DELPHI CLASSICS

James Hilton

Complete Works

Series Fourteen

The Complete Works of

JAMES HILTON

(1900-1954)

Contents

Version 1

The Complete Works of

JAMES HILTON

By Delphi Classics, 2024

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Complete Works of James Hilton

First published in the United Kingdom in 2024 by Delphi Classics.

ISBN: 978 1 80170 176 1

Delphi Classics
is an imprint of
Delphi Publishing Ltd
Hastings, East Sussex
United Kingdom
Contact: sales@delphiclassics.com

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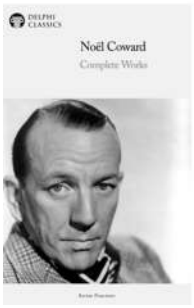

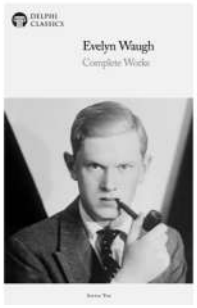

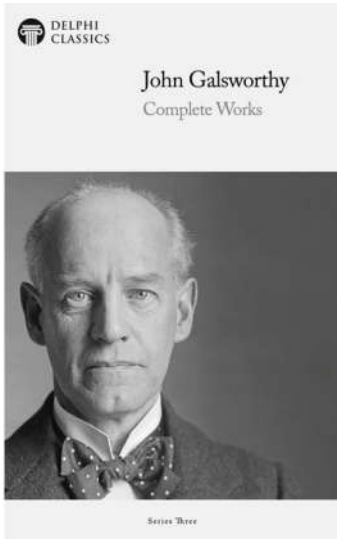

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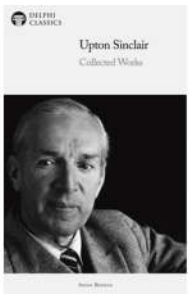


The Novels

Leigh, Greater Manchester, North West England — James Hilton's birthplace

Leigh today

Catherine Herself (1920)

James Hilton was born in Leigh, Lancashire, the son of John Hilton, the headmaster of Chapel End School in Walthamstow. He was educated at the Monoux School Walthamstow till 1914, then The Leys School, Cambridge, before enrolling at Christ's College, Cambridge, where he wrote his first novel, *Catherine Herself*, and was eventually awarded an honours degree in English literature. Hilton was aged just seventeen when he completed the novel. It was published three years later in September 1920, a year before he graduated. It had the working title of 'Winifred Herself'.

Young Catherine Weston is keen to live life, making friends and learning how to play the piano, for which she has a talent. Then, after the unexpected death of her mother, Cathie gets herself a job playing piano at the local cinema, but her father's not happy: "Somebody's been putting silly modern ideas into your head," he says. He forbids her from taking the job and throws her out. She runs away and takes up both lodging and employment. Then the adventure of life really begins…

Critics admired the novel, with many taking note of the author's gender and age; "Mr Hilton has had the audacity, despite his tender age, to write from the woman's point of view; but from a first glance at the book he seems to have a surprisingly accurate knowledge — or intuition — of the other sex. Catherine seems to be a creation of whom many a more mature novelist might be proud," said one, whilst another reviewer declared, "…this book is unique. It is a character study and considering the sex and youth of the writer, a very remarkable one. The story is original and told in an individual manner with a certain terseness and graphic manner. The style is analytical rather than subtle and the personal character of the telling of the story, which is never dissociated from the heroine, indicates a very strong power of imagination on the part of the writer". Some critics were a little more to the point, with one saying, "The writer has a sure hand and if he pursues novel writing seriously will make a mark." And another pointed out that there is, "…no Svengali business, no claptrap, but all is told in a manner that is simple, direct and excellent. This is a story that holds the attention because it is a good story, as well as a very interesting essay in the psychology of suggestion."

Hilton as a young man

CONTENTS

The second edition dust jacket

CHAPTER I. PRELUDE

§ 1

CATHERINE THOUGHT: DAY is white, Night is black, but sometimes it is half-white and half-black.... There were five knobs on the brass rail of the bed: one of them would come off.... The baker came to the door every night and said: “And how is Cathie?” ...

It was cold, and blue flames flickered on top of the coals in the fire-grate. They said: “Lappappappap....” The Man tore off his collar from the stud— “plock” — then he screwed off his boots— “Hr-rooch — flop ... Hr-rooch — flop.” ... The mother said: “Cathie’s asleep: don’t make such a noise.” ...

Then her mother carried her past the brown banisters up to bed.... It was nearly black. The pumping-engine at the water-works went: “Chug-chug ... chug-chug ... chug-chug-chug....”

There were five knobs on the brass rail of the bed....

§ 2

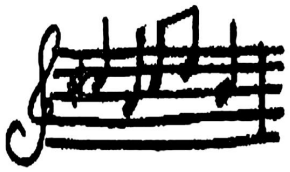
The Man was Father.

Every morning mother called upstairs: “John: come on! Past eight”... and father said: “Just about to.” The sun fell in a slant over the table and climbed up the wall. Father ate porridge and milk: he went “Ooflip-oorooflip.”

The sunlight slid off the table on to the floor. There was nothing to do except listen to the clock. It went “tick-tock — tick-tock” — then it went “ticky-ticky.” ... The milkman said: “Mornin’, m’m. Lavly mornin’. Thenk you, m’m. Mornin’, m’m.” ...

The sunlight ran away....

The face of the man next door had a big bulge. Mother said it was called a goitre. You had them in Derbyshire. The man’s name was Jopson. All the street-children used to follow him singing “Old father Jopson” — like this:



There were other fathers besides old father Jopson. There was one whom Catherine had never seen. He was called “Ch-artinevin,” but he was not like old father Jopson....

Every night her mother sang:

Now the day is over,

Nighties drawing nigh.

and made her talk to our father, Ch-artinevin. Only Ch-artinevin never said anything in reply.

There were two places where little girls went to. One was heaven, the other was hell. Hell was hot, heaven was cold. Heaven was full of white tiles and marble-slabs, like a fish-shop. But hell would be far too hot for you even if you were feeling cold. It

would be a pity to go to hell, especially in the warm weather. Sometimes her father said: “O Hell!” ...

§ 3

Father was an elementary school teacher at the Downlands Road Council School. In winter and on wet nights in summer he sat indoors and put great sprawling ticks and crosses on exercise-books. Sometimes he frowned while he was working: Catherine used to watch him.

He was a little man and he wore cycling stockings under his trousers. Every fine night he put on an old Norfolk tweed jacket and went out into the garden with the two ends of the waistband dangling behind him. He would bend down and make minute examinations of plants. He would twine sweet-pea tendrils round their sticks. Sometimes he would pounce upon a weed and remove it with cruel precision.... On Saturday afternoons he took a bucket and went into the roads to collect horse-manure. To Catherine Saturday afternoon was always signalized by the hard scraping of the kitchen shovel on the gritty surface of the roadway.

Mother was big and billowy. She kept her hair in papers during the mornings and wore stays whose ribbed outline showed through the back of her blouse. She talked more than father. At the Duke Street Methodist Chapel she appeared in the front row of the choir, whilst father took round the collection-plate. She was vaguely religious and vaguely patriotic and vaguely sentimental. When she said “John!” very slowly, father knew he had better be careful.

Catherine sat in the front pew on a Sunday morning, and wondered what it was all about. Why had mother got her hat on? ... Why did everybody come here once a week? What was the man in the round box talking about? Her mother had said, “About God, Cathie.” But he didn’t say God; he said Gahd. Sometimes Ch-artinevin was mentioned and Catherine caught the words with enthusiasm. It was plain that Ch-artinevin was a well-known personage.

The little boy next to her had curly hair. He was eating peppermints. During the prayer he kept taking them out of his mouth to see if they got smaller. Once he gave her one. It was very nice, but she cracked it during the benediction, and it was a loud crack.

Father stood at the door shaking hands with people. He said: “Good evening, Mrs. Lawson”— “Good evening, Ethel”— “Good evening, Miss Picksley, shall we be seeing you at the Band of Hope on Tuesday?”

And to Catherine he said:

“Go and wait in the back pew; there’s a Kermunion.”

A Kermunion, at any rate, was interesting....

§ 4

Father, being an elementary schoolteacher, did not send Catherine to an elementary school. She went to Albany House (principal, Miss Leary, L.R.C.P.). Miss Leary wore her hair in a knob and said to Catherine: “Darling, if you do that again I shall have to smack you hard.”

Catherine learnt: Solomon was the wisest man that ever lived; Gibraltar belongs to England; the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; Henry the First never smiled again; three barleycorns one inch; the messenger rushed up to Wolfe saying, “They run, they run!”— “Who run, who run?” cried Wolfe....

On wet winter days the fireguard was hung with steaming clothes. The row of benches was a mere misty vista of wet noses and pocket-handkerchiefs. Everywhere was the stench of damp mackintoshes. Catherine sat by the window and looked through the streaming panes. She could see Polly, who brought them cups of cocoa in the middle of the morning, washing up the breakfast things in the kitchen. Every now and then the water gurgled out of the slopstone into the sink and made Jack, the black retriever dog, cautiously open one eye in his kennel. Catherine liked Jack. He was very staid and solemn, his sole dissipation being the crunching of snails. Miss Leary said: "Catherine, I do declare you are looking out of that window again! How often have I told you ..." etc., etc.

Every Friday afternoon as a special treat they had reading out of a reading-book. It was not like "Pat sat on the mat: is that Pat's mat?" and the sentences about the cat and rat; it was a real book of adventures, the adventures of a boy and his uncle at the seaside. The avuncular relationship seemed to consist entirely in a readiness to return prompt and plausible answers to all sorts of questions. Uncle Tom and his nephew carried between them a complete outfit of odds and ends, marbles, pieces of string, oranges, scissors, card-board, cubes and prisms, even jars and glass-funnels, and it was their custom to perform experiments with these upon all suitable occasions, wherever they might chance to be. The observations of passers-by, including park-keepers and bath-chairmen, were not recorded. Local byelaws seemed never to impede them from digging up roots and defacing flower-beds.

§ 5

Day followed on day and Catherine grew. As she walked by the sides of brick walls her eye ran along the lines of mortar tapering into the distance. Even she noticed how she kept rising brick by brick until the mortar-line that her eye followed was somewhere between four and five feet high. She left off her very childish habits, such as walking on the cracks of the pavements.... She ceased to ask absurd unanswerable questions about trams and buses; she stopped lamenting if she failed to secure a window-seat in the train. But she was still a child. She still sang out after old father Jopson.

She discovered that the second line of the hymn was not "Nighties drawing nigh," as she had naturally supposed, but "Night is drawing nigh." The discovery was a disappointment.

She began to read. She read *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Walrus and the Carpenter*. She even began to write. At Albany House she wrote in large copybook style: "Honesty is the best policy." Once also she wrote on the back of a birthday card: "Dear Auntie Ethel, Many Happy Returns of the Day, from Your Affectionate Niece, Catherine." ... And on the wooden fence at the end of the road she wrote in chalk: "Freddy McKellar is a Soppy Fool."

She began to do naughty things. She played in the game of "last across"; she hung on to the backs of passing motor-lorries. She danced in the streets to the tune of itinerant barrel-organs. Something may here be said of her appearance. She had hair of a rich and fiery red, and eyes of a fierce compound of brown and green. In the summer-time her face was freckles all over. She was not good-looking, and few people would have called her even pretty. But she was known everywhere in the vicinity of Kitchener Road as "Cathie Weston, that red-haired girl."

§ 6

In the Co-operative Stores the shopman kept her waiting out of her turn. He had seen her sticking "transfers" on his shop-window and he did not like her. The Bockley and Upton Rising Friendly Co-operative and Industrial Society was an imposing institution with patent bacon-slicers and profuse calendar-distributing habits. Behind the polished mahogany counter the shopman fluttered about, all sleek and dapper, and in front stood Catherine, tired and impatient. There was a large co-operative almanac on the wall, and this she used to peruse diligently, supplementing therefrom the meagre knowledge of English history given her at Albany House. The almanac introduced a sort of miscellaneous historical calendar — for example: September 22nd. Battle of Zutphen, 1586. September 23rd. Massacres in Paris, 1789. Then in great staring red letters: September 24th. Opening of the Head Office of the Bockley and Upton Rising Friendly Co-operative and Industrial Society by Lord Fitzroy, 1903. With absolutely no sense of historical perspective at all, Catherine was quite prepared to believe that the last of these was the most prominent because it was also the most important.

When Kitchener Road was first built, in the full-flood of the Soudanese war-fever, it was for a time drowsily suburban. Then a too enterprising religious organization built a tin-mission at one end of it. The mission had a corrugated iron roof. Until then Kitchener Road had not quite decided whether it would tend in the social sense to rise or to fall. The corrugated iron roof forced a decision. Kitchener Road fell, and fell rapidly. From drowsiness it degenerated into frowsiness. A sleek off-licence appeared, with yellow-glazed tiles and an ungrammatical notice board: "No beer to be drank on the premises nor on the public highway." Passing the tarred fence at the upper end the pedestrian ran the whole gamut of flippancy and indecency. And on the gate of the corner house could be seen — a final tribute to disappointed hopes — that sultry hall-mark of respectability: "No Hawkers, No Circulars, No Canvassers." When the headmaster of the Downsland Road Council School heard that an intending pupil lived in Kitchener Road, he generally said: "I am very sorry, but we have no more room. If I were you I should try at Cubitt Lane." ... The headmaster of the Downsland Road Council School did not like the headmaster of the Cubitt Lane Council School.... And on all the tram-standards in Bockley a handbill declared that "On July 11th, at the Upton Rising Petty Sessions, Gabriel Handcote, 21, and Richard Moulton, 19, both of Kitchener Road, Bockley, were fined 40s. and costs for travelling on a tramway-car with intent to avoid payment of fare."

§ 7

Bockley was a sprawling urban district on the edge of the metropolitan area. Itself and Upton Rising had spread till they touched like adjacent blobs of ink on blotting-paper. But Upton Rising was aristocratic, plutocratic.... Its inhabitants had first-class season-tickets, wore spats, and read *The Times* on the 9.27 "Up." They became district councillors, bazaar-openers, hospital-subscribers and such like. They wrote letters to the *Bockley and Upton Rising Advertiser* complaining of municipal apathy in the matter of water-carts. They said "Bockley must have a park to keep it out of mischief," and lo! Bockley had one, with "keep-off-the-grass" notices and geometrical flower-beds, and a code of byelaws half a yard long, and a constant clientele of old-age pensioners and children flying paper windmills....

And in the meantime Bockley became conscious of its destiny. It bore all the unmistakable signs of a township that expects to be great some day — insurance

agencies out of all proportion to the population, a Carnegie library, and a melancholy statue outside the Town Hall....

The origin of Bockley is simple and unconfusing.

Somewhere early on in the latter half of the nineteenth century the Great Eastern Railway Company, seeking parliamentary sanction to extend its suburban lines to Bockley, was compelled by law to carry workmen to and from Bockley and the City for twopence.... It was that twopence which made Bockley....

§ 8

In the front room of No. 24, Kitchener Road there was a Collard and Collard piano. It had jaundiced keys and a bosom of yellow silk interlaced with fretwork. Most of the lower notes said "Hanng-g-g," and the five bottom ones all said the same "hang-g-g." ... The piano-tuner came. He was of the "ping-ping-wrench" and the "see-what-can-be-done" variety. He said:

"It's bin a good interment in its time.... Pity the dampness got in it."

Catherine watched him as he tightened the wires and prodded the notes. At the end he played Thalberg's "Home, Sweet Home," with variations.

That night Mrs. Weston said: "Now that the pianer's bin tuned you might start havin' lessons.... I'll see Mr. Monkhouse about it to-morrer."

And Catherine bought a shilling instruction book and learned: E G B D F — Every Good Boy Deserves Favour....

Mr. Monkhouse was a versatile man. In the *Bockley Advertiser* he announced: "Mr. Reginald Monkhouse has still a few dates vacant during April and May for engagements as entertainer, expert conjurer, pianist, accompanist or children's lecturer Write Box 77." At Masonic dinners Mr. Monkhouse sang "Where did you get that hat?" and other relics of the Victorian music-hall stage. Every evening from 8 till 11 he played the piano and conducted the orchestra at the Victoria Hall, Bockley, vamping with his left hand and beating time with the first finger of his right. And on Saturdays and at odd times whenever possible he gave pianoforte tuition at the rate of sixpence a lesson.... He was always shabbily-dressed, always good-humoured, patient and not too conscientious. The little front parlour where he lodged in Cubitt Lane was full of playbills and concert programmes and signed menu-cards....

He gave Catherine a piece called "White Wings," and initiated her into a few elementary five-finger exercises. She was not particularly apt in picking them up, but at the end of forty-five minutes he said:

"Good-night, my dear. You'll be a female Paderewski before long...."

Those were the days when a pianist had achieved the signal distinction of becoming known to the man-in-the-street. Paderewski was as well known as Krüger.

§ 9

Freddie McKellar and Catherine Weston were seated side by side in the back bench of the Duke Street Schoolroom. The occasion was a Band of Hope entertainment. Mr. Weston was on the platform, surrounded by weird articles of glass and metal.

"I want you all to notice carefully," he said. "Here I have a jar of clean pure water. The little fellow who is gambolling about so playfully inside it is a stickleback. He is having a fine time because the water is so pure and fresh.... Now watch ... here I have a flask of whisky.... I pour it into the water ... so.... I want you to watch very carefully...."

Freddie McKellar, aged fifteen, bent his head slightly to the left in order to see round the corner of Mrs. Mole's hat. In doing so he felt the soft spray-like touch of Catherine's hair against his ear.... It was not unpleasant.

Catherine was dreamily conscious that something tense was going to happen.

"It doesn't always work," she whispered, vaguely, "some sticklebacks like it." ... She bent her head slightly to the right to circumvent the obstruction of Mr. Mole's shiny hairless head. To Freddie McKellar it seemed that this time, instead of his ear touching her hair, her hair had performed the more positive act of brushing against his ear. The difference, though subtle, was not to be ignored.

"Now," cried Mr. Weston, brandishing aloft his jar with the stickleback inside it either dead or drunk or in some way incapacitated for further movement, "if the effect of this foul spirit upon this tiny animal is ..."

"There's refreshments afterwards, ain't there?" said Freddie, *sotto voce*.

"Yes," she whispered, hoarsely. The tragedy of the dying stickleback, "butchered to make a Roman holiday," had made her unwontedly solemn.

... "Now," proceeded Mr. Weston, "if somebody will kindly lower the lights, I will show you on the screen some of the effects of strong drink.... First of all, perhaps you would care to have a look at a drop of whisky as it is seen through the lens of a microscope...."

The lights went out in successive "pops."

Freddie McKellar's left hand slowly closed over Catherine's right one.

"Ugh," said Catherine, presumably at the horrible picture on the screen. Then the thought came to her (she had had no experience of such matters)— "He must be flirting with me."

Simultaneously there came to Freddie McKellar (who, for his age, had had considerable experience of such matters) the thought: "She must be flirting with me."

And at the same time Gladys Stockwell nudged Bessie Millar and whispered: "Just look at Cathie Weston and Freddie McKellar ... at their age, too...." (Gladys was twenty-three and unbeautiful.)

In the refreshment room afterwards Catherine and Freddie sat together on a bench munching ham-sandwiches. You were only expected to take one ham-sandwich, but Catherine had already taken three and Freddie five. The caretaker was stoking up the fire at the other side of the room.

"Ain't you two goin' ter join in the Musical Chairs?" he remarked, contemplatively, "they've started 'em in the other room."

Freddie took another ham-sandwich.

"I don't feel extra like Musical Chairs," he replied.

The caretaker grinned and shuffled out with the empty coke-scuttle. It was precisely at that moment that Catherine began to dislike the scent of Freddie's lavishly spread hair-oil....

Catherine thought: "I don't think I like him at all. I wonder if he knows it was me who chalked up on the fence, 'Freddie McKellar is a soppy fool.' ... 'Cos he is one, really...."

And then suddenly Freddie had an unfortunate inspiration.

He put his arm round her neck and touched her cheek. In an instant she was up and flaring and standing before him.

"What on earth did you do that for?" she cried, passionately; "I don't want your smelly fingers on me!" ("Smelly fingers" was an attribute she bestowed on everybody she disliked.)

He was astonished at her vehemence, but tried to carry it off laughingly.

“Come back,” he called, advancing to her, “and don’t be silly ... silly ... don’t be ... silly....” He was rather nervous. His nervousness made him desperate.

There occurred a somewhat unseemly fracas. He stood before the door and slowly got her trapped into a corner. She aimed a tea-cup at him but missed. Maddened by this he rushed full tilt at her. She struggled, snatched, tore, kicked, pinched. She was stronger than he, but he got hold of her hair, and so held her at his mercy. He just managed to kiss her. She spat in his face. Then he let her go. She marched out of the room, seizing another tea-cup as she went. When she was at the door she took a careful aim and flung it at him with all her might. It struck his head. There was that tense pause just after children are hurt, and just before they begin to cry. Then he broke into a wail.... Most dramatically the piano in the next room stopped, and there was the scuffle of finding chairs.... She paused at the door and tossed her last words at him in uttermost scorn.

“Oh, you great big softie ...” she said, and passed out into the cool night air.

She never enquired whether he were seriously hurt (he might have been); she never stopped to think of the broken crockery on the floor or her own red hair streaming in disarray; at that moment she would not have cared if she had killed him.

And she never spoke to him again....

Afterwards she was doubly angry with him because he had made her lose her temper....

§ 10

Mrs. Weston said: “Jus’ look at your hair! You’ve bin larking abeaout, I darebebound.”

Catherine did not contradict her. “Larking about” was a punishable misdemeanour.

“Everybody was larking about,” she put in, irrelevantly.

“You’re a disgrace,” continued Mrs. Weston, equally irrelevantly. Then as an afterthought: “Larking about with the boys, I daresay....”

Catherine did not reply.

“Well, you’re going to have a sound thrashing, that’s all, so you may as well know.... I’m about sick of your hooligan ways....”

Catherine went white. She was not afraid of a sound thrashing (they were not very fearsome things when you got used to them); it was the atmosphere of strained expectancy that was almost intolerable. She went whiter when her mother said:

“Have your supper first.... There’s some cold rice pudding....”

She ate in silence. Her mother was rushing in and out of the scullery preparing her father’s supper. In the middle of all this her father entered. He was tired and hoarse after the evening’s effort. He noticed the strained atmosphere. He said to Catherine:

“What’s the matter, Cathie?”

Mrs. Weston began to talk very fast and very harshly. Her voice was like the sudden rending of a strip of calico.

“She’s bin behaving herself badly again, that’s what’s amiss with her.... Larking about all this evening, she was. A regular disgrace. I tell you, I’m not going to put up with it. She’s going to get a sound thrashing to teach her to remember....”

Simultaneously Mrs. Weston planked down a plate of greens and vegetables in front of her husband. He attacked them nervously.

“It’s not good enough,” he said, after a pause, with the air of being vaguely reproachful against nobody in particular, “I tell you it’s not good enough.... I don’t know why these things should happen. It’s not as if she was a little girl....”

That was all he said.

The sound thrashing began soon afterwards. It was an extremely unscientific battery of slaps, in which Catherine dodged as best she could amongst the crowded furniture of the kitchen. Once she lurched against the table and knocked over the vinegar-bottle.

"I wish you wouldn't ..." began Mr. Weston, and then stopped and continued eating.

After some moments of this gymnastic display both parties were hot and flushed with exertion, and the finale began when Mrs. Weston opened the door of the lobby and manœuvred Catherine out of the kitchen.

"Off you go," she said. "Straight to bed ... str-h-aight to b-bed...."

The chase proceeded upstairs. Mrs. Weston's stertorous breathing and heavy footfalls were the most conspicuous sounds.... A few seconds afterwards a loud banging of an upstairs door announced that hostilities were over.

In her tiny back bedroom Catherine sat down on a chair for breath. She was not physically hurt; in her "larking about" with boys and girls of her own age she had often paused for breath like this, and at such times there had been joy in her heart even when there had been pain in her body. But now she was conscious only of profound indignity. Her father's vague protest echoed in her memory: "It's not as if she were a little girl...."

She undressed and got into bed. It was quite dark, and she felt acutely miserable. Far away the pumping engine at the water-works whispered, as it always did at night-time, "Chug-chug ... chug-chug ... chug-chug-chug...." Ten, twelve years had passed since she had counted the five knobs on the brass rail of the bed. She was growing up, out of a child into a girl. She was not growing up without faults: she knew that. The worst trait in her was temper ... she would have to conquer that. She must learn self-control....

From below came the old familiar sound of her father taking off his boots and dumping them under the sofa. "H-rooch-flop ... h'rooch-flop." ... That sound was bound up with all her memories of childhood.

Ten minutes later there came a cautious tap at her door, and her father entered in an intermediate stage of attire. He lit a candle clumsily and shone it down upon her. She did not move. He prodded her with his thumb in a vague, experimental way. She made no reply, though her eyes were wide open and staring into his.

"I say, Cathie," he began, vaguely and nervously, "you've bin misbehaving, I'm told.... It's too bad, you know.... Come now ... be a good girl and go to sleep."

Pause.

Then: "Kiss me."

It was the first time for many years that he had asked for such a thing. With no apparent reason at all the tears welled up into her eyes, tears that she had hidden since her tenth birthday.

She was just about to raise her head to meet his when a drop of liquid candle grease fell on her bare arm. The sharp, unexpected pain made her a prey to a sudden gust of tempestuous emotion....

"Oh, go away," she muttered angrily, "don't come bothering me ... I'm tired...." She crouched down beneath the bedclothes with her face turned away from him.

Mr. Weston retired a little sheepishly.

"Oh, well," he said, "if you're going to be sulky ... I suppose...."

When he had gone she cried as she had never cried before, and all because she had spurned his proffered reconciliation. From the other side of the thin partition that

separated the two rooms, she could hear the sharp “plock” as her father wrenched his collar off the stud, and the steady nasal monotone of her mother’s voice. She could not discern any words, but from the vicious way in which her father kept stumbling up against things she guessed that they were quarrelling....

CHAPTER II. JEUNESSE

§ 1

CATHERINE WON AN open scholarship to the Upton Rising High School for Girls. She did not win it because of any particular brilliance or erudition in her examination papers; she won it, as a matter of fact, because Mr. McGill, one of the Governors, happened to remark to Miss Forsdyke, the headmistress: "I hear Weston's got his daughter in for a scholarship."

Miss Forsdyke said, "Weston? — Weston? — Let me see — I believe I've heard the name somewhere ... Er ... who is he?"

"One of the men at the Downsland Road School.... Not a bad sort.... I bet old Clotters'll be mad if Weston's girl gets anything. Clotters' boy missed last year...."

Now Clotters was the headmaster of the Downsland Road Council School. Mr. Weston did not like Mr. Clotters.... Mr. McGill did not like Mr. Clotters.... And even Miss Forsdyke did not like Mr. Clotters....

Thus it happened that Catherine obtained a scholarship to the Upton Rising High School for Girls.

In her English paper she was asked to analyse: "There is a tide in the affairs of men...." She began:

"There" — subject; "is" predicate; "a tide" object — according to a well-established form of procedure which sometimes enabled her to get her analysis right without in the least understanding what she was about.

And in her Scripture paper she was asked: What is a phylactery? She answered: a kind of musical instrument.

Catherine was rather surprised to get a scholarship.

§ 2

Long lingering September evenings with the sun splashing over the roofs of Upton Rising; the soft scented dusk creeping through gravelled roads; tier upon tier of houses astride the hill, with every window like a crimson star.... In the high road the newsboys were calling, the trams swirled citywards like golden meteors flying through space.... In the quiet residential roads was always the chatter of the lawn-mower, the drowsy murmur of hedge-clipping.... In these delectable hours of twilight Catherine passed from Upton Rising into Bockley.... Every night she passed, with swollen satchel under her arm — Luke's Grove, over Makepiece Common, then along the Ridegway into the Bockley High Street.... And from the High Street into Kitchener Road there was a bewildering choice of routes, differing only in degrees of frowsiness....

Men passed her by like dim shadows heralded by the glowing tips of their cigarettes....

The policeman on point-duty in the Bockley High Street knew her. He said, "'d evenin', miss," and Catherine and the other girls who accompanied her on her way home used to giggle hysterically, for he was tall and handsome and presumably young.

Catherine went home with Madge Saunders and Helen Trant. Madge was fat, good-natured, but lymphatic and uninteresting. Her father was on the council and kept a big drapery stores in the High Street. He called his daughter "Maggers," and was excessively jovial and contented. When Catherine went to tea at the Saunders', he called her "Carrots." His humour was exhausted in the invention of nicknames....

Helen Trant was almost the antithesis of Catherine and equally of Madge. She was quiet, undemonstrative, but her quietness was not the quietness of laziness. She worked hard, was moderately clever, almost excessively conscientious, and in a quiet, unobtrusive way immensely powerful and self-reliant. She was a scholarship girl, and her father was in a good position in a London Insurance Office. Neither Madge nor Helen was good-looking, but Helen had a quiet dignity that made a fair substitute for beauty.... They were a rather distinctive trio as they sauntered home together.

As they passed the policeman on point-duty Catherine made provocative eyes at him. Madge rolled into heavy, undisciplined laughter. And Helen sometimes smiled, but when she did it was the smile as of one who knew all about policemen, their lives, wages, conditions of existence, their baulked aspirations, confident hopes and undying ambitions.... She looked to have the sympathy of one who knows everything without being told anything....

Miss Forsdyke, in a spiteful mood, said:

"I wish, Helen, you would be more particular in your choice of companions...."

Yet Catherine and Helen became close friends, and Madge was merely an adjunct to their evening journeys home....

§ 3

Time was passing; Catherine was creeping through her teens, and every night in the drawing-room at 24, Kitchener Road the piano strummed for exactly one hour, and then stopped. By and by the music-lover might have begun to detect certain tunes that were familiar to him. A few of Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words," Tchaikovsky's "Valse Triste," the adagio part of Beethoven's "Pathetic Sonata." ...

Once, too, a prelude of Chopin's, chosen for its unChopin-like qualities....

There came a day when Catherine's playing began to be very slightly superior to the instrument at her disposal. Nor did the latter improve as time passed. All the lower notes responded with a nasal twang reminiscent of a Jew's-harp. The upper ones were so physically inert that when pushed down they refused to come up again without assistance, and so unanimous as to pitch that the striking of the wrong note was no more inharmonious than the striking of the right one....

Yet it was on this instrument that Catherine practised a certain Fantasia in D Minor of Mozart's that won her a first prize at the Upton Rising Annual Eisteddfod.... The examiner was a wizened old man with blue spectacles. From the first he annoyed Catherine. Her music persisted in curling up.

"You should use a flat case," he said, "not one of these roll ones."

Then she discovered that the middle page of the music was not there. Presumably she had left it in the waiting-room.

"You can't go and fetch it," he said. "I think you're very careless...."

"Do you?" she answered impudently. "Then I'll play from memory."

"You ought not to play from memory ... at your age ..." he protested.

Nevertheless she did so, and played better than she had ever played at her practices. It was partly the ecstasy of manipulating a splendid instrument, partly a reckless desire to defy and confute this old man.

“H’m ...” he said, when she had finished. He bore her no malice for her carelessness or impudence, he simply judged her fairly, totted up her marks, and discovered them to be higher than the rest.... Accordingly he adjudged her the winner. He looked neither pleased nor sorry.

Catherine decided that he was utterly soulless....

§ 4

On a certain Monday morning Catherine and Helen took a day off from school, and went picnicking in Epping Forest. Helen’s brother George was with them, and also a friend of the latter’s, one Bert, who took over the financial management of the outing with marked efficiency, but was otherwise vague and indeterminate. George was a moderately good-looking fellow of nineteen, clever in a restricted kind of way, and very entertaining when the mood was upon him. He worked for a City firm of accountants, and was taking his annual fortnight’s holiday.

It was very pleasant to be strolling up the hill leading to High Beech at ten o’clock on a fresh April morning. The party inevitably split up into couples. Bert was walking on in front with Helen; George and Catherine formed up the rear. There was a wonderful atmosphere of serenity over everything: not a soul was about save themselves; the hotels and refreshment châteaux seemed scarcely to have wakened out of their winter’s sleep. And overhead the sky was pure blue.... Up the steep, gritty road they trudged, and in the hearts of each of them something seemed to be singing: “We are going to have a glorious day.”

Bert was saying to Helen: “Yes, of course they’re very nice and comfortable and all that, I know, but they fairly eat up the petrol.... Can’t possibly run them on less than ...”

“Indeed?” said Helen, sympathetically.

And a hundred yards behind them George was saying to Catherine: “I suppose woman is a few inches nearer to mother earth than man.... She is more ... primal ... no, not exactly that.... I mean elemental ... that’s the word, I think....”

“She’s got more common sense, if that’s what you mean....”

“No, I don’t mean exactly that.... Besides, is common sense such a virtue? ... The great things of the world have been done as a rule by people with uncommon sense.... No, I mean this: woman seems to know by instinct what man only learns by patient study and not always then.... Isn’t that your experience?”

“I don’t think I’ve had any experience.”

“H’m! ... the others are waiting for us at the top. I suppose they want to know what we’re going to do....”

They quickened their steps to the summit.

§ 5

They chose for lunch a quiet spot hemmed in by ferns and bushes. Catherine’s spirits soared higher and higher as the hours flew.... The sun was splashing over the hills as they came upon the red roofs of Chingford. The quantity of feeble, flippant conversation that passed amongst them was colossal. But they had had a glorious day....

“I’ll see you home,” said George, as they entered the straggling outskirts of Bockley.

“Please don’t,” replied Catherine. “It’s quite out of your way.”

“I assure you ...” he began.

“Please ...” she reiterated. The truth was she did not wish her mother to see her in the company of a young man.

Amidst the winedark fragrance of an April evening they passed until they reached the corner of the road where the Trants lived. They stopped talking here for three-quarters of an hour, and then said good-bye. At the last minute George said:

“By the way, I’ve got to call in at a shop in the High Street to see about something, so I may as well walk back part of the way with you.”

Catherine blushed, but the darkness shielded her.

“The shops’ll be shut by this time,” said Helen, quietly.

“Er ... not ... er ... the shop *I* mean,” replied George.

He walked back with Catherine as far as the corner of High Street and the Ridgeway. Their talk was rather vaguely, indefinitely sentimental. Twice he quoted from Swinburne and once from Omar Khayyám.

As they descended the hill Catherine took off her tam-o’-shanter hat and stuffed it in her pocket. The soft night breeze blew her hair like a dim cloud behind her....

They shook hands in the dark interval between two brilliantly lighted shop-windows.

“My God,” he whispered softly, “your hair!”

He brushed it lightly with his hand.

“What about it?” she said, and her voice was nearly as soft as his.

“Passionate,” he cried; “like flame ... flame ... good-night....”

He fled into the dark vista of a side-street.

§ 6

The clock on the Carnegie library said, Ten minutes past ten. Catherine thought, Now for a big row at home....

She had been forbidden to come in later than nine o’clock.

“When *I* was young ...” her mother had said.

And her father had argued: “I can’t see..what you need ever to be out later than nine for.... You’ve got all the daytime, surely you don’t need the night as well.... I can’t understand.... It’s not as if we didn’t let you do what you like on Saturday afternoons....”

She put her hat on as she turned into Kitchener Road. She sauntered slowly to No. 24. A minute or two won’t make much difference, she reasoned, on top of an hour and a quarter. The crowded memories of the day just past, coupled with anticipation of a domestic fracas when she got home, combined to make her somewhat excited. The day had been so full of incident that she would have enjoyed walking the cool streets till midnight, reckoning things out and sizing them according to their relative importance.

Then she recollected it was Monday night. Her father would be at night-school; he did not usually arrive home till half-past ten.

The street-lamp in front of No. 24 revealed the interesting fact that the blinds in the front parlour were drawn. There was no light behind them, but the tiny gas-jet in the hall was burning; she could see its beam through the fanlight. Her heart leaped within her. She felt like a prisoner granted a reprieve.... There were visitors. That seemed certain. Somebody had come to spend the evening, and her mother had “put a light in the front room,” the highest mark of respect known. Now probably they were all having supper in the kitchen. The hall-light, too, pointed to that conclusion, for ever since Mr. Tuppinger took the wrong hat from the hall-stand, and failed to discover his

mistake afterwards, Mrs. Weston had made it a rule that the hall should be illuminated when visitors came Catherine knocked at the door.... This was really lucky. With good fortune the lateness of the hour might not be noticed: at any rate the fracas would be postponed. Also there would be a good supper awaiting her.... Cold beetroot; perhaps even stewed prunes and custard....

A strange woman came to the door. Catherine did not know her name, but she recognized her as someone who lived "up the road," and who used to push in front of her when she was a little girl at the co-operative stores.

"Is it Cathie?" said the strange woman.

"Yes," replied Catherine.

"Come inside," answered the strange woman, with peculiar solemnity. Then she went on, like the intoning of a chant:

"Your mother is not well ... in fact ... she's had an accident ... in the street ... in fact ... *do* come inside ... in fact...."

In fact, Mrs. Weston was dead.

§ 7

Mrs. Weston had been out shopping during the evening. In the crowded part of the High Street she had been knocked down by a bicycle. She had fallen upon her face, but had not apparently received much hurt, for after having a cut attended to at the chemist's, she went home unattended. But at the very door of her house in Kitchener Road, something went "snap" inside her head; she collapsed and fell all in a heap on the doorstep. She was putting the key in the lock when this happened, and the key was found in the lock when neighbours came to her assistance. They carried her in the front room (where the Collard and Collard piano was) and laid her down on the sofa. She uttered vague scraps of conversation for some moments: then she died....

When Catherine went in to look at her she could not help thinking how death had made her look ridiculous. She was lying under the window, and the lamp in the middle of the ceiling threw her features into heavy shadow. There was a piece of sticking-plaster over the cut on her forehead, and her chin was bruised as well. The most prominent of her front teeth had broken off half-way, and as, seemingly, she had died gasping for breath, her mouth was wide open. The massive, almost masculine jaws hung unsymmetrically: there was no beauty or calm in her last attitude. She looked as if she had died fighting. An aperture in the drawn Venetian blinds allowed a slit of pale light from the street lamp outside to cross her face diagonally, making it appear more grotesque than ever. Catherine could scarcely believe it was her mother. She had the old workaday blouse on, because she had gone out shopping in a mackintosh and had thought it would not show underneath. Catherine could not help thinking how ashamed her mother would have been at the thought of being seen in this blouse by all the neighbours, and especially to have had the neighbours crowding in her own drawing-room with all the cheap bamboo furniture and the faded carpet, and the "Present from Margate" on the mantel-piece, and the certificate on the wall certifying that John Weston, aged twelve, had achieved merit in writing an essay on "Alcohol and its Effects on the Human Body." (This latter would have been removed long since, had it not successfully covered up a hole in the wallpaper.) ... Catherine felt sure that if her mother had known she was going to die, she would have dressed up for the occasion. But it had come upon her unexpectedly. There she was, with her shabby blouse and her ghastly face, and her mackintosh and string-bag on the chair beside her. There was some tea in the bag, and

her fall had burst the paper wrapper, for the latter was half-full, and there were tea grains about the floor....

Mr. Weston had been sent for. He came in tired after a tiresome day, plus the usual Monday feeling of discontent. He was in a bad temper.

"Hell!" he muttered, as he bashed his shins against the piano in the gloom. "These blinds ..." he began, and checked himself.

He seemed annoyed that she had done such a dramatic, unexpected thing. He was annoyed that there was no supper ready for him. "You might have got me a cup of tea ready," he said to Catherine. Then he tried to be conventional. "She was a good woman," he said, as if it had just occurred to him.

When the strange woman had departed, and Catherine and he were sitting down in the kitchen to a frugal supper, he began the conversation again.

"By the way," he said, "apparently you didn't go to school to-day. Mrs. Jopson thought you'd be staying to the evening-class, and sent a message to the school to fetch you. Miss Forsdyke said you hadn't been present at all to-day.... Is that so?"

"I didn't go to-day," admitted Catherine.

"Where did you go?"

"We ... took a day off ... picnicking in the Forest ... it seemed such a fine day...."

"Who's we?"

"Helen and ... and ... me."

"Are you in the habit of taking days off like that?"

"Oh no.... It's the first time we've ever done it."

There was a pause.

"You know," he went on protestingly, "this sort of thing's not good enough, Catherine.... You ought to see that this sort of thing can't go on ... it's too bad of you ... running off to play truant ... and on the very day that ... that your mother ..."

"How on earth could I — —" she began hastily, and then stopped, for she saw that big tears were rolling down both his cheeks.

"Not good enough," he kept muttering, vaguely reproachful.

Then later on he reopened the question.

"I suppose — er — you and Helen were the only people at the picnic?"

"No — there were two others."

"Girls, I suppose?"

"No."

"Not young men, I hope?"

"Yes, one of them was Helen's brother. The other was a friend of his...."

For a few moments he was very thoughtful. Then he continued:

"I don't think you ought to have gone with them, Catherine ... at your age, you know.... Besides, you've plenty of girl friends — I can't think what you want with young men and boys.... Girls should stick to girls...."

"But surely, Father — —"

"If you want friends, let them be girl friends ... surely you can find plenty of your own sex without — —"

Catherine could think of no adequate answer to this argument, so she bade him good-night and went upstairs to bed....

§ 8

In the little back bedroom she sat down on the bed and tried to gather her wits. She was overwhelmed by a feeling of physical weariness: that was not surprising, for she

had walked perhaps fifteen miles that day. In the candle-light she saw her face in the mirror: she was surprised to find herself almost ashen pale. Her red hair floated cloud-like around her head: in the little hand-mirror there was not room to see all of it at once. But it was still flying as if in the wind, and it was gorgeously wild and untamed....

"My God," George Trant had said, "your hair!" ...

... Catherine was surprised, almost shocked that she had as yet shed no tears for her mother. It seemed such a brutally callous piece of negligence, and Catherine was sure she was neither brutal nor callous.... Yet tears would not come.

She undressed and got into bed....

The pumping-engine at the water-works went on at its patient chug-chugging, and forthwith a myriad memories of childhood came back to her.... She could feel the tears welling up into her eyes, and then she realized that it was sentiment and not grief that was affecting her. She would not weep for sentiment, like the heroines in the six-penny novels that Madge Saunders read.

Ever and anon the whisper came echoing through her mind: "My God ... your hair!" ...

From the very insistence of her thoughts she could not fall asleep until morning was well advanced, but when she did, her sleep was calm and dreamless....

§ 9

Of course there was a splendid funeral. It was infinitely more gorgeous than anything that had taken place in Mrs. Weston's lifetime. Relatives were summoned to attend the obsequies, relatives that Catherine had never seen and had not known existed, relatives with black ties and rubicund faces and Cockney accents, and that deplorable foreign flavour that comes of dwelling in another London suburb. They all gathered together in the drab little front room amongst the bamboo furniture, and gazed curiously at Catherine. Evidently she did not quite realize their ideal of a bereaved daughter. They were all a trifle nervous of the undertaker. Finally, they were all squashed into four black coaches and driven slowly to the cemetery behind a glass hearse. In front of the horses walked two men, each bearing what appeared to be a mace.

The day was chilly and sprinkled with April showers; the mourners in the first coach (in which was Catherine) insisted on having all the windows closed, until the rain-washed panes were dim with the reek of their breaths. They carried their pocket-handkerchiefs in their hands, and spoke in tremulous murmurs.... The cavalcade swept on, through the dreariest and frowsiest streets in all Bockley, out on to the murky highways where the mud splashes from passing motor-buses reached the tops of the window-panes. Then past the Town Hall, magnificently impeding traffic as they crossed the tram-lines at the Ridgeway corner, on to the outer fringes of the town, where public-houses and tin-missions indulged in melancholy stares at one another across cat-haunted waste land. A slow progress past an avenue of cars at the tram terminus, and at last to the gates of a pretentious but infinitely dismal burial-ground. The latter was owned and run on business lines by a limited liability company, and for many years it had paid twelve per cent, on its ordinary shares. That dying was a profitable industry could be seen from the great gates, opening far back from the road, with their ornate metal-work representing winged angels.

As they left the coaches a shower began. They walked about a quarter of a mile amongst a welter of acrobatic angels, broken columns and miscellaneous statuary;

then they reached the grave. The rain plashed dismally on the pile of brown earth by the side, and everybody stood on the brink with a precarious footing on the sodden soil. There was a diminutive Methodist parson with a bad cold, who coughed at every comma in the burial-service and sneezed into the grave at the end of each verse. All around them was the litter of gravediggers' tools, faded flowers and wreath-skeletons. Catherine thought it by far the most depressing business she had ever come across. Her father scattered a handful of cold, clammy mud on top of the coffin, and everybody (especially the bald-headed men with their hats off) seemed eager to get back to the fetid warmth of the coaches.... So back went the procession, down the long cemetery avenue, with nothing in sight save untidy vistas of unsymmetrical gravestones, back into the steaming coaches, home again through the mud and rain to Kitchener Road. The carriages reeked with the smell of wet kid gloves and damp mackintoshes. In the Bockley High Street they passed a crowd round a street accident. A motor-bus had skidded into a tram-way standard, and there were mud-splashed, white-painted ambulances in attendance. Mr. Weston rubbed the vapour off the window with his hand. "Some poor devil," he muttered, and there was a whole world of humanity in his voice. And Catherine felt that nothing in death itself was half so terrible as the dismal fuss that people make over it.

When the carriages arrived back at No. 24, Kitchener Road, and everybody went into the house, they found that the fire in the front room had gone out. Half an hour was spent in trying to relight it with damp coal and damp firewood and damp newspaper. Mr. Weston held up the *Bockley and District Advertiser* to make a draught. The newspaper caught alight and fell back on to the carpet, whereupon Mr. Weston danced a sort of dervish cake-walk to stamp it out. This acrobatic performance exercised a stimulating effect upon the visitors, who became conversational. In a moment of riotous abandon Mr. Weston directed Catherine to run over to the co-operative stores and purchase two small tins of lobster and one large tin of pineapple chunks....

About ten minutes to midnight, when all the mourners had departed, and Catherine was pulling down the blinds in the back bedroom, her father came up and sat down on the end of the bed Unlacing his boots.

"You know, Cathie," he began, nervously, as if there were something he wished to get off his mind, "this business is so ... so ... so sudden.... That's what's the matter with it. It don't give a chap time to gather his wits.... Last week *she* was here. Fussing about and rushing round and seemingly in the best of health. And this week — dead an' buried.... Bit of a shock, isn't it?"

She did not answer. He continued in a spurt:

"You know there's a sort of way in which you miss anybody you've been used to seeing about the place for years an' years. Without any ... er ... what people call love, you know, or anything of that sort.... Well, I miss your mother in that way. Quite apart from any other way, I mean.... If she was here now she'd nag at me for not taking my dirty boots off downstairs. It's funny, but I shall miss all that nagging. I got used to it. I didn't particularly like it, but things'll seem pretty dull for a time without it...."

Pause.

"For twenty years I've chucked my dirty boots under the sofa downstairs, and wouldn't have dreamt of bringing them up here.... And now the first night she's laid to rest I come up here with 'em on without thinkin' about it...."

He kept on making vague remarks.

"Life's passing, Cathie ... one thing an' then another.... Time waits for no man — or woman.... We're like those clocks at the railway stations.... We seem not to be

moving and then we fall forward with a jerk at the end of the minute.... It's easy to notice the jerks ... but time goes steadily on whether we notice it or not...."

Then he changed the subject.

"It's lucky for you it wasn't an ordinary night last Monday, or you'd have got in a fine row, I can tell you. Playing truant and going out with young fellers.... A girl of your age ought not to bother her head with fellers.... I never knew your mother till she was twenty-two.... This sort of free-and-easy-carrying-on won't do, Catherine. For one thing it's not respectable. And for another thing it's not right.... Find some girl friends to go out with, and leave the fellers alone...."

"Fellers," he called them. The word jarred on her.

End of Sample