Chapter II: Rose Love; Deanwood; the Vicarage; Selkirk Street; cinema and Winter Gardens; Loudes' farm; the workhouse; Drama Group of All Saints'; the Maiseys; a baby brother; Weston-super-Mare; Pittville; water polo; setting off to Australia 1912

It was just after the holiday in Penrhyn Bay that I first remember Auntie Rose (only she wasn't my real aunt until some years later). It was soon after Mother came to live in Cheltenham that Rose Love came into her life. Rose Love was a country girl – her people were yeoman farmers at Mortimer, a tiny place near Reading. She had come to Cheltenham as a nurse to the two children of Col and Mrs Griffith, who lived in a large house called Deanwood, at the end of Pittville Circus Road. Rosie, as everyone called her, belonged to GFS, and Mother was asked to befriend her.

I don't know if any such opposite characters ever became such friends as those two. They had so little in common – even looks. Mother was thin, with sallow skin, black wavy hair and the darkest, bluest, naughtiest eyes. She was never still, hardly ever stopped talking and was always looking for fun and adventure. Rose was a plumpish, pink-and-white-skinned country girl; large and quiet. She was neat, prim, tidy, very conventional, old-fashioned and prudish. She looked a strong, country girl, but she was not, and lived a great deal of her adult life in hospital. Before she was married I think Mother often led Rosie into mischief and Rosie had to lead them back out of it.

When we came back from Penrhyn Rosie had just come out of hospital and Mother took her in a Bath chair, with me just sitting on the little ledge between her feet. At that time, too, I was just the size to fit on top of the coal scuttle, where I could sit while Mother dried my curls after my hair had been washed. I also fitted on my father's cupped hand. He would do tricks with me sitting on his hand, and I was never afraid. Sometimes he would sit in an armchair and tell me to climb up and sit on his shoulders, with a leg each side of his head. With my little arms clasped around his neck, he would stand up straight, I would put my hands on his head, often tangling my fingers in his hair, and he would walk about with me. I used to do all kinds of exercises with him that were thought very unusual for those days, probably because very few little girls wore knickers (the modern name for 'drawers') and so, if you were a little lady, you just had to sit still and be careful!

My father's headmaster was so very right when he said my father was a born teacher. He didn't treat me as a little girl, or even as a child, but as a *person.* He didn't talk down to me, he *listened* to my questions, and if he couldn't answer them we both went to find the answers. Again, I was his helper – in today's language, his work-mate. I trotted behind him in the garden or in his workshop. I helped him sow seeds and got to know which were which. I handed him his tools, and right way up. I cannot remember when I didn't know what a hammer, or any other tool, was. Again, he never gave me the impression he expected me to be there, but he always silently welcomed me. He seemed to know the important word seldom to say to children: don't.

Every summer Col and Mrs Griffith, like a number of their friends, took their family and servants to the sea and country for at least two months. In 1909 quite a lot of vandalism and burglary was going on when it was discovered these houses had been left unattended. The Griffith children, Mary and Edward, loved to be brought by Auntie Rose to tea with Mother, and the Griffiths knew my parents, so they asked my father if he would go and live there every summer while they were away. And so, for four wonderful summers, Deanwood was our second home.

I remember Mary when I was very small. My first real memory of her was, once again, going to Deanwood one day without Mother, and having tea in the bread-and-raspberry-jam smell of the servants' hall. I was not yet three years old, and in the excitement of it all I was very upset to find I had wet my drawers. I began to cry with the shame of it all. Just then Mary came rushing in from the Ladies' College, sank down on her knees in front of me and began to comfort me, saying how she would quickly take me home, I would have clean drawers, and all would be well again.

From then on I worshipped her and looked for her company as she did mine. Then, alas, one day she too disappeared, just like Harold, and she too had died. They called it 'drinking diabetes', and all the money her parents had could not have saved her in those days. I was told I must never mention her name to the Griffiths, as they were so upset. Mother told me she sent a bunch of violets from me, and that Mrs Griffith put them in Mary's hand, as she was so fond of me. Fourteen years later I was cycling up the Prom on my way home from school when my school straw hat blew off. Dismounting and returning to claim it from an elderly gentleman, who doffed his hat as he gallantly picked up my flying hat and gave it to me, I gazed into the bittersweet, stricken face of Col Grffith. I must have so reminded him of Mary, I just murmured my thanks and didn't attempt to tell him who I was.

Mother didn't have a brother for me that year, but she had a miscarriage at Deanwood. Deanwood stood in about two acres of gardens, stables and outhouses. It had been a small boys' school, and the basement seemed to have a number of rooms, as well as servants' quarters. One side of the house was a large lawn where you could play croquet. There was a summerhouse, and a huge weeping willow with branches which swept down and stroked the lawn all around, making another summerhouse you could sit under and have tea. Two tortoises lived all the year round there, burying themselves in winter. The whole was surrounded with herbaceous borders. The little paths in the kitchen garden were edged with minute box hedges, not more than nine inches high. The smell of box hedge in the sun is always Deanwood to me, just as privet in bloom is Brockley Coombe and Cleave Tott.

From the drive you went up several wide, shallow steps into a large porch and then through the front door into a wide hall. At the far end was a door into the garden. To the right of the door a food lift came up from the kitchen, as the diningroom was on the left. Just near was the telephone, the first I had ever seen in a private house. When my mother told me to come and talk to my Uncle Harry in Cardiff, I was only mildly interested and didn't seem very impressed with the wonder of it all. I think this must be how children today take radio and television in their stride. It is rather like turning on a tap, expecting water to come out, and not stopping to think how it gets there.

In 1909 Deanwood was a modern, six-storey house with ample accommodation for a family of children and servants. It had a phone, a food lift, two flush toilets but *no bathroom*. Any number of hip baths, and hot and cold water, had to be carted upstairs every day, and dirty water downstairs every day. I do not remember how far up the gas lighting went, but I doubt if it was beyond the first floor. The dear little study had French windows on to a creeper-covered verandah.

As it was always summer when we lived at Deanwood, we nearly always had tea in the garden. I cannot remember it ever raining there. One day my father and I were making tea in the kitchen and he was telling me how the lift worked, and asked if I would like to ride up on it to give Mother a surprise. I thought this a very good idea. He told me to sit with my hands under my crossed legs so that I would not touch the ropes on either side. He also explained that it would be dark for a little of the way. This did not worry me at all. My father called that the lift was coming up. The journey was all too quick for me, and I gazed up expectantly into my mother's face. I did not get the reception I expected. She grabbed me off the lift, calling down to my father what a wicked trick to play; he might have killed his daughter, etc, etc.

My mother had her miscarriage, and afterwards, when the nurses came to attend to her, I did not want to be shut out of her bedroom. Mother's youngest half-sister, Winnie, was staying at Deanwood at the time, and she was told to take me around the house and show me all the rooms to take my mind off Mother. She did just this, and I remember being very polite. At last I had had enough, and I very politely said that I would now like to see my mother, please. So a very scared Winnie took me to the door of my mother's room.

One of the nurses with a little more imagination took me inside and showed me a large screen in one corner, behind which she put a chair. She told me that if I promised to sit behind the screen until they had finished taking care of Mother she would let me in the room. When I was assured by them and Mother that they were not hurting her, I agreed. At first they kept peeping at me to see if I was still there. I think they were amazed that I was, and that I never moved from the chair until they told me I could. I don't think that any of them realised that I had won my point: I was in the bedroom, so I was now quite happy and while I was there no harm could come to Mother. When I was much older Mother told me the nurses told each other at the College about me, and they took it in turns to come and see this extraordinary three-year-old,

One afternoon Mother was nearly well – in those days women were kept in bed so long – there was great fun going on down in the garden, so my father opened the window and pulled Mother's bed over so that she could at least see the fun. I was sitting on the bed beside her when, suddenly, the door burst open and in dashed the senior nurse, Nurse Edwards, of whom everyone seemed afraid. She was hopping mad. What did Mother think she was doing? She would catch her death of cold! She slammed down the window and pulled Mother's bed away from it. Even I shot out of the room, away from her wrath.

My father said he would take my mother out for a ride in a Bath chair he had fixed to his bicycle by its long steering rod. I was seated on her lap and we were both well rugged up and strapped in. At first it was great fun sailing along at the speed of a bike, but when we began going downhill, of course, the Bath chair began pushing the bike! My father managed to jump off and stop us all before we went quite out of control and tipped over. Poor Father – and Mother was terrified.

In 1910 my father did an almost unheard-of thing, especially for the lowest rung of the middle class, the white-collar worker: he bought a house through the building society. All his friends and relations thought he was mad. While arrangements were being made Canon Gardner left the parish and the Vicarage was empty, so we were asked to reside there until the new vicar arrived. This really was a happy arrangement, because it meant we could move to our new house in easy and comfortable stages.

The Vicarage was large, but nothing like as large as Deanwood, and the garden was small and neglected, but it was a more modern house. It even had a *bathroom*, with a bath, hot and cold water, and a gas fire to sit beside and sip bedtime cocoa.

The bath itself was both a fantastic and frightening affair. It was on a platform and set in polished wood. At one end were three shiny, brass tap-like affairs. The middle one you pushed down before you turned on the two outside taps. When you had finished your bath you pulled this centre knob up as hard as you could. There would be a sudden deep gurgle, a popping noise, and the water would begin to swirl out in a sudden terrific whirlpool. It could be very frightening, and for a second you felt you would go down the hole with the water.

Mother would push down the centre 'tap' and slowly turn on the two water taps. When the water was warm enough she would help me climb in, and I would sit down and watch the water rise up around me. It was wonderful. Later she would let me lie down with just my head and the tip of my tummy above the water. The bit I really liked best of all was when I stood up on the sponge after the first horrid rush of water had gone, and it was slowly draining away from my toes on the sponge. It was just like the feet of Jesus I had seen in a picture when he was being baptised.

The Vicarage garden was very overgrown in parts, and there was a dilapidated summerhouse in one corner. From the side of the house was a door on to a porch and several steps on to the lawn. These hadn't been used for years and were covered with ivy. One of Mrs Grange's nephews, who

would come over and play with me when he was on holiday, used to make up a story about these steps, and he would lift me up on the steps and I then had to walk down through the ivy. I think I was supposed to be a princess or something.

It was while we were living at the Vicarage that I saw my first balloon. Mother carried me out from the bathroom and showed me the balloon from a landing window. She explained to me that a man and a woman we had seen in a decorated cart in the morning were the ones now in the balloon. For years I thought she meant the horse and cart too, and puzzled how they could all get in.

I don't suppose my father put down much deposit on the house, but he realised that in future his 'rent' would not be wasted, and when he needed to sell it he would have his first bit of capital behind him. He also insured himself so that if he died the house was paid off. As soon as I was born he paid a penny a week until I was 16 years old. If I had died before I was married he would have £3 to bury me. After I married, my husband would have the £3! Now I am a widow, it is anyone's guess. The policy is a real museum piece. I took it to the insurance firm a few years ago and they were fascinated with it. They wouldn't keep it, but took a photostat of it.

The house was a modern terrace house in Selkirk Street, a road leading off All Saints Road. There were houses on only one side, the other side was high walls of large houses facing on to Pittville Circus. There was a small garden in the front, and a long one at the back, ending in a large work-shed the entire width of the garden, which greatly pleased my father. It was a six-roomed house. There were three bedrooms, and, downstairs, two rooms off the hall, which ended in a scullery. In the scullery was a cooking stove (coal) and the sink with one tap. A side door led into the garden, wash-house and toilet. Later, my father cut a door in the end wall of the scullery so that the toilet and wash-house could be reached without going into the garden. There was gas lighting on the ground floor and candles in lamps upstairs.

A little boy called Benny lived a few doors away. He was a year or two older than me. We used to play in each other's garden sometimes. One day Benny's father asked us if we would like to take a little shovel and a bucket and get some horse droppings from out on the road for him to put around his strawberry plants. I thought this was great fun. I liked the smell of horse droppings and I was very interested to watch Benny's father putting rings of straw around the plants, and then an outer ring of horse droppings, knowing that all this would make much bigger strawberries. When I went home, full of this new knowledge, to tell Mother, she was far from happy. She would not have her daughter going out into the road for horse droppings. She had never heard of such a thing. I was never allowed to play with Benny again.

Ever since I can remember numbers of people, even the élite of the parish, would borrow me for a few hours. I think it made them feel good in some sort of way. I was dainty, pretty, clean and, above all, well behaved. I didn't chatter all the time and I answered politely. I remember, particularly, the Misses Dent taking me to see an invalid aunt of theirs. She was reclining on a couch just as one imagines Elizabeth Barrett Browning did. A little bead-topped footstool was brought for me to sit by her couch, so that she could see me quite closely and touch my curls.

Mother's own sister, Lena, would often take me to tea and see her mistresses, the Misses Miles. My father's sister, Kate, would sometimes take me to her house, but that was large, and I had tea in the servants' hall, and often recited poems to the servants.

Nellie Loude took me out regularly over a span of some three years. She was no relation, but I called her Auntie. She was the youngest of several daughters of a dairy farmer, who had a farm on Cleeve Hill, Battledown way, just above the (then) new reservoir. His son was our milkman. When Nellie became apprenticed to dress-making, and lodged all the week in

Cheltenham, Mother befriended her, and on her half-day off she began taking me out. Nellie was fat and jolly, like all her family. At first, she was only in her teens and she loved her tummy, so our first call was always to her favourite sweet shop. Officially it was for me but, even as a small child, I was not very fond of sweets.

One of the very first adventures we had was for me to have my photo taken as a surprise for Mother. The studio was a long, bare room with queer flat screens down either side, and scenery at the far end. I was wearing a topcoat, down below my knees, button-boots, a shawl like a cape and a bonnet, with my hands thrust into a muff. Under one arm was a doll, well wrapped up in a shawl. This proves that I was not yet three years old, as I did not have my Teddy. They stood me in front of the scenery and told me to look at a large, black box on three legs, with a black cloth over it. I was told to watch the box for a little bird. No one thought to tell me to smile. Anyway, I was too interested in watching all the antics of the photographer diving in and out of the cloth over the black box, and waiting for the little bird to come out. After a while I was informed that it was over, and the little bird wasn't coming out today after all.

Over the years the nature of our afternoons changed. One afternoon Auntie Nellie had some work to finish in the factory-like place she worked in, and she took me with her. I was very interested in the huge charcoal irons and the sewing machines. No electricity was used there except, perhaps, for lighting. Also, at that time the Winter Gardens (a very small copy of the Crystal Palace) in the Prom, next to the Gentlemen's Club, had been lined and turned into the first decent cinema. Auntie Nellie would sometimes take me there to a matinée. The pictures themselves made little impression on me, but in the middle of the performance there was a stage show. This I liked. Once there was a real live kangaroo with boxing gloves, boxing a man. Neither of them seemed to hurt each other; the chief attraction was to show off the kangaroo. I knew that he came from a country called Australia, and that an uncle called Uncle Jack lived there.

The best thing that happened at the Winter Gardens was when Auntie Nellie took me to see the smallest and most beautiful lady in the world. Although she was 23 years old, she was not three feet tall. She was *not* a dwarf, because she was perfect in every proportion, like a midget or a miniature. Therefore she was not ugly. She was dressed as an Edwardian lady, in afternoon clothes complete in every detail. When she visited Cheltenham I was about five years old. A long platform had been fixed down the centre of the seats, resting on their backs, so that she could walk among the audience and be seen. Auntie bought me a bunch of violets to give her and procured seats next to the platform, and when she walked along it , like a dainty little princess, I stood up and presented her with the violets. I was quite overwhelmed by her person and beauty. When she bowed down to me as she accepted the violets and said 'Thank you, my dear' – as I was only a little girl, only almost a head taller than she – I was just speechless at the wonder of it all. She had her own little special carriage driven by a page boy and drawn by Shetland ponies.

Sometimes over the years Auntie Nellie would take me up to the farm. When I was about four years old I went to stay there for a couple of nights. It was in the spring and there were a number of baby animals about. The Loudes were a fat, lively, jolly, good-hearted family. They enjoyed life to the full. Although it was a mixed farm, it was chiefly dairy. They had no separator, or anything like that. The milk would be put in shallow, wide dishes on shelves of slate in a stone room with a stone slab floor. After a certain number of hours the women, with a skilful, gentle hand would skim off the cream to make into butter. The skim milk was also sold, much cheaper than the full-cream milk, although it had vastly more cream than the later separated milk. Scalded Devonshire cream was only made then in Cornwall and Devonshire, and was not sold outside of those counties. Visitors to Devon would send cream in special tins back to their friends.

Perhaps it might be interesting to explain how Devonshire cream should be made, and how I

saw it being made in Devon as late as 1937. Even that was not the original way. The milk was first separated, then a little milk was put in the bottom of a basin like a washing-up bowl. The cream was put on top of the milk and left to stand for a little while. It was then put in a copper of hot water and left to gently come up to boiling point, without actually boiling, for 30 minutes. It was then left to cool and stand for at least 12 hours. By then it was a thick crust of cream, which was skimmed off the small amount of milk and now ready to sell. The dairy farm, where we stayed in 1937, would prepare eight lots of cream a day, and as they could only do one dish at a time in the copper, it took four hours. Someone had to watch the whole time so that the milk would not get too hot, because then the cream would rise and be spoilt.

The women would bottle fruit and make jam and all kinds of country wines and cider. There were numbers of dear little hen-houses for the mothers to sit on their eggs, which later housed them and their chickens. The front of these only had slats of wood, so that the chickens could run in and out. Two of these slats could be removed for the mother hen to come out and get exercise. As the chickens were running in and out she kept a watchful eye open for danger. If she saw any, her clucking would take on a different note, and they would all scuttle inside, under her feathers, and hide themselves away. But she wouldn't be happy till the last delinquent had hopped down off her back. When they were a few days old, and she was let out to take them around to show them the world, she would cluck away, telling them about everything they found, and whether it was edible or not. If she felt danger about, she would sit down solidly and begin her danger call. Not until they were all under her wings – heads and all – and all silent, would she stop. Then I might see a mother duck marching off to the duck pond with all her children in single file behind her, Duck families always go like that.

The brightly-coloured-tailed rooster calling his wives about the farmyard in his arrogant way would rather scare me, until I realised he was not a bit interested in me, but only caring for his womenfolk. But I did *not* like the turkey gobbler with his raw-meat-looking neck. When he would suddenly jerk sideways and shrill 'Gobble gobble!' at the top of his voice, and flip his fan-like tail feathers up at me, I would be quite unnerved. No, I did not think him a pleasant bird at all.

In one of the gardens there was a dear little arbour with golden chain, and the blooms fell around us gently, like golden snowflakes, as one of the Loude daughters and I sat shelling peas. She told me that the blossoms were poisonous, and to wash my hands if I touched any of them. She also showed me the view, explaining that Cheltenham was at our feet, and Churchdown was the little hill between there and Gloucester and the river winding away in the distance. Away on the right horizon she showed me the Welsh mountains peeping out from behind the edge of Clee Hill. I was always fortunate that so many people did show me these things.

The front garden was a mass of bloom throughout the year, like many cottage gardens.Then, of course, there were several rabbit hutches. The rabbits were always so very tame and cuddly. I could watch them eating for hours – the genteel way they had of nibbling. I would give one a juicy dandelion itself, he would begin nibbling at one end, and before my eyes the whole leaf would quickly disappear into his mouth. Again, being spring, there would be kittens, and often puppies, lambs and calves.

Farms were farms, in those days, and not produce factories. The smell of freshly cut grass as it dropped from the horse-drawn mower and began, at once, to dry into hay, as it was raked into rows to dry in the sun... After it was carted and stacked, it was thatched. In different parts of England the stacks were different shapes as well as sizes. Then the corn was cut and tied in sheaves, and we often helped to build them into stooks, or pooks, depending, again, on the district. When you were small, you hid in the little gap left for the air to get through to dry the corn. These were really scientifically built so that the rain would run off.

The pigs were fun, too, especially the baby piglets. They did so love their food. But I loved the cows best of all. I liked to play with the soft, floppy skin of their necks. I loved the warm smell of milk as it clip-clopped into the milk bucket. They have such soulful eyes, and you wondered what they were thinking about as they slowly chewed their cud.

I don't remember the horses on Loudes' farm, but, then, so many horses were used for all kinds of jobs, and I doubt if there were any idle ones on the farm.

Nearly every road in town had its drinking trough, and, every mile or so, the country roads as well, with the one underneath for the dogs. When I first remember, the only pet dogs belonged to very rich ladies and were only seen on the footpaths when exercised by servants, but various breeds of 'working' dogs would need to drink when horse companions did. I loved to watch horses drinking. No other animal does it like they do, with so little apparent effort. All birds drink by taking a drop, holding their head back and letting the drop fall down their throat. Cats are inclined to make little splashes as they daintily lap, lap, lap. Cows are nearly as clumsy as the pigs. But a horse will gently lower its chin into the water and let its mouth almost float on it. The lower lip sinks a little, and then everything is still. There isn't even a ripple, yet the level of the water lowers before your eyes. If you look hard at the horse's throat you will see, every now and again, the throttle moves up and down, and you know, then, that the water is going down the throat. It's all so quiet and gentle and, if it is a hot day, I'll swear the horse dozes as he is drinking. At first I used to wonder why the water in the trough didn't disappear altogether, but my father lifted me up and showed me how the ball-cock worked.

There were so many different kinds of horses on the roads. The shabby-looking horses pulled the coal carts. Each and every day they plodded with their loads, with their nose-bags swinging under the cart. Come mid-day the cart would be pulled up, the nose-bag hung over the horse's neck, the bit taken out of his mouth and he would munch and munch, occasionally stopping for a doze. When the cart moved off, a stop at the next trough would wash it all down.
Then there were the huge dray horses with their polished skins and shining brasses sparkling and rattling as they moved slowly and deliberately, lifting their huge, thick, hairy ankles, the shoe on each hoof making such a deliberate clank of metal on stone with each stride. Mostly they pulled the huge carts of beer barrels. The chains would clank in time to their strides. They looked really grand, with their manes plaited, often with coloured ribbons, and their tails bound with straw.

I often thought the coal-black horses which pulled the funeral hearses were cleaned with black boot polish. They shone so beautifully. They were graceful creatures with neat tails, often their manes were cropped, and on their heads they wore a cockade and black plumes. These same black horses would pull the wedding carriages, but then they would have white bows over their blinkers and white reins. And they stepped our quite daintily – they knew their job!

Then there were the carriage horses – the 'four-in-hands', the spanking trotters pulling dog-carts, the little ponies in the governess traps and the poor relations, the horses who pulled the cabs for hire and the open carriages. Some of these were pathetic creatures who almost apologised for being alive. Their ribs might be showing painfully, but they kept going, knowing that once they fell down they would never get up again but would be dragged off to the knacker's yard. The hunters, riding hacks and little Shetland ponies were all other families of horse flesh. The intelligent farm-horses all knew their jobs, as well as their master's, especially the plough horse who could really plough a straight furrow, leaving the soil like long, straight bars of chocolate. After a long day's work in the field he would take himself home, with the farmhand perched on one side of his huge rump, gently dozing, deep in day-dreams. The milk horses and baker's horses knew their rounds as well as their drivers, especially the houses where they could get a lump of sugar, an apple core or a crust of bread.

Best of all I loved to be able to stand in the blacksmith's doorway. I never discovered why it was called a shop. It was really a large shed with an earth floor. There was the fire, with its enormous bellows to wake up the cinders at any moment. To see those huge farmhorses, at a gentle pat from the blacksmith, lift up a leg and stand easily on three, with great dignity, while being shod! After choosing the thickness of iron suitable for the horse's foot, the smith had his own method of measuring the length he needed. After heating one half he would shape it, try it near the foot for size and then shape the other half. After making the nail holes he would plunge it all into a bucket of water and a great sizzle of steam would rise up. This was done quickly so that the shoe was still warm when he placed it on the hoof, and the unique smell of smouldering horn would fill the building. Once the nails were fixed with their ends filed off, and the blacksmith had smoothed it all for the last time with his large hands, he would lower the leg and often the horse would peer round with one eye as much as to say, 'Thank you, old pal!'

The streets were often more noisy than they are in these days, when filled with the horses' hooves, the rattle of chains and the wheels thundering round. Except for very grand carriages all wheels were metal-rimmed. Again, all, save ladies and gentlemen, wore metal studs on their boots, which made far more noise on the stone pavements and cobble-stone roads. Then there was the loud clatter of the milk churns in the milk floats as they dashed by all day (milk was often delivered twice a day), and hawkers' cries, too, filled the air in day-time.

The milk floats were shaped rather like Roman chariots, only the back step ran the whole width of the two-wheeled 'chariot'. There was a small seat in the front right-hand corner for the driver, with a special container for his whip. Along the front was a fitment to hold the churns of milk. In the summer these would be covered with calico to keep the sun off. Down the side, behind the driver, was another fitment where all the metal measures could hang, together with the covered pail in which he would take the milk to the doors with all the measures hanging on one side. Most of the time the reins would be loosely tied near the whip because, as soon as the milkman's feet touched the back step, the horse was away to the next stop.

All these trade horses seemed to have different temperaments which suited their jobs. The baker's horse would be quite different – more like a slow, solid, friendly country cousin. Then again, think of the different kinds of Army horses there were.

There is no doubt about it, horses of all kinds understand humans. Dogs give their affection and can be ruled and fooled by men. Cats walk their own way and use man. Horses can be tamed by man, if they like him, or through fear. They also realise that men can be different, and they never forget whether they have been tamed by fear or love. Like elephants, they take great pride in their special jobs.

There was a pony in Cheltenham which had a very different job. A man, who was doomed for life to be in a spinal chair, had French windows from his room opening on to the front lawn. His large spinal chair was wheeled out on to the lawn, shafts fixed to the front, and a pony harnessed to the carriage (as it really was). The pony would pull his bed-ridden master carefully through traffic, responding to any slight movement of the reins. One could not but admire them both.

Except for Grandma Waite – who *always* called me Frances – until I was about three years old I was always called Babs, and I was the first grandchild on both sides for a while. When I was three the Church Drama Society was doing a nativity play with several really beautiful angels complete with large feathered wings which all Victorians imagined angels wore. Miss Dent was one of these angels, and had the bright idea of carrying me on as a cherub. Nowadays, of course, I would have worn a strip of nylon, but not in those days. One day when she called for me she asked where her little fairy was, and that did the trick. Forever more I was Fairy to the whole family – in

fact, to everyone who ever met me. I was 18 years old before I managed to make the family drop the y and just call me Fair!

It being Christmas time, I presume, it was decided to take this nativity play to the workhouse. Why, I cannot imagine! When I returned I was so upset Mother wished she had not let me go. It was in the evening, and dark, when my father carried me through the high walls into a dark, gloomy poorly-lit building, whose walls and ceilings were unlined, giving the impression of a huge shed. The lighting was naked gas jets which flickered small, dancing ghosts on the walls. Down each side of the long room, or ward, were rows of rough beds with little clothing on them, although the whole building was terribly cold. Grey-faced, staring-eyed humans sat in each bed just looking, or staring, with the eyes of either very deathly or starving people. If their hair wasn't shaved off it was wisps of grey. Their faces were expressionless; they had long since forgotten how to smile. There was nothing in life for them to smile about.

It shows the lack of imagination on the part of the people who thought to bring this play to them. Perhaps it was good for their souls! But then their only sin was being too old to work, even if they could have found anything to do. I'm sure they would have preferred to starve to death in their own single rooms, but no, they were taken, separated into sexes – male in one ward, female in the other – and given just enough food to keep them shiveringly alive until their hearts just stopped. So, at that early age, I began to understand the difference between fear, horror, hopelessness and compassion and the wrong side of charity. How very glad I was when my father gathered me up and took me home from that nightmare.

I cannot remember when I learned my first prayer, Gentle Jesus, but I can remember learning the Lord's Prayer, because that was harder, and I didn't understand some of it. Great Aunt Maisey taught me my first poem, which was really a kind of nursery rhyme:

I love little pussy her coat is so warm
And if I don't hurt her she'll do me no harm.
I'll sit by the fire and give her some food
And pussy will love me because I'm so good.

'Warm' and 'harm' rhymed, the way Auntie spoke the words.

The next year the children put on their own Christmas play. There was a Christmas tree with a fairy on the top of it. Somehow the fairy came alive, and this was me, which helped to settle the matter of my name.

It was the winter of 1910 when I made my first important stage appearance, but it was in the summer of that year – before Geoffrey was born – that Mother was approached about my taking a small, but important, speaking part in an ambitious play called 'Persephone', written by Miss E Pleate and Canon Gardner for the Drama Group of All Saints. I was to be the first snowdrop sent by Persephone to tell her mother, Demeter, that she was returning to earth. I had only just turned four years old, and Mother said she would only agree if I was not pressured and was allowed to drop out if it was too much. This was agreed, but apparently, if anything happened and I couldn't do the part, they were going to write it out, as it needed a small child like me to be effective.

My father undertook to get me word perfect. I didn't know this at the time, but one day, when we were doing odd jobs in the garden, my father told me the part of the story which affected me. I understood that once I was put on the stage I would walk along, find Father Time and ask him where I would find Demeter. When he had shown me, I would tell her all about her daughter coming soon, that she had already sent a lot more snowdrops and other spring flowers, and I would

show her them danciing. Having made me interested in all this, he taught me the words during the days that we worked. When I was word perfect he sent me to the other end of the garden to make sure he could hear me.

When the time came for rehearsals my father used to take me in Geoffrey's large pram, so that I was warm and could doze if I liked. All the cast made a great fuss of me, and would pass me from arm to arm. I just smiled, taking everything in, but I would not talk to them at all. I didn't know at the time, of course, but it appears they used to have bets on whether they could make me talk. The trouble was, I was so interested in watching it all, I just couldn't be bothered to talk. I can see a great deal of it all quite plainly after over 60 years.

When Mother saw the first performance she was terrified when she found out that I was going to talk to Father Time with his scythe. She was sure that I would get cut by the blade. But I had been told to walk on the other side of him, and that was always my great virtue: I did exactly what I was told. It appeared that I was a great success and every word I said could be heard.

The next year I was a British child in a play about Boadicea. We wore bits of skins and things, and had bare feet. We seemed to spent a great deal of our time trying not to be trodden down by Roman soldiers, or hit by their spears. The hessian-covered boards, which looked like stones, used to prickle our bare legs terribly when we sat on them, we didn't think of complaining, though.

By the time I was six years old I had quite a repertoire of poems that I could recite when asked. I was taught never to make a fuss when asked, and never to expect to be asked. This I obeyed, and so took it all in my stride.

When we first went to Selkirk Street we had a rather quaint German lady staying with us. She was fat and somewhat grotesque, as she wore a false front hair-piece. One day she came home with a grey one. Mother politely didn't change the expression on her face, and so, a little later, she told Mother about having a false front, remarking that it must be good, as Mother didn't mention it ! She used to sing two strange little jingles:

> Quack, quack, quack, says the saucy little duck,
> There's no egg for your breakfast in the morning,
> When the old cock crows, then everybody knows,
> There's an egg for your breakfast in the morning.

The other was:

> Ring the bells for Christmas. Ring, ring, ring.
> Mince pies and oranges, a lovely Christmas tree.
> Hurrah, hurrah, for Christmas. Ring, ring, ring.

Mother discovered that she would be expecting a baby to arrive in October. The quaint Mrs Swabby was asked to leave and Mother began making arrangements for introducing what, she hoped, would be a baby brother into my life. First she fitted up a bedroom for me, for my very own. I was delighted with it all, but she made one mistake, and she didn't even know about it until years after I had grown up. She put one of those little oil lamps, which were quite new at the time, in my room so that I would not be afraid of the dark. I was *never* afraid of the dark, *but* I did *not* like the dancing shadows the light made. As soon as she left the room I used to shut my eyes tightly. I always wondered why the lamp had gone out in the morning – Mother used to put it out when she went to bed, to be safe.

The trouble with me was, and I suppose still is, I looked a fairy-like little girl. Very feminine. Playing with dolls? I'd rather play with building blocks. Like sewing? I'd rather read

books. Help Mother cooking? I'd rather help my father in the garden, or make a cupboard. But I didn't look like a tomboy and neither did I like to get myself dirty. I always found this could make life very complicated for me.

Mother's next preparation was to arrange with Great Aunt Maisey that every few days I would go on my own to visit her for the day. I was very interested in this idea: to be so grown up as to walk along Selkirk Street and be trusted to cross the road then, after waving to Mother that I was safely across into All Saints Road, to walk along until I came to Auntie's house.

Until you reached the church the paving stones were very large, and it took four steps in each paving stone so that you did not step on the lines. After the church the stones were much smaller, making an even pattern, and it was very easy to step in each stone. But higher up All Saints Road, as you came near Auntie's house, they were all uneven, and very difficult to step in. A A Milne had not yet written the poem about 'Bears, bears, look at me walking in all the squares!' I expect he felt like me when he was young. Sometimes as the gratings came I was tempted to stamp on them like I had seen the boys do, or even just pause over one, but I was always afraid the grating might cave in. I was not really a nervous child, only a cautious one, which is different. It was always fun walking down the narrow alley to Harmon Villa. Your footsteps echoed in a queer, long-way-off kind of sound.

Often we would go up to the bakery at the end of the road and Auntie would buy me a penny cottage loaf. It was a very tiny, real cottage loaf. After it was sliced, buttered and perhaps spread with Auntie's out-of-this-world raspberry jam, I would eat it all up. Incidentally, this would please all the adults as I so seldom took interest in food.

After Evensong my father would come and take me home on his bike. He would put a cushion on the cross-bar. Sometimes he took me to the rugger matches on his bike. I would be placed in the covered stands with the VIPs and enjoy it all. Sometimes I would get anxious if they didn't make enough 'buns' for me. I meant scrums, and thought more of those than of goals. In the intervals I liked to watch the teams sucking their pieces of lemon. They didn't leave the field at half-time in those days. They had metal studs on their boots to help stop them from slipping. My father always had a ten-inch scar around his neck where someone had trodden on him. Soon after my brother was born he gave up playing rugger, as he thought it was too dangerous for a married man with responsibilities.

On 27 October 1910, when my father came to take me home from my visit to Auntie Maisey, he told me I had a baby brother, and that he would be named Arthur Geoffrey, but would always be called Geoffrey. I was quite interested in this news, but when I got home and stood at the bottom of Mother's bed peering through the brass railings at Mother lying in bed, with the tip of a little baby's head nestling under her arm, I was not quite so sure whether I liked the idea after all.

The eldest child must always have a different approach to mother-love than the younger children. So often the eldest child doesn't feel it has an identity without Mother. The other children arrive with other children about, and feel loved for themselves, knowing that the other children have some of Mother's love. The first child feels not only a little lost when the next child arrives, but subconsciously feels he has lost some love. All this must have been going on inside me and fighting with the love I at once had for the baby. When Mother asked me if I liked my baby brother I think I summed it up with my reply. 'Yes, but I wish he wasn't born.'

Once Mother was up and attending to Geoffrey's many needs she struck the right note. She gave me to understand that she would *need* my help in looking after Geoffrey. My little footsteps went trotting happily about the house, fetching and carrying, and one evening, after Geoffrey had

gone to bed (Mother always gave me half an hour), she told me that I was ner new little Trotabout. That was always her special name for me, and *only she* called me that. At Christmas and birthdays my present was always for Trotabout. Even now as I write, at the age of 94 with her memory and understanding dimmed, the word 'Trotabout' will get through her clouded mind.

I always loved Geoffrey in a very special way. As he grew older, and the gap in our ages decreased, our companionship increased. We never fought like some brothers and sisters, neither were we really conscious of being opposite sexes. We played wonderful games together, especially in the First World War. In later years, when we were at different schools, we didn't see so much of each other except in the holidays and when doing homework together in the evenings, at either end of the dining table.

I think Mother's sister, Lena, must have stayed in the house for a few days when Geoffrey was born. A tall, dark, handsome man rode up on his bike with a dear little child's wicker chair – a present from Auntie Lena for me. This was William Stratford, who was engaged to Auntie Lena, and would marry her next summer.

I had seen him before, of course, because some months earlier he had taken Auntie, Mother and me for our very first ride in a *car* only, of course, we called it a motor car at that time. He had taken us to Stratford on his way to Coventry. We had to start very early in the morning because it was a *long* way – every bit of 31 miles. The women had veils tying their hats on, and were rugged up against the cold. It was barely dawn when Mother woke me to see us tearing by sheep in a field at about 10 miles an hour. At Stratford Mother impressed on me that a great man called William Shakespeare had lived in a house we visited, and I must always remember that I had been there.

William Stratford was the forerunner of a new era as far as the kind of work he was trained to do was concerned. He had been given a good education, too, which included learning to play the piano and having his voice trained. That was the artistic side. He was one of the first young men to be trained in the mechanics of that new creature, the motor car. Having been trained he became one of the first liveried chauffeurs to a wealthy family which had a large house just outside Cheltenham. He came to lodge with the Maisey family for a while, and that was how he met Auntie Lena. Auntie Lena was some eighteen months older than Mother. It would be difficult to find two sisters so different, both in looks and character. Auntie Lena was short – well under five feet – and small. Her black hair was straight; her face long; her eyes muddy hazel, not deep blue like Mother's. She was thin and muscular. She always ran everywhere, and never caught up with herself. She would be hours early for a date – Mother would run for the date. She was superstitiously religious. She believed in ghosts and spirits. She was always afraid other women would steal her husband. She was extremely prim. Uncle Will was much taller than my father and handsome in a different way. He had straight black hair, large brown eyes and was very shy. For some years he had a moustache and, of course, he had one of those special moustache cups with a ledge across to stop the moustache getting in the tea.

In early spring, 1911, Mother began to wean Geoffrey, but something went wrong and she had breast fever. Nurse Edwards came twice a day. I would watch her place a towel in a bowl with a small piece of flannel on top, then she would pour boiling water over it and, by using the dry ends of the towel, twist it up, drain all the water off, take out the hot flannel, and quickly place it on Mother's breast. In a few days she was cured.

Twenty years later I remembered, and saved our only cow from the same trouble. While the men sat on the cow's head as she lay on the ground I did just that. People thought I was cracked, until I cured the cow.

Soon after this Mother went into hospital for a few days and Auntie Lena came to look after us. Geoffrey thought it would be a good idea to refuse to eat anything. My father took a hand. He told Auntie to hold a drink of milk in front of Geoffrey and, as soon as he opened his mouth, my father popped in a spoonful of food. Geoffrey was so surprised, he had eaten it before he realised what had happened.

When Mother came home I became quite ill. I don't know what it was, but I do remember the doctor saying one night that I should go into hospital, and Mother begging him not to send me. I don't think children came out of hospital alive much at that time. Anyway, by morning the crisis was over, and Mother soon had the difficult task of trying to get me to eat. One night, after Geoffrey's bedtime bottle, he had a little left in the bottom. She brought it to me and asked if I would like to finish it. The idea of sucking it rather amused me. After that, for the time that I was still in bed, she used to bring up some extra milk and put it in the bottle after Geoffrey had finished. I didn't know this of course,. She also used to put a small biscuit and a piece of chocolate under my pillow, in case I was hungry in the night, she said.

In early summer my father sent all three of us to Weston-super-Mare for two weeks – it would do us good. Also, while we were away (only, of course, Mother didn't know until we got back) my father intended to cut a door in the end of the kitchen wall, through to the laundry, so that we did not have to go out into the garden to reach the laundry and toilet. When we returned, one of his Swimming Club friends told us all about it. Father had just used every piece of china and washed all the dishes in the copper the day before we got back. He was always putting everything on the mantelpiece and one day he had the saw in the butter!

Whenever I smell hot tar I am always at Weston-super-Mare, because, as we came out of the railway station, the road was being tarred and the smell of hot tar, mingled with the scent of Weston's mud, was forever impressed on my senses.

What a typical Victorian watering place it was then, and remained so almost to the Second World War – the people and children, so like W Frith's famous detailed painting, except that his view was more Ramsgate and the clothes were Victorian.

If the tide was in, the long stretch of sandy shore spread down to the gentle, shallow waves. If the tide was out, the grey-brown mud lay like frozen waves as far as the eye could see. There were bathing huts on wheels with their shafts empty where the horses had pulled them down to the edge of the hard sand. The donkeys stood in solemn rows, their mischievous faces hidden in their long nose bags. Once their bags were removed and the donkey boys shook their tins, off shot the donkeys at break-neck speed, never heeding if their rider fell off or not and woe betide anyone in their path.

Then there was the Italian icecream man, with his gaily coloured cart; and the kiosk where you could buy buckets and spades and fishing nets. There were Punch and Judy and the concert party. I wasn't at all fond of Punch and Judy. In fact, I almost hated the noise and ugliness of it all. But the concert party was quite a different thing, with its clowns and nigger[sorry] minstrels, and the bands playing tunes like 'Oh, listen to the band'.

I had one terrible experience. I don't think it lasted more than a few moments, but I was really terrified for the five minutes I was *lost*. To get down to the sand you went down one of the wide stone slopes. Mother would push Geoffrey's pushchair down one of these and settle us near it. This day the tide was in and Mother suggested that I go for a bucket of seawater while she got settled. In my haste to catch the tide before it went out, dodging groups of already seated people, I ran a little crooked, and when I turned with my bucket of water Mother had disappeared. She was

gone and I was *lost, lost.* I tore up the slope and began running along the front, crying bitterly. In the meantime Mother, on turning to sit down, couldn't see me anywhere and thought the best thing to do was go back to the front where she could look down on everyone. Within a few minutes I came running towards her, accusing her of moving. It was years before I worked it all out, without Mother moving. In spite of those really terrifying few minutes I still like Weston.

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In about September, every year during the Second World War, I used to write a communal letter to our friends and relations in WA with a personal bit added. In September 1940 we were living in Weston-super-Mare, and I wrote the following letter to Sister Kate, who had then started her Home in Queen's Park, and she sent it to the *Western Mail*.

'A year ago I wrote my first war-time Christmas letter to you. I wrote of balloons in the sky, of gas masks and the blackout. Now, a year later, within a few days of celebrating our 100th raid on this harmless seaside town of Weston-super-Mare, we have had our first death, and the war became one year old. I think it was grand that we needed 100 warnings for one death. Of course, the raids didn't begin until France fell, and often we had warnings, but had heard or seen nothing of planes.

The rationing system may have seemed muddly and unnecessary at the beginning, but it works so far, in that you can always get your ration of food and, what is better, there is at present no need to queue for it. The rationing of tea was a great blow and seemed not half enough, but it is wonderful how far you can make even tea go if you try. In spite of cutting out all of the iced cakes there are still plenty of sweet affairs to choose from, and the number of biscuits on the market are quite good. Of course, we are forgetting how to cook, as sugar does not allow for puddings and home-made cakes, so we use jellies, fruit and bought stuff. It is a marvel to me that we can get so much fresh fish and cheaply too. Clothes and furniture will come under the extra tax next month but – so far – the prices have been very good in the circumstances.

We have grown used to less cars and buses on the road and, anyway, for every car taken off I should think three bikes have come on. Even Edgar George Deacon rides to work on a bike. Trouser clips hardly fit in with a morning suit! What we do *not* get used to is the gap in men of a certain age. The milk vans have girls inside, some in trousers, some in breeches and some in short frocks with bare legs. The butcher girls have baskets of meat on the back of their bikes, and there are girl bus conductors and railway porters.

We came here in spring – a most beautiful spring after such a hard winter. We have seen a seaside town getting ready for its season; what would have been, in peace-time, a record season. Even this year, like many other people, we could not really imagine that life would be so very different.

We watched the flowers in the gardens change with the season; the painting of houses for expected summer guests and all the spring-cleaning and bustle for Whitsun weekend which usually opened the season. The donkeys were all ready, the icecream stalls, the little pony carts, the summer concerts, the evergreen Punch and Judy and even the man who snaps you as you pass. They were all ready. Then, like one of those horrid bombs, fell the news: *no* leave, *no* holiday, *no* gathering of people together and this, on the eve of Whitsun, the hottest for years, with all the larders full of wasting food, as it were. It was the last time the church bells would chime until Peace, because if the bells chimed it would mean that England had been invaded.

On Whit Sunday we sat on the top of Cheddar Gorge watching two planes playing 'chase me' through the Gorge, missing the rocks by inches. The countryside was full of fruit blossom and hidden lilac scented the lanes. More children began to come from the cities and the landladies began to bring in their signs. What with children and people who had evacuated themselves, they were full.

Never had the hedges been so white with hawthorn, it was like snow, as you sat on the hills and looked over the land. The fields were golden with buttercups, the hay was gathered early and France fell. Towards the end of June we had our first warnings, and the town sank in a night, as it were. The self-evacuated fled. The expected vsitors were still only expected. The donkeys set out for the sands later each day. The icecream stalls looked sad. The concerts shut down with a notice saying that you could come in and hire a chair, if you wished. Punch took his Judy away. Only Sunday School treats gave the donkeys any exercise. The theatre on the end of the pier and the picture houses did little better. People did not like going out at night as the warnings came earlier every week. The beauty and sunshine of the best summer for six years spread their glories around us unheeded.

Then the bombs ceased to fall so much among the fields and, less than a week later, our road was suddenly very busy. It was one of those really hot days you sometimes get in early September. They were driving right into the sun and the sweat was running down their young, brown faces. When the column stopped, as it did now and again, they would take off their tin hats and mop their faces. First it was tanks, with their tracks worn smooth and shiny as they spun, chattering, on the hard road – the schoolchildren cheered them as they passed; then the lorries full of stores rolled by. As they waited at hold-ups in the convoy, girls from the houses came out with cups of tea. One van affair had a little black dog, and when it stopped they put the dog under the van to cool off. It was as hot as *that* in England that day. The children waved and ran alongside for a while as they passed and then, when we thought the invasion was over, along came armoured cars with guns behind them. Guns and guns and guns.

I have never been pleased to see guns before, but this time I, too, shouted and waved. Here was no chatter of hoof and guncarriage, but rubber tyres made for silence, and speed from engines, not horses. One would have thought we would be used to soldiers by now, but this was different somehow. Not only were these men coming to protect us – but there was strength in those young faces born of experience, not just training, and we were not surprised to find out that they were Dunkirk men. They held up their thumbs and grinned as they sweated in their uniforms, and I could not help but think of other summers when, on holiday in shirts and slacks, they longed for weather such as this. We felt protected and safe.

The seaside season has given up the ghost. The real raids on London have brought a few more homeless mothers this way. The town, or rather Kewstoke Woods, has swallowed the Dunkirk men, unless you know where to find them. In the last few weeks we find uniforms popping up all over the place to challenge us; or, if we walk through the woods on top of the hill, we find a sentry at the end, standing on the site of the old British camp of hundreds of years ago. That is what six months in Weston-super-Mare have shown us: it is quite understandable that a lot of people – especially the older ones – dread the night and the sirens, but they do not knuckle under to it. The bombing of London has done much to make us angry and thus get the better of even the worse of nerves.

To those of us who have lived in the Bush there is no hardship in this war as yet. The spoonfed people of this island are being weaned so well they hardly notice it, and the various organizations, for all their faults, are doing well. I see no French panic, or the treason which held the Dutch. Now this London business has got our backs up instead of scaring us, as Hitler meant it to do. How long this stalemate will go on, or where it will all lead, we do not know, but as always in wartime, the people are closer together and class falls back ashamed for a while.

Millions of red berries are in the hedges, the blackberries are deep beads of juice and the sun has scorched the grass brown and dry. There is an autumnal cool nip in the air at sunset, and the sea rolls impatiently over the sandy mud, but somehow the winter does not seem the dreaded affair that it was last year. Then we hoped that the war would be short, but now we know it cannot, so we are ready for whatever comes.'

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Just after Geoffrey was born I was taught the following poem which I would render on demand, without fuss, with the elaborate actions popular at the time. It was considered delightful then, but makes me squirm nowadays.

> I have such a dear baby brother
> Papa says he's put out my nose.
> I don't know, I'm sure, how he did it,
> Nurse could tell me if she chose,
> For I'm sure she knows all about him,
> Whatever he wants when he cries,
> For she says when he wrinkles his forehead,
> The light is too strong for his eyes.
> Uncle says if I give him the baby
> To take home in his pocket tonight,
> I shall find, when I wake in the morning,
> That my nose is exactly right.

It was in 1911 that we saw our first aeroplane. It was advertised that this plane (as we now call it) would come to a certain field on the outskirts of Cheltenham. My father said he didn't think it at all necessary to pay the rather large fee to go into the field; he thought we would have a better view from a hill nearby. Of course, he was right.

The next day the plane was on show at one of the first motor showrooms in Cheltenham. The wings had been taken off and placed beside it so that it would fit into the garage. It was rather small and fragile, like a large, pathetic, dewinged butterfly. I was not impressed. I'd rather have a steam-roller any day.

One of the little girls who had been in some of the plays with me invited me to her birthday party, which was in March. It was Lent and, religiously, I was a very precocious child. I informed Mother that I did not think I should go to the party as it was in Lent. In fact, I thought it was rather wicked of her to have a party in Lent. The cheek of a five-year-old! Mother explained to me that, as the little girl was born in March, her birthday always came in Lent. Was she never to have a party because of this? Wasn't it rather unkind of me not to go and really rather rude? I saw the logic of this and not only attended, complete with present, but I recited one of my best pieces when asked!

When Bath became so popular during the Regency, Cheltenham, little more than a village then, woke up to the fact that it, too, had a *spa.* So it, too, set out to become a winter resort. Taking Bath as its model, it is laid out in squares, terraces and crescents. The tree-lined Promenade with Montpellier and the Rotunda are on the south of the High Street, while north-east of the High Street really beautiful squares of villas terminated in Pittville Gardens and the Pump Room, a large, Romano-Grecian building, at first intended as a private house, but mostly an empty white elephant.

The Gardens (really parks) are bisected by a main road, but connected by an underground one-way passage. The Gardens on the left of the road contain a large lake, surrounded by lawns and trees, complete with bridges, a swan island and boats you can hire to row on the lake. It is a very beautiful place to wander in at any time of the year. The Gardens on the right-hand side of the road are quite different in character, and have only one entrance. There was, then, an entrance fee, except on Sundays. There are beautiful formal flower beds, tennis courts, rustic bridges over a much smaller lake and a wide lawn leading up to the Pump Room. There are also swings, but on Sundays, when entrance to the Gardens was free, the swings were *tied up* because it was wicked to swing on a Sunday. I was sure Jesus did *not* agree with this.

On August Bank Holidays, and other special occasions, great festivals of all kinds were held in the Gardens, usually ending with fireworks. The Coronation of George V on 22 June 1911 was one such day. My father was the hero of the swimming world that day. He won every prize he could. One of the supporters of the club owned a fleet of carriages and when we departed he put one of the open carriages at the disposal of the Waite family. There we all sat. Baby Geoffrey and me between our parents, all the prizes on the opposite seat and my father waving his silver cup to the crowd as though we were Royalty!

In August we had another exciting time. We were, of course, at Deanwood. Auntie Lena was to be married to Uncle Will on August Bank Holiday, and my cousin Queenie (the elder daughter of Uncle Harry, who gave me my Teddy) and I were to be the two child bridesmaids. The whole family was coming up from Cardiff to stay at Deanwood for the wedding. The reception was to be in our house in Selkirk Street and, as all the presents were being kept there, the men slept there each night. Uncle Harry's hobby was photography, and very good at it he was. He took a number of photos of us in Deanwood gardens. When it came to the official photos of the wedding Queenie went on strike for a while, so in the photo I look as though I'm in a bad mood. Actually, I was nearly crying because Queenie was so upset.

Auntie Flo bought us beautiful lacy frocks and hats, with little champagne-coloured shoes. They were such a new thing that I was delighted with them. Except for very rich people, children still wore button boots, and even most shoes were black, brown, or, sometimes, white. To have this lovely shade was wonderful – so wonderful that I fell down the first flight of stairs! My father ran to the bottom and, finding me safe half-way down, began to laugh. That did it. My pride was definitely hurt.

In the bedroom all the ladies were behind each other doing up their dresses. Mother's was a beautiful wine-coloured material with rows and rows of lace and tucks on the bodice. She did look beautiful. Billie, Queenie's little sister, was disgusted because she wasn't a bridesmaid too. Auntie Flo bought her a little basket of flowers to carry and then she was happy.

Queenie and I carried tall baskets of flowers that we could stand beside us in the church. Uncle Will gave us both silver bracelets. I was afraid I might lose mine, as I had such a small wrist, so I held my hand in a certain way to keep it safe.

Mother told me I must take care of Queenie in the church and show her what to do – when to kneel down, etc – as she had *never* been in a church before. I just could not understand this, but said I would take care of her and I did. Most of the time we both found Billie a bit of a bore to us. After all, she was only two years old, and we were four and five years old which, at that age, was a bit of a gap.

In 1911 white-collar workers were a new class who lived in six-roomed houses on estates and, except for maids, had everything correct. The Stratfords were no exception. Most houses at that time – in fact, all, I think – were rented. (Most novels of the period 1900-1914 seem to have been written about the gentry and house parties, the rich industrialists or very poor people. Little is written about this new class whose men were to become most of the cannon fodder of the First World War.) The Stratfords returned from their honeymoon to their dear little semi-detached house, with its small front garden and long back one running down to a brook at the bottom and a field beyond, where a pack of hounds lived in their huge kennels.

Uncle Will put up a new cycle shed (quite a modern affair) for his bike and gardening tools. At the bottom of the steps from the back door was the toilet and a coal-shed. There were three bedrooms, two rooms on the left of the dear little hall, a pantry under the stairs and a large scullery

at the end of the hall which held a new gas oven, a copper, and the one tap and sink in the house. It was not the idea at that time to have a kitchen. The front room was called the drawing room, the back room, which we would now call the living room, was just known as the back room. Both had coal fires. At first they were lit by gaslight, downstairs only.

Their furniture was the newest of the period. The drawing room was carpeted with a floral design, there was a sofa and easy chairs to match, a glass-fronted bookcase, Uncle's piano, a fern on the latest stand in the window and, in one corner, one of those folding cake-stands. On the walls were a few large, coloured prints of romantic scenes.

The floor of the back room, like the stairs and the rest of the house, was covered in lino. Very smart it was considered, too. In the back room was a rug in front of the fireplace, and a floor-to-ceiling cupboard and drawers fitment. There was a dining suite including, of course, a small sideboard, a large hanging clock and various prints of skating scenes, children playing in gardens and Still Life, which I thought very pretty at that time.

Two of the bedrooms had bedroom suites, including floral bedroomware on the washstands. The Misses Miles had given Auntie some very dainty china, cutlery and linen, and she had one of those copper kettles you put on the table with a spirit burner underneath. I thought the whole house was just lovely!

Early in 1912 Mother decided that, as I was turning six years old, I should go to school. I already knew all the capital letters, I could count up to 100, I knew the days of the week, most of the months of the year and I could just tell the time, but I did not know the ABC and didn't learn it until I was over eight nyears old. Mother took me to a little private school and, although I remember exactly where it was, I cannot remember the name of the woman who ran it. My parents had decided to go to Western Australia in the June and they wanted to be able to say that I first went to school in England.

I didn't do much at school except write pot hooks and a few numbers and play games. One day we were told to take our favourite doll to school. I had a string of dolls – quite ten I would think – but I took Teddy. The others sneered at me, but I didn't care, neither did I bother to tell them how many dolls I had at home. It was just that Teddy was far and away my favourite.

Mother wrote a poem about leaving England which I used to recite for years. It is now in her book of poems. Here it is.

GOODBYE

Goodbye, little home, far away must I roam.
Goodbye, little flowers, and soft springtime showers.
Goodbye, green fields too, hills, trees, all of you.
Goodbye, little birds flying heavenwards.

Shall I find you just the same when I come this way again?
Shall I find the same old friends where the dear old roadway bends?
Will the world be just as fair, just as bright and free from care?
Will you all be just the same when I come this way again?
Song bird, will you come from your woodland home,
Away from the snow to the land I go?
If you do, sweet bird, let the song I've heard
Be ever the same when you sing again.

Alice M Waite 1912

When we were vaccinated I was very proud to wear the red ribbon around my arm, which meant 'please don't bump me, I've been vaccinated'. The habit was dropped somewhere in the late 1920s.

My father was going to Weston-super-Mare to play water polo for the last time for the County of Gloucestershire. My father was captain and they were playing their great water polo rivals, Somersetshire, which meant that the famous Radmilovic, known as Raddy, would be playing opposite my father. They were well matched, arch enemies and a great public draw. The great difference between them was that my father, as well as being captain, played back, supported and encouraged his team and, if necessary, was capable of back-flipping the ball into the goal from nearly the length of the baths. Raddy, on the other hand, played forward and expected the team to feed him so that he could score. Their positions thus in the water meant that they marked each other. Years later, in the 1920s after one such match, when I took my parents in their morning cup of tea, my father – lying on his back asleep – had a wonderful black eye, and across his fair hairless chest were some terrifically deep and long scratches. He opened his good eye and, with a boyish, gleeful grin, whispered 'But you should see what I did to Raddy!' So, for this last great fight, as they all thought, my father decided it would be a good idea to leave baby Geoffrey with Auntie Lena, who was expecting her first baby, and we three would go to Bristol so that Mother could say goodbye to her father and, leaving me there for the night, they would both go to Weston for the match.

I had never met my grandfather before and found him even more fun than his brother, 'Little Uncle'. He took me to the zoo, and we got wet on the way home, and the women tore strips off him. I thought, 'He couldn't help the rain.' He couldn't understand why I didn't want an icecream off the Italian's cart. There were two reasons, which I did not give him. One, mother did not think they were very pure, and of course she was right. But, chiefly, they only sold wafers, which I didn't like, because they were soft and ran between my fingers and were messy. I was very fussy and didn't like messy things. And, considering I was often 'plumber's mate' and helped my father in the garden, it almost seemed like a contradiction.

In the evening Auntie Winnie took me to my first performance of the Mikado. Being in Bristol, I presume it was a good performance. I was enchanted with it. I thought it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen since 'Pinkie and the Fairies' when I was a baby. After all, I was now just six years! I never forgot one scene when the chorus came, singing, on to the darkened stage, carrying lighted Japanese lanterns on long poles, down an oval staircase.

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In after years I always went to the Mikado whenever I could. The most perfect one was at Sadlers Wells in late 1962, just before we sailed for WA. After the copyright had expired, and when I visited England in 1975, I was taken to see the unusual and very beautiful 'Black Mikado'. And now I feel I can never see it again because of the memory of those last two wonderful performances.

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It was decided to have a family photograph taken to leave with our relations as, in 1912, it was felt very final when people went to Australia. Geoffrey was seated on a small table, with Mother in her beautiful wine-coloured gown (alas, only in black and white then!) bending over him. My father sat at the side with me balanced one side, clutching a bunch of material flowers, which we were told would look like real ones, and did.. Again we were told to 'watch for the dicky bird'. But this time I was smiling, I was older and knew it was just a joke.

When we left Cheltenham Railway Station, relations and Swimming Club friends came to see us off. And the press came and took a photograph, and called me Little Miss Waite, which pleased me greatly. Auntie Lena was not there, of course, as 'nice' females expecting babies were never seen out of doors. Cousin Dorothy was born on 26 August 1912. Granny Waite thought she would never see us all again; actually, 12 years to the month, she would see us depart again. And then she died in my father's house in Cheltenham in 1929. You just never can tell!

And so, in June 1912, we sailed for Western Australia round the Cape, in rather a small ship (I would guess about 6-8000 tons), called the SS Ajana, on her maiden voyage. Life was never quite the same.

Before 1912, Cheltenham had been Home, an anchor. Relations and friends were there, and one especial house was *our home*. And All Saints Church was *our* church and, small as I was, I felt I could always find God when I walked into it. I vaguely knew he had other houses, but...After I was four years old, childhood memories and haunts are in four different parts of England and two in WA. Nearly all outside Cheltenham. And now, Geoffrey having left this life so many years, there is no one to share these memories with. That is the selfish reason I want to talk of the next six years.

Somewhere, sometime, I wrote the following little picture.

In 1908, it seems, always Sunday in All Saints Road,
The crinkle of petticoats and lace drawers -
the rustle as I knelt in Church.
Music swelling and filling the whole building,
and voices chanting,
and the kindly old gentlemen [saints] high up on the walls.

Not one word did I understand, but the whole pattern was the edge of heaven to me. Mint sauce would sail on the breath of roast potatoes to greet me at the door when I went home. Deanwood was a fairyland in those days. The weeping willow, the apple smell of the box hedges, the exciting mustiness of the library, and the bread and raspberry jam smell of the servants' hall. And, best of all, the hollow 'wood against wood' sound of croquet being played and long shadows on the lawns.