Ann Veronica

By

H. G. Wells

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

ANN VERONICA

CHAPTER THE FIRST

ANN VERONICA TALKS TO HER FATHER

Part 1

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

She had a compartment to herself in the train from London to Morningside Park, and she sat with both her feet on the seat in an attitude that would certainly have distressed her mother to see, and horrified her

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

She walked down the station approach, past the neat, obtrusive offices of the coal merchant and the house agent, and so to the wicket-gate by the butcher's shop that led to the field path to her home. Outside the post-office stood a no-hatted, blond young man in gray flannels, who was elaborately affixing a stamp to a letter. At the sight of her he became rigid and a singularly bright shade of pink. She made herself serenely unaware of his existence, though it may be it was his presence that sent her by the field detour instead of by the direct path up the Avenue.

"Umph!" he said, and regarded his letter doubtfully before consigning it to the pillar-box. "Here goes," he said. Then he hovered undecidedly for some seconds with his hands in his pockets and his mouth puckered to a

whistle before he turned to go home by the Avenue.

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

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

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

She seated herself in a loose and easy attitude and surveyed the

backs of the Avenue houses; then her eyes wandered to where the new red-and-white villas peeped among the trees. She seemed to be making some sort of inventory. "Ye Gods!" she said at last. "WHAT a place!

"Stuffy isn't the word for it.

"I wonder what he takes me for?"

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

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

"Hello, Teddy!" she answered.

He hung vaguely for a moment as she passed.

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

"Oh, dammit!" he remarked, "dammit!" with great bitterness as he faced

it.

Part 2

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

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

of fire, unveiled and furnished and lit. Dim souls flitted about her, not only speaking but it would seem even thinking in undertones....

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

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

faded learning in the Tredgold laboratory. She had already realized that this instructress was hopelessly wrong and foggy--it is the test of the good comparative anatomist--upon the skull. She discovered a desire to enter as a student in the Imperial College at Westminster, where Russell taught, and go on with her work at the fountain-head.

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

In addition to the various business men, solicitors, civil servants, and widow ladies who lived in the Morningside Park Avenue, there was a certain family of alien sympathies and artistic quality, the Widgetts, with which Ann Veronica had become very friendly. Mr. Widgett was a journalist and art critic, addicted to a greenish-gray tweed suit and "art" brown ties; he smoked corncob pipes in the Avenue on Sunday morning, travelled third class to London by unusual trains, and openly despised golf. He occupied one of the smaller houses near the station. He had one son, who had been co-educated, and three daughters with peculiarly jolly red hair that Ann Veronica found adorable. Two of these had been her particular intimates at the High School, and had done much to send her mind exploring beyond the limits of the available literature

at home. It was a cheerful, irresponsible, shamelessly hard-up family in the key of faded green and flattened purple, and the girls went on from the High School to the Fadden Art School and a bright, eventful life of art student dances, Socialist meetings, theatre galleries, talking about work, and even, at intervals, work; and ever and again they drew Ann Veronica from her sound persistent industry into the circle of these experiences. They had asked her to come to the first of the two great annual Fadden Dances, the October one, and Ann Veronica had accepted with enthusiasm. And now her father said she must not go.

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

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

"But, my dear!" said Ann Veronica's aunt.

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

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

"But of course it's aunt's doing really."

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

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

Part 3

Ann Veronica's father was a solicitor with a good deal of company business: a lean, trustworthy, worried-looking, neuralgic, clean-shaven man of fifty-three, with a hard mouth, a sharp nose, iron-gray hair, gray eyes, gold-framed glasses, and a small, circular baldness at the crown of his head. His name was Peter. He had had five children at irregular intervals, of whom Ann Veronica was the youngest, so that as a parent he came to her perhaps a little practised and jaded and

inattentive; and he called her his "little Vee," and patted her unexpectedly and disconcertingly, and treated her promiscuously as of any age between eleven and eight-and-twenty. The City worried him a good deal, and what energy he had left over he spent partly in golf, a game he treated very seriously, and partly in the practices of microscopic petrography.

He "went in" for microscopy in the unphilosophical Victorian manner as his "hobby." A birthday present of a microscope had turned his mind to technical microscopy when he was eighteen, and a chance friendship with a Holborn microscope dealer had confirmed that bent. He had remarkably skilful fingers and a love of detailed processes, and he had become one of the most dexterous amateur makers of rock sections in the world. He spent a good deal more money and time than he could afford upon the little room at the top of the house, in producing new lapidary apparatus and new microscopic accessories and in rubbing down slices of rock to a transparent thinness and mounting them in a beautiful and dignified manner. He did it, he said, "to distract his mind." His chief successes he exhibited to the Lowndean Microscopical Society, where their high technical merit never failed to excite admiration. Their scientific value was less considerable, since he chose rocks entirely with a view to their difficulty of handling or their attractiveness at conversaziones when done. He had a great contempt for the sections the "theorizers" produced. They proved all sorts of things perhaps, but they were thick, unequal, pitiful pieces of work. Yet an indiscriminating, wrong-headed world gave such fellows all sorts of distinctions....

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

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

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

His ideas about girls and women were of a sentimental and modest quality; they were creatures, he thought, either too bad for a modern vocabulary, and then frequently most undesirably desirable, or too pure and good for life. He made this simple classification of a large and various sex to the exclusion of all intermediate kinds; he held that the two classes had to be kept apart even in thought and remote from one another. Women are made like the potter's vessels--either for worship or contumely, and are withal fragile vessels. He had never wanted daughters. Each time a daughter had been born to him he had concealed his chagrin with great tenderness and effusion from his wife, and had sworn unwontedly and with passionate sincerity in the bathroom. He was a manly man, free from any strong maternal strain, and he had loved his dark-eyed, dainty bright-colored, and active little wife with a real vein of passion in his sentiment. But he had always felt (he had never allowed himself to think of it) that the promptitude of their family was a little indelicate of her, and in a sense an intrusion. He had, however, planned brilliant careers for his two sons, and, with a certain human amount of warping and delay, they were pursuing these. One was in the Indian Civil Service and one in the rapidly developing motor business. The daughters, he had hoped, would be their mother's care.

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

Of course a little daughter is a delightful thing enough. It runs about gayly, it romps, it is bright and pretty, it has enormous quantities of

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

But a little daughter is one thing and a daughter quite another. There one comes to a relationship that Mr. Stanley had never thought out. When he found himself thinking about it, it upset him so that he at once resorted to distraction. The chromatic fiction with which he relieved his mind glanced but slightly at this aspect of life, and never with any quality of guidance. Its heroes never had daughters, they borrowed other people's. The one fault, indeed, of this school of fiction for him was that it had rather a light way with parental rights. His instinct was in the direction of considering his daughters his absolute property, bound to obey him, his to give away or his to keep to be a comfort in his declining years just as he thought fit. About this conception of ownership he perceived and desired a certain sentimental glamour, he liked everything properly dressed, but it remained ownership. Ownership seemed only a reasonable return for the cares and expenses of a daughter's upbringing. Daughters were not like sons. He perceived, however, that both the novels he read and the world he lived in discountenanced these assumptions. Nothing else was put in their place, and they remained sotto voce, as it were, in his mind. The new and

the old cancelled out; his daughters became quasi-independent dependents--which is absurd. One married as he wished and one against his wishes, and now here was Ann Veronica, his little Vee, discontented with her beautiful, safe, and sheltering home, going about with hatless friends to Socialist meetings and art-class dances, and displaying a disposition to carry her scientific ambitions to unwomanly lengths. She seemed to think he was merely the paymaster, handing over the means of her freedom. And now she insisted that she MUST leave the chastened security of the Tredgold Women's College for Russell's unbridled classes, and wanted to go to fancy dress dances in pirate costume and spend the residue of the night with Widgett's ramshackle girls in some indescribable hotel in Soho!

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

Part 4

MY DEAR VEE, he wrote.

These daughters! He gnawed his pen and reflected, tore the sheet up, and began again.

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

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

"--but this cannot be."

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

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

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

He meditated, and began a new paragraph.

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

young lady in your position may or may not venture to do. I do not think you quite understand my ideals or what is becoming as between father and daughter. Your attitude to me--"

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

"--and your aunt--"

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

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

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

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

His lips tightened, and he frowned with solemn resolution.

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

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

His sister appeared.

She was dressed in one of those complicated dresses that are all lace and work and confused patternings of black and purple and cream about the body, and she was in many ways a younger feminine version of the same theme as himself. She had the same sharp nose--which, indeed, only Ann Veronica, of all the family, had escaped. She carried herself well, whereas her brother slouched, and there was a certain aristocratic dignity about her that she had acquired through her long engagement to a curate of family, a scion of the Wiltshire Edmondshaws. He had died

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

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

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

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

"I could have said more."

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

She paused, and he waited for her to speak.

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

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

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

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

"That is exactly what I feel."

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

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

Part 5

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

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

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

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

this train."

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

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

Instead of which they walked sharply....

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But look here, daddy!"

He flapped the Times at her with an imperious gesture.

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

"But it's about other things."

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

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

"I'm--BUSY!"

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

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

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

must air your opinions--"

"To-night, then, daddy!"

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

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

"There's plenty of time," said Ramage. "Is Miss Stanley coming up with us?"

"I go second," she said, "and change at Wimbledon."

"We'll all go second," said Ramage, "if we may?"

Mr. Stanley wanted to object strongly, but as he could not immediately

think how to put it, he contented himself with a grunt, and the motion was carried. "How's Mrs. Ramage?" he asked.

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

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

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

be a girl, since she was his daughter and pat-able--imitating the woman quite remarkably and cleverly. He resumed his listening. She was discussing one of those modern advanced plays with a remarkable, with an extraordinary, confidence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Now she's all hat and ideas," he said, with an air of humor.

"She seems an unusually clever girl," said Ramage.

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

Part 6

He became quite sure, by a sort of accumulation of reflection, as the day wore on. He found his youngest daughter intrusive in his thoughts all through the morning, and still more so in the afternoon. He saw her

young and graceful back as she descended from the carriage, severely ignoring him, and recalled a glimpse he had of her face, bright and serene, as his train ran out of Wimbledon. He recalled with exasperating perplexity her clear, matter-of-fact tone as she talked about love-making being unconvincing. He was really very proud of her, and extraordinarily angry and resentful at the innocent and audacious self-reliance that seemed to intimate her sense of absolute independence of him, her absolute security without him. After all, she only LOOKED a woman. She was rash and ignorant, absolutely inexperienced. Absolutely. He began to think of speeches, very firm, explicit speeches, he would make.

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

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

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

He consumed Irish stew for some moments.

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

"Good God!" said Mr. Stanley.

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

"But--"

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

"She doesn't care for him now?"

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

life. Makes one want to go back to the Oriental system!"

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

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

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

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

"There was a time when girls didn't get these extravagant ideas."

"Lydia Languish, for example. Anyhow, they didn't run about so much."

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

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

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

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

"Shakespeare is altogether different from the modern stuff. Altogether different. I'm not discussing Shakespeare. I don't want to Bowdlerize Shakespeare. I'm not that sort I quite agree. But this modern miasma--"

Mr. Stanley took mustard savagely.

"Well, we won't go into Shakespeare," said Ogilvy "What interests me is that our young women nowadays are running about as free as air practically, with registry offices and all sorts of accommodation round the corner. Nothing to check their proceedings but a declining habit of telling the truth and the limitations of their imaginations. And in that respect they stir up one another. Not my affair, of course, but I think we ought to teach them more or restrain them more. One or the other. They're too free for their innocence or too innocent for their freedom.

That's my point. Are you going to have any apple-tart, Stanley? The apple-tart's been very good lately--very good!"

Part 7

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

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

"I won't keep you very long, daddy," said Ann Veronica.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Her father's irony deepened. "Why?" he asked, suavely.

Her answer was not quite ready. "Well, because I don't see any reason why I shouldn't."

"You see I do."

"Why shouldn't I go?"

"It isn't a suitable place; it isn't a suitable gathering."

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

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

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

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

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

"You see, daddy, I don't think it IS preposterous. That's really what

I want to discuss. It comes to this--am I to be trusted to take care of myself, or am I not?"

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

"I think I am."

"As long as you remain under my roof--" he began, and paused.

"You are going to treat me as though I wasn't. Well, I don't think that's fair."

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

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

"You see, father," she said, "it isn't only this affair of the dance.

I want to go to that because it's a new experience, because I think it will be interesting and give me a view of things. You say I know nothing. That's probably true. But how am I to know of things?"

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

"I'm not so sure. I want to know--just as much as I can."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Then I suppose when I have graduated I am to come home?"

"It seems the natural course--"

"And do nothing?"

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

"Until some one takes pity on me and marries me?"

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

"Look here, father," she said, with a change in her voice, "suppose I won't stand it?"

He regarded her as though this was a new idea.

"Suppose, for example, I go to this dance?"

"You won't."

"Well"--her breath failed her for a moment. "How would you prevent it?" she asked.

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

"Yes, I know. But suppose I go?"

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

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

"You will give up anything I wish you to give up."

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

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

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

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

"Only you won't let me live. Only you won't let me exist!"

Mr. Stanley lost patience. He bullied frankly.

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

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

"Well," she said, "good-night, father."

"What!" he asked; "not a kiss?"

She affected not to hear.

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

"I don't see what else I could have said," he remarked.