother were discussing a rise in her wages. And eavesdropping was not a *sin*. There was no commandment, "Thou shalt not eavesdrop"—Our Lord had never forbidden it—there was nothing in the Word against it. And what harm would be done? As they were discussing my future, I should know soon enough in any case what they decided, so

why not know at once?... No deceivers in the world are so easily deceived as self-deceivers. I leaned right out of the window.

"Agreed then, Simeon Greeber. You will take her for twelve months, treat her as your own boy, and have the same lessons taught her by Martha. And eight shillings a week for the board."

"Eight shillings?" queried a treacly voice, yet pained as well as treacly. "*Eight* shillings?" It is impossible to describe the sweet sad stress he laid on the numeral, or the wealth of poignant sentiment that stress conveyed. Not of greed or graspingness, oh dear no! Rather of pained sorrow at the greed and graspingness of Aunt Jael. "Eight? One fears 'twill be difficult. If it were *nine*, one might hope, one might struggle, one might endeavour—"

"Stuff and nonsense. A child of nine years old, eating little; and your table don't *groan* with good things. Eight is enough and to spare. Not one ha'penny-piece more. Yea or nay?"

A pause, ere Christian meekness gave in to unchristian ultimatum.

"Well then, dear Miss Vickary, one will try, one will hope—"

"Call the child," she cut him short.

I fled from the window guiltily. "Yes, Grandmother, I'm coming," I called back.

Uncle Simeon stayed the night: my last at Tawborough. Grandmother was kind. I did not know how I loved her till I felt I was going to lose her. This was my first big step in life. I was losing my old

moorings, and sailing off to a new world. My mouth was dry, as it is when the heart is sick and apprehensive. Aunt Jael was adamant against my spending even occasional Lord's Days at Tawborough. I was to visit Bear Lawn but once during the year, though 'twas but nine miles away. There was no appeal against this: Aunt Jael had decided it.

Grandmother came to my bedroom. We read the twenty-third psalm together. Then she prayed for me, and we sang an old hymn together. At "Good-night, my dearie" I clung to her more than usual.

"There's only you in the world that really likes me."

"No, my dear, there is your good aunt. And there is God. Don't 'ee say nobody loves you when *He* is there. Don't 'ee think all the time of yourself. Think of making others happy. There'll be your little cousin Albert to befriend. Your Aunt Martha is kind, and will treat you well. That is why I'm letting 'ee go. Your Uncle Simeon too—"

"*He's* not kind," daringly.

"Hush, my dear, don't 'ee say so. He's a godly man, and fears the Lord exceedingly. He will treat you in a Christian way. And God will always be near you. Pray to Him every night, read in His word, sing to Him a joyful song of praise. Never forget that threefold duty and joy. Never forget, my dear. You will promise your Grandmother?"

"Yes, Grandmother, but 'twill be lonely."

"Your mother—my little Rachel—had worse trials than you, please God, will ever know; yet she praised God always. Will you be brave like her?"

"Yes, Grandmother," huskily, and I kissed her twice.

Next day, after an early dinner, we left Bear Lawn. I had a grim godspeed from the old armchair.

"No highty-tighty, no monkey tricks, no stubborn ways. Fear the Lord at all times,"—and a swift formal peck which was not swift enough to conceal perhaps a faint tinge of regret.

* * * * * * *

We left by rail. Uncle Simeon read his Bible the whole way to Torribridge, and never spoke a word. It was only my second journey by railway, and I had enough to interest me in looking out of the window. The country-side was bright with spring. Little did I foresee the different circumstances of my return journey.

I well remember our arrival. There was a tea-supper on the table, so meagre that my heart sank at the outset. There was my Aunt Martha. She seemed like a weak tired edition of my Grandmother. She looked miserable and underfed; I soon came to know that she was both. I regarded Albert, a dull heavy-faced boy with a big mouth and thick lips.

The latter soon opened. "Don't stare, *you*! Father, she's staring at me."

"It's not true. I'm not staring. I was just looking at him."

"Come, there, no answerings back in this house, learn that once for all." There was still a good deal of honey about Uncle Simeon's, still small voice, but it was flavoured with aloes now and other bitter things, whose presence he had kept hidden at Bear Lawn.

The honeyed whine was now very near a snarl, as he showed his shiny white teeth and repeated, "Once for all." The Tawborough mask was being put aside already.

A clock outside struck the hour. I looked at the time-piece, which registered eight o'clock. So did he.

"She knows her bedroom, Martha? Yes. At eight she goes to bed, and eight in the morning we take our humble breakfast. Come now, to bed!"

I was faced with the Good-night difficulty. Albert I ignored, and he me. Aunt Martha was plain sailing. She looked kind, if weak and blurred. We kissed each other listlessly on the cheek. But from Uncle Simeon I shrank instinctively as I came near him. He saw my feelings, I saw he hated me for them, he saw that I felt his hate. That refusal to kiss was a silent declaration of inevitable war.

He took the offensive that very night, as the clock hands showed next morning.

I went upstairs with my candle, and sat down on a chair in the middle of the room. There was an unused smell about everything which seemed to add to my homesickness and sense of lost bearings. Bear Lawn had never been a gay and festive place, but it was home, and here in the dreary room the first-night-away-from-home feeling overcame me badly with all its disconsolate accompaniments of damp eyes and dry throat. The old injustice burned in my heart, the old bitterness came back. Why had I had to leave my Grandmother, the only one in the world who cared for me? Why was there nobody who loved me even more than that, in whose bosom I could hide my face and cry, whose love to me was

wonderful? Why had the Lord left me no Mother who would have loved me best of all? The same old questions reduced me to the same old tears ... I pulled myself together and remembered my three-fold duty: to say my prayers, to read my psalm, to sing my hymn. I decided, with a true Saint's whim, to choose my nightly psalm by opening my Bible at random—I could gauge the whereabouts of the Psalms well enough, if only by the used look on the edge—and reading always the first psalm that caught my eye. Whether the Lord guided me to a choice of His own, or whether it was that my Bible opened naturally at so familiar a place, I do not know: anyway, there before me was the dirty, well-loved, well-thumbed page (page 537 I remember), and in the middle of it, plastered around with affectionate red crayon, stood my favourite 137th Psalm. I read aloud:

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.*

At once the appropriateness of the words came to me. Never had I felt till now what I had been told a hundred times, that the Bible was written for *me*. Here was a psalm which expressed my identical sorrow:

*We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.*
*For there they that carried us away captive required of us*
*a song; and they that wasted as required of us mirth, saying,*
*Sing us one of the songs of Zion.*

*How shall we sing the Lord's song in a*

*strange land?*

I finished the psalm and then tried to sing my hymn as I had promised my Grandmother, but I could not. My heart and my voice failed me: *How could I sing the Lord's song in a strange land?*

I awoke next morning, refreshed, to see the bright sun shining in. I did not know the time, as nobody had called me, and I had no watch. Just as I had finished dressing, a clock outside struck, the same clock as the night before. I counted; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven—on the eighth stroke I went downstairs. I'll be punctual, I said to myself. Uncle Simeon, Aunt Martha and Albert were already at the table. I looked at the timepiece; it marked nearly a quarter after the hour! Yet last evening it had tallied with the chime outside. Aunt Martha and I exchanged a brief matutinal peck; I found it easier, after the first effort the night before, to keep away from Uncle Simeon. "Good morning, Uncle," was all I said.

"Good morning," he replied, with a new touch of spite and venom in his whispering honeyed voice. "Not a good start, young woman. One said eight punctual for breakfast. 'Tis now fourteen minutes past."

"I came down the second the clock outside struck the hour. Last night it was the same time exactly. One of them must have gone wrong all of a sudden, or been altered perhaps."

"Altered? So you hint that this clock has been deliberately changed?" (I never thought of this till he suggested it, but then I knew; his shifty eyes betrayed him.) "One is not used to that sort of hint,

and one has a way of dealing with it, a certain way."

I began my bowl of porridge. Meanwhile Uncle Simeon and Albert were beginning their eggs, and as soon as I had emptied my porringer, I looked around for mine. There was no egg within sight. I waited; none appeared. I plucked up my courage to ask.

"When is my egg coming, Aunt Martha?" There was a dead silence. Aunt Martha went red in the face, and looked uncomfortable. Uncle Simeon broke the silence. He looked hard at me, though never into my eyes.

"When is your egg coming? It is *not* coming. In one's house little girls are not pampered. They do not live on rich, unhealthy foods, nor wear sumptuous apparel. They do not lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches until a late hour, nor eat the lambs out of the flock, nor the calves out of the midst of the stall. They do not live in kings' houses; they live at Number One the Quay, Torribridge; under this Christian, if humble, roof. They eat humble Christian fare, and thank our Lord for it in a humble Christian way. If a fine generous bowl of porridge does not suffice, there is always plenty of good, plain bread. Your Aunt will give you as many crusts as you can wisely eat."

So I was to be starved, and preached at in my starvation! He was going to make sure of his eight shillings' worth. I felt red with anger, but held my tongue, schooled to silence by ten years of Aunt Jael. Aunt Martha looked ashamed of his meanness, but was far too weak to fight it. What will she ever had was stamped out of her on her wedding-day, poor wretch. Albert, dull, greedy little beast, gloated coarsely over my discomfiture, his tongue (all yellow

with egg) hanging out of his mouth. Uncle Simeon tried to disguise his triumph under his usual loathsome mask of meekness, or perhaps he felt that he had gone too far too soon.

"Come, come! One is forgiving, one can be generous, merciful," and handed me the little top of his egg slit off by his breakfast knife.

This was adding insult to injury. Tears of anger stood in my eyes, but I managed to get out a calm "No, thank you," which enabled him to write to my Grandmother, I afterwards found, that "the little one refuses even part of an egg for her breakfast."

After breakfast came prayers. He whined where Aunt Jael thundered. Then came lessons with Albert and Aunt Martha. The former was stupid to a degree; the latter was very interesting to me, after my years of Miss Glory, especially in the French, to which I took at once. Dinner consisted of an interminable grace, three times as long as Grandmother's longest, and a tiny portion of hash. For "afters" there was a roly-poly pudding, quite plain, with no lovely hot jam worked in between the folds. Uncle Simeon and Albert had cold raspberry jam with theirs, out of a jar on the table. Aunt Martha and I did not. Manifestly the womenfolk at Number One the Quay did not live in Kings' houses, if the males did. Uncle Simeon was the King and Albert the King's son. My slice, the nasty dry bit at the end, was not four mouthfuls. He served everything.

After dinner Albert and I were sent out for a walk together.

"Where are we going to?" I asked.

"Where I like," was the reply, in a sulky voice, ruder than he dared use before his father. "And look here you, learn at the start, when you go walks with me you'll do what I tell you. And if you see me doing aught as I choose to, and there's any sneaking—I've got a fist you know."

The little brute lowered. I wondered what the dark things he hinted at might be; pitch-and-toss with boon companions of a like age, I afterwards discovered. Anyway, his hand too was against me: I was a young Hagar. For tea I had a bit of plain bread and a mug of hot milk and water, though Uncle Simeon and Albert had butter and whortleberry jam with their bread, and tea to drink. Afterwards I worked at the morning's lessons, sums and grammar and *je donne, tu donnes, il donne*. Then knitting—grey woollen socks for Brethren missionaries—evening prayers—my own bedside devotions—and bed.

All days were much like the first one, when not worse. It was the most miserable period of my life. Soon the daily round at Bear Lawn became almost cheerful in my memory. I was wretchedly underfed; though I sometimes lost appetite, and could not even eat the scanty fare he allowed me. When I left food on my plate, unlike Aunt Jael he did not force me. Rather he made it a good excuse for saying I had more to eat than I needed. My morning porridge was what I liked best, and one day I said so. "Ah, gluttony!" he cried, and snatched my porringer, pouring off the milk and scraping the brown sugar on to his own plate; "Whosoever lusteth after her victuals, the same is lost. Ah, to make one's belly one's God, 'tis a sin before the Most High!"

A starvation day in the attic was a favourite

punishment, as it combined economy with cruelty. At times I should have fainted away half-famished but for what Aunt Martha privily conveyed me.

Three evil passions, I soon found, held pride of place in Uncle Simeon; meanness, greed and cruelty. Sometimes, if at a meal-time Aunt Martha went into the kitchen for a moment, he would get up with a cat-like speed, scrape all the butter off her slice of bread-and-butter, and spread it on his own piece. Aunt Martha said nothing, to such depths of fear and obedience can women sink; though she flushed the first time she saw that *I* saw this husbandly deed. He was too mean to keep a servant; helped once a week by a charwoman, a tall funereal Exclusive Sister named Miss Woe. Aunt Martha did all the work of a house twice the size of Bear Lawn.

Cruelty came nearest to his heart. He flogged me brutally. The first time the trouble began over a letter, a few days only after I arrived at Torribridge. He came into the dining-room, sniffing spitefully. I knew something was afoot by the look of mean anticipated triumph in his eyes. He held out a letter for my inspection, placing his thumb over the name of the person to whom it was addressed. I could read "1, The Quay, Torribridge"; the handwriting was my Grandmother's.

"'*Tis* a letter from my Grandmother," I cried, "a letter for me."

"A letter from your dear Grannie, true, true; but who said it was for you? Who said that? ha! ha!"

"It is, I know it is. Give it me, please."

Sniffing and sneering, he handed it across. There was

"Miss Mary Lee" true enough; but the envelope had been opened.

"'*Tis* mine then; who opened it?"

"Who opened it? One who will open every letter that comes if one chooses, in accordance with your dear Great-Aunt's wishes."

"It's not true. I'm ten years old. Can't I open my own letters from my own Grandmother? She's my only friend in the world. It's not true."

"Have a care what you say, young miss, have a care. There is another little friend for you in the drawing-room. You shall be introduced at once."

I followed him upstairs, rabbit-like, not knowing what to expect. He locked the door. "Here is the Little Friend," he said, fetching from a corner a ribbed yellow cane. He gave me a cruel thrashing, clawing my left shoulder and whirling me round and round. The room was enormous; a spacious thrashing place. He hurt me as much as Aunt Jael on a field-day with the ship's rope, but I bawled less; no pain could draw from me the shrieks I knew he longed to hear.

Never more than four or five days passed without his thrashing me. I could review impartially the modes and methods of the two tyrants I knew: Aunt Jael with her stout thorned stick, Uncle Simeon with his lithe ribbed cane. Aunt Jael dealt hard brutal blows, Uncle Simeon sly mean strokes. She hit and banged and bruised. He swished and stung and cut. Hers was the Thud and his the Whirr. Both of them would have been prosecuted nowadays; there was no N.S.P.C.C. then to violate the sacred right of the

individual to maltreat his human chattels. Both Great-Aunt and Uncle always left me bruised, and sometimes-bleeding. Yet of the two I dreaded his canings more; because he seemed so much the viler. Not that the dust of the Torribridge beatings formed as it were a halo round the Tawborough ones, not that Aunt Jael's grim masterpieces were becoming a winsome memory, not that a safe distance lent any enchantment to my mental view of her strong right arm. But with a child's instinctive perspicuity, I felt, though I could not have put my feelings into words, that there was some notion with my Great-Aunt beyond mere brutality; some sense of duty, of loyalty to her own Draconian creed. Her Proverbs counselled her thus. Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying—little she spared for mine;—I found it needed loud houseful of crying for briefest moment of sparing. He that spareth his rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes—then indeed was her love for me exceeding great, out-measuring far the love of Paris for Helen for whose sake terrific war was made and Ilion's plains shook with thunder of armed hosts and Troy town fell, or King Solomon's for his Beloved in the garden of lilies and pomegranates. She thought she was doing her duty.

I knew that Uncle Simeon had no such excuse, and that he was something much worse than Aunt Jael: a coward. He was craven, creeping, caddish. He liked to flog me because I was weak and small and defenceless. His pale face sweated, his eyes lit up with a loathsome triumph, his lips were wet with joy. His cold clammy hands—like wet claws—gripped my shoulder. As evil breeds always evil, his hate bred hate in me: a physical, unhealthy hate I feel to this day, though he is long since gone to his

judgment.

I had no friend, no affection, to protect me from this creature or compensate me for his presence. Aunt Martha, in whom her mother's gentleness ran to feebleness, was sometimes petulant, often kind (if she dared), and always null. With Albert, except on walks, I had little to do. Sometimes he bullied me, or spat or cursed at me, when there was nobody about. At times he was bearable, because too idle to be anything else. I missed my Grandmother terribly, whom I saw through this dark atmosphere as a very angel of kindness.

Life was even now more monotonous than at Bear Lawn, except for the daily walks: there were no changes, no variety, no visitors. Once indeed Mr. Nicodemus Shufflebottom, who had been ministering on Lord's Day to the Torribridge Exclusive Saints, and had missed the last conveyance back to Tawborough, was reluctantly put up for the night by Uncle Simeon. The ill-concealed tortures the latter endured at beholding the egg and bacon Aunt Martha had the temerity to put before Mr. Nicodemus for his breakfast, was a delight that stands fresh in my memory today.

On Sundays the week's monotony was hardly broken by the Meeting, a dull funereal affair, with none of the godly enthusiasm of our Great Meeting. Some ten dull or consumptive-looking creatures attended. Uncle Simeon was the one High Priest: he did fifty per cent of the praying, seventy-five per cent of the exposition, chose and called out almost all the hymns, and always took and "apportioned" the offertory. Nobody else counted for anything. I can just recall one Brother Atonement Gelder, who

sniffled richly throughout the service in away that reminded me of oysters. I see, vaguely, a Brother Berry; and, more vaguely, a Brother Smith. They are shadows; the Meeting never filled a place in my life as at Tawborough. I remember more clearly Uncle Simeon's long sticky half-whispered supplications to the Lord, and one particular hymn we droned out every Lord's Day:

*Come to the ark! come to the ark!*
Oh come, oh come away!
The pestilence walks forth by night
The arrow flies by day.

*Come to the ark!* the waters rise,
The seas their billows rear:
While darkness gathers o'er the skies
Behold a refuge near.

*Come to the ark!* all—all that weep
Beneath the sense of sin;
Without, deep calleth unto deep,
But all is peace within.

*Come to the ark!* ere yet the flood
Your lingering steps oppose!
Come, for the door which open stood,
Is now about to close.

Most of the hymns were in the old London Hymn Book we used at Tawborough, so I could join in the singing from the very first. It pained me to hear the thin peevish rendering the Torribridge Exclusives gave of *He sitteth o'er the water-floods*, or their pale piping of Brother Briggs' stentorian favourite *I hear the Accuser Roar*. Aunt Martha and I squeaked feebly, Brother Atonement Gelder sniffled in tune, and Uncle

Simeon whispered the words to himself with his eye in godly thankfulness turned heavenward. We stood up for the hymns; it is the only Meeting—but one—at which I have known this done. We worshipped in a dark stuffy little room behind a baker's shop. Aunt Martha scarcely spoke to the other Saints or they to her.

My one idea was to get back to Bear Lawn. Aunt Jael said I was to live here for at least one year, and for three if it proved satisfactory—satisfactory to her. I was to have one holiday in Tawborough each year; but not till the first year was out. Grandmother had said she would come over sometimes; I knew that Uncle Simeon was not eager to have her and would find excuses for delaying her visits. Could I abide it for a year? Fear and ill-usage and hunger were worrying me into a state of all-the-time nervousness and wretchedness beyond what I had ever experienced. How could I tell Grandmother this, and how much I wanted to come back to her? He read all my letters, and I knew she would disapprove if I tried to write without his knowing. What should I do? Counting the days and crossing them off each night on the wall-almanac in my bedroom might help to make them pass more quickly.

After all Aunt Jael was no magnet drawing me back to Tawborough. If life was worse here with him, it was bad enough there with her. Life was a wretched business altogether. Still, Uncle Simeon was worse than Aunt Jael, and if the walks and fresh air I got here compensated for the better food at Bear Lawn, my Grandmother weighed down the balance overwhelmingly in favour of the latter. I *must* get back. But how? I was ignorant and inexperienced beyond belief. I first thought of just leaving the

house one day, and running back to Tawborough. I could manage the nine miles from one door to the other,—but the doors! I already felt Uncle Simeon's claws dragging me in as I sought to cross his threshold, and Aunt Jael's heavy hand on my shoulder at the other end if ever I should reach it. If I dared to run away, even if not sent back to worse days here, I could see a bad time of punishment and wrath ahead at Bear Lawn. It would be jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire, bandying myself between the thorned stick and the ribbed cane, escaping from unhappiness to unhappiness. It was hell here, and near it there—hell everywhere. If my face was as disagreeable as my heart was bitter and wretched, I must have looked a dismal little fright. Albert assured me that I did.

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## CHAPTER XIV: I BECOME CURIOUS

Uncle Simeon did not improve on closer acquaintance; nor on closer reflection did my chance of foregoing that acquaintance improve. Just as he abandoned all pretence of being kind and affable, so I began to abandon all hope of getting back to Tawborough for the present. How could I escape him? gave place to: How could I harm him?

I soon came to see that he was in constant fear of something. Slight sounds and movements would make him start. Sometimes when we were talking he

would slink away suddenly as though to reassure himself that all was well in some other part of the house. Could I somehow expose him, triumph over him?

In those days Torribridge Quay, though much decayed, was far livelier than it is today; the river-side was dark with masts, and you could still see the serried line of brown sails: trading ships that plied the routes to the Indies and the two Americas. Number One was a substantial square-looking house hard by the bridge. It was dark, darker even than No. 8 Bear Lawn and very much bigger. The house had belonged to Uncle Simeon's brother, and came to him when the brother died. On the ground floor were three big living rooms—in only one of which we lived. The first floor contained a gloomy sort of drawing-room of enormous dimensions, known to me as the thrashing-room, and five bedrooms. Three of these were large, one being occupied by Uncle Simeon and Aunt Martha, and the other two permanently untenanted. Two smaller bedrooms were used respectively by Albert and myself. Two narrow staircases led to the garrets, the front one to "my" attic (I call it such because I was locked therein not less than three times a week), a small bare apartment with one window, so high in the wall that I could barely see out of it even when standing on tip-toe; the back one to Uncle Simeon's "study." Here he concocted potions if any of us were ill, and here for long hours at a stretch he studied the Word of God. Sometimes he spent whole days there, descending only for meals. This back staircase to the second storey was from the first forbidden to me, forbidden in so marked and threatening a manner as to arouse my curiosity. It was on my second or third day that he found me loitering about near the foot of

it. He came upon me suddenly in his carpet-slipper way. I started. He started too.

"*If* one were to find you where one forbids you to go"—he looked expressively up the narrow staircase —"*if*—well, one thinks it would be better not."

His words had, of course, the opposite effect to that he intended. I determined to risk a rush up this staircase. There were difficulties. I was never alone in the house, and the creaky uncarpeted floor would be sure to give me away. My strong impulse towards obedience, whether the fruits of a nine-year-long régime of thorned stick, or of natural instinct, or both, also counselled leaving well alone. Again, fear was a deterrent, especially when I found that he was watching me; though this stimulated curiosity as well as fear. For some days the battle, Curiosity versus Fear, raged within me: a passion of curiosity as to the mystery of the forbidden room, a lively sense of what Uncle Simeon's mood and methods would be like if he caught me there.

One day I plucked up courage for an attempt. I took off my shoes and tip-toed upstairs. The old stairs creaked villainously. To every creak corresponded a twinge of fear in my heart; I waited each time to see if anything had been heard. At last I reached the top in safety. The key was in the lock inside the door, so I could see nothing. It was some seconds before I realized the fact that the key was inside proved that Uncle Simeon was probably there! For a moment I stood petrified with fear. As he did not seem to have heard me, however, a swift descent was my best policy.

It was some days before I recovered enough spirit to make a second attempt: one afternoon, after tea,

when Uncle Simeon was out. This time there was no key in the door, but it was too dark to see much. All I could make out was a big square box, painted dark green, straight ahead of the key-hole—a safe, though I did not know it—and, by peering up, a dark thing which looked like a big hole in the top of the wall. This was disappointing; next day I seized an opportunity of going up earlier. I could see the big green box quite clearly, and could confirm my idea that the black thing was a large square hole in the wall. There was nothing more to be seen, and I returned for a cautious descent. But my feet refused to move.

There at the foot of the narrow staircase was the white leering face. I was caught, without escape or excuse.

I stood still with fright, waiting for him to say something, to come up to the little landing on which I stood, to touch me, maul me, strike me. He slunk up the stairs. While he came along, smiling, smiling, I stood numbed and helpless. We were the cowering hypnotized rabbit and the sure triumphant serpent. But no, as he came nearer I saw that his face bespoke anything but triumph. There was the same fear and anxiety I had noticed on the first day, and in addition a queerer look I seemed to remember in some more poignant though less definite way. That half-hunted half-hunter look, sneer of triumph distorted by fear, what was it? What string of my memory did it touch? As he reached the top I saw he was sweating with fright, and his fear assuaged mine. I was by now excited rather than frightened, and puzzled even more. He peered into my face. It was an unpleasant moment, quite alone with him on that tiny lonely landing at the top of the house. I feared I

did not know what. He clawed my shoulder.

"Trapped, young miss, trapped. One will bear with much, but with disobedience never" (a sniff). "If this should happen again,—but ha! ha! one has something, something very sure, that will prevent that. Something that stings and cuts and curls, ha! ha! Something worse than one's poor mere cane."

"What?" I said faintly.

"A whip," he whispered. As my fear grew, so his lessened. Then the queer unremembered look came to his face again, and he changed his tone completely. His grasp of my shoulder was transformed from a menace into a coax.

"Well, well, we will say no more about it, we will say no more about. *We*," he repeated meaningly. (With anybody else I should not have noticed the word, which fell strangely from his lips. "*One* will say no more," was his natural phrase.) "If you hold your tongue and don't tell your Aunt Martha I found you here—there'll be no flogging." It was a tacit pact. He descended the staircase, and I followed him.

I thought perhaps I might learn something by pumping Albert.

"What is there in your father's study?" I asked him casually on a walk.

"Oh, some old bottles and books; nothing much, father lets me go in sometimes, but there's nothing special to see."

This was a genuinely casual reply. It puzzled me. If the room was so mysterious, why did Uncle Simeon take Albert there, yet forbid me entrance with such

obvious fear? "He thinks I'm sharper," I flattered myself. This was true, but it explained very little. My curiosity grew. I rehearsed every detail: the green box, the hole in the wall, Uncle Simeon's original veto, and his extreme fear the day he caught me.

And that look? Where had I seen it? I racked my brains without success. Then one night in bed, with a mad suddenness it flashed into my mind as these things do. It was the self-same look I had noticed at Bear Lawn on Aunt Jael's seventieth birthday when we were talking about his brother and how he died and I had said artlessly: "Perhaps it was Poison?" The expression on his face that day was the same as when he clutched me on the staircase.

The dead brother was part of the same mystery as the attic.

Wild ideas coursed through my head. The so-called study was one vast poison-den. The dead brother's skeleton was lying there, the bones were strewn about the floor. Or he had been pushed through the strange black hole in the wall—where did that hole lead to? or his body had been squashed into the green box.

I resolved to raise the poison topic in front of him, and to watch the effect. I would mention it as though quite by accident, and look as artless as I could. Necessity which sharpens all things, had equipped me with a special cunning to achieve the chief aim of my existence: the smallest possible number of beatings. But all my cunning never reduced the least little bit in the world my extreme timidity. Thus while I was quite equal to preparing beforehand a seemingly offhand question for Uncle Simeon as to Poison, I quailed at the thought of actually putting it.

I simply dared not talk to him direct, nor should I be able to look at him so closely if I did. I decided to introduce the topic to Aunt Martha one day when he should also be present. Should I begin talking about the dead brother, or more specifically about poisoning? The latter was more difficult to introduce, but a more crucial test. How could I begin a conversation about poison? I prepared a hundred openings, none of which seemed natural. As usual the opportunity came unexpectedly. Thanks to my scheming I was not quite unprepared.

One evening Uncle Simeon was sitting at the dining-room table reading the Word, while Aunt Martha was discoursing to me on God's Plan of Salvation, exhorting me to repentance while it was not yet too late. "Ah, how great is the likelihood of hell for every one of us! For you, my child, it is woefully great. You, who have been brought up in the glory of the Light, who have communed from your earliest days with the Saints—"

"The Saints, my dear?" sniffed Uncle Simeon, "one would hardly say *the* Saints. To be sure there are many true and earnest believers like your dear mother and dear Miss Vickary amongst them; yet the Open Brethren are for the most part but weak vessels. Only we of the Inner Flock are truly entitled to be called *the* Brethren, *the* Saints. But proceed, my dear."

"Well, my dear, though your uncle is of course right, none will deny that you have had more light shed upon your path than many poor little children. Think of the little black children out in Africa and India, think even of the little ones in England who have Methodist or Churchgoing or Romanish fathers and

mothers. Unless you are saved, what will you do if the Lord takes you suddenly? Are you ready to face Him? Are you ready to die? There are many, you know, whom the Lord calls away very, very suddenly. Today they are, tomorrow they are not. One moment healthy and strong, the next white and stark. The Lord takes them in an instant—"

"Like Uncle Simeon's brother," I broke in. "Didn't the Lord take him very suddenly?"

I managed to keep my voice steady and to watch him while pretending I was not. He tried to pretend he was not watching me. Whether I betrayed my excitement I do not know. *He* was certainly uneasy.

"Yes, my child, the Lord took him in a moment. It was never known of what disease he went." She spoke in her usual lifeless way. She suspected nothing.

"Perhaps his heart?" I said learnedly. It was a favourite ailment of Miss Salvation Clinker's; 'er 'eart. "Or perhaps he had eaten something that was not good for him, too much laver or some mussels or periwinkles, maybe?" Here again my dietetic insight was based on Miss Salvation's lore. I was killing time while I summoned up courage for the crucial word —"or—or—took something that poisoned him?"

The word was out and it had gone home. He did not scold me as he ordinarily would have done for talking so much. I saw him looking sickly and frightened by the glare of the lamp by which he was pretending to read. Then he got up hurriedly and left the room.

I began to rack my brains for some more ordinary

remarks to cover my retreat. Aunt Martha saved me the trouble. "Poison," she said, "nonsense, most likely heart failure."

"Yes," I replied, "Miss Salvation Clinker says all sudden deaths come from heart failure."

"All sudden deaths come because the Lord calls," she corrected. "The Lord called him, that was all. If He calls *you*, be ready."

What I had so far discovered came to this: first, that talk of his brother's death brought a queer look to Uncle Simeon's face; second, that if you spoke of poison there was the same look; third, that it was one and the same with the expression on his face the day he caught me outside his study door. In my heart I had already charged him with the worst of all crimes. I was determined by hook or crook to get into that study; to solve that mystery, which had the shadow of death—and of Uncle Simeon—upon it.

This was about the end of August 1859. Then for a few weeks a happier interest came into my life. But here again the shadow of Uncle Simeon interposed, and darkened the happy dream.

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## CHAPTER XV: WESTWARD HO!

Uncle Simeon did not allow me to go for walks

alone. Albert, however, who was my usual companion, got into the habit of leaving me as soon as we were away from the Quay, with a curt intimation to clear off in another direction and to meet him later at a given place and time so that we might return to the house together.

One fine day in early Autumn, I climbed to the top of one of the hills that looks down on Torribridge: a picture made up of white houses, shining river, old bridge, green bosomy hills sloping down to the stream, and over them all the sun. The scene was pleasing, yet it meant very little to me. There was the sun in my blood, and a young creature's delight in the fine bright day, and in the feeling of space and power that you may feel in high clear places; no more than that. There was no conscious enjoyment of the loveliness beneath me. The joy that beautiful scenery can give to the soul I did not know. Children, like animals, do not feel it. This emotion comes from books, pictures and art generally. As to romantic little boys who draw, or say they draw, their deepest emotions from Nature's well—if so, it must be because they are learned little boys who, taught by the magical words of fine books that Nature is beautiful, have turned to her to find it true.

> The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy
> wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then
> to me
> An appetite; a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, nor any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye ... a sense

sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all
thought,
And rolls through all things.

Wordsworth (that lost soul) felt those things and described them in authentic terms. He could do this because he was not an ordinary, but a very extraordinary, child of the mountains. How many shepherd boys sallying forth at dawn with their flocks up the Stye or along the Little Langdale are haunted "like a passion" by the natural beauties they see? They do not share the poet's emotions because they know nothing of the lovely words and pictures and ideas that can invest poor Nature with romance.

In any case, I was neither a romantic nor a learned little boy, but a very ignorant and unromantic little girl. It was only when I became suddenly a little less ignorant of books, history and ideas, that I came to see—where before there was at most a vague unconscious sense of pleasure—that Torribridge town seen from the hills was a fair prospect.

This is how it happened.

I was leaning on a stile, idly looking down towards the far-away bridge and trying to count the arches.

"Fine!" said a quiet voice behind me.

I started, turned round, and beheld a stranger looking down at me. He was a tall young man of

perhaps twenty; his face pale and rather thin. His eyes peered. A proud mouth contrasted with earnest eyes. He wore breeches and carried a gun. Half squire, half scholar; something of the studious, the aristocratic and sporting all combined. All I was sure of just then was a pair of kind brown eyes which I immediately and favourably contrasted with the steel-blue glitter of Uncle Simeon's, and something exquisite and somehow superior to myself in their owner. I had an unerring instinct of class inferiority: I knew my betters.

"Fine, isn't it?" repeated the Stranger.

"Ye-es," I said. I thought him a bit silly, and felt sillier myself.

"It's a fine sight," he said, leaning against the stile by my side. "Isn't it, little girl? Come, say Yes."

The enthusiasm I failed to understand made me combative. "What's the good of it?" I said tartly. "It hasn't a soul."

The Stranger stared. He was surprised—or amused—I was not sure which.

"Hasn't a soul! This little town that has nestled there for a thousand years, from the days when the Vikings first sailed up the Torridge till the days when the New World was found, when ships sailed forth to the Indies from that quay there and came back laden with gold and wonderful spices? This little town we're looking at now that sent many ships to the Armada and hundreds more to harry the Spaniards on all the seas? Hasn't a soul, little girl! Are you sure?"

"I didn't know all that; I have never heard of all those things and people. There's Robinson Crewjoe, who sailed away to the Indies and lived on an island, that Aunt Jael wouldn't let Mrs. Cheese finish telling me about. Did he sail from here?"

"I'm not sure, but plenty of people like him did."

"And what's the Vikings and the Great Armada? I've heard of the Great Leviathan. Is that the same?"

"Not quite. Most little girls have heard of these things. It's very strange you know nothing about them. Don't you go to school?"

"I did when I lived in Tawborough with my Grandmother and Aunt Jael: I went to Miss Glory Clinker's. But now I'm in Torribridge I do lessons at home with Aunt Martha."

"Well, hasn't either the lady with the peculiar name or your aunt ever taught you any history?"

"History? All about Saul and David and Solomon and Ahab?"

"Yes, but there's other history; the history of Torribridge for instance, and of England; the History of the Armada we have just been talking about."

"Why: did *you* learn about those things at school?"

"Yes. I do still."

"But you don't go to school still?"

"I do."

"But you're grown up."

"Well, I go to a school for grown-ups, don't you see?"

"I've never heard of one. Where is it?"

"In an old city a long way from here called Oxford."

"Oxford! Why I've heard of some one who's there. Do you know Lord Tawborough?"

The Stranger started.

"I do—well; very well. What do *you* know about him?"

"I know he was there at Oxford, that's all; I heard my Grandmother say so. What's he like?"

"That's rather a hard question, young woman."

"Well, is he like you?"

The Stranger smiled.

"Something like me perhaps; about the same age."

"Does he know about the Armada and all these wonderful things you've told me about?"

"Yes, I expect so, I expect he does, and"—he switched away from Lord Tawborough—"you must learn about them too. You shall read about them in a book I'm going to give you."

"A book? What do you mean? My Grandmother would not let me read any book but the Word, nor would Uncle Simeon. Torribridge doesn't come into the Bible, nor do the Vikings nor the Armada, because I've read it all through five times and I would remember the names."

He smiled; it was a kind smile, yet quizzical. I liked him, but was not quite sure of him. I went on a little

less confidingly.

"All other books except the Bible are full of lies. Aunt Jael says so."

This was final. How loyally I quoted Aunt Jael! Sure weapon with which to combat error. I knew I was a little boorish; perhaps I meant to be.

"Well," said the Stranger, "your Grandmother and Uncle Simeon would let you read this book, I know, and as it's all quite true, Aunt Jael won't mind either. We will go down into the town and buy it."

I was proud of his company, proud of his voice, his face, his breeches, his gun, which conferred distinction upon me. I apprehended that there was something odd or special about me that amused him. He liked me and I liked him. He was from a kinder handsomer world than mine. His face was a new treasure in my heart.

I refused to go into the book-shop with him, partly through fear of being seen by Uncle Simeon, partly as a concession to Conscience. If I was going to read a worldly book at least I would not go into the evil place where it was sold. He came out and thrust a parcel into my hand. "Good-bye. Meet me on the hill some other day and tell me if you are still quite sure."

"Thank you, Sir. Sure of what?"

"That Torribridge hasn't a soul!"

I stuffed the book into my blouse and rushed to the meeting-place Albert had fixed. I was half an hour late and he swore at me. When we got home, I put the parcel still unwrapped under the mattress. This

was a safe place, as I made my own bed; I must wait to begin reading till the morning. If I were to begin tonight Uncle Simeon would see the light under the door and come in to complain of the waste of candles. So I resolved to wake early.

Next morning I woke at five o'clock and undid my parcel. The book was a dark red one. On the cover was printed in gold letters "WESTWARD HO!" It was as big as an average Bible, but not so thick. The moment I opened it, I was struck by the scent of the new pages. All smells are indescribable, though smell aids the memory and quickens the imagination as much as any other sense. To this day, it is by digging my nose between those pages that I can best recall the sentiment of forty years ago: the pleasure of talking with the Stranger, the first wild rapture of reading.

I began to read. Here was Torribridge, a place I knew and lived in, described in print. I had read no other book but the Bible, which was so familiar as to have become part of myself, part of my life, something more than any book. Then, too, its glamour was of far-away folk and lands, holy places and holy people. The fact that now for the first time I saw printed words about seen and homely places—that I read of Torridge instead of Jordan, of Torribridge instead of Nineveh, of little oak ships that sailed from Tawborough Bay instead of great arks of cedar wood that went forth from Tyre and Sidon—gave me a new and exciting sensation very hard to describe. In the degree that the little Devonshire town was less sacred than the Holy City of Mount Zion, so it seemed to my eager eyes more wonderful to read about.

"All who have travelled through the delicious scenery of North Devon, must needs know the little white town of Torribridge, which slopes upwards from its broad tide-river paved with yellow sands, and many-arched old bridge where salmon wait for autumn floods, towards the pleasant upland on the west. Above the town the hills close in, cushioned with deep oak woods, through which juts here and there a crag of fern-fringed slate; below they lower, and open more and more in softly-rounded knolls, and fertile squares of red and green, till they sink into the wide expanse of hazy flats, rich salt marshes, and rolling sand-hills, where Torridge joins her sister Taw, and both together flow quickly toward the broad surges of the bar, and the everlasting thunder of the long Atlantic swell. Pleasantly the old town stands there, beneath its soft Italian sky, fanned day and night by the fresh ocean breeze which forbids alike the keen winter frosts, and the fierce thunder heats of the midland; and pleasantly it has stood there for now, perhaps, eight hundred years since the first Grenville cousin of the Conqueror, returning from the conquest of South Wales, drew round him trusty Saxon serfs, and free Norse rovers with their golden curls, and dark Silurian Britons from the Swansea shore...."

That afternoon I climbed the hill again, and saw for the first time something of the romance of the little white town; the bright roofs, the line of masts and great brown sails in the harbour, the old bridge, the yellow sands, the fields green golden or red with pasture harvest or loam, the dark velvet forests, deep blue sky and quiet silver river. I could imagine now the fierce Atlantic not far away, to which the gentle stream was flowing. I saw that it was beautiful, in the same way that the lilies and roses in Solomon's

Song are beautiful; or Heaven in Revelation, the city of jasper and pure gold, that has set in its midst the great white throne. This change was wrought by a book. My Grandmother's oft-repeated words that the salvation of God could only have been revealed in the Book came into my mind.

When I came to the story proper of men who sailed

> *Westward Ho! with a rumbelow,*
> *And hurra for the Spanish Main O!*

I was enthralled. The idea of a story, of a narrative of doings that never took place, of invented events, had never entered my head. Goldilocks, Rumplestiltskin and Little Red Riding Hood were not of my world. I had never begged "Tell me a story," nor heard the magical antiphone "Once upon a time."

Had Grandmother ever heard of Westward Ho!? Did she know there were books like this; true, yet about familiar places? Surely she must. Would she approve? I doubted for a moment, remembering the picture-book Uncle John had once sent to me, which Aunt Jael destroyed while my Grandmother looked on consenting; but was reassured by the godly sentiments which I found everywhere: by familiar phrases, even on the second page, such as "heathen Roman and Popish tyranny." Were there other books like this? If so, I should like to read them. Were they about the Indies too? A world of ideas possessed me, a new planet had swum into my skies. I read hard, wildly. I woke up at four that I might have a good long read before getting up; I went to my bedroom at odd hours of the day to snatch a few moments' delight.

One day just after dinner Uncle Simeon came in in his usual noiseless cat-like way. I just had time to stuff the book under the mattress and to begin pretending to do my hair. He did not seem to have seen anything.

I began to compare or contrast everything I read with myself or my own experiences. Flogging, for instance,—as practised by Sir Vindex Brimblecombe, whilom servitor of Exeter College, Oxford, and master of the Grammar School of Torribridge. I read with interest that flogging is the "best of all punishments" (I inclined to doubt this), "being not only the shortest" (indeed!) "but also a mere bodily and animal punishment" (why *mere*?), "though for the punisher himself pretty certain to eradicate from all but the noblest spirits every trace of chivalry and tenderness for the weak, as well as all self-control and command of temper." How true! How Aunt Jael's chivalry had waned! How Uncle Simeon's tenderness for the weak had withered and wilted away! Surely this book too was inspired. I enjoyed Amyas' encounter with Sir Vindex Brimblecombe. I loved to read how Sir Vindex jumped up, ferula in hand, and exhorted Amyas to "come hither, sirrah, and be flayed alive"; how the latter "with a serene and cheerful countenance" took up his slate, and brought it down on the skull of Sir Vindex "with so shrewd a blow" that slate and pate cracked on the same instant, and Sir Vindex dropped down upon the floor and "lay for dead." Oh vicarious joy, oh borrowed plumes of valour that I wore for that incident! I shut my eyes and visualized Aunt Jael in the stead of Sir Vindex Brimblecombe. "Minx!" she said (not sirrah), as she advanced upon me "stick in hand," for although I did not know what a ferula was, I felt it was somewhat too light and lissom a description of

thorned stick or ship's rope. How I envied Amyas' "serene and cheerful countenance" and revelled in the crash. I rehearsed the scene also with Uncle Simeon in the villain's part and with an even dearer joy brought down the avenging slate on his honey-coloured coxcomb.

To every character in the book I tried to give a face. Amyas, the hero, was my difficulty; I had met no heroes. Don Guzman I pictured as Uncle Simeon, though statelier and nobler. Mrs. Leigh was naturally Mrs. Lee, my Grandmother; in name and character alike. Salvation Yeo I pictured as Brother Brawn, Frank Leigh,—tall, pale and distinguished—was of course the Stranger. I did not care very much for the Rose of Torridge herself, and had little interest in any of the ladies' doings. Theirs was a secondary part. They did not do things themselves; they stayed at home in Torribridge to think about and wait for and be loved by the men who did the valiant deeds. Love affairs, so-called, failed to interest me at all, though the passionate affection between Mrs. Leigh and her sons made me husky and envious. It never occurred to me to visualize myself as Rose; if I took any part it was Amyas'.

I was much interested in the description of Christmas Day. "It was the blessed Christmas afternoon. The light was fading down; the even-song was done; and the good folks of Torribridge were trooping home in merry groups, the father with his children, the lover with his sweetheart, to cakes and ale, and flap-dragons and mummers' plays, and all the happy sports of Christmas night." Why *blessed* Christmas afternoon, I wondered? Was the word used in Mrs. Cheese's naughty sense or Miss Glory Clinker's noble one? In either case I didn't see how it applied to the

hideous 25th of December at Bear Lawn.

I was pleased with the sound views on Popery, described as frantic, filthy, wily, false, cruel. Papists were skulkers, dogs, slanderers, murderers, devils. To be brought up by Catholics was to be taught the science of villany on the motive of superstition, to learn that "all love was lust" and all goodness foul. A Romanist was not a man, but a thing, a tool, a Jesuit. I did not understand it all, but I approved highly. That bigotry which mars the book in the eyes of fair-minded men was the quality that sealed it with the mark of virtue in my zealot eyes. Critics (I have since learnt) forgive the slanderous religious hate of this book for the sake of the fresh spirit and the fine story: I excused these dangerous delights to my conscience and to my Grandmother's conscience by the author's pious attitude towards Rome and error. I felt that the book, in spite of the wild pleasure it gave me, must nevertheless be godly, because of the pious plenitude with which it anathematized the Bad Old Man of the Seven Hills, the Scarlet Woman, the Great Whore of Babylon, the Blatant Beast, the great HIM-HER. There was self-deceiving here.

The story was the thing: the most chivalrous adventure of the good ship "Rose"; how they came to Barbados, and found no men therein; how they took the pearls at Margarita; what befell at La Guayra; Spanish Bloodhounds and English Mastiffs; how they took the Communion under the tree at Higuerote; the Inquisition in the Indies; the banks of the Meta; how Amyas was tempted of the devil; how they took the gold train. I lived in a world of gold and silver, ships and swords, Dons and Devils. I saw the great Cordillera covered with gigantic ferns, and the foamless blue Pacific. I caught my breath as I

stumbled on the dim ruins of dead Indian Empires; and I wiped my eyes when I read of Salvation Yeo and his little maid. I liked to read of the Queen of England, of Drake, Raleigh and Sir Richard Grenville, Devon men all, and John Oxenham swaggering along Torribridge Quay. I was interested most of all by Don Guzman, with his sweet sonorous voice, his woman's grace and his golden hair, as of a god. He had been everywhere and seen all. He knew the two Americas, the East Indies and the West, Old Spain, the seven cities of Italy, the twilight-coloured Levant and the multitudinous East....

I skimmed through each chapter quickly, and then read it slowly to drink in every word. Excitement of another kind was added by the difficulties of reading; I had to stop sometimes in the middle of an exciting passage and hide the book hastily away, when I heard Uncle Simeon on the staircase. However, I managed to get three-quarters way through without mishap: as far as the attack on the gold train. Amyas and his men were hiding in the forest. The long awaited Spaniards and their treasure were just in sight. "Suddenly"—my heart beat fast, then stood still at the sound of a stealthy foot-fall. The door opened and Uncle Simeon came in. I had no time to stuff the book under the mattress properly. I leaned against the place where the clothes were ruffled and pretended to be making my bed. This, I thought bitterly, was the only sort of excitement my life afforded: not splendid bravery and adventure in South American forests but mere feeble cunning to save myself from this whey-faced cringing wretch. He smiled blandly.

"Your aunt wants you to go for a walk with her," he said.

He tried to appear unconcerned, but I feared he had seen something. The moment he had gone I hid the book carefully under the mattress, right in the very middle of the bed. When I came back from the walk with Aunt Martha I went straight up to my room. *The book was not there.* My first rage at losing my treasure gave place, upon reflection, to fear. What would he do? At tea he smiled in a sneering way and said "What is worrying you, little one? You are pale." His manner frightened me. The very fact that he said nothing about the matter was unusual and presaged something exceptionally bad. Would he use the whip, or make the worst of it to Aunt Jael and Grandmother? And what had he done with the book? The answer to these questions, though I did not know it till much later, is lying before me as I write. It is written on faded yellow paper, in a neat hand, with old-fashioned pointed characters.

No 1, The Quay,
Torribridge,
Sept. 17th 1858.

Dear Kinswomen and Sisters in the Lord,—

One hopes the fine weather the Lord is sending finds both of you as well in body and mind and as thankful in spirit for our manifold blessings from above as I rejoice to say it finds dear Martha and one's own poor self. Dear little Mary too is well: the happy result of the good air of Torribridge and of the plenteous, if plainly, fare one's table affords. But the little one is not, alas, so thankful

in spirit as her Aunt and oneself could wish. She has just done a deed which displays but poor gratitude, dear sisters, for your loving spiritual training of her early years and for one's own godly, if humble, care. She has, alas, committed a grievous sin; though it pains one to speak thus, one had best speak openly. A grievous sin—one shrinks from writing the words, but there is one's duty to you, to the child, to her aunt and to one's own afflicted self. The facts are these.

Yesterday one found her in her bedchamber—a homely if humble apartment to which one has always trusted her to retire at will—one found her in the act of reading a *vile and worldly book*. She hid it craftily under the bed-clothes when she heard one coming into the room as one chanced to do the other day. One let her see plainly one had detected all, looking at her sadly, as though to say "Ah, if Miss Vickary and dear Mrs. Lee knew what a viper they have nourished in their respective bosoms!", and gave her one more chance to conquer her sin by herself and destroy the noisome thing. But no! "As a dog returneth to his vomit so a fool to his folly" (Prov. xxvi, II—your own favourite Proverbs, dear Miss Vickary)—and yesterday once again found her

flushed with the carnal pleasure of those evil pages. One opened the book, not without a silent prayer that the Lord would cleanse one from its touch. Feeling it one's plain, if painful, duty to see more clearly the nature of the evil thing, one perused a few pages. One found it to be a *licentious novel*, treating of haughty women "with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes" (Isaiah iii, 16), of men who spend their days "in rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness (Romans xiii, 13) and of drunkards, roisterers, sinners and blasphemers. Here and there the writer, who is, one is told, a Church of England minister in this town—so what could one hope?—strives to beguile the unwary by striking a godly attitude towards Rome. Sounding brass and tinkling cymbals—wolfish pretence to lead poor sheep astray. There is even worse than this; foul and wanton language abounds. A bad word on page 74 pained one much.

Nothing has been said to the child yet, awaiting your wishes. One hopes you will not wish her to be punished *too* severely. "Whom the Lord loveth he correcteth!" (Prov. iii, 12). One knows! one knows! Yet forgiveness may do much. One's heart shrinks from blows; nothing but the direst sin ever drives one to

bodily correction. No! One will simply burn the book before her, add a few godly words and read a Psalm together.

Apart from this, the child's spiritual state is not without hope, but she is a tree that needs careful pruning, if she is to take up her cross, as one hopes, in the foreign field. She holds special place in our hearts (dear Martha's and one's own), nor do we cease to pray for her. God has blessed her in the past, and bestowed many gifts and advantages, but one longs to know that she has received better things than this poor world can give, even joy and peace, the result of sin forgiven and the assurance of eternal life by faith in God's Son as revealed in His Word. You will bear with one in speaking thus. One's love for her is great, and one dares to hope, dear Mrs. Lee, that your regard for one's self is considerable too, when you compare one with that other son-in-law, whose evil qualities, alas, seem to be showing in his little daughter despite her Christian environment.

Our Meetings lately have been very helpful. A new sister has been won from Error; formerly a Wesleyan Methodist, a Miss Towl. Am deriving great consolation from a careful study of the prophet Joel.

> Forgive the length of this letter; one would have come to Tawborough had not the Lord's work detained one. Accept Martha's loving greetings and believe me in the Brotherhood of the Lord,
>
> One who is less than the least of all the Saints,
>
> SIMEON GREEBER.
>
> P.S. The poor wayward child refuses to tell *how* she came by the abomination. It was new, so she must have bought it in a shop where such things are sold. Her money should be watched. Little though she is so wisely allowed, would it not be better for one to take charge of it, to ensure that it be not spent in sin?
>
> P.P.S. Hoping that the Lord is granting you both the best of health and strength. Dear little Albert has a slight touch of quinsy, but this is yielding to treatment and prayer.

The flattering creeping hound! His letter describes him better than any words of mine. At the time I knew nothing of it; I was merely uneasy and wondered why nothing was happening.

A few days later, just as we had finished evening prayers, he called me over to the fireside and said, "There's a duty to the Lord, little one, and to your dear Great-Aunt and Grandmother that has to be fulfilled. One has their orders and one's Lord's to

obey." He rummaged in his cupboard and brought forth my dear book. He looked at me, the lowest meanest triumph in his eyes, then flung the book savagely into the midst of the flames. In the fire-light he looked livid with spite. "So shall they burn who go a-whoring after strange gods," he hissed.

How I hated him. Yet for a moment as the dear book burned, I did not think of him. I was wondering how Amyas captured the Gold Train, and if Salvation Yeo found his little maid, and what the Stranger would say if I met him again.

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## CHAPTER XVI: ROBBIE

More than ever I lived in the world of my own imagination.

Every day and a good part of every night—for I rarely fell asleep till one or two o'clock—I was thinking, worrying, brooding, planning, dreaming. I too would sail to the Indies and the lands of hidden gold, gleaning fame which would help me to bear Aunt Jael's taunts with silent scorn, and wealth which I could fling in her face as clanging and triumphant rejoinder to "*I* pay for the child's music." I would succour the oppressed Indians, free the slaves, overthrow the Inquisition, and bring each and all into the Brethren fold; baldly unaware that these things belonged to centuries past. To right the wrong was important; the all-important was that *I* should do

it. But was it possible to a girl? Could even a grown woman do such things? Sailors were always men, shipwrecked mariners were always men, adventurers were always men. Bright deeds were the monopoly of breaches. It was not fair.

I would think of Mrs. Cheese's friend, poor old Robinson Crewjoe. I invented many desert islands of my own on which I was duly shipwrecked, was for ever drawing new maps of them, showing streams, creeks, bays and hills, position of my principal residence, summer bower, landing-spot of savages, position of wreck, etc., etc. I devised walks, expeditions, explorations; I varied my menu with a feminine skill unknown to old Robinson; and always, as befitted our morally-minded race, I would do good in my islands. I would justify my joy by works. I would convert the savages, and build a Meeting Room of clay and wattles. I would raid their Great God Benamuckee in his mountain fastness, burn him with ceremonial state, and thus atone for my own memorable blasphemy. But the chief joy, alas, of my twenty years' sojourning was never so much in what I did as in announcing to the world that I had done it; not in the good I wrought, but in the praise I should earn. Those twenty years of playing the shipwrecked sea-woman must be lit up by the glare of fame with which I should burst upon the world when at last some well-timed passing schooner restored me to the world. Horrible thought: suppose I, died there? It was not, for the moment, the idea of death that chilled me—for He chills everywhere—but the thought of the glory I should lose by dying before my adventures had astonished the world. And the sex trouble again. Would trousers (if I wore them) however masculine, however bifurcative, enable me to build huts, to shoot, fish, hunt and to fight savages

as well as a man? My inability to do these manly things, however, deterred me little in my dreams. The castle-in-the-air-builder may build beyond her bricks.

At this time Uncle Simeon was naturally my most frequent actor. I fashioned a dozen different things I should discover about him and his attic, and a dozen different ways I should discover them. Sweetest of all were visions of revenge. He was a papist in disguise; I had him handed over to a kind of Protestant Holy Office, set up for his own peculiar benefit, of which I was Grand Inquisitress; I was not stingy with my bolts and nuts and prongs and screws; my soul spared not for his crying. A great pitched battle between Aunt Jael and Uncle Simeon was my *pièce de résistance*. Their hatred for each other was the fiery basis of the vision, my hatred for both of them the fuel. He would swish and she would bang. I let both of them be hurt, while I grudged to each of them the joy of hurting. If anybody won the battle it would be Aunt Jael; for my hatred of her was comparatively a mild thing, a healthy human thing, just as she was a healthy, cruel, humanly bad old woman, a mere wild beast in comparison to this Greeber reptile. I preferred a long long struggle of evenly matched sneers, retorts, cuts and blows, which went on hour after hour until both were bleeding, bruised and utterly exhausted: grimmest of drawn battles. Then I would step in as lofty mediator with the blessed aureole of peace-maker about my head, the pain and weakening of both my enemies for reward. (The same dream the Third Napoleon dreamt a few years later with Austria and Prussia in the rôles of Uncle Simeon and Aunt Jael: rudely shattered, was it not, by that swift Sadowa? But the Saviour of Society could not work his dream figures

at will.)

In most of my picturings either I was alone, or dealing with enemies, some of whom, like Eternity, got the better of me, and others, like Uncle Simeon and Aunt Jael, over whom I triumphed. I shared no castle with a friend. A friend! Aunt Martha, Albert, Uncle Simeon?—I saw no one else. No visitor ever came to the house.

I was astonished therefore when the portents announced one. One afternoon I heard a noise of shifting in one of the unoccupied bedrooms. I looked in, and saw all the disarray of cleaning, with Aunt Martha and the charwoman, Miss Woe, getting the room into order. Was it merely an autumn spring-cleaning, or was somebody coming to stay? I peeped in again next morning. There were clean sheets, the bed was turned down, there was water in the ewer. Grandmother or Aunt Jael? No; I heard from Tawborough every week. Prolonged visit of Mr. Nicodemus Shufflebottom? No: it would wring Uncle Simeon's heart to revive the possibility of that nightmare breakfast of egg *and* bacon Aunt Martha had dared to put before him. After the day's walk, I looked in at the bedroom again on my way down to tea. Oh mystery, there was a long black trunk, studded with brass nails and bearing in new white paint the superscription: R.P.G. A small cap and overcoat thrown on the bed revealed the age and sex of the new comer. I went down to the dining-room, and found him seated at the tea-table.

"Master Robert," said Uncle Simeon; introducing us in the honeyed voice he used before you knew him, "this is Mary. You may come forward, little one. This is Master Robert."

Handshake was followed by the furtive silence during which children stare at each other while vainly pretending to look elsewhere. Master Robert being the shyer, pretended more than he stared: I, being even more curious than shy, stared more than I pretended. I saw a healthy boy's face with big brown eyes, a head of chestnut coloured hair and a brown velvet suit, the last very impressive. I guessed he was about my own age, though he was taller and bigger. All through tea I stared at him with merest snatches of polite pretence. This was the first time I had ever sat at the same table with any boy, except Albert. The latter did not appear to share his father's obsequious delight in the new-comer, over whom Uncle Simeon sat fawning.

I know now that he was a handsome little boy, but doubt if I thought so then. If I did, I was too jealous to admit it to myself. I felt I was an odd drab little object by the side of this healthy, well-dressed and superior being, as far above me as I above Susan Durgles. His rich velvet suit, my old grey merino; his laughing, tan-coloured face and brown happy eyes; my pinched white face and cat-green eyes: he was something better and richer and finer and happier than I was, and I did not like him. Little girls, they say, are never never jealous of little boys' good looks, and the only people whose looks they envy are the other little girls with whom they are competing for the favour of the good-looking little boys. It may be so. I was pitiably ignorant of the proper sentiments. My world was divided not into sexes but into two classes divided far more deeply: myself and other people. The second class was mostly cruel and unkind, so every new-comer was suspect. Master Robert's fine poise, his colour, his health, the curve of his mouth, the velvet suit (I could not take my

eyes from it, what wealth, what prestige, it betokened!) were all against him, and more so the favour with which he was regarded by Uncle Simeon. He was shy; I could stare him out easily. I fell to wondering who he was and why he was here.

Robert Grove was the younger brother of Aunt Martha's old pupil (who had died some years back) and the orphan heir to a fine house and estate the other side of Tiverton. Nearly all his relatives were dead except a bachelor uncle, Vivian Grove, Esquire, with whom he lived at the latter's house near Exeter. Uncle Vivian was travelling abroad for a few months and had put Robert here in his absence. Aunt Martha was known to and respected by Mr. Grove as the old governess of his elder nephew, though if he had known the kind of house she lived in now he would have hardly sent Master Robert there with so light a heart. The arrangements must have been made through friends or by correspondence, as Mr. Grove never entered our house and Aunt Martha never went away to see him.

Robert did lessons with Albert and me, and the three of us went our walks together. Uncle Simeon fawned on the new-comer and was by comparison sharper than ever with me; until, seeing that Robert did not like this, he pretended to treat me better. He did not want to offend Robert, who might write to his Uncle Vivian, and ask to be sent somewhere else. To make sure of keeping Robert's board money, he had to curb somewhat his dislike for me. Greed vanquished spite, or rather, while profit was a thing it must be his present endeavour to retain, spite would wait. For greed's sake he fawned sickeningly upon the boy; a few kicks in dark corners and pinches as he passed

me on the stairs sufficed for the present as tribute to spite. Albert and Robert were on bad terms from the start; Albert disliked him as I did, for his better clothes and superior ways, and more bitterly, "for sneaking up to father." Robert despised Albert. Albert tried to win my alliance against him by treating me better. I accepted his advances while knowing their motive and value.

Master Robert and I had not much to say to each other. Despite my jealousy, I could see how much better and kinder-faced he was than Albert, but I could not like him, as he was "in" with Uncle Simeon. The very fact that his face was good made me despise him the more for liking Uncle Simeon; I felt he was a traitor. He could not be "very much of it" or he would show much more plainly than he did what he thought of Uncle Simeon's treatment of me. This I could see upset him, but he was too cowardly to say so. On the other hand, he knew nothing of the sly slaps and dark-corner kicks with which his dear friend favoured me. Jealousy was kept alive by the better treatment he got in the way of food and everything else, which he seemed to take for granted. Yet if the facts of the case were against him, instinct spoke on the other side. I knew that any one whose eyes looked at you in the same kind way as my Grandmother's must, like her, be kind and good. I argued that he was horrid, I felt that he was kind. I was as sure he did not treat me well as I was that I would like it if he did. Once he made friendly advances. I shied off; toady to a toady of Uncle Simeon's? Never! When I had rebuffed him, I began to reproach him with not making further efforts at friendliness. If he really wanted to, he would try again. If I had been a jolly little girl with fine clothes, curly hair and dark bright eyes, he would be trying

all day long. Why were these allurements denied me, why had I no single attractive quality?

Now if ever in all recorded history there was a little girl ignorant of the bare existence of boy and girl sentiment and of all the normal notions that ordinary books, playmates and surroundings give to children, I was that little girl. Yet here at my first contact with a presentable young male of the human species, I was a-sighing for charms to lure him.

This struggle over the pros and cons of Master Robert raged within. We had little to say to each other. Uncle Simeon never left us alone together; watched us and made a careful third when Albert and Aunt Martha were not about. The first time we spoke to each other alone must have been two or three weeks after he came. Aunt and Uncle were both going out.

"Albert," he said, "don't you leave your cousin and Robert alone. Entertain them, you know, while one is out, you—ha ha!—are the master of the house."

As soon as Albert, leaning out of the window, had seen his father safely round the corner, he went out too, for communion I suppose with his unsaved friends.

"No sneaky tricks, mind!" he said to me, and looked the same injunction at Robert.

"Why does he talk like that?" said the latter, as soon as he was gone. We looked at each other. "Do—do you *really* like him?"

The implied tribute flattered me. I flung my new ally to the dogs.

"Not very much," I said.

"At all?"

"No, not at all—really."

"And—Mr. Greeber, do you like him?"

"Do you *think* I do? You know all right. Do *you*?"

"No." He paused. "You don't like it here at all, do you?"

"Why?"

"Because you don't look as though you liked it": awkwardly.

"I know I don't look as though I liked it," I snapped. "I know I don't look anything nice! We can't *all* look lovely. *You* don't look like I do, so what does it matter to you? *You* haven't much to abide. *You* don't get it all day long." Starving for sympathy I pushed it away.

"No—o. I know. But I'm sorry."

"*Why* are you sorry?" I would hold out in the grim fortress of my loneliness, or I would taunt him to say something so plain, to attack so boldly, that he would force me to give in. I was holding out for a more complete surrender.

"Why?"

"Oh well, I don't know, because—I mean—I think—I like you. You are not really like he said you were. I never thought it."

I pounced. "*He* said I was? What about him? What did he say? Tell me."

Aunt Martha came in and cut us short.

That night in bed, in my usual Think I found how much happier I was. I placed him high; excelling Miss Glory Clinker, equalling Brother Briggs and much nicer looking, nearing the Stranger, and falling short of my Grandmother only. That was my complete catalogue of friendly people. Yet why did he never take my part? Why had he not made it clearer to Uncle Simeon that he disliked him as he had told me he did, and disliked him most of all for ill-treating me? Over and above all, how could he sit at meals gorging himself on dainties and look calmly across the table at me with never enough to eat?

Since his arrival food had improved, but not for me. The contrast was the more marked. At breakfast for instance, Robert began with porridge, of course with sugar and milk, then he had an egg, usually poached on a piece of buttered toast; or a rasher of bacon with lovely bread fried in the fat, and laver; or perhaps mackerel done in butter. Then he had as many slices of bread and butter as he wanted, spread with some of Aunt Martha's home-made jam, whortleberry, raspberry or black currant (by what he was allowed to eat I gauged the mighty sum Uncle Vivian must be paying for board: I had no idea of money values but the sum must be vast, infinite). Uncle Simeon had much the same, less the jam. Albert was not only docked the jam, but his egg was merely boiled instead of poached and served on toast, or if it were bacon he had no laver and a much smaller piece of bread fried in the fat. There was a heavy drop to Aunt Martha, who had porridge, and bread and butter with jam. I came last of all with porridge and jamless bread and butter; very often not even the latter because of punishments or "mortifyings." Note the careful grading. Robert got the most: there was a purse behind him. Uncle

Simeon's lavishness here was dictated by meanness: "If I feed the boy well, he stays; if he stays he pays." For himself he was torn as always between meanness and greed. He compromised shrewdly by foregoing his jam, which he did not care for overmuch. Meanness alone governed Albert's ration, so the King's son got less than the King. Aunt Martha received what her husband chose to allow her, as a good wife should. Spite as well as meanness apportioned to me, Hagar, least of all; though if my bigger portion of porridge were counted against her jam, Aunt Martha really fared no better than I did; and thin and pale she looked. Robert riled me most. It was natural for Uncle Simeon to be mean, greedy, vile. In Robert I felt it was wrong; like Methodies, *he knew better*. Kind brown eyes were all very well, but a poor set-off to a greedy little belly. One morning therefore when in the middle of breakfast, just as he was beginning his poached egg, Robert said he felt sick, I neither felt sorry nor pretended to. Justice at last! I hoped he would be very, *very* sick. Uncle Simeon followed him out, fawning.

"Look here child, eat this," said Aunt Martha passing me Robert's poached egg, "'twill do you good." Kindly but fearfully: her usual struggle. She declined to share it with me, so I accepted. I was just munching the last delicious yellow mouthful, when Robert came back, looking still pale, but better. He saw what had happened, and flushed crimson. He saw what I thought of him and flushed deeper.

That afternoon, when I was in my bedroom putting on my hat, there was a timid knocking. He walked in. I hardened my heart.

"I'm sorry about breakfast, Mary," he faltered. I knew

his heart was beating fast.

"Breakfast? What do you mean, *Master* Robert?"

"You know. The egg. I'm sorry—"

"Of course you are. Sorry I ate it."

He flushed. I developed a meticulous interest in a pincushion.

"No; sorry to see you eating it so hungrily. You know that's what I meant. Now I know it's all lies when he says eggs are bad for you and that you don't like them and you refuse them when he offers them and that you mustn't eat much of anything. It's all a lie, because he doesn't want you to eat things, because he hates you or because he's mean. I always thought it funny you never had nice things. I asked him three times and he said you were always taking medicine, and the doctor said you must eat very little and always very plain. You must have thought me horrid."

"I did. I'm sorry. Oh, the liar, the mean wretch, he dare tell you all that? Look here, we've begun now, haven't we, so I'm going to tell you what I know of him; everything. First you must answer a question. Do you just not like Uncle, or do you really hate him, hate him like this?" I clenched my fists and ground my teeth together.

"Yes, *now* I do; he's never done anything to me, but I've liked him a bit less every day I've been here. Now I hate him, like you do."

"Well, I'll tell you, he's a mean, cruel, wicked man. He beats and cuffs and pinches me when you're not looking. He canes me till I bleed. He starves me so as

to make as much money as he can out of what my Grandmother pays him. The first morning I came I said No, when he offered me one miserable spoonful of his egg. I've never touched one since, and he's told you all this about my not liking eggs at all. I do take medicine, but it's because I'm ill and don't get enough to eat. He's mean and he hates me, that's why he starves me: one as much as the other. He's nice to you because you're rich and important and have friends and relations. Do they pay a lot of money for you?"

"I don't know."

"They must do or you wouldn't get so much to eat. Oh, the beast, he's always talking as though he was so good and then he starves me and gives me sneakish blows in the dark. He praises the Lord with his lips and he's got the devil in his heart. He flatters with his tongue, but his inward part is very wickedness—"

I stopped short, fancying I heard a noise outside, and looked out into the passage. There he was, skulking as usual, making pretence to rummage in a cupboard just outside the door.

"What are you doing, Uncle?" I asked weakly, very weakly.

"What are *you* doing, one asks."

"I just—opened the door...."

"*Ah*," he said, slipping away.

"Has he heard?" asked Robert fearfully.

"Every word. I don't care. He knows the truth now; he can't treat me worse than he has done. I hate him.

Everything is hateful. All the world is against me always; 'tis all beating and starving and meanness and misery; and nobody loves me. I wish I'd never been born, I do, I do." I broke down and sat on the bed, sobbing bitterly.

"Don't, Mary," huskily, "everybody doesn't hate you, I don't." He sat beside me and put his arm on my shoulder.

That was the beginning of happiness.

I cried more than ever, but they were other tears.

"Don't cry, Mary, don't cry, please. I like you. Tell me you know I do. I'm going to do something, I'm going to help you somehow. I'll never touch another egg unless you do too, and if he stops mine, I'll write to Uncle Vivian and tell him why. I shall ask Uncle Vivian to let me go somewhere else as soon as I can; but you must get away first, you must ask your Grandmother to have you back with her right away. Mary dear, don't cry."

He was on the border line himself. He screwed a dirty little handkerchief into his eyes. The other arm was still on my shoulder. He was crying too. Then I comforted him, and found it a joy greater even than being comforted.

"We must go now," I said, getting up. "Come on, *Master* Robert," smiling; smiling being a thing I achieved perhaps once a year.

"No, and don't say Robert either. Say Robbie. Uncle Vivian and all the people I like call me that."

There were two pairs of red eyes at the tea table that night, and one pair of steel blue ones which observed

them. From that moment, the political situation of No. 1 the Quay was entirely transformed. In the field of domestic economy there was a more striking change still. Next morning, I almost reeled when a boiled egg was set before me, though as the porridge was cut down by nearly half, my Uncle spiced his defeat with triumph. Openly he treated me no worse, though he gave me a savage kick in the hall that night. I knew he was saving up for something dreadful. Once the mood of passion and defiance had passed away, I was more afraid of him than ever. He hated Robbie now, while striving not to show it. Robbie showed his feelings sometimes and was openly surly. The short-lived Albert-Mary *entente* collapsed once for all, shattered by the Mary-Robert alliance.

The new friendship caused a veritable revolution in all my ideas. Now, whenever I was brooding or thinking away in my usual bitter fashion, I would say to myself, "Think of it, quickly, quickly," and I would feel again his hand on my shoulder; he would comfort me and I him. I re-lived it over and over again. It was the first purely happy vision I had ever conjured up. To Robbie it meant much less. I decided he was a nice little boy, kind and decent-hearted; he had been sorry to see me unhappy and he had been glad to comfort me. It was an impulse; not more. He liked me, he *pitied* me, but the whole thing meant very little to him.

One day a letter came from his Uncle Vivian.

He came to me joyfully. "Hurrah! Hurrah! I shall be going away soon. I'm ever so glad."

"In every way?" with a sneer; hungrily.

He flushed crimson, as we do when any one surprises us in thoughtless egotism; when another lays bare to us a selfishness we were too selfish to have seen. Or else it was the cruel injustice of what I said, or both: the good reason and the bad.

"You know I didn't mean that. When I get to Uncle Vivian I'll tell him to write to your Grandmother and tell her all about it and have you taken away. She'd listen to my uncle. But wait, you must get away from here before that. It would be dreadful if you were here alone for a bit between my going and the time you'd be able to get away, if we waited for Uncle Vivian to write—"

"He'd kill me if he dared. Can't you write to Uncle Vivian now, so that he could write to my Grandmother at once? I can't write. Uncle Simeon reads all my letters to her."

"A letter of mine mightn't reach Uncle Vivian. The last time he wrote to me was from Paris in France; he said he was going further south for Christmas, that's somewhere much further away, and said I need not write again as he would be back for the New Year. We're quite near Christmas now, so it's too late. I'll tell you my plan. Now, the day I go away, Mr. Greeber is sure to be at the railway station to see me off. The minute we've left the house you must be dressed and ready to run away and walk back to Tawborough; your Grandmother couldn't be angry if you told her all about him. Then Uncle Vivian will write as soon as I see him, and you won't have been alone with Mr. Greeber in the house for a minute."

"'Tisn't Grandmother, 'tis Aunt Jael. And suppose only Uncle Simeon goes with you to the station to see you off. What about Albert and Aunt Martha?

Besides, he'll make me come too. He'd do it to please you, knowing you'd like it, though out of spite he'd want me not to, because he knows I'd like to. It all depends whether he wants to be nice to you more than to be nasty to me. Nice to you, I think, most of the two, because he can be nasty enough to me the second you're gone."

"You could say you felt sick."

"That's a lie. Besides, that might make him want to make me come all the more, if he thought it would pain me or make me feel worse to come. I don't tell lies, if he does. Unless of course, I *really* felt sick. I could take something and make myself sick, and then 'twould be true. But then Aunt Martha would say she'd stay with me while the rest of you went to the railway station. No, the best thing is to pretend very much I'd like to come, which of course I would, and then he won't let me. You might pretend to quarrel with me the last day; that would help. The real trouble is Aunt Jael; she'd get into a frightful rage and send me back; and when I came back, 'twould be a hundred times worse. He'd kill me."

"You said your Aunt Jael hated Mr. Greeber. If she knew he'd like it, are you sure she'd send you back; when she knew too that you'd run away for fear of your life? I'm sure she wouldn't do that."

"You don't know her. No, my plan is this: to write a letter somehow to Grandmother, who'd talk to Aunt Jael and sort of prepare her for my running away. I'll write it in bed tonight, it's the only place I can where he's not watching me; and we'll post it tomorrow afternoon, sometime on the walk when Albert isn't looking. I'll tell my Grandmother about the canings,

and how he half starves me. Aunt Jael hates him so much that I think there's a chance. Then I needn't run away at all. Grandmother would come to fetch me herself."

The letter was duly written that night. I jumped out of bed and hid it in the bottom of my chest of drawers, in a far corner of the drawer between two white cotton Chemises. It would be safe there till the next afternoon. After dinner next day I came up to put on my hat and to get the letter. I put my hand in the corner underneath the Chemises. The letter was not there! I pulled the top chemise right out. There the letter was after all, but at the other end of the chemise. It had been moved. The garment was only eighteen or twenty inches long, but I remembered perfectly I had put the letter at the outside-end of the drawer and now it was right at the other end of the chemise, near the middle of the drawer. Yet there was my handwriting, there was the envelope: no one had tampered with it. It must be my over-suspicious mind. Aunt Martha had been tidying my clothes, or putting the clean washing away and so had moved the letter without seeing anything.... We posted it that afternoon. In a couple of days came my Grandmother's reply.

The first sentence made my heart sick. "Your uncle writes me—tells me he has destroyed an untruthful letter, full of untruthful complaints that you had written me without his knowledge—how grieved he and your Aunt Martha are—how they do everything to make you happy—your Aunt Jael is grievously annoyed—your loving Grandmother is disappointed —Always come to me, my dear, for help, but don't give way to discontent so easily. Reflect always what your dear mother had to put up with. Take up thy

cross and walk!"

This letter Uncle Simeon never asked to see, but he had had one for himself from my Grandmother by the same post. He said nothing, but looked at me from time to time with malicious triumph, meaning "Revenge is near; it will be sweet. Wait till this fine young friend of yours is out of the way. One has a whip, you remember, ha, ha, one has a whip!"

A few days later Robbie had a letter from his Uncle Vivian announcing his return to England for December 30th and arranging for Robbie to leave Torribridge on New Year's Eve, now only three weeks away.

New Year's Eve then was the day, and though I did eventually fly from Torribridge to Tawborough within a few hours of the time we fixed, it befell very differently from anything we had planned or foreseen.

Heaven was dark; yet the clouds at last had begun to break. For always, eternally, I could re-make the moments that had been, and live and cry and laugh and love it over again.

I pretended his arm was round me each night as I fell asleep.

# CHAPTER XVII: CHRISTMAS NIGHT

"What do you do for Christmas?" asked Robbie a day or two later. "It's only a week tomorrow."

"What do you mean—*do* for Christmas?"

"Why, people coming to stay, and a party perhaps. You know."

"What do you mean? The only party we ever had was on Aunt Jael's seventieth birthday and that's in August."

"It must be different at your house from anywhere else. People have a jolly sort of time, a lot of people in the house and that kind of thing."

"There was something about it in Westward Ho! the book *he* stole from me and burned just before you came. It said something about 'happy sports and mummers' plays,' and cakes and ale and some word like flapdragons. It's what worldly people do, I suppose, and sinners, but not us; I've never heard of it with the Saints."

Robbie was too wise to attack priggery-piety in the open. "I don't know about all that. You do talk funnily; your Grandmother seems to be different from other people. You *must* know all the special things you do at Christmas, all the special things you eat—"

"I don't. What are they?"

"Oh, roast goose and turkey and plum-pudding and mince pies. Then for tea the big Christmas cake,

crammed with raisins and covered with almond paste and icing sugar with crystallized fruit on top and those little green bits like candied peel—not really candied peel, it's some name I forget, anyway it's nice. If you're a little boy you're allowed to stay in the dining-room all the same and eat all the walnuts and dates you want and drink a little port or madeira! What do *you* have for Christmas dinner?"

"Hash," I replied enviously, "and a roly-poly pudding with no jam, or hardly any, for afterwards."

Incredulity seemed to struggle with pity in his mind.

"I'm sorry. It sounds so funny. I didn't know there were people like that. The villagers are just the same. Mrs. Richards down at the Blue Dragon makes the biggest Christmas cake I've ever seen, lovely bluey-looking icing with preserved cherries in it, those big red ones, and almond paste an inch thick. Everywhere it's the great day in the year for feasting."

"Why?" I asked. "Why should Christmas Day be the great day for feasting? It's the day Jesus was born; why should that make people guzzle? A funny way of keeping His birthday, eating and drinking. I know what it is, it's what the Papists do: eat all day. That's it, it's Popish." My voice rose combatively in the good cause of plain and Protestant living, hash and heaven.

Weakly or wisely, he skirted the theological issue. "Don't be silly. Besides it's not only what you eat yourself. At Christmas time you always give a lot away to the poor people. Uncle Vivian gives heaps of logs and firewood and coal all round the village, and

gives geese to the tenants and heaps of other things; giving things away is a good enough way of keeping Christmas, isn't it? There are presents. You get presents, don't you?"

"Never."

Here I was wrong, for on Christmas morning a parcel came addressed to Miss Mary Lee. It was the first I had ever received, except some new winter underclothes Grandma had sent me from Tawborough, and I undid it eagerly. Inside was a box of colours. I found from a little note inside the cover of the box that Great-Uncle John had sent me this in addition to his usual half-sovereign. This made me ponder. I had heard vaguely of his half-sovereign at long intervals of time, but had never thought of it in the light of a Christmas present. I had never seen or touched it; it was "put by" or otherwise dimly dealt with by Grandmother and Aunt Jael.

This box of colours was the finest thing I had yet possessed. No doubt the art of mixing paint was then in its infancy, and this box provided me with but a few of the simplest colours; no doubt a mere half crown box of today is superior both in number of colours and quality of paint. No doubt, but ignorance was bliss; no such odious comparisons came to cloud my joy. I had never seen a paint box before except through a shop window; and now I had one in my own hands and was gloating with all the joy of proprietorship over the twelve little pans before me and the high adventurous names with which each was labelled.

Gamboge, yellow-ochre; cobalt, Prussian blue; green-bice, Hooker's green; carmine, crimson-lake; raw-sienna, burnt-sienna; sepia and ivory black. There

was also a mysterious little tube tucked away in a niche at one end and labelled Chinese white, the contents of which oozed out when pressed, like a white tape-worm. These names were a delight. Carmine: the colour which Brother Quappleworthy painted his sins in discourse. Crimson-lake: which called up a vision of a great sea of Precious Blood with wave-crests of scarlet-foam.

Robbie had several presents: a box of soldiers, a picture book, some sweetmeats and money.

"That's much less than usual," he said, not too kindly. "I expect there's more waiting for me at Uncle Vivian's."

Albert was bare and giftless, for his half sovereign from Great-Uncle John meant no more to him than to me, being instantly put (or not put) into "the bank" by Uncle Simeon. He was naturally jealous, envied Robbie's wealth and luck, cursed his father's meanness in giving him nothing, reviled Uncle John for sending me the paint-box as well as the half sovereign, and to himself no corresponding extra. All this well distributed hostility he could vent on me alone. The means of his vengeance should be my solitary ewe-lamb. He waited his opportunity.

Robbie went out to dinner, invited by some friends of his uncle's. So Uncle Simeon brought a cane in to dinner, lodged it on the edge of the table, and allowed me to taste it now and then. I espied neither goose nor turkey, cakes nor ale, port nor madeira; though there was a much better pudding than usual, a suet one made in a basin with sultanas and citron peel which bore—alas!—an awful and edible likeness to the genuine popish article. After dinner Aunt Martha, who said she had a headache, retired to her

bedroom to lie down, and later on Uncle Simeon went out, his big Bible under one arm and his big umbrella under the other, to expound the former to a bedridden old female Saint he visited twice a week, a second cousin of Brother Atonement Gelder's.

Albert and I were left alone together in the dining-room. It was perhaps not more than three o'clock, but it was a cold, dark day and the room was already dusk. Uncle Simeon was hardly out of the house before Albert came up to the table at which I was just settling down to begin using my treasure, snatched the box away, dipped the biggest brush into my cup of water and began roughly digging it into the pans of colour. Then he splashed water over all the pans and made great wasteful daubs on the palette.

"Don't, Albert," I pleaded, "please don't."

"I shall, I shall—ugh" (his usual grunt), "nothing will happen to me if I do. It's no good your whining, I'm going to spoil it, out of spite! because I want to! Try sneaking to father if you dare. Ha, ha, I know what you told Robert Grove about father, nasty little sneaks and liars both of you. Father's on my side now, so you won't get much by going to him; and if you did I'd bang you afterwards."

He took up the cup and poured water into the box, smearing all the colours together with the brush. The little brute was ruining my treasure before my eyes. Appeal was useless, so I made a deft attempt to snatch. For reply he struck me heavily with his fist over the ear. I screamed out half in pain, half in rage, and made another snatch. This time, throwing the box on to the ground, he struck me on the shoulder with the full force of his fist and sent me flying. I fell

down, half stunned for a moment, when another voice broke into the room.

"You beast, you brute," I heard—and saw Robbie, back sooner than we expected. He slammed the door behind him, went straight across the room to Albert, and tried to seize his arm.

"Here, you leave me alone. She hit me first, when I wanted to use her filthy paint box, and the mean cat said I shouldn't, and started snatching and scratching so I had to push her away."

"Oh, you liar!" I cried.

"Then she banged her paint box on the floor in her rage, and came for me again, then I punched her, and serve her right."

"'Tis all lies, lies, lies."

"Believe her, do you?" sneered Albert, lowering at Robbie, "she's a nice one to believe. Do you know what her father did? I do; ugh, ugh, she's a nice one like he was. Look here, just keep your hands off me."

Albert struck a first blow and the two boys were soon fighting like savages. My head was still aching from the two blows that Albert had given me; I forgot them and everything else in the excitement of the struggle. Blows on head, face and shoulders were exchanged. With every stout one Albert received I exulted; every one of Albert's that hurt Robbie hurt me too. Albert was sturdy and strong and even broader than Robbie; on the whole he was getting the best of it; I felt sick and apprehensive. I prayed fervently to God for Robbie to win, promising lordly penances and impossible virtues in return. I would

give all my life and health to comforting the heathen if Robbie might win. I would be burnt or eaten alive —if Robbie might win. I employed all the magic I knew, and counted frenzied thirty-sevens between each blow—for luck to Robbie. Prayer is not always answered by return, and Albert's right fist now landed a heavy blow on Robbie's left ear, which nearly felled him; he tottered and paled. So did I as I resolved to intervene. I would fight till I fainted—to prevent Robbie being beaten. I clenched my teeth and hovered awkwardly nearer, wondering how to get in my first blow (or scratch)—when Robbie recovered suddenly and crashed with his fist between Albert's eyes. Now it was the latter's turn to stagger. My spirits rose. Now Albert picked himself up again. Both were battered. Robbie had a bleeding ear (to match my own), Albert a black eye and broken nose. The fight went on. Robbie began to get the upper hand; I could see the loser's look on Albert's face. "Robbie will win! Robbie will win!" said Instinct exulting. I thought for a moment of that tame fixture, Susan Durgles versus Seth Baker, when my main emotion was mere pity for Seth: water to the wine of joy now coursing through my veins as I watched Robbie pound Albert more victoriously every moment. Albert was now desperate, came closer, tried to grip Robbie and push him to the ground. For a moment prize fight turned to wrestling bout.

The harmony of a choir, singing carols on the Quay outside, fell suddenly on our ears. It may have been the Parish Church choir, or a glee party from the Wesleyan Chapel: sinners, in any case, as Miss Glory would have said. They were singing a carol with a friendly wave-like tune, merry, yet sad too, as Christmas songs should be: *It came upon the midnight*

*clear*—though I did not know the words. The tune revived the fighting. The boys got free from each other's grip; blows were resumed. The end came at last with a swift, terrific stroke on Albert's shoulder, which knocked him flat. In a second Robbie was kneeling on his body and had pinioned his arms. The victim scowled, the victor showed modest pride, the spectator exulted like a savage.

"There now," said Robbie, "that's what you get for striking a girl. Worse another time. Say you're sorry you hit Mary. Say you were a brute."

Albert scowled, growled, made efforts to get free, failed.

"No good, you'll stay here till you say it; 'I'm sorry I hit Mary and I was a brute.'"

Albert wriggled again, perceived that all endeavours would be fruitless, and surrendered. "Well, then, you great bully. Sorry—hit—Mary—and—was—brute. There you are, now let me go."

"Not until you've made one more promise, 'I'll never hit Mary again.'"

For some reason Albert obeyed with alacrity this time. "I'll never strike Mary again."

Robbie released him, and walked towards the door saying shyly to me: "Come to my bedroom, and help bathe my face; it's awful."

I followed him upstairs. Just as we reached the landing Albert came out and shouted. "Ugh, you nasty beasts. I promised I'd never strike Mary again and I won't—never want to see her ugly face again—but I'll see that father does all right. This very night

too, as soon as ever he comes in. He'll make you cringe and bleed; he'll make the flesh fly. You too, you bully, you overdressed flashy big—"

We went into Robbie's bedroom and stopped to hear no more.

"It's not much good," said Robbie, smiling mournfully, as he washed the blood from his ears and face, "because I shall get hurt much more when Mr. Greeber comes in. That beast downstairs is sure to set him on. I think he would dare to flog me this time, because he'd be able to say to Uncle Vivian that I'd half killed Albert."

"Yes, he'd say 'one felt it one's painful duty after young Master Robert's brutal attack on one's own dear son,' and that you had really hurt Albert. Which you have," I concluded with satisfaction.

"Still, it'll be nothing to what he'll do to *you* if he gets you alone; so you must get away the same day as me; or sooner would be best."

"No, sooner wouldn't do, because then he'd flog *you* worse; he'd be sure to know you'd helped me get away."

"Yes, my first plan is best; while they're at the station seeing me off you must run away to Tawborough or take the coach, because we've enough money for that now. Here's the half-sovereign, my present, you know; the half-crown mightn't be enough and I've nothing in between—"

The door, opening softly, cut him short. Uncle Simeon, very pale and slimy and cat-like—himself at his worst—was followed by Albert, also at his worst,

with an ugly black eye and an uglier leer.

"No, father," he whined, "not one; both. Flog 'em both, father, both of 'em."

Albert's disappointed whine seemed to mean that his father might not dare to touch Robbie. I was glad for Robbie's sake; what my own fate would be I hardly dared to think. I shrank from him into the seat of the window sill. He took a long coil of cord out of his pocket, and came towards—not me—but Robbie. What, would you dare? Was Robbie, after all, the victim, and I, if only for the moment, the one to escape? I must do myself the justice of noting that for once in my life at any rate I was sorry to bear the easier part: I would gladly have chosen to take the beating for Robbie, would bravely have played the Royal Prince's whipping-girl. He bound Robbie with the cord hand and foot to the bedpost, his own bedpost of course; for it all took place in his bedroom, where Uncle Simeon had surprised us. Uncle Simeon went out of the room for a moment, leaving Albert to watch us.

There was two minutes absolute silence. The three children looked at each other. We waited.

He came back, in his right hand the long heralded whip; a kind of cat-o'-nine-tails for domestic use, with five tails only instead of nine; these were made of cord, with three knots each at intervals, and were fastened to a piece of thick rope, which Uncle Simeon wielded. An evil-looking thing.

Robbie did not wince. He would not while I was by. But I lost all control of myself, and, for the first time, burst out openly against Uncle Simeon. I flew up to him, and with fierce feebleness clutched his wrist.

"Don't you dare touch him," I cried, in a treble shriek. "I dare you to whip him. You cruel, horrible man."

"Cruel horrible man," he sneered. "Bah! A fine one you are to call one that; you, your father's daughter every inch of you. Cruel horrible man, forsooth!—Go and call *him* that, your own dear, kind, loving father who drove your dear mother into an early grave and mocked her when she was lying there; a heartless whoremongering beast who spent all the time he spared from stews and brothels in hounding her to death with his cruelties; unfit to untie the shoe of a humble Christian like oneself, frail and sinful though one doubtless is. You're like him, body and soul. Come, loose hold!"

The vile words stung me for a moment, but when he wrenched my hand from his wrist, scratching at it savagely with his nails, I cried with redoubled fury: "Don't you dare to whip him, don't you dare."

"Whip him? Whip him?" he purred with bland enquiry, "Who can be meant by 'him'? Not Master Robert surely? One would not dream of punishing one whose only sin is to be led into evil paths by another. One must tie him up, to be sure, lest he should be led into the evil path of interfering with a certain little duty one owes to one's Lord, one's little son, and one's own poor self. Quick, off with your blouse and skirt!"

He gnashed his teeth. Even at that moment it fascinated me to watch how curiously the muscles under his cheek twitched when he was on cruelty bent. There must be a cruelty muscle.

I stood before him in vest and petticoat, pale and limp with fright, a pitiable, cowering object: the sort

of rabbit the serpent loves. I had felt and seen hard blows that same day; now too Aunt Jael's masterpieces flitted in dour procession through my mind: the rope end, the day I sucked the acid drops, the three blows of the thorned stick after Robinson Crewjoe, the great flogging with the butt end of her stick when I said that Proverbs was the nastiest book in the Bible. These were as nothing to what was coming now. I lifted my eyes and for one second looked into his. I shall never again, please God, see a look so cruel, so craven, so cad-like. There was spite in it, and hate, and fear. Yet his fear was as nothing to mine.

Whip in hand he came towards me to catch hold. There could be no hope. Aunt Martha was not to be seen; in any case what could she have done? Albert was kneeling hopefully on the bed, Robbie's bed, to get a better view of the sport. Robbie was bound hand and foot, looking hate at Uncle Simeon; wretchedness, sympathy and encouragement at me. His lips were tight together so that he should not cry. Here was Simeon Greeber approaching me. He looked like the devil; the idea seized me, he *was* the devil, the Personal Devil himself; now I knew. But here lay hope: through the devil's enemy, the Lord God Almighty. Moved by an insane impulse, I went down on my knees on the bare floor.

"Oh, God," I cried, "save me from him, now, somehow! Save me, and if it be Thy will, strike him dead!"

I was cut rudely short. He clutched my shoulder, his claw striking cold and damp through my vest, and pulled me roughly to my feet.

"My Lord, my Lord, how she blasphemes! One will

avenge it, Lord, one will avenge." He dragged me into the middle of the room.

In that moment a strange thing happened. The sudden sweetness of an old Christmas hymn smote our ears. It was the carollers again: they must have moved up the Quay, for now they were singing just outside the house:

Hark the herald angels si-ing
Glory to the new-born King—

For an instant he was unnerved, but for an instant only, and with

Peace on earth and mercy mi-ild

the first stroke of the whip fell across my back.

The memory comes back to me in nightmare. I see the honey-yellow face ghastly against the growing darkness of the room. I see the coarse little brute gloating on the bed. I see the young prisoner at the bed-post flushed with rage and pity, biting his lips manfully. I hear the voices of the singers out on the Quay mocking me with merry Christmas hymns. To this day I can never hear the opening notes of The Herald Angels without starting back, and living over again for a moment all the horror. For all my fear and bodily agony, I would not cry out. I would not give Robbie the pain nor Uncle Simeon the pleasure. The whip tore my legs and body and back. I bled all over. He thrashed me till I was faint with pain; till he could thrash no longer. Then he kicked me and I fell half-dazed to the ground, where as a final tribute from his humble if Christian person he spat in my face. As I lay I heard vaguely the singers outside. The voices now seemed dreamlike and far-away in their last triumphant unison:

Mild he lays His glory by-y,
Born that man no more may di-ie,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to-o give them second birth.
Hark, the Herald Angels sing,

Glory-y to the new-born-king!

In the following silence I heard his voice, far away too it seemed. "Yes, you'd better go at once; dear Mr. Vivian Fortescue would not have you stay another day to be so corrupted."

I felt another kick. "Come, up with you now to bed."

I rose painfully, but was too weak to stand, and tumbled. Albert guffawed. At last I got up and crept to the door.

"Good night," he smiled. "Bid us good night, if you please. Let there be no malice, no evil rage in your heart, for this little *foretaste* of correction. Let there be no evil spirit of revenge. One harbours none oneself. One forgives, forgives freely. Later on when Master Robert is gone away one may *begin* to think of the just punishment that is due. One must not shrink, grievously though it pains one. It is the Lord's will, and His will be done. One forgives you, my child, forgives you freely, despite all the wickedness and trouble you have brought into the house. One forgives, yet one must punish."

I crawled upstairs to my bedroom. I had only my vest to take off—or tear off, for it was stuck to me with blood. When I was naked I looked at myself by the candle-light in the long wardrobe mirror. My white breastless little body was covered with blood and dark strokes and great weals. I bathed the worst places with the ice-cold water in my basin and then rubbed in plenty of the mixed whitening with which Grandmother had supplied me. It relieved me a little, and I got into bed.

Soon the door opened. My heart beat fast. It was

only Aunt Martha, bringing my Christmas supper. Not flap-dragons, nor raisins nor almond paste; just a small basin of mutton gruel.

"I'm sorry you've been so naughty, child, and have had to be corrected."

She produced two apples craftily from her pocket, put them on the bedside pedestal with the gruel, and went out. I did not touch them. I was too sick and wretched to eat.

Nor could I sleep. The long night began; pain, hate and wretchedness possessed me, first one more than another, and each in turn. My rough woollen nightgown chafed my sores; the bed, which was never a soft one, hurt me everywhere. My whole body smarted and ached. Why had I to suffer such pain? Why was I starved and bullied and abused and beaten and half-killed? Why had a man, professing to be one of the Lord's own people, the right to flog me so? Oh, the tyrant, I could only hear to think of him by picturing to myself a glorious day when my turn would come, when I would cat-o'-nine-tail him till he fainted and bang his face against a stone wall till his pale features were one red indistinguishable mush. Hate, hate, a bitter ointment, had eased my pain; hate for him, hate for the world, and by silly bitter moments the Devil's temptation to hate God. From hate for the tyrant I came to pity for the victim, which was self-pity, so sweet a misery that it drove away all other trouble. I was the wretchedest of all God's creatures, the wretchedest being since Creation. For me all things were unjust. Robbie and Albert were never treated as I was; in this alone were they alike, and all children save me alike. Every little child I saw in the street was happy, free, well-

treated. Every one else had brothers and sisters, and friends—and a mother.

The old new bitterness returned; why had my mother been taken away? She would have protected me and cherished me. I tried to think more clearly than ever before what she would have looked like if still alive; like Grandmother, I fancied, with the same kind gentle face, but taller and younger and warmer. I should have nestled to her bosom, she would have taken me in her arms. I should have comforted her. She would have loved me. The agony of the thought was torture. I needed her to madness. I could lie down no longer. I knelt up in bed and my soul cried out for her. Involuntarily my voice was crying too, "Mother, mother!"

I uttered the words without knowing, as it were, that I spoke; they were wrung from me without my consent; it was my soul not my mind which spoke. And I knew this time that the prayer would be answered; I had the sure supernatural instinct that my mother was coming to me. She had been mouldering in Tawborough graveyard for ten years now, yet I knew she was coming. I did not call again, but waited in intense expectation. I clasped my hands in an agony of hope.

She came. Right up to the bedside she moved in a white robe. She spoke. Her voice seemed nearer to me than if it had been at the bedside; inside me, in my very soul. Mother was with me, in me, around me.

"I am here, Mary, I love you. You want to know that I love you, and I have come to show you that I do."

The darkness was made radiant by the white figure

before me. I was bathed in a new presence, and I knew that it was love. I was still kneeling on the bed and my face was on a level with my mother's. I bent forward to fulfil my supreme need; I went nearer, my arms were closing round her—and she was gone.

My arms closed round empty space. I came back to reality. I was kneeling on the cold bed. And she was gone. The feeling of her presence faded away; the sense of love and comfort was abiding. It abides with me still. I was sad, forlorn, but happy to think she had gone back to heaven, and that she loved me enough to come ten million miles to comfort me. She had shown me the truth of the resurrection, of the immortality of the soul; and something far greater, the truth of love.

Hate, pain and weariness were forgotten in the joy of my mother's love, I nestled in it, sheltered in it, clasped it to me, and soon it was wooing me to sleep.

Then—a soft tread in the room—and I was wide awake in a flash. The moon did not light the corner of the room by the door, but I seemed to see a white figure standing there. Was it my angel mother again?

"Mother," I cried faintly. I did not feel the divine sureness of her presence I had known before. It could not be. Yet I heard the soft tread again. The white form moved nearer.

Uncle Simeon! Pity, pity, he had come to flog me naked, torture me in the darkness, rub salt into my wounds as he had threatened; to kill me. I hid my face under the bedclothes in terror, then withdrew as quickly for fear he would stifle me beneath them. His ghostlike figure was still there. "Mother—God—Jesus!"

"Mary, don't be frightened."

It was Robbie.

Reaction from fear was so strong and overwhelming that for a moment I could not think. The first words I could speak were prompted by the fear that had fled, just as the life that has gone enables a tiger still to spring, though shot through the heart a second before.

"Hush, hush," I whispered. "Don't make a sound. What is it? Why are you here? Think, if he found us! Oh, you frightened me. First, I thought it was Mother, then that it was *him*."

"Mother?" said Robbie. "Are you dreaming, Mary? Are you awake properly? I've got bare feet, and he can't hear whispering. Besides he's snoring. I listened outside his door and it's nearly midnight."

"Why have you come?"

"To tell you I'm going away either tomorrow or the day after. He has written to Uncle Vivian's housekeeper, Mrs. Venn, telling her to expect me back straight away; and he has forbidden me to try to see you before I go; dared me to.... This is our only chance, Mary. I overheard him saying that tomorrow morning very early, before breakfast, he's going to lock you in the attic and keep you locked there till after I'm gone away. Well—I came to tell you that—and—to say good-bye." He paused and took courage. "And to tell you that when I'm a man I've made up my mind to come back and beat him till he bleeds as he has made you bleed."

He stopped and waited. I knew what he was waiting for. I trembled, shook like an aspen leaf; my heart,

soul, brain, were all aflood with what he longed for me to say.

"Why don't you come nearer?" huskily. He came a little nearer and waited again, pretending, for all the world like a grown human being, that he did not see the invitation he longed for.

"You are cold," I said (truth ready to my hand for use). "Come and lie under the coverlet." The first word over, it was easier.

"It must be hurting you horribly," he said. He stood by the bedside in a last moment of hesitation.

"*Come*," I repeated. He climbed on the bed beside me. "Yes, it hurts badly. Robbie, come nearer."

Then he put his arms round me; I was half out of the bedclothes; but we were warm together under the coverlet. His curly head touched mine, his soft boyish cheek gently rubbed against my own. This was what he had come to do. This was what I had waited to know.

Here was love again. It was true. It was sweet beyond belief.

That is many years ago. Since then I have known many glorious things. I say still that this moment, when he placed his boyish arms around me, was the holiest and happiest of my life.

I was crying new tears, not of hate nor misery, but joy. Love opens the floodgates; and I was surrounded with love, bathed in it; love in heaven and love on earth; angel mother and human boy. The two little night-gowned bodies lay close together, the two children's hearts beat. In one there was affectionate

pity, in the other a wild joy; in both the high happiness of love. This is a joy so pure, that when older we can never know it again. We kissed each other again and again; eagerly, tenderly, wildly. The pent-up passion of my bitter heart poured forth; I strained him tenderly in my arms, he strained me in his. We were happy, far too happy to speak. His eyes were bright and tender, his dear face transfigured. We forgot everything, except that we loved each other.

The church clock sounded midnight.

Robbie broke the silence nervously. "I must go—soon. We shall have to say good-bye, shan't we? It mayn't be safe much longer. Don't forget you must escape from the attic somehow; break the door open or anything. Find out from Mrs. Greeber exactly when I'm going. I thought of your going tonight when I was still here to help you, but you can't; he has bolted all the doors and locked them and taken away the keys. He knew we might try. Oh, how I'll flog him when I grow up."

"He'll be old then, and yellower and wrinkled instead of smooth."

"I don't care. I'll flog him all the same.... Get a screw-driver or something and hide it when you are up in the attic. Then when we're at the station you must break the lock and fly. I'll leave the money under your bedroom carpet in the corner next to the door, let's say four inches in—"

There was a sound; Robbie started up. "Oh, that's only the floor creaking. Still, it's late."

"Don't go, Robbie."

"You know I don't want to, but I'll have to. When I'm older I'm not going to forget. We mayn't meet for years and years, but we shall see each other again somewhere, I know we shall. We must try to remember each other ever so clearly. Isn't there anything we can do to make it seem we're near together when we're really far apart?"

"I know. Every year exactly at this minute, a few minutes after midnight on Christmas night, we'll think hard of each other, shut our eyes, clench our fists, and think terribly hard. Then it will seem that we're really right by each other; you'll believe I'm in the room with you, and I'll believe you are. I shall wait till just after midnight, then try to think of nothing else in all the world but you. I shall think of you now as you are this minute—kiss me, it will be better to remember by—yes, hard, like that—and then I'll pray 'God, oh God, make Robbie be with me.' He will help it to happen. People who are away from you can be with you like that, even dead people. My mother came tonight. I saw her and she spoke to me. I called out knowing she would come, and she came. You will too. But you must believe with all your heart that it's going to happen; then it will. I shall think you are with me; then you will be. Of course I shall think of you other times, every day I expect, and always when I'm not happy, but only Christmas night in this special way. It's too special to do often. Will you too? Remember, every Christmas night, just after midnight, when you're lying in bed, however far away you are, and every year, always, think with all your soul of me and of our being together just as we are tonight. Then we shall be together again really, so that we shall always know one another whatever happens; always love each other, always be able to kiss. Promise, will you try?"

"Yes, Mary," he whispered.

For another few minutes we lay quietly in each other's arms. We were together that night perhaps one hour in all; an hour in which my whole soul changed. At last he had to go. Though he only whispered, I could hear that the whisper was husky. His little body trembled in my arms.

"Good-night, Mary."

"Oh, my dear, my dear, my dear." I hugged him harder than ever to me. I would not let him go.

Then the good-bye kiss, sweetest of all, too sad for tears. His soft boy's lips brushed mine; it seemed too that they touched the tendrils of my heart and made it blossom like the garden of lilies you read of in Solomon's Song. A spirit of loveliness filled me. He got up; now it was last good-bye. I saw his face for a moment in the beam of moonlight that came slantwise through my window. For many years that vision was the chief treasure I had: a little boy in a long white nightgown, a head of tousled curls, a bright face flushed with joy and tears, radiant with my embrace, radiant with love for me.

"Good-night, Mary, good-night. I'll never forget you; I'll always love you."

"Good-night, Robbie."

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## CHAPTER XVIII: NEW YEAR'S

# NIGHT

I awoke next morning to see Aunt Martha standing by my bedside.

"You're to get up at once. Your uncle says you are to spend a week in the attic for your naughtiness, so get up and dress quickly. I'll come back to take you in a few minutes. Your uncle says you're to go before breakfast, now, at once, so that you can speak to nobody."

Robbie had heard aright.

I was still very sore; my nightgown stuck to me here and there with dry blood, and hurt me as I tore it off. I dressed, and was ready when Aunt Martha returned. In the grey of a damp winter dawn I followed her upstairs. No one else was stirring. The unused, airless smell of the attic seemed more unpleasant than usual in the cold: an atmosphere at once frozen and stuffy. A mattress had been put on the floor; there were no bedclothes or coverlets. The room was bare except for a few boxes and old picture frames in one corner, the rusty old fender that always stood end upwards against the wall, and one rickety backless old chair.

"Here's a cloak to wrap round you in the night. Your uncle said I wasn't to leave one." She went away.

All day I was left alone. Twice Aunt Martha came up with a bowl of gruel and a dry crust, but (evidently under orders) she said nothing. It was so cold that the cloak could not prevent my getting numbed. I lay huddled up on the mattress all through the day, thinking, thinking, thinking.... Now that the first glow of the Wonder Night had passed away, there

came a reaction, and I was gnawing away once more at all my bitter memories and hates. Pain, too, was governing me; my aching body was half numbed with cold, especially my legs and feet, which the cloak was not long enough to cover, huddle as I might. I kept my soul warm—and body too to some degree—by hugging to me the loves that now were mine. I lived the time spent with my mother and with Robbie over and over and over again: every gesture, every kindness, every kiss. For all my unhappiness and physical misery I could never again be so blankly, harbourlessly miserable as before. In my darkest moments I now knew that there were places of comfort to which I could fly.

I wondered what was going on in the house downstairs. It was night-time now; tomorrow morning Robbie would be going and I should be alone with Uncle Simeon. Escape I must. I climbed on to the rickety old chair and opened the skylight window. I looked out and observed that the skylight was of a level piece with the sloping roof. I could see nothing beyond the edge of the roof; the sense of the great drop beyond that edge came to me, and as I pictured myself falling, I shuddered. That way there was no escape.

Then, for one second, as I looked down the sloping roof, came a sudden notion to throw myself over. It was a physical impulse only, and passed as quickly as it came. It would have stayed longer had I been the least bit tempted. But I could never see the sense of suicide. I saw no good in killing myself, because I believed in immortality. By killing myself I should only be ensuring an Eternity in hell instead of an Eternity in heaven. The little boy in one of the new novels makes away with himself because he believes

that there is nothing beyond death, and that by killing himself in this world he has killed his soul for ever. If I had believed that I too might have been tempted. But my creed was in immortality, from which there is no escape. Nor had I the physical courage which suicide requires. And it would steal my chance of meeting my mother in the next world and Robbie in this.

I lay down on my mattress, seeking vainly, like a mouse in a trap, some new way of escape. During the first night in that cold dreary attic I slept hardly at all. The rats frightened me; I could not sleep for fear they would crawl over my face once it was still. Surely Robbie would send some sign, some message. None came. Later I must have slept; for again it was Aunt Martha who woke me when she came to bring my "breakfast." She was startled to see how starved with cold I was, and came back with a big warm blanket. It was a brave thing for her to do.

"Robert Grove is going, isn't he?" I asked casually, steadying my voice.

"Your Uncle thought he was going today, but it has been put off till next Tuesday, New Year's Day, when his uncle returns from abroad. Till then your uncle says you must stay here."

There I stayed. Four walls, locked door, and precipitous roof baffled all my notions of escape. The best thing I could think of was a rush for the door when Aunt Martha came with my food; but I saw this would not be much good. She would raise the alarm, and he would catch me before I could get clear of the house.

Five days passed, long, cold and wretched; though with the big blanket, and the forbidden extras Aunt Martha contrived sometimes to convey me with my meals, I managed to keep alive, and kept, in my fashion of health, reasonably well. No message came from Robbie. No doubt Uncle Simeon was watching him day and night. But still—.

I was not sure of the passage of time, but I reckoned one night that it was New Year's Eve. The last night, and still no message. Tomorrow he was going: this time for certain, and for ever; I should be left alone with my tormentor. Half in terror (of Uncle Simeon when he should get me alone), half in hope (of a sign from Robbie), I lay awake through the whole of that night. It struck midnight. The bells rang out; merrily, mockingly. It was New Year's night as I had thought. All over the town people, even Saints, were wishing each other a Happy New Year. The bells were still. I lay awake waiting for something to happen, for I knew it would. All the night-time sounds of an old house were around me. Boards creaked, roof shook, rats scampered. Sometimes I was startled by a metallic sound as a rat scampered over the tin plate on which Aunt Martha brought my bread.

There—that was a new sound! That tapping noise at the door was never a rat. It seemed low down just where a rat might scratch, but that was the rap of human knuckles, faint but unmistakable. Who? Why? I crawled out of the blanket, lay down on the bare boards and whispered under the door.

"Robbie, is that you, Robbie?"

There was no reply except the stealthy sound of something being pushed under the door. I saw a white thing that looked like a small envelope. I

touched it and felt inside the paper a hard round thing. It was the half-sovereign he had promised me.

"Robbie, Robbie, thank you! Are you there? Robbie, Robbie."

There was no reply. I heard cautious footsteps, with a long interval between each, going down the creaky old stairs. How I wished he had whispered one word, one word. He had thought I was asleep and had not dared to speak loud enough to wake me. Never mind, it was better that the last thing was Christmas Night's perfect good-bye.

I clutched the envelope and mourned the weary hours of waiting until I could read it, for I had no candle. I kept my eyes staring wide open to prevent myself falling asleep. I could feel that there was a letter as well as money inside the envelope. I knew it would help me; I was impatient to know how. So much did it raise my hopes, that I fell to thinking of the coach-ride to Tawborough, of what Grandmother would say and how Aunt Jael would receive me.

As I stared through the darkness I became gradually aware of a ray of light along the ceiling. It did not come from the skylight, for there was no moon; and it ran horizontally along the ceiling, not down into the room. I got up and climbed on to the chair to investigate. Then I guessed. I had often noticed in a corner in the top of the wall (the corner farthest from the door) a little wooden door a foot or more square; it did not exactly fit the space in the wall and there was a thin aperture between the bottom of this little door and where the wall began. It was through this slit, not more than half an inch wide, that the strip of light came. I pulled at the handle and the little door opened.

Ten yards or so away, on a level with my eyes, I saw a square patch of brightness. In a flash, I understood; the light from which it came was in Uncle Simeon's attic. There was a hole in the corner of the top of the wall there too, the selfsame square space I had seen when peeping through the keyhole. What the holes were for I did not know; most likely to ventilate the room in between. The space mystery which had so often puzzled me was now explained. There was, in between the two attics which I knew, mine and Uncle Simeon's, another intermediate garret twice as large as either.

Instantly, I formed the resolution of squeezing my way through the hole, traversing the long dark attic in between, clambering up the other aperture through which the ray of light was streaming, and seeing—just what I was too excited to guess, except that I knew that *he* was there. The hole was about eighteen inches square; it was a tight squeeze, but thanks to his dieting I managed it. Clambering down the other side was awkward work; I held on to the wall part of the hole to prepare for a jump. I knew it was a longish drop; there was no convenient chair on this side, and as I had left my slippers behind so as to make as little noise as possible, I hoped the ground was not too hard. My feet alighted unevenly; the left foot on the corner of a beam stuck edgeways, the right on the level of the floor, which was of course lower by the width of the beam. I hurt my toe badly. The ray of light was only sufficient to show up very dimly the big garret in which I now stood; I could make out that the floor was traversed by long beams laid edgeways, parallel with the front of the house and thus leading from my attic to his. Along one of these I walked; for although it was awkwardly narrow, it was better for my stockinged feet than the

floor, which I made out to be strewn with pieces of wood, stone and plaster. When I got to the other end I found that my objective was too high; my fingers only just reached the edge of the hole. By standing on tiptoe, however, and clutching for all I was worth I managed to lever myself up. Then I looked into the mysterious room.

What I saw was unforgettable. On a high cupboard flared a lamp, nearly on a level with the space through which I was looking. This explained how it was that the light carried right through to the corresponding hole in the wall of my attic. In the full glare of the lamp sat Simeon Greeber, leaning over a table covered with papers and documents, at which he peered. He gloated over them, fondled them, sometimes he laughed and breathed hard, and his eyes shone. Then he would stop, cock his head on one side for a moment, and listen anxiously. I watched him, fascinated. Round him, on the floor and the table, were many envelopes and papers. The wall was some inches thick; to see as much as I could I peered further in, so far indeed that if he stood up and looked my way he could hardly fail to see me. I noticed the big green box I had observed from the key-hole months before; a heavy door on hinges stood wide open; inside were more papers. His face, in the moments when he lifted it up, was of a greenish yellow hue in the lamp-light; and his eyes shone.

In my interest I had forgotten the awkwardness of my posture; supported by my elbows and wrists on the wall part of the hole, with my feet hanging in mid-air, my toes perhaps barely touching the wall. Once I lost my hold, and clutched convulsively so as not to fall. He heard the noise, lifted his face from

the pile in which he was wallowing, and looked round anxiously. I had scared him.

"No, no, it can't be, it can't be," he whispered, endeavouring to assure himself of something.

He returned to his love. Now he rubbed his face sideways against the papers, gently, like a friendly cat against your leg.

I resolved to make a noise deliberately, keeping myself far enough back not to be seen, and to listen to what he might say.

In silence, at night, alone, a sigh is the most awful noise that can strike the human ear. I waited till his face was lifted again for a moment, held myself far enough back so as not to be seen easily, while still seeing him, and uttered a long-drawn agonized sigh. He started up with a cry. His cowardly face was a livid green.

"Brother, brother"—it was a terrified whine—"twelve years ago, twelve years ago."

"Twelve years ago, twelve years ago," echoed the watching whisperer.

He gave a horrible frightened cry, something between a beast's whine and howl, dropped on his knees, clasped his hands, turned his terrified eyes upward, and broke into delirious prayer. His face streamed with sweat.

"Oh, God, God, visit not Thy servant thus. 'Twas all done for Thee, all for Thee, Thou knowest. The gold is all Thine. For Thy name's sake, Oh Lord, pity Thy faithful, humble servant. *He*, Lord, was a sinner, it was meet that he should go, and that one of Thine

own people should hold his wealth. He was spending all in sin; it was one's duty, Lord, one's duty. It was Thou who guidedst one's hand that night, and was he not dying already from the illness with which Thou hadst stricken him? For Thy sake, oh Lord, it was done. Thou knowest it. Not the meanest penny has been spent on worldly pleasures nor evil ways nor self, as he, oh Lord, would have spent it. Thou knowest, Thou knowest; the meetings, the missionaries, the work in Thy vineyard amongst Thy people; all that has been spent has been spent in Thy service, and when Thou callest me to Thee, all will be left for Thy work on earth below. All, oh Lord, all. Thou knowest, Thou knowest. Grant then that he trouble me not thus, grant—"

"Twelve years ago, twelve years ago," I whispered, more boldly, tasting dear revenge, anxious to see to what length of terror and blasphemy this snivelling Thing could go.

I overshot my mark; I whispered a little too loud. He looked quickly up to the hole in the wall, and though I shrank back like a flash, for a fraction of a second our eyes met.

Then he rushed for the door.

I dropped myself down and ran for dear life back across the beamed room to my attic. Feverishly I reviewed the position. He had quite certainly seen me and was now rushing to my attic to cut off my retreat. I sped across, sprang up to the aperture, squeezed my way wildly through, calculating all the while, as the quarry does, the number of seconds it will take the huntsman to finish him. He would have to fly down the stairs from his attic, along the landing, and up the stairs to mine. Thank God, he

had to fetch the key, which I knew was kept somewhere downstairs. This delay saved me. I just had time to squeeze through, shut the little door, drop on to the chair, move the chair from beneath, fly to my mattress, and throw the cape around me, before I heard the key turning.

He came in stealthily and stood listening for a second near the door. Then he struck a match and lighted the candle he held in his hand. I dropped my eyelids so that I could just see him, and affected as far as I could a quiet and regular breathing. He looked first at me, then round the room, evidently baffled. If he had found my mattress empty, if I had not flown back on the wings of terror, he would have had the pleasure of trapping me like a rat in the dark roof-room, the relief of a natural explanation of the strange whisperings, and at last a genuine excuse for beating me sick. But here I was, sleeping peacefully. I could feel him looking at me with intense hate. He hated me almost as much for bringing him here on a fool's errand as if he had thought I was really guilty. He bent down and peered more closely at my face. Instinctively my hand was clasped against my heart.

The door opened and Aunt Martha came in, shivering slightly in her nightdress.

"You here, Simeon? I thought I heard the child cry out."

"So did oneself. One came to see if anything were the matter; but she sleeps calmly enough." The lie saved him.

"Come, Martha, my dear," he said, as he closed the door, "one will deal with her tomorrow."

There, however, he was wrong.

The sights of the past half hour had of course excited me beyond measure, but I already reflected that they could be put to use; a very handy lever to turn Aunt Jael's wrath from me to him. Once again, *how* was I to get to Aunt Jael? I reckoned that hours must still pass before it was light enough for me to read Robbie's letter. I got up again from the mattress to sit on the chair and await the dawn. My feet crunched against something; it was a box of matches Uncle Simeon must have dropped in his excitement. By striking these one after another I read:

> DEAR DEAR MARY: Here is the money for the coach. I am going tomorrow morning. The door is bolted, it is no good that way, but I have found a way. You wait till eleven o'clock tomorrow morning, that will be the morning you find this, then get out by the little window in the roof, it is quite safe I have made sure. There is a drain pipe begins at the very top where the sloping part of the roof stops, you must climb down that, it gets you down into the back yard, and the back yard door is not locked, I've taken the key. Then take the coach or run or anything to Tawborough. Get away from here, that's all, you must. There is *no* danger, it will be quite easy to climb down, you'll not hurt. I am always, always going to think of you and next Christmas we will meet properly like you said.

Your loving
ROBBIE.

P. S. Happy New Year.

I kissed the letter.

There was no time to be lost. I wrapped Aunt Martha's cape round me and put on my shoes,—indoor slippers without a strap, poor enough footwear for an eight mile walk. I clambered on to the chair and lifted the heavy handle of the sky-light window. The damp air of a raw winter's night crept into the room.

How I ever got to the ground, I do not know. Somehow I slithered down the sloping roof till my feet touched the ledge Robbie had spoken of; somehow I found the drain pipe, and somehow I clambered down. The yard door was open as he had said, and I walked through it into the deathly silent street, breathing a sigh of intense relief that I remember to this day. I broke immediately into a run, that I might put between me and that accursed house as much distance with as small delay as possible; when I was halfway across the old bridge I looked back at it, dimly silhouetted against the winter's night.

"Good-bye Robbie!" I called.

I crossed the bridge and climbed the hill. Very soon I was foot-sore; the toe that had caught on the beam in the roof-room began to bleed, and my shoes kept slipping off. I was cold, hungry, sore, cramped and faint. The cold slow rain, somewhere between drizzle and sleet, beat upon my face. By all the tenets of melodrama my escape should have been through

deep crisp snow with the valiant horned moon astride the sky. There was no moon, and sleet is crueller than snow. After a while, I lost one of my shoes, turned back, peered about for it, was unable to find it; kicked away the other and ran along in my stockinged feet. Both feet were soon bleeding. After a mile or so, when I could run no further, I trudged or rather hobbled along, keeping to the middle of the road, which was the easiest and least muddy part. At moments the temptation to sit down was almost irresistible; sleep more than half possessed me. I clenched my teeth and kept on, will power eking out what little physical force was left. I prayed continuously.

After perhaps three or four hours, though it seemed unending years, I saw ahead of me the first roofs of Tawborough. I limped through the wet silent streets of the town, up Bear Street on to the Lawn, and through our garden gate. I pulled the bell, and then with a wretchedness and weariness I could not resist now that my goal was reached, sank down upon the doorstep.

Immediately I must have fallen asleep, for it seemed that I awoke from far away to see my Grandmother in her red dressing-gown and funny nightcap standing before me.

"It's me—Mary. I've come back, Grandmother, because he would have killed me. I've walked all night, and I'm so tired."

I rose to my feet, and fainted in her arms. Then I remember no more.

# CHAPTER XIX: BEAR LAWN AGAIN

I awoke to find myself in my Grandmother's bed. Evening was darkening the room. Uncle Simeon had already come—and gone.

Precisely what had taken place I was not told, but according to Mrs. Cheese neither my Grandmother nor my Great-Aunt had minced their words. Aunt Jael, particularly, must have been in awful form. Though I had not yet told my tale, my condition must have spoken for itself; and if Aunt Jael's sympathy for me was not alone sufficient to pitch her to the highest key of scorn, the sight of her old enemy made good the deficiency. Even for him he must have cringed and whined exceptionally, being quite in the dark as to how much I had told. Whether the flagellative heart of my Great-Aunt was filled with professional jealousy or whether the new rôle of Tender and Merciful appealed to her for the moment, all that is certain is this: that she drove Master Simeon Greeber with words and scorpions over the doorstep, adding that he was never required to cross it again. Nor did he. I was many years older when next we met: under what circumstances the sequel will shew.

When I regained my health, which under my Grandmother's care and feeding was speedily enough, I was surprised to find how little Grandmother and Aunt Jael pressed me for details of my life at Torribridge. This incuriousness puzzled me: chiefly by contrast with what my own interest would have been in their place. Details of other people's doings and sayings were to become one of

the absorbing passions of my life: I was born with my mind at a keyhole. Hence Tuesday afternoons, when they could be diverted from godly generalities to piquant personalities were more welcome than of old; and now that I was occasionally allowed to speak a word at Clinkerian ceremonies, I became quite deft in sidetracking Miss Salvation down the pathways of scandal, where Aunt Jael, not too reluctantly, would sometimes follow her. Aunt Jael, to do her justice, was not much of a gossip: she was too selfish, just as my Grandmother was too unselfish, too deeply absorbed in Aunt Jael ever to feel deep interest, even a scandal-mongering interest, in other people: while her suspicion that her own efforts were capable of similar sacrilegious discussion would not allow her to allow me to talk of Uncle Simeon's beatings and persecutions. She felt that however objectionable Uncle Simeon might be, she would not permit me—a child, a subject, a slave—to discuss him. Authority must be upheld, in whatever unpleasant quarters. In the Tacit Alliance and Trade Union for Cruelty to Children there must be no blacklegs.

My Grandmother was the most incurious woman I have ever known: partly because of her inherent good nature, which made her regard all chatter about others as unkindly; partly because of her religion, which enabled her to see, though I think to exaggerate, the unimportance of earthly things. To every question, every trouble, every accusation, every wrong, she would everlastingly reply: "What will it matter in a hundred years?" and then, "Anyhow, 'tis the Lord's will." With a character thus compounded of kindness, unworldliness and fatalism, Grandmother was never born to pry. It quite irritated me how little she asked me about my life at Uncle

Simeon's. I had believed myself the centre of the universe, the victim of the cruellest wrongs in human story; and here was my Grandmother thinking it friendly and loving and sympathetic to say "Don't 'ee brood over it, my dear. Forget it all. 'Twill seem little in a hundred years from now!"

Apart however from this pique that my miseries should be denied the glory of posthumous fame, I was glad that I was left alone with the past eight months of my life. I could hide without subterfuge my friendship with Robbie. Naturally, and artfully, I mentioned him sometimes.

"*Such* a nice little boy, Grandmother; he was really! We liked each other—ever so!"

Always my favourite form of insincerity: to tell the literal truth, while conveying by the context or my manner something much less—i. e. morally speaking, not the truth at all. I loved him; I told Grandmother I liked him. It was the truth, and a lie.

I also kept hidden in my own breast the chief events of New Year's Night.

* * * * * * *

Within a few weeks the eight months of Torribridge seemed infinitely far away: as though it were some one else's life I was contemplating from a distant mountain-peak. I have always found that the more complete my change of surroundings, the more distant does my previous life immediately become; until some sudden messenger from the earlier days brings it back with a vivid rush. I never lived again the present-moment horror, as it were, of that life with Uncle Simeon until one day, far ahead, when I

realized with frightening suddenness, as I gazed at a certain face beside me, that those eyes, that smile, that gesture—were his.

I fell back almost insensibly into the old groove of Bear Lawn life: the bare empty-seeming silent house, the long days of loneliness and godliness, pinings and prayers, the two familiar black-clad figures in the old familiar horse-hair chairs, the harsh staccato jobations proceeding from one side of the fireplace, and the gentler but no less continual "Don't 'ee do it's!" from the other. Torribridge was soon a nightmare episode shot through with glad dreams more episodal still. This life in this house that had sheltered my first memories was, after all, my real life; was Life. It seemed as though I had never known any other; I often cannot remember whether certain things happened before or after Torribridge: my Bear Lawn life was all one.

Nevertheless a few notable changes marked my return.

First of all, I was received as a full member of the Lawn confraternity. Aunt Jael allowed me to go out and play: ay, with this selfsame famous tribe through whose frankness in grappling with fundamentals I had been disgraced and sent away.

"No filth, mind! No low talk. No abominations."

Nor were there. Filth, low talk and abominations had departed with Joseph Jones to his draper's apprenticeship in a big city—this was one of the large events of my absence—and what Bristol gained, Tawborough lost. Under the new rule of Laurie Prideaux I heard no more of the talk to which my six weeks under Joe had been accustoming me. The

change of chieftainship meant a change in the tone of the whole community. Joe bullied and sneered if you wouldn't use his words; Laurie thrashed Ted King for using them. One boy changed the moral outlook of a Lawn; a generation, a town, a world! Under Laurie's patronage I was received into full membership. Under which flag? After a moving discussion, in which arguments charged with the nicest theological insight jostled with mere vulgar prejudice against my clothes (this was the Tompkins girl, over-dressed and under-witted little cat that she was), it was decided that the Chapel League was best fitted to receive me to its nonconformist bosom. I could not help feeling it a come-down that a Saint should be classed, as it were officially, with mere Dissenters: it was, however, the lesser of two evils, for the Church of England, after all, was something worse than "mere."

I was never much good at the various games, tig, French cricket, rounders and the like, which occupied so large a part of Lawn life. The amorous ones—Kiss in the Ring and Shy Widow—I shunned altogether. I was too serious, or too sensitive, or high-minded, or morbid, to be able to regard touch as a plaything sentiment. Laurie and Marcus were nice boys, and I liked them, quite definitely; but I refused to respond when they "chose" me for their lady. In these games of sentiment and shy surrender, the challenge of choice must be accepted without flush or murmur: I could not, so refused to take part. Kissing was too precious a privilege. I cherished it for three people only: my Mother when I sought the gates of Heaven; myself when on my own lips in the looking-glass I tried to discover the mystery of this world; Robbie, when I needed Love.

I acquired, however, a certain position of my own in Lawn esteem: the teller of stories. My subject was Aunt Jael; her ways, words and deeds; her rods and ropes; her food and medicine cupboards, her winsome underclothing, awful wrath, and appetite diurnal and nocturnal. I told of the beetle and of the Great God; and of far beatings. The Lawn listened, admired and applauded; admitted in me something they did not possess; the power to interest and to amuse. Thus they decided my fate for me, in showing me the thing in which I was different from and better than others; and Mary Lee, silent and morose by instinct, by upbringing and by environment, set up for life as an amateur-professional *raconteuse*. That way lay success, and success is what we seek. In forcing myself to talk that I might bask in the amusement of the other children, I gradually lost some of the moodiness and glumness of my earlier days; later on in life, in still more favourable surroundings, I lost them altogether: that is, in the face I showed to the world. The simple need of status with the Lawn children drove me to do the one thing I could do: to talk, and so to discover my talent and overlay my original nature. Thus it is ambition that transforms character, rather than character ambition. Thus it was that Aunt Jael provided me with the capital for my new venture, and paid handsomely for all her oppressions. An eye for an eye, a Lawn laugh for every blow!

The Elementary Educational Establishment was now beneath my needs, so I was transferred from the Misses Clinker (who, while far above vile pecuniary jealousy, prophesied ill) to the seminary of the Misses Primp. The latter were Saints, obscure but regular at the Great Meeting, and socially above the ruck. "Reg'lar standoffish, wi' the pride ur the flesh in

their 'earts," declared Miss Salvation, who saw clearly from her altitude far above vile pecuniary jealousy. They held their school in a bleak house with a big bare garden, to the north of the town, ten minutes or so from the Lawn. The curriculum embraced Arithmetic to the Rule of Three, Composition, Grammar, French, Literature (Sacred and Profane), Needlework (Plain and Fancy), Drawing (Freehand and Design); Botany and Brushwork; together with "a thorough grounding in the principles of Salvation."

Not to put too fine a point upon it, this last pretension was a lie. A Bible-reading, usually Kings or Chronicles, read with parrot-quickness round the class, one verse to each pupil; a long dry prayer offered up, with eyes gimletted not on heaven but on us, by Miss Prudence Primp; and a longer and still drier homily by Miss Obedience Primp, a gaunt old lady with a gigantic crinoline and a parched soul and throat—in a later, more worldly age, this allowance of heavenly fare may not seem so niggardly; to me, bred as it were in the imperial purple of Grace, the whole performance appeared perfunctory and tepid, and the Primpian acquaintance with the principles of salvation positively sketchy. My studies were remarkable only for their unevenness. The net result of my inequalities was that I occupied a steady middle-place in the weekly marks. I reflected with pride, however, that it was no ordinary middle-place, the result of humdrum averageness in everything: and I was vainer of being bad at my bad subjects than good at my good ones. Were they not stupid subjects in which a quite special unique set-apart Chosen little girl like myself would not stoop to shine? Tots indeed! Brushwork!

I do not recall many events in my school life. Those

that recur to me are chiefly unpleasant; how some of the girls cribbed and copied and cheated and lied; how others giggled sickeningly at the word "boys," or mocked shamefully at their mothers and fathers. They were red-letter days when Cissie King, my Lawn enemy, had a fit, foamed at the mouth, went green in the face, was obdurate under basinsful of water, and only came round at the third dose of brandy; or when Miss Obedience quarrelled openly with Miss Prudence in front of the whole school, and cried "Leave me, woman!" Nor can I forget my first day, when Miss Obedience, as we were leaving after the morning school, asked two of the older girls who lived my way to accompany me home, and I overheard them say to each other "Not likely! We'll leave her at the school gate; wouldn't be seen with her, with her frock all darned and nasty common clothes and boots, would you? If anybody should think she belonged to us!" How my cheeks burned, how I hated and loathed those two giggling little snobs, and still more my own uncomely person and garments. How I brooded for days and gnawed at the shame. These are the real events of a child's life; they sound the depths of human passion: shame, jealousy and hate.

One other major event followed close upon my return. Wedding Bells! For five and forty years had Miss Salvation Clinker been pursuing Brother Brawn; now the long chase was ended, and the quarry at last secured. She was seventy-seven, he but seventy-one. How on a secret visit one morning she broke the news to Grandmother, postponing vainly the Jaelian wrath to come; how later that wrath fell ("Bold woman of Proverbs seven-twelve, who lieth in wait

at every corner," said Denouncer; "I shall do more than *some* as I know, and go to 'Eaven a wedded wife," answered Denounced, brazen in vanishing-maidenhood)—while scorn and pity were showered upon the victim; how Aunt Jael's ban went forth, and the banns despite it; how they became man and wife; how she had her Triumph, and dragged him through the streets of Tawborough in an open carriage ... this and much more I might portray.

The mild scandal in our Meeting was as nothing to the rage and horror in the Upper Room for Celibate Saints. At a solemn mass-meeting of the survivors, nigh half a dozen strong, Doctor Obadiah Tizzard decreed: that Glory Clinker, aider and abetter in evil, be then and thenceforward struck from the sacred roll and flung into outer darkness; that against Salvation, née Clinker, sinner of sinners, be pronounced the Major Excommunication.

The "Upper's" gain was our loss. Henceforward the Clinkers were always with us. (Nobody favoured Salvation with her new surname.) But the chief loser by her change of state was, alas, poor Brother Brawn. The sisters let the High Street Mansion, the aforetime E.E.E., and moved, inseparably, into the White House. There, sandwiched between a gentle *détraquée* and a scolding shrew, our bleating leader found repentance, if no leisure more.

"I told 'ee so," said Aunt Jael. "'E've done it now. There is *no* hope."

The husband certainly had none, though his spouse, dreamily quoting Luke-one-thirteen, declared that *she* had, and the good sister-in-law er-er-er'd and plied her unsteady needle on swaddling-clothes, while muttering always to herself "John! Thou shalt

call his name John!" ...

Neither school nor Lawn nor Clinkers, however, seemed anything but incidental to my life in the big house at Number Eight, always for me the first of external things. Here too there were changes.

Mrs. Cheese had come back. Servant after servant had passed away like that grass which in the morning groweth up and in the evening withereth away. Stability reigned in the kitchen once more. Relations with Aunt Jael partook of the nature of an armed truce. Both restrained themselves, Mrs. Cheese because she wanted to stay, Aunt Jael because she wanted her to; though the former was a bit too fond of making it clear that she had come back to us for my Grandmother's sake only, "and not to plaize zome others I cude mention." Despite her loyal affection for my Grandmother, the real person for whose sake she had come back was herself. At sixty she was too old to break with old habits, such as our kitchen and her routine therein, or with Aunt Jael, who was a habit also, if a bad one.

From this time Grandmother occupies a larger place in my memories than Aunt Jael. Why, I am somewhat puzzled to say; for their life, and my life with them, went on just as of old. Perhaps now that beatings became rarer, it was natural that she whose skill therein had been the terror of my earlier childhood should loom less large. Perhaps it was that Aunt Jael, my bad angel, appeared tame in her badness by the side of Uncle Simeon (but then should Grandmother, my good angel, have become faint in my affections besides Robbie; whereas I liked

her better and thought of her more). Perhaps it was that Grandmother's gentler qualities would naturally have made less impression on a little child than Aunt Jael's harsh ones, or anybody's good qualities than anybody's bad ones. Further, I now saw more of Grandmother, as Aunt Jael developed the habit of confining herself to her bedroom for days at a stretch, only emerging on to the landing to rain curses over the banisters on Mrs. Cheese for a useless, shiftless idler, unfit to wait on a suffering bedridden old martyr, or on Grandmother for a selfish, ungrateful sister always absent from her elder's bed of pain; or (oftenest) on me.

With outdoor exercise and good food, which now for the first time I enjoyed together, I became healthier and I think happier. Though I still lived for my daydreams, I had less time on my hands.

What with dusting and bed-making and cooking, what with homework and meals and prayers and ceaseless reading of the Word in public and private, and Aunt Jael's and Grandmother's expositions, I found my days too full to yield the time I needed for thinking and talking to myself: for living. I got into the habit of stealing odd quarters-of-an-hour in the attic. Aunt Jael was on my scent in a moment. How I loathed her when a luxurious heart-to-heart talk between Mary and Myself was interrupted by her hoarse scolding voice.

"Child! Child! Now then. Down from the garret, now. No monkey tricks."

Perhaps as an attraction to hold me downstairs, the portals of the dining-room bookcase were at last thrown open to me. The wealth therein would have seemed meagre, perhaps, to worldlier spirits; to me,

for whom all books save One (and one other) had always been closed, it was a gold mine. Of unequal yield. With some of the more desiccated devotional works I saw at once that I could make no headway. Such were Aunt Jael's beloved "Thoughts on the Apocalypse" and a row of funereally-bound tomes devoted to the exposition of prophecy. Laid sideways on the bottom shelf was that musty fusty giant, our celebrated copy of the "Trowsers Bible." I liked Matthew Henry's great Commentary in three huge black volumes, with the dates at the top of every page, from which I learnt that this world was made in the year B.C. 4004 (six thousand years ago: a brief poor moment lost in the facing-both-ways Eternity that haunted me), and that Christ was born four years Before Christ. Certain books demolishing the Darbyites or Close Brethren and their fellow-sinners at the other pole of Error pleased me by their hairsplitting arguments and vituperative abuse. Then there was "Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners" by Master John Bunyan.

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The record of this period of my life is perforce wearisome and undramatic. There are no events. More than ever my real life was inside me, was make-believe; that is, real. Change of residence was but a change of stage. The same comedy-tragedy—ME—was for ever on the boards. Not that the change of stage meant nothing. Houses, rooms, weathers, smells, all affected and were somehow a part of my thoughts. The two towns, I knew, were intimately mixed up with my feelings about all that had happened to me in them. Torribridge was the more romantic: little white town made magical by the word-sorcery of Westward Ho! Quay that harboured

brown-sailed ships from the Indies, memories of the Rose of Torribridge and that salmon-coloured hostelry called by her name; then Number One, house of gold and murder and mystery. Tawborough was more real. Graced by no Rose of Torridge, she held instead the rose of merchandise. The busy, countrified, unimaginably English character of her market and her streets seemed to make her more genuine, more actual—the right word eludes me—than Torribridge: Torribridge, that eight months' rainbow-circled nightmare, mere invention of Mr. Kingsley and Robbie and Uncle Simeon. Act Three was back in the first setting again; and here, in dining-room, in bed, in attic, the play went on. The principal character was Mary Lee. The audience was Mary Lee. I was player, producer, public all in one.

"Mary," I would say, as soon as I was alone. "Listen, I will tell you what I think."

"Yes, Mary; do!"

This sense of two selves, one of whom could confide in the other, was ever more vivid. Some one else inside me was pleased, surprised, angered, grieved; shared my sorrows and triumphs. Thus it was that in weeping for myself after some cruelty of Aunt Jael's or some more spiritual grief, I felt I was not selfish, because I was sharing trouble with *some one else*, who lived in the same body. Such impressions are at once too rudimentary and too subtle to be well conveyed in words.

When I called out "Mary," and "*I*" answered "Yes" the reality of question and answer between two different, though curiously intimate persons, was physical, overwhelming.

Soon after my return to my Grandmother's this sense of dual personality began, in its most physical manifestations, to fade somewhat; in its more spiritual quality, to grow more intense: the first when I began my Diary, the second at the miraculous moment of my Baptism.

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## CHAPTER XX: DIARY

The notion came to me one warm autumn afternoon, as I was reading "Grace Abounding."

From the first page I struck up a living friendship with the Bedford tinker, though he had been in heaven for near two hundred years. I understood him as he talked aloud to himself and peered within to discover who and what was this John Bunyan inside him. I liked too—the more so as it was so new in print and from the mind of some-one-else—the careful detail with which he told of his earthly outward life: his descent, his lowly parentage, his school, his early days, though I could have wished for details of his Aunt Jaels and Uncle Simeons. These did not lack when he talked of his "inside" life, and told me (who knew) of his childhood's "fearful dreams" and "dreadful visions" and "thoughts of the fearful Torments of Hell fire," because of which "in the midst of my many Sports and Childish Vanities, amidst my vain Companions, I was often much cast down and afflicted." Why should not I tell a like story of my soul day by day, detail by detail?

The notion rolled through me like a tide. I closed the book, sprang up, shut my eyes, and walked round and round the room in my excitement. Today, this moment, I would begin. Then as I turned my mind to practical details—the book I should write it in, the hiding-place for the book—hesitations appeared. Wasn't it a bit funny? Did other people do it? Why, yes: John Bunyan was "other people" right enough, and a good Christian too. And I remembered that I had heard somewhere before of a man who wrote down the story of his life. In a few seconds I placed my man. Poor old Robinson Crewjoe.

I ran into the kitchen.

"Mrs. Cheese, you know Robinson Crewjoe you told me about, didn't you say you could read about it all in a book he'd written himself?"

"'E wrote it pon a bit buke 'e vound on the Wreck, so's 'e shidden virget it, I reckon, or so's ither volk cude rade it arterwards—"

"Yes, but *when* did he write it?"

"Ivry day, avore goin' to bed nights. Ivrythin' 'e'd been doin' that day. Leastways that's what my ol' Uncle Zam ollers did, who kep' a buke of the zame zort."

"What was it like? Please tell me about Uncle Sam's book."

"Wull, my Uncle Zam, over to Exmoor, was very aiddicayted he was, a turrable 'and vur raidin' and writin'. So long as 'twas a buke 'e'd love'n and spell over'n vur hours and as 'appy as a king, as the zayin' is, but 'e liked best writin' down in this lil buke uv 'is

own—a *dairy* they caals un. Why fer I don't knaw, 'cause tizzen much to do wi' the milk, so far as I can see, and I ain't blind neither. Wull, in this lil buke, and there was eight or nine uv them avore 'e died, 'e put down ivry blimmin' thing 'e did, 'tis true's I zit yer. Wull, when the funeral was over and all the cryin', 'is widder—my ol' Aunty Sary that was, bein' curyus like bein' a lil bit like you—thought she'd be findin' zummat tasty in these ol' dairies, and tuke it into 'er 'ead to try to rade all the eight bukesful, or mebbe 'twas nine. But 'er cud'n 'ardly du it, not bein' aiddicayted like 'im, and when 'er vound it tuke 'er 'alf the day to spell over 'alf wan page, 'er got 'erself into a turrable upset, an threw un all pon the vire, 'ollern' out 'Burn un all, burn un all, burn un all! Then 'er bangs out uv the rume. I was up vrom me zeat avore you cude say Bo, and rescued the bettermos' part uv them avore they was burnt. Aw my dear days, I niver did rade zuch stuff. 'E'd put 'pon they bukes ivry drimpy lil thing e'd done and zeen and zed they vorty years: 'ow many calves the ol' cow 'ad 'ad, how much butter an' crame 'e zold to Markit, all mixed up wi' stuff about the pixies 'e zaw, or *thort* 'e zeed, top uv Exmoor o' nights; and a lot o' religyus writin,' for 'e was a gude Christyen for all 'is pixies and goblins, wi' plenty 'o sound stuff 'bout 'Eaven and 'Ell, and a middlin' gude dale about 'is sowl...."

These were valuable hints. My resolve was confirmed. I would follow in the footsteps of John Bunyan and Robinson Crewjoe and Uncle Zam.

That day, October the Twelfth 1860 (thirty-seven years ago come Tuesday), in the unused half of an old blue-covered exercise book, I began. With what a sense of pride, of importance, of creativeness, of high

adventure, I scrawled in great flourishing capitals my heading:

THE LIFE OF MARY LEE
Written By Herself.

My opening sentence was this: "I was born at Tawborough on March the Second, 1848." I have put it also on the first page of this present record, which from now, my thirteenth year onwards, is but a matured, shortened and bowdlerized version of the diary, eked out—more often for atmosphere than detail—by memory. The keeping of the diary, however, weakened my memory; which, though of its old photographic accuracy in what it held, yet held far less. I did not need to remember things, I said to myself: I could always find them in the book. Certainly for the first few years, I could have found there everything that was worth reading, as well as everything that wasn't; in later years, alas, I have succumbed to the fatal habit of compact little paragraphs epitomizing whole weeks, and even months, as fatal as the Sundries habit in a household account-book. Indeed, despite the pathetic leniency we show towards the trivial when it is the trivial in our own life, I find the earlier pages of my diary tiresomely full; far too fond of "What we had for dinner" or "Aunt Jael's scripture at this evening's worship."

As I told my diary everything, it began to take the place of my other self, and it is in this sense that I mean that the feeling of dual personality was weakened. The self-to-self talks became fewer; the sense of a person telling and a person told was blurred. Unspoken notes in a grimy exercise book took their place; although at first, and always in

exciting passages, I would talk aloud, and take down, so to say, from my own dictation.

This early diary is morbid, precocious, shrewd, petty, priggish, and comically, pitifully sincere. Religion looms large, with food a bad second. This is natural enough. John Bunyan's whole aim was A Brief Revelation of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ to his poor Servant, John Bunyan; Robinson Crewjoe was not the man to let slip any opportunity for a pious ejaculation, a moral reflection or a godly aside; while Uncle Zam, according to his niece, took a middlin' gude deal of interest in his "Sowl." These great exemplars helped to increase what would have been in any case a heavy disproportion of holy matter. This kind of thing is typical of the earlier years:—

> FEB. 13. Woke still worried by the problems of Infinity in Time and Space, tho' less despairing and appalled than the day before. I pray, *pray*, PRAY; but all the time at the back of my soul, the fear is still there:—Eternity faces me tho' I dare not face Him, and *Where* may my Eternity not be spent? Perhaps "One Day at a Time" is the only way. A wet day. Read Exodus this afternoon. Aunt Jael rough; so held forth to the Lawn children this evening. They are *too* appreciative; roar with laughter at everything I say; it does me good, though this is set off by the harm done me by encouragement in self-esteem. But no, no, no—I have a good and great

> ideal for this Mary, that I must strive to fulfil; and petty ministerings to her (my) vanity must be quashed and that right sternly. Laurie Prideaux gave me some chocolate cream. He is an obliging, kind, childlike, good, conceited boy. Polony for supper.
>
> *Sunday*. Meeting. Bro. Quappleworthy on the Personal God. Saw Joe Jones, I think in Bear Street: must be on holiday from Bristol. Mrs. Cheese thought he was back. He did not see me; as he never looked towards or acknowledged me, I assumed did not. To Lord's Day School, two prayer-meetings, and Gospel-Service this evening. *Very* weary.

Like Uncle Zam on Aunt Sary, I indulged in a good deal of "plain-spaikin" on Aunt Jael. The diary thus became invested with a halo of danger. Suppose she found it in one of its many (and changing) hiding-places! She would beat me utterly, burn the diary, and mock cruelly at its contents. Yet it was from my Grandmother that I hid it with my most ardent cunning. She would neither beat, nor burn, nor mock, but I knew she would condemn it as "morbid" (the word is a later acquisition), and search me with her kind common-sense eyes; and I should be covered with shame. Not guilty shame, rather the shame a man feels when his naked soul is shown to the world; the shame I always felt when caught red-handed in one of my self-to-self declarations in the attic. What if other eyes should read this for

instance?

> 1860. Sept. 25. There are three months just to Christmas. *Then I shall kiss Robbie.*

All through my life these books of revelation have dogged me with the daily fear that through them *I should be found out*; now that they have served their purpose in helping me to compile this more permanent record, I have decided, like Aunt Sary, to "burn un all." (Or nearly decided; it is hard for a woman to destroy memorials of the past.)

The precautions I took, beyond subtle hiding, were: prayer, magic, and the etching in red ink on each exercise-book-cover of this Device:—

PRIVATE
SHAME!
ON WHOEVER MAY THINK EVEN OF READING
THIS
BOOK.
SHAME!

Whether in the worst of us, e. g. Aunt Jael, curiosity is not a stronger passion than fear, and whether therefore this curiosity-tempting cover might not do more harm than good, was a problem and a worry that continually assailed me.

In connection with the diary, I must speak of the Resolves or Resolutions I began to make. These were a result, on one side of my growing sense of sin (egotism, ambition, triumph, revenge, hate, greed, dirt, doubt), and on another side of an exactly opposite desire to realize my imagined ambitions by equipping myself to achieve them (wide knowledge,

better health, nicer looks). They were written on half-sheets of note-paper, which I immediately put in an envelope. This was sealed and hidden in between the pages of that day in the diary on which the resolution was formed. The moment the least part of the current resolve was broken—I knew it always by heart—I had to break open the envelope and begin afresh. The old unkept resolve I placed in the page of the day on which it was broken. Thus an enveloped, sealed, still-in-action Resolve was kept with the day in which it was formed, a discarded one on the day on which I fell. I usually began again on a day that would give me a clean start, such as the first of the month, or a magic date, or some special anniversary. Here is one that had a pretty long run:—

March 9th, 1861.

*My Mother died thirteen years ago today*—Therefore from now onwards I DO RESOLVE:—

I. EVERY DAY

| | |
|---|---|
| To drink a glass of cold water before breakfast and | } To help |
| at night (better than senna) | } me be |
| To go for a walk | } healthy |
| | } To help |
| To brush my hair well | } me be |
| To clean my teeth hard | } pretty |

To learn at least seven new verses of the Word by heart and revise seventeen old ones } To help me be good

To tell the Lord everything in prayer } To help me be Him

II. NEVER

To steal oatmeal from the larder (as I did three times last week)

To think dirty things (as I did last Wednesday when I laughed when Mrs. Cheese said Aunt Jael's drawers were like two red bladders).

III. ALWAYS

To eat slowly (37 bites to each mouthful)

To be like God would like.

RESOLVED, with Mother's help

Mary Lee.

20 minutes past 6.
March 9th, 1861.

For any one to whom this absurd document is absurd only, comment would be but adding insult to injury. Here is another:—

*New Year's Day*, 1862.
(Beginning of a new year and third anniversary of my Flight from Torribridge)

For this year I am going to make no special resolutions put out in a list but at

EVERY

moment I shall ask myself this question:

WHAT WOULD THE LORD DO IF HE WERE ME?

Then I shall never do wrong, and I shall be fitted and worthy for His service.

So with His help I sign

Mary Lee.

Jan. 1st, 1862.
10.30 (a.m.)

This magnificent resolve seems not to have been

specific enough, alas, for my frail endeavours; under a date but six or seven weeks later I find this:—

1862. THIS YEAR'S RESOLVE.
(New Version)

WHAT WOULD THE LORD DO IF HE WERE ME?

*EVERY DAY*

(1) He would pray, *hiding nothing*.

(2) He would learn a new piece of the Word, and *more* than Aunt Jael made Him.

(3) He would be clean (ears, face, nails, teeth, hands, *heart*).

(4) He would go a nice long walk (instead of "poking indoors" as *She* calls it)

*AND HE WOULD NEVER*

(5) Have sinful thoughts like

Spite
Vengeance
Vileness
Pride

(6) Say sinful words, like

____
____

(7) Like sinful things, like

Praise
Riches
Eating
The Pleasure I have whenever the worst part of the "For Ever" Fear is over
Flattery
Fame

(Signed) MARY.
Feb. 19th, 1862.

If this era of diaries and resolutions saw the two-persons idea for a while less distinct, all the other mysteries of my earlier days remained. I still, for instance, put everything I did to the test of reason and instinct, obeying always the latter. I believed more than ever in my private magic and was persuaded that there were special acts, gestures and words which would enable me to perform miracles, if only I could discover them. Dreaming away during Breaking of Bread at the Room, I would be assailed by the desire to turn the wine in the two glass decanters into water; Lord's Day after Lord's Day I sought the magic gesture in vain. I knew there was a word that, if cried aloud, just once, would enable me to soar upward to the sky and fly about angel-like among the stars. I never found it, though a hundred times it was on the tip of my tongue, till I was half wild with hope. Another well-cherished notion was this: that if my mother came to me again, and we could achieve a complete embrace, she would be able to take me away with her to heaven for a space, till a moment when she kissed me again, before the very face of God, and I would swiftly return to earth.

The only magic with which I actually succeeded, or

believed I did (which is the same) was Numbers. 1, 10, 17, 437, 777 were magic: 7 and 237 were big magic; 37 was arch-magic, the Holy Number. In every need I called upon them. If Aunt Jael were flogging me, what I had to do was to count a perfectly even 37, timing it to finish at the same moment as her last stroke. I believed positively that it eased my hurt, and I believe so still, for my attention was concentrated not on Aunt Jael's blows but on my magic: so far, if no farther, is faith-healing a fact. Or I would jump out of bed in the morning, and begin to count, always evenly. If when I finished dressing, I was at a magic number (the correct moment was when I shut the bedroom door behind me, though for a second chance I allowed reaching the bottom stair) then the whole day would be lucky. Or out in the street, the amount of house frontage I could cover in thirty-seven strides I believed positively would be the same as the frontage of the big house I should one day possess. So, like the peasant in Count Tolstoi's tale, I strode mightily.

A big house was one of my few material ambitions at this time, with money to spend on grand furniture for it ("Riches," vide Resolution of 19|2|62). Even here my need was chiefly a spiritual one. I thought that in a vast house, utterly alone, I should have a perfect place for practising echoes, one of the means by which I hoped to solve the riddle of my existence. In the midst of a deathly silence I should stand in the great marble hall and shout.

"Mary Lee, what are you? What are you?"

A hundred echoes would swiftly call back through the silence, and I was on the brink of understanding

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A different method of solving the haunting riddle was to whisper my own name quite suddenly in a silent room, when alone with myself. Sometimes the physical effect was so curious that I was certain of success. Fervent praying to the point of ecstasy, more often to the point of exhaustion, was another way. Sometimes I was able, it seemed, to disembody myself; my soul left my body (at which it could look back as though it belonged to some one else) and wandered nowhere, everywhere, becoming in some half-realized fashion a part of everything in space, and an inhabitant of all periods of time. I remembered, in the fleeting fashion of dreams, things I had done before I was born, in some hitherto unremembered life. Then, again, things I had done still earlier, in distant lives and far-away centuries; till, at last, I remembered myself for ever and for ever in the past, and my soul fled back into my body to hide from the new terror: Eternity behind as well as before me, the unpitying everlastingness of the past as of the future.

The latter was still the unappeasable fear which hung like an evil menace over every moment of my life. If I thought it out and lived through the mad blinding moment of terror as my brain battered itself against Infinity, I gained nothing; the terror flung me back. If I was wise, and refused to think of it, I knew myself for an ostrich with my head in the sand. If I dared not face it, it was there beholding me just the same, unconquered, unconquerable.

Was there no escape? The only notion I could conceive, and which I cherished with most desperate hope, was that Love, if ever it could possess my whole soul and being, would slay the King of Terrors once for all. How could Love so come to me?

Sometimes I thought it would be God. I knew that my Grandmother had a joy, a serene and fearless delight in the love of the Lord, which I did not share. I prayed fervently for this: that I might know the peace of God, which is perfect understanding; that I might possess this divine love, which I could see in her but did not feel in myself; that it might free me from the Fear which darkened my soul. And sometimes I thought it would be Robbie. In his kind embrace, not in foolish echoes or magical tricks, might I find a perfect happiness which would transform and transfigure me, till I could turn a laughing face upon the Terror. Then would I long for Eternity; an Eternity of Love. And my body and soul would fly back to Christmas Night. Ah tender arms around me, ah dear little boy beside me, ah tears, ah joy, ah Robbie!

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## CHAPTER XXI: I AM BAPTIZED IN JORDAN

"Do 'ee love the Lord?" my Grandmother was for ever asking.

"Yes, Grandmother," I always replied.

Down in my heart I knew it was not true. There was belief in me, and awe; but of that passion for God which I envied in her, no semblance. If it were really love I felt for Him (I put it to myself) "my heart would warm within me whenever I think of Him, as

it does when I think of Robbie: or of Mother." When I tried to conjure Him up, all I could ever see was a blurred bearded man on a high grey throne; and if I peered harder for face and features, a dark mist like a rain-cloud always filled the space where they should be.

I knew I could never love Any One Whose face I could never see.

"You do not love Him as you do Robbie," kept saying the accusing voice within. It is true, and the thought horrified me. Until I could feel this greater love, I knew I had not "got religion."

For all my godly upbringing, for all my pious ways, I was no more privileged than ninety-nine of a hundred mere averagely religious grown-ups. Like theirs, my religion was but an affair of education, habit, intellect, morality. The Rapture was withheld. I had not got religion.

I knew my Bible as well as any child in England, and I loved it as well. I believed in all the doctrines of the Saints, not vaguely either, like a normal unreflecting child: but had pondered on them, and within my capabilities thought them out and personally accepted them. No atheist doubts oppressed me. The Tempter had not assailed me, as he had assailed my friend John Bunyan, with "Is Christianity no better than other religions, just one religion among many?" and other such wicked doubts. But I had not got religion.

And fear beset me: fear of other people, of the Devil, of Eternity, and, now as I grew older, of myself. The glimpses I had of the evil natures in me affrighted me. Sometimes in brooding over some wrong done

me, my imagination ran riot in fantastic excesses of cruelty and revenge till I drew back appalled at the horrors of which, in thought at any rate, I was capable. I would brood over the unhappiness of my life and the injustice meted out to me every day, till my soul was a dark seething mass of revengefulness and hate. Not till I found myself visualizing the very act of murder did I draw back affrighted.

With the change in my nature that came as I grew into girlhood, a new series of evil visions possessed me. I found myself picturing fleshly and disgraceful things, things I had never heard of nor known to be possible, thrown up from the wells of original sin within. Pleasurable sensations lured me on till I drew back appalled at the sickening deeds that I, godly little Plymouth Sister, conceived myself as doing. Of course they were things I never *should* really do—oh dear no! that was foul, unimaginable!—but Conscience quoted Matthew five, twenty-eight, and though I stuffed my fingers in my ears she kept dinning it. *You have committed it already in your heart.*

I had no sense of proportion, and believed myself a very monster of vileness: a vileness, I feared, which would cling and canker till it deformed my soul and body and face; and I saw myself, a loathsome shape, living on for ever with increasing self-loathing through all the pitiless eternal years. My blood froze with fear as my mind's eye stared fascinated at the shameful shape. I screamed as madmen scream.

Madness I often feared. In my imaginings of Eternity, let me one day go but a single step too far, let me suffer the awful ecstasy of fear to hold me but a second too long, and I knew my reason would be fled. So about this time I added to my prayers: "God,

save me from going mad."

But fear, though never far away, and the sense of wickedness, though always near the surface, were not masters of every moment. The one thing that never left me was a feeling of unsatisfiedness, incompleteness. The world seemed an empty place, my soul an empty vessel. I had a melancholy sureness that something, the chief thing, the secret of happiness, was lacking me. I believed that this secret could only be discovered in the love of God: that there only could I find, as my Grandmother had found, the peace and delight which pass all understanding. That alone was religion, and I had it not.

"Do 'ee love the Lord?" my Grandmother was for ever asking.

To possess the love of God became the aim of all my prayers and hopes. It alone could save me from my evil self, quell my bad desires, dispel my fears, and fill the aching void. How could I possess it? The conviction seized me one day, how or why I do not know, that I should obtain it in the moment at which I was baptized; not before, and in no other way. Once the idea had come, it would not leave me; to hasten on my public immersion became the chief endeavour of my life.

Grandmother was nothing loth, for it was her own dearest wish. My age, she said, might be raised in objection: I was not yet thirteen. Had I surely faith? —I gave her passionate proofs—then God's requirements were fulfilled. She spoke to Aunt Jael, and both of them to Pentecost Dodderidge, who agreed ardently.

The Brethren do not of course practise infant baptism. However, children of about my age could be, and very occasionally were, baptized, provided they gave surpassing proofs of holiness. Faith, not age, as the Bible shows, is the only test of fitness. But certain of the Saints in our Meeting, influenced whether by "common-sense," or by the rankling notion that none of their children ever had been or ever would be admitted to baptism at such a tender age, began to murmur, and spoke privily to Pentecost against the project. Brother Browning took the bolder course of taking my Grandmother herself to task. Dark doubts beset him, he declared, scriptural doubts; though his real motive was jealousy for Marcus.

"Unscriptural?" said my Grandmother in amaze. "Have you read your acts of the Apostles, Brother Browning? Faith, not years or rank or race is what the Scripture requires. Think of Crispus, Cornelius, the jailor of Philippi, Lydia seller of purple! Turn to your eighth chapter: Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch: 'See, here is water, what doth hinder us to be baptized?' Does Philip answer 'But tell me first your age?' No, he answers: 'If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.'"

She turned to me. "Child, do you believe with all your heart?"

"Yes, Grandmother."

Turning in triumph to Brother Browning: "The Scripture is satisfied. And," she added, "Mr. Pentecost approves."

Brother Browning was confounded. Nevertheless, but

for the affection in which Grandmother was held, and Aunt Jael's prestige, both backed by the insurmountable authority of Pentecost, I am pretty sure that some of the Saints would have resisted further. In face of that Trinity, they were dumb.

So it was settled, and I began a term of "preparation." Grandmother enjoined that I turn my mind wholly on heavenly things. She held devotions with me at all hours, praying sometimes far into the night. Pentecost himself came in to pray with me, while those who had raised objections were invited specially to test my faith. Brother Browning came,—like the Queen of Sheba, to prove me with hard questions. Like Solomon, I emerged triumphant.

As the time drew near, sometimes my excitement could hardly contain itself. My visions of the Moment became more detailed, more delirious, more intense. At the very moment of immersion the old Wicked Me would instantly die and a New Self come into being: in a second, Eve would be driven out and Christ implanted for ever in my soul. At one magical stroke I should possess happiness and be freed from all fear and wickedness and emptiness of heart. The love of God would not enter me slowly, gradually; but would storm me like a victorious army, swallow me like the sea.

As part of my preparation, I was taken by Grandmother to one or two baptisms. Ceremonies were held from time to time, according as there were sufficient candidates. Our Meeting baptized not only for ourselves but also for the Branch Meeting and all the villages around. The number of persons immersed ranged from two or three to a dozen. The ceremony took place in the Taw, following Scripture

example; at a spot just beyond the quay and the ships, a few yards from where the Town railway-station for Ilfracombe now stands. Here the river was shallow; you could wade nearly into mid-stream. Robing and re-robing took place at White House, Brother Brawn's tumble-down residence near by. Now that Pentecost was too old, Brother Brawn was our Baptist. The usual time was Lord's Day morning; very early, to avoid a jeering crowd.

At the second of these ceremonies that I was taken to see, a strange incident occurred. Despite the day and hour, we were never quite without a few scoffers, who would stand on the shore a little way away from our company, and shout and mock at the proceedings in the water. On this particular occasion two men who looked like labourers appeared, not on shore, but in a small boat in mid-stream; where they remained cat-calling and jeering while we held our preliminary service on the river bank. Brother Brawn waded out with the convert—a fair-haired young man whose name I do not remember—till the water was about up to their middles. The two men in the boat rowed nearer till they were within a few yards only; but farther out, and therefore in a deeper place. The river was at high tide.

"Look 'ee at the dippers, the sheep dippers!" they cried; then to Brother Brawn, "'Tis too early yet for the dippin', master, 'tis a'most winter still." They used foul words and sneered blasphemously, taking God's name in vain.

We on the shore had noticed a dog with them in the boat, a little terrier, shaggy and brown. When Brother Brawn began the actual act of immersion and dipped the fair-haired young Brother's head

under water, one of the men in the boat began a blasphemous imitation. He took the dog by the scruff of the neck, held it over the edge of the boat, and kept dipping its head under the water. After each word of Brother Brawn's he cried out: "I baptize thee, O Brother Dog, i' the name o' the Vather, o' the Zun —"

We were too horrified to speak or move. I know my face was scarlet with shame; and I prayed within: "O God, stop him, strike him low. Stop his mouth. Punish him now." I saw Grandmother was saying a like prayer.

God replied before our eyes. The mocking man, in a misjudged movement, bent over too far with the dog. In a second the boat was overturned, and men and dog were in the water together, struggling and splashing. (Brother Brawn's back was turned; I do not think he knew what was happening.)

Where the boat had overturned it was clearly much deeper, as neither of the men could stand. One managed to swim in safety to the opposite bank. The other, the chief mocker, struggled, rose, disappeared, rose again, and finally disappeared, gurgling and gesticulating horribly.

Those of us on shore were purged with awe and terror. "God is not mocked!" cried Pentecost.

After the service, the dead body was washed ashore; I gazed in dumb horror (thinking too of God's power) at the staring wide-open eyes, the blue face contorted with fear, the soft white foam issuing from the mouth.

The dog was saved. Brother Brawn took it away with

him and had it poisoned.

This incident served to tinge with apprehension the hopes with which I looked forward to my own immersion, now very near. Suppose I were drowned: in my own way I was wicked as the labourer, with better chances and less excuse. God could drown me if He wished. The mere physical horror of cold water was another fleck. Nor was Mrs. Cheese behindhand with tales that troubled. She recalled the young woman in a rapid decline who had been baptized one winter morning in the Exe, had been dragged out unconscious, and had died within the hour. She knew of Sisters who had fainted through nervousness or collapsed with the cold. Then there was the Christian wife who was stripped naked and horsewhipped by her infidel husband, a country squire over Chittlehampton way, because she had received public baptism. He flogged her till she was a mass of blood and wounds, till she fell to the ground as one dead; then dragged her up again and dashed her head against a stone wall. She died from ill-usage, a true "gauspel martyr."

My day was fixed: our next baptism, a Sunday in April, a few weeks after my thirteenth birthday.

Clothes were a problem. Female candidates usually donned for the occasion an old cast-off skirt which they could afford to let the water ruin. Pieces of lead were sewn at intervals to the inside of the bottom of the skirt, so that when in the water the air would not get into and blow it upwards.

According to Aunt Jael, the pieces of lead should weigh about four ounces each: just sufficient to keep the skirt pendant and modest. All very well, said my Grandmother, but what good were weights—four

ounces or forty ounces—when the skirt, like the child's, reached down to the knees only? There was only one way out of the difficulty: "The child must wear a long skirt for the occasion." A faded black serge of my Grandmother's was unearthed. It fitted me—more or less—though a good couple of inches higher in front than behind; and, helped out by an old black blouse and cape, produced the most grotesque and unlovely Mary the mirror had ever shewn me.

"Changing" was at Brother Brawn's, the White House, near the quay. On the Saturday night preceding the event Grandmother took me down there with my ordinary Lord's Day clothes wrapped up in a paper parcel and laid them out in the back kitchen (the immemorial after-the-event robing room) ready for the morrow. Mistress Brawn, née Clinker, received us with an infantile affectation of patronage: as though we didn't know that Brother Brawn's had been the garmenting-house for forty years and more.

The morrow dawned fine and cold. With Grandmother on my left hand and Aunt Jael on my right, I sallied forth down Bear Street, in full baptismal kit of faded black. What the few early risers we met on our way thought of me I do not know. Nor, I expect, did they.

Though he had relinquished the office of Baptist for several years, Pentecost Dodderidge decided to resume it for this one occasion. It was a supreme honour for me, a high compliment to Aunt Jael and Grandmother, and a real risk and sacrifice on his part: for he was in frail health, and nearing his eighty-fourth year. At the riverside we found him waiting, clad in the black surplice he had always

used, his white beard flowing free. Around him the Saints stood clustered; every man and woman in the Meeting must have been there.

All there, whispered the Devil, to see *you*. You the child-Saint, you the youthful trophy of God's grace. There were other candidates, I knew, mere everyday grown-ups; but I was the "star turn," and I first should enter the water. The moment was very near: "Be ready," whispered Grandmother. My heart beat wildly. The air was sharp and a cold breeze was stirring. How much colder would the water not be! Cold dark water, suppose it should engulph me for ever? How blue the mocking labourer had been. But God would not treat me so: my heart was aching to receive Him. He would come to me, not cast my body to death. How all the Saints were staring. Vanity swelled again. I was the youngest who had ever been baptized in Taw (I heard it whispered near me), the youngest ever privileged to break bread! Were not all the people gazing on me, admiring my piety, specialness, distinction? Ah, publicity, glory! I would walk into the water in the view of all the multitude, like an empress on her way. "Crush that vile vanity!" the Better Me cried savagely: "Chase forth that paltry pride. Only to a clean and humble heart can the Lord of Heaven come. Quick, away with it!" Ere the voice had done speaking, all the pride had fled away. My heart stood empty, sure of its emptiness, hungering for the Holy Spirit, waiting with intense expectation and a hope almost too hard to bear.

"Come, Lord Jesus," I whispered.

Meanwhile around me they had sung a hymn and prayed a prayer; I hardly knew it. Pentecost took my

hand. The moment was here: should I die of hope?—my heart was beating so. We waded out together in the cold stream. I must have been looking eastwards for I remember the bright morning sun was in my eyes. I can see again the green fields opposite. I remember too how frail and tiny I felt as Mr. Pentecost's hand held mine, and as he towered above me in the water.

A long way out we halted: I was up to my shoulder nearly, he to his middle. He grasped me, placing his right hand under my left armpit, and the palm of his left hand flat in the middle of my back. He looked to heaven, holding me still upright, and called in a loud voice: "I do baptize thee, my sister, in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Ghost." On the last word he flung me backwards until for a moment I was wholly under the water.

Now the miracle took place. As I came up again the water streaming from my face was no longer cold, but warm and luminous; not water at all, but light itself. Light suffused me, covered me, poured into me, filled me; a blinding, lilting joy and brightness throbbed and shone through all my body and soul. I shut my eyes in sheer rapture; my ordinary senses faded away; sight and hearing were of another world from this beatific Presence. It seemed as though another person, luminous and divine, had entered into my body. It was God. I knew everything; and everything was well. I remembered all I had ever done, and far away things I had done in distant centuries in other lives I had not known until now. I seemed to remember the future too; for in that moment Time had no meaning; that moment was all Eternity. I understood, with a perfectness of comprehension beside which all my life before

seemed darkness that there was no beginning and no end, no time and no space, nothing but God Who transcended them all, and who now possessed me utterly. I thought my heart would burst. The holy exaltation was too hard and beautiful to bear. All round and in me was light and love: the sun and God and I, all the same soul and body, all merged together, all within each other, all One. For that one glorious moment I *was* God.

A transcendent experience transcends all verbal description: even now I cannot think of it: only feel it, *live* it again. Nor can explanation impart its quality to others. It is my soul's own mystery, indescribable, incommunicable, in the most literal sense ineffable. I rail at words that they can do so little, then at my own folly that I should seek to describe in finite language the Infinite Mystery of God.

The ecstasy lasted perhaps, in the world's time, a minute: though, in reality, for ever. Then I remember, as I woke to finite experience, a gradual ebbing sensation as the Holy Spirit departed from me. The warmth and radiance faded; the streaming fluid of light was dripping water only. I was conscious of Pentecost again, clasping my hand and leading me ashore. I heard the voices of the Saints raised aloft in a song of triumphal thanks. Then—Grandmother's welcoming arms, benignant Saints, the White House, garment-changing, loud Salvation, dear warm breakfast; all part of a waking dream.

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The results of Jordan morning were chiefly four.

First, I was left with a certainty of belief in God, a

sense of authority in my knowledge of Him, and an ever-present memory of His nearness and reality, that faith without experience could never have furnished. I apprehended once and for all the folly and futility of all intellectual reasoning about God, all attempts to bolster Him up by argument; to prove Him. Vain beatings about the bush! You do not beat about the Burning Bush: you enter within, and there is God.

Second, from that day onwards I could never again be sure that life was real. After the blinding reality of my moment with God, all things around me seemed faded and unsubstantial; they were the shadows of a dream, of the dream that I was, alive. After a while, as my soul travelled back to the habits of normal experience, the notion haunted me less; but it has never completely left me.

Third, having received the knowledge of God, I knew that it was the one thing worth living for. I knew I must show myself worthy of possessing Him, and fit to receive Him again. The sense of perfect holiness I had experienced filled me with a yearning for goodness and purity that was almost morbidly intense. I tried every moment of the day to make myself more like the Holy Spirit, more capable of feeling within me the holiness I had for one moment felt. Conscience was ever at hand: for a long space I obeyed her every bidding. The fact that I was happier put spite and revenge and morbid broodings under better control. Heredity and habit, the taint within and the harsh surroundings without, kept me dismal-Jenny enough: but from the day of my baptism my bouts of misery were less frequent, less prolonged, and less cruel. I had always the memory of that tender triumphant ineffable moment with

God.

Fourth, and most curious, I found myself farther away from my Grandmother. We had the same religion, yet different religions; knew the One God, yet different Gods. Or rather the difference was not in Him, but in our two selves, in the two temperaments with which we experienced Him. All my life I had envied my Grandmother's joy and serenity in the Lord; I had obtained a joy as perfect, yet I knew that it was another joy; not greater nor less, but different. Her chief delight was in contemplating the salvation of all souls achieved through the sacrifice on Calvary; mine was the Spirit of God filling and irradiating the heart. Not that I ever doubted that it was through and because of the Cross that the knowledge of the Lord had been vouchsafed me so miraculously; but the emotional result interested me, not the theological cause. In all my earnest strivings to be good it was never the sacrifice of Jesus that spurred me on; but always the memory of the Holy Spirit. I must be clean and good and holy like Him, and worthy to welcome Him again. I have put the distinction between Aunt Jael and Grandmother as this: Aunt Jael was an Old Testament woman, Grandmother a New Testament one. But the real distinction between the three of us was this. God is Triune and One: Aunt Jael revered the First Person, Grandmother loved the Second, and I adored the Third.

Trouble began in this way. Unlike Grandmother, now that I had got religion I took a strong dislike to talking of it. To her "Do 'ee love the Lord?" I could only reply with passionate truth, "Yes, Grandmother"; but I found that (where before my baptism it was the sense of insincerity in my reply that had troubled

me) now it was a certain indelicacy in the question itself that offended. "If in my heart"—this is approximately what I felt—"I have the mystery of the love of the Lord, that is a private and sacred bond between Him and me. Whose business is it else? What right have they to pry?" I felt a curious shame, resembling the shame of nakedness, but more intense and spiritual; as the soul is more sensitive than the body.

"Do you contemplate *hourly* the Cross of Christ?" "Is the Means of Salvation your *only* joy?" "Do you think *always* of the blessed Gospel plan?" "Is the Atonement *everything* to 'ee, my dear?" No worldlyhead, no scoffer could have hated these searching questions as did I. My Grandmother perceived the distaste, and was profoundly puzzled and pained. Her own answer to these questions would have been "Yes," in the weeks after her baptism (she must have said to herself), a fervent triumphant Yes.

One day an incident showed how wide the spiritual breach was becoming, and widened it still further. It was a Saturday morning: I was sitting on the bottom stair of the staircase, pulling on my boots to go for a walk. My Grandmother, coming from the little pantry at the head of the cellar steps, stooped down as she passed, and asked in a loud whisper of intense earnestness: "The Cross, my dear: is it giving you joy *now*?" She bent and peered, poking her face right into mine. It was so sudden, the irritation and distaste so powerful, that I drew back sharply with a quick gesture of annoyance. There had been no time for dissimulation, and the look on my face was unmistakable. So was the look on hers—pain, and a rare and terrible thing, anger.

"You *dare* draw back like that? What is it? *Du my breath smell bad?*"

* * * * * * *

The real crisis, I saw, was yet to come. Now that I had got religion (in my fashion, in God's fashion, for me) I knew that I was never destined to fulfil my Grandmother's purpose: to devote my life to preaching the Gospel in heathen lands. The first moment I thought of this after my baptism I realized with a shivering aversion how much more distasteful my long-decided future was than it had ever appeared before; I realized too in the old authentic way, that it was not God's will or purpose for me; and but for this, I was far too honest, in my new frame of mind, to have let my own distaste count for anything. I reflected how odd it was that through the great central act of my dedication, I had become unable to fulfil its ultimate purpose. But so it was. The same answer came to all my prayers, unspoken and afoot, or cried out on bended knees: His purpose for me was no missionary one, but my best endeavours in an ordinary life in the everyday workaday world. The conflict to come was not with Him, but with Grandmother.

What would she say when the day of decision came, and plans and details of my apostolic career could no longer be evaded or postponed? What would she say? How would she feel? And I, how should I face her scornful accusing eyes? The more I pictured the inevitable instant, the more I feared it.

And the everyday workaday life, where and what would it be? I had still the vaguest ideas on such matters, though I knew I should have to earn money and provide myself with bread: I, the mere

dependent, the Charity Child as Aunt Jael so often described me. The question turned itself over and over in my brain. It was from an unexpected quarter that the answer came.

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## CHAPTER XXII: THE RETURN OF THE STRANGER

I used to visit my mother's grave. Any one not knowing my Grandmother might have thought she would be glad. But no—"Don't 'ee do it, my dear. Once in a way 'tis right enough may be. But don't 'ee be getting too fond of graveyards."

So I would gather flowers and put them on my mother's grave without saying a word to any one.

One Saturday morning in April, about a year after my baptism, I had picked primroses in the lanes, two great bunches, and was on my way back to the cemetery, which lay in Bear Road on the outskirts of the town, not very far above the Lawn. I was absorbed in my thoughts, talking away as usual to myself. But when I saw a horse coming up the road towards me I stepped aside almost into the ditch that ran along under the hedgerow, and stared as one does at whatever inspires fear. Horses came in my mind only second to cows as objects of prowling terror. As the horse came nearer I looked up at its rider.

My heart beat violently. I inordinately wanted him to

recognize me. He glanced at me as he approached as any horseman might at a strange child on the roadside; there was no recognition in the deep-set eyes. He was sharper featured and less handsome than in my memory; but the friendliness and aristocratic distinction of the face were as I had retained them. Set on his horse, he looked something far above the world I knew. Recognize me he must; I would make him.

"Sir! Sir!" I cried eagerly, shrilly, feebly, with an awkward appealing gesture.

He put his hand in his pocket and threw me a shilling. So he thought I was a beggar girl. I was filled with a burning shame of my lowly appearance and shabby clothes, though truth to tell they were hardly as bad as I thought them. I let the coin roll into the gutter. Now he was passing me. My determination to make him know me became desperate: the joy of being recognized must be mine. My heart was throbbing as I came out into the middle of the road. I looked at him appealingly and cried out:

"Westward Ho! Westward Ho!"

He stared.

"I'm not a beggar; I'm the little girl you gave the book to in Torribridge. Don't you remember?"

He jumped from his horse.

"I do."

"Are you sure? Are you really sure?"

"Really! How is Aunt Jael?"

"Yes, yes, you do, you do!"

"And is it still so very silly to say that a certain little white town looks glorious from the hills—?"

"Oh yes—"

"And did Uncle Simon—"

"Simeon," I corrected.

"—Let you read the book after all? Now do you believe I remember, little Miss Doubting Thomas?"

I was radiant in the light of the kind quizzical smile.

"Of course I do. He burned it in the fire and said it was a wicked swearing book just when I was at the best point where they attack the Gold Train. That was when he began to treat me crueller, till at last I ran away and came back to Grandmother and Aunt Jael."

"They live here—in Tawborough?"

"In Bear Lawn, do you know it? Number Eight."

"May I be inquisitive? What is your name, little girl?"

"Mary Lee. May I be inquisitive, please? What is *your* name?"

"Ah, I don't think it would interest you if you heard it."

"That's not fair. Names are very important, they help you to know what people are like. I'm Mary, you can see that to look at me, I see that myself when I look in the glass. Any one like Aunt Jael could only be called Aunt Jael, it belongs to her just as much as her stick. I like names, especially fine names of people

and places: like Ur of the Chaldees. Say it over slowly, in a grand way like this—Urr—of—the—Chal—dees! Penzance is another nice one, and Marazion: I like all places with a 'z' in them, a 'z' looks so rare and special. People's names are better still. The man we beat in the Armada—do you remember it was you who told me about the Armada first, and I thought it was an animal, but I know all about it now—the Spanish commander was called the Duke of Medina Sidonia. Roll it over on your tongue. If there is a Duke of Medina Sidonia alive now, I should like to marry him. Fancy being called the Duchess of Medina Sidonia!"

I half closed my eyes in rapture.

"Yes," he said twitching just a little at the corners of his mouth, "you're the same little girl."

I liked this observation, as I was intended to. I could see he was laughing at me, but liked me. I forgave the first for the second.

"You have not told me your name yet. I think it must be a good one."

"If it is *very* good will you do the same for me as for the Duke of Medina Sidonia?"

"What do you mean? Oh"—colouring—"I will see. Tell me your name first."

"No, you must promise first."

"Very well then, if you won't! I can't promise to marry you. I shall never marry at all." There was a quick vision of Robbie. "At least I don't think so, and anyway it would be some one else. Good-bye, sir, now." We were at the cemetery gates: "Unless you

would wait? These primroses are for my mother. I come here to put them on her grave."

"You wouldn't like me to come?"

"Yes, you may. I want you to."

"Why?"

"Because I like you. That's a proper reason; and *she* wouldn't mind."

"Who? Your Grandmother you mean, or your aunt?"

"No, my mother. So come, will you please? What will you do with your horse?"

The horse was not to be a stumbling block. "Here, hi!" he called to a farmer's lad who was passing. "Hold the mare for a few minutes."

I led the way through the gate and across the familiar daisied turf. We stopped at a simple grave, kerbless, grass-grown and unpretending. On a plain upright slab of stone was inscribed

RACHEL TRAIES
*These are they which came out of great tribulation.*

"Here we are."

"Which one?"

"This." I pointed.

"But, but—Traies? You told me your name was Lee."

"Yes, they call me Lee because my mother was called that before she was married, and it's my Grandmother's name. Traies is my father's; people don't use their father's name unless they live with

him."

"I suppose not."

"What—why do you speak like that? You know him! You know my father!"

"No."

"You've heard of him I can see."

"Well, perhaps."

"How? When? What does he do? Where is he?" I waved the primroses.

"I don't know any of the things you ask me, and I don't know him. Honour bright. But I think I've heard of him, though of course the Mr. Traies I've heard of is quite likely a different person altogether, for the name is not so rare in Devonshire."

"Is the one you've heard of a wicked man?"

"Not a very good man, perhaps."

"Oh, it's the same! Say wicked, it's what you mean. A vile wicked man. He cruelly treated my mother and put her in this grave. There, I was forgetting her. Mother dear, here are the primroses."

I knelt down and said a prayer, half aloud, more to my mother than to her Maker and mine. Only for a moment, and then very slightly, was I shy of the Stranger. Nor was there anything self-conscious and melodramatic in me, no enjoyment in performing a striking and sentimental act in front of another person, such as would have been experienced by most people, and by myself too a few years later. (I had less sense of pose and acting when some one else

was watching me than if alone, for I myself was the only person I performed in front of. On the day when I hurled "Brawling woman in a wide house" at Aunt Jael, it was somebody else inside me looking on and listening who exulted in Mary's wit. Not for some years yet did I begin in the more usual manner to make life a performance before other people.) I was silent for perhaps three minutes. As I rose I wiped my eyes. So I think did the Stranger.

He said: "Would you mind if I put some flowers there too—wipe your knees, the grass is damp—Would you mind?"

"Why? No, it would be very kind. But you haven't got any."

"Some other time I shall bring them, when next I'm passing through Tawborough."

"Why?"

"Because I like you. That's a proper reason; and—maybe—*she* wouldn't mind."

"Well, you may. We must go, it is dinner-time."

We reached the gate and he took his horse. Both of us knew we did not accept this meeting as final, each of us was waiting for the other to speak. I knew I could outwait him.

"Little girl, we shall see each other again? May I write and ask your Grandmother or Aunt to let you come and see me?"

"Grandmother, not Aunt Jael. They might be angry though. What are you—a Saint?"

"A what?"

"A Saint."

"No, a sinner. At least I think so. Not that I know quite what you mean. Still I shall risk it."

"When?"

"One day. Don't worry; not far ahead. Now good-bye." His foot was in the stirrup.

"Good-bye."

He was soon away up the hill. I stared him out of sight. He turned round once.

I turned home, pleased and excited at the new life given to an old player in the drama of Me. He was a kind and interesting looking human-being, with this rare and all-important merit that he liked me. I felt this keenly every time he looked at me. I turned over in my mind whether I should tell Grandmother and decided not to. After all the Stranger had said he would write to her: was it not better that she should learn of it from him? For this letter I waited.

Another letter received by my Grandmother soon put all thought of the Stranger at the back of my head.

One day at breakfast she read us a letter from no less a person than the sixth Lord Tawborough, lord of Woolthy Hall. The writer stated that his love for his old governess, reinforced by the wishes of his late revered father, induced him (now that he had come back to Devonshire to live) to hope to make the acquaintance of her mother; the more especially as she had been wronged by one connected by kinship with the family and whom she had first met in his

father's house—his house. Would Mrs. Lee be courteous enough to name a day on which it would be convenient for him to call?

I was all attention. Now I should meet a person who had played a part in my mother's life, the little boy who had been kind to her. There was a debt to be paid here, as much as to any one who had been kind to my own self. How I should pay back I could not yet decide. A lord! Mary recompense a lord!

As I thus reflected Aunt Jael was weighing up whether she would accord permission to His Lordship to enter *her* house.

"Wull, let him come. Maybe he thinks he's honouring us. Let him know a day on which he may call? The Lord's Day! He can come to Meeting and learn that there's a bit of difference between his high position before men and his wretched position before his Maker. Let him come. I approve."

So did my Grandmother, whom natural instinct, religion, and the sobering experience of seventy years' sisterhood had combined to teach that it was not worth while pointing out that it was to her that Lord Tawborough had written, or that the house too was equally hers, inasmuch as one seventeen-pounds-ten-shillings is quite as good as another.

"Very well, Lord's Day after next. I will ask him to come about ten o'clock. If he wants to, he will make the time suit."

He made it suit, arriving at a bare four minutes past the hour on the Lord's Day after next.

It was a big day to look forward to: except perhaps

for my Grandmother, with her curious indifference to persons and events worldly. Aunt Jael pretended a scornful superiority which deceived nobody. That a lord, and Lord Tawborough, one of the great ones of the earth (and the county) was paying a visit to Miss Vickary—for so of course the visit was announced—was soon all round the Meeting. On the Tuesday preceding, the Misses Clinker discussed it all the afternoon.

"I don't 'old wi' these lords," said Miss Salvation, "the Lord God A'mighty is good enough for me. They 'ave pride in their sinful 'earts, and they imparts pride to them as receives 'em."

"*You* jealous, ha, ha! Don't you know your place?" The old stick thumped.

"I du; and well enough not to go inviting under my 'umble roof folks of another station in life."

"In this life," corrected Glory.

Salvation agreed. "If you was to give 'im a plain talk about 'is sowl, maybe the Lord would forgive the sinful pride in yer 'eart and render the visit fruitful and a blessing to 'ee both. But you won't dare. You'll remember 'e's a lord, and fearing to offend 'im ye'll offend yer 'eavenly Lord instead—" She was ruder than she usually dared, fortified by the knowledge that what she said was getting home.

"Silence, woman!" shouted Aunt Jael. "Every one of your foolish words is false. The young man won't leave my house till he has confessed his sin and been shown the plan of escape. I've asked 'im on a Lord's Day so that he goes to Meeting with us, and hears the gospel. I've no doubt for the first time in his life.

He'll be there at 'Breaking of Bread.'"

"Aw, will 'ee?" Salvation reviewed rapidly what chance she would have on that occasion of attracting his lordship's special notice.

"I beg your pardon, Sister Jael, I'm sure I do. Sorry I spoke in 'aste; I was forgetting to jidge not so I be not jidged. Maybe you're asking a few old friends up to meet him?"

"Maybe fiddlesticks."

Miss Salvation groaned aloud with envy and disappointment. If one considers the disproportionate pleasure an invitation would have given, Aunt Jael may be judged mean in her refusal. On the other hand, poor Lord Tawborough!

My interest in the visitor was greater than Aunt Jael's, less snobbish and more dramatic. He would be the first of my father's relatives I had ever met: he figured in the sacred story of my mother. I pictured a hundred times what he would be like; young, grand and impressive. He would wear a coronet and carry a golden pole with ribbons floating from the top.

At the last moment my chief attention shifted from the visitor to myself: from considering what he would look like to what I should look like to him. He was to arrive by carriage, he said. Aunt Jael was to bow him into the famous front-room, swept and garnished for the occasion, offer him a chair, a glass of sherry and a biscuit, and hustle him off to Meeting. This was Aunt Jael's program. Mine was quite as carefully worked out. I decided to stay upstairs in my bedroom till he came, watching his arrival from my window, retiring so that he could

not catch a glimpse of me, and not descending till Aunt Jael began to shout for me. Then I would go downstairs, ready dressed for Meeting. The advantages were: first I looked best with my bonnet on, as it concealed my scraggy and unalluring hair; second, I should have seen him before he saw me, always a strategic advantage; third, he would see me last, after he had had time to absorb the lesser charms of Grandmother and Aunt Jael—even so does the leading lady fail to appear till you have made the acquaintance of the lesser stars.

I made one eleventh-hour alteration. As I heard carriage-wheels coming up the Lawn path, I decided, with impulsive generosity, not to peep at him. It would be taking an unfair advantage: I would let him burst on me at the same moment as I on him. To avoid temptation I ran away from the window. I was specially excited. Now for some of Aunt Jael's snobbery. A lord!

Grandmother was calling me, "Child, child!"

Begloved, bonnetted, Bibled, I went downstairs. As I approached the half-open parlour door, I heard Aunt Jael expounding my "usual" unpunctuality (a lie). My heart beat fast. I went in to greet our visitor.

It was the stranger.

"Good morning, little girl. So you got home all right that day." He rose, smiling. The advantage was his with a vengeance: poor reward for my self-sacrifice in allowing him a simultaneous first-sight, when I might have peeped from my window, discovered who he was and got through my first excitement alone.

"You!" I gasped, "you're Lord Tawborough?" My amazement was shot through with enjoyment of Aunt Jael's.

"Yes, that's the grand name I told you of. I'm not a duke, you see, only a humble lord. I'm so sorry; Tawborough hasn't got quite the swing of Medin-a Sidon-ia, I must admit. I'm sorry, Your Grace."

"You," I echoed, doubting if all this were not a dream. I clutched for a moment to see if I could feel the side of my bed.

"Come now, child, explanations are due. What's this mean? There's been concealment here."

"'Tis time to be off, Jael," whispered Grandmother, "twenty past."

"You must explain on the way; your lordship is ready too?" The first sentence was spoken with usual harshness slightly modified for the hearing of visitors, the second with an interesting mixture of deference and command.

We sallied forth. Lord Tawborough on the outside, then Aunt Jael, then Grandmother, then myself. On the way, he related briefly his encounters with me, omitting with admirable reticence his purchase of Westward Ho! and our visit to my mother's grave. Our entry into the Room was stately, triumphant and restrained. In the Book of Judgment there is a big black mark against Aunt Jael in that she did forget she was entering the Lord's house, in her majestic obsession that she was entering it with a lord. A biggish black mark against my name too. Grandmother alone of the four of us has a clean white space. For the Stranger too was proud—proud

that he was not too proud to mind entering a Brethren meeting-house with humble folk, the pride of having no pride, the last pride of all—a huge mark his, black as night. Marks against all the Saints' names too, even in that gathering of devout souls I could see that there were none, excepting always my Grandmother, who did not turn from holy thought for an odd moment now and then to note their noble visitor: to feel a worldly interest in his presence. More appropriately I could see them observing with regret that he did not Break Bread (though of course he could not—it would have been wicked if he had) and with pleasure that he was not allowed to give to the box. Despite the glint of a gold guinea, Brother Brawn snatched our four-mouthed monster proudly away from his outstretched hand; we would not take gold from a sinner, albeit a peer.

In almost all the prayers that morning sorrowful reference was made to his lordship: it was hoped that in His own good time the Lord might turn him to Himself. After every such reference came "Ay-men! Ay-men!", Salvation bellowing loudest.

I was too preoccupied pondering on the extraordinary fact that the Stranger, my mother's little friend, and the sixth Lord Tawborough, were one and the same person, to pay much heed to the service. One feature, however, stands in my memory: an eloquent utterance by Brother Briggs, who on this occasion outshone himself: shining face (remember he was an oilman) and shining words alike. His voice roared through the Room.

"There's zummat we've 'eard a powerful lot about jis' lately: Princes. Princes dyin' an' marryin' and givin' in marridge.[3] Princes this an' Princes that." (He took a

deep breath, threw back his head, puffed out his chest, slapped it heartily again and again, beamed supernally, and shouted like a multitude.) "I'm a prince! You stares, brethrin, you stares in wonderment, an' I repeats it to 'ee all; I'm a royull prince. Why vor? Reflect a minute. What *is* a prince? —Why, 'tis a King's son, *an' I'm the son uv a King, I'm the son uv a King, I'm the son uv a King*!" (He slapped his breast resoundingly three times.) "Ay, an' a son uv the King of Kings; so I'm a Prince uv Princes! Turn wi' me to the twenty-second chapter of the Gauspel accordin' to St. Luke, and the twenty-ninth verse: 'I appoint unto you a kingdom.' *You*: that's you and me, brethrin, that's our title and patent, or whatever 'tis they caals un, to be princes royal uv the kingdom uv 'Eaven. Not as we oughtn't ter respect the princes uv this earth: I knaws ma betters, an' I ain't got no pashence wi' they as don't. 'Owsomever, they are but mighty for 'a little space,' while us shan't never be anythin' but lords an' princes, all thru the rollin' glorious years uv Eternity: vur iver, an iver, an iver!

"An' *Who* did it all? *'E* did, *'E*, the same Chris' Jesus. 'E as brought me up out uv a norribull pit, out uv the *moiry* clay an' set my feet upon a rock: the rock uv salvation. An' 'ere I am, a glorious triumph an' trophy of 'eavenly Grace. An' so are all uv 'ee: triumphs and trophies of Grace! It du my ol' eyesight good to look around this blissid rume. My pore 'eart is nigh to bustin' this very minnit as I speaks, wi' 'Is amazin' love fullin' ivry pore an' makin' me shout vur joy. Praise ye the Lawr! Praise the Lawr, O My sowl! Praise 'Im in the 'eavens; praise 'Im in the 'eights! Praise 'Im on earth till us all praises 'Im together in the sky! Bewtivul. Bewtivul. Bewtivul."

He clumped to his seat: a common dirty little man,

faint with shouting and radiant with God.

The moment the last prayer was over, Aunt Jael rose and stumped swiftly for the door, our procession following: the Stranger, Grandmother, Mary. This hint that she intended to escape without introducing "my late niece's kinsman" to all and sundry was understood by sundry and by all save one. Miss Salvation Clinker flew to the door and essayed to bar our exit with ingratiating smile.

"Good mornin', good mornin' to 'ee, Sister Jael." Looked longingly beyond to the Stranger.

Aunt Jael lifted her stick with threatening gesture, did not return the greeting and gave no sign of recognition, thrusting past her through the door.

Miss Salvation stifled a murderous and most unsaintly look, twisted her enormous mouth into what she conceived to be a winsome smile—lips wide apart, tiger-teeth gleaming—pulled out her black serge skirt with both hands in the approved fashion of a courtesy, and ducked. The Stranger slightly bowed—triumph after all!—and we escaped.

For dinner there was roast beef and sprouts followed by rhubarb pie. Aunt Jael, republicanly, had decreed that there should be nothing better than usual for dinner because a lord was coming. Nor, as far as actual food went, was there. But there was a very special show of best damask and our modest best silver, for no other reason (that I could see) than that a lord was coming. Worse than this: Aunt Jael instructed Mrs. Cheese to wait at table, as they do in grand houses. Instead of my Great-Aunt just passing the plates along, Mrs. Cheese bore them, laden with meat only, to our respective places, plumped them in

front of us, and then stood beside us in turn with the sprouts and potatoes. Similarly for the pudding-course, with the cream and the sugar. Unfortunately, when Mrs. Cheese waited at Lord Tawborough's side with these, he was deep in converse and did not observe her. Mrs. Cheese gave his lordship a hearty nudge. He flushed, and as flimsy covering for his fault (in not observing her) said "No," to the sugar and cream, thereby depriving himself, for the rhubarb was sour; and annoying Aunt Jael, whose temper was sourer.

As soon as we were all served, Aunt Jael set upon our visitor. Her fists tightened round her knife and fork, her brows were in battle trim.

"Wull, how did you like the service?" Staccato: opening shot.

He scented battle; realized that he was to be landed in a heart-to-heart talk on the plain issues of religion: a thing he feared, disliked and shirked. (He was a member of the Church of England.)

"Oh, very much, very much, thank you." A trifle evasively.

"Wull, what particular testimony helped you most? Whose utterance did you find of most value?"

"Oh—er—they were all very sincere."

"But you found no special message? For instance, Brother Briggs?"

"Brother Briggs? Let me see, which was he?"

"The one over to the right who spoke last."

"Oh, that odd little man in the corner! His accent was

a little difficult in places: I've been away from Devonshire so long that I'm afraid here and there I didn't quite follow what he said."

There was no intention of sarcasm; he realized the dangers too well. But a certain "superiority" of manner—half-amused, half-irritated, and altogether natural—enraged her.

There was a moment's dead silence. The storm broke tempestuously. She was at the head of the table; the Stranger was sitting on her right. She leaned across the intervening corner, banged the table with her knife-encircling right fist, and howled into his face, with a withering contempt it is impossible to convey, this one phrase: "*'E's got what you ain't got!*"

He dropped his knife with a clatter on his plate in sheer fright, starting back as far as he could as she leered into his face. It was a moment before he could recover sufficiently to reply in a rather quavery un-lord-like way, "Oh, er, what is it then?"

Thunderously: "*Eturrnal Life.*"

The Stranger kept his temper, an irritating thing to do.

"How do you *know*, Miss Vickary, that I have no chance of eternal life?"

On such mild opposition anger feeds. She raised her voice to a kind of bass shriek, dropping her aitches generously.

"'*Ow* do I know young man, 'ow do I know? If you 'ad eternal life, if you *'ad* accepted the Lord, you'd talk about 'Is grace and goodness a little more bravely, and not look like a silly sheep when 'eavenly things

are spoken of. Ugh, I know you shame-faced professin' Christians, who blush when you 'ear the word Jesus, and never dare to roll the 'oly word on your tongue, I know 'ee! *'Ow* do I know?— If you *'ad* eternal life you'd not be mocking at a poor lowly Brother who 'as a 'undredfold better chances of it than you, with yer 'oh-er-ah-excellent little fellow in the corner with a difficult accent doncherknow.' *Ow* do I know? If you 'ad the Lord you'd be a bit readier to talk about Him and testify to 'Is grace. Don't tell me!"—she poked her head into his face for a final thunderous shout,—"*By their fruits ye shall know them!*"

Grandmother looked troubled, seeking a chance to intervene. The Stranger set his face like flint and determined to keep his temper, though she should scalp him with the knife she was brandishing in his face. He spoke very quietly.

"Miss Vickary, one moment please, what do *you* know of my fruits? After all we have met for the first time today."

His calm, his common-sense, were fuel to the fire. She thumped the table with the butt end of her knife till it shook.

"Silence, youth, silence! Am I not seventy-two years of age, and ye but twenty-one? In my young days youth respected age, rank or no rank. I tell 'ee plainly: you're a miserable sinner. Learn to mind your manners with those who're older than yourself; learn not to mock at them of humbler station—"

"Miss Vickary, I—" he protested.

"Jael," pleaded my Grandmother.

"Oh, don't worry, Mrs. Lee. I don't mind, I don't really."

He looked across the table in a bee-line at my Grandmother, as though Aunt Jael did not exist: the proper punishment for people who lose their temper, the most pleasant revenge for those who keep theirs. "No, no, don't worry; of course I don't mind. To be sure, I didn't come here to discuss my own life in the next world but your little granddaughter's in this. I can never forget her mother's kindness to me, I want you to let me do something for her."

Aunt Jael recommenced eating, tired with shouting, beaten after all.

He had so swiftly but irrevocably changed the subject that she could not easily go back to Brother Briggs and Eternal Life. My opinion of the Stranger rose every moment. As a loyal Saint I had not liked his slight note of superiority when he spoke of Brother Briggs, but the moment Aunt Jael attacked him I was of course of his party through thick and thin. And I realized the every-day worldly point of view just enough to see that a peer of England is not accustomed to being railed and shouted at by an old woman he hardly knows, least of all when he is paying a courtesy visit to her in her own house, and decided that the way he kept his temper was wonderful, as well as the shrewdest for getting equal with Aunt Jael. With every reply, modelled on my own method, my opinion of the Stranger rose. And now that he spoke with reverence of my mother and of "doing things" for me my admiration knew no bounds. He was perfect.

Grandmother was replying to him. "Thank you kindly; we need no help. The child needs nothing but

the love and mercy of the Lord."

"Quite so, but worldly advantages—"

"I need no worldly advantages for her, they could do nothing for her if she had them. She is dedicated to the Lord's service in foreign parts, and her whole life will be spent among the heathen."

Now or never I must strike for freedom.

"Oh, no, no, *NO*," I burst out.

There was an amazed silence. I was amazed myself. The words came from my heart before I knew what I was saying.

My Grandmother's voice quavered; there was a bitter disappointment in her face I had never seen there before. "Are you ill, child, are you?—"

"No, Grandmother, no, I will always love and serve the Lord. But not as a missionary among the heathen, I cannot, I cannot, I have never dared tell you about it before, but I will now. I often prayed about it, for I wanted to please you and please Him, and months ago now soon after my baptism He answered No. He told me He needed me in other ways, to go about in England like an ordinary person and testify to Him there. Grandmother dear, don't be sorrowful; 'tis true, it isn't because I want to get out of going to the heathen, 'tis because I know the Lord doesn't mean me to. Oh, if you knew how certain I was—"

She had no answer to this supreme plea. "Very well, my dear. If my dream and your mother's is not to be fulfilled, if your dedication is not to lead you to the fields of sacrifice I have prayed for, you can still remain lowly and far above worldly graces and

achievements. Thank you, your lordship. Mary needs nothing."

"Mrs. Lee, I beg you. All I want to do is whatever a little money or influence can, to give your granddaughter certain advantages it might not be easy for you—forgive me—to afford. I hardly know that I intend anything special. The child is musical, I believe. Some good music lessons, perhaps, with a first class master? Some tuition in French or Italian, so that she might travel or take perhaps a really good governess-post? I'm sure you will forgive me for thinking that her mother would have wished it. It is in her name that I plead."

"And in the name of common-sense." To get a bit of her own back on my Grandmother (for not having been rude to the Stranger) Aunt Jael entered the new battle on my side. "If Lord Tawborough is good enough to offer the child advantages we can't afford, we'd be fools not to take them, and as for the child being a missionary, look at her! I don't hold much with the governess idea, but she has to earn her living somehow, and may as well take advantage of anything she can. Yes, Lord Tawborough, *I* accept."

My Grandmother offered some further resistance, but at last it was decided that I was to have lessons in riding, music and French, each with the best instructors in the town.

Riding! Music! French! Vistas spread before me. Imperial futures.

"Thank you, sir," I said rather primly, though I would have clasped his hand if I had dared.

When we had finished dinner Aunt Jael settled down

as usual for her doze and Grandmother went upstairs to her bedroom to study the Word. At our visitor's request I was excused Lord's Day's school and permitted to go for a walk with him.

We went out of the town along by the river to the woods. I was tongue-tied, waiting for him to speak. I was proud a little, confused a little, shy a little, yet down in my heart quite at ease. Above every other sentiment I was happy. Partly because of the new prospects he had opened for me, partly because of the extraordinary coincidence by which the Stranger and my mother's little boy were one and the same person, chiefly because I liked him, and he liked me.

After a while he began to talk, and so did I. I was too naïvely egotistical to see it then, but he made me talk, led me on all unconscious to most garrulous self-expression. I grievously broke my ancient rule of listening to other people, of absorbing things rather than imparting them. I told him all about our life at Bear Lawn, about Aunt Jael and Grandmother, about Uncle Simeon also and Torribridge, with discreet omissions as to Christmas and New Year's Nights. Nor did I tell him, for I could have told no one, a word about my own inner life; it was too sacred, too ridiculous.

What was his inner life? I fell to wondering.

In my bedroom, on the evening of this wonderful Lord's Day a long and tearful vigil. I had just got into my nightgown, when my Grandmother came in. She closed the door more quietly, yet more decisively, than usual. I knew what was going to happen. She came to me, took my arm, and looked straight into

my eyes.

"Child," she said, "you've taken away the brightest hope of my old age. The light is gone out of my life."

With any one else there would have been a catch in the voice. In that moment I understood and admired and pitied her more than in all the years before. I felt the poignancy of her sorrow, and the measure of my own shallowness and shame. I was her child, more than her child, her daughter's gift to be given to the service of God; my dedication to His Service was her supreme offering to Him Whom she loved with a love beyond my understanding.

We knelt down together for the longest prayer that I remember.... Now that I had forsworn my holy dedication and chosen the worldly path, God grant that I might still walk as in His sight. I had confessed in baptism that I had been raised with the Lord Jesus, and now I had preferred a worldly future to the unsearchable riches of Christ. Might the Lord in His mercy vouchsafe that my salvation might still be secured and that she, the old pilgrim, whose call was very near—and I, whose call might be nearer than I thought (ye know not the day nor the hour)—and one other, called already, whom both of us loved the best—might all three be united in tender love and everlasting sisterhood around the throne of God....

I was sobbing.

She broke short, I remember, without finishing the prayer. "Forgive me, my dear, 'tis I who am wrong. I admonish the Lord in vain. What He has willed He has willed. 'Tis a great sorrow. *His will be done.*"

**FOOTNOTE:**

[3] Albert, Prince Consort, died December 14th, 1861: Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, married March 10th, 1863. The allusion must have been to these events.

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# CHAPTER XXIII: WINE THAT MAKETH GLAD THE HEART OF WOMAN

The Stranger's return was a landmark.

First of all there was a vivid addition to my stock of rehearsable memories. Second, there was the interest of my new accomplishments.

I went for my music lessons to one Monsieur Petrowski, a Polish refugee, who had just fled from his native land and was settling down in Tawborough. I made great progress with my music, and if he gave me a goodly share of scales and studies beyond the needs of discipline he had for plea the direct instruction of Aunt Jael. Now that her time-honoured boast "I pay for the child's music" was crumbling about her ears she solaced herself by instructing Monsieur Petrowski very plainly.

"Now not too much fine showy music."

"Very well, Mademoiselle."

"No infidel trash."

"?" A slight bow, vaguely affirmative.

"Always plenty of what she doesn't like": Aunt Jael's ideal of education. "Make it a task, sir, make it a task. Plenty of scales, chromatics, or whatever 'tis."

"Very well, Mademoiselle."

Monsieur Petrowski obeyed reasonably well, but he forgot to break my will, and I suspect much of the music I learned of open infidelity. My talent and taste developed, and by eighteen years of age I played the piano better than (say) ninety-five embryo governesses out of a hundred. I loved Chopin best.

With French I made equal progress. Here again Aunt Jael appointed herself the intermediary of the Stranger's bounty. She selected to instruct me Miss le Mesurier. This lady was half French by parentage, had lived abroad the best part of her life, and had now come back to spend her declining old-maidhood in her native town, and keep house for her bachelor brother Doctor le Mesurier,—the same who had attended my mother when I was born. She became a regular member of our Meeting. Aunt Jael's instructions were explicit. "Make the work a task, a trial, a tribulation. Pander not to her pleasure loving tastes. No romances for her study, no trash, no infidel works." These restrictions, gladly acquiesced in by my teacher (who about this time followed my example and took up her Cross in public) cut out all fiction, plays and poetry; leaving us with the devotional writings of French Protestants, and

history; the former of an epic dullness, the latter an imperishable fountain of excitement and romance. We read a Monsieur Michelet's History of the Revolution. My appetite for history grew as it was fed.

For my third accomplishment, my instructor was neither Pole nor French, but red-faced broad-breeched Mr. Samuel Prickett of Prickett's "Mews" (sic). In this quarter even Aunt Jael jibbed at bestowing admonitions, nor were they needed. It was a trial and tribulation for me after her heart. No sooner did I approach the fragrant riding-school and behold the feats I should have to emulate than I found myself in a shocking condition of fear, while for the first few minutes in the saddle I was verily purged with terror—in the good (and accurate) old Bible sense of the word. I would hunch my back, my limbs would grow rigid with funk, and when Mr. Samuel Prickett for the first time tickled Rose Queen into the gentlest of trots I clung with frenzy to the scanty mane of that poor mare. The first time she galloped I screamed aloud, rolled incontinently out of the saddle, and clung for dear life to her neck. Every Tuesday and Friday I approached the mews with set teeth and inward prayer for courage, with a supreme "Help me O God!" as I put my foot into the stirrup; after a year or two of prayer and perseverance I was a fair if never a fearless horsewoman. (Even at the beginning there was this set-off to fear: pride.) I knew that my riding-habit became me; if a few of the bolder spirits on the Lawn mocked and jeered, I inwardly mocked and jeered back because I knew that really they were impressed: their sneers were but a natural tribute to their jealousy of me and respect for themselves. More than the costume, the fact of riding gave me a delicious

sense of importance. It may be argued that the connection between horsemanship and aristocracy is merely the result of distant historical origins, far-away reflection of a world where the knight alone went horseback and the common man trudged humbly through the centuries. All I am sure of is this: that in the country lanes I felt myself a very fine young lady, i. e. at such moments as I did not feel a shocking coward. In the middle of pleasant reviews as to the lordliness of riding a horse, I would be seized with a pained and concentrated interest in my reins, a perspiring anxiety not to lose the stirrups, a most unaristocratic readiness to snatch the mane. (Pride qualified by fear: man's natural state.)

The aim of all these proceedings was to obtain, by the Stranger's help, a governess' post in a good family. Meagre and melancholy ambition this would seem to worldly spirits nowadays. To me the prospect was fame, freedom, adventure, *la Vie*!

Lord Tawborough I rarely saw. Grandmother stood out against Aunt Jael in refusing to let me stay at Woolthy Hall. I wrote him a report of progress every three months, a soulless jellyfish document, heavily censored by both Grandmother and Great-Aunt. The former always said I was not grateful enough, the latter that I was not humble enough. The final product was an unpleasing mixture of grovelling gratitude, hateful humility, and perfect grammar. My Grandmother persisted in her old plan of keeping me meek and lowly by never speaking well of me to my face, nor allowing any word of praise to escape her lips, yet I know she was proud of such progress as I made alike in these special pursuits and at the Misses Primps'. I read often in her eyes how deeply she felt it that I had not chosen the Better Way, and I

realized how unselfish was her interest in my progress.

I began to appreciate my Grandmother's unselfishness at its true worth. In it lay all her charm, her goodness, her difference from other people. It was through her that I first came to see that unselfishness is the one virtue, as it was Aunt Jael who helped to teach me that selfishness is the one vice. I would think out every evil act I could imagine and find that at bottom it was Self. I would think out every good deed and discover that its essence was always unselfishness. In one of those flashes in which I saw and felt things I had before only vaguely believed, I grasped the meaning of the Cross. I saw suddenly how utterly selfish I was myself, full of hopes for myself, weaving futures for myself; always self, self, self; and a voice inside me asked: "Now what hopes has Grandmother for *herself*?" and though I was alone I coloured at the sudden discovery of self-accused shame. "She has nothing; the one great hope left to her was you, and you have disappointed her." I began to understand the sorrow and loneliness of an old woman's lot, the vacancy, the lack of hope and lookings-forward. No doubt when Grandmother had been a little girl she too had said to herself: "Wait, Hannah, wait till you're grown up; then things will be happier. Wait for love, marriage; then you will be happy." Married love faded, husband died. "There are your children." But the children went away; Christian into a consumptive's grave, Martha unhappily wed, Rachel slowly tortured to death. Hope still ahead: "You will find comfort in your children's children." What comfort did they hold for her: Albert!—and Mary who had betrayed the last great hope. What had my Grandmother to live for? The daily round of Aunt

Jael's nagging: old age with sorrow behind and only Heaven ahead.

Aunt Jael, I reflected, had been denied even the pleasures of sorrow, the regret for good things gone away; neither love, nor husband, nor children. Should I have been better in her case? Perhaps there were excuses for Aunt Jael.

I had to say this to myself very hard and very often in these days. As my Great-Aunt grew older she grew noisier, more evil-tempered, more shrewish; her evil and domineering nature was having a final bout before the ebb tide of a maudlin dotage. As I remember her during my sixteenth and seventeenth years she well nigh baffles description. A hooked-nose wicked old witch, scolding, snarling, imprecating, hurling texts and threats about her. She would sit back in her old armchair and nag and shout from morn till eve, cursing my Grandmother for an idle selfish ingrate if not always at her beck and call to button or unbutton her boots, to dress or undress her, to help her up- or downstairs. "Why shouldn't she do a bit for me, that's what I want to know? Hannah is younger, Hannah is sprightlier, not an old woman like me!": you would have thought the eighteen months were eighteen centuries. Mrs. Cheese stood up to the old bully, and giving what she got, got rather less. I came in for the most consistent cursing, and the worst outbreaks. She would stand up with eyes blazing and howl at me at the top of her voice (that bass shout impossible to convey in print which I called her "yell-growl"): "Ugh, yer father's child, every inch of 'ee; you feature him and yer character's as evil. Vicious little slut, pert wench, vile little sinner, adulterer's daughter, spawn of Beelzebub!" She would lash out as of old

with her stick; more than once after I had passed sixteen she flogged me till I was black with bruises.

By training and by character—and following my Grandmother's example and for her sake—I could take it all with apparent meekness. But some outlet for the Beast in me was provided by her increasing deafness. Given Grandmother's absence from the room and a suitable modulation of mouth and voice, I could give her all that she gave in the way of abuse. As she sat back exhausted, with her eyes half closed in some passing lull, I would look up from my sewing, and with lips barely moving give her my views. "Oh, you wicked old woman; you cruel selfish beastly hag; you shrew; you enemy of all righteousness! How I loathe you, hate you, spit at you!"

Often Conscience smote me. "Where is your 'do unto others'?" So I would make allowances; she had been lonely, always unloved. She was old, unhappy. I could not help feeling that these were not excuses so much as explanations: she was just what an old maid who had domineered and been deferred to all her life would naturally be. She was herself carried to her logical conclusion.

Her habits changed. She only went to the morning Meeting, and that not always. On weekdays she got up late.

Our mornings would have appeared to outsiders a roaring and improbable farce.

At eight o'clock Grandmother and I would sit down to the breakfast table. No Aunt Jael.

"Is Miss Vickary coming down this morning, do you

know, Mrs. Cheese?"

The latter grunted.

"Please go and see, will you, so that we can have her breakfast right for her."

Mrs. Cheese went upstairs, leaving the dining-room door open behind her. Just before we heard her knocking at Aunt Jael's door, we heard a more sinister noise in the bedroom above, a spring and a thud: Aunt Jael bounding out of bed to lock the door against her, usually managing to turn the key in the lock just as Mrs. Cheese began knocking.

"Lem'me in! Zich games wi' an ole body." She knocked and thumped.

No success. The silence of death.

"Go wi'out yer breakfast then!" A final thump or kick, and she waddled downstairs to the dining-room.

"No good, Mrs. Lee. 'Er's up to 'er tantrums, 'er's banged the door and turned the key."

Immediately the floor-thumping overhead began again. Aunt Jael was leaning out of bed and prodding the floor with her stick. Blows rained thunderously, monotonously; it was no good pretending they were not there, as I sometimes could for a few moments, relying on Grandmother's deafness. Then the noise would cease. We heard the bound and spring. She was out of bed, had opened the door and was howling downstairs over the banisters, "Hannah! Cheese! Child! Food, Food! I'm a-starvin', I'm a-starvin'!"

"Will you try once again, Mrs. Cheese, please?" said

my Grandmother. "Or I will," she would add, seeing reluctance.

This always decided the old lady. To save Grandmother she puffed her way once more upstairs. Aunt Jael went on screaming from the landing, "Food, food!" till Mrs. Cheese was nearly up the stairs. Then she scuttled into her bedroom, and swiftly locked the door again.

"Starve away, ye old biddy, starve till ye die for all I care, an' I 'ope 'tis middlin' quick." She descended, calling in at the dining-room door as she paused, "I've done wi' the 'ole biddy fer iver."

In a few moments it all began again. Grandmother would have a journey, and then I. By the time our peaceful breakfast was over Aunt Jael had usually tired of her fun and was prepared to give in: another lengthy process. The first great step was when she got as far as leaving the door open. Usually if Grandmother or Mrs. Cheese took in her breakfast-tray she refused to have it near her and declared that the Child alone should bring her breakfast to her, the reason being that it was time for school and that I, therefore, was the most inconvenient person she could select. So they left the tray on the brass-nailed box outside her door, and I went in with it. Meanwhile she would close her eyes and moan: "I'm a-sinkin', I'm a-sinkin' for the want of food! A poor lonely woman left to starve! A-sinkin', a-sinkin', a-sinkin'—" her voice sank to a tragic whisper. Next, of course, the egg was too soft or too hard boiled, according as we had been pessimists or optimists in gauging the duration of my lady's mood that morning.

Dressing her was the next trial. I escaped it except in

the holidays. Grandmother had to see to every button and lace and hook, and be railed at the whole time. And so on, throughout the day, morning, afternoon, evening, week in, week out, till life was a misery. My nerves were on edge, and if I kept my temper it was at the expense of my soul, which was filled with a devouring hate. There was one person, however, whose temper would not and did not hold out, and that was Mrs. Cheese. On that last day when my Great-Aunt sat up in bed and threw the whole breakfast-tray at her—a notable feat—she picked up the metal tea-pot, the only whole article in the wreckage, poured hot tea on the aggressor's face, and within a few hours had left the house. "I've warmed the ole biddy's nose, and this time I goes for iver."

* * * * * * *

Then, somewhere in the summer of 1864, came Maud. She brought no references, this being her first place, nor in our dire need could we insist on the usual requirements as to grace and salvation. She was not more than seventeen or eighteen, hardly a year or so older than I was; though with her hair up and her smart womanly attractive appearance she looked several years my senior. I had gathered from the Bible and from the talk at school that our sex was considered the more attractive, the better-looking, the more sought-after for its pleasingness. Neither the many female Saints of my acquaintance nor any member of our humble gallery of housemaids had helped me to understand. Maud was an explanation of much. Looking at her head of fine chestnut hair, gay pretty mouth and sparkling eyes, I began to apprehend why so many worthy folk—King David, King Solomon, Adam our first forefather—had gone astray. Her capacity for hard work equalled her good

looks; her patience, good temper and self-sacrifice with Aunt Jael excelled them both. Here was the first servant we had ever taken without certificate of godliness; and she was the best.

From the beginning she devoted herself to Aunt Jael, who of course shouted at her, and told her she was a bold mincing hussy. She smiled. She just went on cooking, dusting, laying the tea table, hooking the blouse, or whatever it might be, always with the same patient smile. After a while her absolute imperviousness to abuse and her excellence as a lady's maid began to mollify my Great-Aunt, who came to treat her quite passably to her face, and sing loud her praises as soon as she left the room.

"There's a good girl, if you like, something like a girl. Do something for her, Hannah! Give her five pounds and a new suit of clothes."

This last remark became a mania, and half a dozen times a day as the door closed upon Maud, Aunt Jael would shout at my Grandmother, "Five pounds, I say, five pounds, and a new suit of clothes!" Neither did she produce, however.

To my surprise Grandmother did not care very much for our new servant.

"Isn't she good, Grandmother?" I asked one day.

She nodded her head and did not reply.

"You don't like her, Grandmother?"

No reply.

"Why now, because she's not a Christian?"

"No-o, my dear, I can't tell 'ee why. I don't like her:

why, I don't even know myself; but there 'tis."

"But she's so good with aunt, and so patient."

"Yes—"

"Well, why then?"

"There 'tis, and that's all there is about it."

I was puzzled, as Grandmother was always so generous. There must be some mystery about Maud. Her beauty, a strange and new and troubling thing in my imagination. Her inhuman patience, equalling even my Grandmother's. And her carpet-slippers. She moved absolutely without sound.

Soon after her arrival there was a new development. Aunt Jael's indigestion and sleeplessness and ill temper had been getting steadily worse till at last Grandmother had called in Doctor le Mesurier. He prescribed a stimulant: my Great-Aunt was to take a small dose of brandy two or three times every twenty-four hours. Say a small dose at one of her nocturnal repasts and a sip in a wine-glass after dinner. It became one of my duties to go up to her bedroom after dinner, obtain the bottle from the secret cupboard, and pour out the measure. I brought it down and laid it on the corner of the table near her fireside perch.

After a few days, I noticed that more of the brandy seemed to disappear each day than two or even three doses in the night could explain. It was a tall bottle of Cognac, the dose was less than an inch in a wine glass taken not more than twice each day, and yet in under a week the bottle was empty. The fierce teetotalism of the later-nineteenth-century Americanized Protestantism was unknown among

the Brethren, who followed more faithfully the old Puritan tradition and deemed a bottle of liquor a good thing if used and not abused. But though drink had never loomed large in my imagination, I associated it vaguely with the snares of this world. Between Maud the worldly one with her unfamiliar female beauty (snare of snares) and the vanishing brandy the connection was so obvious that I need not have felt so pleased with myself as I did when I first divined it. It was clear as noonday. Maud was the thief. She had access to the cupboard at all hours, she was led into temptation, and had fallen. When I stared at her she would turn a little pale.

Aunt Jael was not yet aware of the theft. Clearly she was in her dotage, as the Cognac cost six shillings a bottle. Was it my duty, my duty before the Lord, to speak out? I inclined to think so. Theft was theft, and theft was sin, and sin should always be exposed for righteousness' sake and the sinner's too. On the other hand, a voice inside me told me that it would be mean and cowardly to sneak on Maud. The feeling of pleasure that Aunt Jael was being thieved from also urged silence. If both these notions weighed against my exposing Maud, yet one seemed in a sense to balance the other in my conscience, for I tried to justify my delight in seeing Aunt Jael robbed by pretending to myself that the generous impulse of shielding Maud was my real reason for keeping silence. As one bottle and then another disappeared with unmistakable speed, and the inroads on Aunt Jael's purse became more extensive and gratifying, my piece of self-deception began to wear hollow. Conscience pricked: "*You* know the real reason you are not telling. You know it is to spite Aunt Jael and not to shield Maud. *You* know."

One night I prayed for guidance. The answer was clear. My evil delight in Aunt Jael being robbed was a sin which I could only atone for by repentance and by stopping the robbery, while to avoid having Maud exposed and dismissed (this had been in one way an argument for and not against telling, because the inevitable dismissal of so helpful a girl would inconvenience Aunt Jael; though here again it cut both ways, as Grandmother and I would be inconvenienced and harried still more when she was gone) it was my duty to speak to her privately. Thus she would be spared, Aunt Jael protected, my sin atoned for, and justice done. I obeyed instantly, got out of bed, lit my candle and crept up to Maud's bedroom. I knocked timidly. There was a faint scuffling inside: she was getting out of bed. She opened the door a few inches and her face appeared. It was sheet white. She was trembling violently.

"I am sorry, Maud, to wake you up, but I had to." I spoke hurriedly, a bit shamefacedly. "If you won't do it again, I'll not tell."

"Miss—" she gasped.

"Don't worry," I said frightened by her frightened appearance, "I'll promise never to say a word."

"Thank you, Miss Mary, I'm sure," she said shakily, "but oh, oh, you did give me a start!"

As she spoke she came right out of the room in her nightgown, shut the door behind her, and stood up against me on the half-landing, still trembling.

"Why did you shut the door like that?" I asked. Her extreme fear puzzled me.

She hesitated for a second. "Oh, I must see you back to bed or you'll be getting your death of cold."

"Good night, miss," she said. Before she blew out the candle I noticed that her face was as white as ever.

Somehow she had seemed *too* frightened.

After all, was stealing brandy so terrible? Was dismissal from Aunt Jael's service so hideous a blow? Then there was the way she had closed the door behind her.

I heard her creep her way upstairs. My heart stood still as I heard another door open quite near me; Grandmother's by the sound of it. No doubt she had been awakened and had heard our going to and fro on the stairs. I sat up in bed so as to hear better. I fancied she was standing at her door as though listening. Then a voice spoke, sounding strangely in the silence. It was my Grandmother's.

"Child, what are you doing? Is that you, child? What are you doing?"

I jumped out of bed and opened my door. "What is it, Grandmother? I'm here, what is it?"

An odd expression came into her eyes.

"Then who was it going downstairs just now? Somebody crouched when I called out, then seemed to wriggle their way further down; somebody in white, like your nightgown. I thought you were sleepwalking."

Some one in white wriggling downstairs! Was not Grandmother herself sleepwalking? It could not be Maud, for I had heard her close her door.

"Maud!" called my Grandmother.

"Yes'm," replied a voice with amazing quickness. She had been listening. But she spoke from *upstairs*. "Yes'm, did you call me, m'm?"

At this moment the front door of the house was unmistakably opened and then closed again. Some one had gone out.

My Grandmother, an odd little figure in her nightcap and gown, looked very grave. "Get to bed, Maud," she called, "and you too, child."

After pondering a certain terrible suspicion in my mind for a few minutes, I fell asleep.

Next morning I shirked seeing Maud. I felt shamefaced for what I had said to her in the night and far more for the thing I had hardly dared to think. I got downstairs later than usual. The dining-room was dark, the blinds had not been drawn. I went into the kitchen; there were no signs of life, the fire had not been lit. I rushed upstairs to her bedroom and burst in without knocking; she was not there, the drawers of the bedroom chest were pulled out and emptied, her box had gone. She had run away.

Months later, I saw a well-dressed young woman in the street. The face was familiar. She was wheeling a baby's perambulator. She looked the other way.

Nothing was said to Aunt Jael, who theorized on Maud's mysterious departure, and declared that my Grandmother's cruel treatment had forced her to flee for her life. She cursed at Maud for an ingrate, though still fitfully maintaining that she was well worth five pounds, not to mention a new suit of

clothes.

Maud's departure marked the beginning of a still more miserable period at Bear Lawn. We were unable for some time to get another servant, and though Sister Briggs came in twice a week to help, there was more than enough work for Grandmother and me, especially as it was term-time. I had to get up at half past five, light the kitchen fire, sweep the rooms, and help Grandmother with the breakfast. I had to cook, sew, dust, do my homework, and dance continual attendance on Aunt Jael. I was wretched, but too hard driven to mope overmuch. Grandmother and I worked early and late, earning nothing but abuse from Aunt Jael, who now ceased to do any work whatever, even to help with the cooking or to carve at table. Her temper became more ungovernable, her abuse more outrageous. All her life she had had a certain dignity—harsh, unlovely, but still dignity—an august presence, a majesty in evil. There was little trace of majesty or dignity in the nagging old shrew she was becoming now. If you get into a pet because the sprouts are undercooked, hurl the vegetable-dish on the floor, tread the sprouts into the carpet, cry "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust" ("Brussels to Brussels" would have been apter), wave the spoon with rage, and gurgle like a stuck pig, you may be many many things, but dignified, no. This was an almost daily experience.

In the middle of this period came her eightieth birthday. There was no jubilee.

My chief Cross was my resolve of absolute evenness of temper. Evenness rather than serenity was the word: I could never take my Grandmother's quiet delight in sitting down under insult and injustice, as

though they were flattering temptations sent me by the Lord, tokens of heavenly privilege. I could always turn the other cheek, but never as though I enjoyed it. Once when I had waited on Aunt Jael hand and foot all day; taking up her breakfast (after three or four attempts and plenty of frolic with the door), dressing her ("no one else would do"), making her bed and tidying her room (while she sat in a chair carping), cooking her a special dinner and arranging it on a little table by the armchair (she felt too ill to sit up to table), doing her sewing ("Clumsy little slut with the needle!"), and reading to her aloud from the Word (her eyes were too tired to read herself); when after tea I had begun and finished the last chapter of Proverbs—"Many daughters have done virtuously but Thou excellest them all"—and she had no further behest; I thought that at last I was free for a few moments. I sat down at the piano and began playing my new piece: Polish Dance in A Minor. I had not played more than a few bars when I heard her get up from her chair. Without warning I received a violent box on the ears, with "That for idling away without my permission on this ungodly trash" as she snatched the music and crumpled it up into a paper ball. The blow was dealt with such force that I fell off the stool on to the floor, where she began belabouring me with her stick.

Struggling to my feet, I began in my intensest manner, bitterer than any rage: "Oh may the Lord punish you, may He visit you with pain and illness and agony in this world—" I do not know how far I had got but the door opened and my Grandmother came in.

"My dear, you are beside yourself."

"Grandmother, hear me. I have toiled for her all day long, and now when I've sat down for a minute to practise she came behind me unawares and gave me a blow that knocked me on to the floor and then began flogging me with her stick."

"Sister—" began my Grandmother.

"None of your 'sister,' if you please!" She went up to Grandmother, who was near the bookcase, and pushed her roughly against it. "No interfering, d'yer see? When the child does what I don't like, I do what I like to her. See?" She clutched Grandmother by the shoulders, and began banging her viciously against the bookcase.

"You brute!" I cried, and with a strength I should not have found in self-defence tore her away from Grandmother. Loosing hold, she turned on me; I ran for safety to the other side of my guardian-angel table. She hesitated for a moment, remembering perhaps her ancient dignity, and then stalked out of the room. Which was after all the most dignified thing to do.

The fact was, her health and self-control were failing together; but if more of a shrew, she was less shrewd than of old. She never noticed, for instance, how the brandy was disappearing. The odd thing about this brandy was that after Maud's departure it had been disappearing more quickly and mysteriously than ever. A new suspicion entered my mind. Sister Briggs never went upstairs. It could not be Grandmother. It was not magic. It was not me....

One day just before dinner, Aunt Jael had not yet appeared in the dining room. This was surprising; on her latest and worst days she usually descended by

eleven o'clock.

"I've heard her moving about," said Grandmother. "Dinner is ready, give her a call."

Before I had time to obey, however, I heard her bedroom door open. We sat down to table. The dining-room door was open, and I fancied there was something odd and shuffling in the way she was coming downstairs. Then I was startled by a series of thuds; it sounded as though she had lost her footing, and fallen down the last two or three stairs. We ran out, for Grandmother had heard too.

"Are you hurt, Jael?" She was lying full length on the bottom stair, her face was dark and flushed, her eyes odd and bleary. She appeared stunned, though it surprised me that to fall two or three stairs should have had so serious an effect.

She did not answer Grandmother, but began slavering and hiccoughing.

"Give her five poundsh an' a new shuit of clothes." The sentence was broken by hiccoughs. My nostrils caught the sudden reek of spirits.

Aunt Jael was drunk.

I looked at Grandmother and Grandmother looked at me. She spoke in a low voice, and there were tears in her eyes. "'Tis hard, my dear. Your aunt has lived a godly sober life these eighty years—and now, look! We must take it as His will."

Resolves are weak, and pity is stronger than hate. I had been looking forward all my life and during the past few weeks more venomously than ever to the day when I should see my hated Aunt the victim of

some supreme humiliation. The day was here. There she lay: drunken, shameful, loathsome. Surely this was humiliation enough. I should have exulted in her shame; I was indeed wicked enough to have done so, but that some one different in me, the Other Me (at such moments of extreme alternative between good and evil I always felt the Second Presence), had only pity and sorrow. My cheeks burned as I thought of how I had been looking forward to a triumph like this. I saw in a flash the shamefulness of spite, the folly of all revenge.

We tried to lift her up. She was too heavy, especially as she resisted, at first dully and then with vigour. I stepped over her body on to the second stair. When I knelt down and began pulling at her shoulder she struck me with her fist and set up a shriek of "Murder!" The sudden noise deterred us. With tipsy cunning she noticed this, and followed up her success; shrieking "Murder!" again and again like a thing demented.

In the middle of pandemonium the front door knocker sounded. Grandmother was on the other side of Aunt Jael, and went to see who it might be. It was the curate from the Parish Church, who had recently come to live next door, No. 6 The Lawn. We had never spoken to him and hardly knew his name.

"Er—umph—Madam, I trust you will excuse me; but we—er—fancied there was some trouble in your house. We *heard* something, Mrs. White and I, and I wondered if I could—er—perhaps *help* in any way."

"Yes, sir, you could," said my Grandmother. "Come in. My sister has had a seizure. She's not herself at all. My grandchild and I haven't the strength between us to lift her upstairs to bed. You'll kindly

help us? Come along the hall to the foot of the stairs. This way, will you?"

I prayed inwardly that he would not discover the truth, but as he bent down to take Aunt Jael's shoulder I noticed the slightest twitch of his nostrils followed immediately by an involuntary I-thought-as-much expression which he instantly concealed.

It was a memorable journey upstairs. How she writhed and punched and struck and spat and shrieked. Somehow we got her there and somehow we laid her on the bed.

We went downstairs to show the Reverend Mr. White out. "I shall be discretion itself," he volunteered meaningly. I saw a shade of annoyance on Grandmother's face; she had not noticed that he had noticed.

When we returned upstairs after the Reverend Mr. White had gone we found her bedroom door locked. For no entreaty would she let us in. Later on my Grandmother pleaded earnestly to let her take her in some food. There was no reply. All through the night her door remained locked; I tried it half a dozen times. Next morning we could do no better. With the infinite resources of her cupboard she had of course enough to eat; but—this was our anxiety—she had far too much to drink also. There was a bottle of sherry, but as far as I remembered not more than an inch or two of brandy in the current bottle. Still our fears were of the darkest.

By Tuesday dinner-time our anxiety had reached a climax. In a few minutes the Clinkers would arrive. Grandmother had half a mind to send me round to tell them not to come; decided that this would be

likelier to excite suspicion than letting them come in the ordinary way, and telling them that Jael was not well enough to appear.

At half-past one sounded the immemorial rat-tat-tat. Salvation was first. She rushed in and flung her arms round my Grandmother's neck.

"Oh, my pore 'Annah, what a trial! Pore dear Jael. Who'd 'a' thought it?" Her teeth shone. She wheezed unwelcome sympathy.

"Salvation," asked my Grandmother sternly, "who told you?"

"Aw my dear, 'tis the talk uv th' town. Brother Obadiah Tizzard came to see Glory this mornin' as 'e sometimes does uv a mornin' to discourse on 'oly things, an' 'e told *us* jis what 'is servant, ole Jenny Fippe, 'ad to'd *'im*. 'Er 'ad it from 'er young niece who's friendly like with a young man who sings in the choir, or whatever 'tis they caals' it, at the parish church, 'im havin' been to'd by the passon 'imself, who lives next door to you, who say 'e were called in 'ere by most *'orrible* shrieks, so Brother Obadiah says Jenny says, and 'e see'd pore dear Jael in a *turrible* way, wavin' a bottle o' brandy in one 'and an' poundin' 'is face till 'twere all a pulp of blood with the other. 'You've got a wrong story this time, Brother Obadiah Tizzard,' I says, 'Jael Vickary is my oldest friend and the soberest woman in North Devon. 'Tis all a passel O' lies, Brother Obadiah, you mark my words,' says I, didn't I, Glory, says I? Aw my pore dear Jael, she's in bed maybe. Take me to 'er, 'Annah."

"No," said my Grandmother very firmly. "What you heard is very much more than the truth, and you'll

please me to keep a quiet tongue in your head about it a bit better than the parson did. But she's not well, and you're not to see her."

It was a constrained gathering that afternoon; our godly discussion halted lamely at times. We were all relieved when Grandmother went into the kitchen rather earlier than usual to prepare tea. While she was out of the room, I heard Aunt Jael's door open: Grandmother had left the dining-room door open. I did not know for a moment what to do, whether to rush upstairs to prevent Aunt Jael descending, or fly into the kitchen to warn Grandmother, when it might be too late. I did nothing. The three of us sat in breathless silence as she stumped downstairs, and watched with open mouths and breathless excitement till a horrible bird-like apparition in night-cap and gown came in. Her eyes were still bloodshot, but she was different from yesterday; merry-maudlin, not vicious drunk. Fortunately, as I had judged, there had been very little more brandy, and she had had recourse to wine. She pranced up to her visitors, chuckling idiotically.

"Good day to 'ee Salvation, Good day to 'ee Glory!" She chucked them under the chin, dug them slyly in the ribs, tweaked their solemn ears. She had a look of beatific idiocy on her red beaky old face, and a tipsy laugh broken by stalwart hiccoughs.

"You'm thinkin'—hic—I'm tipsy. Nothin'—hic—of the kin'—'Tis a very goo'—hic—imitashun, a very goo'—hic—imitashun."

She seized a couple of forks from the table, which I had just finished laying for tea, took one in each fist and began to perform a series of dumb-bell exercises, alternating one movement up with both arms, one

forward, and one to the sides, giggling and chuckling inanely the while. She looked like a performing parrot dressed in white. For a few moments Glory, Salvation and I had been undecided whether to take the performance as tragedy or farce. Suddenly we all began laughing together, and were soon giggling as uncontrollably as Aunt Jael herself.

She tired of the dumb-bell exercises, threw down the forks and cried out "Come on now, letsh have a game." Before we knew where we were the four of us were whirling round and round in the space between the table and the fireplace, singing "Ring a ring of roses," like the four lunatics and godly Plymouth Sisters that we were. Three of us were eighty years old and the fourth not yet eighteen. At the high tide of the bacchanal we became suddenly and stupidly aware that Grandmother was at the door; sane, inexorable, watching us. We parted hands lamely. Aunt Jael, dizzy and without support, tottered back against the firegrate and would have fallen headlong had I not rushed forward just in time to save her.

"She's a good li'l girl, Hannah, after all; she's a good li'l girl. Give her something, give her—"

"Give her what then?" said my Grandmother, wishing to humour her.

"Five poundsh, my dear, and a new shuit of clothes!"

The Aunt Jael that rose months later from her sick bed was not the demented wretch of that tipsy summer; rather the old one I knew, but with memory and will and voice and authority all weaker. The great domineerer had passed into her dotage; was

but the valiant wreck of an autocrat.

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## CHAPTER XXIV: PROSPECTS

I left the Misses Primps' at the end of the summer term of 1865; I was in my eighteenth year.

My Grandmother told me that Lord Tawborough was looking around for "a good opening" for me. The interval of waiting was to be spent perfecting my French and music, and I was to begin Italian with Miss le Mesurier. Uncertainty sent my fancies and ambitions in disorderly riot through the whole gamut of possibilities and impossibilities; transported me to every county in turn, from Cornwall to Caithness, to every manner of dwelling, from palaces to pagodas. Sometimes I saw myself with a tyrant for taskmistress—Aunt Jael to the *n*th—sometimes employed by Fairy Godmother or Lady Bountiful.

Somewhere about New Year of 1866, Lord Tawborough wrote. He had obtained, he thought, an excellent opening for me, and would visit us at once to communicate it. This news brought me to a high pitch of excitement, which culminated on the day he came.

I was to go to France!—as companion rather than governess to a French girl a year or two younger than myself; to perfect her English, and talk English also with an elder sister who was about my own age. The two girls lived with their widowed mother in a

big château in Normandy, though part of the year was spent in the family house in Paris. Lord Tawborough and his father before him had had friendly relations with the family, which was old, illustrious and wealthy. I should meet the best type of French people, and have the opportunity of perfecting my own French. I should be kept, of course, and receive a salary of four hundred francs (sixteen pounds) a year.

As he unfolded this gorgeous prospect I was ravished with delight. Foreign Lands! Normandy! Châteaux! Paris! But Grandmother—why was she looking doubtful, unmoved?

"Papists?" she asked him, keenly.

"They are Roman Catholics." This as though somehow a palliative.

My heart stopped. I scented battle. Lord Tawborough counter-attacked before the forces of objection could muster.

"Yes, Mrs. Lee: Papists, of course, like nearly all French people. But what an opportunity for Mary! If she could help them to a better way, it would be achieving more than to convert a hundred heathen!"

His tongue was in his cheek. Conscience called: Denounce his lies! Ambition urged furiously: Keep silence! My heart was throbbing, as the battle of selves raged within. I saw that Grandmother took his false words in good faith: Ambition was the winning-side and stifled Conscience utterly.

"True," said my Grandmother, and accepted with sober gratitude. Aunt Jael grunted warmer approval.

I thanked him with tears of pleasure.

Details were arranged. I was to go in April, a few weeks after my eighteenth birthday. There was never any direct correspondence; Lord Tawborough made all arrangements. Towards my expenses he gave five pounds, which Grandmother most furiously spent in "a new shuit of clothes." In all I had three new dresses, the finest I had ever possessed; I had no suspicion of how dowdy they might look in my new surroundings. Lord Tawborough, however, to whom Aunt Jael proudly displayed them, must have had the gravest suspicions, for in spite of resistance he sent me to the best dressmaker in the town for a white silk "evening" dress, and to the ladies' tailor in Boutport Street for a smart new riding-habit. For parting-present Aunt Jael gave me a set of bone-backed hair-brushes; Glory and Salvation a pair of kid gloves and a silk scarf; Pentecost Dodderidge a New Testament with an original hymn inscribed in the title page; Mrs. Cheese a plain gold brooch and green parasol, the Meeting a magnificent French Bible in limp red morocco, which was presented to me publicly at my last Breaking of Bread; Brother Browning a Scotch travelling rug; my Grandmother a photograph of my mother I had often begged for and cried over and kissed.

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Let me put down what I was like at this moment of leaving the old life.

I was of average height, but slight build: a frail inconspicuous figure, with small limbs, neatly made perhaps, if too thin for shapeliness. I looked so young for my age that when only a day or two before my

departure I first put my hair up, there was a ridiculous contrast between the adult austere bun—Victorian fashion, at the back, lumpy, far-protruding—and the fifteen-year-old face. Or so I thought, laughing into the mirror. My appearance was one of the few things I was not vain of—not yet—or I should have wept rather than laughed: ugly straight rebellious hair; eyes between green and grey-green, weak and often sore; a short pointed and unpleasant nose. On the other hand, a shapely well-cut mouth, and my mother's delicate complexion. When not tearful and sulky, my habitual expression was one of Quakerish meekness and demureness, wholly natural and wholly unconscious: at any rate now, and until the Serpent showed me that in this quakerishness lay a species of attraction.

On the whole I kept a silent tongue in my head; was voluble only before an audience: Lord Tawborough, or the girls at school whom I regaled with Aunt Jael, or (most important) myself, my oldest audience. My manners were of a piece with my appearance: meek, nervous, old-fashioned, though very "grown-up," in odd contrast with my appearance. Here also I discovered later there lurked an asset, an attracting quality.

Perhaps I was clever. It was a woman's cleverness, sureness not of intellect but of intuition, coupled with an uncanny judgment in matters where my own emotions were at stake or in the motives and actions of others. No. 8 Bear Lawn and No. 1 The Quay were my forcing-beds. I was incapable of connected thought as opposed to connected emotion, and I had no haziest notion of science or logic or business affairs. My two possessions were an imagination so vivid that I saw, at once, *physically* and with a perfect

clearness of outline, whatever I thought of, and a memory so retentive, alike for facts and faces, that I can fairly describe it as one of the two or three best I have ever known.

There was a good deal of knowledge in my head: a lob-sided mass. What I knew, if usual for my age, was much less remarkable than what I did not know. My three special acquirements were: first, an intimate acquaintance with the Word of God that is hardly conceivable today and was rare even fifty years ago. Second, excellent French: the new life would give me the practice to make perfect. Third, the knowledge of history I had picked up in my French reading. Novels, romances, poetry, were all forbidden; except therefore for Huguenot works, devotional and doctrinal, with which Miss le Mesurier had bravely persevered, we were forced to fall back exclusively on history.

I re-produced the drama of history on a gigantic stage, as wide as Time, and cast myself for all the leading rôles. Here again the old handicap of sex enraged me: even though it was all make-believe, yet for me, a woman, to live again the deeds of *men*, was but make-believe. Almost all the best parts had been taken by men; women were slaves, nobodies; unwanted, oppressed; man's victim—or audience. I delighted all the more to read of those few women who, at moments throughout the centuries, had held the stage: Joan of Arc, Isabella of Castile, Elizabeth Tudor, Elizabeth Farnese. I took a pleasure no man could understand in reflecting that among the monarchs of England, no less than five were queens-regnant. The most extreme delight lay in the deeds of tyrant women. When I read of Queen Cleopatra or Empress Catherine lording it over their subjects—

*men*—dealing out sensual cruelties and senseless barbarities to *men*—riding roughshod over the pride and power of *men*—I exulted, breathed hard for joy. It was an instinct stronger than will, some atavistic legacy; against my own tastes, too, for in my experience—wide in imagination if pitifully narrow in fact—I liked men better than women; against my religion also. This I discovered at the Misses Primps', when we were doing English history. I found that the great Marian burnings of the Protestants, with whom alike as Plymouth Sister and human being I sympathized, gave me at one and the same time a feeling of evil exaltation, inasmuch as it was a *woman*, albeit Bloody Mary, who had the power to send hundreds of *men* to the stake. In the great Malagasy persecution of my own day, my burning sympathy with the Christian martyrs hurled over the vulture-haunted rock of Ambohipotsy was stifled by a brutal lilting pleasure that the persecutor was a queen, a woman. Cleopatra, Catherine, Mary Tudor, Ranavalona, all these, however bad and cruel, had striven to redress the balance of wrong which was at all times weighted against their sex and mine.

The Bible, Brethren Theology, French, some history; that was the sum-total of what I knew. What I did not know was much more remarkable. Nothing of art, fiction, poetry, romance; never a word of Shakespeare, Scott, Milton; nothing of contemporary books or events or persons; not even the names of Palmerston, Bright, Disraeli, Dickens, Thackeray, Tennyson. I did just know that the Duke of Wellington was dead, that a war somehow concerned with negro slaves was raging across the Atlantic, and that a new Napoleon reigned in France. I had never been to any form of lecture, concert, or entertainment, nor into any normal household of

healthy young people. Fireside games, the ordinary interests of girlhood, the hundred happinesses of family life were all unknown. I had never seen a newspaper, touched a pack of cards, nor smelt tobacco.

My character was what these twenty-three chapters should have displayed. If it had not shown the steady development of a normal life, still less of a novelist's creation, it was because my circumstances and surroundings did not change or enlarge in ordinarily gradual fashion. My life was a stringing-together of certain special events and outstanding memories—Beetle, Benamuckee, fear that the world would end, knowledge of how life began, the terrible epoch of Torribridge, Baptism, Brandy—each of which had brought suddenly a new series of emotions. Fundamentally I changed little. At eighteen I was as at eight, only "more so"; my hates and hopes were vivider. On the whole I was less unhappy than in my early childhood. The reason was that I had come to visualize and daydream more in the future than in the past; to hope more than to regret. But always I was lonely.

The experience of divine companionship had not made me want human love less. Self-absorbed to mania, I yet wanted nothing so much as to merge my individuality and dissolve my self in a loved being. Loving myself, my supreme hope was some one I could love more. The some one was ordained unalterably, and day and night alike my thoughts were of Robbie—my Robbie; i. e., the real Robbie up to seven years ago, and a creation of my own fashioning since. On Christmas Nights, I had him about as near and as physical as ever, though never near nor real enough for my need, never the comfort

of flesh and blood and of perfect spiritual contact for which I hungered and waited. I feared the waiting might be long. Instinct left no doubt that one day we should meet, and mate, and marry; but forbade that I should try to force the event or seek to discover where he might be or how I might come upon him. Temptation overcame me during one rare visit of Aunt Martha's; she knew, however, nothing. Yet why need I worry? As sure as heaven or hell he would come to me. I had earned love; for all my long unhappy motherless young life Robbie was my requital. So much did I believe also in the complementary doctrine of an Envious Power that I was half-frightened at the success and pleasure the new life abroad seemed to promise. Surely I should have to pay for it, perhaps by losing Robbie. God gets even.

Other doubts assailed. Might it not all be a mad vision? Did Robbie still remember me as I him, live for me as I for him? Was it he himself—in his own bed, wherever it was—who came to me, to be with me, on the anniversaries of our embrace; or was it my own intense longing and imagination that created the appearance of his presence, which might exist in my mind only and not in his? No! the experience was too magical not to be real. He remembered me, visited me, and one day in plain reality would come to claim me. But again—when he came—would love be a complete and perfect thing? Was perfect love possible? Should I be able to mingle my tired and fearful soul for ever and utterly in his, confide in him the utmost secret of my being, lose myself—my Self—in him; and, one soul in two bodies, affront together the terrors of Eternity? "It is not possible," leered Doubt. "Your soul must stand alone; no love can break down the barrier of its eternal isolation.

*You are alone for ever.*"

Then Doubt gave place to Hope, and I fell to enjoying the security and peace of giving myself to him, all my love, my fears: one soul in two bodies, clasped in each other's arms. Pride would second Hope. Robbie would be great, famous, honoured: a warrior, poet, statesman—I favoured each in turn. I would shine in his reflected glory. I felt no discontent at this secondary rôle, and reverting to the true type of a woman's megalomania, built not for myself but for my boy a hundred splendid futures.

I had other ambitions: to see the world, live in new houses, meet wonderful people; to do well in life, become powerful, famous; somehow, anyhow—through fame as Robbie's wife, as ambassadress perhaps or, in madder moments, queen. Then there was the old desert-island business, in which as a female Robinson Crewjoe I was to burst with *panache* of ostrich feathers and panoply of fame on an astonished world. Or I would see myself Tzarina—Mary the Great, Empress and Autocrat of All the Russias, Queen of Poland, Grand Duchess of Finland, etc., etc., etc.; or Queen of Spain; or Anywhere. Never, mind you, the mere idle castle-in-the-air builder! Every detail of the steps by which I was to scale these megalomanic heights was worked out in my mind; every moment of agony, labour, deception, experienced in my heart. My first gesture in success—I sometimes tried to deceive myself it was my chief object—was to do good, succour the poor, spread the Gospel, lead poor darkened Russia or poor heathen Spain from the false gods of Byzantium or Rome to my own true God of Plymouth—and the Taw. A sop to God for letting me succeed.

If I could not change this natural bent of egotism in my imaginings, I was able by prayer and Resolutions to curb my selfishness in the things of daily life. My Grandmother's example helped. Whenever she did an unselfish deed I should have thought to do myself, I flushed quickly with shame, and was readier for the next occasion. In every written Resolution "Do unto others" came to figure first.

Nor did Ambition fill all my visualizings. As often as creating these mad fantastic events that *might* happen, I was creating the exact shape and setting of various events that *had* to happen. My arrival at the Château, how Madame la Comtesse and her daughter would greet me, my bedroom, the details of my daily work: all these were envisaged a hundred times with a hundred variations. Aunt Jael's death; when, how, why?—Should I be summoned from France for the funeral, if it happened while I was abroad?—My feelings, my anticipated sentimental looking-back as though she was dead already: "Poor Aunt Jael, she was hard and cruel at times, *but still*—" My softening towards her for a few days. (It is no bad plan, indeed, always to treat our fellow-beings with the same respect living as we should give them dead.) Or Grandmother's death: and my far-off return to England; or my own death, and the first few moments after death.

The three things I pictured and lived through more often than any others were three meetings that I knew lay somewhere before me in the path of real life. Two would be meetings-again, the other a first encounter.

Robbie. Uncle Simeon. My Father.

Dramatic scenes of these three encounters I worked

out a hundred times with the fullest details of time, place and setting: the luxury of first moments, the splendour or scorn of the respective dénouements. I knew what I should say first. I framed every word of the conversation that followed, experienced every phase of joy, melodrama and hate. How far the realities resembled the anticipations; and how far Instinct was right in telling me—against all appearance—that I was approaching these three inevitable events by going to France, the sequel will show.

* * * * * * *

I have called myself worldly. It is true, except that the one reality to which through all agonies I held was not of this world at all. At moments when my mood could summon no happiness from the past nor hope from the future, I had always a last refuge-place in the ineffable Love of God, as I had felt it once and for all in one miraculous instant. I knew it was more real than the world around me or than the fears of my own mind; as the supernatural was more real than the natural, the thing intuitively felt than the fact ascertained, magic than reason. I could seek refuge from trouble in a state of magical divine consciousness, in which, at perfect moments, I lost all sense of time and space and self, all physical sensation, all power to think—everything but Love. I was a soul only, the soul of all the world. I ceased to be anything. I was everything. I was God and God was I.

I attained this state chiefly by passionate prayer. Sometimes, however, the trance came upon me quite involuntarily. Some notion or idea or word threw me before I knew into a transport of delight.

Chalcedony, Jerusalem, rosemary, tribulation: the sound of these words filled me with exquisite and supernatural sensations. I would clasp my breasts, close my eyes, and open my heart passionately to the presence of God.

On a lower plane were my trick-methods of attaining mystical sensation: staring at myself or kissing myself in the mirror, crooning an everlasting "I—I—I" or calling aloud my own name for echoes. Different again—a superstitious offshoot of intuition—were my signs, omens, fetishes, lucky numbers. If I could walk to Meeting in exactly a lucky number of paces, I knew the service would be specially blessed to me; and inevitably it was. The distance I could cover in running across a field and counting say seventy-seven was the exact measure, thus magically conveyed to me, of a property or estate which would one day be mine. If a lucky number came my way of its own initiative, it was an omen of unusual import. Thus when I learnt that the Paris house of my French family was No. 77 Rue St. Eloy, I was certain of high times thereat.

In all Mrs. Cheese's superstitions, ranging from West Country witchcraft to the happiness of horseshoes or lucklessness of ladders, I believed without reserve. I practised Bible-opening, which was about the only superstition of my Grandmother's. The first verse that caught the eye—or, in my rite, the most heavily red-chalked passage, or, failing that, a verse seven or thirty-seven—had a special God-sent message for the moment's need.

Having discovered the (for me) supernatural nature of the world, my mistake was to press my discovery too far. I was in danger of believing that I could do

anything, however omnipotent or divine, if I only knew the trick; conjure up any supreme sensation, open the door of all power and mystery and pleasure, if I but found the Open Sesame. I sought for the catchword which would destroy all Existence; am seeking it still.

* * * * * * *

Real things that happened did not approach the reality of my supernatural experience until they had been brooded upon a while in my heart, until my thoughts and passions had imbued them with life. At the actual moment of great occurrences—Uncle Simeon's threats, Aunt Jael's curses, Lord Tawborough's great proposal—I deliberately prevented myself receiving the full emotional effect. Later, alone with myself, I re-lived the scene, and took my fill of rage, bitterness, pride, delight. Thus any event affected me much more after it had happened than at the time. The instant anger with which Aunt Jael's blow filled me was nothing to the brooding rage and revengefulness of the next day. The pang of unavoidable shame with which Conscience smote me when I did a mean or cowardly deed was as nothing to the agony of self-scorn I underwent when some long-past meanness of mine returned to my memory—as new and naked as the meanness of some one else. This whole childhood of mine is more vivid than when I lived it.

If past events were more real than present ones, future ones were the most vivid of all. The past is imagination and memory working together. The future is imagination pure. The past was Aunt Jael, floggings, dreariness, tears; Uncle Simeon, terror, cruelty; a childhood cowering, loveless. The future

was joy, in a hundred wonderful shapes—Robbie, somehow, some time; noble ladies, châteaux of France; visions of history, splendour and romance; a fairy land of fame, pleasure and glory—peopled, permeated, queened by Mary Lee. For the last few weeks at home my soul lived at Bear Lawn no longer. Morning, noon and night, sleeping and waking, I dwelt in the imaginary land.

Four days before I left I closed my diary and handed it, a sealing-waxed parcel of exercise-books, to my Grandmother. This was the last entry:—

> During the past year or two the Lord has been exceeding good to me. Fortune has been unusual—for any one. When I started this volume of my Diary, I was at the Misses Primps', with no prospects at all of anything *high*; no hope. And now, I am becoming a lady (almost); and I am going to France, la belle France! Life is mysterious, and God is good.... In my inward life, too, I started this book in the throes of the fiercest fear I have even known. Terror, appallment, awe of the Lord God and His eternal years; all these assailed me so that I thought I should never stand free. Am happier now: slowly yet surely, the fullness of earthly life, the new hopes springing in my heart, the final though hard acceptance of the truth that it is useless for me (finite Mary)

to measure the length and breadth and age of God, and most of all that precious memory of His Holy Spirit, that I can ever invoke in all sorrowful times,—all these have brought me to be able to do what my Grandmother does, and to *Trust in the Lord*.

Life moves mysteriously. It is that walk near Torribridge years ago, when I met the Stranger, that is taking me to France now. And somehow, some time—I don't know how, but I *know*—France will take me back to Torribridge—to R. Shall I meet him in the foreign land? I do not know. But he is coming. All my love is poured out on the only boy-image that has ever interested me; all my passion I have bestowed on one shape only, on my Image, my R. —tenderness and tears, and meeting lips and bodies; and he takes me in his arms. How I long to see him! that I may know his identity with my Image of him, to know for always and ever that the Robbie I live with and live for is the real eighteen-year-old Robbie who—God make it so!—lives for me.

Now Bear Lawn is behind me, and all is new and wonderful ahead: *happiness is coming*. Good bye Grandmother dear! This is the end of my girlhood's book; one day I may

find joy—and sadness—in reading it.

MARY LEE.

April, 1865.

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## CHAPTER XXV: I SAY GOOD-BYE

The last day arrived, a bright showery Sunday in April. I was to leave early next morning. Lord Tawborough would see me as far as Southampton.

At my last Breaking of Bread many allusions were made in prayer to my departure for foreign lands. If I was not going there avowedly in His service, none the less let His service be my chief aim and effort. I worshipped devoutly. This might be the last Lord's Supper of which I should ever partake. The Lord's People in France were the merest handful; there were not more than four Meetings in all the Empire, of which not one, Grandmother had ascertained, was in Paris or the north or any part I was likely to be near. And I might be abroad three or four years without a holiday in England.

Now that at last my hopes and ambitions were being fulfilled, sadness and regret were uppermost. The old life I knew so well, the present in which I had still one day to live, already seemed far behind me. I looked back in the anticipatorily retrospective fashion of all who live in the future; and to whom, living in the future, the present is always already the

past.

Already Bear Lawn was the past, decked with a pathos that as the present it had never worn.

The last dinner was a goodly spread: a roast fowl, a hog's pudding, and apple dumplings with clotted cream. Glory and Salvation were invited. The latter slobbered noisily of how she would miss me; I realized with a sudden sentimental pang that, after all, it might be true. Glory wept till the tears streamed down her cheeks on to her untidy bodice; I watched with a feeling of guilt for her sorrow and the increasing shamefulness of her blouse.

The last night was full of odd pauses and silences. Aunt Jael kept looking at me and looking away quickly when I looked back. She tried to keep up an appearance of stoicism and sternness, and knew that she was failing. At the last moment she gave up all pretence. In my emotional mood, she seemed to atone for years of hardness when she turned sharply away from the Book of Proverbs at which her Bible opened—it was real sacrifice—and chose for the nightly portion my 137th Psalm. I thought of that dismal first night at Torribridge so many years ago.

Later on, at my bedside, my Grandmother prayed a long devoted prayer. "Oh Lord Jesus! How my old heart aches when I am sometimes tempted to fear that she may be unworthy of that Saint who sits with Thee, her dear dear mother. Grant that in foreign lands and the cities of the plain she may shun the ungodly and flee from all worldliness and evil. Grant, Oh Lord, that we three may meet together in Thine Own everlasting arms. For Jesus' sake."

Next morning I was up betimes. Mrs. Cheese, red-

eyed and tearful, helped me cord my box. "I daun knaw what we shall do without 'ee, my dear. Even the ol' biddy is sorrowful, though she's not enough of a Christian to fancy showin' it."

The last moment came. We had finished breakfast. I was dressed for the journey, and my brass-nailed box was ready in the hall. We awaited the sound of Lord Tawborough's carriage.

Aunt Jael epitomized.

"Well, child, you're at your eighteenth year and you're doing well in life. I'm sure I don't grudge it 'ee. Your poor mother would have been a proud woman to see you going off like this to a good post among fine folk; but don't think as much of folk being fine and grand as she did, poor soul. All is vanity. Keep lowly. Don't let your head be turned because a fine lord is seeing you on your way to a life amid foreign lords and ladies: they're no better than humbler folk before the Lord and not often as good. Profit all you can. Never be ashamed of those who brought you up. Maybe 'twill be three or four years before we see you. A long time when we're old and within sight of the grave. Maybe you'll never see us again."

"Oh no, Aunt Jael!"

"Why not?" said my Grandmother, "'tis as likely as not true. Ye know not the day nor the hour." (The door knocker sounded.) "Come kiss me good-bye and remember I shall tell her you're following after. Love the Lord always."

I hold in my mind the last vision of Bear Lawn: Aunt Jael and my Grandmother standing at the gate of

Number Eight, Mrs. Cheese behind weeping in the doorway. I turned round in the carriage and waved my hand. I got a last glimpse of my Grandmother and Great-Aunt and saw them turn round and begin to walk back along the garden path. I saw them after they had ceased to see me. That was the real instant of parting.

On the long journey I said little to my companion; wrapped up in myself and my own thoughts. Some of the way I slept. When we got to Southampton docks, and my last Good-bye in England was but a few minutes ahead I remembered with the greater shame and vividness (that throughout the long journey I had forgotten it) to whom it was I owed all the bright prospects before me, how needlessly good and generous he had always been, and how utterly unworthy of his goodness and generosity I was.

"Sir," I said, and my voice was shaky, "I don't know how to thank you for all you have done for me. I've no money, no power, no anything. But if there's anything I can make or send you to remember me by —if there's anything at all I can do—Is there anything?"

"Yes: Kiss me."

He spoke in a low voice. I trembled with sudden emotion and surprise. Then I kissed him on the cheeks, and he kissed me.

There were two old ladies standing near by; "Brother and sister," we overheard one of them say.

"That's it, isn't it?" I said.

He did not reply.

There was one more moment before I had to go on to the boat. I noticed with a new interest—reviewing with staring inquisition every detail of his face—how good and clever and refined and aristocratic he was; how more than all he seemed sad and hankering and lonely. I could not help apprehending after what had happened—but then, no, that was too absurd. It was but a natural thing to have asked at a parting.

"Au revoir," he said in a last handshake, "but not Adieu."

It was dusk as we sailed out of Southampton Water. England was a fading piece of purple sky, lying low upon the sea; sprinkled with stars, for the harbour lights were showing. As she faded away I knew that she too belonged to the past.

I went to sleep in my bunk, and awoke in the bright sunshine of France and the future.

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# PART TWO

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## CHAPTER XXVI: CHATEAU VILLEBECQ

There came into view a shining white mansion, massive, square-looking, three-storied, pierced with high windows and covered like a mosaic with newly-painted white Venetian shutters. A dream-house, gleaming against a background of fresh greensward and dark yew-trees. "It is not real," I said half-aloud, and mystery banished disappointment. For I had pictured battlements, towers, drawbridges: had thought that "château" meant "castle."

Nothing that day had been quite real. Perhaps it was the hot spring weather. Or the over-wideawakeness that followed a sleepless night—ah, Channel steamboat, stirrings of body and soul, desperate illness creating more desperate resolves to be good, prayers of "Not *this* time, God, and I'll be pure, holy!" renewed with each sickening lurch. Or the inevitable first-day mystery of the foreign land.

I had been met at Havre quay-side by a silent crafty little man in black, with a face like Punch and a head (when with un-English gesture he removed his hat) as smooth and bald as an egg.

"I am François," was all he vouchsafed.

I addressed him in French; he did not seem to understand, shook his head vaguely and made no reply. A ridiculous fear seized me that I did not know French at all, that Miss le Mesurier's lessons had been one mighty sham, false lessons in some goblin tongue.

Or was I dreaming? All the way along the busy quay, amid clamouring porters, gesticulating cabmen, and marionette-like crowds, through unfamiliar streets, and in an unbelievable railway train, a sense of dreaming had persisted.

The carriage drew up in front of the great doorway. François, by signs, explained that he was entrusted with my luggage. A little woman came out on to the steps of the porch to greet me, smiling ingratiatingly. She was a tiny, shrivelled thing, with bulgy eyes and a high receding forehead ridged with careworn lines, the whole dominated by an enormous nose: a human dormouse dressed in black. Despite its harassed air, the face was kind; her age might be fifty. The housekeeper, I surmised. She shook hands effusively.

"Good day, Mademoiselle, so you are here."

"Yes, Madame."

"You are tired. Come upstairs. I will show you your room."

My relief at finding that the French I had learnt was real after all, was less strong than a sudden feeling of fright—religious fright, for God speaks only English —before the blasphemous oddness of the thing. After all, my conversations with Miss le Mesurier had only been for conversation's sake: by way of learning the trick. But this real talking, this conducting of life's actual business in the foreign jargon!—(I prayed swiftly to know. "Little fool," replied God, *in French*.)

I followed the little old lady into a lofty hall, very cool after the heat outside, a cold and stately place. Doors opened out of it on every side, surmounted with antlers. On the walls I saw armour, old swords, banners. We mounted a broad staircase with walls covered in tapestries. A mighty staircase. Majesty filled me.

"Here is your bedroom," said the little lady, "and this door leads through to your study or boudoir, call it

what you like. I hope you will like them both."

"They are beautiful!" I cried, and my heart beat faster as I surveyed the bright bedchamber, the bed-hangings in rose-coloured chintz, the elegant boudoir with book-case and writing-desk and walls covered with portraits and miniatures and little racks for cups and vases—all for me. My heart exulted in contrasts. Oh, now I was a lady!

"You will want to wash your hands. I shall wait for you. I am so glad you have come. Your presence—that is your arrival—it gives me pleasure.... Now come downstairs to luncheon to be introduced to us all. They will be so delighted to see you, dear Mademoiselle, my daughters—"

"Then you are—"

"Madame de Florian."

"The Countess! Oh a thousand pardons!"

What an un-Brethren-like phrase. And what a bad beginning.

She sniggered, was immensely tickled. "Ha! Ha! You thought I was a servant."

"Oh no! Not really—"

"Oh yes you did. And that does not surprise me. My daughters have always told me I look like an old family servant: this will amuse them so. Now come along to luncheon. One thing," she whispered confidentially as she opened the bedroom door, "before you begin with my daughters we must have a little talk together about them both, and what each had best read with you. Ah, they are so different,

Elise and Suzanne: one would not think them sisters. What anxiety it all gives me!"

And she knitted her brows and half closed her eyes in an expression of exaggerated care I thought more comical than sad.

The Countess led the way down the great staircase. In place of a door the dining-room had high hanging curtains. We passed through them into by far the largest room I had ever seen. The floor was of polished wood; there were no rugs or carpets. In each distant corner was a complete suit of armour; all along the walls stood massive and stately pieces of furniture. In the middle of this huge apartment, like an island surrounded by an ocean of bare floor, was a table at which were seated four persons: two young ladies, a gentleman and a little old woman.

All four stared at me with unconcealed interest. Introductions left me in a maze; I was too self-conscious to hear names, far too full of the fact that I was being introduced to them to concentrate on their being introduced to me. Then for the next few minutes I was too busy trying to eat and drink aristocratically, acquiring slyly the new ritual of forks and spoons, posing modestly for five pairs of eyes, to hazard my own stare-round. Of the conversation, which was conducted almost exclusively by the Countess and her younger daughter Suzanne, and which concerned some peasant marriage in the district, I found after the first few moments that I understood almost everything. The food was as delicious as it was unfamiliar. There was an omelette with rich little crusts in it, and a venison-stew with olives.

Towards the end of the meal I found courage to take

the offensive and look round. With pretence of unawareness that was pitiful to see, all immediately arranged themselves to be gazed at: except the elder girl Elise, who faced me with equal eye.

At the head of the table sat the Countess, full of asides to the butler, and peering remorselessly at everybody's plate. When you took a portion of a dish she watched anxiously, to appraise quantity.

On her right, nearly opposite me, sat a tall dark gentleman. With his pointed little beard, suave voice and exaggerated manners, I decided he was a villain: a true French villain. I disliked him at once: his eyes told me he knew it, and they reciprocated. His hard eyes (though dark instead of blue), identical beard (though black instead of yellow), treacly eyes and cat-like gesture, all reminded me of Uncle Simeon. I soon learnt that his name was de Fouquier; he was a cousin of the late Count's and steward for the family estates. Like the Count, he had played some part in the coup d'état which had placed the reigning Emperor on the throne. He spent most of the year at the Château, living as one of the family.

Next to him, and immediately opposite me was my principal charge, Mademoiselle Suzanne: a big healthy young woman, a few months younger than myself, but a year or two older in appearance. She was fair-haired, big-featured and bright-eyed. A large mouth with full red lips proclaimed her sister to Maud—and daughter to Eve. She was lively, kind and perhaps stupid. She was always laughing.

At the end of the table, facing the Countess and immediately on my left, sat Mademoiselle Elise, the elder daughter. She was unhealthily pale; her eyes were fixed-looking, with dark rims underneath, as

though she hardly slept. The oddest feature was the forehead, high and of a marble whiteness that made the blue veins stand out. There was something cross and soured in her expression: also something miserable that reminded me of myself—the first condition of sympathy.

Finally, beside me, and on the Countess' left, sat a wizened little woman, a tinier edition of the tiny Countess, but sallower, uglier and sharper-featured: ferret rather than dormouse. A pair of enormous blue spectacles enabled her to observe without being observed. She was the Countess' lady-companion. Her name, absurdly enough, was Mademoiselle Gros.

The plainness and ordinariness of them all was what struck me most. I had pictured stately and distinguished persons—grand, noble, French—and here was a company quite as ugly and plebeian as the Meeting. No one fulfilled my notion of aristocrats! No one resembled the Stranger.

After luncheon, Mademoiselle Suzanne came up to my rooms to help me unpack. She prattled ceaselessly, in English, which she spoke well, though I found reason to correct her every few moments and thus to begin my duties.

"I shall like you, I know. I hated Miss Jayne: that's our governess when we were little: she was very ugly and severe. I teased her all I dared. Once I kicked her, but I was only nine. Mademoiselle Soyer, who taught us last, was really French, though her mother was English, so she doesn't count. Our other governesses were all French; but" (quickly) "you are not a governess of course; you are to be a friend. I am sure you will like it with us: You can do whatever you want: ride—you do ride?—go to picnics and

excursions; there are very pretty places near here. I am so glad you are not what I feared. Your cousin[!] Lord Tawborough told Mamma you were so clever. And some English women, you know—you know what I mean. But we shall be friends, real friends, I know it."

"Do you?" thought I. "You are friendly and kind, but not at all like that unknown thing I hoped so hard to find, a real friend of my own age and sex, whom I could be free with, confide in—not love, for that there is only Robbie—who could sometimes take the place of the Other Me in my talks and visions, who could end the loneliness."

She paused in her babyish fiddling with my possessions. "What are you thinking about? You are not listening."

"Oh nothing," I said, a shade guiltily, for I was taken with one of my intuitive panics: Suppose she had guessed my thoughts? But the big eyes were staring at me with nothing beyond vague curiosity. To make amends, I set to and tattled in the liveliest and worldliest fashion I knew.

"Oh how droll you are, and what good times we shall have together."

Dinner (no Supper now: I was a lady!) found me already much more at ease. I corrected some mistake in Mlle. Suzanne's pronunciation, and that set the table going. While Weather is the conversational shield and buckler of the English or of the French against themselves, against each other it is the oddness and madness of the other's tongue.

"Heavens!" cried Suzanne. "That makes five ways I

know of to pronounce *ough* in English. It is mad, absurd."

"There are seven ways at least," I boasted.

"There's nothing like that in our language. French is so simple."

"Oh? What about the irregular verbs?"

"You've got them too, quite as many."

"But they're not so irregular as yours: in fact, most of them aren't really irregular at all!"

"Oh, not really irregular at all! *Am*, *be*, *is*, *are*: or *go*, *went*, *been*; aren't they irregular enough for you?"

"And the spelling, oh dear!" put in the Countess....

This sort of thing is as gay and unfailing as a fountain. Thanks to the good oddities of my mother-tongue, on my very first evening in this strange land I was beginning to feel at home. Certainly I talked more than at any meal in the eighteen years before. Everywhere else I had been a child, a chattel: a thing to be bullied and silenced (Aunt Jael), tortured (Uncle Simeon), exhorted (the Saints), prayed for (Grandmother). The new unconstraint exhilarated me; my natural bent for talking came into its own. Here I was listened to, expected to shine, deferred to. I was clever: I was amusing: I was a lady!

Alone in my cosy bedroom, with the lamp lit, I reviewed my first impressions. How good it all was: comfort, ease, dainty food, fine surroundings; kindliness, deference; freedom, importance. Luxurious liberty filled me: after eighteen years of

prison I had escaped. But would things continue as well as they had begun? Or were there new perils ahead? Then Conscience pricked. Is it right, this life of ease, this new atmosphere of careless liberty: is it of the Lord? What place has religion here? Where is God? Has any one of these fine folk spoken, or even thought, of holy things during one moment of this day? HAVE YOU?

It was late. I opened my Bible, and turned, involuntarily, inevitably, to the one hundred and thirty-seventh psalm. I read it through aloud. None of the old emotion, none of the old misery returned; as I read I tried almost to force it back. Where had fled the wretchedness of that other first night of a new life, in the dreary chamber at Torribridge? Where was the desperate luxurious loneliness of that time? Had the fatal atmosphere of France, the Papist Babylon, already in an hour magically completed a change that the easier times of the past few years had begun? Was I deprived of my oldest privilege, my misery? Had I become unworthy of unhappiness? I contrasted myself bitterly with the unhappy Mary of seven years back. Ease was poisoning my soul. I dwelt with perverse envy on the wretched little girl of that other night, and then fell to picturing all the unhappiness that had framed my life, from the long agony of my mother before she bore me to the daily oppression of the years that followed. Soon I was shedding tears of pity for my unhappy past self: weeping, if not for Zion. (More and more, as the contrasts of my new life developed, I indulged in this glad unhappiness of sentimental backward-looking, mimicked and dramatized the sincerity of my old child's misery, wallowed in retrospective self-pity, cried amid present ease: "Ah, what a sad life *was* mine!") That I could weep for it as past showed me

how wide and sudden was the gulf between the new life and the old. I resolved to widen it.

Already a new person—an empty, a surface Mary, of whose existence within me I had sometimes had half-realized and swiftly-vanishing notions—seemed to have sapped the fortress of my soul, to have assumed command of "Me": a person with the same brain, the same will, the same body, but another soul, or no soul. My brain decided to stifle for a while the old Mary, to let this emptier, ease-fuller personality be all myself. Then at the end of a space of time, I should know which was the stronger, which was the realler Me. I never doubted but that I should be free to make my choice.

I chose my Resolutions carefully, prayed them aloud, put them on paper, sealed them in time-honoured envelope:—

> (1) I will cease all visions and daydreams.
>
> (2) I will abandon all magic tricks, numbers and hopes.
>
> (3) I will play with none of my Terrors: Hell, Satan, Eternity.
>
> (4) I will not brood. I will fight my distrust of happiness, my evil instinct that for every moment of pleasure the Lord will make me pay to the uttermost farthing.
>
> (5) I will seek none of the ecstasies of religion; not try to experience the Rapture, nor dwell overmuch on

holy things. Resting from a too great pleasure in God, at the end of the period I am setting myself I may find myself nearer to Him. (A wise experiment, whispered a Voice: perhaps God's, perhaps the Devil's.)

(6) *Only*, I will read His Word daily, and have for every moment the motto "What would He do?"

(7) Except at Christmas only, I will not think of Robbie. If at the end of the time, he is as clear and close as ever, I shall know myself and him better, just as with God (5).

ALL THESE THINGS, for the rest of this year 1866, eight months and more [precisely thirty-seven weeks I noticed with a twinge of emotion which was itself an involuntary breach of (2)], I do, with God's help, here and now RESOLVE.

M. L.

On the envelope I wrote in capitals "Very Private" in English and "Personnel" in French, added "April 17th, 1866" and signed "M. L."—the death-warrant of Mary I, proclamation from the throne of Mary II. And I undressed, and slept like a lady.

# CHAPTER XXVII: MARY THE SECOND

The Countess cornered me next morning for her "little talk," conducting me to her own particular apartment. Mademoiselle Gros was present. She always was, I soon found: a familiar spirit rather than a companion. She sat on a low chair knitting, and if her eyes, or rather goggles, were never raised, I could see that her ears were drinking everything in. The Countess, who spoke in a kind of loud whisper, seemed almost oblivious of me, as one repeating her thoughts aloud to herself: I was merely a good atmosphere in which to recite her woes.

Suzanne, you know. A mere child, good-natured, impulsive—like her father—not clever, but with a will of her own and at times a hot temper—like her father. She gave no real trouble: yet caused her mother many anxieties: how, was not stated. Elise; ah that was a different matter! She was intelligent, fond of study, with a practical head for affairs and money. But so self-centred, so secretive; and so sharp-tongued, so undaughterly when reproved! And in her sullen way, far more obstinate even than her sister. She could never be *made* to do anything: one had given up trying long ago....

"Ah Mademoiselle, if you but knew. It is not easy, to be an old woman alone in the world with two young daughters. They are all I have. I hope they will marry well, but rich husbands are not easy to find, when the girls are poor. We are poor, you know."

"Poor, Madame?" I cried, "with this great château?"

"*Because* of this great château, Mademoiselle. You

cannot know how expensive it is to keep up. Expenses are always going up, and rents and farms are always going down. Things are not what they were. Elise will succeed to this place, and to the little money we have. It is not enough; the only thing is for her to find a husband rich enough to spend money on the estate. But she is so strange, so difficult; mocks at the idea of marrying; declares she hates all men—is it not horrible? Says that if, by any impossible chance, she ever did marry, it would be just whom she fancies, rich as a king or poor as a rat. There is no other girl in France like her. It is unbelievable. For Suzanne, too, a good marriage is important: but I fear the *dot* I can give her is not big enough to secure the sort of husband I want. You see, Mademoiselle, what anxieties a mother has."

Suddenly she woke up and seemed to become aware I was a conscious being. "You are surprised I talk to you so freely? You are young, I know, but so grave, so English, so wise; I feel you will influence my children for the good. You will help me, dear young Mademoiselle, will you not? You will be my ally?" (This word with a snigger, as though trying to pretend she did not mean it.) "And then English is such a sensible thing to study, so useful an accomplishment in Society. Perhaps I will look through the books you read together—though I know you would choose nothing unsuitable—if ever I get time. Oh dear! We are so glad you are here. Our first impression is delightful. Remember you are not a governess but a friend."

"You are too kind, Madame. You are all very good to me. I always knew I should like the French, I have always said so to myself."

"Now really? I cannot truthfully return the compliment—promise me you will not take offence—though I have always liked individual English people I have met. My family have always been fighting your countrymen. Oh dear, I am always interrupted."

This was in response to a few suggestive throat-clearings from Mademoiselle Gros. "Time for you to go into Caudebec for the shopping, is it? Why, it is barely nine o'clock: don't worry me so, you have plenty of time. No, no" (looking at her watch), "It is gone half-past, you must hurry off at once. Why couldn't you remind me sooner? Here is the list—don't lose it—and here are fifty francs—No, you will need sixty. And don't go forgetting again to call at Lebrun's and pay him his account. I will write about the other matter, so say nothing. No, you had better just say—no, after all, say nothing. Here are the three hundred francs; three hundred francs—it is terrible."

"Now," as the dwarf-like creature slunk away, "where was I, dear Mademoiselle? Oh yes: my father was in the Navy, and fought with Villeneuve at Trafalgar, while my husband and his relatives were all in the Army; his father, the famous Count de Florian—the girls' grandfather—was at Waterloo, serving as a general under the great Emperor himself. Trafalgar, Waterloo: what more would you have? But then English is so useful, it is spoken everywhere: there is England with all her colonies, and the Americans speak English too, don't they? The Court Ladies all talk it, and our best families. So when the girls were quite tiny, I got them an English governess, a Miss Jayne; sensible, but very harsh, and not *quite* a lady. When they were older, I looked about for a young

English lady to perfect them. Then our good English friend, Lord Tawborough, told me of a young cousin of his, who would suit perfectly. 'Protestant?' I asked him, for after all religion is important, is it not? 'Yes,' he replied, 'as you know nearly all of us are; and a devout one too. But of course she would never dream of trying to influence your daughters!' You wouldn't, Mademoiselle, would you?"

"Oh, no! Madame," I replied, breaking a lifetime's vows.

"Naturally not. You are a good Protestant, we are good Catholics. But there is tolerance, is there not?"

"Yes," huskily. The new philosophy affected my voice.

"I knew you would think like that. The best way is for you never to refer to religion at all, don't you agree?"

"Yes, Madame," denying for the third time. And immediately in the ears of my spirits, the cock crew. I flushed. Madame stared, wondered, and said nothing.

I sought to turn the subject. "How did you first meet Lord Tawborough?" I enquired. "I should be much interested to hear."

"Has he never told you? Well, he was introduced to us by one of my dear husband's friends, another Englishman, a cousin of his; a much older man, whom my husband knew through friends of the family in Paris. So distinguished too, with a head of perfectly white hair, and so well-groomed; the perfect type of English gentleman. He lived in France. I think he didn't get on very well with Lord

Tawborough, had quarrelled with the latter's father or something like that. The last time I saw Lord Tawborough, he hadn't seen him for years; I think he still lives somewhere or other in France. So distinguished, though pious with it: a Protestant, of course, but a perfect gentleman."

"Which cousin, I wonder? Was he married?"

"He had been, I believe, but his wife was dead. She had treated him shamefully, I heard, and finally ran away. I never quite found out, you know; these things are sometimes hard to discover, aren't they? One day we may meet again; like all my dear husband's friends, he has a standing invitation to the Château. Poor Monsieur Traies, I wonder what has become of him."

I could not hide my extreme emotion, and for a second my brain was too numb to invent a pretext.

"Oh Madame," I cried faintly, "I feel ill all of a sudden," and I rushed from the room, and upstairs to my bedroom.

*He* was in France. I might meet him in this very house. It was not the coincidence which affected me, but the suddenness with which an old vision had become a near possibility. Nature and habit were stronger than last night's Resolution, and pacing about my room I rehearsed in hectic detail all the mad alternative ways in which the meeting would take place, the long-planned dénouement be achieved.

By luncheon I had calmed down and could pass the sudden sickness off as a turn I often had when tired.

"Fatigues of the journey," sympathized the Countess.

Next day I began my duties. The program was an hour or two's Conversation with Suzanne, followed by Reading with Elise. From the first day the former was nothing more (or less) than a chat, sometimes slanderous, mostly frivolous, always friendly: developing my golden talent for tattle, and in the idlest and surest fashion perfecting Suzanne's English. We became the best of companions.

Elise began by giving me a fright. "I love your poets," she said in her precise plaintive English, "Shakespeare best of all, though" (proudly) "very few French people do. We will read his plays together. I have read most of them, but you will know them far better. I should like to begin with either Macbeth or Othello, my two favourites. Which do you advise?"

I had never heard of either.

"You see me colouring," I laughed nervously. "You have guessed: I am a bit ashamed of not knowing my Shakespeare as well as I can see you do."

The half-lie saved me. It most intimately flattered her vanity: that she, the French girl, should be thought to know an English poet better than I. No variety of self-content is more delicious than that which fills a foreigner when she can soar over the natives in knowledge of their own land.

"You are too modest," said Elise. "Now which of those two plays shall we begin with?"

I had clean forgotten one title, and was not sure of repeating the other correctly. "Which do *you* think? It is you who should choose," I returned generously. At all costs she must repeat one of the names.

"Macbeth then. I think it is the finer."

"Yes, Macbaith," I agreed, imitating her pronunciation as closely as I could. "Perhaps you would lend me your copy. Reading it through would"—I recoiled from "refresh my memory"—"would be useful. I'll read it over tonight. The Countess won't mind my reading in my room?"

"Your room is yours to do what you like in. We all do what we like here; I hope you'll do the same."

So that night the bedroom of a French Château saw me make the acquaintance of the greatest of my fellow-countrymen, of multitudinous seas and perfumes of Araby, and of a theme new in print only: a woman's vaulting ambition.

Reading, in fact, by myself or with Elise, became my chief distraction. Elise's sour face held no sour looks for me. I would watch the high blue-veined forehead and the sad white face as we were reading together. For the first time—with the one exception of Lord Tawborough, in whom also intelligence and purity, in their manlier setting, were the qualities that attracted me—I found myself admiring some one, acknowledging frankly to myself that here was something better than I. Her kindness, her sadness, her literary enthusiasm all heightened the effect; and in the ardour of books and discussion sprang up my first real friendship. It ripened slowly, for she was as proud as I. We did not wallow in confidences, knowing that at the right moment they could come.

My private reading was voracious, sharpened by years of unconscious hunger. I read novels, poetry and travel, chiefly in French: one subject became an

enthusiasm, the history of France, and one part of that subject a mania.

Of the glory of this world I knew nothing. It burst on me now in one vision, one shape, one glad triumphant name: the name and shape and vision of France. I devoured every map, every picture, every book of geography or history the library contained. I learnt to know the living soul and lilting name of each river and city and province, from this Normandy of Châteaux and cider-orchards and Vikings and churches to Provence loved of the sun and limned by the Midland Sea; from fervid Gascony to brave Lorraine. I loved the victorious shape: that stands firm on the straight Pyrenees, turns a proud Breton shoulder to the wide Atlantic, and bears on the breast of old Alsace the swing and swerve of the whole eastward Continent. Best of all I loved the story: Gauls and Romans, Troubadours and Crusaders, Kings and Dauphins, Huguenots and Leaguers, lilies and eagles, laughter and war. I see them always as from some hilltop, a tented and bannered multitude spread on a vast twilight plain beneath me, reaching to the utmost horizon of history.

Above them all, in the highest heaven, there shines a Star. It is Napoleon.

I lived every moment from the island-birth to the island death, from Ajaccio to the Rock; knew the emotion of each time so well that I believed I could have been Napoleon, came to feel *I had been* Napoleon, and could revel in retrospective megalomania with no betrayal of Resolution: for I was weaving no futures for myself, but living another's past. Another's, yet mine. For as I read I

found that I *remembered* the lonely childhood, the sour school-days; the hopes of '96, the springtide of Italy; the summertide of glory; Austerlitz, Notre Dame, the crown of battles and the crown of gold; with God's revenge for good days gone:—the wintertime of Russia; the defeat, the disaster, the desertion; the giant self-pity of Longwood. Ah, those were great days. And now I was Mary.

For a long time I thought the Nephew ridiculous. The pictures I saw everywhere portrayed a kind of sleepy Uncle Simeon, bloated, heavier, stupider, but not less crafty. But I kept my thoughts to myself. For the family were staunch adherents of the reigning Emperor.

Then, one day, Elise gave me a book describing his younger days. Again I found that I remembered. I was Louis-Napoleon too. *He* was the great Napoleon. We were all one. In the world there was only one Person. Every one was every one else. My heart—God—once more I had nearly reached the Mystery....

He was a real Napoleon, this living King, who, when as a little child they tore him away from the Tuileries (when the uncle fell and was abandoned), cried out aloud in rage prophetic: "I shall come back," and through madness and mockery and passion and prison—came back.

If books were my most personal pleasure, I settled down to enjoy every phase of the new easeful life: fine bedroom and boudoir (I would exult aloud that they were mine); perfect servants who spared you cleaning your own boots, making your bed and folding your clothes; bright days in the park with Suzanne and her chatter; rides, drives, picnics; excursions to Jumièges, to Caudebec, to

neighbouring mansions, to old Rouen, jewelled with wonderful papist churches. A "No English after dinner" rule of the Countess' enabled me to improve my French almost to perfection, and this acquisition of another tongue contributed to the change in my character: words make thoughts rather than thoughts words: language is the lord of life. Soon this new insouciant way of treating life, which but a few weeks earlier would have been incomprehensible, appeared the natural one. I forgot love, and God, and misery. Mary II had won. Bear Lawn became distant and half-real. A thin bridge of memory, which Resolution forbade me to traverse, spanned the widening gulf between the two lives. The very intenseness of the old days was the reason they so soon became unreal. I had learnt to live each instant in over-intense and concentrated fashion: I could not do it in the present and past as well.

None of my minor fears were realized. I had thought my humble upbringing might make itself seen; but no, to all and sundry I was announced as "the cousin of a Lord" (lusciously pronounced *laurrr* by the Countess) and taken for granted as a young English gentlewoman of orthodox antecedents. I justified my pleasure by the reflection that it was all literally true, though in my heart I knew that the *true* Me was poor middle-class go-to-Meeting Mary. All my ways were found "so English, so quaint, so Puritan, so clever, so charming." Well-chosen hints of the oddness and rigour of Bear Lawn excited interest, amusement, pity, each in their turn delectable: how it pleased, flattered, touched me! The Clinkers and Aunt Jael became victims in a repertoire, butchered to make a Norman holiday. Nor need I have feared for my table-manners with these French aristocrats who wiped their plates with their bread and supped and

squelched and chewed in almost Glorian fashion; while Aunt Jael in hawkiest mood never rivalled the mesmeric stare which Madame la Comtesse de Florian bestowed on other people's plates.

The eternal visualizing was the one habit of old days which I could not completely shake off. My Napoleonizing was one outlet; for the rest, the intrigues and excitements that the next few months were to furnish brusquely stemmed the tide. Stage-manager of a real drama, I had less need to act imaginary ones.

I had soon divined, beneath the lightness, an odd constraint around me. At table there were unpleasant silences, when I could feel that my companions were hostile to each other. I noticed that the Countess, Elise and Suzanne only spoke to me on intimate or serious topics when we were alone. Every talk worth remembering had been *à deux*; they were not, I thought, ashamed of me but of themselves, not shy of me but of each other. Of love as I, who had not known it, felt it should be between mother and daughter and sister and sister, the great house held little. Elise alone, I was beginning to discover, had a jealous and passionate regard for her sister, inadequately returned. The Countess' feeling for her daughters, worldly solicitude or whatever it was, contained I believe no particle of real love; she mistrusted them, feared them, and avoided close contact with them, especially with Elise. In return Suzanne ignored while Elise almost despised the mother. Monsieur de Fouquier's position puzzled me. He seemed to be valued as a steward, honoured as a relation, and disliked as a man. Elise mistrusted him.

The Countess was frightened of him. Suzanne—I did not know. He was excessively polite to me, but spoke little. At table Ferret-Blue-goggles was silence itself, though alone with the Countess I think she had a good deal to say. All the family showed me uniform kindness, genuine and spontaneous, though after a time I detected method in it too. I felt that each one of them separately—Elise over books, Suzanne during our walks and talks, the Countess in her "as one woman to another" confidences—was bidding for the chief place in my affections; seeking me, as the Countess had put it, as an ally.

I was a valuable piece on the Villebecq chessboard. A hand was stretched forth, and played the opening move.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII: LAYING-ON OF HANDS

We were sitting at luncheon one day about the end of the summer.

Suddenly the Countess arose from her seat, erect, pale with fury, pointing at Suzanne.

"Leave the table, wretched vicious girl! Go to your room! And you, Sir"—to Monsieur de Fouquier—"will leave my house without delay."

There was a moment's intense silence. No one moved. All stared.

"Madame—" began de Fouquier suavely.

"Not a syllable! It is not required. Business can be wound up in a few hours; and I do not doubt I shall find a successor who will serve me *not less well* than you. Gentlemanly conduct indeed!—handling and embracing my daughter—"

"Mother"—it was Elise who spoke—"are you *quite* demented?" For one who was not a principal she was inexplicably white and hard.

"Quite, I think," rejoined her sister, not at all as though the chief person concerned, but relieved to have a word to echo.

"Wretched girl. You dare deny—?" Here Mademoiselle Gros nudged and whispered. The Countess walked swiftly round the table to her daughter, and snatched at her left arm. "Deny now, will you? Ha! Ha! Look at your wrists; deny if you can."

We all stared. The white finger-pressure of another hand was unmistakable.

"Deny?" cried Suzanne scornfully, "of course I do. He holding my hand under the table! What an idiotic idea, just the sort of idea you would have. Dear me, how horrible if he had! That's what your filthy little spy thinks she saw through her filthy smoked glasses. The liar!"

"Those marks, then, Mademoiselle, if you please"—her mother sneered confidently—"Be so very kind as to explain."

"Those marks, then, Madame, if you please! I suppose you're not my mother, Madame, if you please, and

know nothing of the little habit I've always had of sitting with my hands in my lap, with my left wrist clasped in my right hand, my own amorous right hand? I had finished my dessert, and—yes, I admit it —was sitting in that wicked position. And I will again. And, what is more, I won't have you and your accusations. I'm not a baby in long clothes, and I won't be spied on and shrieked at in that mad way. And I'll squeeze my wrist till it bleeds if I choose to."

Too confident, too explanatory. Lying was not in her line. But de Fouquier preserved an unruffled silence. I was not sure. The Countess too was wavering.

Ferret whispered again. "Not true." We all heard.

"Listen, Madame," said Elise, very hard and pale, "there is one person who will leave this house without delay: that little spy. Order her to go at once: *Now!*", savagely.

"I won't," piped the Countess, "I am mistress in my own house."

"Then I will," and turning to Mademoiselle Gros, "You have just two minutes to leave this table of your own free will, and till tomorrow to relieve the Château of your presence. If not, I'll drag you from the room myself, or ring for the servants to help me." They all cowered (except de Fouquier) before Elise.

"Yes, go I will, my poor Countess," squeaked the creature, trying to make valour appear the better part of discretion. "I can hear your daughters' insults no longer." Out she skedaddled, tap-tap-tapping across the wooden floor in the midst of a momentous silence.

Then Elise turned sharply to her mother. "All you

have to do is to apologize humbly to Suzanne and Emile. The whole thing is a mare's nest. Have you ever seen anything before to make you suspect anything of the sort? No, and you know you have not. It is utterly unlike my sister. As to Emile, I know him a good deal better than you do—"

"Evidently"; sneering feebly.

"There's a stupid muddle-headed sneer. You can't have it both ways. If it is me you suspect of love-making with our cousin, say so openly and withdraw it about Suzanne. Is it proofs you want? Oh, I can produce authentic marks of loving pressure soon enough." She clutched savagely at her own wrist, scratching it with her nails. "There, mother, dear, there is a spot of blood: now you are convinced. I admit all, all. You may shriek 'Wretched, vicious girl' at me till your voice fails you. But one thing you may not, shall not, do. You shall not talk to my sister like that, not if you were my mother ten times over. That is an order. And for a piece of advice only, don't talk quite so preposterously to Emile."

"You are grown very fond of our cousin all of a sudden; with your 'Emile' this and your 'Emile' that. It is rather sudden."

"Oh, no, my dear mamma: it has been a very gradual affair on the contrary: a passion that has been eating my heart out month by month, day by day, hour by hour. Oh Love, Love. I live in it, it is my joy, my life! Oh God, it is cruel!" With a laugh (or sob) she ran from the table, and hurriedly left the room.

Four of us were left. There was a new unpleasant

pause. No sign or look passed between Suzanne and de Fouquier. I was moved by the display of raging hate in this peaceful family, and bewildered to know what it might all mean. The Countess was sniffing tearfully, mopping her eyes with a tiny cambric handkerchief.

"No need for that," cried Suzanne sharply. "You have not yet apologized to Emile."

He broke his discreet silence at last, suavely, full of forgiveness. "No, my dear cousin, pray do not talk to your mother like that. 'Tis I who am sorry. It is not Madame's own fault; I have always felt that Mademoiselle Gros was putting false ideas into her mind, poisoning her outlook, playing treacherously on her maternal fears, slandering each one of us. Now she is going, and we shall breathe a purer atmosphere."

Madame continued to sniffle.

"Don't-know-what-to-believe."

Neither Suzanne nor Monsieur de Fouquier gave her any enlightenment, though she looked furtively up first at one and then the other. Then with an appealing "Help me" glance she turned in my direction. So, instantly, did the others. "Remember, dear Mademoiselle, that we're friends," was the burden of one look: "Beware, young lady, or we'll be enemies" of the other.

"I think it must all be an unfortunate misunderstanding, Madame," I said. "Personally, I noticed nothing." (Judicial, judicious.)

Here François entered; bald-headed, Punch-faced, beaky-eyed. He looked completely incognizant of the

storm that had been raging: exactly as though he had been listening outside the whole time. The united-front-before-servants which we hastened to display would have failed to deceive the dullard which François certainly was not.

Both Suzanne and her mother began eye-signalling "See you after" to me, the more emphatically when each perceived the other. Suzanne first, I decided: she was my friend, and with her I should get nearer the truth of it all. But as we rose from the table, the Countess laid her hand affectionately on my shoulder, and led me, unavoidably, to her boudoir.

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## CHAPTER XXIX: HAPPY FAMILY

Here we found Mademoiselle Gros, already bonneted and shawled. I went over to the window, where my ears drank in a little comedy of pathetic explanation and injured silence; humiliating apology and continued silence, generous proposal of one month's salary, hinted acceptance of three. From the three months' minimum Ferret would not budge; in the Countess' soul fear of a new scene fought an attacking battle against long-entrenched parsimony; fear won—and money passed.

"I will see you have the carriage for the station. The Havre train: you are returning to your relatives there? Good, I will see you again at the moment of departure."

"Thank you, Madame la Comtesse. I will take leave now of my *successor*." And she held out her wizened claw to me.

"Well, I hope she will be," said the Countess. "You will, dear Mademoiselle, will you not?" she asked, as the door closed upon the other.

"How, Madame? Mademoiselle Gros' successor?"

"Oh, I don't mean as lady's companion, of course, not as her *official* successor." (Nervous snigger.) "For that post I must try to find some one else. It will be difficult: they are all so exacting nowadays, so unreliable. Oh, it will be difficult. I meant, would you succeed poor little Gros as my friendly adviser, my confidante?"

"But, Madame, I am so young. A young foreign girl, who knows very little of the world! I hope always to be your friend; but a confidante, like Mademoiselle Gros—I don't think I should like to—"

"Mademoiselle, there are many things *I* do not like, also. Do you think that I like to be spoken to by my own children as I was in front of 'a young foreign girl' this morning? I come of an ancient family: there is still pride in France. The new generation of young girls is terrible. I would never have dared to speak to my dear mother as Suzanne and Elise do to theirs; I would have died first—"

"Madame," I interrupted, "do you love your daughters?"

"Love them? of course I do! *At the same time*—" She shrugged her shoulders and resumed her plaint.

"Ah, it is hard; I fly from trouble, and it comes

always my way. I need peace, and there is always strife. I am so unhappy, so worried, so alone; I trust no one, I believe nothing they tell me. If our relatives were to hear of this! But they shall not; not for worlds would I confide in them. But one must confide in somebody, mustn't one? You, Mademoiselle, you have seen now the kind of thing I have to bear—I am only surprised that you have been so long here without seeing an exhibition like today's. You know now how my daughters treat their mother—"

"Madame," I interposed, "I know nothing. The whole scene at luncheon leaves me bewildered. What did happen?"

"Something, I'm sure. Gros must have seen something: not that at bottom she was reliable, but she could not have invented the whole thing like that, could she? And I was beginning to have a kind of suspicion myself, too. But when Suzanne explained, it *seemed* true, didn't it? She was never a child for falsehoods. And then I remembered how Gros hated Monsieur de Fouquier—"

"Why?"

"Oh, she always hated him ever since she's been here. She was always trying to poison my mind against him: as if she needed to! And as if a poor creature like that was able to influence me. She hated him so because he wanted me to part with her, and she knew it. He was always hoping she would leave."

"Why?" again.

"Because she was always talking against him to me: a vicious circle is it not? So perhaps what Gros said

today was merely out of spite against him. Still, the very idea is terrible."

"Why—if I may—if you will forgive my asking—why is the idea of Mademoiselle Suzanne and Monsieur de Fouquier so terrible?"

"I will tell you in a moment. But Elise's manner? What did that mean? She frightened me; she was so hard and bitter. I do not understand. Ah, that would be infinitely worse: the idea of him and Elise. Fouquier one day master of this château, ruler in my house,—ah no, no, there are limits to what I could endure. Yet there is something with one of the two: I feel there is something. But which?"

"Why either, Madame? If Mademoiselle Gros' story about Suzanne is all a lie—"

"It might be a lie. It never does to be too hopeful; I am always nursing false hopes."

"Well, assume it's a lie, which after what you have told me about Mademoiselle Gros' spite sounds likely; well, that disposes of Suzanne; while as to Elise, except for her wild talk, which means nothing except that she was angry, have you the tiniest reason for suspecting anything of her?"

"How comforting to hear you talk so! Somehow I feel there may be nothing in it after all. But if there were, how terrible!"

"Why, Madame?"

"Ah, you don't know. It is de Fouquier."

"He is a cousin—"

"Only a second cousin."

"Because he is poor?"

"There is that, of course: but listen, I will tell you all."

She looked nervously towards the door, and dropped her voice to a melodramatic whisper. "Listen, Mademoiselle: he is an enemy. There are other bad points, of course: for instance, he is vicious; you are an English girl and understand what I mean. That is not important; all men are more or less like that. Then he is a thief and a cheat. Since my dear husband died, he has managed all my business affairs; all about the estates, you know. He has what we call a power-of-attorney, signs all documents to do with the property, collects all rents and dues, sees to the leases and the farms and all investments and improvements. Well, he is a robber. He takes commissions and bribes from the tenants and dealers; when he invests in the funds he makes a profit for himself; he falsifies all the documents he puts before me. Do you want evidence, proof? The tenants all come to me on the sly and tell me of his tricks. It was long before I discovered, and still longer before I took my courage in both hands and braved him with his treachery. Oh, I was prostrate with fear, but I worked myself into a temper and that helped me, and I told him in one word—Go!"

"And then?"

"Then the worst thing happened, the thing that had always held me back. He said that if I forced him to leave the château, he would publish abroad things he knew about my husband, would hold up the family name to ignominy and scorn, would prove to all the world that my husband possessed neither honesty nor honour. It was all false, or nearly all; but I was

frightened lest he did know something really dishonourable. Anyway, I knew he would pretend he did, and so carry out his threat. Finally I gave in, though he saw the hate in my eyes, he saw that! So he stayed on. He goes more carefully, that is, he contents himself with stealing less. It is only because of this hold over me, through my affection for my dear husband's memory, that he stays. I hate him, and he hates me."

"Will he always stay?"

"Ah," she replied vaguely, "that's just it. I hope he will die. It is wicked of me, and I trust that the good God will pardon me. However, now you understand."

"I am beginning to understand. One thing, though. Surely, Madame, if he *were* to marry in the family, then he could have no reason to injure the family name—"

"Mademoiselle, for a man who has so spoken to enter our family would be the foulest dishonour." She drew herself up proudly; there was a touch of real majesty in her poor heroics. Then, subsiding into the customary worried-dormouse manner, puckering her brows, and poking forward her anxious nose: "If there is any danger, it must be stopped now—Oh, what a nightmare! We could easily manage Suzanne, but Elise would be terrible. We must find out for certain. Neither of them would tell me anything: I am only their mother! But you, that is different. They will talk freely to you about today, I feel sure they will, Suzanne for certain. You will tell me what they say?"

"Oh Madame, it would be unkind to make me promise that. I could not break their confidences any

more than I could yours, could I?" (Much less so, I realized, as I liked the girls better; knowing that in the last resort I should be guided by preference rather than reason or even interest.)

"Then you'll not help me! You will leave me alone after all? Without husband, or friend, or companion, untrusted by my children" (whimper), "alone, alone? In the short time since you have come I have tried to make you happy in your life with us, and you will not do me this least service? Why even poor Gros, whom I never really liked, told me all—all she could see."

The last phrase turned me from pity to pertness. "Madame," I said, "I am not Mademoiselle Gros. I am a friend, not a spy."

"Spy," she repeated, a cold glint in her eyes; and I shrank away from her, not so much through fear of her anger as through shame at my own cruelty.

"No, no, Madame," I cried, "I did not really mean that. I only meant that I am so much friendlier with the girls than Mademoiselle Gros was, that it will be harder for me to be fair to them as well as to you. But I sympathize truly with all your troubles and anxieties. I do really, dear Madame, I do not say it to be polite—and I will always try to help you, I will help you however I can, I want to repay your many kindnesses."

"Ah, thank you, thank you," and she squeezed my hand affectionately, with tears in her eyes. "Now I must see Mademoiselle Gros off."

I followed her out, and went upstairs to my bedroom.

Suzanne was ensconced in my window-seat.

"So you've escaped at last. I ask pardon for installing myself here, but I knew it was the only place where I should have you to myself. What has the old dear been saying?"

"A good many things."

"I know. Begging you to be 'on my side, dear Mademoiselle.' Oh, don't worry, I've not been listening at the door; I've always left that to Gros, who never got anything but earache for her pains. I know it all by heart, though. In brief, she wound up by asking you precisely what I am here to ask you myself: in this delightful family circle of the aristocracy of France, will you be on *my* side? You hesitate: did you hesitate when she asked you?"

"No, I said 'No' straight out. I said it wouldn't be fair to you two for me to promise that."

"Well, you haven't said 'No' straight out to me. Which means you like me better."

"You know it. But everybody has been so kind, I would rather not take a side at all."

"You'll have to, my poor Mademoiselle! You have seen too much. You have already become more like one of the family in your few months here than any outsider before. And you are too good a friend not to be worth trying for."

"Too useful an ally."

"I mean that. Don't be cynical. Because I like you—and I do enormously—it is not wrong for me to want you to help me, is it? Suppose there were a bad quarrel between Mamma and me, and you became

mixed up in it, so that you had to choose to side with one or the other of us, which would it be?"

"I don't think anything like that would arise, and I don't see what I could *do* anyway; but my sympathies would be with you."

"Thank you, I am so happy. I didn't want to make you promise. You would help me, wouldn't you?"

"Perhaps. On one condition, that you told me everything."

"I promise that. But just for fun, I'd like you to tell me beforehand what you have already guessed on your own: what, for instance, you thought of the pleasant little incidents at luncheon today. Just for fun."

"I might say something that would offend you."

"Say whatever you think, I shall like it better."

"It was the suddenness of what happened that took my breath away; I hadn't time to ask myself what I thought. Then Mademoiselle Gros seemed so natural that I thought she must be telling the truth: I'm sorry, but it was difficult to think otherwise, wasn't it?"

"Go on."

"Then you denied it; but even if true I could not understand why your mother was so tragical. Then, when Elise became so wild and strange, I had a new doubt—that perhaps it was Elise, and not you, who was fond of Monsieur de Fouquier—"

Suzanne interrupted with a shriek of laughter: "Oh, no, no, no! that is a bit too good."

"Why was she so strange in the way she spoke about him, then?", piqued.

"Oh, that is just like her. I forgot of course that before today you have never seen her as she really is. Why did she speak so wildly? Simply and solely to shield and protect me; to muddle old Mother, and to turn her suspicions and anger away from me. She cannot bear to see Mamma rave at me; it gives her pain, physical pain. It is the way she loves me. I am not worthy of her, sometimes I wish I was. I let her kiss me and sacrifice herself for me; but I can't give her what she wants; I like her, of course, but only as an ordinary sister does. What happened today was a sham to save me."

"I am glad. Now I know how much she loves you, there can never be any danger of my going against her because of my promise just now to you. That is the reason I hesitated—"

"I see. There are gradations. You like Mamma, but would throw her over for me, whom you like better. You like me, but at a pinch would throw me over for Elise."

"It is not like that." (It was.) "Anyway, I've done what you asked and told you what I thought. Now you tell me. Before I can help you, the first thing I have to know is,—well, the chief thing. Did you—was what Mademoiselle Gros said true?"

"Perfectly. Poor dear Mamma! It is the hundredth time Emile has held my hand at table, though the first time we were caught. We embrace each other whenever we have the opportunity; in his office downstairs, in the grounds, anywhere. Listen. He loves me. I love him. That is all that matters. Ah, he

is so smart, so *chic*, so courteous, so perfect a lover! He adores me, worships me, would do anything to please me. Perhaps I don't love him quite as much as he does me, though that will come: oh, soon, soon! He buys me presents, beautiful bracelets and things. I cannot wear them, though, because of Mamma. Oh, but I love him. The joy of meeting alone in the park, being near together, embracing, hearing his declarations, loving each other. Oh love! There is only love! Ah, I see you understand—"

I flushed, chiefly in anger: that she should dare, even unwittingly, to put de Fouquier in the same place as Robbie.

"What is it?" she asked sharply, "there is something." ("O Lord," I prayed, "send me a lie to tell her, send swiftly!") To gain time: "Unless you promise, solemnly, not to be offended. I cannot tell you."

"I promise."

(God gracious; lie to hand.) "Well, if what I am going to say is not nice—in comparison—for your friend, it is because it is especially nice for you. I like you very very much, but I don't think Monsieur de Fouquier is worthy of you."

"Why?" with a touch of curtness which in loyalty to her promise she strove to hide.

"It is hard to give the reason—"

"Yes, I know, very hard! Because Mother made you promise not to. She has told you Emile is a thief and a cheat because rents are going down owing to bad times, accused him of muddling accounts which she doesn't vaguely comprehend, not any more than I should. She's been repeating to you all the lies told

her by dealers and farmers he doesn't buy carts and ploughs and stock from, who say he has been bribed by those he does buy them from. I know all the stories. How dare she poison your mind with lying slanders!"

"My reason for thinking him unworthy of you is something quite different. Is he a *good* man?"

She looked puzzled. Then she gave a vague little laugh. "As good as any one else, I suppose. What do you mean by 'good?'"

"Clean-living. Is he a pure man?"

Now she laughed uproariously: her voice jarred on me. "Is he a pure man? My dear Mademoiselle, of course he's not. That's a what-d'ye-call-it, a contradiction in terms, like saying a white nigger. Emile is like the others: keeps mistresses, goes to actress' dressing-rooms, sees cocottes."

"Sees them?" I repeated the silly euphemism mechanically.

"Sleeps with them, possesses them then, if you prefer. Why look so wretched about it? It doesn't worry me. It is the world." Her candid pleasure in shocking me, and the more refined delight of superior worldly-wisdom both failed to annoy me as they should have done: I could only think of the nightmare foulness itself.

"You say—it doesn't worry you? You can love a man like that?"

"Naturally. Better than any other kind, if there were another kind. The more women he has loved, the greater is the compliment in choosing me. If a man is

a better schoolmaster the more experience he has had and the more children he has taught, then a man is a better lover the more experience he has had and the more women he has loved. That's logic. Besides, I prefer the man of the world."

"Suzanne!" I cried, calling her by her Christian name for the first time—a twinkle in her eyes acknowledged the fact; I was too deadly earnest for her to dare to smile—"Suzanne, is it true? You are not exaggerating for fun, or to shock me? Do most young girls of our age believe that? Does your mother know you think like that? Do you realize how sick and wretched you are making me? Tell me it is not true!"

"It is true, Mary. I suppose there is still a pretence kept up by mothers, and curés, that young girls don't know how men live; it may have been so once, but now, my dear, we are in the Second Empire! Maybe Mamma fondly imagines Elise and I are still in our cradles, and daren't look at a pair of trousers: she can imagine just what she pleases for all I care. But I am really sorry I have made you miserable. What is the good of worrying about it? The world is like that, you must take it so—"

"I refuse to."

"You'll have to, or else become a nun. A Protestant nun, how funny! Because all men are the same."

"They are not!" I cried with fury, visualizing Robbie and the Stranger. "You shall not say it."

"Very well, then, I grant you I know one exception, priests apart, of course. He is a cousin of ours, on Mother's side, living down in the Gard, and a

Protestant. A ridiculous creature—I don't mean because he's a Protestant—so ugly and gauche, and overgrown and lanky, with a pale face all covered with pimples. He blushes whenever you look at him, and can't look a girl straight in the face. *He* has never seen a woman, oh dear no! Does something else though, I expect. At any rate, all *nice* men are the same. If it is a fault at all, it is Nature's, not theirs. It is hardly a reason for hating Emile, that he is normal."

"It would be with me."

"Are you so sure? Suppose you loved a man, passionately, as *you* would—ah, you colour—and found out that he saw cocottes, would you fling him over for that?"

"It is a horrible, ridiculous supposition, so I refuse to discuss it. Englishmen are not like that."

"*Vraiment?* Your men know how to amuse themselves in Paris, I fancy."

"It is no good your insisting; I will not believe it. But it will haunt me, I shall never be able to cleanse my mind. Stop."

"Certainly. But as to Emile. Now then, Mary, forget the last ten minutes' talk, and believe me when I say this: I love him. As much as you would love a man, for all your different ideas on the other thing. You accept that?"

"You say so. That is enough for me. My not thinking him worthy of you makes no difference to what you feel."

"Good. And if a man and a girl love each other, you

agree that it is wrong for any one else to come in between them?"

"Yes, if they truly love."

"Well, we do; passionately. I want nobody to come in between me and him, and I want your sympathy. I ask for nothing but to be left in peace. For the present, till I think the right moment has come, you must help me to keep my secret from Mamma. She will make a lot of fuss at first, then reconcile herself quickly to the idea, and finally approve our betrothal. That is, if no one else interferes—"

"Who? Mademoiselle Gros is going, or is gone by now. Some relation, perhaps, that I haven't met?"

"No-o. There is nobody really. I only said *if*. If—Elise, you know—she won't exactly take to the idea at first." Suddenly she was nervous. The moment she spoke of her sister, optimism and boldness seemed to leave her.

"But you told me she was taking your side in the matter—"

"Yes, because she loves me: but for that very same reason she might—just at first—be a little jealous of my love for Emile. She guessed it, but I don't think she was ever quite certain we were lovers till today: that is why it was so nice of her to defend me as she did, and that is why she was so bitter. It is funny, I know, for a sister to be jealous of her sister's lover. At this very moment, for instance, she is probably locked in her bedroom, lying on the bed, crying her heart out—"

Crying her heart out.

"However, she will get over that. Poor Elise, my dear good sister!"

She moved to the door. "I am so glad we have had this long talk. You are a good friend, Mary: you see I have dropped 'Mademoiselle' too. It will be fun at dinner tonight. Mother will have a face as long as a pole!"

* * * * * * *

"Crying her heart out" was my burden all the evening. At dinner I had a whole side of the table to myself, facing a gay over-talkative Suzanne and an unruffled de Fouquier. The Countess wore an even more harried expression than usual. Elise's place was empty.

"I do not understand, Madame," reported Gabrielle, her devoted chambermaid, "but Mademoiselle refuses to come down to dinner, refuses food, refuses to unlock her door." François confirmed.

From the moment Suzanne had left me I had been prompted to go and knock at her sister's door, to comfort her if she would let me. But I was unsure of my reception: she was proud enough to repulse me, to wish to enjoy her misery alone. As soon as I could slip away after dinner, I got back to my bedroom. There I tried "Not your business" and "Meddlesome Mary" and "She doesn't want you" and "You are only the foreign governess" and "You only want to wallow in her grief." Conscience was not convinced; instinct triumphed over sophistry and took me trembling to her door. Here I wavered. Pride shrank anew from a repulse.

"Mademoiselle," called her voice from within: I

knocked, disingenuously. "Was that you calling?"

"It's six hours I have been waiting for you. Sit down, that settee is the most comfortable."

She was lying in bed, half-dressed: sore-eyed, haggard. In comparison, Suzanne had been hilarious, the Countess merely peevish. I knew with whom I "sided."

"Well," she began, "I suppose they have all been at you. Has Fouquier?"

"No."

"The other two then. Suzanne has confided to you that she loves that brute?"

"But you knew it?"

"Oh, I guessed, I guessed; but till today like a fool I hoped against hope. Now it is over. She loves him. She cannot ever again love me, save in a puny second place. Second place! I do not want it. I will not have it, I despise it, I trample on it! Love is a game for two, Mademoiselle; a tragedy for three. There is only love in the world, and it can never ever be mine. I cannot love or be loved if there is another."

"But she is your sister! How can you love her as you are saying? You cannot have the true passion of love for your sister."

"But if I have it, and know I have it, what then? Listen: There is no woman in the history of the world who ever loved any man more than I love Suzanne. 'Cannot' so love her, indeed: but I *do*! Every book I have ever read, every notion that has ever come to me from external things tells me that love is a

passion a woman should feel for a man only; I look into my heart and find it is not so. I do not explain, or defend, or even understand. I suppose God fashions us in different moulds, makes some of us to love one way and some another. Why not? And why should He, Who, as your Bible says, is Himself Love, why should He limit this chief thing in His universe to the one narrow relationship of man and woman? A woman can love her friend more purely, more nobly than ever any man can; and with the bond of blood in addition, her heart can hold a love more intimate, more tender than you will find in all the stories of the sexes. Am I mad to talk so? It is the truth. Do you understand? Do you see?"

I was slowly learning to accept as true for others emotions my heart could never feel, my mind with difficulty comprehend.

"I think I see. But how many other sisters are there who feel as you do? Does she?"

"Ah no! She has never cared, never conceived how I love her. She is careless, indifferent, does not come to me when I need her: an ordinary sister. Sometimes the contrast between her insouciance of what I have felt and my passionate love for her has maddened me. Yet indifference, coldness, I could have borne for ever, but not that she should love some one else. Ah, no, no, no! Oh, my little sister, thou art the only creature I have ever known to love, and thou hast killed me. God made me to be loveless. He decided this cruelty from the Beginning. I had to lose her. I keep saying over and over to myself: it had to be, it had to be—"

"Had it to be *him*?" I was crying, but had to stop her somehow.

"No," with sudden fury. "If she is to have a man, it shall be some one less vile than he. Have you any conception, Mademoiselle, of what this man is?"

"No," I replied, which after hearing the Countess' version and then Suzanne's, was near the truth.

"First of all, he is a scoundrel, who for years has been using his position here to rob my mother; he must have pocketed hundreds of thousands of francs of ours. Later we will talk of my plans to get rid of him, in which I want you to help me: for I am determined to drive him out of this house. I have known all this, more or less, since I was twelve, but for different reasons I have never thought it worth a storm till now—"

"Till he is taking Suzanne from you."

"True. I know his thefts are not the reason, but they are my best weapon, and at the least a sufficient excuse for his having no handling of *my* affairs: I am nearly twenty-one, and his power-of-attorney for Mamma shall not hold for me. Then, he insults my father's memory and threatens mother he will make public things to my father's discredit."

"What kind of things?"

"Oh, money-matters, politics; his private life too. Mother is frightened, whimpers to herself 'I dare not.' Then I happen to know a few details about this brute's habits, and that even for a man—even for a man, mark you—he is foul. Not for my own sake, but for her own, she shall not be sacrificed to this beast. I shall stop it. And you will help me, because you are fond of Suzanne."

"No, because I am fond of you."

"For both of us, then. Before you came just now I had made up my mind, crying it out alone, that if ever a man the least bit worthy should want her, I would stifle my jealousy, sacrifice myself, and wish her well."

"But, Mademoiselle—you being you, and your love for your sister being what it is—would you ever admit that any man was the least bit worthy? I don't think you believe there is any such man in the world."

"Nor is there."

"That is foolishness. There are as many good men in the world as good women; probably more."

"The foolishness, my poor little English girl, is yours. You simply do not know. You simply do not know what men are. They are our masters, and we are their slaves. They gorge themselves on the pleasures of life, and leave to us the sorrows. With the bourgeoisie and the peasants it is the same. The girl brings her little *dot*, for him to spend in the cafés and on gaming and vice; she brings her health for him to ruin, her self-respect for him to steal, her body for him to befoul. Her father will sell her to any filthy jaundiced old roué whom he thinks a good enough 'party'—he would be a good deal more careful in matching his mares and sows. If there is poverty to be faced or shame to be suffered, who bears the burden? When in one of the villages there is an unwedded peasant girl who gives birth to a baby, which of them ought to suffer, and which does? The girl is turned away from every honest door, trampled under: the man, who will naturally have a poor wife

of his own, laughs, pays nothing, forgets, and seduces another. That is the law of the Empire, that is justice, that is 'the way of the world.' Once when I helped a poor drab out of my own pocket —'Remember your position,' said dear Mamma. Bah! position. Why, in our class it is worse: we must sit at home and simper and embroider and maintain the great traditions of the lady of France, while Monsieur obeys only his pleasure, squanders our wealth, gambles, haunts Paris, and keeps his woman. We smirk and say nothing. 'Such a happy marriage,' they say. Ah, their filthy politeness, their ducking and bowing and fawning, picking up fans, opening doors, kissing our hands:—every time mine is kissed, which isn't often I assure you, I feel there is a hole burned in my flesh. Ah their beautiful woman, their adorable sex! The moment our backs are turned, at once their voices become low and greasy, they are all winks and leers and sniggers and bawdy tales. It makes me vomit—"

"Elise!"

"Don't stop me, don't dare! No other French girls are as I am: till now I never found any human soul whom I could tell what I feel: I must have my way, and you must listen. Do you deny it—the injustice, the cruelty and the foulness? Oh why is the world so cruelly made that while women know how to love, men only know how to lust?"

All through this tirade I was conscious of an instinct within me that answered to its bitterness, an instinct of sex-hatred for men as men, a savage half-sadistic hope that women would one day get even, would triumph, would trample! But as her bitterness waxed, mine waned, and the remembered male faces of my

heart put this evil instinct to flight.

"It is not true. I hate this wickedness with the selfsame horror as you, but though I know nothing of the world, I know down in my own soul—I know as I know God, I know as I know myself—that they are not all like that. God did not make one sex all good, the other all bad. I know there are men who love as-purely and passionately as we do. You would believe it if there was one such who loved you. Suppose a man *did* love you, then what?"

"Ah, suppose, suppose!" She savagely ripped open her blouse and vest, caught my hands and placed them on her bare body, on a poor flat cold bosom. "Ha, ha, ha!" She laughed like a madwoman.

Such is the egotism of the human heart that even in that moment of purest pity, when I would have given my right hand to help her and ease her sorrow, even in that moment, and against my will and against a loathing for myself and my selfishness that accompanied (but could not stifle) the joy, there coursed through my veins a high triumphal joy that I was not as she. In an involuntary gesture I threw back my head, and *my* bosom heaved with pride; a hundred half-glimpsed notions of delight tore through my soul.

"Ah, suppose, suppose!" she was mocking, "how I pine for that dear supposed one.—No, dear, I had but one love, my little sister, and a man has taken her away. She was not worthy, but I loved her. Now I have no one, and no one will ever love me. It is cruel and all the universe is cruel. God is cruel to let the world be so:—oh, I forgot, He is a Man, and had no daughter, but a Son. Oh my little Suzanne that I loved—oh no, no, I cannot hear it!"

She broke down utterly, and sobbed as if her heart was breaking. My arms were around her. Very long I held her, till she had sobbed some of the misery away.

After a long while she sprang free, dried her eyes, and said in her calmest every-day voice: "I am hungry."

"Shall I go downstairs and tell them, or ring?"

"Ring; Gabrielle will come. I don't want the others. Before you ring—"

"Yes?"

"Kiss me."

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## CHAPTER XXX: CARDBOARD

It was odd to see normal relations resumed next day at table. Abnormally normal indeed, for we were all a little too much at our ease, a trifle too friendly and natural. There was a chatting and a smiling, and a veritable phrensy of cruet-courtesy. It was "Do have another pancake, Mamma, they are so good today:" "now finish up the gateau, Suzanne, I don't think Louise ever made a better."

On the Countess' part there was little dissimulation, for her anxieties had calmed down with surprising ease. She had cornered me again, first thing in the morning, for "just one word."

"They have been talking to you, I know. How late you stayed with Elise! Not for the world would I try to learn their confidences, but one thing as their mother it is my duty and right to know. Tell me that my worst fears are without foundation."

"Absolutely." I looked her full in the face with a confidence-inspiring false honesty. After all, it was the truth; her worst fears, she had said plainly, were for Elise.

Elise alone could not dissimulate her yesterday. Red eyes no craft, no cosmetics, can conjure away. Suzanne was boisterously at ease; de Fouquier suave, unchanging. Suzanne's ease did not seem artificial. There had been a fright and a fuss yesterday, and trouble would no doubt break out again—one of these days. Meanwhile, she would eat, drink and be merry. How I envied her "meanwhile" temperament.

I had a bewildering mass of new impressions to digest, all of one day's serving. That mother and two daughters, from their different angles, all saw menfolk in the same light was a testimony that overbore my passionate resistance. Many men, at least, must be as evil as they said. Frenchmen perhaps. I idealized my own men only the more. Similarly, while the lack of all friendship between mother and daughters sank into my mind as a fact that was probably general, I idealized my own mother all the more. Perhaps the Fifth Commandment is only ever perfectly obeyed by children whose parents are dead.

Above all, I could now visualize to my heart's content without any breach of Resolution. I melo-dramatized the intrigues and troubles of this family, casting myself (of course) for the leading part. I had

a friend to rescue from a villain, a family to rid of its foe; secrets and papers with which this man threatened my friends to discover and to use for his own dramatic undoing: here was a rôle I had been destined for from birth....

And here for the first time in this record I shall deviate from the plan of absolute completeness at which I have aimed, and shall pass by much in silence. The whirlpool of petty melodramatic intrigues into which I was now plunged—though no doubt more violent in my imagination than in sober fact—might yet form the subject of an exciting tale. But it has no place in this narrative, which deals with MARY LEE. The person who took her full share in these doings, in absorbing (or, if need be, in worming out) still more intimate confidences from the three Frenchwomen, in gracefully raiding M. de Fouquier's quarters and hunting among his papers, in discovering the prattlings and preferences of the servants, in establishing that Gabrielle was for *us* and that François was for *him*, in discovering that while the villainy and vileness of Fouquier had probably been exaggerated by two of his friends his noble passionate character had certainly been overstated by the third, in taking a leading part in all the plans and jealousies and intrigues, which from Countess to Kitchen filled every person and place in this Norman mansion—this person was not the Mary I am chiefly concerned with, but that phantom-personality with brain and with appetites but without fears and without hopes, without love and without God, who, foisted upon me by the real Me's foolish plan of self-effacement, for this year or two ruled within my body, while the real Mary, lulled by the ease and emptiness of that time, lay dormant and almost for dead.

Thus it is that although across forty years the Bear Lawn days are as vivid in my heart as today's noontide, the years in France I can but vaguely reconstruct. Only my brain's memory, the one thing that all the Marys have shared in common, retains them; and what the brain but not the heart remembers is lifeless bones, dimensionless phantoms, as unreal as other people. Château Villebecq, the house, the park, the people, stand before my eyes—now, as I strive to conjure them up—like the cardboard scenes of a stage. When, years later, I first went to the play, the resemblance at once assailed me.

Hardly at all during this period, except at moments in my friendship with Elise, and except in prayer—and then I was no longer in France—was my soul awake. Not until the series of events in which voices from Tawborough and my soul's native surroundings spoke to me again.

To be sure, some of the escapades of that other person are clearer in my memory than others. The most foolish and fantastic is the one I remember best. Diary, rather than my heart, supplies the silly details.

One day I took the opportunity offered by Monsieur de Fouquier's absence on some distant farms to inspect the little downstairs office where he kept his records, received tenants and did business; also his bedroom, where the one object of interest—shades of Torribridge and keyhole-spied green box!—was the safe Elise had told me of.

Its solid sides discouraged me. A fine rôle I had set myself, rescuer of noble families from scheming villains. How fantastic we were, I and my plans.

Then, by a stroke of luck, though at first sight it seemed the very reverse, de Fouquier fell ill. It was a kind of hay-fever which, while not serious enough (at any rate in France) for doctor's aid, kept him confined to his bed. The Countess meanwhile was debating a day in Rouen for purchases and visits.

"I ought to, you know. We may be away in Paris for months, and these things must be done. It is all so tiresome: the train tries me so, and I cannot travel alone. Oh, dear! And Elise and Suzanne both away, and Gabrielle or Pelagie are worse than I am on a journey, so flurried and silly. We have only a day or two left. I must go to Rouen tomorrow; but alone—"

I refused to take the laboured hint.

"Wouldn't you like to come, dear Mademoiselle?" after a while, pitifully.

"I should, Madame: very much! I love Rouen. But this headache"—I half-closed my eyes in approved shammer's fashion—"I mean I feel that if I don't take a little rest I shall be quite unfit for the journey to Paris: I should be a burden to you rather than a help. Of course tomorrow I *may* feel better—stay, is it not François who sometimes accompanies you?"

"At the worst he will have to do, though between ourselves I never really trust him."

"Though"—martyr-like resignation now that my point was won—"if you especially want me, Madame, of course—"

"Would not hear of it."

Thus I killed two birds with one lie, freeing the house for a whole day of its nosy proprietor and its

chief spy.

Next morning I waited impatiently for their departure. From my window I watched the carriage out of sight, staring with superstitious zeal till the last inch of the last wheel had disappeared round the turn in the drive. Then I rang for Gabrielle.

"Mademoiselle requires?"

"To ask you a question. You would do anything for Mademoiselle Elise?"

"Anything, Mademoiselle. And for Mademoiselle also."

"Thank you, Gabrielle. In the matter I am going to talk about it is all one: Whatever I ask, you may take it as from your mistress. She sleeps badly, I think?"

"I don't see—"

"Wait. You take her up a *tisane*, a sleeping potion, sometimes at night when she is in bed? How strong is it?"

"As strong as Mademoiselle Elise requires. It is not well for it to be too strong. She sleeps half-an-hour later: with me it would be two little minutes. Once I could not sleep, and I took a little cupful: I slept for nine hours, and could not wake next morning. I was up late and Madame the Countess scolded. Perhaps Mademoiselle remembers?"

"So I do. Now listen, Gabrielle. François is away today with Madame. Who is taking Monsieur de Fouquier's meals to his bedroom?"

"I understand! It is I, Mademoiselle. I take him a tisane too, for his headaches. How much does

Mademoiselle desire me to give?"

"As strong and as sure as you can without his guessing or noticing any after-effects. Ask me no questions. Let him have no suspicions. I want you to give it him now, this morning."

"Good, Mademoiselle. I take him a little meal between ten and eleven, and I will give it him soon after."

"Come and tell me the moment he has drunk it."

About eleven she returned. "Monsieur has drunk the tisane. I said it was good for the headache."

"Now wait a few minutes, then go into his room again to see if he is sleeping—you can pretend you left something—and come straight back and tell me. On your way back make sure that none of the other servants are about. I trust you. Mademoiselle Elise trusts you."

Ten minutes later. "He sleeps with open mouth: as soundly as a dormouse."

My heart was beating high as I slipped through his bedroom door, thoughtfully left ajar by Gabrielle. I had been hunting some pretext for my presence if he should wake and find me: I could invent none, and knew it would be useless if I could. For the first moment I dared not look at him. I stared craftily at the lower end of the bedclothes, then at the little mound made by his feet, then, very gradually, as though my neck (and courage) were turning on a clockwork spring, up the shape of his body under the

quilt till at last I reached the open mouth of Gabrielle's report. He was in a deep sleep: I gave way for a moment to the curious pleasure of possessing another human being utterly unconscious beneath my gaze. Small clever head, black eyebrows, sensual lips, cruel little beard: I absorbed them all with a photographic sureness not possible before. It was the first time I had seen a man asleep in bed, and I added the fact with zest to my collections of first-times: first Meeting, first marketing, first omelette, first venison; first embrace, first Rapture.

But the quest, the keys. I had visualized all the probabilities, and prepared my scheme of search. Dressing-table and chest-of-drawers-top yielded nothing: I did not expect them to. I searched his clothes next, hoping to succeed before I should reach the most dangerous possibility: under the pillow. Coat was barren, waistcoat sterile. Then to breeches: some wifely atavism must explain the lithe speed with which I rummaged these, undeterred by a passing pang of modesty. Tobacco, coins, knife, handkerchief: sorry yield. As I threw the breeches back in disappointment on the chair, something metallic clicked: not, I fancied, either knife or money. Was there another pocket? Quickly I learnt a point in male sartorics, and the unsuspected hip-pocket gave up—yes, keys! In fumbling feverish haste I tried each one on the bunch; the safe was obdurate with all. Ill-success made me desperate. Panic seized me. He was awake, staring at me, ready to spring and strangle. He moved, he moved—yes, turned in his sleep, you shivering fool! Thank God no one saw my face in that moment of beastly fear.

Calm again, I tried the keys elsewhere. At last, in a little pink soap-box in the cupboard of the dressing-

table, I discovered what I knew was the Treasure. One large key and one very fine and small. It was hard breathing as the one opened the safe, then the other a deed-box I found at the back within. Greedy trembling hands snatched packets neatly tied with red tape and endorsed with a description in Italian, with which I knew he was familiar and—God bless Miss de Mesurier and Lord Tawborough her paymaster—I also.

Packets of letters, incriminating documents, tell-tale scrolls! It was the trove, the triumph! What villainous secrets might they not hold?

But when Elise and I, with a rich sense of the historic importance of the occasion, set to, behind locked doors, to investigate our treasure, what did we discover? Long and affectionate letters from M. de Fouquier's mother to her well-loved son, friendly letters from his dead sister: what a meek, pathetic, uncriminal yield! I was moved almost to tears. It was *we* who were the criminals. And for a while our plots wilted....

I shall pass by much of this kind, as well as the whole diary-remembered general life of the Villebecq days: the excursions, the games, the visits, the chatterings, the mighty meals; the comfortable daily round in which we tasted everything—except everything, except love and God.

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# CHAPTER XXXI: WAY OF AN

# EAGLE IN THE AIR

The one happening of that time which was able to summon the Mary of this record from her torpor was outwardly the most vainglorious of all. I can see now that this was natural. For if the Villebecq puppet had a greater love of empty ease as of empty excitement, it was the first Mary who, from the dawn of consciousness, in those Bear Lawn days when the Holy Bible shaped her earliest consciousness, had best loved pomp: the pomp of words, the pomp of hate, the pomp of misery, the pomp of God.

And here now came the pomp of rulers, the peculiar treasure of kings.

Not indeed till later years did I fully realize what a unique event our Imperial visit was. Whether it is that parvenu sovereigns have to be more careful of their dignity, and cannot, like monarchs of ancient line, honour the hospitality of their subjects' roofs; the fact is that throughout their reign Louis-Napoleon and Eugenie seem never to have made a sojourn in any private mansion of their realm. Very occasionally during their progress in the provinces, some château might be used as a halting-place for luncheon or the night in place of the customary palace or prefecture. *Ours* was one such case. The Countess did not hide (at any rate from us) that she had taken the liberty of addressing herself to the Emperor, begging him on his tour through Normandy to use her house as a halting-place: her humble excuse to His Majesty for her presumption was her dear father's humble share in defending the First Empire, and her dear husband's in founding the Second. She knew she was touching the right chord.

To help and to repay those who had befriended him or his House was with the Emperor a principle, nay a mania: if ingratitude be the hall-mark of princes, then was Louis-Napoleon most spurious and unprincely metal. The privilege of a day and a night at Villebecq was graciously accorded.

If I did not appreciate to the full the exceptional character of the event, I none the less looked forward to it with disproportionate excitement. On the great day I should, I knew, be the least of the nobodies; but the idea of merely sleeping under the same roof with a sovereign lord and lady, seeing them, hearing them, filled me with servile delight. I rehearsed, anticipated, literally cried aloud in my bedroom with the high joy of flunkeydom. Monarchs were sacred in my eyes. They were the Lord's Anointed. Divinity hedged them about. It was a sublimated snobbery that partook of both ecstasy and awe. Kings went to my head like wine.

The Château was all astir with preparations. The musty state-bedroom and neighbouring apartments in the unused wing were made fit for the visitors and their suite; rescued from moths—for moths. Workmen arrived from the villages, decorators from Caudebec and Rouen. Stable, kitchen and larder girded themselves for the fray. The Countess was in parlous state between the two conflicting voices of family pride and family thrift: desire to shine and desire to pare. "Oh dear, the expense" trod hard on "Of course we must do this."

In point of fact all arrangements were taken out of her hands by Elise and de Fouquier, who, working in alliance—for the family honour Elise would have worked in alliance with the Devil—were irresistible.

There being no gentleman in the house, nor any male relative on good enough terms with the Countess to be imported for the occasion for certain duties, Monsieur de Fouquier almost inevitably assumed the rôle of master: he saw to the stables and carriages, arranged for the disposition of the men-servants and the arrival at the station, prepared a shoot for the Emperor. Elise's department was the Empress and her suite, the furniture and the food.

I, too, made my preparations: in the library. All I could pick up in anecdotes from the Countess or Elise, and all that books could tell me about our illustrious guests, I greedily devoured: something in the spirit of the Baedekered tourist, who learns up his *cathedrals and **magnificent views in advance, equipping himself to understand what he is to enjoy.

Wider reading made the Emperor Napoleon III dearer to me, as the perfect type of Another Person who was precisely what I should have been if I had been he: the Compleat Mary. He was a visionary whose most outrageous splendours had come true, a Mary whose madness had won.

Till now the Empress had interested me less. I began to learn that she too was a Woman of Destiny.

—On the day of her birth a great cataclysm burst over Granada, lightning and thunder such as Spain had never seen or heard.

—Above her cradle appeared that mystic sign which tells that: To be a Queen, you need not be born a Princess. That sign, shown once in many centuries, was earnest to the proud child that God had destined her for a crown. Folly?—but faith is folly come true. Dreams of greatness absorbed her. Leading lady was

the one part she could play on the world's stage: the part for which the Playwright had cast her.

—One day, on a Spanish roadside, she gave charity and comfort to an old blind cripple. "It is you," he cried, "you, whom God will reward above all other women!"

"How? Oh tell me!"

"He will make you a Queen."

—A woman, she came with her mother and sister to France. It befell one day that they were invited to an official dinner at Cognac. Among the guests was an old Abbot, skilled in reading ladies' hands (and hearts); one who, though he honestly believed in his art, took care that it inspired him with none but pleasing prognostications. When came the young Eugenie's turn to hold out her hand, the old man started back, half in amazement, half in fear. The guests who were watching started too, since they knew him for a sophisticated worldling, immune from all surprise.

"What is it?" cried Eugenie.

"Señora—I see in your hand—"

"What then, Abbot? Quick, tell me."

"A—crown."

(Now the great Duke of Ossuna, Grandee of Spain, His Most Catholic Majesty's Ambassador to the French Republic, was rumoured to have longings, to nourish intentions.... It would be a magnificent marriage for her, friends said.)

"A Duchess' crown?" she cried.

"No. One more brilliant and resplendent."

"Oh speak, sir, speak! What crown is it you see? It cannot be a Queen's."

"No, señora, *an Empress's*."

—Folly! Austria and Russia were the world's toll of Emperors: portents were mocking her. Still, suppose Destiny were reserving her some faery fate? Suppose —and she said "No" to the Duke of Ossuna. Suppose this comic "Prince-President" of the new French Republic, this poor parrot-faced Louis-Napoleon, this parody of his great uncle—suppose he carried the parody just one act further? (One never knows.) Once introduced to Sick Poll-Parrot through friends in Paris, she lost no single opportunity of meeting him—especially by chance. Ambition is no idler, and toils at all his plans. She used humility and gave admiring glances, employed her unmatchable beauty and gave alluring ones; listened attractively to his every word, wrote devoted letters of support. Soon whisperings reached her: the nation too was beginning to say Suppose? After all, should not a Bonaparte don royaller headgear than republican top hat? (Mad hopes grew bolder.) Yet the step was no easy one: to re-establish Empire in Republican France was still a conspirator's dream.

On December the Second the dream came true: multitudes acclaimed the Third Napoleon. Not least Eugenie, for he had now that crown to bestow. Soon she triumphed, and forced her way into his heart. He loved her. An Emperor loved her. But love is little and marriage much. There, on the very threshold of glory, lay a new danger. She faced it boldly. Desperate in his amorous intent—one night that they chanced to be spending under the same roof as

Imperial host and humble guest—he made seen his wish.

"Señora," in a voice plaintive with passion, "which is the way to your bedroom?"

"Sire," she replied, "it lies through a well-lighted church."

What vice and ambition had achieved, virtue thus completed. Her purity won the crown, the crown won her purity. Through the bannered luminous nave of Notre Dame de Paris he made his way to her bedchamber, and she hers to the girl's wild dream that had come true. Together they scaled the highest peaks of human glory.

The morning of the arrival our Villebecq party assembled in good time on the little wayside platform. The Countess was fussy, full of absurd anxieties; Suzanne in the gayest spirits, Elise calm, de Fouquier debonair. There were guests from neighbouring houses, François with assistants to cope with the Imperial luggage, and a crowd of peasants outside the barrier. During a long wait we kept straining ears and eyes for a sign of the expected train: I could not help thinking of Tawborough on the far-off day when Satan Came.

"Here it is!" cried Suzanne.

The Countess had a last convulsive movement of agony: "I do pray that nothing may go wrong."

A stumpy little gentleman in tight-fitting clothes and an enormous top-hat waddled awkwardly out of the carriage, and turned to help down a showy and

beautiful lady.

Short fat legs, a long highly-tailored body; a sallow leaden complexion with two rouged-looking spots in the middle of each cheek; an aquiline nose, with waxen surface; a goatee of hair on the chin looking like an artificial tuft gummed to the skin; heavy drooping eyelids, and glassy eyes through which he stared as through a window.

This was my Man of Destiny. This marionette in wax. The Thing had movement but no life.

I started when I heard the Countess saying: "This is our English friend, Miss Lee." I bowed low, confused with self-consciousness, and with guilt for the thoughts I had been thinking.

"Good-day, Miss Lee," I heard him saying in slow measured English, "you do not get such glorious weather in your country!" At the moment of shaking hands he looked me straight in the eyes with a smile of dumbfounding charm. The grey eyes lit up, solved the riddle, showed that Waxworks had a human heart. Except in my Grandmother, I never saw such infectious kindliness in a look. "No," he was saying, "I know your London fogs."

"I don't know London, Sir—" I was beginning, by way of exculpation.

"Calumny!" cried the fine lady. "Why up in Scotland we used to get week after week of glorious weather. It is all calumny, our French talk about the English climate."

Active, supple, fresh, full of pride and health, she was an extreme contrast to the man. Her eyes, unlike

his, were frank and honest: unlike his, they were hard. Instead of dreamy dishonest kindness, I saw greedy consciousness of her beauty and prestige. Her nostrils quivered as she drank in our homage. She loved nothing save herself and her pleasures. She was gorgeously dressed. She was bold, beautiful, forthright, hard: the complete incarnation of our Brethren "worldly." She possessed the Empire of France, but not the Kingdom of Heaven.

What glory—not vicarious only—to be taking part in that informal procession along the country roads! In the old coronetted family coach sat the sovereigns, with the Countess and Monsieur de Fouquier; the suite, the guests, the two girls and I followed in four other carriages. Dinner that night was a Sardanapalan affair: gay lights and gorgeous dresses, wealth and wine, power and pride. The menu was imperial; my diary, always an amply dietetic diary, records it in full. Once or twice I thought of Aunt Jael's birthday banquet, and of Jesus Christ on Calvary, who died to save these dolls.

When my eyes were not on my plate, they were chiefly on the Emperor. Half the time he was lost in dreams, dead to the physical world around him, infinities away. When the Countess or another addressed him, for a moment the leaden eyes lit up, and a gentle, almost womanly smile played on the slow lips; he spoke a few pointed yet diffident words, then relapsed abruptly into his dreams. Not that the Countess noticed this abruptness, which resembled her own. She had her own absorbing reflections as hostess of this triumphant evening—this expensive evening. Every new dish filled her with an exquisite conflict of emotions. The guests were dominated by the laughing Empress; her majestic beauty and her

sparkling talk. I remember no single word of her conversation, I only remember that it glittered. Nothing in her really attracted me. I admired the beauty and the brilliance, but they seemed to be separate entities, having nothing to do with her as a woman, as a soul. Had she a soul?

One odd thing I noticed: the Emperor's coldness towards de Fouquier. Knowing the imperial gratitude towards all who had helped him I marvelled accordingly, and fell to seeking a reason. Perhaps in reality de Fouquier never had helped Napoleon's cause, perhaps his game during the Coup d'Etat had been a double one, running with the Bonapartist hare and hunting with the Burgrave or Republican hounds? At a later date I discovered that my surmise was exact. And Napoleon knew. Fouquier, noting his manner, knew that he knew, and hated him accordingly. I fancied I saw plans of revenge forming in the smooth obsequious face. Once again Reason, who mocked at Fancy, was in the wrong.

Next morning, while the gentlemen went shooting, the four of us accompanied Eugenie and the ladies of her suite on a drive to neighbouring scenes.

Elise had said, "Jumièges looks best in the very early morning."

"Good!" cried the Empress, "we will go before the dew has vanished. You are sure it will not inconvenience you, my dear Countess?"

A rhetorical question, and a selfish one. The whole household rose perforce at an unearthly hour of the night. I partly forgave her for the reward our early visit earned. In the brightening mist that follows dawn, in the fragrant expectant silence, the majestic

ruin loomed in a mystery that noontide could never have lent.

All day I kept as near the Empress as I could, learning that the queenly principle is to do exactly what you like: to be haughty and indifferent to your ladies one moment, gushing and over-familiar the next: to demand servile trembling and unseemly giggling turn by turn: to allow all whims to yourself and none to others. Was not her whole career compounded of similar contrasts? Her dream of becoming an Empress was wild romantic folly: the steps she took to make it come true were calculating, of the earth earthy. "Such another as you," propounded Conscience.

Loyal smiles and humble gratitude gave godspeed to the illustrious pair. Among the servants the gratitude varied: where Napoleon had passed—the Countess quizzed them all—tips were imperial. The one or two Eugenie had given were almost as small as I (not yet an Empress) would have bestowed.

"Five francs for Antoinette," repeated the Countess unwearyingly: "it overcomes me. Five francs from an Empress! If it had been but ten—"

# CHAPTER XXXII: PAREE!

Except for the cab-drives between quay and station at Southampton and Havre, and three half-days in Rouen, I had seen no town whatsoever outside North Devon. Par*ee*! Par*ee*! my heart kept crying.

Now "Pariss" was a poor flat word, and "Pary" too, as the French pronounce it; but by dropping the English S while Englishifying the French vowel I formed a darling word which my heart could caress and unwearyingly repeat, thus giving fullest vent to the delight it anticipated. It was Paree! Paree! all the way in the train and on the magical twilight drive from St. Lazare Station (gloomy hole enough) down the great boulevards, past the looming Madeleine, along the Rue Royale, across the great Concord Place, and over the sheeny river to the family "hotel" in the Faubourg. Such a glorious city, such princely streets and monuments I had never pictured, never been able to picture. Paree! Paree!

There were walks and drives with Elise and Suzanne, visits to museums, galleries, churches; though from all theatres and concerts, following the solemn promise to my Grandmother, I was debarred. The brilliant new boulevards were my chief interest. It was often a morbid interest: to see the crowds, laughing or careworn, hideous deformities, vile pockmarked faces, hunger jostling with gluttony; everywhere hurrying gesticulating Mammon. I hated

them, loathed them with a physical loathing that held something of puritanism and patriotism combined: I longed for England, for goodness, for the ugly unworldliness and cleanness of the Saints. Now and then a gentle-faced little boy (for the little girls were for the most part precocious over-dressed apers of the women they would become) lit up my heart with a moment's delight: I would turn round and stare as he passed, hoping he too would turn and stare.

Our most frequent pilgrimage was to the Great Exhibition, a faery wilderness of gardens and fountains, of pavilions, pagodas and pinnacles. We witnessed the Imperial distribution of the prizes in the Great Hall. On a dais sat the Emperor—my Emperor: Man of Destiny, Parrot-Face, Waxworks, Long-Body, the prince of the kings of the earth—surrounded by kings, with the Sultan on his right hand, and pride everywhere. When the little Prince Imperial advanced to his father with the prize for workmen's dwellings, wild applause searched the very roof of the glass palace of Industry. The Emperor smiled, smiled dismally I thought, for the eyes were sad, wretched. ("Queretaro, Queretaro." His brain rang like a beaten bell. He had learnt the news today, though none of his subjects yet knew. While we saw a Sovereign adulated by the world, he saw another Sovereign—his client king—and a Mexican court-yard, and a firing party. Did he see also the selfsame day three years ahead: himself, and the preening Sultan at his right hand, prisoners both in exile and disgrace?)

Kings, everywhere Kings. For this was the year, more truly than Talleyrand's, when your carriage could not

move through the streets of Paris because they were *blocked with Kings*. I do not think I missed a single royal visit—except the King of the Belgians', as I was seedy that day. The girls, even the Countess, made fun of my courtly mania: I did not care, I studied the newspapers, and made sure of the best view-points in each procession. Then I would stand for hours, in patient royalism, fully rewarded by the instant's pomp and the dear glance at the Lord's Anointed. There was the barbarous Tsar, with the Cæsarevitch and the young Grand Duke, his brother. Old Prussia with his big minister, one Count von Bismarck-Schoenhausen, who liked France—so well that he visited it again. Austrian Franz-Josef and the ill-fated Empress. Our own hearty Prince of Wales. Lesser truck: Sweden, Wurtemberg, Portugal, Greece; with the two Louis of Bavaria, the one that loved Lola Montes and the other that loved Wagner.

So the quick scenes shifted, with the actors princes all: till my mind was raced through by glittering equipages and the remembered faces of the great.

Greatest of all were their Hosts, Eagle and his Wife, though not too great to remember friends, or to invite our Villebecq household (with dependent) to a Tuileries dance. It was not a state-ball, but one of the Empress's "Mondays," an intimate little function for some thirty or forty guests. My orgilous delight was chilled by a swift reflection: I could not dance.

"Well," said the Countess, "you must learn."

I saw Grandmother's gentle eyes, appealing, mute in horror. My Mother came to me with a pleading No. Poor kept-in-his-place Resolution dared: *What would Jesus do?* I sent them packing, closed my eyes, barred

up my heart. "Yes, Madame, and at once; there is no time to lose." I spoke so sharply that the poor lady started back in amaze.

Not that I danced very much at the ball, or cared to; I was the guest of an Empress, and that sufficed me. In a wide hall, the Salon of the First Consul, we stood ranged in double row. Eugenie, in a lovely robe of blue satin, of pure simplicity, without pattern or frill, swept into the room, preceded by sumptuous Officers of the Household, and followed by her ladies. Like the Emperor his soldiers, she passed us in review. To each a few gracious words. Yet what right had she to be so condescending? Who was she, anyway? Why should a few words from her lips be deemed our highest earthly privilege? It was vulgar resentment that some woman else was in a lordlier position than I; it was envy; it was democracy. I was ashamed of my unguestly thoughts when she stopped at me and said in beautiful English: "This is not worth Jumièges, do you think?"

The ball began. Most of the ladies were dressed far more gorgeously than the Empress. I remember a tall woman (a duchess, confided the Countess), gowned in shimmering black velvet flounced with gold guipure; another in crimson velvet sewn with great silver daffodils; another in white satin-tulle covered by a light overwork of golden feathers. Everywhere lace, fans, tiaras, jewels. How plain I was beside them! I despised their half-revealed bosoms, their selfish painted faces, their sensual lips. The old ways and the Meeting would keep appearing before me, and Grandmother, and the Lord: I knew that they were right, and these things wrong. Here was I, a saved young woman, one of the Lord's elected children—tricked out like a Jezebel, with flowers in

my hair. The old hymn I had so often repeated to Aunt Jael forced its way into my memory, compelled me to repeat it to myself, verse by remorseless verse:

> Shall the Christian maiden wear
> Flowers or jewels in her hair,
> When the blood-stained crown of thorn
> On her Saviour's brow was borne?

Here in this King's palace I revelled, my bosom swelling with vanity,—

> Shall the Christian maiden's breast
> Swell beneath the broidered vest,
> When the scarlet robe of shame
> Girt her Saviour's tortured frame?

And I was dancing. The first moments showed me that our Brethren-hatred was good hatred, and Elise's description of men a just description. They pressed insinuatingly, their contact sickened me. O Lord, Lord, to what fleshliness was I sinking?—

> Shall the Christian maiden's feet
> Earth's unhallowed measures beat,
> While beneath the Cross's load
> Sank the suffering Son of God?

It was nightmare. Hatred of all this luxury and glare and godlessness flooded me in so physical and overwhelming a fashion that I was near to fainting. I turned from the fleshly men, the hard horrible women: Vanity, Vanity. There was more Resolution in that night's distaste than a thousand sealed envelopes. I pleaded headache, and refused to dance again. Elise was no comfort: she was indifferent tonight, not rebellious like me. "What did I tell you?"

was the best she could do.

I could watch them no longer, and suddenly left the ballroom, to wander about the palace rooms, deliberately turning my thoughts to the old history of this place that I might forget the present loathing. Whether or no much reading be a weariness to the flesh, to me it was a resource unfailing: I could take refuge from the day's trouble in reviewing the glory of yesterday. As for the Tuileries Palace, I would wager that no other living English girl could have told herself its tale much more fully: summoned more surely the long procession of its grey and glittering dead....

Catherine de Medici, first builder of the palace, warned by an astrologer that it would end in tragedy and flames. Louis XIV, the Sun King, lording it in Carrousel fêtes. Marie-Antoinette, Austrian woman, brought here with her poor husband from Versailles, brought back again a prisoner after Varennes. June '92, first invasion of the palace by the mob: threats, insults and obscene shouts. September '92, when the vile mob invaded, sent Louis and Marie to Conciergerie prison, came here to yell, steal, sack, blaspheme, and murder, hacking to pieces the old faithful servants of the crown, slashing with knives the dying and the doctors attending to the dying: prostitutes ransacked the Queen's wardrobes and wallowed, loathsomely, in her bed, kicking up their legs in democratic glee. Revolutionaries, Girondins, Mountainists, with Prince Robespierre—mean, savage and pure. The flat-haired Corsican youth. From here he went forth to be crowned, from here the Pope of Rome went forth to crown him. Here reigned the pomp and splendour of the Empire; hither entered Josephine in triumph and hence slunk

out in disgrace; hither came Marie-Louise (Austrian woman too) in pomp processional, hence she fled a fugitive. These walls stared at the coming and going of the Hundred Days; at bellied Eighteenth Louis and Charles the Tenth his brother, last king of Ancient France; at Louis-Philippe of pear-shaped head and Brethering umbrella; at the wild mobs of '48 (my birth year), pillaging anew. Phrensy of peoples, folly of Kings: change and change about. Each new monarch had sagely wagged his head: "The others, ha ha!—I know the mistakes they made—I will profit by their example—my sojourn here is eternal—these barns are big, but I will build greater."

With my Emperor permanence had come at last. Him no fears could shake: not by divine right nor mere parliaments nor yet by plebiscite alone had he reached the palace, but by dreams, which alone come true. Here he had entered in a state which mocked his poor predecessors; here on the balcony he had stood, while the crowd in the gardens madly acclaimed him, and the Marshal St. Arnaud proclaimed the Second Empire. Here in a pomp and luxury before unknown he had reigned and gloried. From these doors, at the Depart for Italy, he had sallied forth; to sally forth again to Notre-Dame, for the Te-Deum for Solferino, through roads strewn with flowers and adoration. He had made Paris the capital of capitals, himself the King of Kings, this Palace the centre of the universe....

One morning a letter reached the Countess from Lord Tawborough. He was at an hotel in Paris; might he take the liberty of calling?

My heart beat fast with joyful expectation.

He came, once and again. We went out together, sometimes with the others, oftenmost alone—on long walks in the Paris streets or excursions to Versailles and the environs. He was an oasis in this city-wilderness of evil faces: the sight of this Englishman, the clean-featured noble face, the fairy godfather to whom I owed all the rich experiences of the past year, Rachel's little boy, gave me a peaceful pleasure which after my hectic ambitions and intrigues was like dew after rain. The interest of his conversation, the sense of worth and superiority (to me) he imparted cleared my foolish brain and cooled my insane pride. "You'd call this gush if it were Suzanne who thought it!" whispered Satan. "Yes Sir," I replied, "but Tawborough is not Fouquier"—Everywoman's reply. Intellect, character, kindness, purity, race—it was a banquet of pure delight.

I tried to analyse for myself the reasons for the exhilaration which filled me in his presence, and in no other presence; not in Grandmother's, though I had loved her always: not in Elise's, though I loved her now. I could unravel no reasons, only ponder on the facts: (1) that his was the only face I knew which gave me a positive, physical joy, which filled me with tenderness and wonder. I would have fed on his face unceasingly if I had dared; (2) that in his presence alone the consciousness of self, of omnipresent Mary, left me, and I felt free, unconscious, unburdened, happy: if when he was at hand I stopped suddenly and asked myself "And Eternity?" I could laugh, and flout the bogey; (3) I apprehended that these emotions were reciprocal, and this was the chief delight of all.

Yet, I argued, this was not Love. Love was Robbie. Love was Christmas-Night, one day to be renewed. Still, what lesser word than love could describe the admiration, the gratitude, the fluttering tenderness, the pure exultant affection I felt? So in my diary I called it love (with a small l) and kept the capital for Robbie.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII: I BECOME AN HEIRESS

Soon after our return to Normandy I found on my breakfast-plate an envelope in my Grandmother's handwriting. As a rule her letters came in small square envelopes of the ordinary English shape and size. This one was long, plastered with extra stamps, notable-looking, parchmenty. Perhaps a consignment of tracts.

I found inside a heavy parchment document, covered with impressive copper-plate, together with a letter from my Grandmother, written not on her usual cream-coloured note-paper, but on whiter sheets with a thick black edging.

Could it be Aunt Jael? The first line reassured (?) me. It was Great-Uncle John, so rarely heard of, though known to me for ever as my Mother's "dear Uncle" and good man. It did not need my special greed and cunning to surmise rightly why his Will was sent to me. Inordinate hope—changing, as I rushed through

my Grandmother's letter, into radiant certainty—stifled regret. (Regret would have been affectation, whispered Satan.) Without reading through the letter I stuffed the papers into the envelope and devoured my breakfast; preventing myself thinking till it should be over.

Suzanne had been watching me. "You have had good news I think?"

"Yes," I replied, unawares.

"I'm glad, because I noticed a black-rimmed envelope, and thought perhaps it might be bad."

In my boudoir I settled down at my leisure, luxuriously to learn the best. Grandmother's letter was one of the longest I ever had from her. As I read she came near me, became suddenly a part of the present. For an instant I saw her face, *in the flesh*. But the self that saw her was another Mary—Mary of Bear Lawn, full of fear and floggings, surrounded by God and Aunt Jael; not that Villebecq puppet. I could feel the selves changing place within me—and changing back....

All the old prayers, the immemorial pleadings. Love the Lord only, and His service. Dedicate this wealth to Him. Lay it not up where moth and rust do corrupt. His love is the only true riches. There is only His love, my dearie....

Grandmother dear! Noblest of all the Saints, now high among the Saints in Heaven. *How much?* I wondered.

I found a little summary made by the lawyer on half a sheet of notepaper, which spared my wading through the uncommaed intricacies of the Will itself.

Briefly: there was £400 for Grandmother, £200 for Aunt Jael, £100 each for Aunt Martha, Albert, and certain charities. All the rest—some £10,000, or about £500 a year—was left to me: me, Mary.

At first I could only think in exultant exclamation marks. Ten thousand Pounds! Five-hun-dred-pounds-a-year! (Sonorously mouthed.) Wealth, freedom, power!

I was my own mistress now. I could do any defiance, yet have my bread. Aunt Jael, urged the feeble voice of some-far-away Self. "Who is Aunt Jael?" asked Villebecq Mary: "Ah yes, to be sure, I remember." "I pay for the Child's music"—cry that two years ago could have rallied me to any revenge—"I" now stifled with a bland *Pourquoi*? How silly it seemed, how silly Revenge always is.

No, I would buy a house of my own—the ambition which life in the Château, and other dreamings, had made my chief one now—and I would live there with Robbie for ever. The hunger, the longing possessed me more mournfully, more passionately than for long months. I flung myself on the bed and covered the pillow with kisses....

I would help the Saints, play Lady Bountiful to the Lord, send much money for the heathen, succour more than one needy labourer in the Lord's vineyard abroad. "Sops," sneered Conscience. "Go and work in the Lord's vineyard yourself. All that thou hast—"

How furious Uncle Simeon would be, I reflected

pleasurably. The Will provided that if I died all my share was to go (after use by Grandmother during the remainder of her lifetime) to Aunt Martha and Albert. So my life, which he loathed, was all that stood between Simeon Greeber and the money that he so much loved. Unkindest cut: I had plentiful cuts to repay. And for him alone, of Child Mary's enemies my present self nourished hatred: for I knew he was an enemy still.

Could he *do* anything?

Next morning's post brought the only letter he ever wrote me:—

No. 1, The Quay,
TORRIBRIDGE, N. DEVON.
November 7th, 1867 A. D.

Dear Young Niece,—

Often though one asks for your news —seeks to learn of your material and spiritual state—it has never before been one's sad pleasure to address you a letter in person. Two reasons have guided me today, after much prayer, to take this step. One is to express our sympathy—Martha's and one's own—with you in the loss of your Great-Uncle, who, though you never saw him in the flesh, must yet have been very near to you because of your knowledge of his goodness to your poor suffering Mother, now a saint in Heaven! Martha would have written herself, but she is not too well just now: the Lord is visiting

her with bodily affliction. The other reason is to give oneself the opportunity of saying how glad one is to learn of the worldly good fortune poor dear Mr. Vickary's death has brought you. May you use it to *His* glory! If—one will be frank—one had any pangs of husbandly and fatherly jealousy at the *lesser* good fortune of one's dear wife and son, they were quickly o'ercome. Prayer has won one's heart from worship of the Golden Calf, and made one able to be with you in spirit in this new privilege and *duty* the Lord has conferred upon you. May you live long to use it in His Service is one's humble prayer!

One hears of you often thro' Martha and your dear Grandmother. One rejoices to know that, in that Papist land, you still find the reading of His Word the chief of all your joys. One hears that you appreciate most that "*Book* of the heart, and *heart* of the book," viz, the Psalms. Yes, one can find there words of succour for any circumstances, any frame of mind. The Psalms are prophetic of *His* sufferings and glory, notably the 22nd, opening with His cup of agony when abandoned for *our* sins; like Isaiah 53 they point only to Christ (how one loves verses 5 and 6 for the peace they have brought one)—Christ revealed by His Word and

Spirit!

Poor dear Mr. Vickary, how quickly gone! One knew him not at all, but one felt it keenly. One believes he was naturally a good and lovable character—but how one longed to know something much more than that! One's own little son is giving one great hope and comfort. Though cursed with many faults, alas, of both character and temper; and humble as intellectually he may be; yet he reads the Word continually, and speaks to one freely on the subject, so that one can form a fair opinion of his spiritual state.

Dear Martha and Albert send their love, in which one is glad, with prayerful sincerity, to join. One has been dwelling much lately on Philippians iv, 8.

Accept one's best Wishes,

SIMEON GREEBER.

P.S. LAY NOT UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES UPON EARTH. (St. Matt. vi, 19.)

I was uneasy, but what could he *do*?

The family learned my good news, hoped only it did not mean my leaving them. To do so had indeed never crossed my mind; for my plans, house-dreamings and the rest were, as always, watertight:

in the compartment of daydreams, and having no connection with my immediate doings. Even had I wanted to go away, I was as penniless as before until my twenty-first birthday should arrive.

The first two or three days after the Windfall I gave only these surface-thinkings a hearing. All the time—even from the very second the news entered my brain—Other Self was murmuring, though for a foolish day or two I fought her down. Then, one silent night, she broke loose, crashed through the silly web of pride, greed, and heathen-helping, and rained at Snob-Mary (whom "I" loathed this night till I could have spat in my loathing) the hard questions that only the fools who dare not face them say are not worth facing.

Are you not commoner, meaner, lower, since this money?

Is not the Safety you now possess utterly undeserved, selfish, fatal to your soul?

You have your wealth: how will God get even?

£500 is a goodly treasure: but what will it serve you 500 years from now?

Will gold protect you from Eternity?

Are you happier, any happier at all?

Life was a search for the happiness that is the secret of the world. The key was not of Gold.

# CHAPTER XXXIV: I BECOME A DAUGHTER

We had arranged to spend a certain day in Rouen, but when the day came I did not feel well: I was tired and inclined to be feverish. The first sign of a coming illness, to which bad dreams and bad conscience (Money) were each contributing. I asked to be left at home. The Countess and the two girls went away by the early train; de Fouquier also was to be absent for a whole day, visiting some distant farms. I was alone.

I was restless, and could not settle down to read or even to think. A ride might cheer me up, I decided, so I went down to the stables and ordered the horse I always rode. Then I went upstairs and put on my riding-habit. By the time I was downstairs again, I felt tired and disinclined. I sent the horse away, and threw myself down in a chair in the great dining-room, without changing back into my ordinary clothes. I still had the whip in my hand.

I cannot have been more than half awake, for though I had a dim notion of Gabrielle retreating through the curtains and depositing a gentleman in the room, I remember nothing in the way of announcement or explanation. Some one was there: who or how or why I did not know. I took in that he was tall, dressed like a gentleman, and silver-haired; but at his face, for some vaguely-felt reason of half-awakeness or self-consciousness or fear, I could not look.

"Good day, Sir," I said, shunning his eyes, "pray won't you sit down." Naturally I spoke in French.

"Thank you, perhaps I will," he replied in languid and exquisite English, utterly ignoring the fact that I had spoken in French. "I am happy to meet a fellow-countrywoman in this Papist land."

The ancient familiar jargon flung at me so unexpectedly, and in a voice that matched it so ill, roused me to immediate hostility. And was my French so bad that he must needs assume I was English? Or did he know? But it was my own annoyance at his Christian phrasing that annoyed me most. Though, to be sure, the voice was not a Christian's. Who could he be?

I looked more boldly, though still avoiding his eyes. It was impossible to guess his age. The fresh skin and beardless chin were a boy's, the carriage suggested a man in the prime of life, the headful of silvery-white denoted venerable age. The features were small, patrician, womanish; the mouth especially being too small for a man's, while full of pride and authority and race. A lordly and effeminate *grand seigneur*.

The eyes, I knew, were the key to the mysterious face, and at these I dared not look.

All these impressions must have been gathered in a second of time, for he seemed to be still in the same sentence.

"—Yes, I am happy to meet you, for I feel you are the Lord's." The languid voice fashioned such a mockery of our Brethren speech that for a moment I could have railed at him for Antichrist. Then I felt quickly that I was foolish, and let him go on. "Assure me that you are His, Mademoiselle, pray assure me."

"I may be," I said sharply, "but plain 'Miss' is good

enough for me, s'il vous plait, *monsieur*."

"May-be, may-be!" he sneered, for I had roused his spite. "'May-be' is the cry of souls in torment, the watchword of the damned. Beware, young woman, of your woman's filthy pride. It is the snare of men, the source of all wickedness. Woman, subtle of heart and impudent of face, who hath cast down many wounded, whose house is the way to Hell—"

It was a madman. He had forgotten me, he had forgotten himself. He was hypnotizing himself with his own words; his eyes were wild and unseeing. I looked into them now. God, they were not his eyes, but *my own*, just as I saw them when I stared in a mirror. I was bewitched, and could only go on staring, staring. The mystical excitement seized me, the sense of physical existence departed, more surely than ever before the imminent immanent moment was upon me, I had discovered the World, I was kissing the eyes, my soul moved forward to reach him—. I found myself stumbling up from my chair in his direction, and with my ordinary eyes saw him still standing there, still intoning away, still almost unconscious of everything—but not completely, for he knew his power over me.

Suddenly, in the middle of a phrase, he stopped. I broke in quickly, in sanest worldliest fashion.

"I should be glad to know, Sir," I said coldly, "why in an ordinary sensible house, which is neither yours nor mine, you are favouring me with these extraordinary speeches. You have not the advantage of my acquaintance, nor I of yours. Is it Madame the Countess de Florian you called to see?"

"Ah true, true!"—there was no change of voice or

manner, but a change (I felt) of person inside him —"Yes: I am an old friend of the family; I came over from Rouen, through which I was passing, and learn from the servant that by a piece of ill-fortune the family are in Rouen today. Here is my card."

I took it, without looking at it.

"I am an English friend who lives here," I said, "a kind of companion to the girls."

"Indeed, indeed! As I was saying"—and impatient of the length of this irrelevant interruption of his ravings, he half-closed his eyes again and resumed the tirade of piety and denunciation and woman-hating and hell-fire. He was mad. He was not mad. All the world was mad. *It was not happening.*

I was working myself up to face again the experience of his eyes, when my glance lighted accidentally on the visiting card in my hand.

The news entered my soul before my brain. It was not news; I had known it all the time. I stared at the printed letters one by one, not able to understand them, understanding them all too well. They stood up from the card, assumed hideous shapes. It was a nightmare. It was not true. I clutched at the side of the bed—no, it was the dining-room table against which I was leaning. There were the chair, the sideboards, the armour; there was *he*.

In my visions of this meeting I had always taken him unawares and now it was I who had been surprised. The second part of my dreams at any rate should not fail. I gripped the whip more tightly.

In crowding tumult every word of my Grandmother's

old narration filled my heart and brain. I was ten years old again. She called me upstairs to her bedroom, pulled out the brown tin box from under the bed, drew forth the packet. Each phrase of each pitiful letter was marshalled by my inhuman memory before my eyes. Bitch, Bitch, he called her Bitch. As I looked at the white halo-crowned vile beautiful face before me, as he raved away, I did not listen: one by one I went over the ill-deeds and the cruel words I had to his account, feverishly I visualized my mother's suffering and sorrow till I was at the white heat for avenging them. The hardest part was to keep calm, sane: to keep my will in control of my emotions, which were bursting through all the ancient bonds of self-restraint, urging me tempestuously to await no perfectly planned moment, but to wound him *now*.

Somehow I kept my voice steady. I interrupted; and, following my plan, veered him back into his maniacal misogyny.

"You have a poor opinion of our sex indeed. What, Sir, if you have a daughter of your own?"

"I busy myself not with my children of the flesh, but only with my children of the spirit."

He was impossibly real, impossibly like Grandmother's story. He meant what he said; there was no hypocrisy. I was proud of the handsome face, had a lunatic longing for the eyes.

I could kiss him, kill him.

"I had a child once, they tell me—at least her mother said it was mine—"

*Now!* cried Melodrama, *Now!* cried the Plan, and the

Mary I had always visualized for this moment achieved herself as—suddenly, savagely—I cut him across the face with my whip.

He was an old man now, and fell to the ground helplessly. I lashed at him in a blind fury of revenge and righteousness, shouting horrible words of which I hardly knew the meaning. He tried to rise, but I struck him down again. "Bitch, Bitch, you called her Bitch. You swine, God is paying you back."

I knelt down suddenly beside him: "Father, will you kiss me?"

I have a distant notion of de Fouquier somewhere near me, of fading away into a world vaguer and colder than dreams....

There is a door that leads to happiness. Revenge cannot force the lock.

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## CHAPTER XXXV: WAY OF A SERPENT UPON A ROCK

Everywhere there was a cold and mistlike darkness. Shapes emerged. Billows of whiter mist loomed nearer through the darkness, came from every corner of utmost space. The dark heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; the white billows

poured in on every side, engulphed me, choked me with icy fumes. Was I dead, and awake in cold Eternity?

The mists turned into molten suns who scorched my body till only the soul was left, naked against the burning heat.

I died again, to wake once more in a new causeless Eternity of terror. Always there was a menace, everywhere a fear. I knew I was dreaming, in a dream within a dream; this gave me no ease, as I knew that dreams were true. Rather were the pain, the terror, the pursuit, more real, more awful, than waking ills. My agony of soul was unsearchable; there was no God even to cry to, for soon I was God, in His loneliness without help or escape, without beginning and without end.

Human shapes, with a horror and a power to do me evil far beyond their real stature in my past, pursued, reached, assailed, slew me. Always I died, and always I woke to a new universe of more sickening fear. Aunt Jael, Benamuckee—every evil face and evil fact from the old days of the life I had once dreamt on the earth, invested now with infinite power and unimaginable horror—menaced me, dogged my piteous flight along the unending pathway of Eternity. Uncle Simeon was there. The most horrible fear of my childhood, he was the most horrible now: an Evil more ghastly than human memory or imagination. "Twelve years ago, twelve years ago!" I whispered. He saw, rushed to the door, while I rushed madlier across the roof-room to my attic. This time he would outrun me. No, I was in time. I tore through the aperture and just had time, shivering in fright, to huddle down upon the floor

before the key turned and he was in upon me, over me, peering at me with unpitying cruelty and hate, I lay numbly staring at the yellow-pale face, the savage blue eyes, the wet thin lips, the honey-coloured beard—now tinged with grey—just as it would be now in "real" life, I had enough reason in my dream to be able (in a frightening lapse from feeling to thought) to reflect. The face came nearer, gleamed physically its hate, seemed to breathe at me.

"Oh, God!" I prayed wildly, "Where am I? Tell me, oh tell me! If a dream, of thy pity awaken me: if life after death, slay me for ever!"

Now he was Simeon Greeber the poisoner; he was pouring something into a phial, he took a tiny white tablet—fear made my dream-eyes keen—and dissolved it in the liquid. Some one was propping me up, his eyes were gleaming with hope, he lifted the glass to my lips—

"Poisoner!" I shrieked and dashed the glass away. I put my hands swiftly to my eyes, and they were *open*. My bed, the Château Villebecq bedroom, half-drawn blinds, a hundred impressions instantaneously reached me. I was awake again, and in this world; my chin and neck were wet with the spilled liquid, and he was there, the this-world Uncle Simeon, hastily picking up bits of glass. He was real, and I knew it; he looked up and knew that I knew.

Could I sham him into doubting it? My senses had not properly returned, and flog my brain as I would, in a frantic second of endeavour, she could not tell me how or why I was here in bed, how or why Uncle Simeon was here beside me.

I smiled, assumed my frankest stare, and shammed

that I was dreaming again. (Unless it was, after all, a dream unnameably real, a dream within a dream.) Staring at him fixedly as though I did not see him—and for a half-moment I saw doubt in his eyes—"*Madam*," I cried, "some one has tried to poison me. Find him, find him!"

Deceived or no, he was not losing his chance. "One will find him soon, one will find him," he whispered soothingly, the while preparing another potion below the level of the bed: "Meanwhile, dearie, drink something to make you better." Swiftly he seized me, grasped my neck as in a vice, and forced the glass against my lips.

Somehow I got my mouth away, somehow I managed to shriek, to shriek till I seemed to be losing my senses again. In dream-fashion shapes crowded round me once more: Elise and Suzanne—and the Stranger. Whether real shapes or not, they were Friends. I was saved. All would be well. And I fell into a dreamless sleep.

To this day I do not know with absolute sureness whether these moments were dream or waking life. Little is the difference, for is not the one as real, or as unreal, as the other?

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## CHAPTER XXXVI: THE STRANGER WITHIN THE GATES

I awoke to find Lord Tawborough by my bedside, with Elise for chaperone.

The latter soon pieced things together for me. Gabrielle had found me in a feverish half-unconscious state on the dining-room floor. She had got me upstairs, and hastily sent to Caudebec for the doctor, who pronounced me to be in a dangerous fever. Nobody seemed to connect my illness in any way with Monsieur Traies' visit. In the anxiety and fuss upon the family's return, Gabrielle had indeed forgotten even to mention it—till next morning, when his crumpled visiting card was found on the dining-room floor. Nor had any one seen him leave the house or grounds. (Mauled and aching, his hands before his scarred and kissed and bleeding face; crawling, slinking away.) My illness had soon become dangerous; it was doubted whether I could live, and Elise had sent urgent word to England. My Grandmother had written that she was, alas, too frail and old to come, but that she was sending her son-in-law, my Uncle, instead; she prayed the Lord in His mercy to spare me. Monsieur Greeber had arrived—an odd little man, very grateful for his reception—and had sat with me devotedly, all day and half the night, through the worst days, days when I was racked by the wildest fever, torn by ravings and prayers, nightmare cries and supplications, and had indeed been with me alone, in a brief period when the doctor and nurse were absent, at the moment in which I reached the turning-point and for the first time recovered consciousness. I had railed at Monsieur Greeber like a madwoman, suddenly become conscious, and then as suddenly fallen into a calm unfevered sleep. He had hoped to have stayed to see me well on the road to recovery, but word reaching him the very same day that his own son in

England was taken ill, he had left hurriedly. The same critical day Lord Tawborough had reached the house, summoned by the news Elise had urgently sent him.

Meanwhile, in Cardboard-World, big events had ripened. Elise talked feverishly. I listened with mild interest. Who was Fouquier, anyway, and what did it all matter?

I learnt how the Countess had had a mighty quarrel with him, and how at last, after so many years, she had screwed up her courage to the point of deciding to dispense with him, though not yet to the point of telling him of her decision.

"And Suzanne?" I asked. "If she loves him as she did before, she may take it ill."

"I don't know. For months I have seen nothing to make me think so. Anyway, so far we have told her nothing. She knows nothing."

"And when the thunderbolt descends?"

"I am hopeful. The honour of the family...."

The days of my convalescence held a pleasure that banished the nightmare past. Almost the whole day the Stranger was at my bedside. Hour after hour I lay gazing at the dear distinguished face. I soon found that they all thought me less wide-awake and nimble-minded than I was, so I stared with impunity, imparting a touch of vacancy to my stare: a shield-and-buckler vacancy. I lay bathed in a new delicious sentimentality, worshipping him, drinking him in,

idealizing him. He was my Mother's little boy; he had loved her; he had given me the first novel I had ever read, had shaped my first apprehension of nature's beauty. To him I owed my education, my social raising, my life of splendour here. For England he had kissed me Good-bye in the moment I had left her. It was a tender exultant joy to watch his face. He was hardly older than the Stranger of the Torribridge hillside morning ten years ago; though his hair was turning grey, a proud and princely grey. There was the same beloved countenance, manly yet gentle, clean, clear-cut, slightly sharp-featured; the same eyes, quizzical-whimsical, yet holding the kindness of all the world; the same intelligence, culture, race; the same maddening purity and nobleness; the same Call to Worship. With something added, not in him, but in me who regarded him: a knowledge that he was a man, that he was dear and desirable beyond other men, that nearness would be very beautiful. Sometimes, swiftly, sentimentality would flood and transfigure my normal consciousness. My heart would pass through the last Gate of Tenderness, approach the portals of Love. Then in a crowding mystical moment the Vision changed, and it was Robbie: Robbie and I, we were kissing each other, radiantly; Christmas Night of long ago had become the present once again. The Vision would fade, and leave me staring at the Stranger, liking him, needing him, yet with my heart too full of the Vision to be able to wonder what *loving* him might mean.

Love, in its only and ultimate meaning, in the sense of the mystery of this world, of Jordan morning, of the Holy Ghost, could only reach me, I saw once again, through one human being on earth, Robbie of Christmas Night. Who, where, how, what was he

now?

My spirit would flag a little, and sink from the uttermost heights. Once below the level of that very highest heaven of all, Love the Madness passed, and the saner, warmer adoration for the Stranger returned.

What were his feelings? I was not sure. The kindness of his eyes, what was it? A kindness like that must be for every one, must hold a universal message. No, must be for one person alone, could be lighted only by the human soul he loved. Who? Had *he* his Robbie-girl? There were moments when I knew he loved me. More often and more surely, I felt there was a sentiment and a sympathy akin to my own, but quieter, nearer earth, less likely to stray up the steep Robbie-closed path to LOVE.

Yet I would play with fire, and, on the level where Robbie was not remembered, visualize myself loved by, wooed by, married by the Stranger. Swiftly I was on a lower level still, where Snob-Mary could wallow. To become a Peeress! "Not so very absurd," others might think. "After all, they were cousins, his mother and her father were first cousins, you know—though she was, of course, brought up rather differently, with some Nonconformist (sic) relations on her mother's side. However, blood will tell!" I knew better, knew that common Bear Lawn Mary was the real Me. Or was it? Except for the kinship of memory, how was she me at all? She was but a poor remembered Mary: what the I of today would be to the person inhabiting this body ten years ahead. There was no such thing as permanence of personality, there was no such thing as anybody. Ever-different souls inhabit the same body; memory

alone connects them with their predecessors, instinct alone makes them work for their successors. I must work for mine. I must try to deserve well of the coming Marys, seek to marry them well. Lady Tawborough!

His talk, far beyond Elise's even, was a high delight. He spoke of life, books, travels; of the South, which he knew the best, of the seven cities of Italy, the seven hills of Rome. Of his plans and hopes: how he would soon end his wandering and go back to Devonshire for good. Of his schemes for his estates, the work he hoped to do in the country, the book he might write, the position he might win for himself in the House of Lords. Always there was something he did not say, seemed to shrink from saying. Was it that he thought I was fond of him and did not like to wound me by telling me there was some one else: his girl-Robbie? Or was it—?

Those convalescent weeks rank among the gentlest memories of my life. My French friends were kind to me beyond deserts or hopes. I was restored to health in the daily companionship of a Vision of goodness and delight. My chief Revenge had been achieved. The nightmare life was away beyond the nightmare illness. Hate was now for ever behind me. I was a tenderer Mary.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII: WAY OF A SHIP IN THE MIDST OF THE SEA

Villebecq Mademoiselle, who would play melodrama, was achieving much less in her chosen way of business than still slumbering Bear Lawn Mary, who had played at life. And now, in these last days (as they were to prove) of the Villebecq existence as I had known it, she was to shew herself quite unequal to a rôle of garish prominence she was suddenly called upon to play. She quitted the stage, unaccompanied by plaudits or pity, and died of an empty heart.

The circumstances were these.

The first day or so after I left my bedroom I spent in writing up my Diary: making the notes on which the last three chapters are based.

The Countess' arrangements as to de Fouquier's successor were completed; the gentleman in question, a Monsieur de Beaurepaire, was ready to take up his duties in three days' time. De Fouquier knew nothing.

The day before the morning fixed upon for his dismissal I was sitting alone in the library, writing in my Diary. The door opened, I drew the blotting-paper protectively over the page. It was Monsieur de Fouquier, and he knew: knew everything. There was a look in his eyes—a look I have only seen once besides, many years later, on the face of a Russian nobleman, the night before he shot himself in the bedroom of a St. Petersburgh hotel—of wolfish desperation; desperate and wolfish as only the eyes of a selfish luxurious well-fed man can become. His voice, however, was still suave, unpleasantly suave.

"Ah, good day, Mademoiselle. I have come to say Good-bye. I am glad to have had the pleasure of

knowing you so well."

"I am sorry," I replied (I think sincerely), "though, despite the long time I have been here, I could hardly agree with you that we have known each other well. We have so little to do with each other."

"*Directly*, perhaps," he said meaningly. "*De vive voix*, it is true, you have given me but sparingly of your thoughts and views. I have been able to learn to appreciate them, nevertheless, thanks to an occasional perusal of that charming book before you now. Oh, I read your language if I do not speak it. *Vot vud Jesus do? Vot vud Jesus do?*"—in mocking horrible English.

Shame flooded me, and hate. This monster, who for months had been peering into the secret places of my soul!

"Vat vud Jesus do?" he was repeating, with a sneer again and again.

"Stop!" I cried. "I will not listen to blasphemy."

"You will listen awhile to me," and he stood against the door, barring possible egress. "You have had a large share in the filthy campaign of lies and intrigues which has at last succeeded in turning me out of this house. I shall at least make sure that you are bundled out yourself. Before I go, this very day, I am going to supply this amiable and grateful family with a brief account of yourself and who you really are,—your dirty little shopkeeper relations in England, your common sailor of a grandfather, your vulgar canting old grandmother, your boozing aunt. Then a few words about your dear father, and your frankness with Madame la Comtesse on the subject of

his recent visit: how odd that he did not live with your mother, how odd the little hints Monsieur Greeber was so good as to give me as to whether he was your dear father at all, how odd the charm of bastardy—"

"Monsieur," I broke in, "if ever I have a husband, he shall exact full payment for this. Go on insulting me, however. It will achieve nothing, it leaves me cold."

"A husband, ah yes—dear 'R'! How tender your many references to him. Strange though it should seem, this world is small, and suppose so seemingly irrelevant an event as my forced departure from this house in France should have some effect on dear 'R' in England? There is my dear friend Monsieur Greeber. Don't alarm yourself, there's a brave girl—"

"Get out!" I cried.

"When I have done. There are still other results of your handiwork to consider. The family's name, for instance? It will benefit, you think, from my departure? Monsieur le Comte—his honourable doings. Mademoiselle Elise—her passion for her sister—so pure, so natural, so sisterly—"

"Ten seconds, and if you're not gone, I shall shriek for help." I rose, pale with anger.

He came forward, seized me, glued his mouth to mine.

It was no stage-play now. In a strange flooding moment Mary the lover of Robbie reconquered the fortress of my soul. Thirty years later I can summon the odd physical-spiritual sensation as the selves did battle within me. Mine eyes beheld love, and this nightmare moment was its negation.

I only record the moment, shutting the spirit's memory as I write; think of it I will not, cannot. I struggled, for a second or two, without avail, wild with a nameless sickening fear; prayed in shame and desperation "Lord, deliver me: Robbie, forgive!" Then with a desperate movement I freed my face from the foul impact, and gave as heartrending a shriek as was ever achieved by virgin in distress.

He made swiftly to free himself, but now I held him tight, clipped him to me with such a new savagery and strength that although he knee'd and wriggled brutally he could not struggle free. Footsteps were approaching—I knew whose—and I managed, during one more second of supreme endeavour and complex anticipatory delight, to hold on.

Lord Tawborough entered, took him by the scruff of the neck, wrenched him away from me, and flung him out of the room.

I liked Lord Tawborough.

"*Les hommes!*" commented Elise. "So that's the end of friend Fouquier."

It was. That same day he disappeared from the Château for ever.

It seemed as though the house had been cleansed of a foul atmosphere. The Countess, though already worrying about troubles and dangers ahead, seemed for the first time mistress in her own house.

"Let him do his worst," said Elise, "it isn't very much."

Only Suzanne was nowhere about, seen by none of us. At dinner that night she was not present. Her bedroom door was locked, and she would reply to no

one, admit no one. Next day we burst open the door, found the room empty.

Suzanne had fled.

* * * * * * *

It was the end.

It was the end of the Château Villebecq I had known, the end of the easeful days of bright comfort shot through with gay melodrama, the end of the Interlude. For two other women, mother and sister, it was the end for ever of this world's happiness; for the other herself too, as I learned long afterwards.

Madame de Florian crumpled up under the blow. All she had lived for—the honour of her name, the worldly success of her daughters—was lost. All her employment—the day-to-day strivings towards these two ends—was gone. In one night she seemed to shrivel up; to become at a stroke five times more wizened, more futile, more plaintive than before. Life, perhaps, had never had much to give her; now it held nothing. Her days were divided between regrets and self-reproachings, complaints, servant-scoldings and tears.

To me alone she confided her woe. I was the one kind soul she had ever known; Heaven had meant me to be her daughter! I gave her nothing from my soul —except pity, poor pity, and even this soon lost its first spontaneity; became conscious, conscientious— yet always I could see she was getting what I did not give: a sense of boundless sympathy and affection. In every mood and every mope she came to me for comfort, and—though I knew full well in my actress-heart that I was giving her nothing at all, no real

love, no healing sympathy, only the shams and simulacra of these, served up with pity, luxurious self-comforting pity—always I saw that my shadow was her substance. She returned me a boundless gratitude; pathetic, delicious to my palate, cruelly undeserved.

"Ah Mademoiselle, there are not many like you! My life is over. I am a poor old woman alone. Only you understand. Stay with me, dear Mademoiselle."

And I did.

Elise took to her room, asked no comfort, refused what I proffered, railed at me for being the real cause of her losing her dear one, spent long days alone in her bedroom weeping, and would not be comforted. After a few weeks, when no news came of Suzanne, she took really ill. When sufficiently recovered to travel, she went for a long stay in the South of France, Gabrielle accompanying her. At leaving she refused to see me, even to say Good-bye.

The new steward did not live in the house, now a deserted place, damp and cold in the long winter that followed, inhabited by memories, haunted by fugitive joys. Through the long days and nights, echoes of happiness would ring aloud through the emptiness, and sometimes I heard Suzanne's laugh on the staircase or the quick feet of friendly approaches in the corridor. Now that joy had taken flight, the great house became, like Bear Lawn of old, an atmosphere I understood and responded to. It is thus that I have chiefly remembered it ever since, it is thus that I remember it now.

I had no plans except—vaguely "soon"—to go back to Devonshire for good. When I mooted this to the Countess, her pleadings were so pitiful, so flattering, that I registered then and there the vow that I would stay as long as she wanted me. It was the one return I could give for the kindness I had received, the one way I could display loyalty to the good past of yesterday: quite a good way also, maybe, of laying up for myself treasure in Heaven.

So for many long and lonely months I stayed. Except the Countess I saw no one. I was as lonely as in the far-away days of my childhood, and soon it was to my childhood that I returned. Imperceptibly, just as a year or two back the Bear Lawn life had vanished, the present glory of Villebecq taking its place, so now it was Villebecq (though my body remained there) that vanished, and Bear Lawn again that took its place. In bed at night, if my soul was thinking of Mary, the old dining-room or the cold blue attic formed the physical setting in which, as a person detached, I always saw her. In the darkness my bed would always revert to the Bear Lawn position, with the wall facing me as I lay on my right side, although in reality in the Villebecq room it was behind me. Even awake and in the day-time, the articles of furniture in my boudoir often changed as I watched them to the furniture of the old dining-room, the sense came over me that Villebecq was but a dream I had dreamt one night at Tawborough, a dream from which I was at this moment waking up, a dream that already I could not properly remember.... But—Bear Lawn too was a dream—I had only dreamt that I was Mary. Who was I? Was I any one? Oh, terror, was I God Himself? With a cry I fell on to my knees.... The fear passed, it was the Villebecq boudoir, I was rising awkwardly to my feet. (Had anybody seen?)

Even in normal and placid moods, the first two years of my life in France soon appeared as a faded memory, the remembrance of something I had been told rather than something I had lived myself. The whole mosaic of new glittering impressions, storm and stage-play, ease and luxury and chatter and intrigue, seemed something insubstantial and unlived: something very distant, too, for—by a puzzling experience not usual in the young—I could only see clearly the days that lay farther away. The Villebecq life had been a thin shadow of life, the Villebecq drama a puppet drama, the Villebecq Me a pale and partial Me. There was a slow battle spread over weeks in which Bear-Lawn Mary fought her way back to chief place within me. I remember the odd physical moment—sitting on my bed at three o'clock one morning, still undressed—in which she won the victory and in which Mary the gossiper, Mary the worldling, Mary the Fouquier-fighter faded like a wraith into the tomb of my sub-conscious self.

The older habits of mind returned. Now that there was no one to talk to, I talked, as of old, to myself. There was no present to occupy me, so I returned to my pasts and my futures. There were differences, of course, and developments: I was older, a little farther away from madness (which is sanity), a little nearer the world, a little farther from the Lord. My past was seen in worldlier, if not truer, perspective; my ambitions were more concrete. The old habits were fainter, and the old fears. Hope had gained appreciably on Despair. At ten I had dwelt morbidly on my few happinesses, knowing that they would be paid for: God gets even. Now, at twenty, happier days had tilted the balance; I dwelt cheerfully on the manifold unhappinesses of my life, feeling sure they would all be recompensed me: Christ gets even.

Not but what Gloom made a good fight for his old supremacy. After all, *Eternity was on his side*.

And the Rapture never returned. I would pray sometimes for hours, beg for one instant's flowing through my heart of Taw-water and the Holy Ghost. HE did not come.

There was a reason. I knew the reason, though for a long time I dared not formulate it, even in prayer, even alone with myself, or more utterly alone—with God.

Coming from the innermost place of my being, gaining at last my conscious brain and soul, and soon possessing them utterly, was the knowledge that my only way to ultimate happiness lay not through religion, but through ROBBIE.

For many days and nights the agonized struggle fought itself out within me: God's love revealing Itself directly, God Immanent, versus God's Love revealing itself in human shape, God-in-Robbie: memories of Jordan Morning, my honeymoon with God, versus hopes of earthly ecstacy, my honeymoon with *him*.

I have never wished, even if I were able, to fit in this story of my life with wise men's theories of human conduct and development. But the psychologist or the modern novelist would I think label this struggle in my soul as the turning-battle between Environment and Heredity, in which the massed beliefs of my holy upbringing contended against the call of my woman's blood and the needs of my woman's heart.

At last—when I had given God His last chance,

telling Him in an agony of passionate prayer that if He would send me but once again the perfect miracle-moment of Jordan it would quench for ever within me all need of human love—and when no answer came—I knew that the battle was over. Robbie had won.

Had won in my heart. But what were the chances that I should taste the fruits of his victory, that the love I had declared for would, in this actual physical world, one day be mine?

I faced the whole question, "dispassionately."

What were the facts? Years ago, a sentimental and unhappy child had, in a moment of crude (though not contemptible) romantic fervour, grown morbidly fond of another child, and he of her. They had vowed together to seek to perpetuate their experience when away from each other by mutual self-suggestion, especially on that particular night of every year when the childish emotion had culminated. It was all very pretty, quite pathetic too in its way, but what else?

What else? Everything. These were the cowardly picturings of Common-Sense: Heart put them swiftly to flight. The only realities are the realities of the spirit, and Robbie in the visions I now had, not only every Christmas, but every day—near every hour—was a warm divine reality in my soul. He was with me, kissing my face. Where the human body of the living twenty-one-year-old Robbie might be I did not know—though I constructed for myself a hundred different stories as to his whereabouts and doings—but that his spirit was with me whenever mine was with him I knew in the authentic uttermost way, beyond all knowledge and reason, in which I had

once known God. Sometimes the whole night through his Presence enveloped me, his face was mirrored in my soul. Yet always the ultimate Rapture evaded me; I would reach the mystical moment when the lips of the vision-Robbie upon mine were changing into the dear desired lips of the real-life Robbie, when vision-reality and this-world-reality were merging magically into one—then always, on the threshold of realization, the Vision faded, and I was left empty and desolate and cold.

The mere physical longing, though less intense than the spiritual, was newer and more baffling: for I understood my body much less well than my soul. Oh for him to put his arms around me, crush me tenderly to him, while I should clasp him to my breast and pour out my heart upon him! I would kiss the miserable pillow (and say it was his throat) and clasp it and cover it with tears. When bearing-point was passed, I would burst into half-hysterical prayer: Send him now, oh Lord Jesus, or banish the tormenting vision from my eyes!—the while I would savagely stop the eyes and ears of my spirit, until God's answer came, and for a space the hunger passed away.

Doubt trod hard upon Desire. Fool-Mary as always! You loved the little boy then, and he you. It was a child's moment, gracious for the child's sorrow that it eased, but over at once and for ever. Love comes not back again. All the rest, all these fantastic years of mystical repeatal are but the wraiths of your own disordered imagination. The Presence is a phantom presence of your own creating.

"It is no phantom," I replied. "If anything in God's universe is real, that is real."

"Real to him? For if not, the presence is not real at all."

"It is real to him."

"Are you so sure? You are quite, quite certain: that at the same moment in which you possess his Presence, he is possessing yours?"

"Yes, I know it. God tells me so."

"But where is real Robbie? Why does he not come to you?"

"He is coming soon."

And with valiant words I chased Doubt away, knowing him for the destroyer of everything that he encompasses, who can make things that are true untrue, just as Faith, his enemy, can make of things that are not things that are. Faith makes facts, not facts faith. If you believe that Robbie is with you, he is with you. If you doubt his presence, you destroy it.

> If the Sun and Moon should doubt
> They'd immediately go out.

Balked of his actual physical presence in one way I would seek it in another. Memory would essay where Visualization had at the ultimate instant always failed, and would guide me moment by moment through the whole of the old Torribridge time, from the first glimpse, and Uncle Simeon's introduction, through egg-day and fight-day to the supreme midnight hour; at last I found I could reconstruct our happiness together so vividly that *it was actually happening again*. Eternity had turned backwards, the past had become the living present, I was sore from the cruel flogging, I was twelve-year-old Mary again,

and Robbie's arms were around me. Then Memory in his turn failed me; in a swift physical way I felt inside me the years scuttling back into their place: it was the old eternal present, and the ideal unconsummated, and the loneliness.

Then doubt and fear and need would all together assail me, pressing in unison the chief question. When he is real to you, are you as real to him? The answer was always Yes, and the answer was always No. In either case I fell to sorrowing for him: if he wanted me, because of his need; if he did not know he wanted me, because of his need also. And I would forget myself altogether, and think only of his need of love. How could I give him most, give myself to him most? How could I discover and lay at his feet the wild unimagined sacrifices for which my heart was aching? I knew I could give him everything, live for him only, destroy my own happiness for him, give him my heart, my life, my hope of everlasting death. Ah, for his sake I would take God's nameless gift of immortality, if He would but set Robbie free, grant him the eternal sleep. I would do the far greater thing than die for him; for him I would live for ever.

Ah, no, no, no!—Robbie asleep for ever, and me for ever alive. Ah, no, oh loving Heavenly Father, that alone I could not bear.

In two months I filled three large new volumes of Diary: all with Robbie.

Much of it was in the form of a series of letters between us. The first letter was addressed from me to him: a tremulous self-conscious composition, asking

him to excuse my taking the liberty of writing, feeling certain that he would doubtless remember who I was, recalling that we had been rather good friends, *n'est-ce-pas*?, in that short period when we had been together as children, etc., etc. I tortured myself for a whole fortnight awaiting, in fear and delicious hope, his reply. This I composed—as I wanted to compose it: friendly, enthusiastically reminiscent, but not (being his first letter) so affectionate as to damage my scheme of a long *crescendo* of ever more affectionate letters to come. Then my reply, and his reply, till soon the floodgates were opened.

> "Oh, Robbie (at last I wrote), Tell me you are the same Robbie; that now, as a man, you are not some strange man I should not know, but that you have the same loving heart, only more passionate and tender than before; the same loving arms, only manlier and even more ready to embrace me; the same loving boy's face, only transfigured, developed, ennobled by the long lonely years of the love you have given me. Tell me that in body as well as spirit you are coming soon, to love me for ever as I do you."

He replied:

> "Post haste I write, because I must speak back to you. I got your letter this morning, and ever since then have been full of it, and full of joy.

Never in all the letters you have written me have I felt so much of you in it, never have I felt you so near, so completely in sympathy and understanding, so exquisitely, so utterly in love. (I cannot restrain myself from uttering this.) As I read and re-read your letter, I feel, at this very moment as I write, that we are alone, alone and together; I can hear you crying out and I send back the echo; but it is no echo now, for we are so near: only distances echo, my Mary dear. Tonight I am fuller than I have ever been before, full because of your inspiration, of your influence; but not this alone, because I am my own influence, and it is this which sways me now. The outer world is a great silence, a mere waste of towns and cities, empty and desolate as a city of the dead, a place of graves. All the people around me are shadows, are only for themselves, but we are for each other, and all all else is dead.

"The Christmas promise has come true for ever. Now it is a great joy to live, and not to live has no terrors. Everything is at the highest point of its change; all is changed by this thing we know, this secret we have discovered, and I am glad. We alone are its guardian, but it needs no guardian, because Mary and Robbie before discovered it, and have

guarded it ever since.

"I shall come very soon now. But do not fret: this long absence in form has meant a more palpable presence in spirit. For the soul needs space: it flies, like a kite, and you hold the line; the line is of interminable distance, the kite of immeasurable power. It flies happy, among the life-giving, high breezes; and it makes you happy, a child at the other end, a child with a kite—the child whom I loved that night long ago and who loved me, the dear Mary whom I will love and who will love me for ever. She is the child who has not changed—it is the same face, though a woman's now, and it is with me by day and by night...."

"Robin," I answered, "your letter is the goodliest yet: it has given me a day and a waking night of celestial happiness—for I had it yesterday only, and like you I reply 'post-haste.' You bring me to the house of happiness, and your banner over me is Love: but when will your left hand be under my head and your right hand embrace me? My letters bring you happiness too: but when will you read them with the eyes of the flesh as well as the eyes of the spirit? You say you will come to me 'very soon:' but you will come before the ink on these pages has faded? (If it

> can ever fade, for it is the blood of my aching heart.)
>
> "Now dear, I kiss your brow, your dear eyes, your mouth; I place my lips upon your dear glorious little heart. All the love that was in the beginning of the world, that is in the universe now, that will people Paradise through all the everlasting years, is in me now; I assemble and concentrate it into this moment, into the kiss that I am giving you at this moment as I write. From face to feet, my heart's beloved, Good-night!"

At last, after two or three months of these imaginary letters, I wrote the real one which was the necessary condition of their ever becoming real: I wrote to Aunt Martha. I always wrote to her on her birthday: it was near birthday-time, so no other pretext was needed. I made my letter rather longer than usual, introducing the one thing that mattered with appropriately naïve and casual abruptness. "By-the-way," I asked, as careful after-thought, "do you ever hear anything now of Robert Grove. He was a nice boy, and I have often wondered what became of him?" And I made a Special Temporary Resolution to shut the door of my spirit as far as possible (weak proviso) till Aunt Martha should have given me some news.

It was only a day or two after writing this letter that a letter I received—from Lord Tawborough, now back in England—ushered in a new phase of spiritual

trouble. Robbie had vanquished Almighty God: was he to be vanquished now by a mere peer of England? Very vividly the Stranger re-entered my imagination. He had thought it discreet and kinder to leave the Château almost immediately after the Fouquier crisis and Suzanne's flight, and in the turmoil of those days and of Elise's bitterness and then in the long loneliness and the following period of return to religion and to Robbie, he had been very little in my thoughts. This letter brought him gladly, warmly back. My heart brightened as I mused upon the well-loved features, the manifold gentleness, the secret sympathy, the goodness he had shown me, the delight I knew he found when near me. And this was no kindly benefactor's letter, no tenderest of distant cousin's letter, no 7th of the Title's letter. It was but a Best Friend's letter. For a moment my heart recoiled from immediate irrepressible "Is it a Lover's letter?" Some one said "No": it was the Mary who wrote the mad missives to Robbie and the mad missives from Robbie to herself. Some one else said "Yes": it was the this-world Mary whom every one (save Mary) knew.

At that instant of time, I think, more surely and more strangely than at any other time in my life, I knew and in spiritual-physical fashion felt and understood that there was no such thing as "I": that there were many living and disparate beings inside me. As I mused pleasurably and lovingly on Tawborough (Quick! What was his Christian name?—I had never heard it, I must learn it, or invent it, find swiftly some endearing name to give him in my thoughts), not only Robbie, but the Mary who loved him beyond all heaven and earth, was some one far away, some one I had been, should be yet again, but was not now; some one else whom the present-moment

"I" could contemplate from the outside, but from the inside not at all.

Thus there was no sense of conflict or contradiction. Simple souls say: You cannot love two people at once. Shrewder souls add: Not in the same way. Both miss the point, ignore the real mystery: that *you* is two folks and not one, a divine self and a human self: with two loves accordingly, a human love and a divine love. At the selfsame moment of time the two selves cannot both be in possession, and the two loves cannot be felt together. There is no clash and no conflict.

I reasoned out my hope. That the real Robbie, when I met him, would conquer utterly the human me, win all my liking, answer all my needs. Real Robbie and Dream Robbie would become one: real Mary and dream Mary would become one. Love would be everywhere, the two selves would mingle and make at last one Mary, the world would be revealed—God was in me, around me—I am the Universe—. There are no words....

But if chance—I dared not say Death—decreed that in this world I should never see Robbie? Then the human liking and earthly possibility could never merge into the divine romance. The quest my soul was created for would be over: Eternity would not be Love. Yet, I was a woman—and I loved the word "marry"—and the Stranger was my chief human liking and earthly possibility—and this world's happiness was worth possessing even though emptiness lay beyond.

So if Robbie is not given to you, said Reason, the Stranger will be a glorious second-best. "Glorious Second-Best." dinned Reason in my heart, and a

whole crowd took up the echo: snobbery and sanity, and pride and probability, and intellectual sympathy and physical delight.

But first I would search the world for Robbie.

* * * * * * *

Suddenly my heart learned that Robbie, wherever he was, knew that I was musing thus: knew that I was toying with notions of Tawborough, and over *his* deathbed was meditating eventual treason. Suddenly my heart understood how his own was aching. The magnitude of my vileness sickened me. I could find no sleep, nor heart to sleep. All night I heard him crying out, saw his dear face wistful with doubt. I told him it was not true, that I loved him and him only. He did not hear me; I could not make him hear me; I knew that his heart was still aching.

I got out of bed, wrapped my dressing-gown around me, went through into the boudoir, and wrote in my Diary this following letter. (The inkpot was empty, and even if I had had the courage to take my candle and to go through the long dark corridor and down the stairs in search of ink, I should not have gone. For time was precious. I knew that, magically, each word as I wrote it would bring ease and comfort to Robbie somewhere far away, and my heart could not abide that his own should suffer for one moment longer. So I snatched a pencil, glad for Robbie's sake to mar the neat inky well-beloved uniformity of my eight years' diaries, and scrawled feverishly at the frantic dictation of my passionate heart. Today, as I copy, the pencil is faded, and the page the hardest to decipher in all the record):

*To Robert Grove,*

*Wheresoever You Are, my Dear!—*

How sorrowful you are tonight, how evil am I since I am the cause! But I write post-haste to send you tidings of comfort, to tell you there is no other in my heart but you, to send you my everlasting love. You came to me Christmas Night, and you came for ever. There has been no other, nor ever can. *What can the man do that cometh after the king?*

My friend who is causing you such grief, you know who he is—tho' 'tis nine years now since the moment I knew you—tho' you have never seen him nor (in earthly way) even heard his name—I know that you know. He is Lord Tawborough, my cousin and my benefactor, and my very dear friend, tho' much older and cleverer than I. But do understand, dear Robbie, that the respect and affection in which I hold him are *only* the reflection of his generosity and loving kindness to me. It is he who gave me my education, gave me my good fortune, who has always been far, far too kind to me. And now that, here in this land, I have met with him again, I like him better than ever. How could I not?

There is "like" for him and for you my whole girl's aching LOVE. Even when I am looking at my kind

friend's face, suddenly I will stop the working of my mind and will turn to look for you, trying to grope out where in this world at the exact moment you are; and God always helps me to make a picture which I know is near reality. At this moment I can see you—vaguely—dreamily—in a bright city whose name I do not know, but where often I have sojourned in dreams. I cannot actually *touch* you now: for our meeting-place is not in cities or houses or streets or fields; rather we go to meet each other in the skies and oh! Robbie! my spirit! my soul! what a meeting we have, how happy, how jubilant, how full of the glory which is not of the earth, unutterable, something I cannot speak, or say, or write; something only which tears my heart into a thousand particles of agony, which is the divinest, wildest, fiercest, holiest, sweetest joy of all. The agony of love, Robbie, how it wounds! The moments when, in vision, I cannot invoke your face, how cruelly long they seem! Then betimes your dear face forms among the mists of all my wildness and restlessness and smiles upon me in a peace that is infinite, and passeth all men's understanding. Now, Robbie, know that this is no earthly thing I have, you have, but a thing entirely

of the soul, a gift entirely of God. It should leave us tolerant and truthful, ever knowing that no other friends (however dear) can ever endanger it, even conceive of its meaning; and ever waiting for its supreme fulfilment.

Can I have this for any but you? Can any but you have this for me? Why, my Robbie, can you ask?

I stretch out my arms through the unknown to reach you. I would comfort you, cover you with eternal kisses. Stretch your dear arms out too, put them around me, crush me against your breast.

Come to me now, and come to me soon for the time that will be for ever.

Mary of Christmas Night.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII: DEATHBED

For over a year I was alone in the great empty château with my dreams.

I ate and slept, and took walks in the park and the country-lanes; I comforted the ever-shrivelling Countess; I read incessantly. But I did not live. The

life of my soul was sometimes in the past, chiefly in the future, in the present not at all. By deliberate endeavour I made the present even less than it would have been, by encouraging myself to experience no emotion except in my dreamings, to take no interest in the small daily happenings (they were very small) of my Villebecq daily life, to remember that for me Life would begin at the moment when Vision and Reality became one. Till then the years were wasting. Time marked time. (Perhaps the real horror of Eternity—Time marking time for ever, with no Love beyond?)

In her reply to my birthday-letter Aunt Martha had omitted any reference to Robbie. It was a cruel disappointment. Probably she knew nothing, or had ignored or forgotten my query, thinking the postscript merely the casual after-thought it pretended to be, hardly calling for answer? Or perhaps, in a moment of intuition, such as might come even to Aunt Martha once in a way, she had divined the truth, and had deliberately omitted to reply?

After a while, the longing to get on the track of Robbie's this-world whereabouts—to hasten his Second Coming—became unbearable, and on Christmas Day 1869, being the Tenth Anniversary, I wrote to Aunt Martha again. I made the most of "A Happy New Year," and of the anxiety which I had for some months been beginning to feel as to my Grandmother's health and as to whether I ought not soon to be coming back to Devonshire once for all. Again, with beating heart, I penned the carefully thought-out afterthought. "By-the-way, I fancy I asked you once before, tho' can't remember your telling me anything on the point. Do you ever have

news of Robert Grove who lived with you ten years ago, when I did? I sometimes think about him—he was a nice boy—and sometimes wonder where he is or what he may be doing?"

Was it by malice or accident that she consigned her barren response to the cry of my aching heart to a P.S. also? "You ask about Robert Grove: I have heard nothing of him for years. He must be a young man of 21 now."

Wretched woman! Well, I could wait no longer, I would go home and find him for myself. The main news in Aunt Martha's letter urged me to a like resolve:—"Mother and Aunt," she said, "are both ageing. Although Mother would never let you know it herself; also for fear of bringing to an end your life abroad, which she knows has been abundantly blessed to you—yet I know she would like you back."

I made up my mind at once—need for Robbie made the duty-call to my Grandmother's side clear and insistent—and told the weeping Countess within the hour.

Though her health was no better, Elise de Florian had at last decided to come home. When I wrote and told her I was returning to England, she replied that she would forward her plans and come back to Normandy at once. For the first few months after her departure she had ignored my existence except for formal courtesies in her infrequent letters to her mother. Then, suddenly, she had begun to write, and soon the letters were as friendly, as unhappy, and as passionate as the long talks in the old days together. I forgave her before I was half-way through the first

letter, and had for some time been doing battle with Pride as to whether I should tell her how much I wanted to see her again.

She returned with Gabrielle one bitter January morning. I kissed her blue-pale forehead, and, as I gazed at the drawn ever-unloved face, felt for a moment bitterly ashamed of Love's triumphant futures that I hoped to garner in my own heart. That night I prayed God in His mercy to send her what her heart cried out for, knowing all the while that somehow God Himself could not grant my petition. I knew—understood physically—that Elise was a woman damned into the world to excite no supreme love in any heart; knew that if I were a man I could not love her, knew that God had given her life without power to win the one good this life can give.

Next morning she was too frail to rise. At first we were hopeful, and put everything down to the fatigues of the long journey. As day succeeded day, however, and she was each day wearier, neither we nor she could elude the truth the doctor was whispering: that Mademoiselle was in the last and rapid stages of a decline.

One night I was lying in bed reading by candle-light. The door softly opened. My heart stopped. She stood there in a long white night-gown, trembling in the cold air, bare-footed, ghastly pale. There was something in the eyes that awed me.

"I am dying now," she said. Her voice was low, melodious, and as though from far-away; from another place, another body, another soul. "Some one must kiss me once—love me once, properly, before I go. Will you, Mary?"

I had jumped out of bed. I wrapped my dressing-gown round her, and supporting her cold and tottering body led her back to her own room, and comforting her all the while got her back into bed, and slipped down gently beside her.

I pressed her tenderly to me and told her a dozen foolish times that she would soon be better.

"No"—she spoke in English as I did—"it is over. I wish it had been over long ago. I had a heart that could have loved the world, but no one loved me in return. I shall die a good Catholic, but religion has never given me comfort—never what it has given you. I loved my little sister: but it was all one-sided, and that is not Love at all. Love is when the getting and the giving are equal, when the two bodies change souls. There is only love. Poor little Suzanne, she could not help it. I could never have seen in her eyes what I longed for her to see in mine. Oh, the need for some one to love me; sometimes my poor heart could have burst. I was not wanted in the world. I was—not—wanted."

The sentences came oddly, disjointedly, further and further apart.

For some moments she had not spoken. Then, suddenly, her arms tightened round me in supreme yearning; she placed her lips hard upon mine in an embrace of ultimate passionate sadness; her body trembled violently, and then, in a swift second, was still.

The lips were cold. My arms were round a corpse. I freed myself, got up, lit a candle.

The old misery had for ever left her eyes, which were

happy, and full of love. I closed them reverently, kissed each lid as I closed it, and went out to awaken the household.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX: END OF THREE VISIONS: THE STRANGER'S

Immediately after the funeral, I left the desolate Château, the desolate Countess, the country of France soon to be made desolate, and, after nearly four years' absence, returned to my native land.

On Southampton Quay Lord Tawborough awaited me.

I saw him from the boat before I landed, and he saw me. I braved myself for the greeting: I would be pleasant, natural, would look him frankly in the eyes. I came down the little landing-bridge, we shook hands, for one half-instant of time I looked into his eyes; then self-consciousness and joy rolled through me like a tide, my heart beat unreasonably, I forgot who or where I was. When I got over the worst of it, I was conscious of how foolish I had been, and I flushed to think what he might be thinking. I still dared not look. He was busying himself with my luggage. We got into a cab, into a train....

If it was not love that filled me, what was it? If it was not love that I had seen for that swift second in his eyes, what was its name? Or was I once more judging others by my romantic self-conscious self,

lending them looks and emotions they had never sought to borrow? Yet had he made this journey to Southampton for cousinship's sake, or through courtesy to my Grandmother, or for my mother's sake—or for any sake but mine? I knew that he had not. Then I must tell him I was "another's." How—without absurdity, immodesty? For I did not know, by any solid sign or certain token, that he loved me at all. He sat in the corner of the carriage reading his newspaper. I sat in my corner reading mine—the first English newspaper I had ever touched.

It was the last stage of our journey; we had changed at Exeter on to the North Devon line. He suddenly threw his newspaper aside and looked me bravely in the face, though he could not completely master his trembling eyes.

"Well, Miss Traies" (my name since my twenty-first birthday, when the lawyers had slain Miss Lee), "what are your plans? What are you going to do with your life? What is the program?" Would-be banteringly.

"You know," I replied. "I am coming home to help and look after my Grandmother and my Great-Aunt."

"They are old."

"So will you be one day."

"Perhaps I am old already. Do not mock at my poor grey hairs! But I wonder if I want to wait until I am as old as your Great-Aunt for some one to look after me. Young men want looking after, Miss Traies, as well as old women. Old age is lonely, but youth is lonelier. Perhaps there are younger folk than your good Grandmother and Great-Aunt whom you could

help. There are men in the world too."

"I know," I said, realizing that in speaking aloud of my love of Robbie for the first time in all the years I should be doing the kindest thing to my dear friend the Stranger, and should at the same time be bringing that love magically nearer reality. For if I spoke of him, he was real: to utter his name to another human being made him suddenly part of this visible world. From this uttering of his name to meeting him was but a matter of hours—days. Devon was a little place: green fields and red loam flashed quickly past: as I spoke of him I saw him coming nearer. "I know—maybe there *is* a man in the world I shall help—help him for all his life."

I could not look.

"Do I know him?" he asked. His voice was odd, toneless: steadied by supernatural effort: nearest despair, though still caressing hope.

"No," I replied shortly.

In the silence that followed I could see nothing, think nothing; hear nothing but my own negation ringing in my ears, harsher and more brutal as each second passed.

My cruelty filled me with exquisite pity: the insolent eternal offering from the soul that is not suffering to the soul that is. Poor heart, it could not be! My eyes were my chief difficulty: but the carriage window held resources. He went back to his *Times*.

Odd, crowding sensations overcame me as the train drew up in Tawborough station, the same to which,

once upon a time, Satan Had Come—and the North Devon odour (western, immemorial, unmistakable: the smell of broad tidal rivers that are the sea, yet not the sea) filled my nostrils. We drove across the bridge: for the first moment the bright town spread out before me across the river wore the cardboard strangeness of a foreign land. There was an almost imperceptible instant of confusion, while my senses adjusted themselves to the changed physical world, and then the buildings around me—we had crossed the bridge by now—seemed normal, inevitable; and France was a dream I had to struggle to remember.

The same odd moment of physically-felt spiritual adjustment was repeated at the house, where my Grandmother stood at the gate of Number Eight to greet me. It was not so much that she was frailer, thinner, older, it was that she was a different person, or rather that the I who now beheld her was a different person from the I who had known her before, and to the new me she was a new creature. As I kissed her the years rolled back, my own self changed, and she was Grandmother of old.

Inside the house the strangeness and the same return were again repeated, this time less perceptibly. On the morrow I went very slowly over the whole house, remaining for some time in each room and staring at every corner and every article of furniture, while I summoned back to me all the ancient happenings that connected me with each. Here was Aunt Jael's front parlour, a little yellower, a little darker, a little dingier than of old. There on the floor by the window was the row of dismal etiolated plants, each in its earth-begrimed saucer. There was her bluebeard cupboard; I opened it, and a smell of decayed fruits and stale sweetmeats escaped;

probably no one had been near it for months. There was a jar of ginger, and a French-plum jar. I got as far as handling the lids, but no further: what new flaming letters might not be writ within? Besides, the plums were probably bad, while I never *really* cared for ginger. There too was the door that once had opened, through which a face of nameless horror once had peeped. There was Lord Benamuckee.

Here was the dining-room, with horsehair furniture and Axminster carpet perhaps shabbier than I remembered them, this room which all through my childhood, even too through my year in France, and in all my life since, has always,—in those moments when I behold myself from outside, when my soul flies away from my body and looks down upon it from afar—been the visual setting and earthly ambience of Mary. Here was the kitchen where Mrs. Cheese had lived, where Robinson Crewjoe had stealthily been born, where my love for scrubbing floors had for ever died. Here was the blue attic, cold, barren, airless; heavy with memories—of misery and cruelty and tears.

After a few nights' dreams in my old bedroom—confused visions of the Château and Fouquier and Elise and Napoleon—the four years of France became literally no more than a dream in my memory. I remembered them rather from the morning's impressions of these nightly visions than from the actual happenings themselves. If indeed they were actual happenings. For frequently I could not be sure, and would fancy that all the complex visions of the life in France had come to me in sleep: until Calendar and Common-Sense convinced me.

Aunt Jael seemed to share my illusions. She would

ask me sometimes where I had been, and rail at me for "stopping out" so long, treating my absence as one of hours rather than years. Never, at any rate after the first day or two, did she treat me as though my life at Bear Lawn had been anything but continuous. I treated her likewise, swiftly forgetting the first moment of contact when (as with my Grandmother) she had seemed to me so much smaller, swarthier, dryer, older than in my memory: a stranger who immediately, imperceptibly, became familiar once again. She rarely got out of bed now, and her voice was huskier and less authoritative than of old. But she cursed and railed and threatened almost as bravely as ever. I alone had really changed, and wondered sometimes at the earlier Mary who had taken this bad old woman's imprecations so bitterly to heart. My new heart was too full of the hopes of love to feed on the broodings of hate. Moreover, though the faithful thorned stick lay on the coverlet ready to hand for use it never struck out at me now, and the poor villainous veteran saw no service reminiscent of his ancient glory save floor-thumpings to summon meals—or Mary. I neither feared her nor hated her. I pitied her.

Some weeks before, Mrs. Cheese had been taken ill and had gone back to her friends in the country. About the same time Aunt Jael had taken permanently to her bed, and my Grandmother, who was herself rapidly failing, had had to attend to her sister and do the household work. Sister Briggs came to help in the kitchen in the mornings, and Simeon Greeber charitably allowed Aunt Martha to come over for the day on one or two occasions; but the two old women—the two dying old women—were virtually alone in the big house, with my Grandmother, probably the weaker of the two,

struggling against pain, and against the fatigue which marks the journey's end, to keep on her feet for her sister's sake. I realized how selfish I had been not to have come sooner: except that in France another old woman had needed me almost as much.

"I'm glad 'eo've come, my dearie," said my Grandmother on the night of my return. "God has dealt very lovingly with me; but I am full of years, and 'tis time for me to go. I have finished the work He gave me to do. I was waiting for 'ee to come back, my dearie: now I can go Home."

I was sobbing.

"Don't 'ee," she reproved gently. "There is no place for sorrow. Heaven is near, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

One strange day I remember: the last valiant effort of Aunt Jael to revive the splendour of her stark imperial days. Glory and Salvation were old and frail now, especially Glory, and for a year and more, the Empress' famous Tuesdays had been abandoned.

"There'll be a last one," declared Aunt Jael, and one Tuesday morning when she felt stronger than usual, decreed a Final Feast. After dinner, which in the regular way I had taken to her in her bed, I helped her to dress, and got her down into the old armchair. Then, as bidden, I sallied forth, hired a cab, drove to Brother Brawn's (robing-house for Jordan) upon the Quay, and after infinite delay, while Glory made minutest traditional preparations with goat's milk, rusks and bags, haled those two mad old Christian women to Number Eight.

"Our last foregathering on earth," chuckled my Great-

Aunt brightly throughout the afternoon.

Death was discussed till tea-time: with dogmatic satisfaction by Aunt Jael, with vulgar self-assurance by Salvation, with mystical hope by Glory, with reverent delight by my Grandmother.

"Though Death, mind 'ee, is a pain," said Salvation; wagging her head sagely.

"Nay, 'tis a portal," corrected Glory.

"Yes," said my Grandmother, "a portal to the Life Everlasting."

The Life Everlasting. *Yet I looked and saw joy in the four old faces.*

Glory was absolved her corner penitence for this Last Tea, and the five of us sat down when I had laid the table and got the meal ready.

Immediately a row began. Now saying grace was a strictly regulated detail of the Tuesday ritual. Decades of dispute had not enabled Aunt Jael to oust my Grandmother from an equal share in this privilege in our ordinary daily life alone, and a compromise had obtained through all the years I remember whereby Aunt Jael asked the blessing before breakfast and dinner, and Grandmother before tea and supper. But on Tuesdays, with two guests to be reckoned with, both of whom were as eager in pre-prandial "testimony" as their hostesses, the position was more complicated. Though sometimes challenged, the rule of taking turns Tuesday by Tuesday in saying grace, had gradually become established: a childish and democratic arrangement which can have been little to Aunt Jael's taste, but which, despite occasional bickerings, was accepted as

early as I can remember.

It was for the privilege of asking the blessing at this Last Tea, this ultimate spread, that the dispute now arose. Grandmother and Glory took no part, but Aunt Jael and Salvation each swore it was her turn.

"We'll all ask a blessing," finally proposed my Grandmother. The suggestion was accepted, and in turn the Four Graces were solemnly declaimed.

Aunt Jael (stentorian, staccato):

"Oh Lord. Thou hast promised grace and glory to Thy Saints. Oh Lord. Change these husks to the fruitful meats of the spirit before our eyes. Support our footsteps to the Table of Thy bounties spread in the wilderness; where true believers may feast among the bones of those who sought Thee to their own destruction. Aymen."

My Grandmother (in a whisper, soft, sibilant):

"Behold us, O Lord of seedtime and harvest, set free from earthly care for a season that we may dwell on the bounties which Thy hand has provided. Thou preparest a table before us in the presence of our enemies (sic). Thy dear mercies now spread before us are many: sanctify them, we beg Thee, to our use, and us to Thy service. Make us ever grateful, and nourish us with the meat of Thy Word. For Jee-sus' sake."

Salvation (noisily; with sticky report, sound of spoon in treacle-jar sharply withdrawn):

"For what us are about to receive, may the Laur make we trewly thankful."

Glory (gauntly):

"Bless er-er-er these er-er-er meats!"

And we set to.

Grandmother prayed with me continually. She was too old to kneel. Propped up on her pillows, she would take my head upon her heart as I half-lay half-leant upon her bed. My vanity, my worldliness, my imperilled soul were the unvarying theme.

One night she stopped sharply in the middle of her prayer.

"Your soul, my dear, is not praying with me. The Lord tells me that at this moment your mind is on fleshly things. Look at the eyes of 'ee! You're hankering after earthly glory, after high station in this worldly life."

Then, after a moment's pause, shrewdly: "Has any one ever proposed to 'ee to give 'ee another station in life?"

"No. What do you mean, Grandmother? Who?"

"Nothing. Maybe no one." And she resumed her prayer.

I was more careful in pretending to listen, but ceased to listen at all. I was trying—with the conscientious, artificially lashed-up desperation of the egotistical soul that sees for a moment its own nakedness—to visualize what the Stranger's misery and hunger must be like if by some wild chance ("It is so," God shouted in my heart) he loved me, not as I loved him, but as I loved Robbie. Ah no, it could not be. There is never a love like our own.

" ... Send her *Thy* love. For *Jee*-sus' sake. Aymen."

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## CHAPTER XL: END OF THREE VISIONS: NAPOLEON'S

Soon Grandmother followed Aunt Jael, and took to her bed permanently. One Lord's Day evening I helped her upstairs for the last time.

My life was now spent in the two bedrooms where my Great-Aunt and Grandmother lay, and in crossing the corridor from one to the other as Aunt Jael's voice or my own sense of Grandmother's need alternatively summoned me. In the one room I was chiefly cursed at, in the other principally prayed for.

Sister Briggs came in most days to give me help in the kitchen; even so I found it a heavy task to do the whole work of the big house and to feed and mind and minister to two bedridden old women. But I preferred it to the heavy idleness of Villebecq: found waiting upon others more natural, more agreeable, more self-righteously satisfactory, than being waited upon. There was the pride of humility, the unctuous flattery of fatigue.

I never went out of doors except to Market and (for Breaking of Bread only) to Meeting. I had the lonely livelong day in which to work and to think of Robbie. Here I was back in Devon, the Devon where I had met him, the Devon where he lived: was I any whit the nearer finding him? My brain revolved in a

futile circle of planlessness and hope: as usual, my imperial imagination failed cravenly when face to face with need for practical endeavour. The only plan I could decide upon was to broach the subject to Aunt Martha next time she should come over from Torribridge, to ask her brazenly for the address of the family in South Devon and the surname of Uncle Vivian, and then to write direct for news of my Beloved. It was high time Aunt Martha came over again—she had not been near her mother's bedside for a fortnight and more. When would she come?

My only other interest during these days was in the tremendous drama being enacted in the country I had just left. Unknown to my Grandmother I took in the *Times* newspaper daily, and had French ones specially sent to me. I followed every stage of the war and the political story with a passion that seemed sometimes incongruous in this bare Christian English house. What had Bear Lawn to do with this war?—or any other war? (I forgot that it had been built for barracks in the other Napoleon's day; that maybe redcoats who had seen and smashed Boney had slept and sworn in each familiar room.)

"Shall I tell you anything about the war?" I asked my Grandmother one evening. "There is only one war," she replied, "God's war with evil."

I was so infinitely more interested in persons than things, in the players than in the play, that never at any stage of these events across the Channel did I much reflect on their mighty political significance: how the Ruler of Europe who, through centuries, had lived in Paris, would live from this time onwards in Berlin; or how, together with the sword the last French Emperor handed to the first German Emperor

at Sedan, he was handing also the secular leadership of civilization. I could only think of the hunch-shouldered suffering wretch who proffered the sword.

His lady, too, was an object-lesson for would-be empresses. Though if her fate was unambiguous, as the Lord's lessons are, the fashion in which she faced it was more doubtful, as History is. Some accounts spoke of her bravery: how calm and queenly she was while the savage mob in the Tuileries garden shrieked "Dethronement!" and would have torn her limb from limb—others of her cowardice: how cravenly she scuttled away at the first approach of realities, where a Maria Theresa would have driven hardily through the streets and by courage effected a revulsion of the people's feeling. Her Good-bye, how touching!—the last sad glance at the well-loved rooms in which for seventeen imperial years she had reigned, the thought for others, the dignified tears, the bitter "In France no one has the right to be unfortunate!" wrung from her anguished soul—*or*—the stealthy selfish escape under the protection of foreigners, the abandonment of others, the skulking anxiety for her own skin only, the well-filled purse. The candid selfishness: "Do not think of me, think only of France"—*or*—the uneasy self-righteousness: "Have I not done my duty to the end?" "Yes, Madam": "I am on your arm" (to the Italian Ambassador): "Am I trembling?" "No, Madam, you are not trembling." "What more could I have done?": "Nothing, Madam."

How loving a wife she had been in the dark preceding weeks! In an agony of fear for her beloved husband's life if he should return to Paris, how she had sent him hourly telegrams, messages of aching anxiety and forethought and tenderness, to dissuade

him from the project,—*or*—to keep him away from the Capital at all costs, since his return would put an end to her power, her Regency, the wreaking of her spites and vendettas, her even darker ambitions. How many hours of unrecorded prayer had she not spent with God!—praying for the sweet Emperor's safety—*or*—for the stray bullet that would achieve her ends.

France was ungrateful, France who had paid for her food and her follies for seventeen squandering years. And the journals were indiscriminating, to print such varying tales. And events were unkind, to give the poor later historian so embarrassing a choice between black and white and every colour between. But Fate was just, to turn his wheel abruptly against this over-fortunate woman; or unjust, maybe, to visit with spite so calamitous one who was no eviller or vainer than almost any other woman of us would have been in her place—no worse than *you*, Mary Lee.

No worse than me: granted. But in what way different from me, then, to have deserved those incomparable years? Ah, well, she would pay for them now: God gets even.

The place of pity is where Fate turns upon a nobler soul. I suffered with this gentle unscrupulous Man who had woo'd Ambition through the last dismal stages on the road where Ambition ends. A Bonaparte at the back of his armies, slinking from defeat to defeat. Bodily pain so monstrous that it could only be borne with the help of morphia injected every few hours by the sombre-faced young doctor who did duty for glittering aide-de-camp. A rudderless wretch, dragged at the heels of "his" army

like so much tawdry baggage, a crowned camp-follower, a commander without a command; flaunted by his officers, mocked by his soldiers, cajoled, disowned and threatened by his wife; not daring to return to his capital, not daring to show himself to his troops: shrinking back in the gorgeous Imperial carriage from the hisses of the townspeople in the cities of France he was abandoning to the foe, and the lewd and horrible insults of the troops. A hunchback haggard doll.

For Sedan he rouged himself. Why not? The play had lasted for eighteen years, and the hollow cheeks needed new cosmetics for the final scene. He quitted the stage with excruciating agony of soul and body, with painted dignity, with eternal inseparable calm. Nothing in his reign became him like the leaving it.

Vanity seeks ambition, and the end of ambition is Vanity. There is only love.

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## CHAPTER XLI: END OF THREE VISIONS: MINE

Before writing to Aunt Martha I waited for the moment in my aged kinswomen's increasing weakness when Conscience told me it was for their sakes only I was summoning her, and not for my own.

It was the second night after she had come. The hour was late, as Grandmother and Aunt Jael had been

long in getting to sleep. Aunt Martha and I were sitting down to a bite of supper in the lamp-lit dining-room. All day I had been praying for boldness of heart and steadiness of voice that I might ask her my question. I stared now at her listless faded face. I was already moistening my lips for my introductory "I say, Aunt Martha—" or "By the way—."

Telepathy is true, or Coincidence longer-armed than Fate. I had not spoken the words; she took them out of my mouth.

"Oh, young Robert Grove: I forgot. Simeon heard he was dead—died nine years ago, I believe. Poor young fellow, how soon gone! How one longs to know that all was well with him before he died—."

I sat, staring.

For moments maybe. For Eternity perhaps. I do not know.

My heart was cold, my brain numb. My body and mind were gripped as in a vice; I could not move my head to one side or the other, I could not remove my unseeing eyes from a fixed point in emptiness straight before me; my brain could not work, could seek no details of where or when or why, could not move from one cramped corner of agony, in which it must listen ceaselessly to a far-away voice repeating "Robbie is dead. Robbie is dead. Robbie is dead."

I was nearly unconscious: there was no me left to be conscious. As in a dream I remember Aunt Martha being kind, being fussy, pleading, advising, exhorting, appealing. I would not, could not move. I sat in the same chair, in the same posture, staring, staring at nothing; speaking, speaking to no one.

"Robbie is dead. Robbie is dead."

After a while Aunt Martha seemed to have gone. The lamp was still burning. Very slowly, through the hours of that eternal night, the meaning of what had happened entered my heart; broke my heart.

Grey morning light was entering the room. I got up from the chair, stiff and cramped after my long unmoving vigil, went up to my bedroom, discovered my diary in its secret haunt, brought the *Times*-wrapped exercise-book downstairs again with me, blew out the lamp, and in the dim light of the autumn dawn, sat down amid the uncleared supper things to pen my last entry:—

> "I am writing this at five o'clock on Lord's Day morning at the most miserable moment of my life. I have been up all night. I have not slept. I don't know how it happened: unless God, in His cruelty, heard the unspoken question in my heart and answered it through Aunt Martha's witless mouth. 'Oh, young Robert' she began—my heart stopped beating—'I forgot'! I could not have guessed what was coming, have guessed that his presence all these years was a lie, a vanity of my own creating. *Dead.* It was so terrible that I could not feel it soon, did not understand for a long time what it meant. My heart was broken; but did not understand. It is here, alone in the long night, that I have found out what it is. I can hardly see to write

for my tears. What I feel, I cannot write. It is the cruellest thing (save creating me) that God has done to me; God who damned me into the world, hated, loveless. I have lived a life such as few girls—cowering, haunted, passionate; utterly unloving, unloved utterly. Then I loved this dark-haired boy on that Christmas Night when—more surely even than on Thy Jordan morning with me, O Lord God!—in tears and happiness I was BORN AGAIN. And ever since, in endless vision, with my soul and brain and body, I have been faint with loving him, and memory has kindled hope and hope excelled memory, and I have thanked the Lord God even for His nameless gift of immortality,—for it would be immortality with Robbie. God, I thought, had paid me for the unhappiness in which He had created me: He had given me Robbie. Year after year his heart was with me. I was gladder and more radiant than the ordinary happy woman could be. My heart sang aloud with my love.

"And now it is gone. It burns my heart as salt tears are burning my lashes. I understand. Love was never meant for me. I was conceived in hate. I shall die in hate. God gave me the wildest-loving soul He could fashion, and I kept it for my dear

one only. And now my beloved is gone, gone to his long home, and the light is gone out of my life. For him there is no immortality: immortality is only for the damned. Sorrow is older than laughter, and sorrow alone lives. My lovely boy is dead for ever; I thank God only for this, that he has spared him Eternity. And I, who loved him, must live on for ever alone: alone through all the merciless eternal years—oh, Christ Jesus on the Cross, strike me dead now, abolish the universe, abolish Thyself—ah Robbie, Robbie, come back.

"No, it is no good. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. For me it shall be weeping-time and mourning-time for ever. Joy and laughter are for other folk. I shall go, as I knew I must, the way of all my people, the way of bitterness and loneliness, the way of my Mother. (Mother dear, will God strive to keep us apart in Eternity?) I shall find no happiness under the sun; nor in heaven—nor hell—afterwards. The visions of the past can comfort me no more; for they were but phantoms of my own creating. This past year when night after night he has come to my body and soul, it was not he who came at all—his bright body was rotting in the grave

(where? since when?)—but a cruel sham of Christ's, a silly clockwork presence born of my own love and hunger, a cowardly trick God played upon me.

"My beloved, there is Eternity and the grave between us. I cannot, dare not, conjure up your vision. In memory only, I will go back once, for the last time, to Christmas of long ago, feel your gentle dead arms around me, and kiss you Good-night and Good-bye.

MARY LEE."

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## CHAPTER XLII: TWIN DEATHBEDS

Grandmother and Aunt Jael were failing every hour. On the afternoon of the morrow of my misery old Doctor le Mesurier took me aside—I was the mistress now—and told me that for both of them it was only a matter of days.

"Which will be the first?" I asked him, between tears.

"I should not like to say."

"'Tis a close race, my dearie," was the way my Grandmother put it when, a few minutes later, I

went upstairs to cry my heart out by her side: "a close race to glory, and the odds are even."

She smiled, with a tender frivolity that was new to me. New too was this form and manner of speech.

Both she and Aunt Jael knew that the end was near. I got a nurse the same evening, who took turns with me throughout the night, crossing from one bedroom to the other. I could not forget my own grief, but had little time to remember it. I was so dead-tired when I got to my bed that, almost for the first time in my life, there was no long waking-time: the breeding-time of misery and fear.

Aunt Jael developed jaundice, also a bronchial cough. She was soon too weak and suffering to be her own unpleasant self. The Devil, however, as late as four days before the end, made a last desperate struggle for the soul that had so long been His. It was one evening; I had brought the last beef-tea for the night, changed the hot-water jar, straightened her pillows and put everything right. Suddenly, without warning, she dashed the cup, full of the steaming liquid, into my face, which it cut and scalded; screaming the while like a mad thing. She was a vile, a repulsive sight. With her toothless hairy face distorted with rage, foul also with the dark-yellowish taint of the jaundice; with her beady black eyes gleaming savagely, her immense nose, her crested nightcap, she looked like some obscene monster, half-bird, half-witch. She clutched the ancient stick, slashed out at me savagely-feebly; her failure to hurt me bringing her to the last livid agony of rage. She screamed, grimaced, dribbled: "Ingrate, minx, harlot —oh, I'll kill 'ee, you and yer wicked idle Grandmother. I'll—." She was cut short by a fit of

violent coughing. She lay back sweating with pain, almost unconscious with hate, her face too loathsome to behold. She was possessed of the Devil.

Drawn by the noise, the nurse came hurriedly from my Grandmother's room. But already Satan was cast out; now she was sobbing, grunting, wailing, in a maudlin pitiful way. For a moment our eyes met. I saw shame there, and my heart quickened towards her. "Never mind, Aunt. You had a nightmare. It is over now."

In the opposite bedroom, the end drew gentlier near. In her less painful hours, my Grandmother was livelier than I had ever known her. With the scent of Death's nostrils in the room, she grew skittish, gay, worldly. She gave me droll winks and knowing smiles, as she recounted pranks of eighty years ago: mighty jam-stealing forays, ginger *battues*, historic bell-ringing expeditions; tremendous truantries, twelve-year-old amours.

"Grandmother," I said gravely (I was the godly parent now and she the child) "you've waited a long time to tell me this!" For a moment genuine priggery, and sour remembrance of the blows meted out for my own lean escapades, hindered my joining in her brazen glee. Then we laughed together till we cried.

"Ah, they were happy days," she said, wiping her eyes. "My unsaved days," she added, the holy familiar tone coming into her voice, "the days before I found the Lord."

Then she fell to talking of the Faith, and for the first and last time in her life spoke critically of the ways of the Lord's People.

"They do too much for them that are saved already, and too little to bring in them that are lost. 'Tain't the Lord's precept at all. 'Remember the ninety-and-nine.'"

As in everything, my Grandmother was right. Apart from the Foreign Field, our people make small stir to rescue the perishing. That, they feel, is not the business of religion: which is not so much to reclaim sinners as to edify saints, not to fight the Devil but to worship God. Thus they are in sharpest contrast with the later nineteenth-century evangelism, with its hordes of professional missioners—mountebanks, gipsies, Jews—its Transatlantic sensationalism and sentimentalism, its hysterical appeals to the spiritual egotism of the individual, its sinner hunts, its spectacular war with Satan.

Though they are not always free from the danger of spiritual pride, it may at least be said of our people that they worship the Lord in a quieter holier way, that they practise the fast-vanishing art of personal religion. Yet my Grandmother was right: "It is the sinners that Christ came to save. 'Remember the ninety-and-nine!'"

One morning I found Aunt Jael greatly changed. Her eyes were gentler than ever before, her face more peaceful.

I could see she had been waiting for me.

"Child," she said quickly, "is your Grandmother awake?" Her voice was soft.

"I haven't been in yet. I always come to you first. The nurse is with her."

"Go and see. I must speak to her."

"Speak to her, Aunt? You mean you want me to give her a message."

"No, Child. I must speak to her with my own voice. Go first and find whether she is awake."

"Yes," I reported.

"Now then. Open the door wide. Yes—now put that chair against it, so it can't swing to. Now go and do likewise with your Grandmother's door. First move me right to the edge of the bed—thank 'ee! There!" I propped her up amid her pillows.

Then with Grandmother and her door I did the same. (The nurse was downstairs.)

Though the two old women could not see each other, despite the width of the passage their faces cannot have been more than seven yards apart. Grandmother's deafness had increased with her years, but today, helped out now and then with a word from me, she heard everything. I stood just inside Grandmother's room, watching her face, and listening to Aunt Jael, whose voice was calm and clear.

"Can you hear me, Hannah?"

"Yes, Jael."

"Well, sister, I haven't many hours to go. The Lord is calling, but I've this to say to 'ee first. These eighty years we've been together I've been a hard sister to 'ee. These eighty years I've been a sinner. 'Ee 've been a loving forgiving woman, and I've been a bad and selfish one: full o' pride and wickedness. Before I go,

I want to hear 'ee with your own lips say as 'ee forgive me, as maybe the Lord in His mercy will too —"

A fit of coughing cut her short. Her pride she had torn into shreds. Grandmother was sobbing with joy.

"Don't 'ee talk so, my dear! I've nothing to forgive 'ee."

"Hannah woman, 'tis not so. Come, oh say 'ee forgive me." The old woman was eager, desperate: pleading against time, against Eternity.

"I forgive 'ee," said my Grandmother.

The same evening Aunt Jael died in her sleep. The face was not ugly in death; the mouth was still hard and proud, but the eyes were serene.

She won the glory-race by just seven days. After this brief space of time—the same span as between my birth and my mother's death—my Grandmother followed.

It was the day after Aunt Jael's funeral. Towards the end she called me Rachel. At the very last she sat up in bed, gazed at me with a tenderness already radiant with the glory of the City of Heaven.

"I'm journeying away, Rachel,—up yonder. Mary is there. Can't 'ee see her, Rachel? What is the veil between 'ee?—I can see 'ee both. Look! There is New Jerusalem. The King in His Glory. Her words. Come —"

She fell back. I caught her in my arms. My soul could not follow.

# CHAPTER XLIII: ONE LONG PRERCESSION O' DEATHBEDS

About this time, indeed, persons in the play of Mary Lee were dying Hamletwise. One after another, swiftly, bodies were being trundled off the stage.

Aunt Jael's leadership of the Seven Old Maids of Tawborough was maintained in death. It was edifying to note that just as sixty years ago they had briskly emulated her Conversion, now with equal alacrity they followed her to her Home above.

Within three months Miss Glory Clinker departed. One February morning she went away; wide-eyed, stuttering, triumphant. I heard her last words. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand—er-er-er." Her eyes lit up; a beatific happiness brightened the kind foolish old face. "Er-er-er—." She was stammering before the Throne.

Of the Seven, Salvation alone survived for long: till her one hundred and fourth year, a few years only before the time at which I write, almost into the new century that is at hand. Her last words were incoherent. I could not catch them, though I tried to.

Pentecost Dodderidge outlived his most famous convert by seven months only. He was in his one hundredth year. A stroke of paralysis came suddenly, followed by a restless ten days, in which he suffered

intense pain and displayed eternal patience, and which he filled with edifying epigrams and godly saws and instances, all reverently collected by the faithful ones around his bed and embodied in his *Choice Sayings*. (The volume is before me as I write.) As the last saved soul to whom he had stood Baptist, and as the grand-niece and grandchild of "those two eminent bright jewels in our Saviour's crown," I was specially in request at the old man's bedside. His last words, spoken clearly and solemnly, with all the actor-like sincerity of his greatest days, were these, each utterance coming a clear moment or two after the other:

"Peace within and rest."

"I have peace with God."

"The Peace of God which passeth all understanding —"

This, his last utterance, was given at about a quarter past eight. Some forty minutes later he passed away: voyaging peacefully to Heaven.

Of another death I knew only by hearsay. It was a Bonapartist intriguer who, just before the dynasty's disaster, had ratted to the Republicans, and in the struggle with the Red Commune of Paris became a spy for the Versaillais. I first saw the name and the bare fact in the French newspapers, but a fuller story reached me in another way. Of the Grand Rouquette, Red gaolers, a cage. A name on a list. One word at the foot: Condemned. A yard, a high wall covered with vines and creepers. A May morning, six priests who died like heroes, filthy insults, levelled rifles.

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. *Fire!* an explosion. A curled-up corpse upon the ground.

His former employer lived a few years longer, keeping Death at bay by sheer fussiness. Her last gesture, Gabrielle wrote me, was a deprecatory shrug of the shoulder; her last (recorded) utterance "Enfin —"

In another, an uglier death than any, the human creature gave way to the passion of extreme sickening fear, to fawning appeals for God's mercy, to every last licence—except the use of the first person singular. I stood outside; Aunt Martha would not let me enter the room for very shame, though I peeped in once and saw the pale face livid with fear, streaming with sweat, contorted with agony of body and soul.

"Forgive, Lord, forgive!" he was whining, "all has been done for Thy sake. One sees one's filthy sinfulness, one sees the error of one's ways—"

Not in such cowardly supplication, but in arrogant prayer, prayer as to an equal, prayer to his young friend God, died a braver, wickeder old man. They found him kneeling against his bed: heart-failure, said the doctor. His face was insolent, beautiful, serene. His soul had strolled disdainfully into Heaven, as a gentleman's should. Among his papers were found two worn photographs; one of my mother, the only one she had ever had taken,

showing her in all the innocent beauty of her maidenhood, the other of myself, taken in France, which, against my will Grandmother had managed to convey to him. On the back of each of them was written, in his hand-writing:—"I have kissed this picture to shreds. They do not know. God knows."

For me, those are his Last Words.

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## CHAPTER XLIV: CHRISTMAS NIGHT

In the slow weeks that followed my Grandmother's death I never came face to face with my own sorrow. My brain told me the sorrow was there, but my will, reinforced by a numbness that possessed my spirit, forbade my facing or feeling it. Never did I dare to summon the vision. It was mockery. It had been a mockery all through.

But the soul lives on, leaves death behind, is the same for ever: can we not be together still, Robbie on the other side of death, Mary on this? The notion came fearfully at first, then boldlier. Dare I try to discover? Does God permit us to love across the grave?—Even so, in my innermost heart, I knew that a love which could bridge the gulf would still be a love not quite completed, since not completed and perfected between us both together here on earth.—Could I then bring him back to life? Instinct intimated and Prayer confirmed. On Christmas Night,

now two or three weeks ahead, I would seek him just as before. Till then I must possess my soul in emptiness.

The literal loneliness of the dead house helped to hush my spirit. There were still some years of the lease of Number Eight to run; I decided for the present to live on there, absolutely alone. With Grandmother's and Aunt Jael's income—all of which save a small legacy to Aunt Martha from the former came to me—added to the little fortune that Great-Uncle John had left me, I was now a young woman of independent means. How different was realization from anticipation. Money could buy me everything, save the only thing in heaven or earth I wanted. Independence liberated me to roam throughout the world, and I remained desolate in this mournful forbidding house, the slave of my sick heart's memories and desires. Sister Briggs continued to come in for the mornings, to help me with the housework and in the kitchen. I had no plans, and, if Christmas failed me, no hopes. I was in a kind of spiritual stupor; I was but half alive. I had nothing to live for, and no hope to seek from death. Death, and then some other existence: but always life—always a Me.

There was, however, at moments, a certain mystical freedom of spirit in this cloistral utter loneliness. After about half-past one, when she had washed up the dinner things, I knew that I was rid of Sister Briggs until the morrow, and I could fill the desolate house with myself. I would wander from empty room to empty room, sit for half-an-hour here, half-an-hour there, pray, read, talk to myself, meditate, most often do nothing at all.

Aunt Jael's front parlour I still shunned, except when the blinds were up and in the broadest daylight, for Benamuckee's eyes could still move, his face still leer. A heathen image, which men in savage forests have worshipped and sacrificed to, can never be quite inanimate wood or stone. The Devil is alive in his likenesses on earth.

The sound of my own voice in the silent echoing rooms brought me time after time to the verge of the old Expectation. I would shout, cry aloud; till the mystery of self was almost discovered, and I ceased praying to God. He was too near.

One day the noise of shouts and supplications brought the next-door neighbour—that same clergyman who that far-off vinous day had been drawn by Aunt Jael's agonies—knocking at the door.

"Er—excuse me. Is any one ill? I fancied I heard cries —"

"Thank you. I am not ill. I am crying to God. Thank you all the same. Good-morning."

The healing power of the Church of England as by law established stops short at saner souls than mine. He skedaddled with Pilate gesture down the garden path. He had flushed when I used the word God.

Thus in prayer and madness and reading of the Word I panned out the weeks till Christmas. Once or twice I sought to recover the ancient Rapture of the Lord's Presence. But at the approaching moment a voice always intervened: The Great Happiness is coming back to you, but *in some other way*. He that loveth not knoweth not God: for God is Love. No man hath seen God at any time. But when perfect love for

another human soul shall be perfected in you, then God, more rapturously than at Jordan, will enter your soul, and dwell within you for ever.

What other way? It could only be Christmas.

Christmas came, announced by the calendar but by no other outward sign, unless it was that Sister Briggs left before instead of after dinner. The silence was stranger, more complete than ever. Through all the afternoon and evening I read, to prevent myself hoping. As I turned over pages of print, staring uncomprehendingly, one question absorbed all my being: I did not consciously think of it, for it was myself, all of myself, and the brain cannot think of the soul: *Can love then bridge the grave?*

Suddenly, late in the afternoon, as dusk was turning to darkness, an insane notion stormed my brain, which woke at once to feverish activity.

I had only Aunt Martha's word for it. Her information came certainly from Uncle Simeon, Uncle Simeon was a liar, a cur, a cruel scoundrel. He had invented that Robbie was dead, had lied to Aunt Martha, knowing that she would convey the lie to me, knowing how it would afflict me. Robbie was alive, alive! Why had it not struck me before? My heart fainted with hope. I prayed God that he would make me unconscious till midnight, for I did not know how I could live through those waiting hours.

Live somehow I did. There was even time for Doubt to raise his unwearying head. He was dead after all: what reason had Uncle Simeon had to lie, who could never have really divined what Robbie was to me?

And if he were dead, Oh Christ, was it possible he could come to me?

After supper I went upstairs to bed. There was a bright moon. I pulled the curtains wide from the window that the room might be filled with moonlight as the Torribridge room eleven years before.

I sat up in bed and prayed God passionately to be merciful, to deal with me lovingly: to send me Robbie, whether from this world or the next.

Imperceptibly, in the luminous silence, the spiritual sluggishness of the latter days disappeared; physical being fell from me like a cloak; my mind became clear and radiant, my heart breathless with hope. Faith possessed me, and as I prayed, I waited.

There was a soft tread in the room: I knew whose, should know it at the end of Eternity. There was no terror in me this time, no dreadful thought that it might be Uncle Simeon. Nor was there any soul's illusion, as in the hundred other times the need of my heart and the power of my imagination had created his presence. For the little white nightgowned figure standing at the door was there, *in plain reality*, as he had been at the Torribridge door eleven years before.

And now, in this moment when the actual physical presence I had for ever prayed and longed for was achieved, the whole structure of my love collapsed. A disappointment too sudden, too infinite to bear, filled my heart, from which the life seemed to be ebbing away. I understood the difference between the child I had loved on the Torribridge night, and the vision I had built with my love. One was dead

and returned to earth for a moment, the other had never lived except in my heart. I was a woman, this was a little boy.

At the supernatural fact of his resurrection for this night I never stopped to marvel: only at my own folly in not having paused to think that the physical shape of Robbie returning to earth must needs be the physical shape in which he had left it. I was a woman, this was a little boy.

The vision had been real, but it was not Robbie. My heart still loved the darling of its dreams, but my darling was not Robbie.

"I cannot come nearer, Mary," he said softly, and at the sound of his remembered voice my pulse beat faster, and life flowed back into my heart, and my child's love in its first simplicity, without the added passion of the years, came back to me again. "I have returned for a moment only. Do not grieve because God did not let me grow to be a man on earth below. I loved you that happy once, and I love you still. Do not think, dear, that because I had gone to Heaven, all the times you have called for me since, and when I have come to you, have not been true. Each time you have called I have answered you in Heaven. Each time my spirit has been with you. But God never meant me for this world: He never meant me to be His this-world's love for you. Your happiness is coming."

"When, Robbie? How?"

"Very soon. You will see. You will be very happy."

"Come nearer, and kiss me Good-bye."

"No, Mary; you are a living woman, and I am a little

boy whose life was long ago. *He* will kiss you."

I watched the white form dissolve in the moonlight. I knew the room was empty. The crystal clearness of my heart was suddenly dimmed. The cloak of physical existence once more enveloped my soul. I was back in the world.

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## CHAPTER XLV: WAY OF A MAN WITH A MAID

At my Grandmother's funeral Lord Tawborough had said: "Miss Traies, if ever you need any advice or service of any kind, write and let me know, will you? It is the only kindness I would presume to ask." On the morrow of Christmas Night I thought often—only—of these words. I did not write. Something told me that I had no need to.

The whole of that wintry morrow I was alone in the cold house. Even for Sister Briggs it was Boxing-Day: I had told her to take advantage of a day that even for oilmen (and Christians) should be a holiday, and to stay at home with her husband, as I could very well fend for myself.

I waited. It was foolish, impossible, one more Maryish notion of magic, madness, moonshine. It was possible, probable, inevitable, immediate.

The bell rang; with clamant heart and hurrying feet I sped to the door.

There were preliminary embarrassments and explanations. Trivial matters, to which we both gave grateful over-measure of zeal and zest, filled the awkwardest first moments, tided them capably over. "The snow on your coat: I must dry it"—"May the coachman come in and wait? The weather is bad"—"Certainly, there is the kitchen fire: for coat and coachman too"—"Thank you"—"I will get you a cup of tea."

We did not look at each other. In the dining-room we continued to speak of trifles, pouncing with eager dexterity and emulous speed upon any sudden silence that showed its head. Covertly once or twice I dared to look at the well-remembered face: fed swiftly on the manliness, the gentleness; the proud grey hair, the noble forehead, the charitable eyes; the mouth. My heart beat tempestuously.

Then God, in His Goodness, performed a miracle within me.

The mystical delight seized me. As on Jordan morning, I knew I should reach the Rapture. All love was one, and the Stranger was my Robbie. His face was the face of my visions, the face I had called Robbie's, that was not Robbie's. I knew that all the torrential affection which in dream and diary I had poured forth upon my vision, had been for my Love who stood before me now. The magical moment for which I had been born was at last upon me—oh, hope too hard to bear—but he must speak the word. He alone could complete the miracle, fulfil the hope, carry love's banners to their ultimate victory in my heart.

The silences grew longer and more shameless. My heart throbbed, my body trembled, my spirit was faint with expectation. He got up from his chair and began pacing up and down the room, talking of something, talking of nothing, moistening his parched lips, seeking through moments of unbearable longing for the words that would not come.

At this moment of time, which is present in my heart more clearly than any other of the memorable moments I have tried to describe in this record of twenty-two years, I was sitting on the old horsehair Chesterfield couch against the window; around me were the familiar objects of this chiefly familiar room —Aunt Jael's traditional chair, and my Grandmother's; the faded rosewood piano, the ancient chiffonièr, the odour of my childhood, the taste of religion and many meals, the all-pervading gloom. God was everywhere around me, the God of my childhood, the God of Beatings.

He stopped in his pacing up and down. I knew that his heart had stopped. His voice was husky, faint with passion and hope and fear.

"Miss Traies, may I ask you a question?"

I could not look up. My heart was near breaking point. I could not speak. Perhaps I nodded.

"Will you—promise me this? That if the answer to the question is 'No,' you will forgive me for having asked it, and like and respect me not less well than now?"

This longer sentence came a little more easily: words gave courage to each other. The first question had

been harder; though the hardest was yet to come.

"What-is-the-question?" I still looked downwards. My voice was as husky as his, my heart as hungry.

"You know it."

"What-is-the-question?" repeated obstinately, mechanically, and because—for one-millionth part—I was not sure. I knew the question, my heart had answered it already; but I was a woman, and my mouth could not speak for my heart till the man had achieved his task—found *his* mouth courage to speak for his heart. I knew, my heart knew; but my brain waited for the serene absolute certainty which his words alone could give. To complete the miracle this word was needed.

"What-is-the-question?" I repeated mechanically.

His heart stopped again for the last effort, the ultimate moment of life. "Will you—once—one time only—before you go abroad again—before I am old—one single time—" (how fondly each poor broken conciliatory qualification seemed to ease his task, break his amorous fall, make easier my way to the answer his soul sought)—"*kiss me?*"

A spasm of spiritual joy went through me from head to foot. His soul was mine, and mine was his: we were one soul, one double-soul inhabiting each body.

The winter was past, the rain was over and gone.

"Yes," I whispered. My voice was unsure, my eyes were filled with tears of happiness, my heart was fondling the two flawless words with which he had transformed me.

More bravely, easily, surely: "When?"

"Soon."

"Very soon?"

"Now."

He came swiftly to me, his arms were round me, our mouths were together in a tender infinite embrace. My soul and body were singing. Love, garlanded with lilies, marched with God's paradisal banner of Perfect Happiness through all my heart.

He was kneeling by my side. His head was against my breast. I was kissing his hair, brushing my lips across his eyes.

After a very long while I spoke. My voice fell strangely and softly upon my own ears. My new heart had fashioned me a new voice worthy to do its bidding.

"Oh my dear, unhappiness is gone for ever. Now I am full of joy. You are near, you are completely in understanding. Look me in the eyes, dear; tell me it is not a dream."

"Mary, it is a dream. Today I have passed out of a land of unreality into one of wonderful dreams. Now I am part of another, my soul is part of hers, and can never be torn away. Time cannot do it, and what is more powerful than time?"

"Eternity," I said.

And I found as I uttered that word, that for the first

time it held no terror.

Transcriber's Note:

Obvious typographic errors have been corrected.

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