

OPEN THE DOOR

BOOK I

“. . . Open the door, and flee.”—2 Kings ix. 3.

CHAPTER I

I

FOR Juley Bannerman to leave home was in any case a heavy undertaking. Even without her four children, even with the admonishing help of her husband, the occasion was one for which complicated plans—gallant but not availing—had to be laid weeks beforehand. And on this morning neither alleviation was hers.

As always she had done her best, of course. The night before she had not undressed, had not so much as taken the hairpins from her aching head. Then since breakfast her two daughters, aged twelve and fifteen, had rushed about the house, strapping and unstrapping luggage, and exhorting her. Her confused servants had done what they could. Even her little sons had tried to help, and as the four-wheeled cab went lumbering over the granite setts of the city, they strove unskilfully to knot up her bonnet strings between them.

But it was all no use. The morning express from Glasgow to Edinburgh, said the porter, had been gone these two minutes. Now there was no train until ten minutes past twelve.

Smarting, not for the first time, under this kind of public ignominy, the children precipitated themselves upon the pavement before Queen Street Station, and Georgie, the eldest, a stout and lively girl, addressed herself with violence to the open door of the cab.

“It’s always the same when Father isn’t here,” she stormed. “I told you we’d miss it, didn’t I?” In her rage she could have struck her mother.

It exasperated the children that the culprit still stayed