

Sunday, August 25th 1889

Dear diary,

My name is Margaret Smith, and it's the first time I have written a diary. I have decided to begin to write because my life is changing. I left my native town and my father; whose shop went bankrupt, to come here, in London. I had to find a job since I couldn't stay with Poppy and I find one thanks to a relationship of a relationship of my mother: It is a London family who needs a governess for their daughter.

I arrived today, after a long and tiring trip in stagecoach, but when I saw London I was greatly impressed. I was completely overwhelmed by the size of the city and that of the crowd : I can 't describe it, it is so incredible : all these Victorian houses, these so tall buildings, the Thames, these persons in the streets who are so well-dressed. It's fascinating! I have never imagined that London was like I saw it today. This city is spectacular! I think I already like it. Besides maybe I will see Queen Victoria, one day!

I met the Woods, in the middle of the afternoon. They have a so beautiful house : it is sprawling! Mrs. and Mr Woods are so good-looking, and Mrs. Woods is pregnant: they seem to be happy. We began to talk, about the role I will have in the family. Then, the two children came into the living-room : a young girl named Jane and her brother, Edward. They were smiling, and when I saw them all together; they appeared to me as the ideal family: they seem to be so happy which make me think of my mother I hadn't known, and of my father who remains alone in our house...

The children looked pleased to meet me and I felt relieved because I was afraid they don't like me, but perhaps I speak too fast because we don't know each other yet. Jane is a nice girl and I will take care of her. As far as Edward is concerned, if I well understood what the Woods said; he will go to a public school next year and I don't have to take care of him.

So, after that, Jane and Edward made me visit the house, or rather a part and they took me to my room where I am here now. It is my new house.

Good evening diary



Sunday, September 1st 1889

I arrived at the Woods' a week ago, and I am beginning to discover what my role is about. I don't have to take care of Edward, a private tutor is in charge of his education. I am only in charge of Jane and a part of her education : I have to teach her how to behave in the society. For that, I will teach her embroidery, poetry, how to have a conversation and what subjects she can mention. Besides, I must go out with her for her dresses, for example, or to have a walk or to visit a place like a museum. I understand what a new dress can represent for a young girl because I used to be one and with the shop of Poppy, I used to play to wear hats and accessories : I loved that. I am aware that if Jane wants a new dress, it is to please a man.

But today, I wonder whether having a new dress is so important in life ; now I consider it as frivolous things because I think there are more important things in the world. I dream of something else : a world where women would have more rights, life for example the right to vote, and be less submissive to men. I would like the situation changes but I don't fight for my ideas.

This new environment, which appears to me as a new world, is very different from what I have known in my childhood. I have never lived in a so big city ! I know I have been here for only a week but I don't feel I am where I belong. Maybe, it is because at the Woods' I am considered as a servant by the masters but not by the servants themselves. They don't accept me given that I supposedly have more relations with our masters. I am isolated, I feel alone. I hope this situation will change rapidly because I will not be able to bear it for a long time.

Sunday, November 17th 1889

Dear diary

I do worry about Edward.

Yesterday I entered his room while he was sobbing at his desk. Of course he felt very ashamed of having been seen in a situation of weakness. He eventually confessed that he feared failing, he feared going to Eton.

I had never realized to what extent he was under pressure regarding this acceptance to his prestigious boarding school : since he was born his future has been scheduled : he is expected to be the best in everything he does, he has to succeed brilliantly in his studies...

It may be too heavy to stand for an eight-year-old boy to feel that his whole family keeps eyes on him. No failure is tolerated.

Even his leisure time hides an investment to his future life : he has to be the winner in sports, to read his father fulfilled bookcase to make a perfect scholar course. His father cannot stand defeat : he has always been successful in what he did... He feels every failure of his son is a deep and personal humiliation...

I would have liked to be able to console him, but he needs his parent 's encouragement and recognition... :Nothing could comfort him, and my mother's instincts made me hold him in my arms.

He was amazed and a bit embarrassed by this physical contact he is not used to having since his nurse left...

This family is so strange...

Parents hand strict rules down to their children, as if it were a life-or-death question that they are considered as a well-to-do family. But I wonder whether they really subscribe or not to those principle. Do they really believe in what they say, in what they show ? I think Mrs Woods tries to... She gives importance to attend to church every Sunday, to pray every morning and evening...

But her husband sometimes disgusts me. He pays attention to his gentleman appearance, to his public image... but behind the mask, hides somebody so different... I presume (anyway I had rather not know) that he has affairs with other women... What a strange society in which appearances and reality are so contradictory...

Good night diary, I will write you later.

Sunday, December 15th 1889

Dear diary,

Today I take advantage of my free-time which is something rare. My job takes much time so each time I can, I write. I wanted to read but the temptation was too hard. I have to write I can't help it ; especially today because I have something important to put here.

*Mr and Mrs Woods told me a few weeks ago I should take Jane to the theatre. They asked for a choice of my own but I did not answer at once so they told me to think about it. Now I know ; I choose **Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde**. Indeed, I have heard it had been programmed last year at the London Theatre but I still wonder whether my idea is good or not. Is it a good play for a future lady ? And, to another extent, an appropriate book for her ? Should I advise Jane to read Stevenson's writings ? I just can't imagine the Woods' reaction if I do and if they do not agree ; I will be so ashamed.*

On the one hand; this book and play are perhaps not exactly what they want for their daughter ; but on the other hand; if I cannot take her to see such a masterpiece (to my mind), I do not know which one she should see.

Because finally, in general, arts are good for the education of ladies; they should know a little about that. Jane will be one of them so I will take her to the theatre. I should also speak about painting with her, maybe take her to an art gallery then...

For this, I am almost sure the Woods would approve. But let's come back to the play ; I am doubting again. Am I not mistaking on my choices for Jane's education? Am I not influenced by my own ? Some of the things that do not shock me can shock her and (worse for me) her parents.

Ah... sweet dream; dream of a world in which such things are not a real problem, a moral problem, a social problem. A lot of dreams for little Margaret. [was born at the wrong time... I'm convinced the future will be better than now but I will not see it. Isn't it unfair ?

Sunday, December 22nd 1889

Dear diary,

Nothing about my job for once. I wrote to Poppy a few days ago ; I think will go to see him in a couple of weeks. I am eager to be over there. I remember we used to speak for hours of mummy and other things in my childhood; dream together, play, and above all, I used to tell him each one of my secrets. We have always been close. That is why I want to speak of the relationship between Jane and her father. Actually, a strange feeling comes to me each time I see them together... which does not happen very often. I suppose this feeling comes from the memories I have of Poppy and me.

Now, when I see little Jane and Mr Woods, there is such a huge distance between them. Jane with her eyes wide open, looking at her father lovingly; and his eyes : almost cold. Looking at his daughter, I feel he is only thinking of the lady she will become. I have never seen a spark in his eyes looking at Jane; or maybe my imagination is overtaking my view...

I have never seen them speak. together like father and daughter. Does he only care about Jane's feelings ?

But here is my real question : can natural leanings, feelings be bound by a social class, by the attitude people must adopt ? In this way, that could explain the difference between my memories and what I can observe here. This could be the reason why Mr Woods seems so distant with Jane. Well, I will think about that later, I have to go: we cut and brought a fir tree as the German tradition is used to doing : they decorate this tree with kinds of glass balls and ribbons as well as wooden stars... Since Prince Albert has arrived to the Court, he imposes that this tradition coming from his native country is carried on... And consequently, aristocratic families begin to adopt it also: everything that is done by the royal family is imitated !

What a funny state of mind...

Good bye dear Diary, I am going to join them !

Sunday January 12th 1890

Dear diary,

I am very tired today because I spent the whole day on the train, and now I am in my room.

Mr and Mrs Woods allowed me to come back home to see Poppy - I love this nickname : I gave him it many years ago. I remember this day : we had been to a field of poppies and he made a flower wreath which was so beautiful. Since that I have called him Poppy. I got three days off. So I took the train and I felt as the first time I had taken it : I was thrilled because I love looking at the landscape which passes by ! .And the train went so fast. I cannot describe this sensation of speed : 30 kilometres an hour, that's a lot ! It was a little as if I were stuck to my chair. I couldn't move anymore. Furthermore I didn't see very well the landscape : it made me imagine another world where I could fly and be what I want, that is to say I could express myself freely on all subjects I am interested in. There is also another thing I love about trains : the fact one doesn't see all the details of the landscape, only stripes of colour... it made me escape from my daily life in London. I don't say that I am not satisfied with this life, because I like to look after Jane : we get on well, but I am homesick ; I miss my native town.

I hadn't seen Poppy for four months and I was so happy to come home. When I arrived; it was in the afternoon, Poppy was not in the house though he is always in the house. Suddenly, I was afraid : perhaps something had happened to him... I began to imagine horrible things : he might be sick or worse... dead. But I was relieved when I heard his voice behind me : "Maggie, my sweet daughter, I'm so glad to see you !" He took me in his arms, I was so elated. Then, we sat down in the living-room and we began to speak about all I had done. I told him what I was doing with Jane : our conversations, when we had a walk in the park near the house, or when we went to shops for Jane's dresses... Then we spoke about my new way of life, more urban. Indeed, it is very different from life in the countryside or in poorer towns than London. London is huge ; there are many things to see and to learn, for example in museums : there is the Great Exhibition - my parents saw it a long time ago - where I visited galleries. I think, that painting is a beautiful way to express oneself : I love Whistler, for example. But to learn something we can just look around us. People are different, it is difficult to explain : they don't have the same life, they are not interested in the same things, and they don't have the same needs. London is lively. There are so many things to do; people only have to walk, in the street to meet somebody or buy something, and they are so many streets !

But this trip made me realise that now I have a new life. And I don't like it when Poppy stays alone in this house, without anybody to help him. He seems to be tired and I am not there anymore to take care of him. I worry for him. That is difficult to live far from my only family.

I enjoyed this trip, it enabled me to have a break but tomorrow I am back to my new life but I am happy to see back Jane.

Sunday, February 2nd 1890

Dear diary,

A few hours ago, I found the Times laying on a table in the house. Yes. The Times. This expensive newspaper which costs seven pence. I cannot afford it so it was the first time I'd read it. The headline was "Crazy Woman" : Emmeline Pankhurst. I wish I had the author of such things in front of me. He (because he must be a man since the words were hard) was writing absolute horrors. As far as he was concerned; this woman had gone mad and she should suffer a thousand deaths for the shame she has brought upon her family and English ladies to another extent.

Why ? Why all that ? She only fought for something I consider fair, actually, more than fair. The right to vote for women. Is it a crime ? Why are people so narrow-minded ? Are women so different from men ? Is there something really proving that our brain is smaller than theirs just like black people ? Well, I know I should not be furious like this but such an attitude is really disturbing. I think for this I can say "thank you daddy for having educated me like a boy". I am not used to thinking like a "good girl", like a "lady". I hope I will not talk Jane into thinking just like me. I must not. I must stick to my job : "Teach Jane lady's occupations. Teach her how to behave to be a real lady." But I keep thinking that it is a natural thought, a natural feeling of injustice that come to us, women, reading or hearing such dreadful words. From this point of view, Jane could think like me by herself, by nature.

I hope for the future that all women will be luckier than we are now. I often dream of equality between all people and I just can't explain that. A world in which men do not despise women on behalf of God or Mother Nature or their "superiority". I really hope for things to change but for now nothing changes. What a pity.

Sunday, March 9th 1890

Good evening diary,

I still can't get over it.

The more I learn about the well-to-do etiquette, the more incomprehensible I find it and so silly!

Even if I had been told by former neighbours before coming that I would be surprised by the nonsensical rules of the London aristocratic society, but to that extent, I did not expect...

Yesterday, I had decided to make Jane read an article published the previous day, which dealt with the economy and especially the development of the industry in our country, because I had found it clear and useful to understand what occurs everyday around us, but I immediately saw that it extremely bored her: she yawned her head off every two minutes. I must confess that I was very disappointed in her behaviour; and so I asked her to make some effort and to concentrate. She impudently replied that it was not worth making efforts since she would never need any economical knowledge in her future life: she was to marry Henry, her father's friend's son. Given that she has a tempting dowry, and that he belongs to a noble and well-to-do family, the only thing she should be able to do was to take care of the servants and organise receptions.

What struck me the most was that she did not even seem reluctant to do so.

As I did not want her to be turned against me, I tried not to show her my disagreement regarding to what she said; but I was aghast... I asked her if she found him likeable, (this could have been the reason why she accepted so easily her parents' plan) and if she agreed that nobody cared about what she felt. She answered; amused by my unexpected question: "Why should I worry? I know that he suits me: he belongs to the same class as I do, he has curly and dark hair while mine is soft and blond; his eyes are blue while mine are green... We are physically different, and every body knows that it is the key of a well-balanced marriage. Moreover, he will earn a lot of money thanks to his father's affairs and I will bring him a part of the family estate: we will make a perfect couple!"

Seeing my wide-open eyes, she added: "these rules are very useful: they are meant to create a couple that balances each other out. You should not marry somebody who looks like yourself..."

I suddenly understood that she considers it as normality. I feel so apart from the world I live in... Of course I know that few marriages start with love, and that the first most important marriage aim is to found a family in every social class... But I was used to seeing people who know and appreciate each other before the man asked the woman's hand to her father. I could never imagine that there was a code of etiquette dictating whom you were or were not allowed to marry based on physical features...

Those beliefs are completely out of sense ! What proves that you get better with someone with a different hair colour than yours ! I had the feeling that her parents had planned this union because it was a good business deal...

She explained me that all the art of courting was to follow different steps : when she is older, maybe seventeen or eighteen, she will go out and purchase a new wardrobe in order to look her best in receptions, private dinners... She will be under her mother's wing who will act as a chaperone, since a single woman is never allowed out of the house by herself, and since she can't address a gentleman without an introduction by a mutual friend or relationship. Then courting will progress slowly, step by step, with couples first speaking, then walking out together, and finally keeping company, yet always avoiding any contact : they have to walk apart. The only contact a gentleman is allowed with a woman who is not his fiancée is to offer his hand while walking over rough spots.

While Jane was explaining me this code, which I still do not understand, I secretly thanked my father for not having raised me according to those silly principles.

Should I marry an honourable gentleman without following the rules of etiquette and respecting the act of silence ? I wish my future husband would respect and take my opinion into account, would reckon my capacities to think, would love me for what I really am !

I realise that I am not at all as I ought to be, I was raised in such an unusual way : When my mother died my father was at a complete loss and transferred to me, his single child, all his affection without caring about the etiquette that usually structures a girl's education... I would probably think as Jane do today... I would not be interested in anything, neither in politics than in philosophy... I would not be who I am now...

On the other hand, I sometimes feel so lonely that I nearly wish I would be more "conform, normal" even if I past my intellectual interests... Anyway, I can't talk to anybody about it, I can't share my thoughts... I suffer from the difference there is between the other women and I.

Jane might be my confident, she is so lively, but she has not any intellectual interest... Actually she could have some : history and literature already interest her, but she is used to learning by heart, and her critical mind has not been encouraged ,she does even know what it consist in !

If I shared all my considerations with her, first she would be shocked, then even if she understood me I do not think it would be beneficial to her : her parents want her to be a docile girl... It is not worth creating problems for net; keeping her away from the society she lives in... She would not be happier !

I shall not forget that her mother told me clearly that she had to be groomed for her role of dutiful wife and mother.

I am expected to teach her English, French, singing, dancing, playing the piano, being conversant with light literature (how frustrating it is to be compelled to study "conform" authors : Homer, while it would be so interesting, impassioning to make her discover new and committed writers such as Dickens...), needlework... I feel bored teaching her things which do not interest me and things I am not gifted in : especially in needlework, Jane is much better than I !

I am reading a book, that the genius Samuel Smiles wrote in 1878... according to him : to instruct women is to instruct man, to enlarge her mental freedom is to extend and secure that of the whole community...

I wish I could meet him !

I do not know what to think, I should reconsider it later...

Let's just keep doing what I am expected to do without asking too many questions... Good night diary, it is late, tomorrow will be a busy day... But maybe my thoughts will be clearer !



Sunday April 27th 1889

Dear Diary,

That's probably the last time I write as governess at the Woods'. Indeed I'm leaving in a few days. Eight months... I've just spent around eight months in this family, all the time with them, looking after sweet Jane... and in a few days I won't see them all anymore. What is she going to become? A great lady as her mother because of her condition, but submissive by rules of behaviour, by her husband; her responsibilities with her home and her role as a wife... This year in London, I have seen and discovered so many things. I have heard of women who asked for the right to vote as I have written before. My God! The right to vote for women... I'd like to see that! A first step to improve women's status. I wish it would have been granted more before I leave, but it hasn't. What a pity that those things can't be done in a year...

To resume with the family, that's interesting to compare the vision I had of it when I first arrived, and the one I have now, and to think of what happened within a year... I've just read my first page... that's funny! I thought of a beautiful family, a happy family... In fact, the father is hard with his wife and children. I've never imagined a father could be like this. He doesn't show any signs of love. It is a shame! In front of other people, he pretends, that's all that he can do! People must think, this is a happy family. No matter if it isn't true! And he really seemed to be in love with his wife, but I know he sometimes sees other women... I don't think Mrs Woods knows that, anyway she can't do anything... Mrs Woods... an unhappy woman hiding behind a beautiful face. She is often strict, especially with me because I see the family as it is.

Finally, the big change was the birth of a third child. When I came, there were two children, Jane and Edward. Now Adrian is the third one.

I don't want to stay here. It is too hard for me not to educate Jane as I think the best way is. I've tried to make her take an interest in a lot of things. I would have liked to talk with her about the right to vote, about her way of life but she does not seem to be concerned at all.

By the way, a few days ago, she found the diary her grand-mother wrote when she was about my age. Those days seemed to be quite hard, because of very strict rules... more than today! This is such an exciting account of a past time! A time seen from inside, through her inner thoughts, her own vision of her way of life... What will people think, of me if they find my diary? What will society be like in a century? Perhaps there will be a lot of new inventions. Perhaps in a century men will be submissive to women? That's a funny idea, isn't it?

That's definitely exciting what people are able to invent! Things I would never have thought of! Fountain Pens, motor cars, motorcycles... In 1851, there was "The Great Exhibition" in London. Daddy and Mummy visited it together. They spent two days in London and did the trip by... train!! That was their only trip to London. Dad often tells me about it. Two beautiful days in his life! And the Exhibition was "simply fabulous" as he always says! He makes me laugh when he talks about that... He speaks with a lot of energy, happiness, and excitement about what has been, in his opinion, "the proof of the power of the British Empire!" which he says with a proud and serious behaviour! That is Daddy! Now I'm going home... I have to take care of Poppy, and then... find a new job. And I think Dad would like me to find a husband... Perhaps I will... But I can't become a submissive woman! I would like a man who realizes that, even if I am a woman, I can think by myself and have my own opinion. How will he look like? How will be my new life? ... if I can say so.