

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

EXPOSTULATIONS

Part 1

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

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

Ann Veronica closed the door quite softly and stood still.

"This has almost killed your father.... After Gwen!"

"I sent a telegram."

"He cares so much for you. He did so care for you."

"I sent a telegram to say I was all right."

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

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

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

"Do what?" said Ann Veronica.

"What you have done."

"But what have I done?"

"Elope! Go off in this way. We had no idea. We had such a pride in you, such hope in you. I had no idea you were not the happiest girl. Everything I could do! Your father sat up all night. Until at last I

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

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

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

"I said I was all right."

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

"But what did father imagine?"

"Of course he imagined! Any one would! 'What has happened, Peter?' I asked. He was standing up with the telegram crumpled in his hand. He used a most awful word! Then he said, 'It's Ann Veronica gone to join her sister!' 'Gone!' I said. 'Gone!' he said. 'Read that,' and threw the telegram at me, so that it went into the tureen. He swore when I tried

to get it out with the ladle, and told me what it said. Then he sat down again in a chair and said that people who wrote novels ought to be strung up. It was as much as I could do to prevent him flying out of the house there and then and coming after you. Never since I was a girl have I seen your father so moved. 'Oh! little Vee!' he cried, 'little Vee!' and put his face between his hands and sat still for a long time before he broke out again."

Ann Veronica had remained standing while her aunt spoke.

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

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

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

"Oh, why raise up old scores? If you could see him this morning, his poor face as white as a sheet and all cut about with shaving! He was for coming up by the very first train and looking for you, but I said to him, 'Wait for the letters,' and there, sure enough, was yours. He could hardly open the envelope, he trembled so. Then he threw the letter at me. 'Go and fetch her home,' he said; 'it isn't what we thought! It's just a practical joke of hers.' And with that he went off to the City, stern and silent, leaving his bacon on his plate--a great slice of bacon

hardly touched. No breakfast, he's had no dinner, hardly a mouthful of soup--since yesterday at tea."

She stopped. Aunt and niece regarded each other silently.

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

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

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

Part 2

Then it was the expostulations really began.

From first to last, on this occasion, her aunt expostulated for about two hours. "But, my dear," she began, "it is Impossible! It is quite out of the Question. You simply can't." And to that, through vast rhetorical meanderings, she clung. It reached her only slowly that Ann Veronica was

standing to her resolution. "How will you live?" she appealed. "Think of what people will say!" That became a refrain. "Think of what Lady Palsworthy will say! Think of what"--So-and-so--"will say! What are we to tell people?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Don't you care for Mr. Manning?" said her aunt.

"I don't see what he has to do with my coming to London?"

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

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

Part 3

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

brutal than she had ever known him before.

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

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

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

To which the only possible reply seemed to be, "I'm not coming home."

"Not coming home!"

"No!" And, in spite of her resolve to be a Person, Ann Veronica began to weep with terror at herself. Apparently she was always doomed to weep when she talked to her father. But he was always forcing her to say and do such unexpectedly conclusive things. She feared he might take her

tears as a sign of weakness. So she said: "I won't come home. I'd rather starve!"

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

"I shall live," sobbed Ann Veronica. "You needn't be anxious about that! I shall contrive to live."

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

"Sha'n't get odd jobs," said Ann Veronica, wiping her eyes.

And from that point they went on to a thoroughly embittering wrangle. Mr. Stanley used his authority, and commanded Ann Veronica to come home, to which, of course, she said she wouldn't; and then he warned her not to defy him, warned her very solemnly, and then commanded her again. He then said that if she would not obey him in this course she should "never darken his doors again," and was, indeed, frightfully abusive. This threat terrified Ann Veronica so much that she declared with sobs and vehemence that she would never come home again, and for a time both

talked at once and very wildly. He asked her whether she understood what she was saying, and went on to say still more precisely that she should never touch a penny of his money until she came home again--not one penny. Ann Veronica said she didn't care.

Then abruptly Mr. Stanley changed his key. "You poor child!" he said; "don't you see the infinite folly of these proceedings? Think! Think of the love and affection you abandon! Think of your aunt, a second mother to you. Think if your own mother was alive!"

He paused, deeply moved.

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

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

In the retrospect she was amazed to think how things had gone to pieces, for at the outset she had been quite prepared to go home again upon

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

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

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

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

Part 4

The next day her aunt came again and expostulated, and was just saying it was "an unheard-of thing" for a girl to leave her home as Ann Veronica had done, when her father arrived, and was shown in by the pleasant-faced landlady.

Her father had determined on a new line. He put down his hat and umbrella, rested his hands on his hips, and regarded Ann Veronica firmly.

"Now," he said, quietly, "it's time we stopped this nonsense."

Ann Veronica was about to reply, when he went on, with a still more deadly quiet: "I am not here to bandy words with you. Let us have no more of this humbug. You are to come home."

"I thought I explained--"

"I don't think you can have heard me," said her father; "I have told you to come home."

"I thought I explained--"

"Come home!"

Ann Veronica shrugged her shoulders.

"Very well," said her father.

"I think this ends the business," he said, turning to his sister.

"It's not for us to supplicate any more. She must learn wisdom--as God pleases."

"But, my dear Peter!" said Miss Stanley.

"No," said her brother, conclusively, "it's not for a parent to go on persuading a child."

Miss Stanley rose and regarded Ann Veronica fixedly. The girl stood with her hands behind her back, sulky, resolute, and intelligent, a strand of her black hair over one eye and looking more than usually delicate-featured, and more than ever like an obdurate child.

"She doesn't know."

"She does."

"I can't imagine what makes you fly out against everything like this,"

said Miss Stanley to her niece.

"What is the good of talking?" said her brother. "She must go her own way. A man's children nowadays are not his own. That's the fact of the matter. Their minds are turned against him.... Rubbishy novels and pernicious rascals. We can't even protect them from themselves."

An immense gulf seemed to open between father and daughter as he said these words.

"I don't see," gasped Ann Veronica, "why parents and children... shouldn't be friends."

"Friends!" said her father. "When we see you going through disobedience to the devil! Come, Molly, she must go her own way. I've tried to use my authority. And she defies me. What more is there to be said? She defies me!"

It was extraordinary. Ann Veronica felt suddenly an effect of tremendous pathos; she would have given anything to have been able to frame and make some appeal, some utterance that should bridge this bottomless chasm that had opened between her and her father, and she could find nothing whatever to say that was in the least sincere and appealing.

"Father," she cried, "I have to live!"

He misunderstood her. "That," he said, grimly, with his hand on the door-handle, "must be your own affair, unless you choose to live at Morningside Park."

Miss Stanley turned to her. "Vee," she said, "come home. Before it is too late."

"Come, Molly," said Mr. Stanley, at the door.

"Vee!" said Miss Stanley, "you hear what your father says!"

Miss Stanley struggled with emotion. She made a curious movement toward her niece, then suddenly, convulsively, she dabbed down something lumpy on the table and turned to follow her brother. Ann Veronica stared for a moment in amazement at this dark-green object that clashed as it was put down. It was a purse. She made a step forward. "Aunt!" she said, "I can't--"

Then she caught a wild appeal in her aunt's blue eye, halted, and the door clicked upon them.

There was a pause, and then the front door slammed....

Ann Veronica realized that she was alone with the world. And this time the departure had a tremendous effect of finality. She had to resist an impulse of sheer terror, to run out after them and give in.

"Gods," she said, at last, "I've done it this time!"

"Well!" She took up the neat morocco purse, opened it, and examined the contents.

It contained three sovereigns, six and fourpence, two postage stamps, a small key, and her aunt's return half ticket to Morningside Park.

Part 5

After the interview Ann Veronica considered herself formally cut off from home. If nothing else had clinched that, the purse had.

Nevertheless there came a residuum of expostulations. Her brother Roddy, who was in the motor line, came to expostulate; her sister Alice wrote. And Mr. Manning called.

Her sister Alice seemed to have developed a religious sense away there in Yorkshire, and made appeals that had no meaning for Ann Veronica's mind. She exhorted Ann Veronica not to become one of "those unsexed intellectuals, neither man nor woman."

Ann Veronica meditated over that phrase. "That's HIM," said Ann Veronica, in sound, idiomatic English. "Poor old Alice!"

Her brother Roddy came to her and demanded tea, and asked her to state a case. "Bit thick on the old man, isn't it?" said Roddy, who had developed a bluff, straightforward style in the motor shop.

"Mind my smoking?" said Roddy. "I don't see quite what your game is, Vee, but I suppose you've got a game on somewhere.

"Rummy lot we are!" said Roddy. "Alice--Alice gone dotty, and all over kids. Gwen--I saw Gwen the other day, and the paint's thicker than ever. Jim is up to the neck in Mahatmas and Theosophy and Higher Thought and rot--writes letters worse than Alice. And now YOU'RE on the war-path. I believe I'm the only sane member of the family left. The G.V.'s as mad as any of you, in spite of all his respectability; not a bit of him straight anywhere, not one bit."

"Straight?"

"Not a bit of it! He's been out after eight per cent. since the beginning. Eight per cent.! He'll come a cropper one of these days, if you ask me. He's been near it once or twice already. That's got his nerves to rags. I suppose we're all human beings really, but what price the sacred Institution of the Family! Us as a bundle! Eh?... I don't half disagree with you, Vee, really; only thing is, I don't see

how you're going to pull it off. A home MAY be a sort of cage, but still--it's a home. Gives you a right to hang on to the old man until he busts--practically. Jolly hard life for a girl, getting a living. Not MY affair."

He asked questions and listened to her views for a time.

"I'd chuck this lark right off if I were you, Vee," he said. "I'm five years older than you, and no end wiser, being a man. What you're after is too risky. It's a damned hard thing to do. It's all very handsome starting out on your own, but it's too damned hard. That's my opinion, if you ask me. There's nothing a girl can do that isn't sweated to the bone. You square the G.V., and go home before you have to. That's my advice. If you don't eat humble-pie now you may live to fare worse later. I can't help you a cent. Life's hard enough nowadays for an unprotected male. Let alone a girl. You got to take the world as it is, and the only possible trade for a girl that isn't sweated is to get hold of a man and make him do it for her. It's no good flying out at that, Vee; I didn't arrange it. It's Providence. That's how things are; that's the order of the world. Like appendicitis. It isn't pretty, but we're made so. Rot, no doubt; but we can't alter it. You go home and live on the G.V., and get some other man to live on as soon as possible. It isn't sentiment but it's horse sense. All this Woman-who-Diddery--no damn good. After all, old P.--Providence, I mean--HAS arranged it so that men will keep you, more or less. He made the universe on those lines. You've got to take what you can get."

That was the quintessence of her brother Roddy.

He played variations on this theme for the better part of an hour.

"You go home," he said, at parting; "you go home. It's all very fine and all that, Vee, this freedom, but it isn't going to work. The world isn't ready for girls to start out on their own yet; that's the plain fact of the case. Babies and females have got to keep hold of somebody or go under--anyhow, for the next few generations. You go home and wait a century, Vee, and then try again. Then you may have a bit of a chance. Now you haven't the ghost of one--not if you play the game fair."

Part 6

It was remarkable to Ann Veronica how completely Mr. Manning, in his entirely different dialect, indorsed her brother Roddy's view of things. He came along, he said, just to call, with large, loud apologies, radiantly kind and good. Miss Stanley, it was manifest, had given him Ann Veronica's address. The kindly faced landlady had failed to catch his name, and said he was a tall, handsome gentleman with a great black mustache. Ann Veronica, with a sigh at the cost of hospitality, made a hasty negotiation for an extra tea and for a fire in the ground-floor

apartment, and preened herself carefully for the interview. In the little apartment, under the gas chandelier, his inches and his stoop were certainly very effective. In the bad light he looked at once military and sentimental and studious, like one of Ouida's guardsmen revised by Mr. Haldane and the London School of Economics and finished in the Keltic school.

"It's unforgivable of me to call, Miss Stanley," he said, shaking hands in a peculiar, high, fashionable manner; "but you know you said we might be friends."

"It's dreadful for you to be here," he said, indicating the yellow presence of the first fog of the year without, "but your aunt told me something of what had happened. It's just like your Splendid Pride to do it. Quite!"

He sat in the arm-chair and took tea, and consumed several of the extra cakes which she had sent out for and talked to her and expressed himself, looking very earnestly at her with his deep-set eyes, and carefully avoiding any crumbs on his mustache the while. Ann Veronica sat firelit by her tea-tray with, quite unconsciously, the air of an expert hostess.

"But how is it all going to end?" said Mr. Manning.

"Your father, of course," he said, "must come to realize just how

Splendid you are! He doesn't understand. I've seen him, and he doesn't a bit understand. I didn't understand before that letter. It makes me want to be just everything I CAN be to you. You're like some splendid Princess in Exile in these Dreadful Dingy apartments!"

"I'm afraid I'm anything but a Princess when it comes to earning a salary," said Ann Veronica. "But frankly, I mean to fight this through if I possibly can."

"My God!" said Manning, in a stage-aside. "Earning a salary!"

"You're like a Princess in Exile!" he repeated, overruling her. "You come into these sordid surroundings--you mustn't mind my calling them sordid--and it makes them seem as though they didn't matter.... I don't think they do matter. I don't think any surroundings could throw a shadow on you."

Ann Veronica felt a slight embarrassment. "Won't you have some more tea, Mr. Manning?" she asked.

"You know--," said Mr. Manning, relinquishing his cup without answering her question, "when I hear you talk of earning a living, it's as if I heard of an archangel going on the Stock Exchange--or Christ selling doves.... Forgive my daring. I couldn't help the thought."

"It's a very good image," said Ann Veronica.

"I knew you wouldn't mind."

"But does it correspond with the facts of the case? You know, Mr. Manning, all this sort of thing is very well as sentiment, but does it correspond with the realities? Are women truly such angelic things and men so chivalrous? You men have, I know, meant to make us Queens and Goddesses, but in practice--well, look, for example, at the stream of girls one meets going to work of a morning, round-shouldered, cheap, and underfed! They aren't queens, and no one is treating them as queens. And look, again, at the women one finds letting lodgings.... I was looking for rooms last week. It got on my nerves--the women I saw. Worse than any man. Everywhere I went and rapped at a door I found behind it another dreadful dingy woman--another fallen queen, I suppose--dingier than the last, dirty, you know, in grain. Their poor hands!"

"I know," said Mr. Manning, with entirely suitable emotion.

"And think of the ordinary wives and mothers, with their anxiety, their limitations, their swarms of children!"

Mr. Manning displayed distress. He fended these things off from him with the rump of his fourth piece of cake. "I know that our social order is dreadful enough," he said, "and sacrifices all that is best and most beautiful in life. I don't defend it."

"And besides, when it comes to the idea of queens," Ann Veronica went on, "there's twenty-one and a half million women to twenty million men. Suppose our proper place is a shrine. Still, that leaves over a million shrines short, not reckoning widows who re-marry. And more boys die than girls, so that the real disproportion among adults is even greater."

"I know," said Mr Manning, "I know these Dreadful Statistics. I know there's a sort of right in your impatience at the slowness of Progress. But tell me one thing I don't understand--tell me one thing: How can you help it by coming down into the battle and the mire? That's the thing that concerns me."

"Oh, I'm not trying to help it," said Ann Veronica. "I'm only arguing against your position of what a woman should be, and trying to get it clear in my own mind. I'm in this apartment and looking for work because--Well, what else can I do, when my father practically locks me up?"

"I know," said Mr. Manning, "I know. Don't think I can't sympathize and understand. Still, here we are in this dingy, foggy city. Ye gods! what a wilderness it is! Every one trying to get the better of every one, every one regardless of every one--it's one of those days when every one bumps against you--every one pouring coal smoke into the air and making confusion worse confounded, motor omnibuses clattering and smelling, a horse down in the Tottenham Court Road, an old woman at the corner coughing dreadfully--all the painful sights of a great city, and here

you come into it to take your chances. It's too valiant, Miss Stanley, too valiant altogether!"

Ann Veronica meditated. She had had two days of employment-seeking now. "I wonder if it is."

"It isn't," said Mr. Manning, "that I mind Courage in a Woman--I love and admire Courage. What could be more splendid than a beautiful girl facing a great, glorious tiger? Una and the Lion again, and all that! But this isn't that sort of thing; this is just a great, ugly, endless wilderness of selfish, sweating, vulgar competition!"

"That you want to keep me out of?"

"Exactly!" said Mr. Manning.

"In a sort of beautiful garden-close--wearing lovely dresses and picking beautiful flowers?"

"Ah! If one could!"

"While those other girls trudge to business and those other women let lodgings. And in reality even that magic garden-close resolves itself into a villa at Morningside Park and my father being more and more cross and overbearing at meals--and a general feeling of insecurity and futility."

Mr. Manning relinquished his cup, and looked meaningly at Ann Veronica.

"There," he said, "you don't treat me fairly, Miss Stanley. My

garden-close would be a better thing than that."