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FOREWORD.

One parent families are much talked about and catered for these days, as if they are a modern feature of our society. Not so. When I was a child in the second decade of the century, and in the Naval Dockyard town where I was born and brought up, one parent families were more or less the rule. Not for present day reasons such as mother or father absconding from their responsibilities, or because of divorce which is now much more common and easier to obtain.

My father was in the Royal Navy, and almost a complete stranger to my brothers and me. Like all naval personnel, he was sent away on commissions to outposts of our far flung Empire. These commissions were for periods of about three years duration, and wives and children did not accompany their menfolk, but inevitably, when father came home after such long absences, another child was conceived, then off he was sent again leaving mother to cope with all the extra work, and it was HARD work in those days and very little money with which to clothe and feed the extra mouths.

People who are now able to claim for this and that allowance, and even in many cases, are able to go overseas with father when he is sent abroad for a spell of duty, have no idea how the wives and mothers managed to bring up large families single handed.

In the following pages, I have endeavoured to convey how wonderful women, like my mother, carried on against sometimes fearful odds, to rear big families unaided, and to turn them into good, well disciplined citizens.

They were not forever moaning about their lot, but accepted it all cheerfully with firm but kindly hands till their men came home.

Life to me was simple but happy in spite of a lack of material possession. What we never had, we never missed; our toys were very few and far between, we made our ^{own} entertainment.

Oh for "The Happy Highways where I went

And cannot come again."

as A.E. Housman so poignantly phrased it.

(From Mrs. D. R. Hannan,
Adm Dale,
5, Gore Road,
New Milton, Hants.)

I remember, I remember, the house where I was born,
The little window where the sun came peeping in at morn,
He never came a wink too soon, nor brought too long a day,
But now I often wish the night had borne my breath away.

Thomas Hood might have written these lines specifically for me, for I can in all honesty say that the first twelve years of my life were the happiest.

The house was one of a terrace of back to back dwellings in a street of a dockyard town, just one among many scores of such streets and houses, mainly inhabited by dockyard "mateys" or naval personnel of lower deck status.

The street was a most respectable one with very houseproud wives who took great pride in their humble rented dwellings. Each patch of pavement ~~was~~ outside each house was religiously swept every morning, the minute porches washed over and the brasses polished to their utmost brilliance. The lace curtains which hung at every window were dazlingly white, and there was friendly rivalry as to who had the prettiest pattern, and discussion over the garden walls as to the store which had the best selection of goods at the most reasonable price; and those housewives certainly knew where to get the best value for their pennies, few and hard earned as they were, goods had to last till there was virtually no life left in them. Another feature of those sash windows were the venetian blinds with wooden lathes. How I hated those blinds at Spring cleaning time, as we had to help with the washing and polishing of each separate lathe, a very tedious chore.

As I first remember it, the road itself had a gravel surface, hence when one of us fell down, we had "gravel rash". For some reason, (childish snobbery?) when I had to give my address at school or on other occasions, I always felt it was superior to be able to say "Road" as opposed to "Street"!

When there was a very serious illness in an area, straw was laid down across the road in the vicinity of the afflicted person's home, to deaden the traffic noise.

Our particular house consisted of two good sized bedrooms upstairs, and on the ground floor, ~~front~~ parlour, a drawing room, living room and a large scullery, or wash house, as we called it. In this last place which had a concrete floor and plain unadorned brick walls, there was a big coal bunker with a wooden cover, a gas cooker, a stone sink with one cold tap, a brick built copper, and, a rare commodity in those days, an inside lavatory at one end. The roof was of slate and when it rained there was an incessant and depressing drumming. Fortunately, we could always close the intervening door between the wash house and living room, and so shut out the irritating noise.

Outside the back door, there was a small garden with a central brick path, on one side of which my mother kept ~~some~~ ^{SOME} hens, and on the other, she always managed to grow a few flowers. There was no back entrance, and a high brick wall separated us from the houses in the next road, but the walls between the gardens in our terrace were quite low thus enabling neighbours to have many a friendly chat, though dividing the houses on one side, we had a paved passage way leading to the french windows in the drawing room, and this passage had a high brick wall to ensure privacy. Our side of this wall was kept painted white to reflect the light and to give a pleasanter outlook from the living room window. Also along the beginning of this passage there grew an unenclosed grape vine, its climbing foliage forming an

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attractive canopy, and giving an illusion of greener pastures. Alas! it only bore bunches of inedible sour grapes about the size of currants.

The front door of the house opened straight on to the street. Ours was always smart with varnish and grained paintwork and the tiny porch brickwork finished in two shades of harmonizing colours with a band of black paint dividing them. To anybody rat-tapping on the shining brass knocker there was always a sincere and joyous welcome, and an invitation to "Come in". It was considered rude and most inhospitable to keep anyone standing on the doorstep.

So into this environment I was born in the first decade of the twentieth century, a humble home where money was scarce, but love was unlimited and happiness the keynote.

My mother had married young to a stoker in the Royal Navy. She was very beautiful both in looks and temperament, and I feel sure that had she been born in more recent times, she would have been hailed as a beauty queen, though I doubt if she would have paraded in a scanty swim suit, she was too shy, part of her charm. Her figure was perfect with a waist tiny enough for a man's hands to encompass. Her skin was like the proverbial peach with a natural lovely colour; her hair, dark brown with chestnut tints, and her eyes so brown, warm and shining. No artificial aids were ever used or indeed needed by my mother, and of course, she could not have afforded them, anyway. She was a typical English country girl, one of a very large family, and put out into service when she was eleven years old. She had a passionate love for all children, so when her own came along, they were very much desired.

There were seven of us, five boys and two girls. First to arrive were twins, Martha and Steven, followed two years later by John, who only survived for six months, a victim of the scourge whooping cough. Three years after this, I, Rosie, was born, to be quickly succeeded by William, and then at intervals of five years by Edward and finally Percival. Edward was born during the first part of the Great War on Trafalgar Day, and while my father was fighting at sea under the command of Admiral Jellicoe. This coincidence prompted my maternal grandmother to suggest that the boy be christened "Nelson Jellicoe", but my mother refused to saddle him with such a dated mouthful, for which my brother must be eternally grateful, though to be sure he was quite often called "Dan or Dan'I" amongst the children, while Steven, the eldest, for some obscure ^{reason} became "Nonnie".

To return to my mother. She once related to me, how, after she had been in her place of service as a parlour maid for a few years, an elderly man, a constant visitor to the house and extremely wealthy, offered her marriage, trying with tempting promises of her own servants, carriage, jewels, clothes, mistress of a fine house, etc; to make her accept his proposal. Alas! and foolishly, to my way of thinking, she refused him, her reason being that she did not want to be an old man's darling. She was certainly a young man's slave, toiling endlessly all through her life, bringing up her family against odds of poverty and trouble. I often wondered if she regretted marrying for love; I don't think so, she always seemed so happy, and her love endured through fifty three years of wedlock and nine years of tragic bereavement.

We saw little of my father when we were small, he seemed to be sent away on one naval commission after another, to such far flung outposts of the British Empire as the West Indies, the Cape, Seychelles, and patrolling the vast and varied oceans for as long as two and a half to three years at a time. No wonder then, when on one occasion my father arrived home, William, who had been "a long clothes baby" at the time of Dad's departure, took cover behind my mother's skirt, saying, "Mummy, who is

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that man in our house, and when is he going away?" Dad was a typical jolly Jack Tar when he was young, always laughing and playing practical jokes. He was very proud of his wife and children, and loved us very much when we were small.

While I was quite young, I had to share a bedroom with Steven, Martha and William. I had never known baby John, of course, but I heard my father tell how he had to sail away on a commission the day the baby died, he felt very bitter at having to leave my mother at such a time. Fortunately for modern parents, the Navy and other services are now much more compassionate, and it is also the custom for families to accompany Dad when he is posted abroad for any length of time. The loss of John was a great blow to my parents, especially so as my mother said that he was the bonniest baby of us all, but another tragedy was doomed to tear those loving hearts when at the age of eight years and eleven months, Martha died as the result of a fall in the school playground. I was then nearly four, and can vaguely recall the disaster, and being given Martha's doll with strict instructions not to break it. Alas! it was inevitable that in the course of time, the doll did get broken, but I never had much inclination to play with dolls. I must have been a great disappointment to my mother, and father too, I suppose, though he being away so much, it probably didn't mean the same to him that I was a tomboy, so different to Martha who had been a sweet gentle girl, never seeming to get dirty or tear her clothes. I once heard it said that "she had been too good to live."

Most of our games were perforce played in the street, but there wasn't much traffic about in those days, an occasional horse and cart and bicycles. We raced around with our hoops, mine being a wooden one propelled with a stick and the boys had an iron one with a metal hooked rod. Marbles, five stones, flicking fag cards, whip and top, tag, hop-scotch, conkers, all figured in our amusements, and we would play at not treading on the cracks in the pavement, pushing each other to try and cause us to go on a line, as a result of which, dire things would happen, such as falling down stairs, falling at school, or being turned out of home. Skipping was also a great favourite with girls mostly, and we used to sing various rhymes to accompany this activity, such as -

"Old Billy Bance did a dance
Out of England into France,
Out of France and into Spain
Over the hill and back again,
There a man gave him a poke
Sent him back to Basingstoke."

Ball bouncing was also nearly always done to singing, for instance -

"One, two, three a'lairy, my ball's in the dairy,
Don't forget to give it to Mary
And not to Mabel Mitchell."

or some other name, possibly of a girl or boy with whom you were not particularly friendly.

There were literally dozens of these singing rhymes, some topical, some vulgar, but none that I can recall really obscene.

On the one day a week when the dustbins had to be emptied, they had to be carried through the houses from the backyard, and stood out along the edge of the pavement for the men. These long rows of bins were an invitation for an impromptu game of leap frog, as well as providing hunting grounds for roaming dogs, who were quite adept at pushing off the lids, and tipping out the bins' contents.

Several doors along from our house, there lived two boys with their parents.

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Now we were envious of Geoffrey and James for they were the fortunate owners of a tricycle. How we schemed and pleaded with them in order to have a ride! We were often successful, and so with one of us on the saddle, we would peddle away quite happily with Geoffrey or James standing on the bar at the back. Secretly, we thought these boys were rather "cissies", as their mother was forever fussing over them. She spoke with, what was to us, a strange accent, though she only came from the next county, and she was always very kind to us.

My mother's ^{IMMEDIATE} neighbours on either side had no children, so we were constantly being warned not to be too noisy or to cause annoyance in any way. Both ladies had husbands in the Navy, one, a very jolly person with flaming red hair used to come into our home and play games with us. She would let down her mass of hair, get down on all fours, pretending to be a ferocious animal and would give the smaller ones rides on her back. She was a real friend to my mother and to us, but her favourite was Edward, she really doted on him. Her name was Mrs: Curridge and the lady the other side, was a Mrs: Tine. She was to me, anyway, a very beautiful lady, her elderly mother, Mrs: Soames lived with her, and sometimes we would run errands for the old lady, who rather fascinated me in a repulsive sort of way, for she had no teeth and a most enormous stomach, which when she laughed, really shook with ^{MERRIMENT} ~~laughter~~. We never minded doing anything for Mrs: Soames for she always rewarded us with a penny, which soon found its way into the till of the corner shop, where it was exchanged for such delights as Tiger nuts, Locust sticks, liquorice "boot laces", coconut balls and a wide selection of other boiled sweets and toffees for twopence a quarter. These were served to us in a cone shaped bag made out of newspaper by the shopkeeper. A bar of milk chocolate was to me a luxury, and I would promise myself that when I grew up, I would buy a whole quarter pound slab!

Next door to Mrs: Tine lived her sister, an enormous lady, whose husband was also in the Navy; she had two children, older than us, and she took in lodgers. I never felt really at ease with Mrs: Rudden, she was so big and booming, but kind, and would sometimes give me a banana, an article which my mother couldn't often afford, unless it was cut in half and mashed up to spread on bread and butter. Mrs: Rudden's neighbour was a Mrs: Kilner, a great friend of my mother's as she had five children, four girls and a boy, so there was a common bond, and we and the Kilner children were always together, outside if it was fine, and if wet, in one or the other's houses. Mr: Kilner was a labourer, until war broke out, when he was called up into the Army. When we had to stay indoors, we would play "Ludo" or "Snakes and Ladders", sometimes making believe we had a shop with buttons as coins. We had to be very inventive, and there was one game we played which even now after half a century has the effect of making me feel the laughter gurgling up inside me, albeit that the tears for those happy carefree days, "where I cannot come again", are not far behind. This game was played first thing in the morning, and we called it "Balcony Seats". It was always great fun except for Mum, who had to cope with the dishevelled bedclothes afterwards, but she never forbade us to play it. I must explain that the cinema at that time was in its infancy, and it was a very rare occurrence for us to go, but we had been a few times to a small place called "The Bijou". To us, the height of affluence and luxury was the balcony at "The Bijou", seen only from our lowly and cheapest seats in the front of the pit. So when we played our game, the bolsters, pillows and bedding were piled up into a high heap at the head of the bed. We took it in turns to act as commissionaire standing at the door calling out, "Balcony seats, any more for the balcony seats?" whereupon

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the "customers" would perch up on top of the bedding pile joined by the "commissionaire". Then one of us (we also took our turn at this) would perform at, and on the foot of the bed, singing, dancing and doing tricks to amuse the others. If and when as inevitably, the performance became too hectic, the "balcony seats" would collapse, tipping the audience into the middle of the bed, where there was much bouncing about and a mix up of flailing arms and legs amidst much hilarity. After sorting ourselves out, the "balcony seats" would be re-made, the customers once more took up their precarious positions, and with a different performer, the whole show would begin again. At length when the shrieks and laughter reached fever pitch, my mother's voice would somehow penetrate the din, calling at the foot of the stairs, "What are you children doing up there? You had better get dressed and come down before one of you gets hurt and a crying match starts. Your breakfasts are ready, you'll be late for school if you don't hurry".

There was never a cross word at our antics, and as soon as she called us, we obeyed her, no thought of not so doing never crossed our minds, Mum's word was law!

Chapter 2.

Once downstairs, we had a quick wash at the sink in the scullery, there was no bathroom, of course, but as we had a good wash every night before we went to bed, it didn't really matter that the morning one was just "a lick and a promise, to get the sleepy dust out of our eyes". We had a proper bath all over once a week on Friday evening in front of the living room fire. This must have been really hard going for my mother, as the water had to be heated in the copper and carried into the living room. A galvanised dipper was used to transfer the hot water into a bucket, then after bathing, the process was reversed till there was little enough water left in the bath to enable Mum and Steven to carry it out to the sink to empty.

That living room of my childhood is indelibly printed on my memory as a place of love, comfort and happiness, a refuge in times of trouble, and always that caring figure with the gentle, capable hands and soft cosy lap when we felt poorly. In my early days, the fireplace was a black kitchen range and the fire a bright barred square, with an oven at the side, a singing kettle on the hob which shone like ~~silver~~ ebony, the steel fender polished with emery paper, the brass fire irons reflecting the glow, the hearthstone as white as pipeclay could make it, and the whole thing protected from small children by a guard with a brass rail along the top. The room itself was not very big and quite simply furnished, with a table, two Windsor armchairs, and three other chairs, plus a Victorian sofa, on which, miraculously, places were always found should an extra one or two arrive in time for a cup of tea and slice of cake. The table at meal times was covered with a white cloth, and at other times a red tapestry one with a vase of homely flowers in the centre. There was always such a feeling of snug security in that room, and of all the rooms I have seen since, be they beautifully furnished and decorated with perhaps expensive items of china and paintings, choice arrangements of flowers, central heating, in fact everything calculated to make life pleasant and easy, none has ever, or will ever, mean so much or spell out the word "Home" to me as vividly as that little room in that terraced house, and "our MUM" always there when we needed her to bathe our grazed knees, and kiss them better, and to re-assure us when we were frightened. How hard she worked to keep everything, including us, clean and sparkling. I never realized till I myself married, just how hard my

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mother must have worked, and how she must have juggled with the pennies to feed and clothe us. No state hand outs or labour saving devices in those days, and yet she seemed to sing her way through life with songs like "The Yellow rose of Texas", "When we are married", "When the fields are white with daises," "I'll be your sweetheart", "Honeysuckle and the bee" and many others of that time, though how she knew them, I can't think, unless from some tinkling musical^{box} or barrel organ.

But I digress. We were fortunate in living fairly near school, which was quite a big one divided into "Infants, Boys, and Girls". There was a large play ground of asphalt with lavatories over the far side, no washbasins, but metal fountains to provide drinking water. These were manipulated by pressure on the central portion, whereupon the water would gush upwards into the mouth. Metal cups were attached to the fountains, but somehow I never fancied using them. The class rooms had one fireplace, and those children seated at the back didn't derive much warmth or benefit from the fire.

We always had a good breakfast before leaving for school. This consisted of porridge or bread and milk, if the weather was cold, "Force" or "Grapenuts" when warmer, also bread fried in dripping or bread and jam. We also took a sandwich of jam or dripping to eat during playtime. At noon, we went home for dinner, always a good hot meal, with a nourishing and filling pudding, such as "Spotty Dick", "Treacle Duff", made with pure suet, which could be bought very cheaply from the butcher, and grated for use. The only exception to our hot dinners was on Mondays, when we had cold meat, the remains of Sunday's joint, with "Bubble and Squeak" followed perhaps by a tart of some kind and made on Sunday, ~~of some kind~~ pudding, which could, ^{cook} while the washing day was in progress. One day a week, usually Friday, was what my mother called "Banian Day", Banian meaning in Naval parlance, a meatless day or day of poor fare. On such days we had bowls of thick soup, made with a ham bone, split peas, pearl barley, and a pennyworth of mixed vegetables grated into the liquid, and cooked in a great black bellied cast iron saucepan with suet dumplings. How truly delicious that soup was, and when I think about it, so cheap yet with such an incomparable flavour, I can hear my dear Mum saying in her cheery way, "Well, what won't fatten, will fill" and fill it certainly did and warmed us right through.

After dinner, back to school till four o'clock. Sometimes, if one of my friends had a birthday, Mum would give me a note, asking if I might leave at a quarter to four in order that I might be washed and changed for the party. How excited I felt when the teacher called my name to say I could go, how privileged, too, as I left the class room with the envious eyes of the other children following me. In retrospect, I cannot understand why the parties were not held a little later, so that the children invited had no need to leave early. Now and again after school, we would go to the blacksmith's shop nearby to watch him at work. How fascinating it was to stand in the doorway and see the great cart horses being shod! The roaring of the fire, the souging of the bellows, the rhythmical clang and tinkle, and the flying sparks as the hammer shaped the red hot iron on the anvil, the patience of the animals as they were being fitted with their new shoes, the blacksmith himself in leather apron with his strength and gentleness. I could never understand when I was young, how it was that the old horse shoe was ripped off, the hoof trimmed and pared and the new shoe nailed into place without causing any distress to the animal. Oh, what never-to-be-forgotten sights and sounds and warm distinctive smells emanated from that interesting place with its strange assortment of implements.

Returning home for tea, we would perhaps have a fresh herring, half of one when-

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we were small or maybe the roes on toast, and sometimes it was sprats. Fish was very cheap in that town, as a good deal of it was caught locally. My grandmother used to say that there was as much nourishment in a herring as in a pound of steak. Incidentally, the toast was made by impaling a slice of bread on a long handled fork, and holding it in front of the fire, when one side was done, the bread was turned over and the other side treated similarly. We also had eggs for tea for a change, these came from the hens in the garden. They were kept in a wire netting run with one end enclosed and containing roosting porches and nesting boxes. The whole run was covered over at the top with roofing felt, so that the fowls kept dry. My mother cooked potato peelings and mixed them with bran, so that the hens had one warm meal a day, and this was supplemented with corn, and the outer leaves of cabbages were hung up high in the run so that the birds had to jump to reach them, thus giving them both food and exercise. I hated the smell of those potato peelings being cooked, but they must have tasted good to the chickens, for the mixture was always quickly eaten. Sometimes a broody hen would be put to sit and hatch out baby chicks, we had strict instructions not to disturb her while she was sitting on the eggs, and how exciting it was when the tiny yellow balls of fluff arrived and began chirping. Our hens were always well cared for, and rewarded with a good supply of food. One of my favourite tea items was dripping toast. There was always a basin of beef or pork dripping, and great competition between my brothers and me as to who could get the first dig down into the bottom of the basin to find the juicy tasty brown deposits which lurked there!

My mother was a superb cook, and we were never without an enormous "cut-and-come again" cake of one kind or another, fruit, saedy, coconut, date, ginger, and at Christmas time it would be an extra rich cake which she decorated with a layer of marzipan covered with icing, and completed with a small imitation robin and Father Christmas figure in the centre, with little silver balls or hundreds and thousands arranged and sprinkled round to form a greeting. A home made tissue paper red frill gave a festive finishing touch. When Mum had used all the icing she required, she always managed to leave some in the bowl for us and which we rapidly demolished, and the same with the Christmas pudding mixture. We all had a stir "for luck" and a wish, of this latter preparation, before it was put into the basins, one of which contained a few silver threepenny pieces, and the other after cooking was put away for Easter. I still have some of those threepenny pieces, treasured through the long years, mementoes of those happy times, alas, so fleeting, and not fully appreciated till they were gone beyond recall.

There wasn't much time to do anything after tea, as we were always in bed by seven 'o' clock. Sometimes we would have a game in the street, and as we grew older we had homework to do, but I loved to curl up in the fireside corner with a book, I could ^{read} before I went to school, and there was nothing I liked to do better, so that when my mother said to me as she often did, "Go out and play in the fresh air for a little while, Rosie, you will ruin your eyes with your head always in a book", I thought she was cruel, especially if the weather was at all cold.

After our nightly wash, we could have some milk, or a cup of cocoa and broken biscuits to stay us through the night, if we wanted them. The broken biscuits were the only kind that Mum could afford in that line, and we loved them, there were so many different kinds and flavours. Most of our shopping was done at Lipton's, the World Stores or the Maypole, but all the big grocers in those days, had large tins of biscuits arrayed along the front of their counters, and customers chose what quantity and variety they wanted, assorted, if required, and inevitably many biscuits

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in the process of being served, were broken. These were put into another tin and sold off cheaply, so we had a taste of all.

While on the subject of shops, I must mention the "Penny Bazaar" which existed at that time, and where nothing cost over one penny, a fact which was of great interest to us with our very limited and cherished pocket money. Woolworth's also supplied a wonderful range of goods at threepence and sixpence, it seems incredible now what one could buy for such modest sums.

To return to the matter of food, grace was said before every meal, and at the end we always had to give thanks and ask permission to leave the table.

Once up the "wooden hill", we knelt down by the side of our beds to say our prayers, beginning with "Our Father", followed by "Gentle Jesus", and finishing with "God bless Mummy and Daddy and keep me a good little girl, (boy)". On one occasion when one of my numerous cousins was staying with us, I was quite startled, when after the usual prayers, Peggy burst into loud song, or rather, hymn, and I have never forgotten it,

"Lord keep us safe this night, secure from all our fears,

May angels guard us while we sleep, till morning light appears."

It is, of course, a well known couplet and widely sung, but I had never heard it before, and was completely taken aback at the unexpected solo.

Incidentally, Peggy's mother, Auntie Florrie, was one of those people who "talked the hind leg off a donkey", nobody else could get a word in edgeways when she was around, and Dad used to say, "Just sit still and listen, and she will answer herself given time!" However, she was a very jolly person, whose physical appearance belied her joviality and wit, for she was tall and angular with a bristly chin, though her eyes twinkled mischievously.

After my mother had tucked us up with her goodnight kiss, we younger ones prevailed on our elder brother to tell us a story. When one was finished it was, "Just another little one, Nonnie, please," and being a kind indulgent boy he usually obliged. How he thought of them night after night, I don't know, any more than I know how his nickname originated. I forgot to mention that although we had gas lighting downstairs, we had to go to bed by candlelight in the winter.

On Sundays we were dressed in our best clothes, kept especially for that day or special occasions, and off we went to Sunday School mornings and afternoons in the Wesleyan Methodist Church. We went there because it was much nearer than the Parish Church where we had been christened. The school in its early days was a large corrugated iron structure, but in later years it became a brick extension of the main building.

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We were always very keen to keep up a regular attendance at Sunday School as we were then rewarded with an outing into the country in the summer. I liked going too, for the singing, of which there was an abundance, good hearty hymns with tunes that were easy to learn and with which we were really able to let ourselves go, and enjoy. My first recollection of a Sunday School outing was by horse brake, but with the arrival of the internal combustion engine, this form of transport gave way to the charabanc.

Incidentally, my very first boy friend entered my life in a Sunday School class. Although I played with the local boys in the street, they had never seemed any different to my brothers, but Joe was somehow attractive, possibly because he was on holiday and came from London. This fact alone surrounded him with a kind of aura, magical and remote. London to me at the age of eight was far off and as inaccessible as the moon. I knew it was the capital of the vast British Empire and that the King and Queen lived there in a palace, but to actually meet and be friends with somebody whose home was there as well, was to me a fantastic occurrence! Alas, I soon became disillusioned! While sitting together in class one Sunday, I noticed that his ears were dirty, probably not his fault, but it had the effect of completely shattering any romantic feelings I may have had.

When Joe went home, I had no real regrets, and never saw him again, but there's no doubt he was a smartly dressed little boy with such gentle manly manners. A pity about his ears.

Chapter 3.

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My mother ran her home very methodically, each day having its special chores. Monday was washing day, usually the whole week's wash being done on that one day, but if there was an extra heavy load, the white things were boiled on Monday, and the coloured articles disposed of on Tuesday, though Mum didn't like it spread over two days. She arose extra early on Monday mornings to light the copper fire, all the waste paper, cardboard and anything else combustible was used in the copper, which simply gobbled up the fuel and sometimes needed an awful lot of coaxing. Often I've heard mother say, "Isn't this jolly thing ever going to boil this morning?" What a ritual it was! Each garment was first rubbed through with an extra quota of soap on the most soiled parts, then everything that would stand boiling, would go into the copper with soda, and I seem to remember borax being used in some capacity. When the linen was taken out of the copper, it was rinsed first in two lots of clear water, then put into a bath of blue water, and finally starched if necessary. Quite a number of articles were starched in those days. The washing was then put through a big mangle with wooden rollers, into a large wicker basket and taken outside to be hung. Every garden had its double clothes lines, one low and the other high which had to be hauled up by means of a pulley. It was a fine sight on Monday mornings to see all the top lines billowing out with the snowy linen, the big sheets giving the impression of ships in full sail. Sometimes if there was an extra strong wind and Mrs: So-and-So hadn't pegged her things on very securely, a cry would echo along the little gardens, "Missus, your sheet is down the road, soon be out the beach!" Often another cry would rend the air, "Raining, raining," whereupon there would be a great skamble-skambling to take in the washing, and exclamations like "Oh, drat it, couldn't keep fine a little longer, could it!" and much good humoured banter would be tossed over the walls as the scurrying went on. If the rain persisted, our linen was stretched up high on a line in the wash house.

After dinner when we had returned to school, the cleaning had to be done. The copper top was whitened, the wooden lid scrubbed as were the table top and cover of the coal bunker. Finally the big stone floor was scrubbed. How it was all done by one small pair of hands, I don't know, but when we came home to tea, everything was spick and span, and there was Mum, washed and changed, looking as if she was a lady of leisure. Far from it, of course, for after we were tucked up safely in bed, there was the huge pile of ironing to do, with two old fashioned flat irons used alternately, and heated on the top of, or in front of the fire. To keep the irons clean and smooth, a piece of beeswax could be tied up in a rag and rubbed quickly over the bottom of the iron, and to save the snowy linen from

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being soiled by black marks, the iron could be run to and fro across a piece of wire gauze, if available, failing that, sandpaper. When later, Mum had saved enough to buy a gas cooker, it was a real godsend in many ways; the old black range was taken out and an open fireplace installed in the living room, the middle drawing room and front parlour already had open grates as did the bedrooms.

My mother never bought anything unless she could pay cash for it, and for special occasions such as Christmas, she belonged to a grocery club into which she paid a shilling a week.

There is much talk today of one parent families, but this was commonplace in my childhood and in that town, for with so many fathers away at sea, mothers had to do their jobs as well as their own, and Mum was no exception. She was quite self-reliant, and I have even seen her repairing our boots to keep out the wet. The boys used to have studs called "Blakey's" in theirs, to make the soles and heels last longer.

To my eldest brother fell the task of cleaning our footwear, and on Saturday mornings he always had to polish the spoons and forks, and clean the knives with fine emery paper. Also on Saturdays we had to take the rent money to my father's cousin who owned the house in which we lived, and who resided in a similar house in the next road. She also owned a small tobacconist's shop in the town. We didn't like Aunt Ellen, as we called her, very much, she seemed a grumpy sort of woman, and she had a little black Pekingese dog named "Bogey" which slept on the sofa and was very smelly.

Saturday was the day, too, when we had our weekly penny pocket money, and there was much serious pondering on how to spend it to get the best value! Sometimes to augment our finances, we would save jam jars and when we had about a dozen, would take them to one of the shops who would give us a few coppers in return, or maybe a man with a horse and cart came round the streets and gave us a windmill or some other bauble in exchange for a jar. Rags were also saved and sold for pennies to the rag and bone man, nothing was wasted. Each time my father came home after a long commission, he would bring hand made rugs, or maybe a hand carved picture frame, worked at during the long hours at sea. The big drawback with the rugs was that they were so heavy to shake, but they were cheap, warm and cosy looking, nice for bare feet on linoleum covered floors. Dad was quite adept at designing patterns from the thrums available on board ship, and he was a very good handyman at any sort of job when he was home. He would never ^{admit} say that a thing couldn't be done, somehow or other he accomplished tasks which appeared impossible, seemingly making articles out of nothing, the pity was that he served so much time abroad, when mother could have done with some help.

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CHAPTER
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When we were on holiday from school or on Saturdays, we had various ways of amusing ourselves, other than playing in the street. Sometimes, Mum would find us an old tablecloth or counterpane, past repair, and armed with this, we betook ourselves to the recreation ground about five minutes walk away. There we fixed up the tablecloth along one side of the spiked railings which surrounded the rec: pegging the other sides down into the ground, thereby making a rough sort of tent, which was our headquarters. We would then while away the time with games of our own invention, or perhaps play cricket or rounders on the grass. When we wanted a rest we would cry "Creams"; and partake of the refreshments which Mum had given us, and which usually consisted of a couple of bottles of lemonade made with a pennyworth of powder, and perhaps a slice of cake or a sandwich, and thus fortified, we had more games till we felt loar again, which told us it was time to go home for dinner.

On one side of the rec: there ran the railway line and beyond that the Workhouse or Union. We could see the inmates of this drab place working or walking about, they seemed to us a race apart, and I always felt sorry for the children there in such dreary clothes and penned away from other people. There was one bright spot concerning the Workhouse, and that was a band composed of some of the boys. This was established in 1866, when approximately £30 had been granted to buy musical instruments for the boys in the Home. They used to play once a week on Wednesday evenings during the summer, in the circular bandstand in the rec: and Mum made a point of taking us to hear them, much to our delight and pleasure. When the boys were old enough, they were accepted into the Army as instrumentalists, so saving the Workhouse money.

Some days when we wanted a change from the rec: we ventured further afield, out through the gate at the far end, across the railway bridge and along what seemed to me a most depressing and frightening road, for it was bounded by a cemetery and prison on the left hand, the Workhouse on the right, and at the end the isolation hospital, truly a grim area, but it was the latter group of buildings which scared me most. Imagining the immediate vicinity to be teeming with germs, I always hurried by as fast as I could, my mouth and nose covered with my handkerchief till I was almost stifled. On occasions, the fever van, as distinct from an ordinary ambulance, would come down the road where we lived, to take some unfortunate being away, and this really filled me with horror. I felt sure we would all catch the dreaded illness, as scarlet fever and diptheria were then quite common, and I thought I would surely die if they took me away from Mum. Actually, the only illness I suffered was measles with complications, and this nearly proved fatal, William and I were ill together, but whereas he developed bronchitis with his measles, I had double pneumonia. Most of this

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period is, of course, very hazy, but I can remember that when we had recovered enough to get up, we were so weak we could hardly stand and had to learn to walk again. On our first time out of bed, our dear old family doctor was there, whether by design or accident, I don't know, but he came into the bedroom and pretended he couldn't find us. Mum dissolved into tears, whereupon he said, "Now what are you crying about, they are better!" I learned afterwards that it had been touch and go for me, the doctor had ordered linseed poultices on my back, and my mother couldn't bring herself to put them on hot enough, so the services of a retired nurse, who lived a few doors away, were requested, and she slapped the poultices on so hot that she fetched the skin off my back, but she saved my life, and I still bear the scars of her treatment to this day. It was then recommended that I be given Scott's Emulsion to help my recovery, William was lucky, he didn't have to take this concoction, though we all had another tonic from time to time, called Parrish's Food, this although more palatable had the effect of making our teeth black, so extra cleaning was necessary.

To return to our outings outside the recreation ground; my fears regarding the isolation hospital were needless, and we continued to have our excursions past the intimidating buildings, on by the last few houses to fields and what we called the Shores. One of these meadows was a great favourite of mine, as it was like being in the country, really beautiful with its lush grass and masses of buttercups and daises. Alas! there was a serpent in this garden of Eden, in the shape of a man who seemed to be in permanent occupation of a hut at the far end of the field. To this day I don't know who he was, or why he was there, but he could have been the owner protecting his land, or a hired hand to look after what was probably a hay crop. We always advanced very cautiously into the forbidden territory, but were inevitably spotted by the man, who appeared to be either lame or have a wooden leg, which handicap, though sad for him, was very advantageous for us for we knew that he couldn't catch us. We never got near enough to him to see what exactly his infirmity was, but he always emerged from his hut brandishing a stick and shouting, "Go back, go back", at which we turned tail and fled, though we had meant no harm, merely wishing to wander round the edge of the field and pick a few buttercups and oreyes. Naturally, this man was known to us as "Daddy Go-back". Such is progress, the buttercup and daisy field along with all the others around that area, have long since disappeared under bricks, mortar and concrete, and where the skylarks sang and the blackbirds flew, the cars and juggernauts thunder their never ending way along, but in fancy, I can see the fields as they were, and down the years, the voice of "Daddy Go-back" echoes with his melancholy cry, "Go b-a-c-k, go b-a-c-k."

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Another favourite walk of mine, strange though it may seem for a child, was through the vast cemetery. Being a country lover, the long avenue of trees and in Spring, the crocus lined paths, with all the beautiful flowers displayed, appealed to me. There was also an ornamental pond just inside the grounds and we liked to watch the goldfish swimming therein. Unfortunately, the cemetery was forbidden territory to children unless accompanied by adults, or if one had a bunch of flowers, one was allowed in, presumably these were a kind of passport admitting the bearer to a grave. So we had to find flowers, not always easy, but we usually managed to gather together a bunch of some kind. We might be able to find a few in the garden, and sometimes a kindly neighbour would help us, or we would go for a walk along the "lanes" at the back of the railway nearby, and pick whatever came to hand, clover, yarrow, big white bindweed flowers which were very plentiful, knapweed, hedge parsley, sorrel, and any other species which grew on the waste land. It was surprising what an attractive bunch of blooms we often collected, albeit most of them were what my maternal grandfather called weeds! So thus armed we would march through the cemetery gate, flowers held defiantly high and with pounding hearts, at least mine was, till we successfully passed the man on duty. We were never stopped or turned back, and we did, of course, have a genuine reason for visiting the cemetery, as we wanted to put the flowers on Martha's grave, and we always arranged them lovingly. There was a cross at the head of the grave which my father had made with her name on, also two glass domes with artificial flowers and inscriptions inside, one which said, "Safe in the arms of Jesus" and the other, "Loved by all", as indeed she had been, that sister I can hardly remember.

During the long hot summers which we seemed to enjoy in those days, and when we were home for our holidays, we spent many hours on the beach. This entailed a walk of about two miles, so Mum, who always arose betimes, would pack up sandwiches, cake, and a large cold solid rice pudding made the previous day, bottles of water, home made lemonade and cold tea. This was put into the pram basket, with the baby at one end, and off we would go accompanied by Mrs. Kilner and her children. On arrival at the beach, the prams were pushed down into a position to afford back rests for the two Mums who sat on cushions on the stones. We children had our clothes removed and folded away into the prams ready for the return journey, as clean as when we set out. While on the beach we wore an odd assortment of older clothes and an outlandish selection of "bathing suits" culled from the devil knows where, some too long, some a bit tight, but we were all "decently covered" to go into the water. This never appealed to me very much, I always came out shrammed and shivering, but I did learn to swim.

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Sometimes a magical halfpenny was forthcoming and we had a trip out in a rowing boat, though this nearly ended in tragedy on one occasion. Polly, Mrs. Kilner's middle girl, and about the same age as our William, had already had a ride in the boat, but wasn't satisfied, and when the boat pulled away again, Polly hung on to the stern, the man, of course, couldn't see the small girl, but shouts from his passengers soon drew his attention to what was happening before he got too far out, and Polly was dragged to safety. How we loved those beach days, and how good those great hunks of cold rice pudding tasted!

If the weather wasn't very warm or it was too windy on the beach, we went into a little park not far away from there, and had our picnic. There were seats for the mothers, too. At the end of such days, off we would go on the long trek home, the two Mums pushing the prams, no respite for them, but if we children were very tired and began trailing behind, we were put on a tram. I often think of the many miles my mother must have footslogged to the beach and back, but she never complained, and as she said, she came into a clean house, we were clean and healthily tired and soon in bed, when she could have a sit down, though to be sure, there was always a bit of mending to do.

On some occasions she would take us on a tram to the outskirts of the town where there were fields with a little stream, and now and again we had a ride on the Portsdown and Horndean Light Railway, this was an outing "over the Hill". We caught a tram which conveyed us to the village of Cosham, via North End and Portsbridge, a narrow wooden structure, over the moats which made the town an island. At Cosham we boarded another tram known as the P. and H.L. Railway. This trip was quite an adventure to us. Up the stairs of the tram we would clamber excitedly, the driver "tinged" his bell, and away we'd go! The tram would grind its labourious way up the Hill, past the chalk pits till it reached the top. I was always afraid that the struggle would perhaps one day prove too much for the toiling vehicle, and that we would run backwards and tip over, but we never did, and triumphantly reached the summit, where from then on like an animal released from a restraining leash, the tram cavorted joyously down, down and down through the villages of Purbrook, Waterlooville and Cowplain, eventually reaching its terminus and our destination. It was a very pleasant and pretty ride in those far off days. Alas! how different is that same route now, under the misnomer "progress."

We never actually did much on these visits, just played and wandered about taking in all the country sights and sounds, and breathing in the soft moist air which Mum said was good for us. Maybe we would see a startled rabbit scurrying away to the nearest burrow with a flick of his powder puff tail.

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a pond with tadpoles and fringed around with marsh marigolds, or kingcups as we sometimes called them. There were lush green meadows with fat cattle grazing, and tall friendly trees where the singing birds nested, and the copse fragrant and misty with bluebells, pale primroses and delicate windflowers. Whenever I see cowslips, to this day, fancy takes me back to the child I was in a Hampshire lane. The time always passed far too quickly on these happy jaunts, and we had to make the most of them as they weren't very frequent. With money being scarce, even those very modest fares had to be carefully manoeuvred out of her housekeeping by mother, truly a financial wizard.

The reluctance with which my brothers and I anticipated the return journey was tempered somewhat by the excitement of the actual trip. The tram never seemed to have to make such an effort to climb the Purbrook side of the Hill and when we reached the "George Hotel" on the way back, it was to us the climax of the ride. There we were, perched on the edge of our front seats on the open upper deck of the tram, poised on top the world, nothing but the sky above and the town far below! At that time, of course, I didn't really appreciate the fine panoramic view, and now, to a certain extent, it has been spoiled. A few minutes wait at the "George" to let down and take on passengers, then "Ting-ting" went the bell, off went the brakes, and Wheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee -----, helter-skelter! We clung to the rail on the front of the tram as it rocked, swayed and clanged downwards, ever downwards, with reckless abandon, it seemed to me that we must leap off the lines! I was both thrilled and scared at the same time, and when, as always, we arrived in Cosham quite safely, I don't know which emotion was uppermost, relief at having reached there, or regret that it was over so soon. The rest of the ride home was uneventful and dull in comparison. The "penny bumper" carried us back from whence we had started, and the magic of the day was over, lost in the sameness of all those little back to back houses that made up so much of the town.

So to supper and bed, there to soon be in the "Land of Nod", and "perchance to dream" of the happy hours just spent, the exhilarating ride on the Light Railway, or maybe the fairy folk in Horndean Woods, curled up asleep in the windflowers, which is why they fold their petals at night, -- or so I've been told!

We only ever went on one far away trip, and that is so vague as to be hardly remembered. It was when Dad took us to Birkenhead for the launching of his latest ship. We also paid a visit to a place called Port Sunlight where soap was made, something of a novelty, I was given to understand, as we had a trip over and under the River Mersey. This was long before the road
canal was built, and we went by rail and ferry.

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 My maternal grandparents lived in a village about eighteen miles from our town, and we usually had one holiday annually with them. My grandmother was a tiny, stern but kindly figure, who had raised a large family, and just lived for her husband, children and grandchildren. An indomitable lady, she would rise very early, walk to the village centre, about twenty minutes distant, to clean some offices to help out my grandfather's wage. He worked on the land, a very handsome man with a mass of thick white hair and much be-whiskered, he was also, unfortunately, a victim of that scourge, asthma, and would sit in his straight backed Windsor chair, with a small container burning powder to help him to breathe. Grandmother also acted as nurse and midwife in the village, and was known for miles around to all and sundry as Gran, truly a remarkable woman and whose word was law! Once when I had a very painful ~~whitlow~~ whitlow on my thumb, she cured it by making, and applying, a poultice of a warm cow pat!

What excitement and eager preparation there was for our visit to Gran's, and when the much longed for day of departure arrived and we took our seats in the train, we could hardly contain ourselves. "Faster than fairies, faster than witches, diddly dee, diddly da," we sped along till we eventually arrived at Botley, where if lucky, we caught a branch line to Bishop's Waltham. If we missed the connection, we had to ride on "Shank's pony". This did actually happen once when Dad was with us, Edward had been "scrumping" and we had to walk the four miles to catch the main line train, ^{home} What a miserable journey that was! Edward grizzling all the way with stomach ache, Dad grumbling at him for eating too many unripe apples, and Mum, dear patient Mum, coaxing and encouraging us along, with "Not much further, now, we're nearly there", or drawing our attention to some interesting feature along the way.

Oh, the pleasure of actually arriving at Gran's cottage, and the wonderful welcome which always awaited us. My grandparents could see us coming up the road from the station, as their cottage was in a commanding position, and if the weather was good, the door stood open, and indeed was only locked at night.

We children slept in my grandparent's bedroom, which was roomy enough to take their big double bed, another bed on one side which slept two of us comfortably, and I sometimes shared this with Peggy, if she was staying there. In a recess on the other side was another ^{truckle} bed, which the boys had. I am sure this arrangement would be much frowned on today as being unhygienic, but we never suffered any ill effects, though to be sure one morning at breakfast, Gramp, usually a very quiet man, suddenly gave a loud shout, startling us all, and looking at me, he said, "That's what you did in the middle of the night." They must have been very tolerant souls to put up with so many grandchildren.

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We were awakened each morning by the crowing of cockerels, for of course there were fowls and plenty of new laid eggs. At the bottom of the big vegetable garden, there was always a pig in a sty. This pig was invariably called Dennis, when one Dennis went, another took his place.

Harvest time was a particularly enjoyable experience, at mid-day, Gran took a meal to the field where the work was going on. She would don a large straw hat and sally forth with ~~her~~ a well filled bag of food, which varied from day to day but the most popular seemed to be bread, cheese and onions, followed by a fruit pie, and washed down with a bottle of cold tea and a bottle of ale. "Yer 'tiz, maaster, cum an' get on wi'it" she would call, and the horses were led to a shady spot by the hedge to have their meal, while the rest of us would sit down on the ground in the sweet smelling field. When the men were carting, we were sometimes allowed to ride atop the load, and even hold the reins. How exciting it was when a rabbit suddenly broke cover and made a frantic dash for safety, the boys chasing after it. Secretly, I was always very pleased when it got away, which it mostly did, though we had some wonderful rabbit and bacon pies, as the men were more adept at catching the rabbits, and as long as I didn't see them, it didn't worry me. After the field was cleared of the stocks of corn, we went gleaning, this helped to feed the chickens. Another tasty dish we had was the one made from "musheroons". We had to rise very early, go out into the meadows heavy with dew, and were usually lucky enough to find plenty of mushrooms, which after being prepared, were simmered till tender, then thickened with cornflour, seasoning and Oxo, and what a feast we had, soaking up that thick luscious gravy to the last drop, with a slice or two of bread. Gran was, like Mum, a marvellous cook, and knew how to fill hungry young people cheaply and nourishingly. Never since have I tasted such crusty bread, farmhouse butter, home made jam and lardy cake.

Another activity we enjoyed, was going "oodin" with Gran. Armed with bags and baskets, we wandered along the lanes collecting sere sticks and fir cones for kindling. One particular spot we made for was a big clump of trees, visible from the cottage and which Dad had christened "Dumper's Clump", and this journey made quite a long and pleasant walk.

We always had plenty of companions at Bishop's Waltham as an aunt and uncle lived near Gran's in a cottage at the top of what was known as School Hill, and where there were numerous cousins. Even now when I hear the sonorous notes of a single bell, I can see again the village children straggling up the hill to school. We were never allowed inside my aunt's front parlour, neither were her own children for that matter, it was sacred to visiting adults! One special friend I had there was a girl named Margeety, who came from one of the big houses.

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and one special event stands out in my mind concerning her. She challenged we townies to walk the whole length of a field with a grasshopper in our mouths, and this we did, not without some qualms on my part. We weren't allowed to run, but there was quite a lot of giggling between closed lips, and it was with great relief that we reached the stile on the far side of the meadow! I don't recall whether the poor unfortunate insects survived their ordeal, I was only too glad to get rid of mine. There were always more than enough wasps around Gran's, especially when she was making jam, but they never bothered her, she would let them crawl up her bare arms without being stung, though she did have jars containing a small quantity of sugared water or ale covered with a piece of paper with a hole in at the top, through which the wasps crept in, and drowned in the liquid at the bottom. She used to tell us not to dab at the creatures as it made them angry and then we could get stung, but I was filled with admiration at her bravery towards them. Once she said, "When I have collected enough wasps in my jars, I'll make you a pie, ever tasted wasp pie?" She was joking, of course, but I did wonder at the time, in my innocence, if it was a possibility.

The period after tea when it began to get dusk, was very pleasant at Gran's. They would sit one on either side of the fireplace, the oil lamp was lit and Gran would heat the poker in the fire to mull their glasses of stout or ale, an action which never ^{failed} to fascinate me.

One year we had a very special treat when we were taken to Otterbourne, a small village on the way to Winchester, and where Gramp's brother lived with his son and daughter-in-law. Great-uncle John, as he was known to us, seemed terribly old, but was still spry and active. We made this journey by pony and trap, and when we reached Otterbourne Hill, we all had to get out and walk to enable the pony to climb it.

During the first World War, we saw the "Tommys" marching down the turpiket outside Gran's, and the cottagers came to their doors to cheer and wave. It was during one visit that a message came to say that my youngest ^{brother's} aunt's fiancée had been killed in action in France, he was a local lad. When I think of this sad time, a few lines of a Hampshire poem go through my mind.

"Gone is many a lad and many a horse gone too,
Of all the lads and horses in those fields that I knew,
Like Dick who fell at Givinchy, and Prince beside the guns
On the road to glory, a mile or two from Mons."

A footnote about Gramp, he had all his own perfect teeth even in his old age, yet he never used a tooth brush in his life, but always ate an apple before going to bed.

Chapter 6.

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I suppose we were lucky in the fact that we had four grandparents alive, and indeed they all survived to what is known as a ripe old age. Unfortunately, my father's mother was a real Tartar, and made Mum's life a misery whenever she had the chance. She and my grandfather lived in another part of the town, as did Dad's brother and two sisters, one of whom was married to a sailor and the other to a dockyard "matey". Grandfather was a retired Master Mariner, a dear gentle old man, addicted to always wearing his peaked sea faring cap. Gran was a big handsome woman, very upright and with a commanding manner; Dad said she used to horsewhip him when he was a boy, and being the eldest, he invariably got the blame for any naughtiness, whether it was his fault or not. He started work when he was eleven in a grocery store, but as soon as he was old enough, he joined the Royal Navy as a stoker. We hated Gran's visits, she was so stern, and when she was there, we weren't allowed to do this or that, had to sit like mutes, and on one occasion when I dared to sew a button on my coat on Sunday, I was doomed to everlasting hell fire. Playing cards were the invention of the devil, and later, when we had a gramophone we were not allowed to play it on Sunday. She seemed to always have a special grudge against Edward, a most inoffensive and quiet boy, maybe it was because Mum wouldn't let her have her way over his names. Another thing at which Mum put her foot down firmly, was when Gran wanted to pierce my ears, her own daughters wore earrings and the other ^{grand daughters'} ~~girls'~~ ears were pierced, but Mum was adamant in her refusal, for which I was very grateful.

We sometimes visited one of Dad's sisters, Auntie Maud, a very childish woman, and in our view and vernacular, soppy! However, she was the possessor of a musical box, which both delighted and fascinated us. It was kept locked, but she would play it for us, enjoying the tinkling tunes as much as we did, and as if she was hearing them for the first time; I loved that musical box and could never have enough of it, I suppose because I heard it so rarely. Auntie Maud also had two daughters, a little younger than me, very ladylike quiet girls, and to us, rather old fashioned due no doubt to their mother's attitude and outlook on life.

Grandpa was in the habit of coming to see us every Sunday morning, it was quite a long walk from their house to ours, and he could manage it there and back before "nammit", or one o'clock dinner, as it was then called. Sadly, with his advancing years, he developed an illness, which although still able to visit us, affected him with a trembling of the hands. He would sit on the sofa in our living room, his weather beaten face with its short white beard and tender smile, shaking hands resting on the walking stick he used.

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Once, on one of Grandpa's weekly visits, a terrible tragedy occurred. He had come in with his usual affectionate greeting for my mother, and sweets in his pocket for us. Invariably, he would say, "Where is my little puss this morning, and that broth of a boy?" meaning me and William. This particular day, Edward, who was about three years old, was playing in the washhouse with one of Mrs: Kilner's children of the same age, Lena, by name. They had climbed up on to the top of the coal bunker while Mum's back was turned, she being busy cooking the Sunday dinner; Dad, as usual, was away at sea. Now about a foot above the back of the coal bunker and running the length of it, was a window, casement type, and opening at both ends. The two small children managed to undo one of the latches, Edward overbalanced and fell out right on to a piece of guttering which ran along under the window. The force of the child's fall broke the guttering, causing a large cut in his head. Both children were by now screaming, Mum rushed out into the garden and gathered up the injured boy, "Ma Curr" as we called the red haired neighbour, hopped over the wall between the two gardens at hearing the commotion. Edward's head was pouring blood, so Mum held it under the running tap to try and ascertain the extent of the damage, which did indeed turn out to be considerable, both long and deep. Mum and Ma Curr thereupon set off hot foot to the nearest doctor's, but there being nobody available, went on to the general hospital, about half an hour's walk. Edward's head was cradled in a pillow. Meanwhile, little Lena had run along to her own home, frightened and sobbing to tell her mother what had happened. Grandpa was unable to help much in any way, poor old man, ^{and} ~~but~~ was deeply distressed, but greatly relieved and grateful to Mrs: Kilner when she came along and gave us our dinners. "What a kind woman" was his remark, but I know that had the positions been reversed, my mother would have done the same for her children, and indeed, any of the neighbours would have helped anyone in need.

After dinner, Mrs Kilner said it would be best if we went on to Sunday school as usual, which we did, and when mother returned later, she said that Edward had had to have several stitches in his head, and would be kept at the hospital overnight. Mum was worried very much that a report of the accident would be in the local evening paper and that Dad might see it and fear the worst. However, there was no mention of it and Edward was brought home the next day.. Unfortunately, the stitches in his head turned sceptic and had to be removed, but he gradually recovered, and to this day he still has a great scar, over which he is able to brush his hair, and the wound never affected his brain power, a possibility which my parents feared might happen; in fact, he became the cleverest one in the family, and achieved more than any of us.

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What agonies Mum must have suffered when Edward fell, only she knew, having lost one child, my sister through a fall on the head, and she was always telling us when we were on the swing which Dad had erected in the garden for us, "Be careful, don't go so high", but no harm came from that quarter. I do remember on one occasion when Dad was home and we were going out somewhere; we children were ready and waiting outside for our parents to join us, when William ran into the road and was knocked down by a man on a bicycle, who didn't stop, whereupon my father gave chase all the way down the road, much to our glee, and caught the man. What ensued we never knew, of course, but no doubt Dad gave the man a good ticking off for not stopping to see what injury, if any he had done, though to be sure it was William's fault for running into the road, and he was duly chastised, not with the cane which I can never remember being used, though it always hung horizontally above a long framed picture of "Fry's Chocolate Boys", over the mantel piece in the living room. If we were naughty, Mum would point to the cane and say, "There it is, I can soon get it down if need be." We took the hint, we knew that Mum meant what she said! Firm but kindly discipline was what she successfully practised, and she was ever ready to praise when it was warranted. She had two slogans which she often quoted to us, "Where there's a will there's a way", and "There's no such word as 'can't', if at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

Both my parents were very compassionate people, sometimes when one of us lay awake softly grizzling to ourselves with toothache in the middle of the night, Mum would creep in to us, candlestick in one hand and in the other, some oil of cloves and cotton wool with which to soothe the offending gum, and there she sat with us till the pain eased a little, or we dropped off to sleep, and if we hurt ourselves Dad would say, "I wish I could bear that pain for you, my dear."

One great event of the year was the Trafalgar Day parade, when the Navy really went all out to collect as much money for their charities as possible. What antics those sailors got up to, dressing in fancy clothes, playing barrel organs, and jolly Jack Tar bands rolling round the town. I can only remember Dad being able to take part in this festivity once, and how eagerly we waited at our vantage point till he hove in sight with a collecting bag on the end of a long cane, enabling him to reach over the heads of the crowd for their pennies, and of course, we eagerly dropped ours in. This carnival procession covered all the main roads of the town, those taking part enjoying it as much as the onlookers, for those bluejackets with their skylarking kept people in fits of laughter. "

At this time, that wonderful ship, H.M.S. "Victory", was still afloat, anchored in the harbour, and on a trip over to Gosport in the ferry, one had a very good view of it.

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Another sight which we never seemed to grow tired of watching, were the mudlarks down on the Ward. As we went to board the ferry, there they were down below, wallowing about in the black mud and calling out to passers by, " Penny in the mud, penny in the mud", whereupon people threw coins and the boys dived down into the mud to retrieve them. I should think that those well skilled in this messy art, did quite well by the end of the day. On a few occasions we went over to Hayling Island in a small boat, but we weren't very keen on this outing as it meant an awfully long walk to the boat and back, and if it was the least bit windy, we had sand everywhere, even in our sandwiches.

When Dad happened to be home for Christmas once, he said, "I've got a ^{real} treat in store for you, I'm going to take you all to the Panto". It was a complete surprise and naturally we were very excited at our first visit to a live theatre, and our make believe game of "Balcony Seats " became a wonderful reality, for we went into the Upper Circle. How high up we were, almost to the ceiling, but not quite, for there was another balcony of people above us, this apparently was known as the "gods". In spite of our lofty position, we were able to see and hear everything, though the people on the stage looked rather small, and some of their voices sounded like tinkling fairy folk. The memory of that magical outing with all its fun, lights laughter and beautiful costumes stayed with us for a long time, and no other trip to a theatre ever captured my imagination as much as that first rapturous visit.

One activity we indulged in as soon as we were able to ride a bicycle, was to hire one out and take turns on it for the allotted time. There was a man in the next road who loaned out old boneshakers for three halfpence an hour. Some of these machines were in a very dilapidated condition, no bells, brakes that didn't work, so to stop ourselves, we had to drag one foot along the ground, but we rattled around till the cash ran out. Later on, when William and I were a bit older, we went for long bike rides together, even as far afield as Bishops Waltham and Levant where we had relatives.

We didn't have many pets when we were young, ^{one} of these was a puppy which my mother had given her, it was very pretty and like all puppies quite adorable, we named him "Chum", but alas, we didn't have him long, he caught some doggy disease and died. We also had some rabbits who had a very nice hutch which Dad had made, but sometimes we allowed them to run about in the garden, and then woe betide any stranger who ventured out there, the rabbits would attack their ankles. Once they disappeared for a time, and we thought some ill had befallen them, when lo, and behold one day they re-appeared from a burrow they had made and with them they brought a litter of young, black and white like Ma and Pa !

2.3

Along with other children in the road, we enjoyed elections, partly because it meant a holiday from school as the building was needed for the voting, and also it became very exciting, as, although we didn't really understand what it was all about, we had our favourite candidate, often chosen because we liked his colours, much as in the same way that we hoped a certain college crew would win the boat race. We had a song which we sang at election times, and which, I suppose, was meant to encourage our man, and which went thus: +----

"Vote, vote, vote for "Billy Bingo, (candidate's name)

When he comes knocking at your door,

And if Billy don't get in

We will punch him on the chin,

And he won't go voting any more."

Strange as it may seem, for people who were not well endowed either with money or worldly goods, my parents always voted Conservative, as did most of the folks round about, but there was one exception a few doors away from us. This was a man, a newcomer to the district and dubbed locally a "Labourite", and he worked in the dockyard. He and his wife had two small children, but they never played outside with the other children. When war was declared in 1914, this man did not go into any of the fighting services for some reason, this caused a great deal of resentment and did not make for very good neighbourly relations among the sailors' and soldiers' wives.

24

Chapter 7.

I was only a few years old when the first World War broke out. Dad was serving on H.M.S. "Audacious", and it wasn't very long before this battleship struck a mine off the Irish coast, and sank. Fortunately, there was a Royal Mail steamship in the vicinity at the time, and this picked up survivors, including my father, though, of course, they lost all their belongings.

Thus began four years of worry and dreadful anxiety for Mum, which we were really too young to understand, or able to be of much comfort to her. I used to wonder what "casualty lists" were, which the wives studied and then discussed from the local paper; the horror which the numbers of the killed and missing provoked in that homely little community, as well as in the rest of the world. The rumours, some without foundation, which abounded regarding ships that were supposed to have been torpedoed or mined, and Mrs "So-and-so's" husband or son was aboard. Actually, Mr. Ting, from next door, a Chief Petty Officer in the Navy, was taken prisoner and sent to Germany till ^{the end} of the war, when he came home terribly thin and gaunt, and not enough fat on him "to grease the hinges of a pair of spectacles," as Dad put it.

Personally, I was terrified of the war, having seen pictures of fierce looking Germans in spiked helmets with dreadful bayonets, the Kaiser with his bristling moustachios, and his son, the Crown Prince, commonly referred to as "Little Willy", to some a figure of fun, but to me, part of an awful nightmare. I went to bed thinking that when I woke in the morning the Germans would have landed and captured us all. My mother tried her best to calm my fears, though heaven knows it must have been difficult for her with her man, brothers and brothers-in-law in the thick of the fighting on sea and land, but she said, "Now don't you be frightened of those dirty old Germans, Daddy in his battleship with the big guns will take good care that they don't reach us". (Mum always referred to the "dirty Germans", even in the second World War.)

Dad was now serving in H.M.S. "Canada" which took part in the battle of Jutland. Once when he managed to snatch a few days' leave, and came home quite unexpectedly, he was very angry because we couldn't get any potatoes. He shouted, "What on earth am I fighting for, when my wife and children can't get enough to eat?" He walked all over the town till he found a shop selling seed potatoes, and he signed a paper to say that he had an allotment, and bought some. I suppose he felt justified in telling what he thought was a white lie, as of course, he had no allotment. I was always given the family butter ration during the war. Mum said I just couldn't stomach the margarine, rather hard on the boys, but they didn't seem to mind, or even notice.

When Steven was old enough, he joined the Boy Scouts, and thereafter we often had several of them piling in and out of the house, they helped in some way with the war effort.

Came the great day when hostilities ended, and the world went mad, not the least of these were the people in our road. The whole neighbourhood seemed to gather outside in the street, even though it was November, and till late in the evening we were singing, dancing, ringing bells, banging anything that would make a noise, and a lad called Robbie, one of a large family who lived opposite us, had a bugle which he blew loud and long. Bedtime was forgotten for once, but in the midst of this happy din, the front door of "Mr: Labourite" opened, and out he stormed, demanding to know what the racket was all about and for how long it was going on. He was a brave man, daring to face all those ~~servicemen's~~ servicemens' wives, but they were in a joyous mood, the war was over and their men would soon be home, so Mr: "L" was shouted down good humouredly, "Shut up, get back indoors, mizzer" and so on, and the jollifications continued till we were tired out.

When Mr: Kilner came home from France, I remember Polly saying, "My dad won't kiss any of us, not even Mum, till he's had a bath, because he's lousy!" We thought this highly amusing, and whether this statement was true or not, I don't know, though it probably was.

There was one song which we children sang during the war, in addition to the choruses which the troops marched to, such as "Tipperary", "Pack up your troubles", "Long, long trail", "Mademoiselle from Armentieres" and many others; our speciality went as follows to the tune of "Pretty Red Wing",

"When the moon shines bright on Charlie Chaplin,
His boots are cracking
For the want of blacking,
And his little baggy trousers they want mending
Before they send him to the Bardanelles."

Striking a more serious note, apart from such hymns as "There's a Friend for little children," and "Jesus wants me for a sunbeam?" there was one hymn which dominated my childhood, and naturally enough it was, "Eternal Father, strong to save, Oh hear us when we cry to Thee, for those in peril on the sea." Once when my maternal ^{grandmother} was staying with us for a day or two, she took me to a service held in a hall at the Royal Sailors' Rest, or Aggie Weston's, as it was known, and I've never forgotten the singing, it was wonderful, with good old familiar tunes in which everybody could, and did, heartily join.

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Gran, the Tartar, (my paternal grandmother) hated the sea, which I could not understand, as we always enjoyed ourselves by it, so when I asked her why she didn't like it, she said gruffly, "It is so cruel, so very cruel, and makes widows and orphans." Her attitude was understandable, I suppose, having a husband who was an old salt, and two sons in the Navy. She was also probably prejudiced as she was born and brought up in the depths of rural Hampshire.

If there was a gale blowing and the weather was really foul, my mother would say, "Oh, all those poor men tossing about like cockleshells hundreds of miles from land", but Dad preferred the wind, he said that anything was better than fog at sea. He used to laugh at me when I described a wave as big, and I firmly believe he would only describe the sea as rough if the ship was actually standing up on end! I have always been terrified of going on the sea, though I do love watching it, especially when the huge breakers are rolling in.

Dad had a very rolling gait, and he and Grandpa were really expert at forecasting the weather.

Chapter 8.

96

As stated previously, I must have been a great disappointment to my parents in more ways than one. To begin with, Martha had been a pretty little girl with fair hair and blue eyes, but I was exactly the opposite, extremely plain with no redeeming features that I could see. My hair was dark and lank and Mum took immense trouble every night at bedtime, putting it into rag curlers so that each morning I had shoulder length sausage curls. Needless to say, that if the atmosphere was in any way damp, the curls soon became veritable "rats' tails".

However, I was quite popular and had plenty of friends, my "very best one" being Sylvia, also a very pretty girl with naturally fair hair and blue eyes. She was an only child, much doted on by her parents and so, of course, able to have almost anything she wanted within reason, as did another girl, Betty, who lived a few doors along, but Betty wasn't allowed much freedom, and was very cosseted, her mother, a tiny woman, forever fussing and clucking over her and taking her to and from ballet classes. I have a feeling that Mrs. Howard rather looked down her nose at us, certainly her darling wasn't encouraged to play with us or the Kilner children. I must admit I was sometimes envious of Sylvia and Betty being only children, they seemed to have so much more than I did, as everything in our house had to be shared between the lot of us.

Also among my friends while I was in the "big girls" section of the elementary school, after having automatically "gone up" from the infants', were Edith, Maidie, Ruth and Kathleen, a real beauty, this one, her mother was a big Irish woman. These were my special friends, who, with Sylvia, called for me for school, and who, when we were old enough, went into a separate class with a view to intensive instruction for an entrance examination to Secondary education (not to be confused with latter day secondary modern schools.) There was great competition between Sylvia and I when we had spelling bees, a regular feature in class at that time. We were both very good at spelling, and it was usually a ding dong battle in the eliminating contests which took place, all very good natured fun, we were never jealous if the other won. Mum would greet me with, "And who won the spelling bee today, you or Sylvia?" It was taken for granted that it would be her or me. Not so with needlework lessons, I was the world's worst. I really loathed needlework, the ghastly chemises which seemed to form the basis of our lessons were a nightmare to me. Time and time again I had to unpick what I had done, and invariably I had to take my garment home to be washed because it was stained with specks of blood from pricked fingers and more the colour of a floor cloth than an undergarment. I was hopeless!

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Another subject I didn't excel in was arithmetic, but ^{with} this I usually managed to get by, though I didn't like it. What I really did enjoy and always gained first or second place in when we had tests or examinations, was English grammar, dictation and literature, these subjects came very easily to me.

I must, en passant, pay tribute to the teacher who coached us in the class in preparation for the Secondary School examination. She was a widow, small, very kindly and considerate and completely dedicated to her task; I can still, in my inward sight, see that slight, grey haired figure bending over us, helping, cajoling, gently pointing out some mistake, dinning into our sometimes thick heads, facts and figures, and explaining patiently but firmly what to do and how to do it. I suppose the satisfaction she achieved from all her efforts was in the high number of passes gained.

Came the great day for our entrance exam: All entrants had to assemble in the big main hall of the Girls' Secondary School, where rows and rows of desks and chairs were lined up awaiting us; I felt quite overawed. My seat was about three quarters of the way back on one side of the hall, which position was quite satisfactory till we came to the dictation piece. For this, the headmistress, a tall, elegant but austere lady with grey hair, stood on a platform in the front of the hall and read out an extract for us to take down. I'm afraid the accoustics were not at all good, and the girls sitting right at the back of the hall must have had difficulty in hearing properly as the mistress's voice echoed and was lost on some words. I managed to get every thing down fairly well with the exception of one word, and for the life of me I couldn't decide whether it was 'rolled' or 'rode' which she said, and, of course there was no time to ponder over it, because she was on the next phrase, so I had to guess, and being a born loser, I naturally guessed the wrong word. However, although it lost me marks on one of my best subjects, I thought I had done very well in the dictation, English and literature papers, not so well in the arithmetic. Thanks be, there was no needlework exam:!

Then came the weeks of waiting for the results and much eager scanning of the local paper. Eventually, the lists were out; I had been out to the beach with some of my friends who liked swimming, and on the way home, one of them bought a paper. I couldn't see my name, but Sylvia's, Maidie's and Ruth's were there, but not Kathleen's, though she should worry with her looks! If I had been such an Irish beauty as she was, I wouldn't even have bothered to sit for exams: let alone do all that swotting! I wasn't unduly bothered about not seeing my name in the list of successful candidates, as I was one of the youngest entrants, and could have another try the following year.

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We continued on our homeward way and as we turned the bend into our road, I could see in the distance, my father standing out on the pavement. I knew, of course, that my parents would be once again disappointed in me if the other girls had passed the exam: and I hadn't, but I didn't expect to see Dad waiting for me. "Oh, oh" I said, Dad has seen the results, now for it!" Imagine my surprise when he started walking towards us, his pace quickening the nearer he got, and the pleasure was there for all to see. "You've passed, Rosie, you've passed", he called out excitedly even before he reached us, and there, as he pointed out, but somehow overlooked by us, was my name.

My father was by this time out of the Navy, having been pensioned off after his twenty two years service, he finished as a Chief Petty Officer. When he first came home he was unemployed for three months, in spite of all his efforts, he was unable to get work of any kind, and things were getting desperate. My parents used to go down to the market in the town on Saturday evenings to buy fruit, vegetables and meat which ~~was~~ ^{were} always sold off cheaply at weekends. Christmas was rather bleak that particular year, but thanks to Mum's grocery club and the fact that Dad was able to buy a goose quite cheaply, we had the traditional bird for dinner, I do remember though that the goose had an awful lot of fat on it, which no doubt was the reason for its bargain price.

Eventually, Dad managed to get a job; by sheer persistence, perseverance and making a thorough nuisance of himself, he was given work, rather menial and quite a come down from his position in the Navy, but it was work with a regular wage, which in those hard and troubled times when thousands were on the dole, was really all that mattered, when there was a family to feed and clothe. So we survived and even in the worst period, we never went cold or hungry.

Life now took on a different pattern, with Dad at work all day, but home every evening, Saturday afternoons and all day Sundays, and Steven had a small job which brought in a few shillings, so helping the budget. Dad had a cooked meal when he came home at five o'clock as he had to take sandwiches for mid-day. Mum had her usual baking stint on Sunday morning, but we children now did the washing up after dinner so that Mum could have a rest, and there was no more cooking that day for her. For tea we had such tasty delicacies as winkles, cockles or shrimps, and sometimes "watercreases" as they were called. A man came round the streets with a bell and calling his wares. If it was cockles, a great favourite of my father's, he would first soak them in salt water, ^{to clean them,} then put them on to boil, after which they had to be taken out of the shells, and with vinegar, salt and pepper and bread and butter, they were delicious. The winkles and shrimps were already cooked, of course, and equally succulent.

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Another tradesman who came round the streets with his merchandise was the baker, and once a year ~~he~~ on Good Friday morning, he was extra early. We children would lie in bed listening for his call,

"Hot Cross Buns, Hot Cross Buns,
One a penny, two a penny,
Hot Cross Buns."

There then followed a mad exciting scramble down the stairs, with Dad leading the way when he was home, to catch the man at the door before he got too far down the road. For his usual daily delivery the baker had a horse and closed in cart which he drove from the front, but the milkman had a pony and a lower open cart, which enabled him to step up and down easily to serve the milk. This he did with ladles, measuring half pint and a pint, and which he dipped into the oval galvanised pails, tipping the requested amount of milk into the housewives' jugs. The pails had lids and when not in use the ladles hung down on the inside. Sometimes there was also a churn on the cart, and in the summer our particular milkman always wore a straw hat. Many butchers affected this type of headwear too, and wore blue and white striped aprons.

Good Friday was a very solemn day, no shops were open and no ordinary work was done, and only church services were held, indeed the day was ~~kept~~ as being more sacred than any Sunday. We always had a very plain mid-day meal, the basis of which was salt fish, bought the previous day. Easter Day was much more joyous and we invariably started off with boiled eggs for breakfast and usually had something new to wear.

Two other characters who frequented the area around my home at that time stand out in my mind. One was a tall, very thin pale man, always well dressed, who pushed a small ^{child} ~~man~~ about in a pushchair. He was known locally as "Silly Billy", and he smiled at us in a funny sort of way when we said, "Hullo", but he never spoke. I think he must either have been just simple or suffered some ailment, he was evidently trustworthy enough and had sufficient sense to be allowed out with the child, though some adults debated the point. The other person I remember was a kind of tramp, not a diddyki, for he was a loner and was often seen in the "lanes" running between the Workhouse grounds and the railway lines. We sometimes went up on to the ^{foot}bridge over the railway to watch the trains chuffing out of the station on their different, and to us, exciting and mysterious journeys to far away places which were just names on a map to us. It was usually when we went up there that we saw "Lousy Luke" as we christened him, like us, he watched the trains and the shunting of goods trains too, of which there was a great deal, but we always gave him a wide berth for obvious reasons.

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So the day dawned when with new satchel over my shoulder, I started at the Girls' Secondary school. My friends and I were mostly split up into different classes according to the position in which we passed the entrance exam: The first five girls had free scholarships, but as I wasn't one of these, my parents had to pay fees. Then there were books etc. to buy, and the school uniforms which were compulsory, consisted of Navy blue gymslips and knickers, white blouses, with panama hats for summer wear, Navy blue felt for winter, and Navy coats or macs: The hats had the school crest on the bands, and we had to have our hair either short or tied back.

It was the hats which led Sylvia and me into trouble one day. We had just come out of afternoon school, pleased to be free, although we both enjoyed lessons. Once outside the gates, we snatched off our headgear and with these dangling and swinging from our hands by the elastic, we started on our way home laughing and skipping along, when suddenly a figure loomed up in front of us and like the voice of doom, in stark tones came the words, "Are you two of MY little girls?" There before us looking frighteningly tall and austere at such close quarters, we were petrified to recognise the Headmistress. As we stammered out an affirmative reply, she said, "Then put your hats on, behave yourselves, and walk along properly as befits two young ladies from my school." I wished the earth would open up and swallow me, but we did as we were told, and crept ^{sheepishly} away, all high spirits firmly subdued under that stern gaze.

We soon found that our new school was different in many ways to our old homely elementary, for one thing there were hundreds of pupils and so it was much more impersonal. We had a different mistress for every lesson, and there were several ~~extra~~ subjects in the curriculum, such as mathematics, science, botany, and French. This was taught by a genuine Mademoiselle, dark and vivacious, given to much gesticulation, and quick tempered if she couldn't make herself understood at once, but I enjoyed her lessons and trying to learn the language, though I could never fathom out why inanimate objects had to have masculine or feminine genders!

For Art classes we had a master, a small cheerful witty man with a moustache and very twinkling eyes behind his spectacles. I would hazard that they had plenty to twinkle at with some of our efforts, but I usually did very well in Art exams: finishing in the first five places.

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The gymnasium I did not like at all, which was rather surprising, having been considered a tomboy since I was quite small, but I hated rope climbing and the wall ladders, also somersaulting and vaulting, though I found netball an exciting and exhilarating game. Tennis I did not play, as funds would not run to the equipment and outfit, required.

As a reward for passing the entrance exam to the Secondary School, my parents had bought me a piano, second hand, of course, but nevertheless quite a nice one, and which I have to this day. I was very keen to be able to play, and had a lesson once a week from a quiet ladylike teacher who lived nearby. This went on for two years and I practised regularly, but then my father began grumbling at the practise, especially scales, which he said sounded as if I was treading on the piano, and so I had to stop. As it was futile trying to learn when not allowed to practise, I gave up lessons. To be fair to my father, I can understand that after a hard noisy day's work, he wanted some peace and quiet in the evening, and in that small house, one could not get away from the sound, and evenings were really the only time when I could practise properly, week ends were no better, as he was home most of the time, so that was it. I did play when, and what little, I could, and sometimes I went across the road to visit an elderly lady who lived there and who had a small organ. Mrs: Breen liked me to have tea with her occasionally, "give her a little tune" as she put it, and have a chat, and I usually went home with some small delicacy. She lived alone, a very superior lady, who asked Mum on several occasions if she would allow me to go over to her house to sleep, but my mother would never consent to this arrangement, I don't know why, I suppose she had a good reason.

I would dearly have liked to have had singing lessons, as I had been told that I had a very good voice, but the budget wouldn't stretch to this. Since reaching maturity, I marvel at all my parents achieved on their small income, they must have denied themselves in many ways to pay for everything, nothing was ever owed for, and to them, getting into debt was a cardinal sin.

I did take part in a school play on one occasion, and was given the character of Captain Hardy to Lord Nelson. Parents were invited to the performance, and though there were plenty of mothers present, Dad was the only male visitor. I don't know how he felt in the company of hundreds of girls and women, but he took it in his stride, and was very pleased with me as I was congratulated on my every word being heard, and when the Headmistress thanked him personally for being the only father there and for showing such an interest in the school's affairs, I felt proud and gratified.

32
(copy)

My favourite reading matter at this period in addition to the classics which we read at school, were books by one, Angela Brazil, with such titles as, "Harum Scorum Schoolgirl", "Headgirl at the Gables", "The Fortunes of Philippa", etc; and the magazines I most enjoyed were, "The Schoolgirls' Own", and The Childrens' Newspaper. "I devoured these publications eagerly every week, the trouble was that I read them so quickly and even a thick ^{book} lasted no time.

I think my parents were rather disappointed that the school syllabus did not contain a course in typewriting and shorthand as they were hoping I would be able to take a secretarial post when I left school, though my own ambition was to teach.

Soon after starting at the Secondary School, I was made aware of the facts of life. Sylvia said to me one day, "You know that girl who serves in so-and-so Post Office, well, she is going to have a baby and she's not married." This didn't mean much to me except that I thought there had to be a Mister and Missus, that is a mother and father, before there could be any children. In retrospect, it seems incredible that at that age, eleven, I was quite ignorant of anything to do with birth. I knew, of course, that my brothers were made differently to me, but had never thought much about it, as it was something I had always been used to, and put it down to the fact that they were boys. I had seen dogs performing in the street, but thought they were playing, and in fact had been told by one of the other children that they were giving each other a "piggy-back", as we mis-pronounced the word, "pick-a-back". So when I arrived home that day, I quite innocently told Mum what Sylvia had said, she coloured, looked rather embarrassed and replied quickly and rather vehemently for her, "Well, then, all I can say is that she is a very naughty girl", meaning the Post office girl. No more was said and no explanation forthcoming as to why the girl was naughty, but soon after, the eldest Kilner girl, told us ^{that} about a certain Mrs: Cranmer, who lodged with her Gran in the same road, was expecting a child, and Nellie Kilner knew all the details of procreation. Up till then I had believed in the story of the doctor and his black bag, and thought that mothers had to stay in bed with a new baby to keep it warm. So when I heard the true facts of the matter, I felt disgusted and horrified, sick, would be a more apt description. I just could not associate my dear, lovely Mum with what seemed to me an absolutely degrading act, so I blamed my father, and saw him in an entirely new and very unattractive light. However, I didn't say anything to anyone about what I had learned regarding birth and how it came about.

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About six months later, when I was just over eleven and a half, I learned that another addition to the family was imminent, and I really hated and resented his coming now that I knew the facts behind it. For another thing, it meant yet another mouth to feed and body to be clothed. More than ever did I envy Sylvia and Betty for being only children of doting parents. My mother had always treated us all alike with great fairness, but the new boy was looked upon by my father as if he was the only child ever born. During my mother's confinement, we had a woman to come in to get us off to school and see to meals for us all. How I detested that grim misery of a woman and the awful lumpy porridge she served us with for breakfast, and it heightened the grudge I was feeling against Dad and his precious son. Incidentally, Dad's attitude towards this boy never changed throughout the rest of his life, he could do no wrong, and even when in the fullness of time he grew up, was married and had children of his own, they were marvellous in my father's eyes. I can only think he looked on this last child as something special because he hadn't really seen the rest of us growing up, but now he was at home all the time and could watch every small development and there was plenty of spoiling and pampering. The only quarrel I ever saw my parents have, was over this boy. Mum had cause to correct him for being naughty and this Dad wouldn't allow. He seized Percival away from her and shouted that she was not to smack his baby. Now my mother, poor dear soul, had brought up the rest of us virtually single handed without any trouble, and naturally was very upset at the way Dad carried on, so she put on her outdoor clothes without a word as to where she was going or how long she would be, and off she went. We other children were frightened that she might not come back, but she did, of course, and all was well again, but things were never the same. The happy life we had known when Dad was in the Navy and only a casual visitor, gradually changed. He became frustrated and bitter about his job which was hard and took him out in all weathers, and apparently he had to endure snags and sneers of resentment from his fellow workers because he received a Naval pension. He was increasingly irritable and short tempered and difficult to live with, and one episode stands out in my mind which heightened the positive dislike I was beginning to feel towards him. It happened like this.

Just after tea one day when he was sitting reading his evening paper, a knock came at the door, and I answered it, holding my baby brother in my arms, Mum, as usual, was busy, clearing away after the meal. The person confronting me was a girl from my class at school, who lived in the next road. I was surprised to see her as we were not friends and had hardly ever exchanged more than a few words when necessary at school.

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I was at a loss as to why she had called on me till she explained that she seemed to have copied her homework down wrongly, and as I lived near, had come to ask for the correct version. Just as I was explaining to her, my father suddenly ^{descended} on us, and in a terrible voice demanded to know what I was doing and why I was standing at the open door with his baby son. He was really furious, and shouting at me to "Get Inside at once", slammed the door in Letty's face. Never had I before felt, or been, so humiliated and upset, and in front of that particular girl of all people! To this day, well over half a century later, I still feel the shame he made me experience every time I saw Letty Brock, and I imagined her standing in the middle of a group of her cronies, telling them about the rude uncouth man who was my father. At the actual time of the incident, I felt like throwing the boy at him and shouting back at him, "There's your precious brat, keep him," and of course, it didn't exactly engender any love towards the baby, whom I already disliked.

There was another very frightening occurrence when Percival was quite small. Dad had come home from work as usual, and was sitting at the table with us waiting for Mum to bring in the meal which she had been cooking at the gas stove in the wash house. The communicating door was shut, and we waited and waited, but nothing happened. Eventually Dad called out, "Do you want any help?" Anne, then as no reply was forthcoming, he went out to see why, and found Mum on the floor in a pool of blood, she had had a haemorrhage. The doctor was sent for immediately and Mum had to stay in bed for a few days, but fortunately it was nothing serious and she was soon her old cheerful self again. I suppose on that particular day, she had had an extra heavy work load, it was washing day, and with that and the baby and us, it was all too much for her. She was a very brave person, and never gave in to aches and pains. I remember on one occasion, when Dad was still at sea, she had been bothered by toothache, as we learned afterwards, and when we came home from school, she greeted us with the words, "Well, those jolly things won't trouble me any more," and she had been to the dentist without a word to anybody, and had the teeth out, no fuss or bother, though she must have felt more like lying down for a few hours, than having to set to and get tea for, and put children to bed. I don't think I have ever met anyone more unselfish than my mother.

When Steven was 16 years old, he joined the Navy as a junior canteen assistant, till such day when he was eighteen and could sign on properly. So the first one left home and the inevitable breakup began. He still came home for leave periods, bringing us unusual gifts from the foreign places he visited, but, of course, he now considered himself a man, with a man's interests, and we were still just "kids".

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However, I felt a little bit more grown up, as when I left the ~~elementary~~ elementary school, I had been allotted the small front parlour as my own bed sitting room, being considered now too old, and it was hoped, more, ladylike, to share with the boys, especially when the extra one arrived.

So the days and weeks went by and then came a rather unexpected development. ~~William was sent to~~ ^{I had been at} the Secondary School for just over a year, when William, who was fifteen months younger than I, began asking my parents if he could go away to a school, where one of his friends had gone. This school in Greenwich, had originally been founded by William and Mary in 1694, and was intended as a home for Naval pensioners and to "provide for the maintenance and education of children of seamen killed or disabled in sea service". Over the years, of course, many aspects of the school had changed, but boys wishing to enter, still had to be the sons of seamen or Naval pensioners.

Now my parents didn't really want William to go away from home at such an early age and they ~~tried~~ ^{tried} to dissuade him from the idea, but he would not be deterred, and eventually Dad wrote to the authorities, with the result that William was accepted, and soon after he was eleven years old, off he went, so the second fledgling left the nest. What a shock we had when he came home on his first leave, he looked so different and small in uniform, and his hair had been cropped as close to the scalp as possible, in accordance with the rules of the school, where discipline was very strict and life quite tough, I believe.

We always knew what to expect for dinner on the days when William came on leave, and returned, it was invariably steak and onions as that was his favourite meal. On one occasion when he was home, there was quite a spot of bother when he was caught smoking a cigarette with another boy. The policeman who discovered the culprits asked them where they had bought the cigarettes, and on being told, escorted them to the corner shop where the owner was very upset and said she didn't realise that she was committing an offence. She knew the boys, of course. The next call by the constable was at their homes, and my poor mother was frightened out of her wits in case the misdeed was reported and William would be in trouble. Mum told me to run down the road to meet Dad on his way home from work to tell him what had happened and ask him to call in at the police station. However, the incident blew over, nothing more was heard about it, but at the time, the fuss was so great that one would have thought that at least the boys had committed murder!

William stayed at this school till he was old enough to go on to another training establishment in Suffolk, and from there he joined the Navy as a man.

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Meanwhile, I had been plodding along at school, which I liked very much, but when I had been there for just over three years and was a little over fourteen, I had to leave as my parents couldn't afford the fees to enable me to go on to further education. Naturally, I was very disappointed as I saw my ambition to become a teacher shattered, and I felt that the money already spent on fees, books, uniform etc: had really been wasted. Also, all the hours of effort, homework, swotting to pass exams: of learning subjects which were to be of no use whatsoever to me in my future life, had all been of no avail. The first job I had, I could have taken with an ordinary elementary education, as I became a junior assistant in a large store, the only small satisfaction gained was the wage of a few shillings weekly, which I was proud to give Mum to help with the family budget.

So ended my childhood as I took my first tentative steps into the sad disillusionment of the adult world, just how sad and disillusioning I would not even in my wildest dreams have guessed.