ANN VERONICA A MODERN LOVE STORY

By H. G. Wells

"The art of ignoring is one of the accomplishments of every well-bred girl, so carefully instilled that at last she can even ignore her own thoughts and her own knowledge."

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ANN VERONICA

CHAPTER THE FIRST

ANN VERONICA TALKS TO HER FATHER

Part 1

One Wednesday afternoon in late September, Ann Veronica Stanley came down from London in a state of solemn excitement and quite resolved to have things out with her father that very evening. She had trembled on the verge of such a resolution before, but this time quite definitely she made it. A crisis had been reached, and she was almost glad it had been reached. She made up her mind in the train home that it should be a decisive crisis. It is for that reason that this novel begins with her there, and neither earlier nor later, for it is the history of this crisis and its consequences that this novel has to tell.

She had a compartment to herself in the train from London to Morningside Park, and she sat with both her feet on the seat in an attitude that would certainly have distressed her mother to see, and horrified her grandmother beyond measure; she sat with her knees up to her chin and her hands clasped before them, and she was so lost in thought that she discovered with a start, from a lettered lamp, that she was at Morningside Park, and thought she was moving out of the station, whereas she was only moving in. “Lord!” she said. She jumped up at once, caught up a leather clutch containing notebooks, a fat text-book, and a chocolate-and-yellow-covered pamphlet, and leaped neatly from the carriage, only to discover that the train was slowing down and that she had to traverse the full length of the platform past it again as the result of her precipitation. “Sold again,” she remarked. “Idiot!” She raged inwardly while she walked along with that air of self-contained serenity that is proper to a young lady of nearly two-and-twenty under the eye of the world.

She walked down the station approach, past the neat, obtrusive offices of the coal merchant and the house agent, and so to the wicket-gate by the butcher’s shop that

led to the field path to her home. Outside the post-office stood a no-hatted, blond young man in gray flannels, who was elaborately affixing a stamp to a letter. At the sight of her he became rigid and a singularly bright shade of pink. She made herself serenely unaware of his existence, though it may be it was his presence that sent her by the field detour instead of by the direct path up the Avenue.

“Umph!” he said, and regarded his letter doubtfully before consigning it to the pillar-box. “Here goes,” he said. Then he hovered undecidedly for some seconds with his hands in his pockets and his mouth puckered to a whistle before he turned to go home by the Avenue.

Ann Veronica forgot him as soon as she was through the gate, and her face resumed its expression of stern preoccupation. “It’s either now or never,” she said to herself....

Morningside Park was a suburb that had not altogether, as people say, come off. It consisted, like pre-Roman Gaul, of three parts. There was first the Avenue, which ran in a consciously elegant curve from the railway station into an undeveloped wilderness of agriculture, with big, yellow brick villas on either side, and then there was the pavement, the little clump of shops about the post-office, and under the railway arch was a congestion of workmen’s dwellings. The road from Surbiton and Epsom ran under the arch, and, like a bright fungoid growth in the ditch, there was now appearing a sort of fourth estate of little red-and-white rough-cast villas, with meretricious gables and very brassy window-blinds. Behind the Avenue was a little hill, and an iron-fenced path went over the crest of this to a stile under an elm-tree, and forked there, with one branch going back into the Avenue again.

“It’s either now or never,” said Ann Veronica, again ascending this stile. “Much as I hate rows, I’ve either got to make a stand or give in altogether.”

She seated herself in a loose and easy attitude and surveyed the backs of the Avenue houses; then her eyes wandered to where the new red-and-white villas peeped among the trees. She seemed to be making some sort of inventory. “Ye Gods!” she said at last. “WHAT a place!

“Stuffy isn’t the word for it.

“I wonder what he takes me for?”

When presently she got down from the stile a certain note of internal conflict, a touch of doubt, had gone from her warm-tinted face. She had now the clear and tranquil expression of one whose mind is made up. Her back had stiffened, and her hazel eyes looked steadfastly ahead.

As she approached the corner of the Avenue the blond, no-hatted man in gray flannels appeared. There was a certain air of forced fortuity in his manner. He saluted awkwardly. “Hello, Vee!” he said.

“Hello, Teddy!” she answered.

He hung vaguely for a moment as she passed.

But it was clear she was in no mood for Teddys. He realized that he was committed to the path across the fields, an uninteresting walk at the best of times.

“Oh, dammit!” he remarked, “dammit!” with great bitterness as he faced it.

Part 2

Ann Veronica Stanley was twenty-one and a half years old. She had black hair, fine eyebrows, and a clear complexion; and the forces that had modelled her features had loved and lingered at their work and made them subtle and fine. She was slender, and sometimes she seemed tall, and walked and carried herself lightly and joyfully as one who commonly and habitually feels well, and sometimes she stooped a little and was preoccupied. Her lips came together with an expression between contentment and the faintest shadow of a smile, her manner was one of quiet reserve, and behind this mask she was wildly discontented and eager for freedom and life.

She wanted to live. She was vehemently impatient—she did not clearly know for what—to do, to be, to experience. And experience was slow in coming. All the world about her seemed to be—how can one put it?—in wrappers, like a house when people leave it in the summer. The blinds were all drawn, the sunlight kept out, one could not tell what colors these gray swathings hid. She wanted to know. And there was no intimation whatever that the blinds would ever go up or the windows or doors be opened, or the chandeliers, that seemed to promise such a blaze of fire, unveiled and furnished and lit. Dim souls flitted about her, not only speaking but it would seem even thinking in undertones....

During her school days, especially her earlier school days, the world had been very explicit with her, telling her what to do, what not to do, giving her lessons to learn and games to play and interests of the most suitable and various kinds. Presently she woke up to the fact that there was a considerable group of interests called being in love and getting married, with certain attractive and amusing subsidiary

developments, such as flirtation and “being interested” in people of the opposite sex. She approached this field with her usual liveliness of apprehension. But here she met with a check. These interests her world promptly, through the agency of schoolmistresses, older school-mates, her aunt, and a number of other responsible and authoritative people, assured her she must on no account think about. Miss Moffatt, the history and moral instruction mistress, was particularly explicit upon this score, and they all agreed in indicating contempt and pity for girls whose minds ran on such matters, and who betrayed it in their conversation or dress or bearing. It was, in fact, a group of interests quite unlike any other group, peculiar and special, and one to be thoroughly ashamed of. Nevertheless, Ann Veronica found it a difficult matter not to think of these things. However having a considerable amount of pride, she decided she would disavow these undesirable topics and keep her mind away from them just as far as she could, but it left her at the end of her school days with that wrapped feeling I have described, and rather at loose ends.

The world, she discovered, with these matters barred had no particular place for her at all, nothing for her to do, except a functionless existence varied by calls, tennis, selected novels, walks, and dusting in her father’s house. She thought study would be better. She was a clever girl, the best of her year in the High School, and she made a valiant fight for Somerville or Newnham but her father had met and argued with a Somerville girl at a friend’s dinner-table and he thought that sort of thing unsexed a woman. He said simply that he wanted her to live at home. There was a certain amount of disputation, and meanwhile she went on at school. They compromised at length on the science course at the Tredgold Women’s College—she had already matriculated into London University from school—she came of age, and she bickered with her aunt for latch-key privileges on the strength of that and her season ticket. Shamefaced curiosities began to come back into her mind, thinly disguised as literature and art. She read voraciously, and presently, because of her aunt’s censorship, she took to smuggling any books she thought might be prohibited instead of bringing them home openly, and she went to the theatre whenever she could produce an acceptable friend to accompany her. She passed her general science examination with double honors and specialized in science. She happened to have an acute sense of form and unusual mental lucidity, and she found in biology, and particularly in comparative anatomy, a very considerable interest, albeit the illumination it cast upon her personal life was not altogether direct. She dissected well, and in a year she found herself chafing at the limitations of the lady B. Sc. who retailed a store of faded learning in the Tredgold laboratory. She had already realized that this instructress was hopelessly wrong and foggy—it is the test of the good

comparative anatomist—upon the skull. She discovered a desire to enter as a student in the Imperial College at Westminster, where Russell taught, and go on with her work at the fountain-head.

She had asked about that already, and her father had replied, evasively: “We’ll have to see about that, little Vee; we’ll have to see about that.” In that posture of being seen about the matter hung until she seemed committed to another session at the Tredgold College, and in the mean time a small conflict arose and brought the latch-key question, and in fact the question of Ann Veronica’s position generally, to an acute issue.

In addition to the various business men, solicitors, civil servants, and widow ladies who lived in the Morningside Park Avenue, there was a certain family of alien sympathies and artistic quality, the Widgetts, with which Ann Veronica had become very friendly. Mr. Widgett was a journalist and art critic, addicted to a greenish-gray tweed suit and “art” brown ties; he smoked corncob pipes in the Avenue on Sunday morning, travelled third class to London by unusual trains, and openly despised golf. He occupied one of the smaller houses near the station. He had one son, who had been co-educated, and three daughters with peculiarly jolly red hair that Ann Veronica found adorable. Two of these had been her particular intimates at the High School, and had done much to send her mind exploring beyond the limits of the available literature at home. It was a cheerful, irresponsible, shamelessly hard-up family in the key of faded green and flattened purple, and the girls went on from the High School to the Fadden Art School and a bright, eventful life of art student dances, Socialist meetings, theatre galleries, talking about work, and even, at intervals, work; and ever and again they drew Ann Veronica from her sound persistent industry into the circle of these experiences. They had asked her to come to the first of the two great annual Fadden Dances, the October one, and Ann Veronica had accepted with enthusiasm. And now her father said she must not go.

He had “put his foot down,” and said she must not go.

Going involved two things that all Ann Veronica’s tact had been ineffectual to conceal from her aunt and father. Her usual dignified reserve had availed her nothing. One point was that she was to wear fancy dress in the likeness of a Corsair’s bride, and the other was that she was to spend whatever vestiges of the night remained after the dance was over in London with the Widgett girls and a select party in “quite a decent little hotel” near Fitzroy Square.

“But, my dear!” said Ann Veronica’s aunt.

“You see,” said Ann Veronica, with the air of one who shares a difficulty, “I’ve promised to go. I didn’t realize—I don’t see how I can get out of it now.”

Then it was her father issued his ultimatum. He had conveyed it to her, not verbally, but by means of a letter, which seemed to her a singularly ignoble method of prohibition. “He couldn’t look me in the face and say it,” said Ann Veronica.

“But of course it’s aunt’s doing really.”

And thus it was that as Ann Veronica neared the gates of home, she said to herself: “I’ll have it out with him somehow. I’ll have it out with him. And if he won’t—”

But she did not give even unspoken words to the alternative at that time.

Part 3

Ann Veronica’s father was a solicitor with a good deal of company business: a lean, trustworthy, worried-looking, neuralgic, clean-shaven man of fifty-three, with a hard mouth, a sharp nose, iron-gray hair, gray eyes, gold-framed glasses, and a small, circular baldness at the crown of his head. His name was Peter. He had had five children at irregular intervals, of whom Ann Veronica was the youngest, so that as a parent he came to her perhaps a little practised and jaded and inattentive; and he called her his “little Vee,” and patted her unexpectedly and disconcertingly, and treated her promiscuously as of any age between eleven and eight-and-twenty. The City worried him a good deal, and what energy he had left over he spent partly in golf, a game he treated very seriously, and partly in the practices of microscopic petrography.

He “went in” for microscopy in the unphilosophical Victorian manner as his “hobby.” A birthday present of a microscope had turned his mind to technical microscopy when he was eighteen, and a chance friendship with a Holborn microscope dealer had confirmed that bent. He had remarkably skilful fingers and a love of detailed processes, and he had become one of the most dexterous amateur makers of rock sections in the world. He spent a good deal more money and time than he could afford upon the little room at the top of the house, in producing new lapidary apparatus and new microscopic accessories and in rubbing down slices of rock to a transparent thinness and mounting them in a beautiful and dignified manner. He did it, he said, “to distract his mind.” His chief successes he exhibited to the Lowndean

Microscopical Society, where their high technical merit never failed to excite admiration. Their scientific value was less considerable, since he chose rocks entirely with a view to their difficulty of handling or their attractiveness at conversaziones when done. He had a great contempt for the sections the “theorizers” produced. They proved all sorts of things perhaps, but they were thick, unequal, pitiful pieces of work. Yet an indiscriminating, wrong-headed world gave such fellows all sorts of distinctions....

He read but little, and that chiefly healthy light fiction with chromatic titles, The Red Sword, The Black Helmet, The Purple Robe, also in order “to distract his mind.” He read it in winter in the evening after dinner, and Ann Veronica associated it with a tendency to monopolize the lamp, and to spread a very worn pair of dappled fawn-skin slippers across the fender. She wondered occasionally why his mind needed so much distraction. His favorite newspaper was the Times, which he began at breakfast in the morning often with manifest irritation, and carried off to finish in the train, leaving no other paper at home.

It occurred to Ann Veronica once that she had known him when he was younger, but day had followed day, and each had largely obliterated the impression of its predecessor. But she certainly remembered that when she was a little girl he sometimes wore tennis flannels, and also rode a bicycle very dexterously in through the gates to the front door. And in those days, too, he used to help her mother with her gardening, and hover about her while she stood on the ladder and hammered creepers to the scullery wall.

It had been Ann Veronica’s lot as the youngest child to live in a home that became less animated and various as she grew up. Her mother had died when she was thirteen, her two much older sisters had married off—one submissively, one insubordinately; her two brothers had gone out into the world well ahead of her, and so she had made what she could of her father. But he was not a father one could make much of.

His ideas about girls and women were of a sentimental and modest quality; they were creatures, he thought, either too bad for a modern vocabulary, and then frequently most undesirably desirable, or too pure and good for life. He made this simple classification of a large and various sex to the exclusion of all intermediate kinds; he held that the two classes had to be kept apart even in thought and remote from one another. Women are made like the potter’s vessels—either for worship or contumely, and are withal fragile vessels. He had never wanted daughters. Each time a daughter had been born to him he had concealed his chagrin with great tenderness and effusion from his wife, and had sworn unwontedly and with passionate sincerity in the

bathroom. He was a manly man, free from any strong maternal strain, and he had loved his dark-eyed, dainty bright-colored, and active little wife with a real vein of passion in his sentiment. But he had always felt (he had never allowed himself to think of it) that the promptitude of their family was a little indelicate of her, and in a sense an intrusion. He had, however, planned brilliant careers for his two sons, and, with a certain human amount of warping and delay, they were pursuing these. One was in the Indian Civil Service and one in the rapidly developing motor business. The daughters, he had hoped, would be their mother's care.

He had no ideas about daughters. They happen to a man.

Of course a little daughter is a delightful thing enough. It runs about gayly, it romps, it is bright and pretty, it has enormous quantities of soft hair and more power of expressing affection than its brothers. It is a lovely little appendage to the mother who smiles over it, and it does things quaintly like her, gestures with her very gestures. It makes wonderful sentences that you can repeat in the City and are good enough for Punch. You call it a lot of nicknames—"Babs" and "Bibs" and "Viddles" and "Vee"; you whack at it playfully, and it whacks you back. It loves to sit on your knee. All that is jolly and as it should be.

But a little daughter is one thing and a daughter quite another. There one comes to a relationship that Mr. Stanley had never thought out. When he found himself thinking about it, it upset him so that he at once resorted to distraction. The chromatic fiction with which he relieved his mind glanced but slightly at this aspect of life, and never with any quality of guidance. Its heroes never had daughters, they borrowed other people's. The one fault, indeed, of this school of fiction for him was that it had rather a light way with parental rights. His instinct was in the direction of considering his daughters his absolute property, bound to obey him, his to give away or his to keep to be a comfort in his declining years just as he thought fit. About this conception of ownership he perceived and desired a certain sentimental glamour, he liked everything properly dressed, but it remained ownership. Ownership seemed only a reasonable return for the cares and expenses of a daughter's upbringing. Daughters were not like sons. He perceived, however, that both the novels he read and the world he lived in discountenanced these assumptions. Nothing else was put in their place, and they remained sotto voce, as it were, in his mind. The new and the old cancelled out; his daughters became quasi-independent dependents—which is absurd. One married as he wished and one against his wishes, and now here was Ann Veronica, his little Vee, discontented with her beautiful, safe, and sheltering home, going about with hatless friends to Socialist meetings and art-class dances, and displaying a disposition to carry her scientific ambitions to unwomanly lengths. She seemed to

think he was merely the paymaster, handing over the means of her freedom. And now she insisted that she MUST leave the chastened security of the Tredgold Women's College for Russell's unbridled classes, and wanted to go to fancy dress dances in pirate costume and spend the residue of the night with Widgett's ramshackle girls in some indescribable hotel in Soho!

He had done his best not to think about her at all, but the situation and his sister had become altogether too urgent. He had finally put aside The Lilac Sunbonnet, gone into his study, lit the gas fire, and written the letter that had brought these unsatisfactory relations to a head.

Part 4

MY DEAR VEE, he wrote. These daughters! He gnawed his pen and reflected, tore the sheet up, and began again.

"MY DEAR VERONICA,—Your aunt tells me you have involved yourself in some arrangement with the Widgett girls about a Fancy Dress Ball in London. I gather you wish to go up in some fantastic get-up, wrapped about in your opera cloak, and that after the festivities you propose to stay with these friends of yours, and without any older people in your party, at an hotel. Now I am sorry to cross you in anything you have set your heart upon, but I regret to say—"

"H'm," he reflected, and crossed out the last four words.

"—but this cannot be."

"No," he said, and tried again: "but I must tell you quite definitely that I feel it to be my duty to forbid any such exploit."

"Damn!" he remarked at the defaced letter; and, taking a fresh sheet, he recopied what he had written. A certain irritation crept into his manner as he did so.

"I regret that you should ever have proposed it," he went on.

He meditated, and began a new paragraph.

"The fact of it is, and this absurd project of yours only brings it to a head, you have begun to get hold of some very queer ideas about what a young lady in your position

may or may not venture to do. I do not think you quite understand my ideals or what is becoming as between father and daughter. Your attitude to me—"

He fell into a brown study. It was so difficult to put precisely.

"—and your aunt—"

For a time he searched for the mot juste. Then he went on:

"—and, indeed, to most of the established things in life is, frankly, unsatisfactory. You are restless, aggressive, critical with all the crude unthinking criticism of youth. You have no grasp upon the essential facts of life (I pray God you never may), and in your rash ignorance you are prepared to dash into positions that may end in lifelong regret. The life of a young girl is set about with prowling pitfalls."

He was arrested for a moment by an indistinct picture of Veronica reading this last sentence. But he was now too deeply moved to trace a certain unsatisfactoriness to its source in a mixture of metaphors. "Well," he said, argumentatively, "it IS. That's all about it. It's time she knew."

"The life of a young girl is set about with prowling pitfalls, from which she must be shielded at all costs."

His lips tightened, and he frowned with solemn resolution.

"So long as I am your father, so long as your life is entrusted to my care, I feel bound by every obligation to use my authority to check this odd disposition of yours toward extravagant enterprises. A day will come when you will thank me. It is not, my dear Veronica, that I think there is any harm in you; there is not. But a girl is soiled not only by evil but by the proximity of evil, and a reputation for rashness may do her as serious an injury as really reprehensible conduct. So do please believe that in this matter I am acting for the best."

He signed his name and reflected. Then he opened the study door and called "Mollie!" and returned to assume an attitude of authority on the hearthrug, before the blue flames and orange glow of the gas fire.

His sister appeared.

She was dressed in one of those complicated dresses that are all lace and work and confused patternings of black and purple and cream about the body, and she was in many ways a younger feminine version of the same theme as himself. She had the same sharp nose—which, indeed, only Ann Veronica, of all the family, had escaped. She carried herself well, whereas her brother slouched, and there was a certain

aristocratic dignity about her that she had acquired through her long engagement to a curate of family, a scion of the Wiltshire Edmondshaws. He had died before they married, and when her brother became a widower she had come to his assistance and taken over much of the care of his youngest daughter. But from the first her rather old-fashioned conception of life had jarred with the suburban atmosphere, the High School spirit and the memories of the light and little Mrs. Stanley, whose family had been by any reckoning inconsiderable—to use the kindliest term. Miss Stanley had determined from the outset to have the warmest affection for her youngest niece and to be a second mother in her life—a second and a better one; but she had found much to battle with, and there was much in herself that Ann Veronica failed to understand. She came in now with an air of reserved solicitude.

Mr. Stanley pointed to the letter with a pipe he had drawn from his jacket pocket. "What do you think of that?" he asked.

She took it up in her many-ringed hands and read it judicially. He filled his pipe slowly.

"Yes," she said at last, "it is firm and affectionate."

"I could have said more."

"You seem to have said just what had to be said. It seems to me exactly what is wanted. She really must not go to that affair."

She paused, and he waited for her to speak.

"I don't think she quite sees the harm of those people or the sort of life to which they would draw her," she said. "They would spoil every chance."

"She has chances?" he said, helping her out.

"She is an extremely attractive girl," she said; and added, "to some people. Of course, one doesn't like to talk about things until there are things to talk about."

"All the more reason why she shouldn't get herself talked about."

"That is exactly what I feel."

Mr. Stanley took the letter and stood with it in his hand thoughtfully for a time. "I'd give anything," he remarked, "to see our little Vee happily and comfortably married."

He gave the note to the parlormaid the next morning in an inadvertent, casual manner just as he was leaving the house to catch his London train. When Ann Veronica got it she had at first a wild, fantastic idea that it contained a tip.

Part 5

Ann Veronica's resolve to have things out with her father was not accomplished without difficulty.

He was not due from the City until about six, and so she went and played Badminton with the Widgett girls until dinner-time. The atmosphere at dinner was not propitious. Her aunt was blandly amiable above a certain tremulous undertow, and talked as if to a caller about the alarming spread of marigolds that summer at the end of the garden, a sort of Yellow Peril to all the smaller hardy annuals, while her father brought some papers to table and presented himself as preoccupied with them. "It really seems as if we shall have to put down marigolds altogether next year," Aunt Molly repeated three times, "and do away with marguerites. They seed beyond all reason." Elizabeth, the parlormaid, kept coming in to hand vegetables whenever there seemed a chance of Ann Veronica asking for an interview. Directly dinner was over Mr. Stanley, having pretended to linger to smoke, fled suddenly up-stairs to petrography, and when Veronica tapped he answered through the locked door, "Go away, Vee! I'm busy," and made a lapidary's wheel buzz loudly.

Breakfast, too, was an impossible occasion. He read the Times with an unusually passionate intentness, and then declared suddenly for the earlier of the two trains he used.

"I'll come to the station," said Ann Veronica. "I may as well come up by this train."

"I may have to run," said her father, with an appeal to his watch.

"I'll run, too," she volunteered.

Instead of which they walked sharply....

"I say, daddy," she began, and was suddenly short of breath.

"If it's about that dance project," he said, "it's no good, Veronica. I've made up my mind."

"You'll make me look a fool before all my friends."

"You shouldn't have made an engagement until you'd consulted your aunt."

"I thought I was old enough," she gasped, between laughter and crying.

Her father's step quickened to a trot. "I won't have you quarrelling and crying in the Avenue," he said. "Stop it!... If you've got anything to say, you must say it to your aunt—"

"But look here, daddy!"

He flapped the Times at her with an imperious gesture.

"It's settled. You're not to go. You're NOT to go."

"But it's about other things."

"I don't care. This isn't the place."

"Then may I come to the study to-night—after dinner?"

"I'm—BUSY!"

"It's important. If I can't talk anywhere else—I DO want an understanding."

Ahead of them walked a gentleman whom it was evident they must at their present pace very speedily overtake. It was Ramage, the occupant of the big house at the end of the Avenue. He had recently made Mr. Stanley's acquaintance in the train and shown him one or two trifling civilities. He was an outside broker and the proprietor of a financial newspaper; he had come up very rapidly in the last few years, and Mr. Stanley admired and detested him in almost equal measure. It was intolerable to think that he might overhear words and phrases. Mr. Stanley's pace slackened.

"You've no right to badger me like this, Veronica," he said. "I can't see what possible benefit can come of discussing things that are settled. If you want advice, your aunt is the person. However, if you must air your opinions—"

"To-night, then, daddy!"

He made an angry but conceivably an assenting noise, and then Ramage glanced back and stopped, saluted elaborately, and waited for them to come up. He was a square-faced man of nearly fifty, with iron-gray hair a mobile, clean-shaven mouth and rather protuberant black eyes that now scrutinized Ann Veronica. He dressed rather after the fashion of the West End than the City, and affected a cultured urbanity that somehow disconcerted and always annoyed Ann Veronica's father extremely. He did not play golf, but took his exercise on horseback, which was also unsympathetic.

"Stuffy these trees make the Avenue," said Mr. Stanley as they drew alongside, to account for his own ruffled and heated expression. "They ought to have been lopped in the spring."

“There’s plenty of time,” said Ramage. “Is Miss Stanley coming up with us?”

“I go second,” she said, “and change at Wimbledon.”

“We’ll all go second,” said Ramage, “if we may?”

Mr. Stanley wanted to object strongly, but as he could not immediately think how to put it, he contented himself with a grunt, and the motion was carried. “How’s Mrs. Ramage?” he asked.

“Very much as usual,” said Ramage. “She finds lying up so much very irksome. But, you see, she HAS to lie up.”

The topic of his invalid wife bored him, and he turned at once to Ann Veronica. “And where are YOU going?” he said. “Are you going on again this winter with that scientific work of yours? It’s an instance of heredity, I suppose.” For a moment Mr. Stanley almost liked Ramage. “You’re a biologist, aren’t you?”

He began to talk of his own impressions of biology as a commonplace magazine reader who had to get what he could from the monthly reviews, and was glad to meet with any information from nearer the fountainhead. In a little while he and she were talking quite easily and agreeably. They went on talking in the train—it seemed to her father a slight want of deference to him—and he listened and pretended to read the Times. He was struck disagreeably by Ramage’s air of gallant consideration and Ann Veronica’s self-possessed answers. These things did not harmonize with his conception of the forthcoming (if unavoidable) interview. After all, it came to him suddenly as a harsh discovery that she might be in a sense regarded as grownup. He was a man who in all things classified without nuance, and for him there were in the matter of age just two feminine classes and no more—girls and women. The distinction lay chiefly in the right to pat their heads. But here was a girl—she must be a girl, since she was his daughter and pat-able—imitating the woman quite remarkably and cleverly. He resumed his listening. She was discussing one of those modern advanced plays with a remarkable, with an extraordinary, confidence.

“His love-making,” she remarked, “struck me as unconvincing. He seemed too noisy.”

The full significance of her words did not instantly appear to him. Then it dawned. Good heavens! She was discussing love-making. For a time he heard no more, and stared with stony eyes at a Book-War proclamation in leaded type that filled half a column of the Times that day. Could she understand what she was talking about? Luckily it was a second-class carriage and the ordinary fellow-travellers were not there. Everybody, he felt, must be listening behind their papers.

Of course, girls repeat phrases and opinions of which they cannot possibly understand the meaning. But a middle-aged man like Ramage ought to know better than to draw out a girl, the daughter of a friend and neighbor....

Well, after all, he seemed to be turning the subject. “Broddick is a heavy man,” he was saying, “and the main interest of the play was the embezzlement.” Thank Heaven! Mr. Stanley allowed his paper to drop a little, and scrutinized the hats and brows of their three fellow-travellers.

They reached Wimbledon, and Ramage whipped out to hand Miss Stanley to the platform as though she had been a duchess, and she descended as though such attentions from middle-aged, but still gallant, merchants were a matter of course. Then, as Ramage readjusted himself in a corner, he remarked: “These young people shoot up, Stanley. It seems only yesterday that she was running down the Avenue, all hair and legs.”

Mr. Stanley regarded him through his glasses with something approaching animosity.

“Now she’s all hat and ideas,” he said, with an air of humor.

“She seems an unusually clever girl,” said Ramage.

Mr. Stanley regarded his neighbor’s clean-shaven face almost warily. “I’m not sure whether we don’t rather overdo all this higher education,” he said, with an effect of conveying profound meanings.

Part 6

He became quite sure, by a sort of accumulation of reflection, as the day wore on. He found his youngest daughter intrusive in his thoughts all through the morning, and still more so in the afternoon. He saw her young and graceful back as she descended from the carriage, severely ignoring him, and recalled a glimpse he had of her face, bright and serene, as his train ran out of Wimbledon. He recalled with exasperating perplexity her clear, matter-of-fact tone as she talked about love-making being unconvincing. He was really very proud of her, and extraordinarily angry and resentful at the innocent and audacious self-reliance that seemed to intimate her sense of absolute independence of him, her absolute security without him. After all, she only LOOKED a woman. She was rash and ignorant, absolutely inexperienced. Absolutely. He began to think of speeches, very firm, explicit speeches, he would make.

He lunched in the Legal Club in Chancery Lane, and met Ogilvy. Daughters were in the air that day. Ogilvy was full of a client's trouble in that matter, a grave and even tragic trouble. He told some of the particulars.

"Curious case," said Ogilvy, buttering his bread and cutting it up in a way he had. "Curious case—and sets one thinking."

He resumed, after a mouthful: "Here is a girl of sixteen or seventeen, seventeen and a half to be exact, running about, as one might say, in London. Schoolgirl. Her family are solid West End people, Kensington people. Father—dead. She goes out and comes home. Afterward goes on to Oxford. Twenty-one, twenty-two. Why doesn't she marry? Plenty of money under her father's will. Charming girl."

He consumed Irish stew for some moments.

"Married already," he said, with his mouth full. "Shopman."

"Good God!" said Mr. Stanley.

"Good-looking rascal she met at Worthing. Very romantic and all that. He fixed it."

"But—"

"He left her alone. Pure romantic nonsense on her part. Sheer calculation on his. Went up to Somerset House to examine the will before he did it. Yes. Nice position."

"She doesn't care for him now?"

"Not a bit. What a girl of sixteen cares for is hair and a high color and moonlight and a tenor voice. I suppose most of our daughters would marry organ-grinders if they had a chance—at that age. My son wanted to marry a woman of thirty in a tobacconist's shop. Only a son's another story. We fixed that. Well, that's the situation. My people don't know what to do. Can't face a scandal. Can't ask the gent to go abroad and condone a bigamy. He misstated her age and address; but you can't get home on him for a thing like that.... There you are! Girl spoilt for life. Makes one want to go back to the Oriental system!"

Mr. Stanley poured wine. "Damned Rascal!" he said. "Isn't there a brother to kick him?"

"Mere satisfaction," reflected Ogilvy. "Mere sensuality. I rather think they have kicked him, from the tone of some of the letters. Nice, of course. But it doesn't alter the situation."

"It's these Rascals," said Mr. Stanley, and paused.

“Always has been,” said Ogilvy. “Our interest lies in heading them off.”

“There was a time when girls didn’t get these extravagant ideas.”

“Lydia Languish, for example. Anyhow, they didn’t run about so much.”

“Yes. That’s about the beginning. It’s these damned novels. All this torrent of misleading, spurious stuff that pours from the press. These sham ideals and advanced notions. Women who Dids, and all that kind of thing....”

Ogilvy reflected. “This girl—she’s really a very charming, frank person—had had her imagination fired, so she told me, by a school performance of Romeo and Juliet.”

Mr. Stanley decided to treat that as irrelevant. “There ought to be a Censorship of Books. We want it badly at the present time. Even WITH the Censorship of Plays there’s hardly a decent thing to which a man can take his wife and daughters, a creeping taint of suggestion everywhere. What would it be without that safeguard?”

Ogilvy pursued his own topic. “I’m inclined to think, Stanley, myself that as a matter of fact it was the expurgated Romeo and Juliet did the mischief. If our young person hadn’t had the nurse part cut out, eh? She might have known more and done less. I was curious about that. All they left it was the moon and stars. And the balcony and ‘My Romeo!’”

“Shakespeare is altogether different from the modern stuff. Altogether different. I’m not discussing Shakespeare. I don’t want to Bowdlerize Shakespeare. I’m not that sort I quite agree. But this modern miasma—”

Mr. Stanley took mustard savagely.

“Well, we won’t go into Shakespeare,” said Ogilvy “What interests me is that our young women nowadays are running about as free as air practically, with registry offices and all sorts of accommodation round the corner. Nothing to check their proceedings but a declining habit of telling the truth and the limitations of their imaginations. And in that respect they stir up one another. Not my affair, of course, but I think we ought to teach them more or restrain them more. One or the other. They’re too free for their innocence or too innocent for their freedom. That’s my point. Are you going to have any apple-tart, Stanley? The apple-tart’s been very good lately—very good!”

Part 7

At the end of dinner that evening Ann Veronica began: “Father!”

Her father looked at her over his glasses and spoke with grave deliberation; “If there is anything you want to say to me,” he said, “you must say it in the study. I am going to smoke a little here, and then I shall go to the study. I don’t see what you can have to say. I should have thought my note cleared up everything. There are some papers I have to look through to-night—important papers.”

“I won’t keep you very long, daddy,” said Ann Veronica.

“I don’t see, Mollie,” he remarked, taking a cigar from the box on the table as his sister and daughter rose, “why you and Vee shouldn’t discuss this little affair—whatever it is—without bothering me.”

It was the first time this controversy had become triangular, for all three of them were shy by habit.

He stopped in mid-sentence, and Ann Veronica opened the door for her aunt. The air was thick with feelings. Her aunt went out of the room with dignity and a rustle, and up-stairs to the fastness of her own room. She agreed entirely with her brother. It distressed and confused her that the girl should not come to her.

It seemed to show a want of affection, to be a deliberate and unmerited disregard, to justify the reprisal of being hurt.

When Ann Veronica came into the study she found every evidence of a carefully foreseen grouping about the gas fire. Both arm-chairs had been moved a little so as to face each other on either side of the fender, and in the circular glow of the green-shaded lamp there lay, conspicuously waiting, a thick bundle of blue and white papers tied with pink tape. Her father held some printed document in his hand, and appeared not to observe her entry. “Sit down,” he said, and perused—“perused” is the word for it—for some moments. Then he put the paper by. “And what is it all about, Veronica?” he asked, with a deliberate note of irony, looking at her a little quizzically over his glasses.

Ann Veronica looked bright and a little elated, and she disregarded her father’s invitation to be seated. She stood on the mat instead, and looked down on him. “Look here, daddy,” she said, in a tone of great reasonableness, “I MUST go to that dance, you know.”

Her father’s irony deepened. “Why?” he asked, suavely.

Her answer was not quite ready. “Well, because I don’t see any reason why I shouldn’t.”

“You see I do.”

“Why shouldn’t I go?”

“It isn’t a suitable place; it isn’t a suitable gathering.”

“But, daddy, what do you know of the place and the gathering?”

“And it’s entirely out of order; it isn’t right, it isn’t correct; it’s impossible for you to stay in an hotel in London—the idea is preposterous. I can’t imagine what possessed you, Veronica.”

He put his head on one side, pulled down the corners of his mouth, and looked at her over his glasses.

“But why is it preposterous?” asked Ann Veronica, and fiddled with a pipe on the mantel.

“Surely!” he remarked, with an expression of worried appeal.

“You see, daddy, I don’t think it IS preposterous. That’s really what I want to discuss. It comes to this—am I to be trusted to take care of myself, or am I not?”

“To judge from this proposal of yours, I should say not.”

“I think I am.”

“As long as you remain under my roof—” he began, and paused.

“You are going to treat me as though I wasn’t. Well, I don’t think that’s fair.”

“Your ideas of fairness—” he remarked, and discontinued that sentence. “My dear girl,” he said, in a tone of patient reasonableness, “you are a mere child. You know nothing of life, nothing of its dangers, nothing of its possibilities. You think everything is harmless and simple, and so forth. It isn’t. It isn’t. That’s where you go wrong. In some things, in many things, you must trust to your elders, to those who know more of life than you do. Your aunt and I have discussed all this matter. There it is. You can’t go.”

The conversation hung for a moment. Ann Veronica tried to keep hold of a complicated situation and not lose her head. She had turned round sideways, so as to look down into the fire.

“You see, father,” she said, “it isn’t only this affair of the dance. I want to go to that because it’s a new experience, because I think it will be interesting and give me a view of things. You say I know nothing. That’s probably true. But how am I to know of things?”

“Some things I hope you may never know,” he said.

“I’m not so sure. I want to know—just as much as I can.”

“Tut!” he said, fuming, and put out his hand to the papers in the pink tape.

“Well, I do. It’s just that I want to say. I want to be a human being; I want to learn about things and know about things, and not to be protected as something too precious for life, cooped up in one narrow little corner.”

“Cooped up!” he cried. “Did I stand in the way of your going to college? Have I ever prevented you going about at any reasonable hour? You’ve got a bicycle!”

“H’m!” said Ann Veronica, and then went on “I want to be taken seriously. A girl—at my age—is grown-up. I want to go on with my University work under proper conditions, now that I’ve done the Intermediate. It isn’t as though I haven’t done well. I’ve never muffed an exam yet. Roddy muffed two....”

Her father interrupted. “Now look here, Veronica, let us be plain with each other. You are not going to that infidel Russell’s classes. You are not going anywhere but to the Tredgold College. I’ve thought that out, and you must make up your mind to it. All sorts of considerations come in. While you live in my house you must follow my ideas. You are wrong even about that man’s scientific position and his standard of work. There are men in the Lowndean who laugh at him—simply laugh at him. And I have seen work by his pupils myself that struck me as being—well, next door to shameful. There’s stories, too, about his demonstrator, Capes Something or other. The kind of man who isn’t content with his science, and writes articles in the monthly reviews. Anyhow, there it is: YOU ARE NOT GOING THERE.”

The girl received this intimation in silence, but the face that looked down upon the gas fire took an expression of obstinacy that brought out a hitherto latent resemblance between parent and child. When she spoke, her lips twitched.

“Then I suppose when I have graduated I am to come home?”

“It seems the natural course—”

“And do nothing?”

“There are plenty of things a girl can find to do at home.”

“Until some one takes pity on me and marries me?”

He raised his eyebrows in mild appeal. His foot tapped impatiently, and he took up the papers.

“Look here, father,” she said, with a change in her voice, “suppose I won’t stand it?”

He regarded her as though this was a new idea.

“Suppose, for example, I go to this dance?”

“You won’t.”

“Well”—her breath failed her for a moment. “How would you prevent it?” she asked.

“But I have forbidden it!” he said, raising his voice.

“Yes, I know. But suppose I go?”

“Now, Veronica! No, no. This won’t do. Understand me! I forbid it. I do not want to hear from you even the threat of disobedience.” He spoke loudly. “The thing is forbidden!”

“I am ready to give up anything that you show to be wrong.”

“You will give up anything I wish you to give up.”

They stared at each other through a pause, and both faces were flushed and obstinate.

She was trying by some wonderful, secret, and motionless gymnastics to restrain her tears. But when she spoke her lips quivered, and they came. “I mean to go to that dance!” she blubbered. “I mean to go to that dance! I meant to reason with you, but you won’t reason. You’re dogmatic.”

At the sight of her tears his expression changed to a mingling of triumph and concern. He stood up, apparently intending to put an arm about her, but she stepped back from him quickly. She produced a handkerchief, and with one sweep of this and a simultaneous gulp had abolished her fit of weeping. His voice now had lost its ironies.

“Now, Veronica,” he pleaded, “Veronica, this is most unreasonable. All we do is for your good. Neither your aunt nor I have any other thought but what is best for you.”

“Only you won’t let me live. Only you won’t let me exist!”

Mr. Stanley lost patience. He bullied frankly.

“What nonsense is this? What raving! My dear child, you DO live, you DO exist! You have this home. You have friends, acquaintances, social standing, brothers and sisters, every advantage! Instead of which, you want to go to some mixed classes or other and cut up rabbits and dance about at nights in wild costumes with casual art student friends and God knows who. That—that isn’t living! You are beside yourself. You don’t know what you ask nor what you say. You have neither reason nor logic. I am sorry to seem to hurt you, but all I say is for your good. You MUST not, you SHALL not go. On this I am resolved. I put my foot down like—like adamant. And a time will come, Veronica, mark my words, a time will come when you will bless me for my firmness to-night. It goes to my heart to disappoint you, but this thing must not be.”

He sidled toward her, but she recoiled from him, leaving him in possession of the hearth-rug.

“Well,” she said, “good-night, father.”

“What!” he asked; “not a kiss?”

She affected not to hear.

The door closed softly upon her. For a long time he remained standing before the fire, staring at the situation. Then he sat down and filled his pipe slowly and thoughtfully....

“I don’t see what else I could have said,” he remarked.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

ANN VERONICA GATHERS POINTS OF VIEW

Part 1

“Are you coming to the Fadden Dance, Ann Veronica?” asked Constance Widgett.

Ann Veronica considered her answer. “I mean to,” she replied.

“You are making your dress?”

“Such as it is.”

They were in the elder Widgett girl's bedroom; Hetty was laid up, she said, with a sprained ankle, and a miscellaneous party was gossiping away her tedium. It was a large, littered, self-forgetful apartment, decorated with unframed charcoal sketches by various incipient masters; and an open bookcase, surmounted by plaster casts and the half of a human skull, displayed an odd miscellany of books—Shaw and Swinburne, Tom Jones, Fabian Essays, Pope and Dumas, cheek by jowl. Constance Widgett's abundant copper-red hair was bent down over some dimly remunerative work—stencilling in colors upon rough, white material—at a kitchen table she had dragged up-stairs for the purpose, while on her bed there was seated a slender lady of thirty or so in a dingy green dress, whom Constance had introduced with a wave of her hand as Miss Miniver. Miss Miniver looked out on the world through large emotional blue eyes that were further magnified by the glasses she wore, and her nose was pinched and pink, and her mouth was whimsically petulant. Her glasses moved quickly as her glance travelled from face to face. She seemed bursting with the desire to talk, and watching for her opportunity. On her lapel was an ivory button, bearing the words "Votes for Women." Ann Veronica sat at the foot of the sufferer's bed, while Teddy Widgett, being something of an athlete, occupied the only bed-room chair—a decadent piece, essentially a tripod and largely a formality—and smoked cigarettes, and tried to conceal the fact that he was looking all the time at Ann Veronica's eyebrows. Teddy was the hatless young man who had turned Ann Veronica aside from the Avenue two days before. He was the junior of both his sisters, co-educated and much broken in to feminine society. A bowl of roses, just brought by Ann Veronica, adorned the communal dressing-table, and Ann Veronica was particularly trim in preparation for a call she was to make with her aunt later in the afternoon.

Ann Veronica decided to be more explicit. "I've been," she said, "forbidden to come."

"Hul-LO!" said Hetty, turning her head on the pillow; and Teddy remarked with profound emotion, "My God!"

"Yes," said Ann Veronica, "and that complicates the situation."

"Auntie?" asked Constance, who was conversant with Ann Veronica's affairs.

"No! My father. It's—it's a serious prohibition."

"Why?" asked Hetty.

"That's the point. I asked him why, and he hadn't a reason."

"YOU ASKED YOUR FATHER FOR A REASON!" said Miss Miniver, with great intensity.

“Yes. I tried to have it out with him, but he wouldn’t have it out.” Ann Veronica reflected for an instant “That’s why I think I ought to come.”

“You asked your father for a reason!” Miss Miniver repeated.

“We always have things out with OUR father, poor dear!” said Hetty. “He’s got almost to like it.”

“Men,” said Miss Miniver, “NEVER have a reason. Never! And they don’t know it! They have no idea of it. It’s one of their worst traits, one of their very worst.”

“But I say, Vee,” said Constance, “if you come and you are forbidden to come there’ll be the deuce of a row.”

Ann Veronica was deciding for further confidences. Her situation was perplexing her very much, and the Widgett atmosphere was lax and sympathetic, and provocative of discussion. “It isn’t only the dance,” she said.

“There’s the classes,” said Constance, the well-informed.

“There’s the whole situation. Apparently I’m not to exist yet. I’m not to study, I’m not to grow. I’ve got to stay at home and remain in a state of suspended animation.”

“DUSTING!” said Miss Miniver, in a sepulchral voice.

“Until you marry, Vee,” said Hetty.

“Well, I don’t feel like standing it.”

“Thousands of women have married merely for freedom,” said Miss Miniver. “Thousands! Ugh! And found it a worse slavery.”

“I suppose,” said Constance, stencilling away at bright pink petals, “it’s our lot. But it’s very beastly.”

“What’s our lot?” asked her sister.

“Slavery! Downtroddenness! When I think of it I feel all over boot marks—men’s boots. We hide it bravely, but so it is. Damn! I’ve splashed.”

Miss Miniver’s manner became impressive. She addressed Ann Veronica with an air of conveying great open secrets to her. “As things are at present,” she said, “it is true. We live under man-made institutions, and that is what they amount to. Every girl in the world practically, except a few of us who teach or type-write, and then we’re underpaid and sweated—it’s dreadful to think how we are sweated!” She had lost her

generalization, whatever it was. She hung for a moment, and then went on, conclusively, “Until we have the vote that is how things WILL be.”

“I’m all for the vote,” said Teddy.

“I suppose a girl MUST be underpaid and sweated,” said Ann Veronica. “I suppose there’s no way of getting a decent income—independently.”

“Women have practically NO economic freedom,” said Miss Miniver, “because they have no political freedom. Men have seen to that. The one profession, the one decent profession, I mean, for a woman—except the stage—is teaching, and there we trample on one another. Everywhere else—the law, medicine, the Stock Exchange—prejudice bars us.”

“There’s art,” said Ann Veronica, “and writing.”

“Every one hasn’t the Gift. Even there a woman never gets a fair chance. Men are against her. Whatever she does is minimized. All the best novels have been written by women, and yet see how men sneer at the lady novelist still! There’s only one way to get on for a woman, and that is to please men. That is what they think we are for!”

“We’re beasts,” said Teddy. “Beasts!”

But Miss Miniver took no notice of his admission.

“Of course,” said Miss Miniver—she went on in a regularly undulating voice—“we DO please men. We have that gift. We can see round them and behind them and through them, and most of us use that knowledge, in the silent way we have, for our great ends. Not all of us, but some of us. Too many. I wonder what men would say if we threw the mask aside—if we really told them what WE thought of them, really showed them what WE were.” A flush of excitement crept into her cheeks.

“Maternity,” she said, “has been our undoing.”

From that she opened out into a long, confused emphatic discourse on the position of women, full of wonderful statements, while Constance worked at her stencilling and Ann Veronica and Hetty listened, and Teddy contributed sympathetic noises and consumed cheap cigarettes. As she talked she made weak little gestures with her hands, and she thrust her face forward from her bent shoulders; and she peered sometimes at Ann Veronica and sometimes at a photograph of the Axenstrasse, near Fluelen, that hung upon the wall. Ann Veronica watched her face, vaguely sympathizing with her, vaguely disliking her physical insufficiency and her convulsive movements, and the fine eyebrows were knit with a faint perplexity. Essentially the

talk was a mixture of fragments of sentences heard, of passages read, or arguments indicated rather than stated, and all of it was served in a sauce of strange enthusiasm, thin yet intense. Ann Veronica had had some training at the Tredgold College in disentangling threads from confused statements, and she had a curious persuasion that in all this fluent muddle there was something—something real, something that signified. But it was very hard to follow. She did not understand the note of hostility to men that ran through it all, the bitter vindictiveness that lit Miss Miniver's cheeks and eyes, the sense of some at last insupportable wrong slowly accumulated. She had no inkling of that insupportable wrong.

"We are the species," said Miss Miniver, "men are only incidents. They give themselves airs, but so it is. In all the species of animals the females are more important than the males; the males have to please them. Look at the cock's feathers, look at the competition there is everywhere, except among humans. The stags and oxen and things all have to fight for us, everywhere. Only in man is the male made the most important. And that happens through our maternity; it's our very importance that degrades us.

"While we were minding the children they stole our rights and liberties. The children made us slaves, and the men took advantage of it. It's—Mrs. Shalford says—the accidental conquering the essential. Originally in the first animals there were no males, none at all. It has been proved. Then they appear among the lower things"—she made meticulous gestures to figure the scale of life; she seemed to be holding up specimens, and peering through her glasses at them—"among crustaceans and things, just as little creatures, ever so inferior to the females. Mere hangers on. Things you would laugh at. And among human beings, too, women to begin with were the rulers and leaders; they owned all the property, they invented all the arts.

"The primitive government was the Matriarchate. The Matriarchate! The Lords of Creation just ran about and did what they were told."

"But is that really so?" said Ann Veronica.

"It has been proved," said Miss Miniver, and added, "by American professors."

"But how did they prove it?"

"By science," said Miss Miniver, and hurried on, putting out a rhetorical hand that showed a slash of finger through its glove. "And now, look at us! See what we have become. Toys! Delicate trifles! A sex of invalids. It is we who have become the parasites and toys."

It was, Ann Veronica felt, at once absurd and extraordinarily right. Hetty, who had periods of lucid expression, put the thing for her from her pillow. She charged boldly into the space of Miss Miniver's rhetorical pause.

"It isn't quite that we're toys. Nobody toys with me. Nobody regards Constance or Vee as a delicate trifle."

Teddy made some confused noise, a thoracic street row; some remark was assassinated by a rival in his throat and buried hastily under a cough.

"They'd better not," said Hetty. "The point is we're not toys, toys isn't the word; we're litter. We're handfuls. We're regarded as inflammable litter that mustn't be left about. We are the species, and maternity is our game; that's all right, but nobody wants that admitted for fear we should all catch fire, and set about fulfilling the purpose of our beings without waiting for further explanations. As if we didn't know! The practical trouble is our ages. They used to marry us off at seventeen, rush us into things before we had time to protest. They don't now. Heaven knows why! They don't marry most of us off now until high up in the twenties. And the age gets higher. We have to hang about in the interval. There's a great gulf opened, and nobody's got any plans what to do with us. So the world is choked with waste and waiting daughters. Hanging about! And they start thinking and asking questions, and begin to be neither one thing nor the other. We're partly human beings and partly females in suspense."

Miss Miniver followed with an expression of perplexity, her mouth shaped to futile expositions. The Widgett method of thought puzzled her weakly rhetorical mind. "There is no remedy, girls," she began, breathlessly, "except the Vote. Give us that—"

Ann Veronica came in with a certain disregard of Miss Miniver. "That's it," she said. "They have no plans for us. They have no ideas what to do with us."

"Except," said Constance, surveying her work with her head on one side, "to keep the matches from the litter."

"And they won't let us make plans for ourselves."

"We will," said Miss Miniver, refusing to be suppressed, "if some of us have to be killed to get it." And she pressed her lips together in white resolution and nodded, and she was manifestly full of that same passion for conflict and self-sacrifice that has given the world martyrs since the beginning of things. "I wish I could make every woman, every girl, see this as clearly as I see it—just what the Vote means to us. Just what it means...."

Part 2

As Ann Veronica went back along the Avenue to her aunt she became aware of a light-footed pursuer running. Teddy overtook her, a little out of breath, his innocent face flushed, his straw-colored hair disordered. He was out of breath, and spoke in broken sentences.

“I say, Vee. Half a minute, Vee. It’s like this: You want freedom. Look here. You know—if you want freedom. Just an idea of mine. You know how those Russian students do? In Russia. Just a formal marriage. Mere formality. Liberates the girl from parental control. See? You marry me. Simply. No further responsibility whatever. Without hindrance—present occupation. Why not? Quite willing. Get a license—just an idea of mine. Doesn’t matter a bit to me. Do anything to please you, Vee. Anything. Not fit to be dust on your boots. Still—there you are!”

He paused.

Ann Veronica’s desire to laugh unrestrainedly was checked by the tremendous earnestness of his expression. “Awfully good of you, Teddy.” she said.

He nodded silently, too full for words.

“But I don’t see,” said Ann Veronica, “just how it fits the present situation.”

“No! Well, I just suggested it. Threw it out. Of course, if at any time—see reason—alter your opinion. Always at your service. No offence, I hope. All right! I’m off. Due to play hockey. Jackson’s. Horrid snorters! So long, Vee! Just suggested it. See? Nothing really. Passing thought.”

“Teddy,” said Ann Veronica, “you’re a dear!”

“Oh, quite!” said Teddy, convulsively, and lifted an imaginary hat and left her.

Part 3

The call Ann Veronica paid with her aunt that afternoon had at first much the same relation to the Widgett conversation that a plaster statue of Mr. Gladstone would have

to a carelessly displayed interior on a dissecting-room table. The Widgetts talked with a remarkable absence of external coverings; the Palsworthys found all the meanings of life on its surfaces. They seemed the most wrapped things in all Ann Veronica's wrappered world. The Widgett mental furniture was perhaps worn and shabby, but there it was before you, undisguised, fading visibly in an almost pitiless sunlight. Lady Palsworthy was the widow of a knight who had won his spurs in the wholesale coal trade, she was of good seventeenth-century attorney blood, a county family, and distantly related to Aunt Mollie's deceased curate. She was the social leader of Morningside Park, and in her superficial and euphuistic way an extremely kind and pleasant woman. With her lived a Mrs. Pramlay, a sister of the Morningside Park doctor, and a very active and useful member of the Committee of the Impoverished Gentlewomen's Aid Society. Both ladies were on easy and friendly terms with all that was best in Morningside Park society; they had an afternoon once a month that was quite well attended, they sometimes gave musical evenings, they dined out and gave a finish to people's dinners, they had a full-sized croquet lawn and tennis beyond, and understood the art of bringing people together. And they never talked of anything at all, never discussed, never even encouraged gossip. They were just nice.

Ann Veronica found herself walking back down the Avenue that had just been the scene of her first proposal beside her aunt, and speculating for the first time in her life about that lady's mental attitudes. Her prevailing effect was one of quiet and complete assurance, as though she knew all about everything, and was only restrained by her instinctive delicacy from telling what she knew. But the restraint exercised by her instinctive delicacy was very great; over and above coarse or sexual matters it covered religion and politics and any mention of money matters or crime, and Ann Veronica found herself wondering whether these exclusions represented, after all, anything more than suppressions. Was there anything at all in those locked rooms of her aunt's mind? Were they fully furnished and only a little dusty and cobwebby and in need of an airing, or were they stark vacancy except, perhaps, for a cockroach or so or the gnawing of a rat? What was the mental equivalent of a rat's gnawing? The image was going astray. But what would her aunt think of Teddy's recent off-hand suggestion of marriage? What would she think of the Widgett conversation? Suppose she was to tell her aunt quietly but firmly about the parasitic males of degraded crustacea. The girl suppressed a chuckle that would have been inexplicable.

There came a wild rush of anthropological lore into her brain, a flare of indecorous humor. It was one of the secret troubles of her mind, this grotesque twist her ideas would sometimes take, as though they rebelled and rioted. After all, she found herself reflecting, behind her aunt's complacent visage there was a past as lurid as any

one's—not, of course, her aunt's own personal past, which was apparently just that curate and almost incredibly jejune, but an ancestral past with all sorts of scandalous things in it: fire and slaughterings, exogamy, marriage by capture, corroborees, cannibalism! Ancestresses with perhaps dim anticipatory likenesses to her aunt, their hair less neatly done, no doubt, their manners and gestures as yet undisciplined, but still ancestresses in the direct line, must have danced through a brief and stirring life in the woady buff. Was there no echo anywhere in Miss Stanley's pacified brain? Those empty rooms, if they were empty, were the equivalents of astoundingly decorated predecessors. Perhaps it was just as well there was no inherited memory.

Ann Veronica was by this time quite shocked at her own thoughts, and yet they would go on with their freaks. Great vistas of history opened, and she and her aunt were near reverting to the primitive and passionate and entirely indecorous arboreal—were swinging from branches by the arms, and really going on quite dreadfully—when their arrival at the Palsworthys' happily checked this play of fancy, and brought Ann Veronica back to the exigencies of the wrappered life again.

Lady Palsworthy liked Ann Veronica because she was never awkward, had steady eyes, and an almost invariable neatness and dignity in her clothes. She seemed just as stiff and shy as a girl ought to be, Lady Palsworthy thought, neither garrulous nor unready, and free from nearly all the heavy aggressiveness, the overgrown, overblown quality, the egotism and want of consideration of the typical modern girl. But then Lady Palsworthy had never seen Ann Veronica running like the wind at hockey. She had never seen her sitting on tables nor heard her discussing theology, and had failed to observe that the graceful figure was a natural one and not due to ably chosen stays. She took it for granted Ann Veronica wore stays—mild stays, perhaps, but stays, and thought no more of the matter. She had seen her really only at teas, with the Stanley strain in her uppermost. There are so many girls nowadays who are quite unpresentable at tea, with their untrimmed laughs, their awful dispositions of their legs when they sit down, their slangy disrespect; they no longer smoke, it is true, like the girls of the eighties and nineties, nevertheless to a fine intelligence they have the flavor of tobacco. They have no amenities, they scratch the mellow surface of things almost as if they did it on purpose; and Lady Palsworthy and Mrs. Pramlay lived for amenities and the mellowed surfaces of things. Ann Veronica was one of the few young people—and one must have young people just as one must have flowers—one could ask to a little gathering without the risk of a painful discord. Then the distant relationship to Miss Stanley gave them a slight but pleasant sense of proprietorship in the girl. They had their little dreams about her.

Mrs. Pramlay received them in the pretty chintz drawing-room, which opened by French windows on the trim garden, with its croquet lawn, its tennis-net in the middle distance, and its remote rose alley lined with smart dahlias and flaming sunflowers. Her eye met Miss Stanley's understandingly, and she was if anything a trifle more affectionate in her greeting to Ann Veronica. Then Ann Veronica passed on toward the tea in the garden, which was dotted with the elite of Morningside Park society, and there she was pounced upon by Lady Palsworthy and given tea and led about. Across the lawn and hovering indecisively, Ann Veronica saw and immediately affected not to see Mr. Manning, Lady Palsworthy's nephew, a tall young man of seven-and-thirty with a handsome, thoughtful, impassive face, a full black mustache, and a certain heavy luxuriousness of gesture. The party resolved itself for Ann Veronica into a game in which she manoeuvred unostentatiously and finally unsuccessfully to avoid talking alone with this gentleman.

Mr. Manning had shown on previous occasions that he found Ann Veronica interesting and that he wished to interest her. He was a civil servant of some standing, and after a previous conversation upon aesthetics of a sententious, nebulous, and sympathetic character, he had sent her a small volume, which he described as the fruits of his leisure and which was as a matter of fact rather carefully finished verse. It dealt with fine aspects of Mr. Manning's feelings, and as Ann Veronica's mind was still largely engaged with fundamentals and found no pleasure in metrical forms, she had not as yet cut its pages. So that as she saw him she remarked to herself very faintly but definitely, "Oh, golly!" and set up a campaign of avoidance that Mr. Manning at last broke down by coming directly at her as she talked with the vicar's aunt about some of the details of the alleged smell of the new church lamps. He did not so much cut into this conversation as loom over it, for he was a tall, if rather studiously stooping, man.

The face that looked down upon Ann Veronica was full of amiable intention. "Splendid you are looking to-day, Miss Stanley," he said. "How well and jolly you must be feeling."

He beamed over the effect of this and shook hands with effusion, and Lady Palsworthy suddenly appeared as his confederate and disentangled the vicar's aunt.

"I love this warm end of summer more than words can tell," he said. "I've tried to make words tell it. It's no good. Mild, you know, and boon. You want music."

Ann Veronica agreed, and tried to make the manner of her assent cover a possible knowledge of a probable poem.

“Splendid it must be to be a composer. Glorious! The Pastoral. Beethoven; he’s the best of them. Don’t you think? Tum, tay, tum, tay.”

Ann Veronica did.

“What have you been doing since our last talk? Still cutting up rabbits and probing into things? I’ve often thought of that talk of ours—often.”

He did not appear to require any answer to his question.

“Often,” he repeated, a little heavily.

“Beautiful these autumn flowers are,” said Ann Veronica, in a wide, uncomfortable pause.

“Do come and see the Michaelmas daisies at the end of the garden,” said Mr. Manning, “they’re a dream.” And Ann Veronica found herself being carried off to an isolation even remoter and more conspicuous than the corner of the lawn, with the whole of the party aiding and abetting and glancing at them. “Damn!” said Ann Veronica to herself, rousing herself for a conflict.

Mr. Manning told her he loved beauty, and extorted a similar admission from her; he then expatiated upon his own love of beauty. He said that for him beauty justified life, that he could not imagine a good action that was not a beautiful one nor any beautiful thing that could be altogether bad. Ann Veronica hazarded an opinion that as a matter of history some very beautiful people had, to a quite considerable extent, been bad, but Mr. Manning questioned whether when they were bad they were really beautiful or when they were beautiful bad. Ann Veronica found her attention wandering a little as he told her that he was not ashamed to feel almost slavish in the presence of really beautiful people, and then they came to the Michaelmas daisies. They were really very fine and abundant, with a blaze of perennial sunflowers behind them.

“They make me want to shout,” said Mr. Manning, with a sweep of the arm.

“They’re very good this year,” said Ann Veronica, avoiding controversial matter.

“Either I want to shout,” said Mr. Manning, “when I see beautiful things, or else I want to weep.” He paused and looked at her, and said, with a sudden drop into a confidential undertone, “Or else I want to pray.”

“When is Michaelmas Day?” said Ann Veronica, a little abruptly.

“Heaven knows!” said Mr. Manning; and added, “the twenty-ninth.”

“I thought it was earlier,” said Ann Veronica. “Wasn’t Parliament to reassemble?”

He put out his hand and leaned against a tree and crossed his legs. “You’re not interested in politics?” he asked, almost with a note of protest.

“Well, rather,” said Ann Veronica. “It seems—It’s interesting.”

“Do you think so? I find my interest in that sort of thing decline and decline.”

“I’m curious. Perhaps because I don’t know. I suppose an intelligent person OUGHT to be interested in political affairs. They concern us all.”

“I wonder,” said Mr. Manning, with a baffling smile.

“I think they do. After all, they’re history in the making.”

“A sort of history,” said Mr. Manning; and repeated, “a sort of history. But look at these glorious daisies!”

“But don’t you think political questions ARE important?”

“I don’t think they are this afternoon, and I don’t think they are to you.”

Ann Veronica turned her back on the Michaelmas daisies, and faced toward the house with an air of a duty completed.

“Just come to that seat now you are here, Miss Stanley, and look down the other path; there’s a vista of just the common sort. Better even than these.”

Ann Veronica walked as he indicated.

“You know I’m old-fashioned, Miss Stanley. I don’t think women need to trouble about political questions.”

“I want a vote,” said Ann Veronica.

“Really!” said Mr. Manning, in an earnest voice, and waved his hand to the alley of mauve and purple. “I wish you didn’t.”

“Why not?” She turned on him.

“It jars. It jars with all my ideas. Women to me are something so serene, so fine, so feminine, and politics are so dusty, so sordid, so wearisome and quarrelsome. It seems to me a woman’s duty to be beautiful, to BE beautiful and to behave beautifully, and politics are by their very nature ugly. You see, I—I am a woman worshipper. I worshipped women long before I found any woman I might ever hope to worship. Long ago. And—the idea of committees, of hustings, of agenda-papers!”

“I don’t see why the responsibility of beauty should all be shifted on to the women,” said Ann Veronica, suddenly remembering a part of Miss Miniver’s discourse.

“It rests with them by the nature of things. Why should you who are queens come down from your thrones? If you can afford it, WE can’t. We can’t afford to turn our women, our Madonnas, our Saint Catherines, our Mona Lisas, our goddesses and angels and fairy princesses, into a sort of man. Womanhood is sacred to me. My politics in that matter wouldn’t be to give women votes. I’m a Socialist, Miss Stanley.”

“WHAT?” said Ann Veronica, startled.

“A Socialist of the order of John Ruskin. Indeed I am! I would make this country a collective monarchy, and all the girls and women in it should be the Queen. They should never come into contact with politics or economics—or any of those things. And we men would work for them and serve them in loyal fealty.”

“That’s rather the theory now,” said Ann Veronica. “Only so many men neglect their duties.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Manning, with an air of emerging from an elaborate demonstration, “and so each of us must, under existing conditions, being chivalrous indeed to all women, choose for himself his own particular and worshipful queen.”

“So far as one can judge from the system in practice,” said Ann Veronica, speaking in a loud, common-sense, detached tone, and beginning to walk slowly but resolutely toward the lawn, “it doesn’t work.”

“Every one must be experimental,” said Mr. Manning, and glanced round hastily for further horticultural points of interest in secluded corners. None presented themselves to save him from that return.

“That’s all very well when one isn’t the material experimented upon,” Ann Veronica had remarked.

“Women would—they DO have far more power than they think, as influences, as inspirations.”

Ann Veronica said nothing in answer to that.

“You say you want a vote,” said Mr. Manning, abruptly.

“I think I ought to have one.”

“Well, I have two,” said Mr. Manning—“one in Oxford University and one in Kensington.” He caught up and went on with a sort of clumsiness: “Let me present you with them and be your voter.”

There followed an instant’s pause, and then Ann Veronica had decided to misunderstand.

“I want a vote for myself,” she said. “I don’t see why I should take it second-hand. Though it’s very kind of you. And rather unscrupulous. Have you ever voted, Mr. Manning? I suppose there’s a sort of place like a ticket-office. And a ballot-box—” Her face assumed an expression of intellectual conflict. “What is a ballot-box like, exactly?” she asked, as though it was very important to her.

Mr. Manning regarded her thoughtfully for a moment and stroked his mustache. “A ballot-box, you know,” he said, “is very largely just a box.” He made quite a long pause, and went on, with a sigh: “You have a voting paper given you—”

They emerged into the publicity of the lawn.

“Yes,” said Ann Veronica, “yes,” to his explanation, and saw across the lawn Lady Palsworthy talking to her aunt, and both of them staring frankly across at her and Mr. Manning as they talked.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

THE MORNING OF THE CRISIS

Part 1

Two days after came the day of the Crisis, the day of the Fadden Dance. It would have been a crisis anyhow, but it was complicated in Ann Veronica’s mind by the fact that a letter lay on the breakfast-table from Mr. Manning, and that her aunt focussed a brightly tactful disregard upon this throughout the meal. Ann Veronica had come down thinking of nothing in the world but her inflexible resolution to go to the dance in the teeth of all opposition. She did not know Mr. Manning’s handwriting, and opened his letter and read some lines before its import appeared. Then for a time she forgot

the Fadden affair altogether. With a well-simulated unconcern and a heightened color she finished her breakfast.

She was not obliged to go to the Tredgold College, because as yet the College had not settled down for the session. She was supposed to be reading at home, and after breakfast she strolled into the vegetable garden, and having taken up a position upon the staging of a disused greenhouse that had the double advantage of being hidden from the windows of the house and secure from the sudden appearance of any one, she resumed the reading of Mr. Manning's letter.

Mr. Manning's handwriting had an air of being clear without being easily legible; it was large and rather roundish, with a lack of definition about the letters and a disposition to treat the large ones as liberal-minded people nowadays treat opinions, as all amounting to the same thing really—a years-smoothed boyish rather than an adult hand. And it filled seven sheets of notepaper, each written only on one side.

"MY DEAR MISS STANLEY," it began,—"I hope you will forgive my bothering you with a letter, but I have been thinking very much over our conversation at Lady Palsworthy's, and I feel there are things I want to say to you so much that I cannot wait until we meet again. It is the worst of talk under such social circumstances that it is always getting cut off so soon as it is beginning; and I went home that afternoon feeling I had said nothing—literally nothing—of the things I had meant to say to you and that were coursing through my head. They were things I had meant very much to talk to you about, so that I went home vexed and disappointed, and only relieved myself a little by writing a few verses. I wonder if you will mind very much when I tell you they were suggested by you. You must forgive the poet's license I take. Here is one verse. The metrical irregularity is intentional, because I want, as it were, to put you apart: to change the lilt and the mood altogether when I speak of you.

"'A SONG OF LADIES AND MY LADY

"'Saintly white and a lily is Mary,

Margaret's violets, sweet and shy;

Green and dewy is Nellie-bud fairy,

Forget-me-nots live in Gwendolen's eye.

Annabel shines like a star in the darkness,

Rosamund queens it a rose, deep rose;

But the lady I love is like sunshine in April weather,

She gleams and gladdens, she warms—and goes.'

"Crude, I admit. But let that verse tell my secret. All bad verse—originally the epigram was Lang's, I believe—is written in a state of emotion.

"My dear Miss Stanley, when I talked to you the other afternoon of work and politics and such-like things, my mind was all the time resenting it beyond measure. There we were discussing whether you should have a vote, and I remembered the last occasion we met it was about your prospects of success in the medical profession or as a Government official such as a number of women now are, and all the time my heart was crying out within me, 'Here is the Queen of your career.' I wanted, as I have never wanted before, to take you up, to make you mine, to carry you off and set you apart from all the strain and turmoil of life. For nothing will ever convince me that it is not the man's share in life to shield, to protect, to lead and toil and watch and battle with the world at large. I want to be your knight, your servant, your protector, your—I dare scarcely write the word—your husband. So I come suppliant. I am five-and-thirty, and I have knocked about in the world and tasted the quality of life. I had a hard fight to begin with to win my way into the Upper Division—I was third on a list of forty-seven—and since then I have found myself promoted almost yearly in a widening sphere of social service. Before I met you I never met any one whom I felt I could love, but you have discovered depths in my own nature I had scarcely suspected. Except for a few early ebullitions of passion, natural to a warm and romantic disposition, and leaving no harmful after-effects—ebullitions that by the standards of the higher truth I feel no one can justly cast a stone at, and of which I for one am by no means ashamed—I come to you a pure and unencumbered man. I love you. In addition to my public salary I have a certain private property and further expectations through my aunt, so that I can offer you a life of wide and generous refinement, travel, books, discussion, and easy relations with a circle of clever and brilliant and thoughtful people with whom my literary work has brought me into contact, and of which, seeing me only as you have done alone in Morningside Park, you can have no idea. I have a certain standing not only as a singer but as a critic, and I belong to one of the most brilliant causerie dinner clubs of the day, in which successful Bohemianism, politicians, men of affairs, artists, sculptors, and cultivated noblemen generally, mingle together in the easiest and most delightful intercourse. That is my real milieu, and one that I am convinced you would not only adorn but delight in.

"I find it very hard to write this letter. There are so many things I want to tell you, and they stand on such different levels, that the effect is necessarily confusing and

discordant, and I find myself doubting if I am really giving you the thread of emotion that should run through all this letter. For although I must confess it reads very much like an application or a testimonial or some such thing as that, I can assure you I am writing this in fear and trembling with a sinking heart. My mind is full of ideas and images that I have been cherishing and accumulating—dreams of travelling side by side, of lunching quietly together in some jolly restaurant, of moonlight and music and all that side of life, of seeing you dressed like a queen and shining in some brilliant throng—mine; of your looking at flowers in some old-world garden, our garden—there are splendid places to be got down in Surrey, and a little runabout motor is quite within my means. You know they say, as, indeed, I have just quoted already, that all bad poetry is written in a state of emotion, but I have no doubt that this is true of bad offers of marriage. I have often felt before that it is only when one has nothing to say that one can write easy poetry. Witness Browning. And how can I get into one brief letter the complex accumulated desires of what is now, I find on reference to my diary, nearly sixteen months of letting my mind run on you—ever since that jolly party at Surbiton, where we raced and beat the other boat. You steered and I rowed stroke. My very sentences stumble and give way. But I do not even care if I am absurd. I am a resolute man, and hitherto when I have wanted a thing I have got it; but I have never yet wanted anything in my life as I have wanted you. It isn't the same thing. I am afraid because I love you, so that the mere thought of failure hurts. If I did not love you so much I believe I could win you by sheer force of character, for people tell me I am naturally of the dominating type. Most of my successes in life have been made with a sort of reckless vigor.

"Well, I have said what I had to say, stumblingly and badly, and baldly. But I am sick of tearing up letters and hopeless of getting what I have to say better said. It would be easy enough for me to write an eloquent letter about something else. Only I do not care to write about anything else. Let me put the main question to you now that I could not put the other afternoon. Will you marry me, Ann Veronica?

"Very sincerely yours,

"HUBERT MANNING."

Ann Veronica read this letter through with grave, attentive eyes.

Her interest grew as she read, a certain distaste disappeared. Twice she smiled, but not unkindly. Then she went back and mixed up the sheets in a search for particular passages. Finally she fell into reflection.

“Odd!” she said. “I suppose I shall have to write an answer. It’s so different from what one has been led to expect.”

She became aware of her aunt, through the panes of the greenhouse, advancing with an air of serene unconsciousness from among the raspberry canes.

“No you don’t!” said Ann Veronica, and walked out at a brisk and business-like pace toward the house.

“I’m going for a long tramp, auntie,” she said.

“Alone, dear?”

“Yes, aunt. I’ve got a lot of things to think about.”

Miss Stanley reflected as Ann Veronica went toward the house. She thought her niece very hard and very self-possessed and self-confident. She ought to be softened and tender and confidential at this phase of her life. She seemed to have no idea whatever of the emotional states that were becoming to her age and position. Miss Stanley walked round the garden thinking, and presently house and garden reverberated to Ann Veronica’s slamming of the front door.

“I wonder!” said Miss Stanley.

For a long time she surveyed a row of towering holly-hocks, as though they offered an explanation. Then she went in and up-stairs, hesitated on the landing, and finally, a little breathless and with an air of great dignity, opened the door and walked into Ann Veronica’s room. It was a neat, efficient-looking room, with a writing-table placed with a business-like regard to the window, and a bookcase surmounted by a pig’s skull, a dissected frog in a sealed bottle, and a pile of shiny, black-covered note-books. In the corner of the room were two hockey-sticks and a tennis-racket, and upon the walls Ann Veronica, by means of autotypes, had indicated her proclivities in art. But Miss Stanley took no notice of these things. She walked straight across to the wardrobe and opened it. There, hanging among Ann Veronica’s more normal clothing, was a skimpy dress of red canvas, trimmed with cheap and tawdry braid, and short—it could hardly reach below the knee. On the same peg and evidently belonging to it was a black velvet Zouave jacket. And then! a garment that was conceivably a secondary skirt.

Miss Stanley hesitated, and took first one and then another of the constituents of this costume off its peg and surveyed it.

The third item she took with a trembling hand by its waistbelt. As she raised it, its lower portion fell apart into two baggy crimson masses.

“TROUSERS!” she whispered.

Her eyes travelled about the room as if in appeal to the very chairs.

Tucked under the writing-table a pair of yellow and gold Turkish slippers of a highly meretricious quality caught her eye. She walked over to them still carrying the trousers in her hands, and stooped to examine them. They were ingenious disguises of gilt paper destructively gummed, it would seem, to Ann Veronicas’ best dancing-slippers.

Then she reverted to the trousers.

“How CAN I tell him?” whispered Miss Stanley.

Part 2

Ann Veronica carried a light but business-like walking-stick. She walked with an easy quickness down the Avenue and through the proletarian portion of Morningside Park, and crossing these fields came into a pretty overhung lane that led toward Caddington and the Downs. And then her pace slackened. She tucked her stick under her arm and re-read Manning’s letter.

“Let me think,” said Ann Veronica. “I wish this hadn’t turned up to-day of all days.”

She found it difficult to begin thinking, and indeed she was anything but clear what it was she had to think about. Practically it was most of the chief interests in life that she proposed to settle in this pedestrian meditation. Primarily it was her own problem, and in particular the answer she had to give to Mr. Manning’s letter, but in order to get data for that she found that she, having a logical and ordered mind, had to decide upon the general relations of men to women, the objects and conditions of marriage and its bearing upon the welfare of the race, the purpose of the race, the purpose, if any, of everything....

“Frightful lot of things aren’t settled,” said Ann Veronica. In addition, the Fadden Dance business, all out of proportion, occupied the whole foreground of her thoughts and threw a color of rebellion over everything. She kept thinking she was thinking about Mr. Manning’s proposal of marriage and finding she was thinking of the dance.

For a time her efforts to achieve a comprehensive concentration were dispersed by the passage of the village street of Caddington, the passing of a goggled car-load of motorists, and the struggles of a stable lad mounted on one recalcitrant horse and

leading another. When she got back to her questions again in the monotonous high-road that led up the hill, she found the image of Mr. Manning central in her mind. He stood there, large and dark, enunciating, in his clear voice from beneath his large mustache, clear flat sentences, deliberately kindly. He proposed, he wanted to possess her! He loved her.

Ann Veronica felt no repulsion at the prospect. That Mr. Manning loved her presented itself to her bloodlessly, stilled from any imaginative quiver or thrill of passion or disgust. The relationship seemed to have almost as much to do with blood and body as a mortgage. It was something that would create a mutual claim, a relationship. It was in another world from that in which men will die for a kiss, and touching hands lights fires that burn up lives—the world of romance, the world of passionately beautiful things.

But that other world, in spite of her resolute exclusion of it, was always looking round corners and peeping through chinks and crannies, and rustling and raiding into the order in which she chose to live, shining out of pictures at her, echoing in lyrics and music; it invaded her dreams, it wrote up broken and enigmatical sentences upon the passage walls of her mind. She was aware of it now as if it were a voice shouting outside a house, shouting passionate verities in a hot sunlight, a voice that cries while people talk insincerely in a darkened room and pretend not to hear. Its shouting now did in some occult manner convey a protest that Mr. Manning would on no account do, though he was tall and dark and handsome and kind, and thirty-five and adequately prosperous, and all that a husband should be. But there was, it insisted, no mobility in his face, no movement, nothing about him that warmed. If Ann Veronica could have put words to that song they would have been, “Hot-blooded marriage or none!” but she was far too indistinct in this matter to frame any words at all.

“I don’t love him,” said Ann Veronica, getting a gleam. “I don’t see that his being a good sort matters. That really settles about that.... But it means no end of a row.”

For a time she sat on a rail before leaving the road for the downland turf. “But I wish,” she said, “I had some idea what I was really up to.”

Her thoughts went into solution for a time, while she listened to a lark singing.

“Marriage and mothering,” said Ann Veronica, with her mind crystallizing out again as the lark dropped to the nest in the turf. “And all the rest of it perhaps is a song.”

Part 3

Her mind got back to the Fadden Ball.

She meant to go, she meant to go, she meant to go. Nothing would stop her, and she was prepared to face the consequences. Suppose her father turned her out of doors! She did not care, she meant to go. She would just walk out of the house and go....

She thought of her costume in some detail and with considerable satisfaction, and particularly of a very jolly property dagger with large glass jewels in the handle, that reposed in a drawer in her room. She was to be a Corsair's Bride. "Fancy stabbing a man for jealousy!" she thought. "You'd have to think how to get in between his bones."

She thought of her father, and with an effort dismissed him from her mind.

She tried to imagine the collective effect of the Fadden Ball; she had never seen a fancy-dress gathering in her life. Mr. Manning came into her thoughts again, an unexpected, tall, dark, self-contained presence at the Fadden. One might suppose him turning up; he knew a lot of clever people, and some of them might belong to the class. What would he come as?

Presently she roused herself with a guilty start from the task of dressing and re-dressing Mr. Manning in fancy costume, as though he was a doll. She had tried him as a Crusader, in which guise he seemed plausible but heavy—"There IS something heavy about him; I wonder if it's his mustache?"—and as a Hussar, which made him preposterous, and as a Black Brunswicker, which was better, and as an Arab sheik. Also she had tried him as a dragoman and as a gendarme, which seemed the most suitable of all to his severely handsome, immobile profile. She felt he would tell people the way, control traffic, and refuse admission to public buildings with invincible correctness and the very finest explicit feelings possible. For each costume she had devised a suitable form of matrimonial refusal. "Oh, Lord!" she said, discovering what she was up to, and dropped lightly from the fence upon the turf and went on her way toward the crest.

"I shall never marry," said Ann Veronica, resolutely; "I'm not the sort. That's why it's so important I should take my own line now."

Part 4

Ann Veronica's ideas of marriage were limited and unsystematic. Her teachers and mistresses had done their best to stamp her mind with an ineradicable persuasion that it was tremendously important, and on no account to be thought about. Her first intimations of marriage as a fact of extreme significance in a woman's life had come with the marriage of Alice and the elopement of her second sister, Gwen.

These convulsions occurred when Ann Veronica was about twelve. There was a gulf of eight years between her and the youngest of her brace of sisters—an impassable gulf inhabited chaotically by two noisy brothers. These sisters moved in a grown-up world inaccessible to Ann Veronica's sympathies, and to a large extent remote from her curiosity. She got into rows through meddling with their shoes and tennis-rackets, and had moments of carefully concealed admiration when she was privileged to see them just before her bedtime, rather radiantly dressed in white or pink or amber and prepared to go out with her mother. She thought Alice a bit of a sneak, an opinion her brothers shared, and Gwen rather a snatch at meals. She saw nothing of their love-making, and came home from her boarding-school in a state of decently suppressed curiosity for Alice's wedding.

Her impressions of this cardinal ceremony were rich and confused, complicated by a quite transitory passion that awakened no reciprocal fire for a fat curly headed cousin in black velveteen and a lace collar, who assisted as a page. She followed him about persistently, and succeeded, after a brisk, unchivalrous struggle (in which he pinched and asked her to "cheese it"), in kissing him among the raspberries behind the greenhouse. Afterward her brother Roddy, also strange in velveteen, feeling rather than knowing of this relationship, punched this Adonis's head.

A marriage in the house proved to be exciting but extremely disorganizing. Everything seemed designed to unhinge the mind and make the cat wretched. All the furniture was moved, all the meals were disarranged, and everybody, Ann Veronica included, appeared in new, bright costumes. She had to wear cream and a brown sash and a short frock and her hair down, and Gwen cream and a brown sash and a long skirt and her hair up. And her mother, looking unusually alert and hectic, wore cream and brown also, made up in a more complicated manner.

Ann Veronica was much impressed by a mighty trying on and altering and fussing about Alice's "things"—Alice was being re-costumed from garret to cellar, with a walking-dress and walking-boots to measure, and a bride's costume of the most ravishing description, and stockings and such like beyond the dreams of avarice—and a constant and increasing dripping into the house of irrelevant remarkable objects, such as—

Real lace bedspread;

Gilt travelling clock;

Ornamental pewter plaque;

Salad bowl (silver mounted) and servers;

Madgett's "English Poets" (twelve volumes), bound purple morocco;

Etc., etc.

Through all this flutter of novelty there came and went a solicitous, preoccupied, almost depressed figure. It was Doctor Ralph, formerly the partner of Doctor Stickell in the Avenue, and now with a thriving practice of his own in Wamblesmith. He had shaved his side-whiskers and come over in flannels, but he was still indisputably the same person who had attended Ann Veronica for the measles and when she swallowed the fish-bone. But his role was altered, and he was now playing the bridegroom in this remarkable drama. Alice was going to be Mrs. Ralph. He came in apologetically; all the old "Well, and how ARE we?" note gone; and once he asked Ann Veronica, almost furtively,

"How's Alice getting on, Vee?" Finally, on the Day, he appeared like his old professional self transfigured, in the most beautiful light gray trousers Ann Veronica had ever seen and a new shiny silk hat with a most becoming roll....

It was not simply that all the rooms were rearranged and everybody dressed in unusual fashions, and all the routines of life abolished and put away: people's tempers and emotions also seemed strangely disturbed and shifted about. Her father was distinctly irascible, and disposed more than ever to hide away among the petrological things—the study was turned out. At table he carved in a gloomy but resolute manner. On the Day he had trumpet-like outbreaks of cordiality, varied by a watchful preoccupation. Gwen and Alice were fantastically friendly, which seemed to annoy him, and Mrs. Stanley was throughout enigmatical, with an anxious eye on her husband and Alice.

There was a confused impression of livery carriages and whips with white favors, people fussily wanting other people to get in before them, and then the church. People sat in unusual pews, and a wide margin of hassocky emptiness intervened between the ceremony and the walls.

Ann Veronica had a number of fragmentary impressions of Alice strangely transfigured in bridal raiment. It seemed to make her sister downcast beyond any precedent. The

bridesmaids and pages got rather jumbled in the aisle, and she had an effect of Alice's white back and sloping shoulders and veiled head receding toward the altar. In some incomprehensible way that back view made her feel sorry for Alice. Also she remembered very vividly the smell of orange blossom, and Alice, drooping and spiritless, mumbling responses, facing Doctor Ralph, while the Rev. Edward Bribble stood between them with an open book. Doctor Ralph looked kind and large, and listened to Alice's responses as though he was listening to symptoms and thought that on the whole she was progressing favorably.

And afterward her mother and Alice kissed long and clung to each other. And Doctor Ralph stood by looking considerate. He and her father shook hands manfully.

Ann Veronica had got quite interested in Mr. Bribble's rendering of the service—he had the sort of voice that brings out things—and was still teeming with ideas about it when finally a wild outburst from the organ made it clear that, whatever snivelling there might be down in the chancel, that excellent wind instrument was, in its Mendelssohnian way, as glad as ever it could be. "Pump, pump, per-um-pump, Pum, Pump, Per-um...."

The wedding-breakfast was for Ann Veronica a spectacle of the unreal consuming the real; she liked that part very well, until she was carelessly served against her expressed wishes with mayonnaise. She was caught by an uncle, whose opinion she valued, making faces at Roddy because he had exulted at this.

Of the vast mass of these impressions Ann Veronica could make nothing at the time; there they were—Fact! She stored them away in a mind naturally retentive, as a squirrel stores away nuts, for further digestion. Only one thing emerged with any reasonable clarity in her mind at once, and that was that unless she was saved from drowning by an unmarried man, in which case the ceremony is unavoidable, or totally destitute of under-clothing, and so driven to get a trousseau, in which hardship a trousseau would certainly be "ripping," marriage was an experience to be strenuously evaded.

When they were going home she asked her mother why she and Gwen and Alice had cried.

"Ssh!" said her mother, and then added, "A little natural feeling, dear."

"But didn't Alice want to marry Doctor Ralph?"

"Oh, ssh, Vee!" said her mother, with an evasion as patent as an advertisement board. "I am sure she will be very happy indeed with Doctor Ralph."

But Ann Veronica was by no means sure of that until she went over to Wamblesmith and saw her sister, very remote and domestic and authoritative, in a becoming tea-gown, in command of Doctor Ralph's home. Doctor Ralph came in to tea and put his arm round Alice and kissed her, and Alice called him "Squiggles," and stood in the shelter of his arms for a moment with an expression of satisfied proprietorship. She HAD cried, Ann Veronica knew. There had been fusses and scenes dimly apprehended through half-open doors. She had heard Alice talking and crying at the same time, a painful noise. Perhaps marriage hurt. But now it was all over, and Alice was getting on well. It reminded Ann Veronica of having a tooth stopped.

And after that Alice became remoter than ever, and, after a time, ill. Then she had a baby and became as old as any really grown-up person, or older, and very dull. Then she and her husband went off to a Yorkshire practice, and had four more babies, none of whom photographed well, and so she passed beyond the sphere of Ann Veronica's sympathies altogether.

Part 5

The Gwen affair happened when she was away at school at Marticombe-on-Sea, a term before she went to the High School, and was never very clear to her.

Her mother missed writing for a week, and then she wrote in an unusual key. "My dear," the letter ran, "I have to tell you that your sister Gwen has offended your father very much. I hope you will always love her, but I want you to remember she has offended your father and married without his consent. Your father is very angry, and will not have her name mentioned in his hearing. She has married some one he could not approve of, and gone right away...."

When the next holidays came Ann Veronica's mother was ill, and Gwen was in the sick-room when Ann Veronica returned home. She was in one of her old walking-dresses, her hair was done in an unfamiliar manner, she wore a wedding-ring, and she looked as if she had been crying.

"Hello, Gwen!" said Ann Veronica, trying to put every one at their ease. "Been and married?... What's the name of the happy man?"

Gwen owned to "Fortescue."

"Got a photograph of him or anything?" said Ann Veronica, after kissing her mother.

Gwen made an inquiry, and, directed by Mrs. Stanley, produced a portrait from its hiding-place in the jewel-drawer under the mirror. It presented a clean-shaven face with a large Corinthian nose, hair tremendously waving off the forehead and more chin and neck than is good for a man.

“LOOKS all right,” said Ann Veronica, regarding him with her head first on one side and then on the other, and trying to be agreeable. “What’s the objection?”

“I suppose she ought to know?” said Gwen to her mother, trying to alter the key of the conversation.

“You see, Vee,” said Mrs. Stanley, “Mr. Fortescue is an actor, and your father does not approve of the profession.”

“Oh!” said Ann Veronica. “I thought they made knights of actors?”

“They may of Hal some day,” said Gwen. “But it’s a long business.”

“I suppose this makes you an actress?” said Ann Veronica.

“I don’t know whether I shall go on,” said Gwen, a novel note of languorous professionalism creeping into her voice. “The other women don’t much like it if husband and wife work together, and I don’t think Hal would like me to act away from him.”

Ann Veronica regarded her sister with a new respect, but the traditions of family life are strong. “I don’t suppose you’ll be able to do it much,” said Ann Veronica.

Later Gwen’s trouble weighed so heavily on Mrs. Stanley in her illness that her husband consented to receive Mr. Fortescue in the drawing-room, and actually shake hands with him in an entirely hopeless manner and hope everything would turn out for the best.

The forgiveness and reconciliation was a cold and formal affair, and afterwards her father went off gloomily to his study, and Mr. Fortescue rambled round the garden with soft, propitiatory steps, the Corinthian nose upraised and his hands behind his back, pausing to look long and hard at the fruit-trees against the wall.

Ann Veronica watched him from the dining-room window, and after some moments of maidenly hesitation rambled out into the garden in a reverse direction to Mr. Fortescue’s steps, and encountered him with an air of artless surprise.

“Hello!” said Ann Veronica, with arms akimbo and a careless, breathless manner. “You Mr. Fortescue?”

“At your service. You Ann Veronica?”

“Rather! I say—did you marry Gwen?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

Mr. Fortescue raised his eyebrows and assumed a light-comedy expression. “I suppose I fell in love with her, Ann Veronica.”

“Rum,” said Ann Veronica. “Have you got to keep her now?”

“To the best of my ability,” said Mr. Fortescue, with a bow.

“Have you much ability?” asked Ann Veronica.

Mr. Fortescue tried to act embarrassment in order to conceal its reality, and Ann Veronica went on to ask a string of questions about acting, and whether her sister would act, and was she beautiful enough for it, and who would make her dresses, and so on.

As a matter of fact Mr. Fortescue had not much ability to keep her sister, and a little while after her mother’s death Ann Veronica met Gwen suddenly on the staircase coming from her father’s study, shockingly dingy in dusty mourning and tearful and resentful, and after that Gwen receded from the Morningside Park world, and not even the begging letters and distressful communications that her father and aunt received, but only a vague intimation of dreadfulness, a leakage of incidental comment, flashes of paternal anger at “that blackguard,” came to Ann Veronica’s ears.

Part 6

These were Ann Veronica’s leading cases in the question of marriage. They were the only real marriages she had seen clearly. For the rest, she derived her ideas of the married state from the observed behavior of married women, which impressed her in Morningside Park as being tied and dull and inelastic in comparison with the life of the young, and from a remarkably various reading among books. As a net result she had come to think of all married people much as one thinks of insects that have lost their wings, and of her sisters as new hatched creatures who had scarcely for a moment had wings. She evolved a dim image of herself cooped up in a house under the

benevolent shadow of Mr. Manning. Who knows?—on the analogy of “Squiggles” she might come to call him “Mangles!”

“I don’t think I can ever marry any one,” she said, and fell suddenly into another set of considerations that perplexed her for a time. Had romance to be banished from life?...

It was hard to part with romance, but she had never thirsted so keenly to go on with her University work in her life as she did that day. She had never felt so acutely the desire for free initiative, for a life unhampered by others. At any cost! Her brothers had it practically—at least they had it far more than it seemed likely she would unless she exerted herself with quite exceptional vigor. Between her and the fair, far prospect of freedom and self-development manoeuvred Mr. Manning, her aunt and father, neighbors, customs, traditions, forces. They seemed to her that morning to be all armed with nets and prepared to throw them over her directly her movements became in any manner truly free.

She had a feeling as though something had dropped from her eyes, as though she had just discovered herself for the first time—discovered herself as a sleep-walker might do, abruptly among dangers, hindrances, and perplexities, on the verge of a cardinal crisis.

The life of a girl presented itself to her as something happy and heedless and unthinking, yet really guided and controlled by others, and going on amidst unsuspected screens and concealments.

And in its way it was very well. Then suddenly with a rush came reality, came “growing up”; a hasty imperative appeal for seriousness, for supreme seriousness. The Ralphs and Mannings and Fortescues came down upon the raw inexperience, upon the blinking ignorance of the newcomer; and before her eyes were fairly open, before she knew what had happened, a new set of guides and controls, a new set of obligations and responsibilities and limitations, had replaced the old. “I want to be a Person,” said Ann Veronica to the downs and the open sky; “I will not have this happen to me, whatever else may happen in its place.”

Ann Veronica had three things very definitely settled by the time when, a little after mid-day, she found herself perched up on a gate between a bridle-path and a field that commanded the whole wide stretch of country between Chalking and Waldersham. Firstly, she did not intend to marry at all, and particularly she did not mean to marry Mr. Manning; secondly, by some measure or other, she meant to go on with her studies, not at the Tredgold Schools but at the Imperial College; and, thirdly,

she was, as an immediate and decisive act, a symbol of just exactly where she stood, a declaration of free and adult initiative, going that night to the Fadden Ball.

But the possible attitude of her father she had still to face. So far she had the utmost difficulty in getting on to that vitally important matter. The whole of that relationship persisted in remaining obscure. What would happen when next morning she returned to Morningside Park?

He couldn't turn her out of doors. But what he could do or might do she could not imagine. She was not afraid of violence, but she was afraid of something mean, some secondary kind of force. Suppose he stopped all her allowance, made it imperative that she should either stay ineffectually resentful at home or earn a living for herself at once.... It appeared highly probable to her that he would stop her allowance.

What can a girl do?

Somewhere at this point Ann Veronica's speculations were interrupted and turned aside by the approach of a horse and rider. Mr. Ramage, that iron-gray man of the world, appeared dressed in a bowler hat and a suit of hard gray, astride of a black horse. He pulled rein at the sight of her, saluted, and regarded her with his rather too protuberant eyes. The girl's gaze met his in interested inquiry.

"You've got my view," he said, after a pensive second. "I always get off here and lean over that rail for a bit. May I do so to-day?"

"It's your gate," she said, amiably; "you got it first. It's for you to say if I may sit on it."

He slipped off the horse. "Let me introduce you to Caesar," he said; and she patted Caesar's neck, and remarked how soft his nose was, and secretly deplored the ugliness of equine teeth. Ramage tethered the horse to the farther gate-post, and Caesar blew heavily and began to investigate the hedge.

Ramage leaned over the gate at Ann Veronica's side, and for a moment there was silence.

He made some obvious comments on the wide view warming toward its autumnal blaze that spread itself in hill and valley, wood and village, below.

"It's as broad as life," said Mr. Ramage, regarding it and putting a well-booted foot up on the bottom rail.

Part 7

“And what are you doing here, young lady,” he said, looking up at her face, “wandering alone so far from home?”

“I like long walks,” said Ann Veronica, looking down on him.

“Solitary walks?”

“That’s the point of them. I think over all sorts of things.”

“Problems?”

“Sometimes quite difficult problems.”

“You’re lucky to live in an age when you can do so. Your mother, for instance, couldn’t. She had to do her thinking at home—under inspection.”

She looked down on him thoughtfully, and he let his admiration of her free young poise show in his face.

“I suppose things have changed?” she said.

“Never was such an age of transition.”

She wondered what to. Mr. Ramage did not know. “Sufficient unto me is the change thereof,” he said, with all the effect of an epigram.

“I must confess,” he said, “the New Woman and the New Girl intrigue me profoundly. I am one of those people who are interested in women, more interested than I am in anything else. I don’t conceal it. And the change, the change of attitude! The way all the old clingingness has been thrown aside is amazing. And all the old—the old trick of shrinking up like a snail at a touch. If you had lived twenty years ago you would have been called a Young Person, and it would have been your chief duty in life not to know, never to have heard of, and never to understand.”

“There’s quite enough still,” said Ann Veronica, smiling, “that one doesn’t understand.”

“Quite. But your role would have been to go about saying, ‘I beg your pardon’ in a reproving tone to things you understood quite well in your heart and saw no harm in. That terrible Young Person! she’s vanished. Lost, stolen, or strayed, the Young Person!... I hope we may never find her again.”

He rejoiced over this emancipation. “While that lamb was about every man of any spirit was regarded as a dangerous wolf. We wore invisible chains and invisible

blinkers. Now, you and I can gossip at a gate, and Honi soit qui mal y pense. The change has given man one good thing he never had before," he said. "Girl friends. And I am coming to believe the best as well as the most beautiful friends a man can have are girl friends."

He paused, and went on, after a keen look at her:

"I had rather gossip to a really intelligent girl than to any man alive."

"I suppose we ARE more free than we were?" said Ann Veronica, keeping the question general.

"Oh, there's no doubt of it! Since the girls of the eighties broke bounds and sailed away on bicycles—my young days go back to the very beginnings of that—it's been one triumphant relaxation."

"Relaxation, perhaps. But are we any more free?"

"Well?"

"I mean we've long strings to tether us, but we are bound all the same. A woman isn't much freer—in reality."

Mr. Ramage demurred.

"One runs about," said Ann Veronica.

"Yes."

"But it's on condition one doesn't do anything."

"Do what?"

"Oh!—anything."

He looked interrogation with a faint smile.

"It seems to me it comes to earning one's living in the long run," said Ann Veronica, coloring faintly. "Until a girl can go away as a son does and earn her independent income, she's still on a string. It may be a long string, long enough if you like to tangle up all sorts of people; but there it is! If the paymaster pulls, home she must go. That's what I mean."

Mr. Ramage admitted the force of that. He was a little impressed by Ann Veronica's metaphor of the string, which, indeed, she owed to Hetty Widgett. "YOU wouldn't like

to be independent?" he asked, abruptly. "I mean REALLY independent. On your own. It isn't such fun as it seems."

"Every one wants to be independent," said Ann Veronica. "Every one. Man or woman."

"And you?"

"Rather!"

"I wonder why?"

"There's no why. It's just to feel—one owns one's self."

"Nobody does that," said Ramage, and kept silence for a moment.

"But a boy—a boy goes out into the world and presently stands on his own feet. He buys his own clothes, chooses his own company, makes his own way of living."

"You'd like to do that?"

"Exactly."

"Would you like to be a boy?"

"I wonder! It's out of the question, any way."

Ramage reflected. "Why don't you?"

"Well, it might mean rather a row."

"I know—" said Ramage, with sympathy.

"And besides," said Ann Veronica, sweeping that aspect aside, "what could I do? A boy sails out into a trade or profession. But—it's one of the things I've just been thinking over. Suppose—suppose a girl did want to start in life, start in life for herself—" She looked him frankly in the eyes. "What ought she to do?"

"Suppose you—"

"Yes, suppose I—"

He felt that his advice was being asked. He became a little more personal and intimate. "I wonder what you could do?" he said. "I should think YOU could do all sorts of things....

"What ought you to do?" He began to produce his knowledge of the world for her benefit, jerkily and allusively, and with a strong, rank flavor of "savoir faire." He took an optimist view of her chances. Ann Veronica listened thoughtfully, with her eyes on the

turf, and now and then she asked a question or looked up to discuss a point. In the meanwhile, as he talked, he scrutinized her face, ran his eyes over her careless, gracious poise, wondered hard about her. He described her privately to himself as a splendid girl. It was clear she wanted to get away from home, that she was impatient to get away from home. Why? While the front of his mind was busy warning her not to fall into the hopeless miseries of underpaid teaching, and explaining his idea that for women of initiative, quite as much as for men, the world of business had by far the best chances, the back chambers of his brain were busy with the problem of that "Why?"

His first idea as a man of the world was to explain her unrest by a lover, some secret or forbidden or impossible lover. But he dismissed that because then she would ask her lover and not him all these things. Restlessness, then, was the trouble, simple restlessness: home bored her. He could quite understand the daughter of Mr. Stanley being bored and feeling limited. But was that enough? Dim, formless suspicions of something more vital wandered about his mind. Was the young lady impatient for experience? Was she adventurous? As a man of the world he did not think it becoming to accept maidenly calm as anything more than a mask. Warm life was behind that always, even if it slept. If it was not an actual personal lover, it still might be the lover not yet incarnate, not yet perhaps suspected....

He had diverged only a little from the truth when he said that his chief interest in life was women. It wasn't so much women as Woman that engaged his mind. His was the Latin turn of thinking; he had fallen in love at thirteen, and he was still capable—he prided himself—of falling in love. His invalid wife and her money had been only the thin thread that held his life together; beaded on that permanent relation had been an inter-weaving series of other feminine experiences, disturbing, absorbing, interesting, memorable affairs. Each one had been different from the others, each had had a quality all its own, a distinctive freshness, a distinctive beauty. He could not understand how men could live ignoring this one predominant interest, this wonderful research into personality and the possibilities of pleasing, these complex, fascinating expeditions that began in interest and mounted to the supremest, most passionate intimacy. All the rest of his existence was subordinate to this pursuit; he lived for it, worked for it, kept himself in training for it.

So while he talked to this girl of work and freedom, his slightly protuberant eyes were noting the gracious balance of her limbs and body across the gate, the fine lines of her chin and neck. Her grave fine face, her warm clear complexion, had already aroused his curiosity as he had gone to and fro in Morningside Park, and here suddenly he was

near to her and talking freely and intimately. He had found her in a communicative mood, and he used the accumulated skill of years in turning that to account.

She was pleased and a little flattered by his interest and sympathy. She became eager to explain herself, to show herself in the right light. He was manifestly exerting his mind for her, and she found herself fully disposed to justify his interest.

She, perhaps, displayed herself rather consciously as a fine person unduly limited. She even touched lightly on her father's unreasonableness.

"I wonder," said Ramage, "that more girls don't think as you do and want to strike out in the world."

And then he speculated. "I wonder if you will?"

"Let me say one thing," he said. "If ever you do and I can help you in any way, by advice or inquiry or recommendation—You see, I'm no believer in feminine incapacity, but I do perceive there is such a thing as feminine inexperience. As a sex you're a little under-trained—in affairs. I'd take it—forgive me if I seem a little urgent—as a sort of proof of friendliness. I can imagine nothing more pleasant in life than to help you, because I know it would pay to help you. There's something about you, a little flavor of Will, I suppose, that makes one feel—good luck about you and success...."

And while he talked and watched her as he talked, she answered, and behind her listening watched and thought about him. She liked the animated eagerness of his manner.

His mind seemed to be a remarkably full one; his knowledge of detailed reality came in just where her own mind was most weakly equipped. Through all he said ran one quality that pleased her—the quality of a man who feels that things can be done, that one need not wait for the world to push one before one moved. Compared with her father and Mr. Manning and the men in "fixed" positions generally that she knew, Ramage, presented by himself, had a fine suggestion of freedom, of power, of deliberate and sustained adventure....

She was particularly charmed by his theory of friendship. It was really very jolly to talk to a man in this way—who saw the woman in her and did not treat her as a child. She was inclined to think that perhaps for a girl the converse of his method was the case; an older man, a man beyond the range of anything "nonsensical," was, perhaps, the most interesting sort of friend one could meet. But in that reservation it may be she went a little beyond the converse of his view....

They got on wonderfully well together. They talked for the better part of an hour, and at last walked together to the junction of highroad and the bridle-path. There, after protestations of friendliness and helpfulness that were almost ardent, he mounted a little clumsily and rode off at an amiable pace, looking his best, making a leg with his riding gaiters, smiling and saluting, while Ann Veronica turned northward and so came to Micklechesil. There, in a little tea and sweet-stuff shop, she bought and consumed slowly and absent-mindedly the insufficient nourishment that is natural to her sex on such occasions.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

THE CRISIS

Part 1

We left Miss Stanley with Ann Veronica's fancy dress in her hands and her eyes directed to Ann Veronica's pseudo-Turkish slippers.

When Mr. Stanley came home at a quarter to six—an earlier train by fifteen minutes than he affected—his sister met him in the hall with a hushed expression. "I'm so glad you're here, Peter," she said. "She means to go."

"Go!" he said. "Where?"

"To that ball."

"What ball?" The question was rhetorical. He knew.

"I believe she's dressing up-stairs—now."

"Then tell her to undress, confound her!" The City had been thoroughly annoying that day, and he was angry from the outset.

Miss Stanley reflected on this proposal for a moment.

"I don't think she will," she said.

“She must,” said Mr. Stanley, and went into his study. His sister followed. “She can’t go now. She’ll have to wait for dinner,” he said, uncomfortably.

“She’s going to have some sort of meal with the Widgetts down the Avenue, and go up with them.

“She told you that?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“At tea.”

“But why didn’t you prohibit once for all the whole thing? How dared she tell you that?”

“Out of defiance. She just sat and told me that was her arrangement. I’ve never seen her quite so sure of herself.”

“What did you say?”

“I said, ‘My dear Veronica! how can you think of such things?’”

“And then?”

“She had two more cups of tea and some cake, and told me of her walk.”

“She’ll meet somebody one of these days—walking about like that.”

“She didn’t say she’d met any one.”

“But didn’t you say some more about that ball?”

“I said everything I could say as soon as I realized she was trying to avoid the topic. I said, ‘It is no use your telling me about this walk and pretend I’ve been told about the ball, because you haven’t. Your father has forbidden you to go!’”

“Well?”

“She said, ‘I hate being horrid to you and father, but I feel it my duty to go to that ball!’”

“Felt it her duty!”

“‘Very well,’ I said, ‘then I wash my hands of the whole business. Your disobedience be upon your own head.’”

“But that is flat rebellion!” said Mr. Stanley, standing on the hearthrug with his back to the unlit gas-fire. “You ought at once—you ought at once to have told her that. What

duty does a girl owe to any one before her father? Obedience to him, that is surely the first law. What CAN she put before that?" His voice began to rise. "One would think I had said nothing about the matter. One would think I had agreed to her going. I suppose this is what she learns in her infernal London colleges. I suppose this is the sort of damned rubbish—"

"Oh! Ssh, Peter!" cried Miss Stanley.

He stopped abruptly. In the pause a door could be heard opening and closing on the landing up-stairs. Then light footsteps became audible, descending the staircase with a certain deliberation and a faint rustle of skirts.

"Tell her," said Mr. Stanley, with an imperious gesture, "to come in here."

Part 2

Miss Stanley emerged from the study and stood watching Ann Veronica descend.

The girl was flushed with excitement, bright-eyed, and braced for a struggle; her aunt had never seen her looking so fine or so pretty. Her fancy dress, save for the green-gray stockings, the pseudo-Turkish slippers, and baggy silk trousered ends natural to a Corsair's bride, was hidden in a large black-silk-hooded opera-cloak. Beneath the hood it was evident that her rebellious hair was bound up with red silk, and fastened by some device in her ears (unless she had them pierced, which was too dreadful a thing to suppose!) were long brass filigree earrings.

"I'm just off, aunt," said Ann Veronica.

"Your father is in the study and wishes to speak to you."

Ann Veronica hesitated, and then stood in the open doorway and regarded her father's stern presence. She spoke with an entirely false note of cheerful off-handedness. "I'm just in time to say good-bye before I go, father. I'm going up to London with the Widgetts to that ball."

"Now look here, Ann Veronica," said Mr. Stanley, "just a moment. You are NOT going to that ball!"

Ann Veronica tried a less genial, more dignified note.

"I thought we had discussed that, father."

“You are not going to that ball! You are not going out of this house in that get-up!”

Ann Veronica tried yet more earnestly to treat him, as she would treat any man, with an insistence upon her due of masculine respect. “You see,” she said, very gently, “I AM going. I am sorry to seem to disobey you, but I am. I wish”—she found she had embarked on a bad sentence—“I wish we needn’t have quarrelled.”

She stopped abruptly, and turned about toward the front door. In a moment he was beside her. “I don’t think you can have heard me, Vee,” he said, with intensely controlled fury. “I said you were”—he shouted—“NOT TO GO!”

She made, and overdid, an immense effort to be a princess. She tossed her head, and, having no further words, moved toward the door. Her father intercepted her, and for a moment she and he struggled with their hands upon the latch. A common rage flushed their faces. “Let go!” she gasped at him, a blaze of anger.

“Veronica!” cried Miss Stanley, warningly, and, “Peter!”

For a moment they seemed on the verge of an altogether desperate scuffle. Never for a moment had violence come between these two since long ago he had, in spite of her mother’s protest in the background, carried her kicking and squalling to the nursery for some forgotten crime. With something near to horror they found themselves thus confronted.

The door was fastened by a catch and a latch with an inside key, to which at night a chain and two bolts were added. Carefully abstaining from thrusting against each other, Ann Veronica and her father began an absurdly desperate struggle, the one to open the door, the other to keep it fastened. She seized the key, and he grasped her hand and squeezed it roughly and painfully between the handle and the ward as she tried to turn it. His grip twisted her wrist. She cried out with the pain of it.

A wild passion of shame and self-disgust swept over her. Her spirit awoke in dismay to an affection in ruins, to the immense undignified disaster that had come to them.

Abruptly she desisted, recoiled, and turned and fled up-stairs.

She made noises between weeping and laughter as she went. She gained her room, and slammed her door and locked it as though she feared violence and pursuit.

“Oh God!” she cried, “Oh God!” and flung aside her opera-cloak, and for a time walked about the room—a Corsair’s bride at a crisis of emotion. “Why can’t he reason with me,” she said, again and again, “instead of doing this?”

Part 3

There presently came a phase in which she said: “I WON’T stand it even now. I will go to-night.”

She went as far as her door, then turned to the window. She opened this and scrambled out—a thing she had not done for five long years of adolescence—upon the leaded space above the built-out bath-room on the first floor. Once upon a time she and Roddy had descended thence by the drain-pipe.

But things that a girl of sixteen may do in short skirts are not things to be done by a young lady of twenty-one in fancy dress and an opera-cloak, and just as she was coming unaided to an adequate realization of this, she discovered Mr. Pragmar, the wholesale druggist, who lived three gardens away, and who had been mowing his lawn to get an appetite for dinner, standing in a fascinated attitude beside the forgotten lawn-mower and watching her intently.

She found it extremely difficult to infuse an air of quiet correctitude into her return through the window, and when she was safely inside she waved clinched fists and executed a noiseless dance of rage.

When she reflected that Mr. Pragmar probably knew Mr. Ramage, and might describe the affair to him, she cried “Oh!” with renewed vexation, and repeated some steps of her dance in a new and more ecstatic measure.

Part 4

At eight that evening Miss Stanley tapped at Ann Veronica’s bedroom door.

“I’ve brought you up some dinner, Vee,” she said.

Ann Veronica was lying on her bed in a darkling room staring at the ceiling. She reflected before answering. She was frightfully hungry. She had eaten little or no tea, and her mid-day meal had been worse than nothing.

She got up and unlocked the door.

Her aunt did not object to capital punishment or war, or the industrial system or casual wards, or flogging of criminals or the Congo Free State, because none of these things really got hold of her imagination; but she did object, she did not like, she could not bear to think of people not having and enjoying their meals. It was her distinctive test of an emotional state, its interference with a kindly normal digestion. Any one very badly moved choked down a few mouthfuls; the symptom of supreme distress was not to be able to touch a bit. So that the thought of Ann Veronica up-stairs had been extremely painful for her through all the silent dinner-time that night. As soon as dinner was over she went into the kitchen and devoted herself to compiling a tray—not a tray merely of half-cooled dinner things, but a specially prepared "nice" tray, suitable for tempting any one. With this she now entered.

Ann Veronica found herself in the presence of the most disconcerting fact in human experience, the kindliness of people you believe to be thoroughly wrong. She took the tray with both hands, gulped, and gave way to tears.

Her aunt leaped unhappily to the thought of penitence.

"My dear," she began, with an affectionate hand on Ann Veronica's shoulder, "I do SO wish you would realize how it grieves your father."

Ann Veronica flung away from her hand, and the pepper-pot on the tray upset, sending a puff of pepper into the air and instantly filling them both with an intense desire to sneeze.

"I don't think you see," she replied, with tears on her cheeks, and her brows knitting, "how it shames and, ah!—disgraces me—AH TISHU!"

She put down the tray with a concussion on her toilet-table.

"But, dear, think! He is your father. SHOOH!"

"That's no reason," said Ann Veronica, speaking through her handkerchief and stopping abruptly.

Niece and aunt regarded each other for a moment over their pocket-handkerchiefs with watery but antagonistic eyes, each far too profoundly moved to see the absurdity of the position.

"I hope," said Miss Stanley, with dignity, and turned doorward with features in civil warfare. "Better state of mind," she gasped....

Ann Veronica stood in the twilight room staring at the door that had slammed upon her aunt, her pocket-handkerchief rolled tightly in her hand. Her soul was full of the

sense of disaster. She had made her first fight for dignity and freedom as a grown-up and independent Person, and this was how the universe had treated her. It had neither succumbed to her nor wrathfully overwhelmed her. It had thrust her back with an undignified scuffle, with vulgar comedy, with an unendurable, scornful grin.

“By God!” said Ann Veronica for the first time in her life. “But I will! I will!”

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

THE FLIGHT TO LONDON

Part 1

Ann Veronica had an impression that she did not sleep at all that night, and at any rate she got through an immense amount of feverish feeling and thinking.

What was she going to do?

One main idea possessed her: she must get away from home, she must assert herself at once or perish. “Very well,” she would say, “then I must go.” To remain, she felt, was to concede everything. And she would have to go to-morrow. It was clear it must be to-morrow. If she delayed a day she would delay two days, if she delayed two days she would delay a week, and after a week things would be adjusted to submission forever. “I’ll go,” she vowed to the night, “or I’ll die!” She made plans and estimated means and resources. These and her general preparations had perhaps a certain disproportion. She had a gold watch, a very good gold watch that had been her mother’s, a pearl necklace that was also pretty good, some unpretending rings, some silver bangles and a few other such inferior trinkets, three pounds thirteen shillings unspent of her dress and book allowance and a few good salable books. So equipped, she proposed to set up a separate establishment in the world.

And then she would find work.

For most of a long and fluctuating night she was fairly confident that she would find work; she knew herself to be strong, intelligent, and capable by the standards of most of the girls she knew. She was not quite clear how she should find it, but she felt she

would. Then she would write and tell her father what she had done, and put their relationship on a new footing.

That was how she projected it, and in general terms it seemed plausible and possible. But in between these wider phases of comparative confidence were gaps of disconcerting doubt, when the universe was presented as making sinister and threatening faces at her, defying her to defy, preparing a humiliating and shameful overthrow. “I don’t care,” said Ann Veronica to the darkness; “I’ll fight it.”

She tried to plan her proceedings in detail. The only difficulties that presented themselves clearly to her were the difficulties of getting away from Morningside Park, and not the difficulties at the other end of the journey. These were so outside her experience that she found it possible to thrust them almost out of sight by saying they would be “all right” in confident tones to herself. But still she knew they were not right, and at times they became a horrible obsession as of something waiting for her round the corner. She tried to imagine herself “getting something,” to project herself as sitting down at a desk and writing, or as returning after her work to some pleasantly equipped and free and independent flat. For a time she furnished the flat. But even with that furniture it remained extremely vague, the possible good and the possible evil as well!

The possible evil! “I’ll go,” said Ann Veronica for the hundredth time. “I’ll go. I don’t care WHAT happens.”

She awoke out of a doze, as though she had never been sleeping. It was time to get up.

She sat on the edge of her bed and looked about her, at her room, at the row of black-covered books and the pig’s skull. “I must take them,” she said, to help herself over her own incredulity. “How shall I get my luggage out of the house?...”

The figure of her aunt, a little distant, a little propitiatory, behind the coffee things, filled her with a sense of almost catastrophic adventure. Perhaps she might never come back to that breakfast-room again. Never! Perhaps some day, quite soon, she might regret that breakfast-room. She helped herself to the remainder of the slightly congealed bacon, and reverted to the problem of getting her luggage out of the house. She decided to call in the help of Teddy Widgett, or, failing him, of one of his sisters.

Part 2

She found the younger generation of the Widgetts engaged in languid reminiscences, and all, as they expressed it, a “bit decayed.” Every one became tremendously animated when they heard that Ann Veronica had failed them because she had been, as she expressed it, “locked in.”

“My God!” said Teddy, more impressively than ever.

“But what are you going to do?” asked Hetty.

“What can one do?” asked Ann Veronica. “Would you stand it? I’m going to clear out.”

“Clear out?” cried Hetty.

“Go to London,” said Ann Veronica.

She had expected sympathetic admiration, but instead the whole Widgett family, except Teddy, expressed a common dismay. “But how can you?” asked Constance. “Who will you stop with?”

“I shall go on my own. Take a room!”

“I say!” said Constance. “But who’s going to pay for the room?”

“I’ve got money,” said Ann Veronica. “Anything is better than this—this stifled life down here.” And seeing that Hetty and Constance were obviously developing objections, she plunged at once into a demand for help. “I’ve got nothing in the world to pack with except a toy size portmanteau. Can you lend me some stuff?”

“You ARE a chap!” said Constance, and warmed only slowly from the idea of dissuasion to the idea of help. But they did what they could for her. They agreed to lend her their hold-all and a large, formless bag which they called the communal trunk. And Teddy declared himself ready to go to the ends of the earth for her, and carry her luggage all the way.

Hetty, looking out of the window—she always smoked her after-breakfast cigarette at the window for the benefit of the less advanced section of Morningside Park society—and trying not to raise objections, saw Miss Stanley going down toward the shops.

“If you must go on with it,” said Hetty, “now’s your time.” And Ann Veronica at once went back with the hold-all, trying not to hurry indecently but to keep up her dignified air of being a wronged person doing the right thing at a smart trot, to pack. Teddy went round by the garden backs and dropped the bag over the fence. All this was exciting and entertaining. Her aunt returned before the packing was done, and Ann Veronica lunched with an uneasy sense of bag and hold-all packed up-stairs and inadequately

hidden from chance intruders by the valance of the bed. She went down, flushed and light-hearted, to the Widgetts' after lunch to make some final arrangements and then, as soon as her aunt had retired to lie down for her usual digestive hour, took the risk of the servants having the enterprise to report her proceedings and carried her bag and hold-all to the garden gate, whence Teddy, in a state of ecstatic service, bore them to the railway station. Then she went up-stairs again, dressed herself carefully for town, put on her most businesslike-looking hat, and with a wave of emotion she found it hard to control, walked down to catch the 3.17 up-train.

Teddy handed her into the second-class compartment her season-ticket warranted, and declared she was "simply splendid." "If you want anything," he said, "or get into any trouble, wire me. I'd come back from the ends of the earth. I'd do anything, Vee. It's horrible to think of you!"

"You're an awful brick, Teddy!" she said.

"Who wouldn't be for you?"

The train began to move. "You're splendid!" said Teddy, with his hair wild in the wind. "Good luck! Good luck!"

She waved from the window until the bend hid him.

She found herself alone in the train asking herself what she must do next, and trying not to think of herself as cut off from home or any refuge whatever from the world she had resolved to face. She felt smaller and more adventurous even than she had expected to feel. "Let me see," she said to herself, trying to control a slight sinking of the heart, "I am going to take a room in a lodging-house because that is cheaper.... But perhaps I had better get a room in an hotel to-night and look round....

"It's bound to be all right," she said.

But her heart kept on sinking. What hotel should she go to? If she told a cabman to drive to an hotel, any hotel, what would he do—or say? He might drive to something dreadfully expensive, and not at all the quiet sort of thing she required. Finally she decided that even for an hotel she must look round, and that meanwhile she would "book" her luggage at Waterloo. She told the porter to take it to the booking-office, and it was only after a disconcerting moment or so that she found she ought to have directed him to go to the cloak-room. But that was soon put right, and she walked out into London with a peculiar exaltation of mind, an exaltation that partook of panic and defiance, but was chiefly a sense of vast unexampled release.

She inhaled a deep breath of air—London air.

Part 3

She dismissed the first hotels she passed, she scarcely knew why, mainly perhaps from the mere dread of entering them, and crossed Waterloo Bridge at a leisurely pace. It was high afternoon, there was no great throng of foot-passengers, and many an eye from omnibus and pavement rested gratefully on her fresh, trim presence as she passed young and erect, with the light of determination shining through the quiet self-possession of her face. She was dressed as English girls do dress for town, without either coquetry or harshness: her collarless blouse confessed a pretty neck, her eyes were bright and steady, and her dark hair waved loosely and graciously over her ears....

It seemed at first the most beautiful afternoon of all time to her, and perhaps the thrill of her excitement did add a distinctive and culminating keenness to the day. The river, the big buildings on the north bank, Westminster, and St. Paul's, were rich and wonderful with the soft sunshine of London, the softest, the finest grained, the most penetrating and least emphatic sunshine in the world. The very carts and vans and cabs that Wellington Street poured out incessantly upon the bridge seemed ripe and good in her eyes. A traffic of copious barges slumbered over the face of the river-barges either altogether stagnant or dreaming along in the wake of fussy tugs; and above circled, urbanely voracious, the London seagulls. She had never been there before at that hour, in that light, and it seemed to her as if she came to it all for the first time. And this great mellow place, this London, now was hers, to struggle with, to go where she pleased in, to overcome and live in. "I am glad," she told herself, "I came."

She marked an hotel that seemed neither opulent nor odd in a little side street opening on the Embankment, made up her mind with an effort, and, returning by Hungerford Bridge to Waterloo, took a cab to this chosen refuge with her two pieces of luggage. There was just a minute's hesitation before they gave her a room.

The young lady in the bureau said she would inquire, and Ann Veronica, while she affected to read the appeal on a hospital collecting-box upon the bureau counter, had a disagreeable sense of being surveyed from behind by a small, whiskered gentleman in a frock-coat, who came out of the inner office and into the hall among a number of equally observant green porters to look at her and her bags. But the survey was satisfactory, and she found herself presently in Room No. 47, straightening her hat and waiting for her luggage to appear.

“All right so far,” she said to herself....

Part 4

But presently, as she sat on the one antimacassared red silk chair and surveyed her hold-all and bag in that tidy, rather vacant, and dehumanized apartment, with its empty wardrobe and desert toilet-table and pictureless walls and stereotyped furnishings, a sudden blankness came upon her as though she didn’t matter, and had been thrust away into this impersonal corner, she and her gear....

She decided to go out into the London afternoon again and get something to eat in an Aerated Bread shop or some such place, and perhaps find a cheap room for herself. Of course that was what she had to do; she had to find a cheap room for herself and work!

This Room No. 47 was no more than a sort of railway compartment on the way to that.

How does one get work?

She walked along the Strand and across Trafalgar Square, and by the Haymarket to Piccadilly, and so through dignified squares and palatial alleys to Oxford Street; and her mind was divided between a speculative treatment of employment on the one hand, and breezes—zephyr breezes—of the keenest appreciation for London, on the other. The jolly part of it was that for the first time in her life so far as London was concerned, she was not going anywhere in particular; for the first time in her life it seemed to her she was taking London in.

She tried to think how people get work. Ought she to walk into some of these places and tell them what she could do? She hesitated at the window of a shipping-office in Cockspur Street and at the Army and Navy Stores, but decided that perhaps there would be some special and customary hour, and that it would be better for her to find this out before she made her attempt. And, besides, she didn’t just immediately want to make her attempt.

She fell into a pleasant dream of positions and work. Behind every one of these myriad fronts she passed there must be a career or careers. Her ideas of women’s employment and a modern woman’s pose in life were based largely on the figure of Vivie Warren in Mrs. Warren’s Profession. She had seen Mrs. Warren’s Profession furtively with Hetty Widgett from the gallery of a Stage Society performance one

Monday afternoon. Most of it had been incomprehensible to her, or comprehensible in a way that checked further curiosity, but the figure of Vivien, hard, capable, successful, and bullying, and ordering about a veritable Teddy in the person of Frank Gardner, appealed to her. She saw herself in very much Vivie's position—managing something.

Her thoughts were deflected from Vivie Warren by the peculiar behavior of a middle-aged gentleman in Piccadilly. He appeared suddenly from the infinite in the neighborhood of the Burlington Arcade, crossing the pavement toward her and with his eyes upon her. He seemed to her indistinguishably about her father's age. He wore a silk hat a little tilted, and a morning coat buttoned round a tight, contained figure; and a white slip gave a finish to his costume and endorsed the quiet distinction of his tie. His face was a little flushed perhaps, and his small, brown eyes were bright. He stopped on the curb-stone, not facing her but as if he was on his way to cross the road, and spoke to her suddenly over his shoulder.

"Whither away?" he said, very distinctly in a curiously wheedling voice. Ann Veronica stared at his foolish, propitiatory smile, his hungry gaze, through one moment of amazement, then stepped aside and went on her way with a quickened step. But her mind was ruffled, and its mirror-like surface of satisfaction was not easily restored.

Queer old gentleman!

The art of ignoring is one of the accomplishments of every well-bred girl, so carefully instilled that at last she can even ignore her own thoughts and her own knowledge. Ann Veronica could at the same time ask herself what this queer old gentleman could have meant by speaking to her, and know—know in general terms, at least—what that accosting signified. About her, as she had gone day by day to and from the Tredgold College, she had seen and not seen many an incidental aspect of those sides of life about which girls are expected to know nothing, aspects that were extraordinarily relevant to her own position and outlook on the world, and yet by convention ineffably remote. For all that she was of exceptional intellectual enterprise, she had never yet considered these things with unaverted eyes. She had viewed them askance, and without exchanging ideas with any one else in the world about them.

She went on her way now no longer dreaming and appreciative, but disturbed and unwillingly observant behind her mask of serene contentment.

That delightful sense of free, unembarrassed movement was gone.

As she neared the bottom of the dip in Piccadilly she saw a woman approaching her from the opposite direction—a tall woman who at the first glance seemed altogether

beautiful and fine. She came along with the fluttering assurance of some tall ship. Then as she drew nearer paint showed upon her face, and a harsh purpose behind the quiet expression of her open countenance, and a sort of unreality in her splendor betrayed itself for which Ann Veronica could not recall the right word—a word, half understood, that lurked and hid in her mind, the word “meretricious.” Behind this woman and a little to the side of her, walked a man smartly dressed, with desire and appraisal in his eyes. Something insisted that those two were mysteriously linked—that the woman knew the man was there.

It was a second reminder that against her claim to go free and untrammelled there was a case to be made, that after all it was true that a girl does not go alone in the world unchallenged, nor ever has gone freely alone in the world, that evil walks abroad and dangers, and petty insults more irritating than dangers, lurk.

It was in the quiet streets and squares toward Oxford Street that it first came into her head disagreeably that she herself was being followed. She observed a man walking on the opposite side of the way and looking toward her.

“Bother it all!” she swore. “Bother!” and decided that this was not so, and would not look to right or left again.

Beyond the Circus Ann Veronica went into a British Tea-Table Company shop to get some tea. And as she was yet waiting for her tea to come she saw this man again. Either it was an unfortunate recovery of a trail, or he had followed her from Mayfair. There was no mistaking his intentions this time. He came down the shop looking for her quite obviously, and took up a position on the other side against a mirror in which he was able to regard her steadfastly.

Beneath the serene unconcern of Ann Veronica’s face was a boiling tumult. She was furiously angry. She gazed with a quiet detachment toward the window and the Oxford Street traffic, and in her heart she was busy kicking this man to death. He HAD followed her! What had he followed her for? He must have followed her all the way from beyond Grosvenor Square.

He was a tall man and fair, with bluish eyes that were rather protuberant, and long white hands of which he made a display. He had removed his silk hat, and now sat looking at Ann Veronica over an untouched cup of tea; he sat gloating upon her, trying to catch her eye. Once, when he thought he had done so, he smiled an ingratiating smile. He moved, after quiet intervals, with a quick little movement, and ever and again stroked his small mustache and coughed a self-conscious cough.

“That he should be in the same world with me!” said Ann Veronica, reduced to reading the list of good things the British Tea-Table Company had priced for its patrons.

Heaven knows what dim and tawdry conceptions of passion and desire were in that blond cranium, what romance-begotten dreams of intrigue and adventure! but they sufficed, when presently Ann Veronica went out into the darkling street again, to inspire a flitting, dogged pursuit, idiotic, exasperating, indecent.

She had no idea what she should do. If she spoke to a policeman she did not know what would ensue. Perhaps she would have to charge this man and appear in a police-court next day.

She became angry with herself. She would not be driven in by this persistent, sneaking aggression. She would ignore him. Surely she could ignore him. She stopped abruptly, and looked in a flower-shop window. He passed, and came loitering back and stood beside her, silently looking into her face.

The afternoon had passed now into twilight. The shops were lighting up into gigantic lanterns of color, the street lamps were glowing into existence, and she had lost her way. She had lost her sense of direction, and was among unfamiliar streets. She went on from street to street, and all the glory of London had departed. Against the sinister, the threatening, monstrous inhumanity of the limitless city, there was nothing now but this supreme, ugly fact of a pursuit—the pursuit of the undesired, persistent male.

For a second time Ann Veronica wanted to swear at the universe.

There were moments when she thought of turning upon this man and talking to him. But there was something in his face at once stupid and invincible that told her he would go on forcing himself upon her, that he would esteem speech with her a great point gained. In the twilight he had ceased to be a person one could tackle and shame; he had become something more general, a something that crawled and sneaked toward her and would not let her alone....

Then, when the tension was getting unendurable, and she was on the verge of speaking to some casual passer-by and demanding help, her follower vanished. For a time she could scarcely believe he was gone. He had. The night had swallowed him up, but his work on her was done. She had lost her nerve, and there was no more freedom in London for her that night. She was glad to join in the stream of hurrying homeward workers that was now welling out of a thousand places of employment, and to imitate their driven, preoccupied haste. She had followed a bobbing white hat and gray jacket until she reached the Euston Road corner of Tottenham Court Road, and there, by the name on a bus and the cries of a conductor, she made a guess of her

way. And she did not merely affect to be driven—she felt driven. She was afraid people would follow her, she was afraid of the dark, open doorways she passed, and afraid of the blazes of light; she was afraid to be alone, and she knew not what it was she feared.

It was past seven when she got back to her hotel. She thought then that she had shaken off the man of the bulging blue eyes forever, but that night she found he followed her into her dreams. He stalked her, he stared at her, he craved her, he sidled slinking and propitiatory and yet relentlessly toward her, until at last she awoke from the suffocating nightmare nearness of his approach, and lay awake in fear and horror listening to the unaccustomed sounds of the hotel.

She came very near that night to resolving that she would return to her home next morning. But the morning brought courage again, and those first intimations of horror vanished completely from her mind.

Part 5

She had sent her father a telegram from the East Strand post-office worded thus:

| *All* | *is* | *well* | *with* | *me* |

|————-|————-|————|————|————-|

| *and* | *quite* | *safe* | *Veronica* | |

————————————————————————————-

and afterward she had dined a la carte upon a cutlet, and had then set herself to write an answer to Mr. Manning's proposal of marriage. But she had found it very difficult.

"DEAR MR. MANNING," she had begun. So far it had been plain sailing, and it had seemed fairly evident to go on: "I find it very difficult to answer your letter."

But after that neither ideas nor phrases had come and she had fallen thinking of the events of the day. She had decided that she would spend the next morning answering advertisements in the papers that abounded in the writing-room; and so, after half an hour's perusal of back numbers of the Sketch in the drawing-room, she had gone to bed.

She found next morning, when she came to this advertisement answering, that it was more difficult than she had supposed. In the first place there were not so many suitable advertisements as she had expected. She sat down by the paper-rack with a general feeling of resemblance to Vivie Warren, and looked through the Morning Post and Standard and Telegraph, and afterward the half-penny sheets. The Morning Post was hungry for governesses and nursery governesses, but held out no other hopes; the Daily Telegraph that morning seemed eager only for skirt hands. She went to a writing-desk and made some memoranda on a sheet of note-paper, and then remembered that she had no address as yet to which letters could be sent.

She decided to leave this matter until the morrow and devote the morning to settling up with Mr. Manning. At the cost of quite a number of torn drafts she succeeded in evolving this:

"DEAR MR. MANNING,—I find it very difficult to answer your letter. I hope you won't mind if I say first that I think it does me an extraordinary honor that you should think of any one like myself so highly and seriously, and, secondly, that I wish it had not been written."

She surveyed this sentence for some time before going on. "I wonder," she said, "why one writes him sentences like that? It'll have to go," she decided, "I've written too many already." She went on, with a desperate attempt to be easy and colloquial:

"You see, we were rather good friends, I thought, and now perhaps it will be difficult for us to get back to the old friendly footing. But if that can possibly be done I want it to be done. You see, the plain fact of the case is that I think I am too young and ignorant for marriage. I have been thinking these things over lately, and it seems to me that marriage for a girl is just the supremest thing in life. It isn't just one among a number of important things; for her it is the important thing, and until she knows far more than I know of the facts of life, how is she to undertake it? So please; if you will, forget that you wrote that letter, and forgive this answer. I want you to think of me just as if I was a man, and quite outside marriage altogether.

"I do hope you will be able to do this, because I value men friends. I shall be very sorry if I cannot have you for a friend. I think that there is no better friend for a girl than a man rather older than herself.

"Perhaps by this time you will have heard of the step I have taken in leaving my home. Very likely you will disapprove highly of what I have done—I wonder? You may, perhaps, think I have done it just in a fit of childish petulance because my father locked me in when I wanted to go to a ball of which he did not approve. But really it is

much more than that. At Morningside Park I feel as though all my growing up was presently to stop, as though I was being shut in from the light of life, and, as they say in botany, etiolated. I was just like a sort of dummy that does things as it is told—that is to say, as the strings are pulled. I want to be a person by myself, and to pull my own strings. I had rather have trouble and hardship like that than be taken care of by others. I want to be myself. I wonder if a man can quite understand that passionate feeling? It is quite a passionate feeling. So I am already no longer the girl you knew at Morningside Park. I am a young person seeking employment and freedom and self-development, just as in quite our first talk of all I said I wanted to be.

"I do hope you will see how things are, and not be offended with me or frightfully shocked and distressed by what I have done.

"Very sincerely yours,

"ANN VERONICA STANLEY."

Part 6

In the afternoon she resumed her search for apartments. The intoxicating sense of novelty had given place to a more business-like mood. She drifted northward from the Strand, and came on some queer and dingy quarters.

She had never imagined life was half so sinister as it looked to her in the beginning of these investigations. She found herself again in the presence of some element in life about which she had been trained not to think, about which she was perhaps instinctively indisposed to think; something which jarred, in spite of all her mental resistance, with all her preconceptions of a clean and courageous girl walking out from Morningside Park as one walks out of a cell into a free and spacious world. One or two landladies refused her with an air of conscious virtue that she found hard to explain. "We don't let to ladies," they said.

She drifted, via Theobald's Road, obliquely toward the region about Titchfield Street. Such apartments as she saw were either scandalously dirty or unaccountably dear, or both. And some were adorned with engravings that struck her as being more vulgar and undesirable than anything she had ever seen in her life. Ann Veronica loved beautiful things, and the beauty of undraped loveliness not least among them; but these were pictures that did but insist coarsely upon the roundness of women's

bodies. The windows of these rooms were obscured with draperies, their floors a carpet patchwork; the china ornaments on their mantels were of a class apart. After the first onset several of the women who had apartments to let said she would not do for them, and in effect dismissed her. This also struck her as odd.

About many of these houses hung a mysterious taint as of something weakly and commonly and dustily evil; the women who negotiated the rooms looked out through a friendly manner as though it was a mask, with hard, defiant eyes. Then one old crone, short-sighted and shaky-handed, called Ann Veronica "dearie," and made some remark, obscure and slangy, of which the spirit rather than the words penetrated to her understanding.

For a time she looked at no more apartments, and walked through gaunt and ill-cleaned streets, through the sordid under side of life, perplexed and troubled, ashamed of her previous obtuseness.

She had something of the feeling a Hindoo must experience who has been into surroundings or touched something that offends his caste. She passed people in the streets and regarded them with a quickening apprehension, once or twice came girls dressed in slatternly finery, going toward Regent Street from out these places. It did not occur to her that they at least had found a way of earning a living, and had that much economic superiority to herself. It did not occur to her that save for some accidents of education and character they had souls like her own.

For a time Ann Veronica went on her way gauging the quality of sordid streets. At last, a little way to the northward of Euston Road, the moral cloud seemed to lift, the moral atmosphere to change; clean blinds appeared in the windows, clean doorsteps before the doors, a different appeal in the neatly placed cards bearing the word

| *APARTMENTS* |

in the clear bright windows. At last in a street near the Hampstead Road she hit upon a room that had an exceptional quality of space and order, and a tall woman with a kindly face to show it. "You're a student, perhaps?" said the tall woman. "At the Tredgold Women's College," said Ann Veronica. She felt it would save explanations if she did not state she had left her home and was looking for employment. The room was papered with green, large-patterned paper that was at worst a trifle dingy, and the arm-chair and the seats of the other chairs were covered with the unusual brightness

of a large-patterned chintz, which also supplied the window-curtain. There was a round table covered, not with the usual “tapestry” cover, but with a plain green cloth that went passably with the wall-paper. In the recess beside the fireplace were some open bookshelves. The carpet was a quiet drugget and not excessively worn, and the bed in the corner was covered by a white quilt. There were neither texts nor rubbish on the walls, but only a stirring version of Belshazzar’s feast, a steel engraving in the early Victorian manner that had some satisfactory blacks. And the woman who showed this room was tall, with an understanding eye and the quiet manner of the well-trained servant.

Ann Veronica brought her luggage in a cab from the hotel; she tipped the hotel porter sixpence and overpaid the cabman eighteenpence, unpacked some of her books and possessions, and so made the room a little homelike, and then sat down in a by no means uncomfortable arm-chair before the fire. She had arranged for a supper of tea, a boiled egg, and some tinned peaches. She had discussed the general question of supplies with the helpful landlady. “And now,” said Ann Veronica surveying her apartment with an unprecedented sense of proprietorship, “what is the next step?”

She spent the evening in writing—it was a little difficult—to her father and—which was easier—to the Widgetts. She was greatly heartened by doing this. The necessity of defending herself and assuming a confident and secure tone did much to dispell the sense of being exposed and indefensible in a huge dingy world that abounded in sinister possibilities. She addressed her letters, meditated on them for a time, and then took them out and posted them. Afterward she wanted to get her letter to her father back in order to read it over again, and, if it tallied with her general impression of it, re-write it.

He would know her address to-morrow. She reflected upon that with a thrill of terror that was also, somehow, in some faint remote way, gleeful.

“Dear old Daddy,” she said, “he’ll make a fearful fuss. Well, it had to happen somewhen…. Somehow. I wonder what he’ll say?”

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

EXPOSTULATIONS

Part 1

The next morning opened calmly, and Ann Veronica sat in her own room, her very own room, and consumed an egg and marmalade, and read the advertisements in the Daily Telegraph. Then began expostulations, preluded by a telegram and headed by her aunt. The telegram reminded Ann Veronica that she had no place for interviews except her bed-sitting-room, and she sought her landlady and negotiated hastily for the use of the ground floor parlor, which very fortunately was vacant. She explained she was expecting an important interview, and asked that her visitor should be duly shown in. Her aunt arrived about half-past ten, in black and with an unusually thick spotted veil. She raised this with the air of a conspirator unmasking, and displayed a tear-flushed face. For a moment she remained silent.

“My dear,” she said, when she could get her breath, “you must come home at once.”

Ann Veronica closed the door quite softly and stood still.

“This has almost killed your father.... After Gwen!”

“I sent a telegram.”

“He cares so much for you. He did so care for you.”

“I sent a telegram to say I was all right.”

“All right! And I never dreamed anything of the sort was going on. I had no idea!” She sat down abruptly and threw her wrists limply upon the table. “Oh, Veronica!” she said, “to leave your home!”

She had been weeping. She was weeping now. Ann Veronica was overcome by this amount of emotion.

“Why did you do it?” her aunt urged. “Why could you not confide in us?”

“Do what?” said Ann Veronica.

“What you have done.”

“But what have I done?”

“Elope! Go off in this way. We had no idea. We had such a pride in you, such hope in you. I had no idea you were not the happiest girl. Everything I could do! Your father sat

up all night. Until at last I persuaded him to go to bed. He wanted to put on his overcoat and come after you and look for you—in London. We made sure it was just like Gwen. Only Gwen left a letter on the pincushion. You didn't even do that Vee; not even that."

"I sent a telegram, aunt," said Ann Veronica.

"Like a stab. You didn't even put the twelve words."

"I said I was all right."

"Gwen said she was happy. Before that came your father didn't even know you were gone. He was just getting cross about your being late for dinner—you know his way—when it came. He opened it—just off-hand, and then when he saw what it was he hit at the table and sent his soup spoon flying and splashing on to the tablecloth. 'My God!' he said, 'I'll go after them and kill him. I'll go after them and kill him.' For the moment I thought it was a telegram from Gwen."

"But what did father imagine?"

"Of course he imagined! Any one would! 'What has happened, Peter?' I asked. He was standing up with the telegram crumpled in his hand. He used a most awful word! Then he said, 'It's Ann Veronica gone to join her sister!' 'Gone!' I said. 'Gone!' he said. 'Read that,' and threw the telegram at me, so that it went into the tureen. He swore when I tried to get it out with the ladle, and told me what it said. Then he sat down again in a chair and said that people who wrote novels ought to be strung up. It was as much as I could do to prevent him flying out of the house there and then and coming after you. Never since I was a girl have I seen your father so moved. 'Oh! little Vee!' he cried, 'little Vee!' and put his face between his hands and sat still for a long time before he broke out again."

Ann Veronica had remained standing while her aunt spoke.

"Do you mean, aunt," she asked, "that my father thought I had gone off—with some man?"

"What else COULD he think? Would any one DREAM you would be so mad as to go off alone?"

"After—after what had happened the night before?"

"Oh, why raise up old scores? If you could see him this morning, his poor face as white as a sheet and all cut about with shaving! He was for coming up by the very first train and looking for you, but I said to him, 'Wait for the letters,' and there, sure enough, was

yours. He could hardly open the envelope, he trembled so. Then he threw the letter at me. 'Go and fetch her home,' he said; 'it isn't what we thought! It's just a practical joke of hers.' And with that he went off to the City, stern and silent, leaving his bacon on his plate—a great slice of bacon hardly touched. No breakfast, he's had no dinner, hardly a mouthful of soup—since yesterday at tea."

She stopped. Aunt and niece regarded each other silently.

"You must come home to him at once," said Miss Stanley.

Ann Veronica looked down at her fingers on the claret-colored table-cloth. Her aunt had summoned up an altogether too vivid picture of her father as the masterful man, overbearing, emphatic, sentimental, noisy, aimless. Why on earth couldn't he leave her to grow in her own way? Her pride rose at the bare thought of return.

"I don't think I CAN do that," she said. She looked up and said, a little breathlessly, "I'm sorry, aunt, but I don't think I can."

Part 2

Then it was the expostulations really began.

From first to last, on this occasion, her aunt expostulated for about two hours. "But, my dear," she began, "it is Impossible! It is quite out of the Question. You simply can't." And to that, through vast rhetorical meanderings, she clung. It reached her only slowly that Ann Veronica was standing to her resolution. "How will you live?" she appealed. "Think of what people will say!" That became a refrain. "Think of what Lady Palsworthy will say! Think of what"—So-and-so—"will say! What are we to tell people?

"Besides, what am I to tell your father?"

At first it had not been at all clear to Ann Veronica that she would refuse to return home; she had had some dream of a capitulation that should leave her an enlarged and defined freedom, but as her aunt put this aspect and that of her flight to her, as she wandered illogically and inconsistently from one urgent consideration to another, as she mingled assurances and aspects and emotions, it became clearer and clearer to the girl that there could be little or no change in the position of things if she returned. "And what will Mr. Manning think?" said her aunt.

"I don't care what any one thinks," said Ann Veronica.

“I can’t imagine what has come over you,” said her aunt. “I can’t conceive what you want. You foolish girl!”

Ann Veronica took that in silence. At the back of her mind, dim and yet disconcerting, was the perception that she herself did not know what she wanted. And yet she knew it was not fair to call her a foolish girl.

“Don’t you care for Mr. Manning?” said her aunt.

“I don’t see what he has to do with my coming to London?”

“He—he worships the ground you tread on. You don’t deserve it, but he does. Or at least he did the day before yesterday. And here you are!”

Her aunt opened all the fingers of her gloved hand in a rhetorical gesture. “It seems to me all madness—madness! Just because your father—wouldn’t let you disobey him!”

Part 3

In the afternoon the task of expostulation was taken up by Mr. Stanley in person. Her father’s ideas of expostulation were a little harsh and forcible, and over the claret-colored table-cloth and under the gas chandelier, with his hat and umbrella between them like the mace in Parliament, he and his daughter contrived to have a violent quarrel. She had intended to be quietly dignified, but he was in a smouldering rage from the beginning, and began by assuming, which alone was more than flesh and blood could stand, that the insurrection was over and that she was coming home submissively. In his desire to be emphatic and to avenge himself for his over-night distresses, he speedily became brutal, more brutal than she had ever known him before.

“A nice time of anxiety you’ve given me, young lady,” he said, as he entered the room. “I hope you’re satisfied.”

She was frightened—his anger always did frighten her—and in her resolve to conceal her fright she carried a queen-like dignity to what she felt even at the time was a preposterous pitch. She said she hoped she had not distressed him by the course she had felt obliged to take, and he told her not to be a fool. She tried to keep her side up by declaring that he had put her into an impossible position, and he replied by shouting, “Nonsense! Nonsense! Any father in my place would have done what I did.”

Then he went on to say: “Well, you’ve had your little adventure, and I hope now you’ve had enough of it. So go up-stairs and get your things together while I look out for a hansom.”

To which the only possible reply seemed to be, “I’m not coming home.”

“Not coming home!”

“No!” And, in spite of her resolve to be a Person, Ann Veronica began to weep with terror at herself. Apparently she was always doomed to weep when she talked to her father. But he was always forcing her to say and do such unexpectedly conclusive things. She feared he might take her tears as a sign of weakness. So she said: “I won’t come home. I’d rather starve!”

For a moment the conversation hung upon that declaration. Then Mr. Stanley, putting his hands on the table in the manner rather of a barrister than a solicitor, and regarding her balefully through his glasses with quite undisguised animosity, asked, “And may I presume to inquire, then, what you mean to do?—how do you propose to live?”

“I shall live,” sobbed Ann Veronica. “You needn’t be anxious about that! I shall contrive to live.”

“But I AM anxious,” said Mr. Stanley, “I am anxious. Do you think it’s nothing to me to have my daughter running about London looking for odd jobs and disgracing herself?”

“Sha’n’t get odd jobs,” said Ann Veronica, wiping her eyes.

And from that point they went on to a thoroughly embittering wrangle. Mr. Stanley used his authority, and commanded Ann Veronica to come home, to which, of course, she said she wouldn’t; and then he warned her not to defy him, warned her very solemnly, and then commanded her again. He then said that if she would not obey him in this course she should “never darken his doors again,” and was, indeed, frightfully abusive. This threat terrified Ann Veronica so much that she declared with sobs and vehemence that she would never come home again, and for a time both talked at once and very wildly. He asked her whether she understood what she was saying, and went on to say still more precisely that she should never touch a penny of his money until she came home again—not one penny. Ann Veronica said she didn’t care.

Then abruptly Mr. Stanley changed his key. “You poor child!” he said; “don’t you see the infinite folly of these proceedings? Think! Think of the love and affection you

abandon! Think of your aunt, a second mother to you. Think if your own mother was alive!"

He paused, deeply moved.

"If my own mother was alive," sobbed Ann Veronica, "she would understand."

The talk became more and more inconclusive and exhausting. Ann Veronica found herself incompetent, undignified, and detestable, holding on desperately to a hardening antagonism to her father, quarrelling with him, wrangling with him, thinking of repartees—almost as if he was a brother. It was horrible, but what could she do? She meant to live her own life, and he meant, with contempt and insults, to prevent her. Anything else that was said she now regarded only as an aspect of or diversion from that.

In the retrospect she was amazed to think how things had gone to pieces, for at the outset she had been quite prepared to go home again upon terms. While waiting for his coming she had stated her present and future relations with him with what had seemed to her the most satisfactory lucidity and completeness. She had looked forward to an explanation. Instead had come this storm, this shouting, this weeping, this confusion of threats and irrelevant appeals. It was not only that her father had said all sorts of inconsistent and unreasonable things, but that by some incomprehensible infection she herself had replied in the same vein. He had assumed that her leaving home was the point at issue, that everything turned on that, and that the sole alternative was obedience, and she had fallen in with that assumption until rebellion seemed a sacred principle. Moreover, atrociously and inexorably, he allowed it to appear ever and again in horrible gleams that he suspected there was some man in the case.... Some man!

And to conclude it all was the figure of her father in the doorway, giving her a last chance, his hat in one hand, his umbrella in the other, shaken at her to emphasize his point.

"You understand, then," he was saying, "you understand?"

"I understand," said Ann Veronica, tear-wet and flushed with a reciprocal passion, but standing up to him with an equality that amazed even herself, "I understand." She controlled a sob. "Not a penny—not one penny—and never darken your doors again!"