



opening extract from

Carbonel

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Breaking-up

Rosemary's satchel bounced cheerfully up and down on her back as she hopped on and off the pavement of Tottenham Grove. She enjoyed school, except for arithmetic and boiled fish on Fridays. But breaking-up, as you will have noticed, even if you have not particularly distinguished yourself, gives everyone a delightful party feeling, particularly at the end of the Summer Term. Rosemary Brown was fizzing with it as she bounced up and down on the kerb.

She had just reached the pillar box at the corner when Mary Winters came by with her friend Arlene.

'Hallo, Rosie!' said Mary. 'We're going to Blackpool tomorrow!'

'Blackpool is common, my auntie says. We're going to Bournemouth.' Arlene wore brooches, and sometimes a gold bracelet to go to school, although it was not allowed. Her auntie thought

a great many things were common. 'Where are you going, Rosie?'

Rosemary hopped off the kerb, changed feet, and hopped on again with great deliberation.

'Nowhere!' she said as carelessly as she could manage.

'Poor thing!' said Arlene with maddening pity, and the two friends hurried off, giggling, together.

Rosemary went on doggedly hopping, but the party feeling was only fizzing at half-cock now. Mary and Arlene knew quite well that she was unlikely to be going away. It was hard enough for her mother to manage at all, because she had no money but her widow's pension, and what she earned by sewing for people. Rosemary stopped hopping. Her satchel was beginning to hurt when she bounced. It was heavy because it was full of end of term things, a rather squashy piece of clay modelling, her indoor shoes and a dirty overall, as well as some books. She ran the rest of the way down Tottenham Grove with her short pigtails flapping up and down sideways, like the blades of an old pair of scissors.

Rosemary and her mother lived at number ten, in three furnished rooms on the top floor, with use of bath on Tuesdays and Fridays, and a share of the kitchen. It was not a very pleasant arrangement, because the furniture was ugly (most of it

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was covered with horse-hair that pricked, even through a winter tunic), and the bathroom was always festooned with other people's washing. But it was cheap, and would have to do until they could find somewhere unfurnished, and then they would be able to use their own comfortable, shabby belongings again.

The houses in Tottenham Grove were all exactly alike, very tall and thin, with a great deal of peeling paint and cracking plaster. Once they had been rather grand, with servants in the basement, and carriages driving up to the front doors, and ladies with very large hats and very small waists paying calls. Her mother had told her all about it. But Rosie was not bothering her head about that at the moment. She knew without looking which was number ten, and went running up the twelve steps so quickly that she bumped into Mrs Walker, the landlady, who was slapping the door mat against one of the pillars of the peeling portico.

'I'm so sorry, Mrs Walker!' said Rosemary breathlessly.

'I should think so!' said Mrs Walker sourly. 'Home for the holidays? How long is it this time?'

'Six weeks,' said Rosie.

'Well, I don't know! Six weeks! I should have thought a great girl like you could have been doing something useful.'

She flopped the still dusty mat into its place, and Rosie went slowly upstairs with her satchel bumping on each step as it trailed behind her. When she opened the door of the sitting room she saw that the table was drawn up to the window and already laid.

‘Mummy, what a lovely dinner!’

‘Well, it’s the first day of the holidays,’ said her mother cheerfully, ‘and I’ve just got three weeks’ work from Mrs Pendlebury Parker, so I thought we would celebrate.’

There was a bunch of marigolds in the centre of the blue and white table cloth, a constellation of small, glowing suns. There were crescent rolls, tinned tongue and salad, and a bottle of bright pink fizzy stuff for Rosemary.

‘There is ice-cream with stewed fruit afterwards,’ said her mother, ‘but hang up your things and wash first.’

‘Tell me about Mrs Pendlebury Parker!’ said Rosemary when her knife and fork began to move a little more slowly. ‘Is it nice sort of sewing, and can you bring it home with you?’

Stories of Mrs Pendlebury Parker and the splendours of Tussocks, her house which was just outside the town, were always a source of wonder to Rosemary.

‘I’m afraid I shall have to go there every day for

the next three weeks,' said her mother. 'I'm so sorry to have to leave you for so long on your own, Poppet, but she does pay so well, I felt I could not afford to say no. I'm afraid it is largely mending linen, so I can't bring the work home.'

Rosie let the blob of ice-cream on her tongue melt completely before she answered, and then she said as cheerfully as she could, 'I shan't mind really, I expect. How hateful for you to be sides-to-middling sheets, when you ought to be making beautiful dresses!'

Mrs Brown smiled. 'Never mind, darling. Think of all the things I shall have to tell you when I come home in the evenings!'

'And perhaps,' said Rosemary, brightening, 'you'll be rich enough afterwards to buy one of those things for making your sewing machine go by electricity, and then you'll earn so much more money that we shall be able to go and live somewhere else, where your ladies will come to you, instead of you having to go to their houses whatever the weather is like. And I shall dress in black satin and say, "This way, Modom!"' Her mother laughed.

'And I shall be able to say, "Mrs Pendlebury Parker," I shall say, "No, I'm afraid I cannot make you twelve flannel nightdresses by the day after tomorrow. I never sew anything coarser than crêpe

de chine!” They both laughed a great deal, and the meal ended quite cheerfully.

When they had finished, Mrs Brown had to go into the town to match some silks, so Rosemary cleared away and washed up the dinner plates. Next she put away her school things and changed into a cotton frock, and all the time she was wondering what she could do with herself for the next three weeks. Could she really do something useful, she wondered, as Mrs Walker had suggested? It had been rather unfair to call her a ‘great girl’, because she was rather small for her ten years. All the same, it would be wonderful, she thought, to earn some money without her mother knowing anything about it, and at the end of the holidays carelessly to pour a shower of clinking coins into her astonished lap!

‘The trouble is, I don’t know what I could do,’ she said to herself. ‘I can’t sew well enough. The only thing I can do is to keep our rooms clean and tidy. I always do that in the holidays when Mummy is busy. I *can* sweep and polish and wash-up.’

She rather liked the idea, and by the time she had done up the difficult button at the back of her cotton frock Rosemary had made up her mind. She would go out daily and clean.

Now she had a hazy idea that it would be necessary to take her tools with her, in the same way

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that her mother took her own thimble, needles, and scissors when she went out to sew. Dusters and a scrubbing brush would be easy, but Mrs Walker would not let her past the front door with a broom without going into a long explanation, and then it would no longer be a surprise.

‘Well, there is nothing for it,’ she said to herself, ‘I shall have to buy one for myself.’

After much rattling and poking with a dinner knife her money-box produced two and fivepence three farthings.

‘P'r'aps if I went to Fairfax Market I could find a cheap broom,’ she thought doubtfully. ‘It’s rather a long way, but I think I could get there and back before tea time.’