

CHAPTER IV

TWO WOMEN DIE

It goes without saying that Alvina Houghton did not make her fortune as a maternity nurse. Being her father's daughter, we might almost expect that she did not make a penny. But she did--just a few pence. She had exactly four cases--and then no more.

The reason is obvious. Who in Woodhouse was going to afford a two-guinea nurse, for a confinement? And who who was going to engage Alvina Houghton, even if they were ready to stretch their purse-strings? After all, they all knew her as Miss Houghton, with a stress on the Miss, and they could not conceive of her as Nurse Houghton. Besides, there seemed something positively indecent in technically engaging one who was so much part of themselves. They all preferred either a simple mid-wife, or a nurse procured out of the unknown by the doctor.

If Alvina wanted to make her fortune--or even her living--she should have gone to a strange town. She was so advised by every one she knew. But she never for one moment reflected on the advice. She had become a maternity nurse in order to practise in Woodhouse, just as James Houghton had purchased his elegancies to sell in Woodhouse. And father and daughter alike calmly expected Woodhouse demand to

rise to their supply. So both alike were defeated in their expectations.

For a little while Alvina flaunted about in her nurse's uniform. Then she left it off. And as she left it off she lost her bounce, her colour, and her flesh. Gradually she shrank back to the old, slim, reticent pallor, with eyes a little too large for her face. And now it seemed her face was a little too long, a little gaunt. And in her civilian clothes she seemed a little dowdy, shabby. And altogether, she looked older: she looked more than her age, which was only twenty-four years. Here was the old Alvina come back, rather battered and deteriorated, apparently. There was even a tiny touch of the trollops in her dowdiness--so the shrewd-eyed collier-wives decided. But she was a lady still, and unbeaten. Undeniably she was a lady. And that was rather irritating to the well-to-do and florid daughter of W.H. Johnson, next door but one. Undeniably a lady, and undeniably unmastered. This last was irritating to the good-natured but easy-coming young men in the Chapel Choir, where she resumed her seat. These young men had the good nature of dogs that wag their tails and expect to be patted. And Alvina did not pat them. To be sure, a pat from such a shabbily-black-kid-gloved hand would not have been so flattering--she need not imagine it! The way she hung back and looked at them, the young men, as knowing as if she were a prostitute, and yet with the well-bred indifference of a lady--well, it was almost offensive.

As a matter of fact, Alvina was detached for the time being from her interest in young men. Manchester House had settled down on her like a doom. There was the quartered shop, through which one had to worm one's encumbered way in the gloom--unless one liked to go miles round a back street, to the yard entry. There was James Houghton, faintly powdered with coal-dust, flitting back and forth in a fever of nervous frenzy, to Throttle-Ha'penny--so carried away that he never saw his daughter at all the first time he came in, after her return. And when she reminded him of her presence, with her--"Hello, father!"--he merely glanced hurriedly at her, as if vexed with her interruption, and said:

"Well, Alvina, you're back. You're back to find us busy." And he went off into his ecstasy again.

Mrs. Houghton was now very weak, and so nervous in her weakness that she could not bear the slightest sound. Her greatest horror was lest her husband should come into the room. On his entry she became blue at the lips immediately, so he had to hurry out again. At last he stayed away, only hurriedly asking, each time he came into the house, "How is Mrs. Houghton? Ha!" Then off into uninterrupted Throttle-Ha'penny ecstasy once more.

When Alvina went up to her mother's room, on her return, all the poor invalid could do was to tremble into tears, and cry faintly:

"Child, you look dreadful. It isn't you."

This from the pathetic little figure in the bed had struck Alvina like a blow.

"Why not, mother?" she asked.

But for her mother she had to remove her nurse's uniform. And at the same time, she had to constitute herself nurse. Miss Frost, and a woman who came in, and the servant had been nursing the invalid between them. Miss Frost was worn and rather heavy: her old buoyancy and brightness was gone. She had become irritable also. She was very glad that Alvina had returned to take this responsibility of nursing off her shoulders. For her wonderful energy had ebbed and oozed away.

Alvina said nothing, but settled down to her task. She was quiet and technical with her mother. The two loved one another, with a curious impersonal love which had not a single word to exchange: an almost after-death love. In these days Mrs. Houghton never talked--unless to fret a little. So Alvina sat for many hours in the lofty, sombre bedroom, looking out silently on the street, or hurriedly rising to attend the sick woman. For continually came the fretful murmur:

"Vina!"

To sit still--who knows the long discipline of it, nowadays, as our mothers and grandmothers knew. To sit still, for days, months, and years--perforce to sit still, with some dignity of tranquil bearing. Alvina was old-fashioned. She had the old, womanly faculty for sitting quiet and collected--not indeed for a life-time, but for long spells together. And so it was during these months nursing her mother. She attended constantly on the invalid: she did a good deal of work about the house: she took her walks and occupied her place in the choir on Sunday mornings. And yet, from August to January, she seemed to be seated in her chair in the bedroom, sometimes reading, but mostly quite still, her hands quietly in her lap, her mind subdued by musing. She did not even think, not even remember. Even such activity would have made her presence too disturbing in the room. She sat quite still, with all her activities in abeyance--except that strange will-to-passivity which was by no means a relaxation, but a severe, deep, soul-discipline.

For the moment there was a sense of prosperity--or probable prosperity, in the house. And there was an abundance of Throttle-Ha'penny coal. It was dirty ashy stuff. The lower bars of the grate were constantly blanketed in with white powdery ash, which it was fatal to try to poke away. For if you poked and poked, you raised white cumulus clouds of ash, and you were left at last with a few darkening and sulphurous embers. But even so, by continuous application, you could keep the room moderately warm, without feeling you were consuming the house's meat and drink in the grate.

Which was one blessing.

The days, the months darkened past, and Alvina returned to her old thinness and pallor. Her fore-arms were thin, they rested very still in her lap, there was a ladylike stillness about them as she took her walk, in her lingering, yet watchful fashion. She saw everything. Yet she passed without attracting any attention.

Early in the year her mother died. Her father came and wept self-conscious tears, Miss Frost cried a little, painfully. And Alvina cried also: she did not quite know why or wherefore. Her poor mother! Alvina had the old-fashioned wisdom to let be, and not to think. After all, it was not for her to reconstruct her parents' lives. She came after them. Her day was not their day, their life was not hers. Returning up-channel to re-discover their course was quite another matter from flowing down-stream into the unknown, as they had done thirty years before. This supercilious and impertinent exploration of the generation gone by, by the present generation, is nothing to our credit. As a matter of fact, no generation repeats the mistakes of the generation ahead, any more than any river repeats its course. So the young need not be so proud of their superiority over the old. The young generation glibly makes its own mistakes: and how detestable these new mistakes are, why, only the future will be able to tell us. But be sure they are quite as detestable, quite as full of lies and hypocrisy, as any of the mistakes of our parents. There is no such thing as absolute

wisdom.

Wisdom has reference only to the past. The future remains for ever an infinite field for mistakes. You can't know beforehand.

So Alvina refrained from pondering on her mother's life and fate. Whatever the fate of the mother, the fate of the daughter will be otherwise. That is organically inevitable. The business of the daughter is with her own fate, not with her mother's.

Miss Frost however meditated bitterly on the fate of the poor dead woman. Bitterly she brooded on the lot of woman. Here was Clariss Houghton, married, and a mother--and dead. What a life! Who was responsible? James Houghton. What ought James Houghton to have done differently? Everything. In short, he should have been somebody else, and not himself. Which is the *reductio ad absurdum* of idealism. The universe should be something else, and not what it is: so the nonsense of idealistic conclusion. The cat should not catch the mouse, the mouse should not nibble holes in the table-cloth, and so on and so on, in the House that Jack Built.

But Miss Frost sat by the dead in grief and despair. This was the end of another woman's life: such an end! Poor Clariss: guilty James.

Yet why? Why was James more guilty than Clariss? Is the only aim and

end of a man's life, to make some woman, or parcel of women, happy? Why? Why should anybody expect to be made happy, and develop heart-disease if she isn't? Surely Clariss' heart-disease was a more emphatic sign of obstinate self-importance than ever James' shop-windows were. She expected to be made happy. Every woman in Europe and America expects it. On her own head then if she is made unhappy: for her expectation is arrogant and impertinent. The be-all and end-all of life doesn't lie in feminine happiness--or in any happiness. Happiness is a sort of soap-tablet--he won't be happy till he gets it, and when he's got it, the precious baby, it'll cost him his eyes and his stomach. Could anything be more puerile than a mankind howling because it isn't happy: like a baby in the bath!

Poor Clariss, however, was dead--and if she had developed heart-disease because she wasn't happy, well, she had died of her own heart-disease, poor thing. Wherein lies every moral that mankind can wish to draw.

Miss Frost wept in anguish, and saw nothing but another woman betrayed to sorrow and a slow death. Sorrow and a slow death, because a man had married her. Miss Frost wept also for herself, for her own sorrow and slow death. Sorrow and slow death, because a man had not married her. Wretched man, what is he to do with these exigent and never-to-be-satisfied women? Our mothers pined because our fathers drank and were rakes. Our wives pine because we are virtuous but inadequate. Who is this sphinx, this woman? Where is

the Oedipus that will solve her riddle of happiness, and then strangle her?--only to marry his own mother!

In the months that followed her mother's death, Alvina went on the same, in abeyance. She took over the housekeeping, and received one or two overflow pupils from Miss Frost, young girls to whom she gave lessons in the dark drawing-room of Manchester House. She was busy--chiefly with housekeeping. There seemed a great deal to put in order after her mother's death.

She sorted all her mother's clothes--expensive, old-fashioned clothes, hardly worn. What was to be done with them? She gave them away, without consulting anybody. She kept a few private things, she inherited a few pieces of jewellery. Remarkable how little trace her mother left--hardly a trace.

She decided to move into the big, monumental bedroom in front of the house. She liked space, she liked the windows. She was strictly mistress, too. So she took her place. Her mother's little sitting-room was cold and disused.

Then Alvina went through all the linen. There was still abundance, and it was all sound. James had had such large ideas of setting up house, in the beginning. And now he begrudged the household expenses, begrudged the very soap and candles, and even would have liked to introduce margarine instead of butter. This last

degradation the women refused. But James was above food.

The old Alvina seemed completely herself again. She was quiet, dutiful, affectionate. She appealed in her old, childish way to Miss Frost, and Miss Frost called her "Dear!" with all the old protective gentleness. But there was a difference. Underneath her appearance of appeal, Alvina was almost coldly independent. She did what she thought she would. The old manner of intimacy persisted between her and her darling. And perhaps neither of them knew that the intimacy itself had gone. But it had. There was no spontaneous interchange between them. It was a kind of deadlock. Each knew the great love she felt for the other. But now it was a love static, inoperative. The warm flow did not run any more. Yet each would have died for the other, would have done anything to spare the other hurt.

Miss Frost was becoming tired, dragged looking. She would sink into a chair as if she wished never to rise again--never to make the effort. And Alvina quickly would attend on her, bring her tea and take away her music, try to make everything smooth. And continually the young woman exhorted the elder to work less, to give up her pupils. But Miss Frost answered quickly, nervously:

"When I don't work I shan't live."

"But why--?" came the long query from Alvina. And in her expostulation there was a touch of mockery for such a creed.

Miss Frost did not answer. Her face took on a greyish tinge.

In these days Alvina struck up an odd friendship with Miss Pinnegar, after so many years of opposition. She felt herself more in sympathy with Miss Pinnegar--it was so easy to get on with her, she left so much unsaid. What was left unsaid mattered more to Alvina now than anything that was expressed. She began to hate outspokenness and direct speaking-forth of the whole mind. It nauseated her. She wanted tacit admission of difference, not open, wholehearted communication. And Miss Pinnegar made this admission all along. She never made you feel for an instant that she was one with you. She was never even near. She kept quietly on her own ground, and left you on yours. And across the space came her quiet commonplaces--but fraught with space.

With Miss Frost all was openness, explicit and downright. Not that Miss Frost trespassed. She was far more well-bred than Miss Pinnegar. But her very breeding had that Protestant, northern quality which assumes that we have all the same high standards, really, and all the same divine nature, intrinsically. It is a fine assumption. But willy-nilly, it sickened Alvina at this time.

She preferred Miss Pinnegar, and admired Miss Pinnegar's humble wisdom with a new admiration. The two were talking of Dr. Headley, who, they read in the newspaper, had disgraced himself finally.

"I suppose," said Miss Pinnegar, "it takes his sort to make all sorts."

Such bits of homely wisdom were like relief from cramp and pain, to Alvina. "It takes his sort to make all sorts." It took her sort too. And it took her father's sort--as well as her mother's and Miss Frost's. It took every sort to make all sorts. Why have standards and a regulation pattern? Why have a human criterion? There's the point! Why, in the name of all the free heavens, have human criteria? Why? Simply for bullying and narrowness.

Alvina felt at her ease with Miss Pinnegar. The two women talked away to one another, in their quiet moments: and slipped apart like conspirators when Miss Frost came in: as if there was something to be ashamed of. If there was, heaven knows what it might have been, for their talk was ordinary enough. But Alvina liked to be with Miss Pinnegar in the kitchen. Miss Pinnegar wasn't competent and masterful like Miss Frost: she was ordinary and uninspired, with quiet, unobserved movements. But she was deep, and there was some secret satisfaction in her very quality of secrecy.

So the days and weeks and months slipped by, and Alvina was hidden like a mole in the dark chambers of Manchester House, busy with cooking and cleaning and arranging, getting the house in her own order, and attending to her pupils. She took her walk in the

afternoon. Once and only once she went to Throttle-Ha'penny, and, seized with sudden curiosity, insisted on being wound down in the iron bucket to the little workings underneath. Everything was quite tidy in the short gang-ways down below, timbered and in sound order. The miners were competent enough. But water dripped dismally in places, and there was a stale feeling in the air.

Her father accompanied her, pointed her to the seam of yellow-flecked coal, the shale and the bind, the direction of the trend. He had already an airy-fairy kind of knowledge of the whole affair, and seemed like some not quite trustworthy conjuror who had conjured it all up by sleight of hand. In the background the miners stood grey and ghostly, in the candle-light, and seemed to listen sardonically. One of them, facile in his subordinate way as James in his authoritative, kept chiming in:

"Ay, that's the road it goes, Miss Huffen--yis, yo'll see th' roof theer bellies down a bit--s' loose. No, you dunna get th' puddin' stones i' this pit--s' not deep enough. Eh, they come down on you plumb, as if th' roof had laid its egg on you. Ay, it runs a bit thin down here--six inches. You see th' bed's soft, it's a sort o' clay-bind, it's not clunch such as you get deeper. Oh, it's easy workin'--you don't have to knock your guts out. There's no need for shots, Miss Huffen--we bring it down--you see here--" And he stooped, pointing to a shallow, shelving excavation which he was making under the coal. The working was low, you must stoop all the

time. The roof and the timbered sides of the way seemed to press on you. It was as if she were in her tomb for ever, like the dead and everlasting Egyptians. She was frightened, but fascinated. The collier kept on talking to her, stretching his bare, grey-black hairy arm across her vision, and pointing with his knotted hand. The thick-wicked tallow candles guttered and smelled. There was a thickness in the air, a sense of dark, fluid presence in the thick atmosphere, the dark, fluid, viscous voice of the collier making a broad-vowelled, clapping sound in her ear. He seemed to linger near her as if he knew--as if he knew--what? Something for ever unknowable and inadmissible, something that belonged purely to the underground: to the slaves who work underground: knowledge humiliated, subjected, but ponderous and inevitable. And still his voice went on clapping in her ear, and still his presence edged near her, and seemed to impinge on her--a smallish, semi-grotesque, grey-obscure figure with a naked brandished forearm: not human: a creature of the subterranean world, melted out like a bat, fluid. She felt herself melting out also, to become a mere vocal ghost, a presence in the thick atmosphere. Her lungs felt thick and slow, her mind dissolved, she felt she could cling like a bat in the long swoon of the crannied, underworld darkness. Cling like a bat and sway for ever swooning in the draughts of the darkness--

When she was up on the earth again she blinked and peered at the world in amazement. What a pretty, luminous place it was, carved in substantial luminosity. What a strange and lovely place, bubbling

iridescent-golden on the surface of the underworld. Iridescent golden--could anything be more fascinating! Like lovely glancing surface on fluid pitch. But a velvet surface. A velvet surface of golden light, velvet-pile of gold and pale luminosity, and strange beautiful elevations of houses and trees, and depressions of fields and roads, all golden and floating like atmospheric majolica. Never had the common ugliness of Woodhouse seemed so entrancing. She thought she had never seen such beauty--a lovely luminous majolica, living and palpitating, the glossy, svelte world-surface, the exquisite face of all the darkness. It was like a vision. Perhaps gnomes and subterranean workers, enslaved in the era of light, see with such eyes. Perhaps that is why they are absolutely blind to conventional ugliness. For truly nothing could be more hideous than Woodhouse, as the miners had built it and disposed it. And yet, the very cabbage-stumps and rotten fences of the gardens, the very back-yards were instinct with magic, molten as they seemed with the bubbling-up of the under-darkness, bubbling up of majolica weight and luminosity, quite ignorant of the sky, heavy and satisfying.

Slaves of the underworld! She watched the swing of the grey colliers along the pavement with a new fascination, hypnotized by a new vision. Slaves--the underground trolls and iron-workers, magic, mischievous, and enslaved, of the ancient stories. But tall--the miners seemed to her to loom tall and grey, in their enslaved magic. Slaves who would cause the superimposed day-order to fall. Not because, individually, they wanted to. But because, collectively,

something bubbled up in them, the force of darkness which had no master and no control. It would bubble and stir in them as earthquakes stir the earth. It would be simply disastrous, because it had no master. There was no dark master in the world. The puerile world went on crying out for a new Jesus, another Saviour from the sky, another heavenly superman. When what was wanted was a Dark Master from the underworld.

So they streamed past her, home from work--grey from head to foot, distorted in shape, cramped, with curious faces that came out pallid from under their dirt. Their walk was heavy-footed and slurring, their bearing stiff and grotesque. A stream they were--yet they seemed to her to loom like strange, valid figures of fairy-lore, unrealized and as yet unexperienced. The miners, the iron-workers, those who fashion the stuff of the underworld.

As it always comes to its children, the nostalgia of the repulsive, heavy-footed Midlands came over her again, even whilst she was there in the midst. The curious, dark, inexplicable and yet insatiable craving--as if for an earthquake. To feel the earth heave and shudder and shatter the world from beneath. To go down in the débâcle.

And so, in spite of everything, poverty, dowdiness, obscurity, and nothingness, she was content to stay in abeyance at home for the time. True, she was filled with the same old, slow, dreadful craving

of the Midlands: a craving insatiable and inexplicable. But the very craving kept her still. For at this time she did not translate it into a desire, or need, for love. At the back of her mind somewhere was the fixed idea, the fixed intention of finding love, a man. But as yet, at this period, the idea was in abeyance, it did not act. The craving that possessed her as it possesses everybody, in a greater or less degree, in those parts, sustained her darkly and unconsciously.

A hot summer waned into autumn, the long, bewildering days drew in, the transient nights, only a few breaths of shadow between noon and noon, deepened and strengthened. A restlessness came over everybody. There was another short strike among the miners. James Houghton, like an excited beetle, scurried to and fro, feeling he was making his fortune. Never had Woodhouse been so thronged on Fridays with purchasers and money-spenders. The place seemed surcharged with life.

Autumn lasted beautiful till end of October. And then suddenly, cold rain, endless cold rain, and darkness heavy, wet, ponderous. Through the wind and rain it was a toil to move. Poor Miss Frost, who had seemed almost to blossom again in the long hot days, regaining a free cheerfulness that amounted almost to liveliness, and who even caused a sort of scandal by her intimacy with a rather handsome but common stranger, an insurance agent who had come into the place with a good, unused tenor voice--now she wilted again. She had given the

rather florid young man tea in her room, and had laboured away at his fine, metallic voice, correcting him and teaching him and laughing with him and spending really a remarkable number of hours alone with him in her room in Woodhouse--for she had given up tramping the country, and had hired a music-room in a quiet street, where she gave her lessons. And the young man had hung round, and had never wanted to go away. They would prolong their tête-à-tête and their singing on till ten o'clock at night, and Miss Frost would return to Manchester House flushed and handsome and a little shy, while the young man, who was common, took on a new boldness in the streets. He had auburn hair, high colouring, and a rather challenging bearing. He took on a new boldness, his own estimate of himself rose considerably, with Miss Frost and his trained voice to justify him. He was a little insolent and condescending to the natives, who disliked him. For their lives they could not imagine what Miss Frost could find in him. They began even to dislike her, and a pretty scandal was started about the pair, in the pleasant room where Miss Frost had her piano, her books, and her flowers. The scandal was as unjust as most scandals are. Yet truly, all that summer and autumn Miss Frost had a new and slightly aggressive cheerfulness and humour. And Manchester House saw little of her, comparatively.

And then, at the end of September, the young man was removed by his Insurance Company to another district. And at the end of October set in the most abominable and unbearable weather, deluges of rain and

north winds, cutting the tender, summer-unfolded people to pieces. Miss Frost wilted at once. A silence came over her. She shuddered when she had to leave the fire. She went in the morning to her room, and stayed there all the day, in a hot, close atmosphere, shuddering when her pupils brought the outside weather with them to her.

She was always subject to bronchitis. In November she had a bad bronchitis cold. Then suddenly one morning she could not get up. Alvina went in and found her semi-conscious.

The girl was almost mad. She flew to the rescue. She despatched her father instantly for the doctor, she heaped the sticks in the bedroom grate and made a bright fire, she brought hot milk and brandy.

"Thank you, dear, thank you. It's a bronchial cold," whispered Miss Frost hurriedly, trying to sip the milk. She could not. She didn't want it.

"I've sent for the doctor," said Alvina, in her cool voice, wherein none the less there rang the old hesitancy of sheer love.

Miss Frost lifted her eyes:

"There's no need," she said, and she smiled winsomely at Alvina.

It was pneumonia. Useless to talk of the distracted anguish of Alvina during the next two days. She was so swift and sensitive in her nursing, she seemed to have second sight. She talked to nobody. In her silence her soul was alone with the soul of her darling. The long semi-consciousness and the tearing pain of pneumonia, the anguished sickness.

But sometimes the grey eyes would open and smile with delicate winsomeness at Alvina, and Alvina smiled back, with a cheery, answering winsomeness. But that costs something.

On the evening of the second day, Miss Frost got her hand from under the bedclothes, and laid it on Alvina's hand. Alvina leaned down to her.

"Everything is for you, my love," whispered Miss Frost, looking with strange eyes on Alvina's face.

"Don't talk, Miss Frost," moaned Alvina.

"Everything is for you," murmured the sick woman--"except--" and she enumerated some tiny legacies which showed her generous, thoughtful nature.

"Yes, I shall remember," said Alvina, beyond tears now.

Miss Frost smiled with her old bright, wonderful look, that had a touch of queenliness in it.

"Kiss me, dear," she whispered.

Alvina kissed her, and could not suppress the whimpering of her too-much grief.

The night passed slowly. Sometimes the grey eyes of the sick woman rested dark, dilated, haggard on Alvina's face, with a heavy, almost accusing look, sinister. Then they closed again. And sometimes they looked pathetic, with a mute, stricken appeal. Then again they closed--only to open again tense with pain. Alvina wiped her blood-phlegmed lips.

In the morning she died--lay there haggard, death-smearred, with her lovely white hair smearred also, and disorderly: she who had been so beautiful and clean always.

Alvina knew death--which is untellable. She knew that her darling carried away a portion of her own soul into death.

But she was alone. And the agony of being alone, the agony of grief, passionate, passionate grief for her darling who was torn into death--the agony of self-reproach, regret; the agony of remembrance; the agony of the looks of the dying woman, winsome, and sinisterly

accusing, and pathetically, despairingly appealing--probe after probe of mortal agony, which throughout eternity would never lose its power to pierce to the quick!

Alvina seemed to keep strangely calm and aloof all the days after the death. Only when she was alone she suffered till she felt her heart really broke.

"I shall never feel anything any more," she said in her abrupt way to Miss Frost's friend, another woman of over fifty.

"Nonsense, child!" expostulated Mrs. Lawson gently.

"I shan't! I shall never have a heart to feel anything any more," said Alvina, with a strange, distraught roll of the eyes.

"Not like this, child. But you'll feel other things--"

"I haven't the heart," persisted Alvina.

"Not yet," said Mrs. Lawson gently. "You can't expect--But time--time brings back--"

"Oh well--but I don't believe it," said Alvina.

People thought her rather hard. To one of her gossips Miss Pinnegar

confessed:

"I thought she'd have felt it more. She cared more for her than she did for her own mother--and her mother knew it. Mrs. Houghton complained bitterly, sometimes, that she had no love. They were everything to one another, Miss Frost and Alvina. I should have thought she'd have felt it more. But you never know. A good thing if she doesn't, really."

Miss Pinnegar herself did not care one little bit that Miss Frost was dead. She did not feel herself implicated.

The nearest relatives came down, and everything was settled. The will was found, just a brief line on a piece of notepaper expressing a wish that Alvina should have everything. Alvina herself told the verbal requests. All was quietly fulfilled.

As it might well be. For there was nothing to leave. Just sixty-three pounds in the bank--no more: then the clothes, piano, books and music. Miss Frost's brother had these latter, at his own request: the books and music, and the piano. Alvina inherited the few simple trinkets, and about forty-five pounds in money.

"Poor Miss Frost," cried Mrs. Lawson, weeping rather bitterly--"she saved nothing for herself. You can see why she never wanted to grow old, so that she couldn't work. You can see. It's a shame, it's a

shame, one of the best women that ever trod earth."

Manchester House settled down to its deeper silence, its darker gloom. Miss Frost was irreparably gone. With her, the reality went out of the house. It seemed to be silently waiting to disappear. And Alvina and Miss Pinnegar might move about and talk in vain. They could never remove the sense of waiting to finish: it was all just waiting to finish. And the three, James and Alvina and Miss Pinnegar, waited lingering through the months, for the house to come to an end. With Miss Frost its spirit passed away: it was no more. Dark, empty-feeling, it seemed all the time like a house just before a sale.