

N.B. This is a personal, provisional and unpublished account. Please treat as such.

THE JONES GIRLS

THE EASTBOURNE HOUSE

I have a file stuffed with papers labelled "The Eastbourne House", and photographs and paintings of it, 13 Lushington Terrace. It was an imposing square mansion, set in stately gardens, probably picked up for a song in 1869 when Juxon and Maria moved into it for their retirement.

In a letter written to Minnie in Simla, Juxon discussed his retirement plans, but his ideas then were centred on Cheltenham. First thoughts of Tasmania had been put aside because "the means of educating the girls was very inadequate". The boys would have been better off with farming and cattle rearing to occupy them, but he had heard that the population was decreasing with "a dearth of farming and domestic servants". There was also the problem of "a very disagreeable twang" which would grate on Jones ears.

"So now Pins", he wrote, "you may picture to yourself your living in Cheltenham one of the smartest, dearest most gay and cheerful towns in England", where many old friends were to be found and "my two sisters easily accessible by railway". Minnie must have been much cheered by the prospect of a move to such a place from Miss Mackinnon's dreary establishment. I don't know why they settled for Eastbourne instead, but guess it was the good schools, particularly its Ladies College.

The Eastbourne House became the background for much of the Ballad. Beautiful Beatrice was born there, Juxon died in it, my grandmother grew up in it, Coco eloped from it, Maria upped and left it in a huff when she overheard a remark about "those Jones girls". It finally became one of the main sources of income to my grandmother in her widowhood and received a direct hit in the Second World War and so the subject of endless correspondence regarding compensation. It was eventually rebuilt as two flats and there was talk of my parents going there when they retired, but my mother disliked the idea. Finally it was sold for a "pittance", over which she fumed for years.

Minnie was sixteen when they settled in Eastbourne, a lovely long-necked girl with a curly brown fringe, tall and slim like her mother. She would soon be putting up her hair and coming out into society to meet suitable young men. Yet things went wrong for her. The three boys seemed to have taken up most of the family time, and when they were finally sorted out and despatched East and West, the three younger sisters Irene(Coco), Annie and Flo were blossoming into prospective brides. She was unlucky in her place in the family: followed by three brothers and the dead Eleanor, there were nine years between her and a sister. The iron had cooled considerably by the time her case was considered, and couldn't be struck for suitors. The shelf life of spinsters was short.

My grandmother remembered the Eastbourne House as a rather gloomy place with Papa in pain and Mama rigid and strict, into which came one blessed day a young nurse. Nurse "took" the baby Beatrice from birth (though I don't know who fed her, English cow's milk was probably considered safe), and gave her and the three youngest children all the fun, warmth and love they needed. They lived the life of the upstairs nursery, with visits to the drawing room after tea, and it was made happy for them by Nurse.

Nurse was "spoken for" but she couldn't leave her charges, and delayed her marriage for ten years until the time Maria took umbrage and transferred her slighted daughters to London. Then she and her Fred were married, but too late to have children of their own, and the marriage was a short one. Fred worked in a cotton mill and his lungs filled with

fluff, and after six years his fluff-filled lungs gave out and he died. Nurse retired to a tiny cottage in Rutland and was helped by spasmodic donations from Drayton Gardens. My grandmother was still visiting her when I was a child, but the woman who had been much more to her than her mother was just Poor Old Nurse, eking out her last years in damp poverty in a remote backwater as the working classes were wont to do.

Within the walls of the Eastbourne House my grandmother along with the rest of the Jones family absorbed the articles of faith of their time and status: Catholics, Jews, the lower classes, non-conformists en masse, anyone in Trade and most foreigners were taboo. My grandmother imparted all this lore to me, though she exempted the foreigners except those we regularly fought against; and she had a long memory in this respect, stretching way back into history. At least in Lushington Terrace they didn't have to be on guard against the terrible Touch of the Tarbrush.

Juxon found that even after all his hard work, Harry still hadn't reached the standards required by the Civil Service, and he joined the Indian Army where his skill with a gun and a horse served him well, and he was apparently happy. The luckless pair Bertie and Willy were sent to Eastbourne schools and then despatched out of sight to the New World. There are no papers recording these decisions, and the Ballad only starts with Bertie's journey out to New South Wales "before the mast".

His sufferings were terrible,
Gently reared as he was,
I couldn't bear to keep his letters
Telling of that dreadful trip.

It was a pity my mother destroyed those letters, the only ones she seems actually to have read, as they would have cast some light on this handsome, luckless Jones; beautiful at birth after travelling in his mother's womb through the "Mutiny", thereafter unable to do anything right. He died at the age of thirty three in Ararat, where he worked in a bank. His marble tombstone, despatched by his "devoted mother", would have cost more than the money he begged for his return passage. "A few Christian friends" were with him at his death, according to the local paper; he died of pneumonia. Willy went to Canada and disappeared from sight, which seemed to worry nobody.

The girls went to Eastbourne Ladies College for a year or two each, where they were taught violin and deportment and poems from carefully selected anthologies. They all showed signs of a rare beauty, the right kind of elegant and aquiline looks which were a prerequisite of putting them on the marriage market. This was a great relief to Maria, who had no other plans for them. Suffragettes were much frowned on by the Joneses, who didn't recognise their tempestuous rows as a sign of frustration and boredom.

Their growing up wasn't part of the Ballad; the first momentous event was Coco's elopement.

Co co ran away to marry
Though I never found out why,
Fred Hulke was a gentleman
Who was able to support her.

My mother was always puzzled about this elopement, of which she only learnt when Coco was dead and couldn't be questioned. The only two necessary conditions for a suitor seemed to have been fulfilled. Fred was a doctor, a profession perfectly respectable of course, and Coco was twenty and ready for marriage. Whatever the necessity for this daring step, when they emerge into family snapshot albums it is as a prosperous pair, living in Admiralty House, Deal, complete with carriage and a red yacht in the bay. My mother spent her summer holidays with them as a girl and nothing could have been more sedate than their life-style: Coco a busty matron much given to amateur

theatricals; her Fred thin and rather hang-dog with a drooping moustache, not at all the kind of dashing lover to carry off a Jones girl over the walls of 13, Lushington Terrace. Perhaps it was this event that shamed Maria into making the move to London.

The life they lived in Palace Court Mansions, and later Drayton Gardens Maria, Minnie almost an old maid at twenty seven, Annie, Flo and Beatrice aged sixteen, eleven and nine - was much the same as that in Eastbourne. I don't know whether the younger girls went to school, but Minnie and Annie would live the life depicted by the many lady novelists of the time: long days filled with good works and piano tinkling and walks in the park, and, of course, looking after Mother. About this time, in her fifties, Maria decided to lay herself out on the ottoman and be an interesting ailing widow like her monarch. She carried on with the charade for thirty years, except when she had to stir herself to help nurse Minnie who became really ill.

POOR PINS

When she wasn't fetching and carrying for her mother or attending Church bazaars or gossiping with girl friends, Minnie was pasting into an album letters and poems from a man she had met when she was twenty five and he twenty seven; a man she appears to have loved for ten years until his early death, and whom she outlived for twelve. His name was Harry Lowe and he gave her the huge red-tooled album in which I have searched for clues about her.

Poor Pins, not only was it her fate to be the eldest daughter followed by three brothers who needed all the family's resources at a time when she was ready for some herself, it was also her lot to love a man who was already married. He was also a clergyman's son, a canon no less; so short of some special providence translating his wife to glory, or his own sleight of hand with the weed-killer, there was no hope for them. If the appalling poetry he wrote her is anything to go by, Harry Lowe wasn't over-bright for he not only composed the stuff, he thought it worth making a fair copy and passing it on. Minnie, who delighted in Tennyson and Browning, thought it worth pasting in her album too, in spite of the risk involved. Victorian parents never ceased to think it their duty to read their daughter's private correspondence.

"A Rhapsody", in six verses, seems to suggest that they met in Deal.

"I'm sure that I shall ne'er forget
(The memory haunts me still)
That fatal day when we first met
In the Town below the Hill.

Tw'as at a garden party that
I first my love did see
But as I did not wink at her
She did not wink at me.

So like a moth I hovered round
That angel bright and fair
And thought that I at last had found
A flower sweet and rare

Unluckily I had a wife
And she was fair and fat
And for the first time of my life
I had quite forgotten that.

Oh Minnie, dear Minnie pray lunch with me now
The herrings are spoiling for tea,
Your cat has had kittens and run up the flue

So Minnie come hither to me."

The jokey last verse presumably made it permissible for Minnie to accept his overtures without being compromised. There was quite a lot more in the same vein, and a One Act Play entitled "The Wedding Day of M.S.J2". Minnie is pictured dressing in her bridal gown. "Oh Minnie dear how nice you look," exclaims her best friend Cicely, whose eyes later become suffused with tears as she plaintively observes, "Oh Minnie dear, I wish I was you". Rivetingly, Minnie replies, "It will be your turn next". And this gripping dialogue continues until she leaves for the church to marry - whom? By then Minnie was well into her thirties and all the suitors who came to the house were for her sisters. Why did Harry Lowe taunt her with such silly scenarios of the improbable? Was he the un-named bridegroom in some fond game they played together, his wife and her mother delicately disposed of? Perhaps it titillated him to talk of weddings; to visualise her led veiled and trembling to the altar, and then to enter into the imagined delights of the honeymoon.

Perhaps I have guessed too much into this relationship. Along with Harry's awful effusions, Minnie pasted an early letter from Uncle Tom written to her as a young girl in India. He thanks her "for your dear long letter - because in it you assure me that you still love me - I hope you don't allow the fat-looking Capt. Schetines or that black-looking Capt. Turner to pay you any attention, if I heard you gave either of them or any other gentleman a single kiss I would be very miserable and go away and pine in a forest".

Charming nonsense to make a little girl laugh? Uncles don't now seem as innocent as they were once supposed, their relations with their little "nieces" entered the faintly erotic atmosphere that surrounded women from their earliest years. No nice girl was left alone with a man, yet in the guise of friends or relations men touched, fondled and kissed, thus arousing confusing responses that could at best be channelled into loving Jesus, at worst ended in banishment to Hamburg.

There is another scrap of paper stuck in the album between the accounts of Tennyson's funeral and a reproduction of "The Light of the World". This is a note from a Colonel Curtis: "A gentleman who met Miss M. Juxon Jones at Dinan having lately had occasion to get his back hair cut, presumes to offer a little souvenir of those happy days in May". A hank of red wool (ha ha) is stuck to the letter, and then a P.S. adds: "The old woman is not dead yet, but she cannot hold on forever". Did they in those days in Dinan plan a future together on the legacy of some aged aunt, Minnie and her elderly suitor? In her copy of Tennyson Minnie underlined in pencil: "the shade by which my life was crost, which makes a desert in the mind". One guesses again at this shadow: her demanding mother, her fruitless love affair, her three pretty sisters, the undying aunt, her failing health?

Dinan was the exception, most of Minnie's holidays were spent in Deal staying with Coco. Here, year after year she went to fancy dress balls as a Dresden shepherdess, and sang "When Love is Blind" at charity concerts. She went on doing this till she was forty, Harry dead and her sister, Flo, in her twenties, drawing from the audiences at the concerts the rapturous applause. Flo not only sang: "the violin playing of Miss Florence Juxon Jones was rapturously received, the exquisite daintiness and brilliant execution of this talented performer held the audience spellbound", declared the Deal Advertiser. Minnie's "I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby" got only a tepid reception.

I think of her pasting all those bits of paper into her album by gaslight; and then I think back to her at the Simla school, teeth aching, chilblains burning, and of the Eastbourne years which brought no suitors until she went to Deal and met Harry Lowe and could not have him. Ironically, his wife died a year after he did which was one more "if only" in her life. If only she had been born after her brothers; if only her father hadn't died and her mother demanded a daughter at home; in fact, if only, like the two little dead girls who preceded her, she had failed to take a first breath at all.

She suffered so much dreadful pain
Coldly stretched out on the sofa,
I raised my little hand to shield
Her pale face from the fire's flames

As she recited this verse of the Ballad, my eighty year old mother would somehow transform herself into the six year old who sat by her dying aunt's head, one tiny hand raised to protect the suffering face from the fire's heat. She supposed it was cancer that killed Minnie at forty nine. She was buried in Kensall Green cemetery on an April day that was, typically, kept sacred amongst the Joneses; my mother was still making ritual pilgrimages to the grave in her teens. The mother to whom she gave her adult life survived Minnie by ten years.

POOR FLO

Looking after this mother then devolved onto the other unmarried sister, Flo, who was thirty five and for reasons unexplained hadn't married a certain Captain Pilleau. His baritone voice also enchanted Upper Deal, and he continued to trail after Flo until well after he had added a major's pips to his shoulder. I can only presume that he was without "private means", and when at last Maria died and Flo inherited, he didn't consider it manly to move in and live off her. He did think it manly, in fact he had little choice, to go and get himself killed in the first year of the Great War.

The thing about Flo that impressed me very much as a child was her constipation.

She didn't "go" for a whole week
When she was a little girl,
Her insides never recovered
And finally she died of it.

The syrup of figs or castor oil that were weekly poured down our throats were often accompanied by this cautionary tale of what happened to Flo, so that the nauseating tastes and griping pains that followed were connected in my mind with this unfortunate aunt. For my mother's generation, the opening of the bowels daily was a sacred necessity. She saw to it that I went to a school which observed the rules. Matron stood in the lavatories every morning inspecting our offerings; pleas of "Matron I can't go" were met with a stern "You will sit there till you do". So I spent my mid-morning breaks collecting bits of brown twig to float in the lavatory pan, cunningly concealed by toilet paper. It should have created all sorts of awful anal complexes, but was in fact part of the way things were, unexceptional though requiring some astuteness and slight of hand with the toilet roll.

Unlike Minnie, Flo was reasonably educated at Eastbourne Ladies College for a year or two, and then probably in London. At the age of seventeen she was sent, with my grandmother Annie, to the Brussels Conservatoire to be "finished". There she learnt the violin well enough to spell-bind the people of Deal. An odd thing about this Brussels trip was that they went as the Misses Stirling. Maria had changed their name by deed-poll to Juxon Jones by then but that didn't seem sufficiently grand to go abroad with.

The Brussels trip ended sooner than expected when Annie became engaged to a Belgian. The pair of them were shipped home before worse occurred, foreigners being highly suspect since they were almost bound to be Catholics. Flo, nearly twenty, was very pretty, quite musical; but she spent the rest of her life doing little but growing older and more Flawed. She lived with her mother and Minnie, and went to Deal for her holidays. Dazzle them in Deal she might, particularly Captain Pilleau, but nothing came of it.

When my mother knew Flo in her forties she was a bitter, bad tempered woman, always ready to criticise, devoted to only one creature, her dog Donald. When Violet, my

mother, was thirteen her aunt took her aside and told her that there were five letters concealed under paper in the bottom drawer of her dressing table. If she died suddenly, Violet was to go to the drawer and destroy them. What tender secrets were concealed in Flo's Five Letters? They seem to stand as a symbol of the times; one had to lock up, hide away, be ashamed of a love that came from an unsuitable direction, probably Captain Pilleau's in this case. Even in her forties, Flo must beware of a mother's prying eyes. In my sixties, I was still having to beware of the same thing.

My mother often talks in her diary of the "blazing rows" at Drayton Garden, Flo letting off the head of steam she had stored up, a Jones girl once more unable to find any use for her ardour and brightness and brains. Major Pilleau was shot on September 14th 1914 and died a week later. Flo was "beside herself" my mother noted in her diary, and two months later she set off for Burma to join her sister Annie. Maria had died two years earlier, and presumably her adored Donald was dead too. She was forty seven and casting a last desperate die.

She made a perfect idiot
Of herself by all accounts,
Plastering her face with paint
Chasing every man in sight.

My mother never had much good to say of Flo, but from the boat before she sailed to Burma a note survives which makes me wonder if they fought as hard and bitterly as was later maintained: "My dearest little Bilotte," wrote Flo to her niece Violet, "It was sweet of you to come round this morning and I was so glad to see you dear - I hope you didn't catch cold - I am thinking of you tonight with your soldier brother at the prize giving - my little Bilotte looks so sweet in her grown up dress - We have had dinner and are not starting till midnight which accounts for my being able to write so much - I have a cabin to myself the ship is only half full I hear. There is a funny old Wandering Jew on board who grows a beard and long hair because he suffers from neuralgia and on the top of that a snuff like little hat". She signs herself a loving aunt. The little girl wearing a grown up dress was eighteen and a half.

Flo returned after a year in Burma, to work in a war-time hospital in Devon. A woman of private means, with worthwhile work to do, she must have found at last some satisfaction. No letters from her describe this experience, but two letters survive from a prisoner of war she had "adopted" through the Missions to Seamen. They are addressed to "Mrs Jones"; perhaps it was indelicate for a single woman even to have a pen friend, especially of the lower classes.

Lower, but not the lowest; he was a petty officer in the Royal Naval Brigade. In his first letter of November 1914, he describes his capture: "We soon got to business after we left the firing line at Antwerp Tuesday morning so I think you will agree with me that we lost no time although when we arrived the outer line at Hort (sic) had already been taken. We stuck it well to the end as we had no Artillery to back us up were compelled to retire but not until the inhabitants of Antwerp were safely got away and when we came through Friday morning the city was quite deserted and burning and in ruins in parts, it was a pitiful sight I shan't forget as long as I live. The bridge over the Scheldt was blown up before we could get over so had to take a boat down the river to Fort St Marie and were making our way back to Ostend by foot when we were cut off by German Cavalry and compelled to cross the Dutch frontier at Haltz from whence we were brought on to Groningen where we shall have to remain until the end of the war. The Dutch are very kind to us but of course we would much rather be free so as we could have another smack at the Germans". He thanks her for two books on "How to Speak Dutch", with which to while away the rest of the war.

Dick Quick's next letter of a year later tells of an effort to escape: "About six weeks ago I escaped from the Camp and after walking by night. along the country roads for over 10

hours without a stop I went into a cafe to get something to eat and have a little rest and on entering much to my surprise and horror I saw a soldier who recognised me immediately (he used to be on duty in the camp but lived at this place and was there on leave and was just in the cafe having a drink) saying "Ah you come from Groningen" but I told him he was mistaken and pitched him up a yarn that I was an American journalist come up from the south but it was no use he knew my face and he put me under arrest of the police who brought me back to Groningen by train. The Dutch Guard put me in the Arrest Kamer and the next morning I had to go before the Dutch Commandant who locked me up in the 14 days Cells so instead of having a good fortnights leave in England prior to joining up again, I had a quiet 14 solitary confinement. I had d...d bad luck there is no doubt, but I have one consolation knowing that I have done my duty in trying to get back to fight again for the old Country but through jolly hard lines I got caught".

He talks of training to take his Royal Life Saving Certificate and of playing football and rugby, keeping as fit as possible "so that I shall be ready for anything that may come along". It is plain that life in internment was a holiday camp compared to life in the trenches or on board ship and he was d...d lucky to bump into that German officer in the cafe, and get the chance of staying alive. His letters must have enlivened the dinner tables of Mandalay, where Flo received them. What happened to Dick I don't know, because Flo was dead before the war ended and never met him.

The social conscience that made her care about captured seamen came coupled with a deep, not to say obsessive, Evangelical fervour. My mother remembered mornings spent on Beachy Head.

Flo and I flung tracts about,
Hoping God would blow them landwards
Hoping wicked folk would read them
See the light and be converted.

When the Holy Word sank on a down draught and landed in the sea, my mother feared Flo's wrath. Anger and piety always went together with the Joneses, some subconscious fire fuelling them both. There is something dottily delicious in that picture of the pair of them, skirts blowing, button-booted legs squarely apart, filling the Sussex air with holy litter. Why Sussex I forgot to ask.

How much God helped Flo in her last illness I don't know. Her brother Harry who was with her described her last three months in a Newton Abbott hospital as "terrible". She was fifty and had been ailing for some time, though went on working in the hospital until nearly the end. Whether it was the result of constipation, or more likely was cancer, her end was no easier than her life had been.

COCO

The other three Jones girls made it to the altar. Coco's Dr Hulke was soon accepted, and Annie and Beatrice were handed over to men with jobs in places where money was thought to be made: Burma and Buenos Aires. This made Maria overlook drawbacks. Annie's husband, Rodway Swinhoe, signed himself "The Darkie" and was extremely swarthy, with a family a hundred years in India. Beatrice's Fred Crowther was not quite a gentleman but lavish with expensive presents at Annie's wedding; and the most beautiful of the sisters, not yet twenty, was thought to be onto a good thing when she was sent out to Argentina as his bride. Maria's brother, Waite Stirling, was Bishop of Buenos Aires and presumably vouched for the doubtful Fred.

Coco's marriage, which started so wildly, settled into the staidest of all the sisters. Admiralty House in Deal, where she and her doctor husband lived, was supplied with tennis courts and terraces and the ghost of Nelson. She had a moderate family of two sons and a daughter and entertained her nieces and sisters every summer. She was also

the life and soul of Upper Deal society and took the lead in its non-stop theatrical productions, press-cuttings of which were pasted into Minnie's album. The Deal Walmer and Sandwich Mercury was as ecstatic about her as about Flo; in fact, one wonders what the good people of Deal would have done without the Joneses. For the big concert of the year in aid of the Primrose League, Flo brought down the "London contingent" (her sisters) to sing and play. She herself only seemed to be able to supply "Annie Laurie" though once as an encore she sang "Mother Darling". She and a Mr Metcalfe yearly brought the house down with their performance of "Where are you going to my pretty maid?" though, and in a comedy she was "charming and the air of gracefulness and freedom which she assumed would have done credit to professional talent".

Graceful is not the word that springs to mind when considering Coco. In the few photographs of early in the century she appears weighed down by an enormous bust and hat. By then she was a matron in middle age, referred to in my mother's diaries as The Beast, though like most of Violet's nicknames this was unkind; she lectured a lot and also "made" Violet break off her first engagement to a fellow art student. The war gave her plenty of scope for good works, which up to then had been centred on the House for Destitute Children and local boatmen. For these she opened Admiralty House to a hundred and fifty guests at a time, usually in fancy dress, and The Mercury was there to write up the costumes "donned by the fair sex" and the "splendid repasts" provided. No destitute children were there, needless to say, but maybe got a little more scrape on their bread as a result of the revelry; boatmen probably got tracts.

There were a lot of wounded soldiers in Deal during the war and Coco helped to bandage them, but didn't invite them to her tennis parties even as spectators. Soldiers, in spite of their gallantry, were lower class and to be kept in their place. The Hulke household was often rent by "rows" and "bust ups" so it seems that Coco was Flawed too, and with Harry down the road in retirement, and the visits of Flo, Violet and her sister Margery, there was a heavy concentration of Joneses along that stretch of coast. It was lucky they lived in large houses with thick walls.

Coco died at sixty four and left me 100 in her will and an amethyst brooch surrounded by seed pearls, which made me feel warmly towards this largely unknown aunt. The life in Deal comes alive in my mother's diaries, and Coco emerges as a typical middle-class well-meaning woman, absorbed in running her house with a lot of servants, and raising money for the less privileged as long as it didn't impinge on her own comforts. The God of the Joneses was a true blue Tory and didn't expect them to ask awkward questions about why children were destitute. All of them, even my adored grandmother, considered it unladylike to ponder problems like the slums.

BEATRICE THE BEAUTIFUL

Beatrice, the youngest of Maria and Juxon's family and the only one born in England, was always talked of as the beauty which was saying a lot in such a well-endowed crowd. As a result, she was married at nineteen to Fred Crowther, a rich business man from Argentina. His vowels were suspect and being in Trade was unfortunate, but the mother of five daughters couldn't be too fussy. The wedding was in Buenos Aires, and what happened after it my mother never knew, but four years later Beatrice was back for good with two little girls. Not long afterwards Fred conveniently died and left Beatrice to play, for many years, the role of rich and beautiful widow. My mother thought there was something in his will about losing her money if she remarried. Men were constantly in attendance at her lovely flat in Hyde Park Mansions.

For my mother in her teens, the flat and its contents, supplied by the dead Fred, represented the good and the glamorous. Beatrice was all that Minnie and Coco and Flo were not: idle, frivolous and spendthrift. She never sang for destitute children; Deal was

entirely ignorant of her talents. She drove round in one of the first cars, dressed in fur coats and muffs, rode her own horse in Rotten Row and entertained lavishly. Her presents rescued Christmases and birthdays; white skates, silk blouses, jewellery, they shine out of my mothers diaries from among the dreary lists of handkerchiefs and writing pads.

Beatrice seemed to be free of the Flaw too; there were no "barneys" in her elegant rooms. She was all grace and sophistication, with her pretty little daughters in attendance when she needed them, and colonels and commodores hovering, perhaps ignorant of the conditions of Fred's will. Just to revel at second hand in her wealth did the Joneses good. For my mother, she possessed the quality Violet admired most all her life, the ability to have a Good Time.

In 1914, when she was forty four, Beatrice received a very odd proposal from a tea planter home on leave, one of Rodway's relations. Hugh Swinnoe thought nothing odd in offering her, in exchange for her luxury flat, a swampy backwater in distant Assam; or perhaps he intended to retire and live off her. Hugh was in his forties and after twenty years of planting tea would be presumed to be rich. Beatrice, for reasons of Fred's will or others of her own, turned him down, but offered him instead her daughter, Aileen.

Hugh proposed to Beatrice first,
Then he settled on her daughter,
Took her off, poor pretty Aileen
To return a little barmy.

Poor Aileen's story comes later. Beatrice continued happily for a few years longer. The war did little to interrupt her lunches, her rides in cars or on horseback. My mother went on worshipping this one glamorous Jones and took to her drawing room the young man she wanted to become engaged to. Beatrice's approval mattered, and she enjoyed dazzling her Harold. In fact, he saw through the shiny veneer, and thought her remarks about how she would simply love to go to the trenches profoundly silly. Her silliness was really revealed when she suddenly ran out of money, unaware that even large amounts of capital finally ended. "Somebody should have told her," tutDtutted my mother. "She had no idea she should have invested the money." Spending it was apparently all that Beatrice knew about money, a vulgar subject anyway.

So out went the cars and the furs, the horse, the furniture. Beatrice herself and Aileen, returned from India with her son Basil, drifted about between boarding houses, and her last address was Lancaster Gate, a shabby set of rooms which she shared with her sadly disturbed daughter and grandson until her death from pneumonia in her early sixties. She did pay dearly for her silliness, but until the crash she enjoyed life in the way that only a woman of private means could. A rich dead husband was the best thing, almost, that could happen to a woman. Unburdened by endless childbearing or an overbearing mother, she didn't need a chaperone and could enjoy the gratitude of her family, lavishing on them the goodies gained from the doubtful dead Fred.

No wonder the name "Aunt Beatrice" was always underlined in my mother's teenage diaries, lifting her out of the ordinary run of aunts into a fairytale figure. She may even have based her own aspirations on this aunt. She continued all her life to admire people who lived splendidly and wastefully: royalty, aristocracy, film stars. The only charities she supported, and these late in life, were for injured jockeys and rescued horses. Forever and a day she fantasised about herself as just such a lovely rich lady as her long-ago aunt, encircled by men, admired and envied by everyone.

She felt that Aunt Beatrice's shabby end was a cruel quirk of fate, undeserved. For myself, I find it easy to forgive her for her silliness and extravagance, but not for what she did to Aileen. I followed Aileen out to Assam thirty years later and knew what she

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had to put up with, though I didn't go from Hyde Park Mansions with a man old enough to be my father who had been turned down by my mother.