

THIS FREEDOM

BY

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BY A. S. M. HUTCHINSON

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THE HAPPY WARRIOR

ONCE ABOARD THE LUGGER —

THE CLEAN HEART

IF WINTER COMES

THIS FREEDOM

“With a great sum obtained I this freedom.”

—ACTS xxii, 28.

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PART ONE
HOUSE OF MEN

THIS FREEDOM

CHAPTER I

ROSALIE'S earliest apprehension of the world was of a mysterious and extraordinary world that revolved entirely about her father and that entirely and completely belonged to her father. Under her father, all males had proprietary rights in the world and dominion over it; no females owned any part of the world or could do anything with it. All the males in this world — her father, and Robert and Harold her brothers, and all the other boys and men one sometimes saw — did mysterious and extraordinary things; and all the females in this world — her mother, and Anna and Flora and Hilda her sisters, and Ellen the cook and Gertrude the maid — did ordinary and unexciting and generally rather tiresome things. All the males were like story books to Rosalie: you never knew what they were going to do next; and all the females were like lesson books: they just went on and on and on.

Rosalie always stared at men when she saw them. Extraordinary and wonderful creatures who could do what they liked and were always doing mysterious and wonderful things, especially and above all her father.

Being with her father was like being with a magician or like watching a conjuror on the stage. You never knew what he was going to do next. Whatever he suddenly did was never surprising in the sense of being startling, for (this cannot be emphasised too much) nothing her father did was ever surprising to Rosalie; but it was surprising

in the sense of being absorbingly wonderful and enthralling. Even better than reading when she first began to read, and far better than anything in the world before the mysteries in books were discoverable, Rosalie liked to sit and stare at her father and think how wonderful he was and wonder what extraordinary thing he would do next. Everything belonged to him. The whole of life was ordered with a view to what he would think about it. The whole of life was continually thrown off its balance and whirled into the most entrancing convulsions by sudden activities of this most wonderful man.

Entrancing convulsions! Wonderful, wonderful father with a bull after him! Why, that was her very earliest recollection of him! That showed you how wonderful he was! Father, seen for the first time (as it were) flying before a bull! Bounding wildly across a field towards her with a bull after him! Wonderful father! Did her mother ever rush along in front of a bull? Never. Was it possible to imagine any of the women she knew rushing before a bull? It was not possible. To see a woman rushing before a bull would have alarmed Rosalie for she would have felt it was unnatural; but for her father to be bounding wildly along in front of a bull seemed to her perfectly natural and ordinary and she was not in the least alarmed; only, as always, enthralled.

Her father, while Rosalie watched him, was not in great danger. He came ballooning along towards Rosalie, not running as ordinarily fit and efficient men run, but progressing by a series of enormous leaps and bounds, arms and legs spread-eagling, and at each leap and bound always seeming to Rosalie to spring as high in the air as he sprung forward over the ground. It would not have surprised Rosalie, who was then about four, to see one of these stupendous leaps continue in a whirling flight through mid-air and her father come hurtling over the

gate and drop with an enormous plunk at her feet like a huge dead bird, as a partridge once had come plunk over the hedge and out of the sky when she was in a lane adjacent to a shooting party. It would not have surprised her in the least. Nothing her father did ever surprised Rosalie. The world was his and the fulness thereof, and he did what he liked with it.

Arrived, however, from the bull, not as a ballooning bird out of the sky, but as a headlong avalanche over the gate, Rosalie's father tottered to a felled tree trunk, and sat there heaving, and groaned aloud, "Infernal parish; hateful parish; forsaken parish!"

Rosalie, wonderingly regarding him, said, "Mother says dinner is waiting for you, father."

Her mother and her sisters and the servants and the entire female establishment of the universe seemed to Rosalie always to be waiting for something from her father, or for her father himself, or waiting for or upon some male other than her father. That was another of the leading principles that Rosalie first came to know in her world. Not only were the males, paramountly her father, able to do what they liked and always doing wonderful and mysterious things, but everything that the females did either had some relation to a male or was directly for, about, or on behalf of a male.

Getting Robert off to school in the morning, for instance. That was another early picture.

There would be Robert, eating; and there was the entire female population of the rectory feverishly attending upon Robert while he ate. Six females, intensely and as if their lives depended upon it, occupied with one male. Three girls — Anna about sixteen, Flora fourteen, Hilda twelve — and three grown women, all exhaustingly occupied in pushing out of the house one heavy and obstinate male aged about ten! Rosalie used to stand and watch

entranced. How wonderful he was! Where did he go to when at last he was pushed off? What happened to him? What did he do?

There he is, eating; there they are, ministering. Entrancing and mysterious spectacle!

Robert, very solid and heavy and very heated and agitated, would be seated at the table shoving porridge into himself against the clock. One of his legs, unnaturally flexed backward and outward, is in the possession of Rosalie's mother who is on her knees mending a hole in his stocking. The other leg, similarly contorted, is on the lap of Ellen the cook, who with very violent tugs, as if she were lashing a box, is lacing a boot on to it. Behind Robert is Anna, who is pressing his head down with one hand and washing the back of his neck with the other. In front of him across the table is Hilda, staring before her with bemused eyes and moving lips and rapidly counting on drumming fingers. Hilda is doing his sums for him. Beside him on his right side, apparently engaged in throttling him, is Gertrude the maid. Gertrude the maid is trying to tear off him a grimed collar and put on him a clean collar. Facing Gertrude on his other side is Flora. Flora is bawling his history in his ear.

Everybody is working for Robert; everybody is working at top speed for him, and everybody is loudly soliciting his attention.

"Oh, do give over wriggling, master Robert!" (The boot-fastener.)

"'Simon de Montford, Hubert de Burgh, and Peter de Roche.' Well, say it then, you dreadful little idiot!" (The history crammer.)

"Oh, master Robert, do please keep *up!*" (The collar fastener.)

"Keep *down*, will you!" (The neck washer.)

"Four sixes are twenty-four and six you carried thirty!" (The arithmetician.)

"Robert, you *must* turn your foot further round!" (The stocking-darner.)

"'The Barons were now incensed. The Barons were now incensed. The Barons were now incensed.' Say it, you ghastly little stupid!"

"Do they make you do these by fractions or by decimals? . . . Well, what *do* you know, then?"

Entrancing spectacle!

Now the discovery is by everybody simultaneously made and simultaneously announced that Robert is already later in starting than he has ever been (he always was) and immediately Rosalie would become witness of the last and most violent skirmish in this devoted attendance. Everybody rushes around hunting for things and pushing them on to Robert and pushing Robert, festooned with them, towards the door. Where was his cap? Where was his satchel? Where was his lunch? Where were his books? Who had seen his atlas? Who had seen his pencil box? Who had seen his gymnasium belt? Was his bicycle ready? Was his coat on his bicycle? Was that button on his coat?

With these alarums at their height and the excursions attendant on them at their busiest, another splendid male would enter the room and immediately there was, as Rosalie always saw, a transference of attendance to him and a violent altercation between him and the first splendid male. This new splendid male is Rosalie's other brother, Harold. Harold was eighteen and him also the entire female population of the rectory combined to push out of the rectory every morning. Harold was due to be pushed off half an hour later than Robert, and as he was a greater and more splendid male than Robert (though infinitely lesser than her father) so the place to which

he was pushed off was far more mysterious and enthralling than the place to which Robert was pushed off. A school Rosalie could dimly understand. But a bank! Why Harold should go to sit on a bank all day, and why he should ride on a bicycle to Ashborough to find a bank when there were banks all around the rectory, and even in the garden itself, Rosalie never could imagine. Mysterious Harold! Anna had told her that men kept money in banks; but Rosalie had never found money in a bank though she had looked; yet banks — of all extraordinary places — were where men chose to put their money! Mysterious men! And Harold could find these banks and find this money though he never took a trowel or a spade and was always shingly clean with a very high collar and very long cuffs. Wonderful, wonderful Harold!

Robert was due to be pushed off half an hour before Harold was due to be pushed off, but he never was; the two splendid creatures always clashed and there was always between them, because they clashed, a violent scene which Rosalie would not have missed for worlds. A meeting of two males, so utterly unlike a meeting of two females, was invariably of the most entrancingly noisy or violent description. When ladies came to the rectory to see her mother they sat in the drawing-room and sipped tea and spoke in thin voices; but when men came to see her father and went into the study, there was very loud talking and often a row. Yes, and once in the village street, Rosalie had seen two men stand up and thump one another with their fists and fall down and get up and thump again. When two women, her sisters or others, quarrelled, they only shrilled, and went on and on shrilling. It was impossible to imagine the collision of two women producing anything so exciting and splendid as invariably was produced by the collision of two males.

As now —

In comes Harold in great heat and hurry (as men always were) with his splendid button boots in one hand and an immense pair of shining cuffs in the other hand.

"Haven't you gone yet, you lazy young brute?"

"No, I haven't, you lazy old brute!"

Agitated feminine cries of "Robert! Robert! You are not to speak to Harold like that."

"Well, he spoke to me like that."

"Yes, and I'll do a jolly sight more than speak to you in a minute if you don't get out of it. Get out of it, do you hear?"

"Shan't!"

"Robert! Robert! Harold! Harold!"

"Well, get him out of it, or he'll be sorry for it. Why is he always here when I'm supposed to be having my breakfast? Not a thing ready, as usual. Look here, where I'm supposed to sit — flannel and soap! That's washing his filthy neck, I suppose. Filthy young brute! Why don't you wash your neck, pig?"

"Why do you wear girl's boots with buttons, pig?"

Commotion. Enthralling commotion. Half the female assemblage hustle the splendid creature Robert out of the door and down the hall and on to his bicycle; half the female assemblage cover his retreat and block the dash after him of the still more splendid Harold; all the female assemblage, battle having been prevented and one splendid male despatched, combine to minister to the requirements of the second splendid male now demanding attention.

Busy scene. Enthralling spectacle. There he is, eating; shoving sausages into himself against the clock just as Robert had shovelled porridge into himself against the clock. One ministrant is sewing a button on to his boot, another with blotting paper and hot iron is removing a stain from his coat, divested for the purpose; one is pouring out his coffee, another is cutting his bread, a third is

watching for his newspaper by the postman. And suddenly he whirls everything into a whirlpool just as men, if Rosalie watches them long enough, always whirl everything into a whirlpool.

“ Oh, my goodness, the pump! ”

Chorus, “ The pump? ”

“ The bicycle pump! Has that young brute taken the bicycle pump? ”

“ Yes, he took it. I saw it. ”

Commotion.

“ Catch him across the field! Catch him across the field! Where are my boots? Where the devil are my boots? Well, never mind the infernal button. How am I going to get to the bank with a flat tyre? Can't some one catch him across the field instead of all standing there staring? ”

Away they go! Rosalie, seeking a good place for the glorious spectacle, is knocked over in the stampede for the door. Nobody minds Rosalie. Rosalie doesn't mind — anything to see this entrancing sight! Away they go, flying over the meadow, shouting, scrambling, falling. Out after them plunges Harold, shirt-sleeved, one boot half on, hobbling, leaping, bawling. Glorious to watch him! He outruns them all; he outbellows them all. Of course he does. He is a man. He is one of those splendid, wonderful, mysterious creatures to whom, subject only to Rosalie's father, the entire world belongs. Look at him, bounding, bawling! Wonderful, wonderful Harold!

But Robert is wonderful too. If it had been Anna or Flora or Hilda gone off with the pump, she would have been easily caught. Not Robert. Wonderful and mysterious Robert, wonderfully and mysteriously pedalling at incredible speed, is not caught. The hunt dejectedly trails back. The business of pushing Harold out of the house is devotedly resumed.

And again — enthralling spectacle — just as the reign of Robert was terminated by the accession of Harold, so the dominion of Harold is overthrown by the accession of father. Harold is crowded about with ministrants. Nobody can leave him for a minute. Rosalie's father appears. Everybody leaves Harold simultaneously, abruptly, and as if by magic. Rosalie's father appears. Everybody disappears. Wonderful father! Everybody melts away; but Harold does not melt away. Courageous Harold! Everybody melts; only Harold is left, and Rosalie watching; and immediately, as always, the magnificent males clash with sound and fury.

Rosalie's father scowls upon Harold and delivers his morning greeting. No "Good morning, dear," as her mother would have said. "Aren't you gone yet?" like a bark from a kennel.

"Just going."

Wonderful father! A moment before there had been not the remotest sign of Harold ever going. Now Harold is very anxious to go. He is very anxious to go but, like Robert, he will not abandon the field without defiance of the authority next above his own. While he collects his things he whistles. Rosalie shudders (but deliciously as one in old Rome watching the gladiators).

"Do you see the clock, sir?"

"Yes."

"Well, quicken yourself, sir. Quicken yourself."

"The clock's fast."

"It is not fast, sir. And let me add that the clock with which you could keep time of a morning, or of any hour in the day, would have to be an uncommonly slow clock."

Harold with elaborate unconcern adjusts his trouser clips. "I should have thought that was more a matter for the Bank to complain of, if necessary. I may be wrong, of course —"