

My God, she thought frantically, how true they may turn out to be! If I don't get on top of this situation in another few seconds, those wretched questions will be answered once and for all. The sting will quite clearly be with me till the end of my days, and Annie Tiddle will walk off with the victory!

C198641

She looked desperately out of Miss Tiddle's window, and there was the plum tree. She had forgotten it for the moment, allowed it to be driven from her mind by that monstrous clock, that stripped room, Annie Tiddle, and St. Paul. There it was, its shadow, as the sun mounted, creeping more closely around it like a circle of surrounding light, and on that shadow a few white petals had fallen.

"I've come to you, Annie, dear, for help," she said quietly. "Just think of all the help you've given me since I was in that third-grade room of ours at school, how kind you were then to all of us. Don't I remember the hours you took, the patience you always had?"

That was true, she thought, that, at least, was true. Miss Tiddle, as Emma Davis' teacher fifty years ago in this very town, had been patient to the point of complete inertia. Her meek patience had, in fact, saddened a long succession of restless children, a great crowd of ruth-