CHAPTER XIX

SPRING IN BOND STREET

The visit to London was part of an evolution of both body and mind to Rosalie Anstruthers. In one of the wonderful modern hotels a suite of rooms was engaged for them. The luxury which surrounded them was not of the order Rosalie had vaguely connected with hotels. Hotel-keepers had apparently learned many things during the years of her seclusion.

Vanderpoels, at least, could so establish themselves as not to greatly feel the hotel atmosphere. Carefully chosen colours textures, and appointments formed the background of their days, the food they ate was a thing produced by art, the servants who attended them were completely-trained mechanisms. To sit by a window and watch the kaleidoscopic human tide passing by on its way to its pleasure, to reach its work, to spend its money in unending shops, to show itself and its equipage in the park, was a wonderful thing to Lady Anstruthers. It all seemed to be a part of the life and quality of Betty, little Betty, whom she had remembered only as a child, and who had come to her a tall, strong young beauty, who had--it was resplendently clear--never known a fear in her life, and whose mere personality had the effect of making fears seem unreal.

She was taken out in a luxurious little brougham to shops whose varied allurements were placed eagerly at her disposal. Respectful persons,

obedient to her most faintly-expressed desire, displayed garments as wonderful as those the New York trunks had revealed. She was besought to consider the fitness of articles whose exquisiteness she was almost afraid to look at. Her thin little body was wonderfully fitted, managed, encouraged to make the most of its long-ignored outlines.

"Her ladyship's slenderness is a great advantage," said the wisely inciting ones. "There is no such advantage as delicacy of line."

Summing up the character of their customer with the saleswoman's eye, they realised the discretion of turning to Miss Vanderpoel for encouragement, though she was the younger of the two, and bore no title. They were aware of the existence of persons of rank who were not lavish patrons, but the name of Vanderpoel held most promising suggestions. To an English shopkeeper the American has, of late years, represented the spender--the type which, whatsoever its rank and resources, has, mysteriously, always money to hand over counters in exchange for things it chances to desire to possess. Each year surges across the Atlantic a horde of these fortunate persons, who, to the sober, commercial British mind, appear to be free to devote their existences to travel and expenditure. This contingent appears shopping in the various shopping thoroughfares; it buys clothes, jewels, miscellaneous attractive things, making its purchases of articles useful or decorative with a freedom from anxiety in its enjoyment which does not mark the mood of the ordinary shopper. In the everyday purchaser one is accustomed to take for granted, as a factor in his expenditure, a certain deliberation and

uncertainty; to the travelling American in Europe, shopping appears to be part of the holiday which is being made the most of. Surely, all the neat, smart young persons who buy frocks and blouses, hats and coats, hosiery and chains, cannot be the possessors of large incomes; there must be, even in America, a middle class of middle-class resources, yet these young persons, male and female, and most frequently unaccompanied by older persons--seeing what they want, greet it with expressions of pleasure, waste no time in appropriating and paying for it, and go away as in relief and triumph--not as in that sober joy which is clouded by afterthought. The sales people are sometimes even vaguely cheered by their gay lack of any doubt as to the wisdom of their getting what they admire, and rejoicing in it. If America always buys in this holiday mood, it must be an enviable thing to be a shopkeeper in their New York or Boston or San Francisco. Who would not make a fortune among them? They want what they want, and not something which seems to them less desirable, but they open their purses and--frequently with some amused uncertainty as to the differences between sovereigns and half-sovereigns, florins and half-crowns--they pay their bills with something almost like glee. They are remarkably prompt about bills--which is an excellent thing, as they are nearly always just going somewhere else, to France or Germany or Italy or Scotland or Siberia. Those of us who are shopkeepers, or their salesmen, do not dream that some of them have incomes no larger than our own, that they work for their livings, that they are teachers journalists, small writers or illustrators of papers or magazines that they are unimportant soldiers of fortune, but, with their queer American insistence on exploration, and the ignoring of limitations, they have,

somehow, managed to make this exultant dash for a few daring weeks or months of freedom and new experience. If we knew this, we should regard them from our conservative standpoint of provident decorum as improvident lunatics, being ourselves unable to calculate with their odd courage and their cheerful belief in themselves. What we do know is that they spend, and we are far from disdaining their patronage, though most of them have an odd little familiarity of address and are not stamped with that distinction which causes us to realise the enormous difference between the patron and the tradesman, and makes us feel the worm we remotely like to feel ourselves, though we would not for worlds acknowledge the fact. Mentally, and in our speech, both among our equals and our superiors, we condescend to and patronise them a little, though that, of course, is the fine old insular attitude it would be un-British to discourage. But, if we are not in the least definite concerning the position and resources of these spenders as a mass, we are quite sure of a select number. There is mention of them in the newspapers, of the town houses, the castles, moors, and salmon fishings they rent, of their yachts, their presentations actually at our own courts, of their presence at great balls, at Ascot and Goodwood, at the opera on gala nights. One staggers sometimes before the public summing-up of the amount of their fortunes. These people who have neither blood nor rank, these men who labour in their business offices, are richer than our great dukes, at the realising of whose wealth and possessions we have at times almost turned pale.

"Them!" chaffed a costermonger over his barrow. "Blimme, if some o' them

blokes won't buy Buckin'am Pallis an' the 'ole R'yal Fambly some mornin' when they're out shoppin'."

The subservient attendants in more than one fashionable shop Betty and her sister visit, know that Miss Vanderpoel is of the circle, though her father has not as yet bought or hired any great estate, and his daughter has not been seen in London.

"Its queer we've never heard of her being presented," one shopgirl says to another. "Just you look at her."

She evidently knows what her ladyship ought to buy--what can be trusted not to overpower her faded fragility. The saleswomen, even if they had not been devoured by alert curiosity, could not have avoided seeing that her ladyship did not seem to know what should be bought, and that Miss Vanderpoel did, though she did not direct her sister's selection, but merely seemed to suggest with delicate restraint. Her taste was wonderfully perceptive. The things bought were exquisite, but a little colourless woman could wear them all with advantage to her restrictions of type.

As the brougham drove down Bond Street, Betty called Lady Anstruthers' attention to more than one passer-by.

"Look, Rosy," she said. "There is Mrs. Treat Hilyar in the second carriage to the right. You remember Josie Treat Hilyar married Lord

Varick's son."

In the landau designated an elderly woman with wonderfully-dressed white hair sat smiling and bowing to friends who were walking. Lady Anstruthers, despite her eagerness, shrank back a little, hoping to escape being seen.

"Oh, it is the Lows she is speaking to--Tom and Alice--I did not know they had sailed yet."

The tall, well-groomed young man, with the nice, ugly face, was showing white teeth in a gay smile of recognition, and his pretty wife was lightly waving a slim hand in a grey suede glove.

"How cheerful and nice-tempered they look," said Rosy. "Tom was only twenty when I saw him last. Whom did he marry?"

"An English girl. Such a love. A Devonshire gentleman's daughter. In New York his friends called her Devonshire Cream and Roses. She is one of the pretty, flushy, pink ones."

"How nice Bond Street is on a spring morning like this," said Lady Anstruthers. "You may laugh at me for saying it, Betty, but somehow it seems to me more spring-like than the country."

"How clever of you!" laughed Betty. "There is so much truth in it."

The people walking in the sunshine were all full of spring thoughts and plans. The colours they wore, the flowers in the women's hats and the men's buttonholes belonged to the season. The cheerful crowds of people and carriages had a sort of rushing stir of movement which suggested freshness. Later in the year everything looks more tired. Now things were beginning and everyone was rather inclined to believe that this year would be better than last. "Look at the shop windows," said Betty, "full of whites and pinks and yellows and blues--the colours of hyacinth and daffodil beds. It seems as if they insist that there never has been a winter and never will be one. They insist that there never was and never will be anything but spring."

"It's in the air." Lady Anstruthers' sigh was actually a happy one. "It is just what I used to feel in April when we drove down Fifth Avenue."

Among the crowds of freshly-dressed passers-by, women with flowery hats and light frocks and parasols, men with touches of flower-colour on the lapels of their coats, and the holiday look in their faces, she noted so many of a familiar type that she began to look for and try to pick them out with quite excited interest.

"I believe that woman is an American," she would say. "That girl looks as if she were a New Yorker," again. "That man's face looks as if it belonged to Broadway. Oh, Betty! do you think I am right? I should say those girls getting out of the hansom to go into Burnham & Staples' came from out West and are going to buy thousands of things. Don't they look

like it?"

She began to lean forward and look on at things with an interest so unlike her Stornham listlessness that Betty's heart was moved.

Her face looked alive, and little waves of colour rose under her skin. Several times she laughed the natural little laugh of her girlhood which it had seemed almost too much to expect to hear again. The first of these laughs came when she counted her tenth American, a tall Westerner of the cartoon type, sauntering along with an expression of speculative enjoyment on his odd face, and evidently, though furtively, chewing tobacco.

"I absolutely love him, Betty," she cried. "You couldn't mistake him for anything else."

"No," answered Betty, feeling that she loved him herself, "not if you found him embalmed in the Pyramids."

They pleased themselves immensely, trying to guess what he would buy and take home to his wife and girls in his Western town--though Western towns were very grand and amazing in these days, Betty explained, and knew they could give points to New York. He would not buy the things he would have bought fifteen years ago. Perhaps, in fact, his wife and daughters had come with him to London and stayed at the Metropole or the Savoy, and were at this moment being fitted by tailors and modistes

patronised by Royalty.

"Rosy, look! Do you see who that is? Do you recognise her? It is Mrs. Bellingham. She was little Mina Thalberg. She married Captain Bellingham. He was quite poor, but very well born--a nephew of Lord Dunholm's. He could not have married a poor girl--but they have been so happy together that Mina is growing fat, and spends her days in taking reducing treatments. She says she wouldn't care in the least, but Dicky fell in love with her waist and shoulder line."

The plump, pretty young woman getting out of her victoria before a fashionable hairdresser's looked radiant enough. She had not yet lost the waist and shoulder line, though her pink frock fitted her with discreet tightness. She paused a moment to pat and fuss prettily over the two blooming, curly children who were to remain under the care of the nurse, who sat on the back seat, holding the baby on her lap.

"I should not have known her," said Rosy. "She has grown pretty. She wasn't a pretty child."

"It's happiness--and the English climate--and Captain Dicky. They adore each other, and laugh at everything like a pair of children. They were immensely popular in New York last winter, when they visited Mina's people."

The effect of the morning upon Lady Anstruthers was what Betty had hoped

it might be. The curious drawing near of the two nations began to dawn upon her as a truth. Immured in the country, not sufficiently interested in life to read newspapers, she had heard rumours of some of the more important marriages, but had known nothing of the thousand small details which made for the weaving of the web. Mrs. Treat Hilyar driving in a leisurely, accustomed fashion down Bond Street, and smiling casually at her compatriots, whose "sailing" was as much part of the natural order of their luxurious lives as their carriages, gave a definiteness to the situation. Mina Thalberg, pulling down the embroidered frocks over the round legs of her English-looking children, seemed to narrow the width of the Atlantic Ocean between Liverpool and the docks on the Hudson River.

She returned to the hotel with an appetite for lunch and a new expression in her eyes which made Ughtred stare at her.

"Mother," he said, "you look different. You look well. It isn't only your new dress and your hair."

The new style of her attire had certainly done much, and the maid who had been engaged to attend her was a woman who knew her duties. She had been called upon in her time to make the most of hair offering much less assistance to her skill than was supplied by the fine, fair colourlessness she had found dragged back from her new mistress's forehead. It was not dragged back now, but had really been done wonders with. Rosalie had smiled a little when she had looked at herself in the

glass after the first time it was so dressed.

"You are trying to make me look as I did when mother saw me last, Betty," she said. "I wonder if you possibly could."

"Let us believe we can," laughed Betty. "And wait and see."

It seemed wise neither to make nor receive visits. The time for such things had evidently not yet come. Even the mention of the Worthingtons led to the revelation that Rosalie shrank from immediate contact with people. When she felt stronger, when she became more accustomed to the thought, she might feel differently, but just now, to be luxuriously one with the enviable part of London, to look on, to drink in, to drive here and there, doing the things she liked to do, ordering what was required at Stornham, was like the creating for her of a new heaven and a new earth.

When, one night, Betty took her with Ughtred to the theatre, it was to see a play written by an American, played by American actors, produced by an American manager. They had even engaged in theatrical enterprise, it seemed, their actors played before London audiences, London actors played in American theatres, vibrating almost yearly between the two continents and reaping rich harvests. Hearing rumours of this in the past, Lady Anstruthers had scarcely believed it entirely true. Now the practical reality was brought before her. The French, who were only separated from the English metropolis by a mere few miles of Channel,

did not exchange their actors year after year in increasing numbers, making a mere friendly barter of each other's territory, as though each land was common ground and not divided by leagues of ocean travel.

"It seems so wonderful," Lady Anstruthers argued. "I have always felt as if they hated each other."

"They did once--but how could it last between those of the same blood--of the same tongue? If we were really aliens we might be a menace. But we are of their own." Betty leaned forward on the edge of the box, looking out over the crowded house, filled with almost as many Americans as English faces. She smiled, reflecting. "We were children put out to nurse and breathe new air in the country, and now we are coming home, vigorous, and full-grown."

She studied the audience for some minutes, and, as her glance wandered over the stalls, it took in more than one marked variety of type. Suddenly it fell on a face she delightedly recognised. It was that of the nice, speculative-eyed Westerner they had seen enjoying himself in Bond Street.

"Rosy," she said, "there is the Western man we love. Near the end of the fourth row."

Lady Anstruthers looked for him with eagerness.

"Oh, I see him! Next to the big one with the reddish hair."

Betty turned her attention to the man in question, whom she had not chanced to notice. She uttered an exclamation of surprise and interest.

"The big man with the red hair. How lovely that they should chance to sit side by side--the big one is Lord Mount Dunstan!"

The necessity of seeing his solicitors, who happened to be Messrs. Townlinson & Sheppard, had brought Lord Mount Dunstan to town. After a day devoted to business affairs, he had been attracted by the idea of going to the theatre to see again a play he had already seen in New York. It would interest him to observe its exact effect upon a London audience. While he had been in New York, he had gone with something of the same feeling to see a great English actor play to a crowded house. The great actor had been one who had returned to the country for a third or fourth time, and, in the enthusiasm he had felt in the atmosphere about him, Mount Dunstan had seen not only pleasure and appreciation of the man's perfect art, but--at certain tumultuous outbursts--an almost emotional welcome. The Americans, he had said to himself, were creatures of warmer blood than the English. The audience on that occasion had been, in mass, American. The audience he made one of now, was made up of both nationalities, and, in glancing over it, he realised how large was the number of Americans who came yearly to London. As Lady Anstruthers had done, he found himself selecting from the assemblage the types which

were manifestly American, and those obviously English. In the seat next to himself sat a man of a type he felt he had learned by heart in the days of his life as Jem Salter. At a short distance fluttered brilliantly an English professional beauty, with her male and female court about her. In the stage box, made sumptuous with flowers, was a royal party.

As this party had entered, "God save the Queen" had been played, and, in rising with the audience during the entry, he had recalled that the tune was identical with that of an American national air. How unconsciously inseparable--in spite of the lightness with which they regarded the curious tie between them--the two countries were. The people upon the stage were acting as if they knew their public, their bearing suggesting no sense of any barrier beyond the footlights. It was the unconsciousness and lightness of the mutual attitude which had struck him of late. Punch had long jested about "Fair Americans," who, in their first introduction to its pages, used exotic and cryptic language, beginning every sentence either with "I guess," or "Say, Stranger"; its male American had been of the Uncle Sam order and had invariably worn a "goatee." American witticisms had represented the Englishman in plaid trousers, opening his remarks with "Chawley, deah fellah," and unfailingly missing the point of any joke. Each country had cherished its type and good-naturedly derided it. In time this had modified itself and the joke had changed in kind. Many other things had changed, but the lightness of treatment still remained. And yet their blood was mingling itself with that of England's noblest and oldest of name, their wealth

was making solid again towers and halls which had threatened to crumble. Ancient family jewels glittered on slender, young American necks, and above--sometimes somewhat careless--young American brows. And yet, so far, one was casual in one's thought of it all, still. On his own part he was obstinate Briton enough to rebel against and resent it. They were intruders. He resented them as he had resented in his boyhood the historical fact that, after all, an Englishman was a German--a savage who, five hundred years after the birth of Christ, had swooped upon Early Briton from his Engleland and Jutland, and ravaging with fire and sword, had conquered and made the land his possession, ravishing its very name from it and giving it his own. These people did not come with fire and sword, but with cable and telephone, and bribes of gold and fair women, but they were encroaching like the sea, which, in certain parts of the coast, gained a few inches or so each year. He shook his shoulders impatiently, and stiffened, feeling illogically antagonistic towards the good-natured, lantern-jawed man at his side.

The lantern-jawed man looked good-natured because he was smiling, and he was smiling because he saw something which pleased him in one of the boxes.

His expression of unqualified approval naturally directed Mount Dunstan's eye to the point in question, where it remained for some moments. This was because he found it resting upon Miss Vanderpoel, who sat before him in luminous white garments, and with a brilliant spark of ornament in the dense shadow of her hair. His sensation at the

unexpected sight of her would, if it had expressed itself physically, have taken the form of a slight start. The luminous quality did not confine itself to the whiteness of her garments. He was aware of feeling that she looked luminous herself--her eyes, her cheek, the smile she bent upon the little woman who was her companion. She was a beautifully living thing.

Naturally, she was being looked at by others than himself. She was one of those towards whom glasses in a theatre turn themselves inevitably. The sweep and lift of her black hair would have drawn them, even if she had offered no other charm. Yes, he thought, here was another of them. To whom was she bringing her good looks and her millions? There were men enough who needed money, even if they must accept it under less alluring conditions. In the box next to the one occupied by the royal party was a man who was known to be waiting for the advent of some such opportunity. His was a case of dire, if outwardly stately, need. He was young, but a fool, and not noted for personal charms, yet he had, in one sense, great things to offer. There were, of course, many chances that he might offer them to her. If this happened, would she accept them? There was really no objection to him but his dulness, consequently there seemed many chances that she might. There was something akin to the pomp of royalty in the power her father's wealth implied. She could scarcely make an ordinary marriage. It would naturally be a sort of state affair.
There were few men who had enough to offer in exchange for Vanderpoel millions, and of the few none had special attractions. The one in the box next to the royal party was a decent enough fellow. As young

princesses were not infrequently called upon, by the mere exclusion of royal blood, to become united to young or mature princes without charm, so American young persons who were of royal possessions must find themselves limited. If you felt free to pick and choose from among young men in the Guards or young attaches in the Diplomatic Service with twopence a year, you might get beauty or wit or temperament or all three by good luck, but if you were of a royal house of New York or Chicago, you would probably feel you must draw lines and choose only such splendours as accorded with, even while differing from, your own.

Any possible connection of himself with such a case did not present itself to him. If it had done so, he would have counted himself, haughtily, as beyond the pale. It was for other men to do things of the sort; a remote antagonism of his whole being warred against the mere idea. It was bigoted prejudice, perhaps, but it was a strong thing.

A lovely shoulder and a brilliant head set on a long and slender neck have no nationality which can prevent a man's glance turning naturally towards them. His turned again during the last act of the play, and at a moment when he saw something rather like the thing he had seen when the Meridiana moved away from the dock and the exalted Miss Vanderpoel leaning upon the rail had held out her arms towards the child who had brought his toy to her as a farewell offering.

Sitting by her to-night was a boy with a crooked back--Mount Dunstan remembered hearing that the Anstruthers had a deformed son--and she

was leaning towards him, her hand resting on his shoulder, explaining something he had not quite grasped in the action of the play. The absolute adoration in the boy's uplifted eyes was an interesting thing to take in, and the radiant warmth of her bright look was as unconscious of onlookers as it had been when he had seen it yearning towards the child on the wharf. Hers was the temperament which gave--which gave. He found himself restraining a smile because her look brought back to him the actual sound of the New York youngster's voice.

"I wanted to kiss you, Betty, oh, I did so want to kiss you!"

Anstruthers' boy--poor little beggar--looked as if he, too, in the face of actors and audience, and brilliance of light, wanted to kiss her.