Two Novels
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CHAPTER IX

REBELLION

IT WAS queer, the stillness. It crept over the room like a fog. The tension of waiting for a word to burst it, made it hard to bear. It soughed in waves and beyond them, thin, electric, came the rumble of wheels that linked hope up to life. When the wheels ceased the silence pricked needle points into bare flesh.

“I’m falling. Falling into an abyss.” But that was just speech because the shock of the fall never happened. There was never the unconsciousness that must wait at the bottom of the cliff.

“When I’m grown up I shall be free.” But there was no freedom. Only an invisible but actual clutch of circumstance that wove grey chains back and forth across her limbs and mind, a chain... no being a cabin boy, no miracle of release happening, no great book, no liberty, no friend, no hope.

“I do like Mallarmé. I can’t help what people write. If he is old-fashioned. Idumenée is beautiful and lines from the “Faune.” It is like that purple-blue flushed with wine colour of ripe plums, like the gold
plums where the skin tears. If only somebody would speak to me about these things. I want someone with a mind. And Régnier. Julie with her feet among the rose leaves. And ‘fleur hypocrite, fleur du silence.’ Words, like flowers, brushing across my brain.”

It was her own fault for making no move but how could she explain her world? It would be terrible if they did not understand. They would not understand. Terrible if she had to fight. That evening, seven years before, “I must go to an art school.” “You are too young to paint. We want you to have companionship of your own age.” If she said she wanted freedom people might come in from the street and lock her up.

Escape. How was one to escape? The girl round the corner had tried to get away. They had shut her up. With two nurses. Told her friends she was ill. The illusion of liberty had been stript from her. She was shut away because she wanted to be free.

One heard these things even if one did not go about. One knew, bafflingly, inevitably, the chances against one.

Escape. Romance. To go down the street thinking one’s own thoughts . . . a romance impossible. “Yes, it would be nice to go to tea with Mrs. Hearth. No, the country is pleasanter now than London.” Lies, all lies. No rescue. No hope. Oh, God, no hope. Beauty written in the sunset. Do you see that cloud there, like ripe grapes? The girl in the next street kept in her bedroom with two nurses, because she wanted to be free.
TWO SELVES

“I’m living in a prison. How long my sentence. Have I not earned my release?” Say that to people and see what would happen. Tears. Threats. “How can you be so ungrateful?” If only people would not care about one. Not be kind. Hell, life was awful.

It was not that one hated . . . it was not . . . it was only that one was twenty three and wanted to think one’s own thoughts. They might guess if one thought one’s mind out in the street. If she faced the thing she was afraid people might come in from the street and shut her up. If she went out one night alone would they follow, say she was mad, ill, drunk and shut her up?

Marriage. Girls married to escape. But she hated men. And to cut the knot that way was playing the game wrong. It was to create the same situations over again. And when people married they had children. That was awful. Awful to drag a child into the world to fight one’s beastly fights over again. Better die first, any day.

If she had been a boy life would have lain at her feet.

It was not the year that was so long; it was the hour. These indefinite days when nothing happened, were they youth? She waited opportunity but would it ever be granted her? Why was she forced to desire unconsciousness when her spirit cried for consciousness? The hour . . . the hour so long.
REBELLION

“All I have known of youth, all I may ever know, I bring. Are my dreams, life, as nothing in your eyes? I have given you my strength, my wishes, my desire. It was for you I watched dawn rise, for you. It was for you I learnt. I wait as the wind waits that shakes in the pines.”

The prayer of her loneliness must call a heart from the street to keep her from despair.

“You are younger than any future.”

Not a sound tore the tense longing of her imprisoned thought.

“No more, no more.” Yet her mind would not break. Why was she denied madness, unconscious madness? She listened. Her ears strained till to feel was simply to hear. A step on the stair. Yet the door never opened.

“Grant me adventure or grant me death.”

Her flesh shrank from the myriad points of the silence. If only her mind would snap. “Adventure . . . death . . .”

Life made no answer.