

young women's dreams of social brilliance and the reality of life. These girls got more and more girlish, until, from being women at the administering of laudanum, they sank back to about eight years of age—perfect children—at the tea-table.

The tension was snapped by Mr. Povey. "My God!" he muttered, moved by a startling discovery to this impious and disgraceful oath (he, the pattern and exemplar—and in the presence of innocent girlhood too!). "I've swallowed it!"

"Swallowed what, Mr. Povey?" Constance inquired.

The tip of Mr. Povey's tongue made a careful voyage of inspection all round the right side of his mouth.

"Oh yes!" he said, as if solemnly accepting the inevitable.

"I've swallowed it!"

Sophia's face was now scarlet; she seemed to be looking for some place to hide it. Constance could not think of anything to say.

"That tooth has been loose for two years," said Mr. Povey, "and now I've swallowed it with a mussel."

"Oh, Mr. Povey!" Constance cried in confusion, and added, "There's one good thing, it can't hurt you any more now."

"Oh!" said Mr. Povey. "It wasn't *that* tooth that was hurting me. It's an old stump at the back that's upset me so this last day or two. I wish it had been."

Sophia had her teacup close to her red face. At these words of Mr. Povey her cheeks seemed to fill out like plump apples. She dashed the cup into its saucer, spilling tea recklessly, and then ran from the room with stifled snorts.

"Sophia!" Constance protested.

"I must just——" Sophia incoherently spluttered in the doorway. "I shall be all right. Don't——"

Constance, who had risen, sat down again.

## II

Sophia fled along the passage leading to the shop and took refuge in the cutting-out room, a room which the astonishing architect had devised upon what must have been a backyard of one of the three constituent houses. It was lighted from its roof, and only a wooden partition, eight feet high, separated it from the passage. Here Sophia gave rein