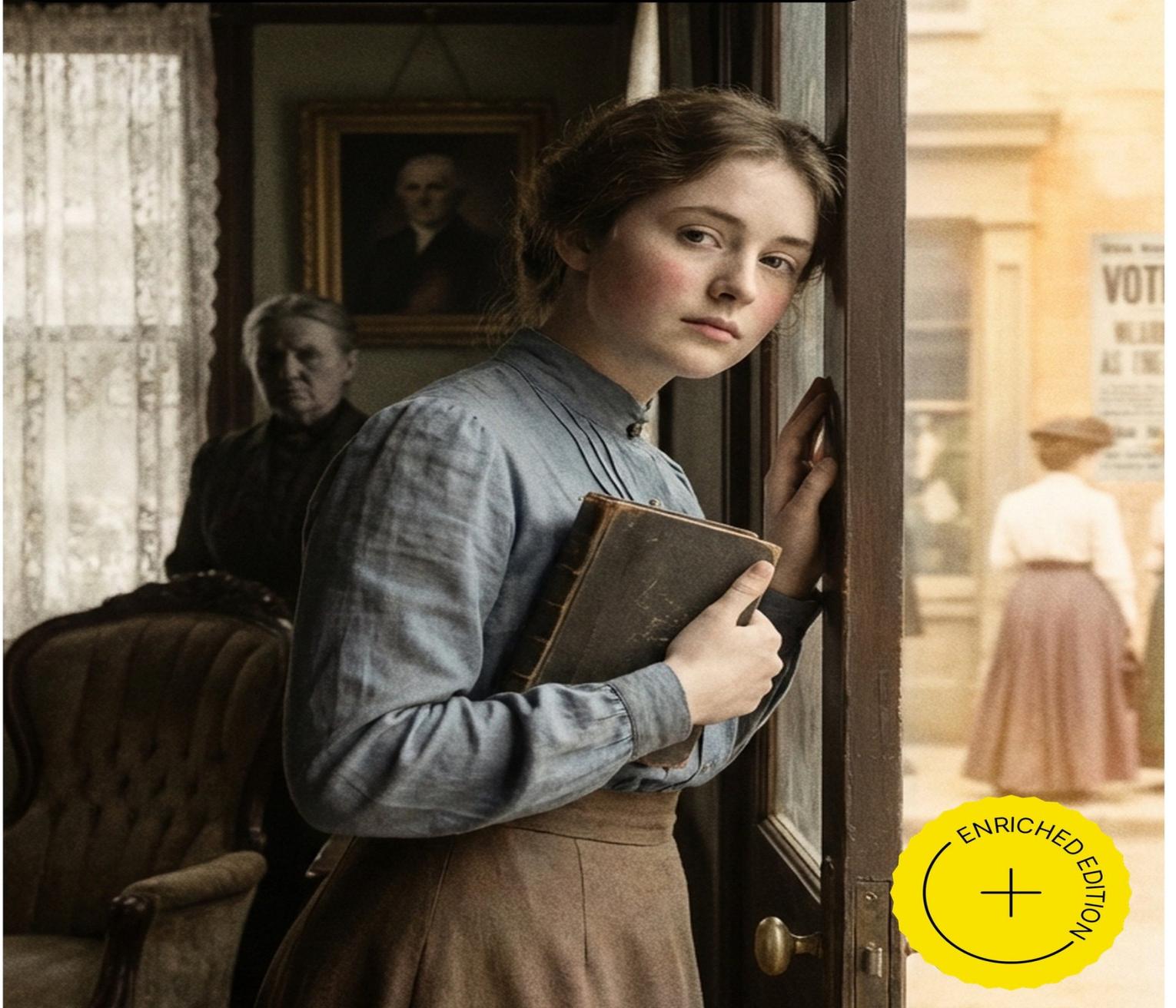


**FLORENCE MORSE
KINGSLEY**



**TRUTHFUL
JANE**

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**TRUTHFUL
JANE**

Florence Morse Kingsley

Truthful Jane

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Jackson Price

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CHAPTER I

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Miss Jane Evelyn Aubrey-Blythe stared steadily at the toes of her damp, shabby little boots which peeped out from beneath the hem of an equally damp and shabby gown, her youthful brows puckered thoughtfully over a pair of extraordinarily bright, long-lashed hazel eyes. Miss Blythe, was for the moment, feeling very much out of it, and consequently very unhappy.

The room in which she was sitting, drying her damp boots and petticoats by a smoldering fire of logs, was a sufficiently cheerful one, its two large windows commanding a wide view of red-tiled London roofs and glazed chimneys, all of which glistened wetly in the dull light of the late afternoon. For the rest, the red Turkey carpet[2] was badly worn in spots; the chairs presented the appearance of veterans staunchly surviving a long and stormy career; while the two small desks piled with dog-eared school-books exhibited tokens of strenuous usage in the shape of ineradicable ink-stains, which served to diversify the cuttings and carvings of inexpert jackknives, stealthily applied.

At opposite sides of a table in the center of the room two small boys in knickerbockers[1] were actively engaged in a competition in which large china mugs of milk and water, and thick slices of bread and butter and jam figured conspicuously.

"You'd better come to your tea, Jane, before we eat all the bread and butter," advised one of the boys thickly.

"I don't want any tea, Cecil; and you shouldn't talk with your mouth full; it's very rude[1q]," replied the girl tartly.

"You'll get no dinner, you know, because there's company," observed the other boy, slamming his mug on the table. "Old Gwendolen won't have you down because you're so much handsomer than she is."

Jane turned a distractingly pretty profile toward the speaker, a slight smile dimpling the corners of her mouth. "You oughtn't to say such things, Percy," murmured the girl—"though I dare say it's true enough," she added plaintively.

The two boys, having variously disposed of the thick slices of bread and butter, were now causing startling explosions to issue from the depths of their mugs.

"Put down your mugs this instant!" ordered Miss Blythe sternly. "Haven't I forbidden you to make those disgusting noises in your milk?"

"You have—yes," admitted Cecil coolly, as he sent his empty mug spinning across the table; "but who cares for you, anyway! You're only a poor relation!"

With a smothered howl of rage the smaller Percy arose from his place and fell upon his brother, who received the attack with practiced courage, while Miss Blythe resumed her moody contemplation of her steaming boots.

"You're a cad!"

"You lie!"

"You're another!"

"Ouch!"

"Leggo!—Leggo, I say!"

The tugging and panting of the small combatants, and the scuffling of their stout little shoes on the threadbare

carpet, quite drowned the slight sound of the opening door.

"Cecil—Percy—*my sons!*" exclaimed a voice.

Jane Blythe shrugged her slim shoulders wearily in anticipation of what was to follow.

"I am surprised and displeased, Jane, that you should permit such a disgraceful scene to take place in the school-room without even attempting to quell it," went on the lady, advancing majestically into the center of the floor. "What do I see?—bread and butter on the *floor*, on the *sofa*, on the—yes, actually, *on the mantle!* and *milk*— Really, Jane, I fear you sadly forget your duties at times."

Miss Blythe had risen, apparently that she might bring her bright hazel eyes more nearly on a level with the frozen blue ones behind the double glasses which pinched the lady's aquiline nose.

"I don't forget my duties, Aunt Agatha," she said distinctly; "but I think you have forgotten to pay me for them."

"What do you mean, ungrateful girl?"

"I mean that if I am to perform the duties of a nursery governess[3] in your house I should be paid regular wages the same as the rest of the servants. My shoes are worn through the soles, and I need—everything. Even Parks dresses better than I do. She can afford to."

A dead silence followed this clear statement of fact. The two small boys were sulkily regarding their mother from beneath their light lashes, who, in her turn, attempted to quell the militant light in the eyes of the girl.

"How—*dare* you say such a thing to me!" cried the lady at length. "And before the children, too! You may come to

me in the library to-morrow morning, Jane, when I am examining the accounts. I will talk with you then. In the meantime"—Lady Agatha Aubrey-Blythe paused to draw her rustling gown more closely about her tall figure—"I would advise you to reflect on the fact that when you were entirely alone in the world, *helpless* and *penniless*, I took you into my house and cared for you like—like——"

Jane Blythe laughed aloud. It was a dreary little sound; somehow it caused Percy to clench his small fist and draw a little nearer to his cousin.

But it appeared to enrage the lady. Her patrician countenance assumed a peculiar, sickly, mottled pink colour. "To-morrow, at ten, in the library," she said coldly. "And, Jane, as Parks will be occupied with my toilet, I should like you to assist Gwendolen. You may go down now. Susan will put this disgracefully untidy room to rights. Cecil and Percy, you will go to bed at once—*at once!* do you hear?"

"Yes, mother," piped the two small scions of the house of Aubrey-Blythe in a respectfully subdued chorus. After which they proceeded to thrust their agile tongues into their red cheeks and bulge out their round, blue eyes behind their maternal relative's august back as she turned to leave the room.

"You'll catch it to-morrow, Miss Jane—at ten—in the library!" opined Master Cecil sagely. "I'll bet she'll smack you with the ruler."

"Hold your tongue, Cecil, and come on to bed!" bawled Percy, "or you'll be the one to get smacked with the ruler."

Miss Blythe had walked over to the window and was looking out with unseeing eyes into the gathering dusk.

"It is true," she told herself forlornly. "I am poorer than any of the maids in the house. I hate it! Oh, how I *hate it all*!" She wiped away two or three rebellious tears on a grimy little pocket-handkerchief.

A servant had entered and was somewhat noisily gathering the empty dishes onto a tray. "I see you've 'ad no tea, miss," she observed kindly. "Shan't I toast you a bit o' bread at the fire an' fetch some more jam?"

"No, Susan, thank you; I must go down now. But you're very kind to have thought of it."

Jane's smile was beautiful, and the warm-hearted Susan, for one, appreciated it. "They'd orto to be 'shamed o' theirsels," she observed vaguely to the tea things, as the girl closed the door softly behind her. "An' she's pretty's a pink, an' that sweet-mannered! She'd orto marry a r'yal dook, that she 'ad; an' dress in di'mon's an' satings!"

Susan was in the habit of solacing herself with yellow-covered romances in the scant leisure stolen from her duties as housemaid, and of late Miss Jane Evelyn had figured as the heroine of everyone of these tales in the honest damsel's rather crude imaginings.

As Miss Blythe passed down the dimly lighted staircase on her way to her cousin's room, she was startled to the point of uttering a slight scream by a dark figure which darted out upon her from behind a tall suit of armor stationed on the landing.

"O Reginald!" she exclaimed, "why will you play such baby tricks, now that you are nearly grown?"

"'Nearly grown,' indeed!" echoed the tall youth in a displeased voice. "I am grown. Look at me—away over your

head, Miss Jane! I say, give us a kiss, will you?"

"No, indeed, I'll not! Get out of my way directly. I'm in a hurry!"

"Oh, no, you've lots of time to talk to me," chuckled Reginald, planting his ungainly figure directly across the stair. "And you'll not go a step farther till you've paid toll. Do you know, Jane, you're growing deucedly pretty—upon my word!"

"Impudence!" cried Jane sharply. "If you don't let me go this instant I'll call your mother."

"If you do that," drawled the boy, wagging his head threateningly, "I'll tell the mater you were trying to kiss me. Then you'd catch it; she'd believe me every trip."

By way of reply to this taunt Miss Blythe reached up and dealt the tall youth a stinging slap on his beardless cheek.

"Tell her that a girl cuffed you, too, baby!" she retorted, and slipped past him like a shadow.

"I'll pay you out for that, miss! See if I don't!" threatened Reginald. But Jane was safely out of sight and hearing, too.

The tall girl seated before a dressing table, carefully inspecting a rather rough and muddy complexion by the light of two wax candles, turned frowning eyes upon Jane as she entered the room.

"Where have you been keeping yourself, slow-poke?" she inquired crossly. "Don't you know I'll be late if I don't make haste?"

"You'd better make haste then," advised Jane coolly, advancing with her hands behind her back. Her usually pale cheeks were flushed to a lovely pink by her triumphant escape from Reginald; her brown hair, ruffled into crisp

waves, fell about her brilliant eyes. "What do you want me to do, Gwen—hook up your frock?" she added carelessly.

"I want you to dress my feet first, and be quick about it, too," replied Miss Gwendolen haughtily. "No; not those pink stockings!— I've decided to wear all white this evening. The open-work silk ones, stupid! What is the matter with you, anyway, Jane? You're as red as a lobster."

Jane's little hands trembled as she pulled the designated hose from a pile of party-colored ones in the tumbled drawer. "Here are your stockings," she said briefly. "Which shoes do you want?"

"The white suede with straps; they're the freshest—and do make haste!" replied Gwendolen impatiently.

Jane set the large, white, high-heeled shoes down on the floor beside her cousin's chair with a loud thump.

"Well, aren't you ever going to put them on?" demanded Miss Gwendolen, kicking her satin bedroom slippers half across the room.

"No; I'm not. You can put them on yourself," said Jane deliberately. "Why should I put on your shoes and stockings for you, Gwendolen? You never put on mine for me—do you?"

Gwendolen stared at Jane's rebellious face in silence. She was a dull girl, and it took her some time to understand what Jane had really said to her.

"Why, why—" she stammered, "you have always done as you were told before, and—I'll tell mother," she added, an ugly frown distorting her face. "She'll not allow you to be impertinent to me, you know."

"It is quite impossible for me to be impertinent to you, Gwendolen," said Jane, drawing up her little figure superbly. "One cannot be impertinent to one's equals. I'll hook up your frock for you, if you like, because you are my cousin, and I ought on that account to be willing to be civil to you. But I won't put on your stockings and shoes for you, so you may as well begin."

Gwendolen stooped and drew on her stockings in sullen silence; then she put on her shoes. "I'll tell mother," she repeated stupidly.

"You may tell her if you like," said Jane airily. "And you may tell Lady Maybury that you haven't sense enough to pull on your stockings straight, if you like. I don't care."

Gwendolen looked actually frightened; she peered into her cousin's face with her ugly, shortsighted eyes. "What *has* come over you, Jane?" she asked anxiously. "Oh, I do believe you've got a fever and are out of your head! Get away from me—do! Suppose it should be smallpox, and I should catch it—oh! Go away—quick! Ring the bell for Susan as you go out. She can hook my frock, and——"

Jane pirouetted out of the door like a sprite. "Thank you, Gwen!" she cried mockingly. "Yes, I fancy I have a fever. But you'll not catch it, you poor, dear, stupid thing, you!"

Then she darted up two flights of stairs to her own cold little room under the roof, where she flung herself face downward across the narrow bed and wept tempestuously.

"O God, *please* let me go away from this house!" she prayed between her sobs. "I've been good and patient just as long as I possibly can. Things will *have* to change!"

The girl was truthful—even with herself—even with her Creator**[3q]**.



CHAPTER II

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Jane Aubrey-Blythe was not in the habit of weakly shedding tears; nevertheless on this occasion she wept herself into a state of somnolence like a whipped child, when she lay quite still, her handkerchief rolled into a tight, damp ball, her limp figure shaken with an occasional recurrent sob.

"They are all too hateful," she murmured brokenly. "I wish something would happen—anything; I don't care what."

As a matter of fact, something did happen almost immediately. As Jane was sleepily pulling the blankets about her chilly shoulders, Susan's honest face, shining like a hard red apple in the light of the candle she carried, was thrust inside the door.

"O Miss Jane Evelyn," she whispered, "are you 'ere?"

"What is it, Susan?" demanded Jane, sitting up and winking drowsily at the candle flame.

"W'y, you've 'ad no dinner, miss, an' so I've brought you a bite of chicken and a mouthful of salad," said Susan briskly. "Just you lie back comfortable-like on these 'ere pillows, miss, an' I'll bring it in directly."

"But I'm not ill, Susan, and I'm not hungry," protested Jane. "I—I'm just tired."

"You'll be ill directly if you don't pick a bit o' somethink," Susan declared oracularly, "an' you that slender an' delicate, Miss Jane Evelyn." She was arranging the contents of a neat tray before Jane as she spoke. "Now you jus' try a mossel o' that bird, an' you'll find it tastes moreish, or I'm

mistook i' the looks o' it. Miss Gwendolen, now, is that thick i' the waist she might go wi'out her dinner for a fortnight, that she might, miss. It was all I could do a-'ookin' up 'er frock this very evenin'. 'You're such a stoopid, Susan,' she says, 'your fingers is all thumbs.' Then she turns an' twists afore 'er glass as proud as proud, though the Lord knows she's nothink to be proud of, wi' that rough, muddy skin o' hers, alongside of yours, Miss Jane Evelyn."

"You are very impertinent, Susan," said Jane reprovingly. "Gwen can't help her complexion, nor her thick figure, though of course they must get on her nerves, poor thing." And Jane dimpled demurely, as she tasted her salad with appetite. "I was hungry, after all," she acknowledged.

Susan gazed at the young lady with admiring eyes. "Of course you were, Miss Jane Evelyn," she exulted, "an' I knowed it. As I says to cook, 'Miss Jane Evelyn's 'ad nary bite o' supper,' I says; an' cook says to me, 'Susan,' she says, 'you'll find a tray i' th' buttry, once I'm through wi' dishin' up.'"

Jane's eyes filled with fresh tears; and she choked a little over her tea. "You're too good, Susan," she murmured, "and so is cook, to think of me at all."

"All I hasks in return, miss, is that you'll take me on as lidy's maid once you're married an' settled in a 'ome o' your own."

Jane fixed wistful eyes upon Susan's broad, kindly face. "O Susan," she said, "do you suppose I'll ever have a home of my own?"

"Do I suppose you'll ever— W'y, land o' love, Miss Jane Evelyn, in course you will! Mussy me, don't I *know*? Ain't I

seen young ladies in my time? There was Miss Constance and Mary Selwyn, both of 'em thought to be beauties, an' me scullery maid an' seein' 'em constant goin' in an' out of their kerridge through the area windy, where I was put to clean vegetables; an' they wasn't a patch on you, miss, fer figure, nor yet fer complexion, nor yet fer eyes, nor yet——"

"O Susan!" exclaimed Jane soulfully, "you oughtn't to talk that way. I'm not at all pretty."

"You're jus' beautiful, Miss Jane Evelyn," said Susan firmly, "beautiful enough fer a dook or a prince, if it's only me as says it; an' you'll see what you'll see some o' these days, that you will. W'y, only last night I was tellin' your fortin' wi' cards, miss, an' the dark man wi' a crown was fightin' a dool wi' the light man, an' all for the love of you, miss; an' if that ain't a sign o' somethin' serious then I don't know cards nor fortins neither."

"That will do, Susan," said Jane, very dignified indeed. "Thank you so much for bringing me something to eat, and will you thank cook for me, too. I think I will go to bed now, Susan, and you may take the tray away."

"I'll take the tray down directly, Miss Jane Evelyn," said honest Susan, quite unabashed, "but go to bed you'll not, miss, because the master wishes to see you quite pertic'lar in the library when 'e's through 'is dinner."

"What! Uncle Robert?" exclaimed Jane, flying out of bed, and beginning to pull the pins out of her tumbled hair. "I wonder what he can possibly want with me." Her little hands trembled. "Oh, I'm afraid Aunt Agatha——!"

"No; it ain't, miss," beamed Susan encouragingly. "I'll bet it's somethink himportant, that I do. I was jus' a-comin'

downstairs after Miss Gwendolen's flowers, an' the master was standin' in the 'all. 'Where's Jane?' he says to my Lidy. 'She should be down by this.' An' my Lidy she says, 'aughty an' cold-like, 'Jane 'ad her supper in the school-room with the children, as usual, to-night,' she says. 'She didn't care to come down.' 'Why, dang it,' 'e says, or some such word, 'Jane ought to be down to-night of all nights; 'aven't you told her, madam?' 'No,' says my Lidy, 'I 'aven't. I left that to you. Then 'e turns to me, an' horders me to tell you to be in the library at ten o'clock, an' to say that you was to wait for 'im there till 'e come. It ain't much after nine, miss, so you've time a-plenty, an' I'll 'elp you to dress."

Jane's eyes were shining like frightened stars. "Oh!" she murmured brokenly, "I wonder what it can be!"

"Now, don't you be scared ner yet worried, Miss Jane Evelyn," exhorted Susan, her head in Jane's little wardrobe. "You just put on this 'ere white frock an' I'll 'ook it up fer you. But first I'll do your 'air, if you'll let me."

Jane resigned herself with a sigh to Susan's deft hands. "You do brush my hair so nicely, Susan," she murmured, after a long silence filled with the steady stroking of the brush through her long brown tresses.

"It's the Lord's own mussy you'll let me do it, miss," cried Susan fervently, "else a 'ouse-maid I'd live an' die, an' me wantin' to be a lidy's maid sence I was knee high to a grass-'opper. I says to Miss Gwendolen on'y yesterday, 'Mayn't I brush your 'air, miss,' I says, 'Parks bein' busy, I think I can do it satisfactory.' 'Go 'way, Susan!' she snaps out, 'do you s'pose I'd 'ave your great, rough, clumsy 'ands about my 'ead?' she says."

"Your hands are not rough, nor clumsy, either," said Jane, understanding the pause, and filling it exactly as Susan wished; "and if I ever do have a lady's maid it shall be you, Susan."

"Thank you kindly, Miss Jane Evelyn," beamed Susan. "Now ain't that a lovely coffer? I'll bet Parks couldn't do no better nor that in a hundred years! But it 'ud be a simple idgit what couldn't do your 'air, miss; it's that soft an' shinin' an' curls itself better nor curlin'-tongs could do it."

All of which was strictly true, as Jane's brown eyes told her. Then the white frock was carefully put on, and Susan next produced from somewhere three great creamy buds, one of which she fastened behind Miss Blythe's pretty pink ear; the other two she pinned to the modest little bodice, standing off to survey her handiwork with an air of honest pride.

"I 'ooked them three roses from Miss Gwendolen's bouquet," she announced unblushingly, "an' a mighty good job it were."

"Then I'll not wear them," said Jane decidedly. "You may take them away, Susan. I may be forced to wear Gwen's cast-off frocks; but I'll *not* wear her flowers!"

An ethical differentiation which it would have puzzled Miss Blythe to explain, and which left poor Susan in open-mouthed dismay.

"She's a reg'lar lidy, is Miss Jane Evelyn, as ever was," cogitated that worthy hand-maiden, as Jane's light step passed down the corridor, "'igh an' 'aughty as the 'aughtiest, yet that sweet an' lovely in her w'ys I can't 'elp a-worshipin' the ground she walks on. It's a dook or a lord as

ought to marry Miss Jane Evelyn, an' it's me as 'll be her lidy's maid." And she proceeded to put the poor little room with its shabby appointments into truly exquisite order with all the zeal born of her anticipations.

There was no one in the library when Jane entered it, so she sat down in one of the great carved chairs by the fire, feeling very small and young and lonely. The gentle hum of conversation and the subdued tinkle of glass and silver reached her where she sat, and between curtained doorways she could catch glimpses of the softly lighted drawing-room beyond, gay with masses of azaleas and ferns.

After a little Jane found herself busy with dim memories of her past. She had been a child of three when her father and mother died, within a month of each other, she had been told; the broken-hearted young wife apparently not caring enough for her one child to face her bleak future.

"Oliver Aubrey-Blythe's wife was an exceedingly weak woman," Lady Agatha had once told Jane cruelly; "and I feel that it is my duty to train *you* into something far different, if such a thing is at all possible."

Jane's little hands grew quite cold, as she strove vainly to fix the illusive memory of the two faces which had bent over her on the day she had fallen into the fountain at Blythe Court. She remembered the fountain distinctly, with its darting goldfish and the stout cherub in the middle staggering under the weight of an impossible dolphin from whose open mouth gushed a dazzling jet of water.

There were blue flowers growing about the edge of the marble basin, and she had recklessly trampled them under

foot in her baby efforts to grasp a particularly beautiful goldfish. The rest was a blur, wherein dazzling blue sky seen through green waving treetops an immense distance away made a background for the two shadowy figures which stood out from the others. It was pleasant at the bottom of the fountain, Jane remembered, where one could look up through the clear water and see the far blue sky and the waving trees. For an instant she paused to wonder what would have happened had the shadowy figures of her parents been farther away when she shrieked and fell—quite at the other side of the garden, say. Would the blue sky and the waving trees have faded quite away into nothingness after a little? And was somethingness so much better than nothingness, after all?

But all this ghostly cogitation being quite at variance with Miss Blythe's usual optimistic and cheerfully human way of looking at things, she presently abandoned it altogether to speculate on the nature of the interview with her uncle, an event which certainly concerned her immediate fortunes much more intimately. Mr. Robert Aubrey-Blythe was an exalted personage with whom Jane felt herself to be very slightly acquainted. He was kind; yes, certainly. Jane could not recall a single occasion upon which he had spoken to her in a manner even remotely approaching unkindness. Indeed, he very rarely spoke to her at all beyond a curt 'Good evening, Jane' when she slipped into her place at the family dinner table. Twice before this she had been summoned to the library; each time to receive a perfunctory rebuke for some childish piece of mischief, reported presumably by Lady Agatha; whereat she had gone away