

Penguin  Readers

I CAPTURE THE CASTLE

DODIE SMITH



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People in the story



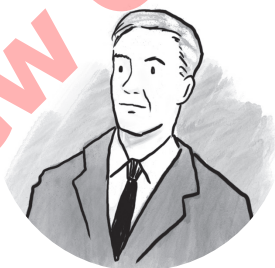
Cassandra Mortmain



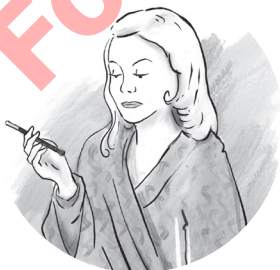
Rose Mortmain



Simon Cotton



Neil Cotton



Topaz Mortmain



Stephen

CHAPTER ONE

A journal

March

I'm writing this sitting on the **draining board**. It's the only part of the kitchen where there is any daylight left. Also, writing stories and poems in strange places helps to give me ideas. Outside the window the evening sky is full of cloud. I tell myself that soon spring will come.

Rose is **ironing** next to the fire. She looks lovely in the soft firelight because she is pinkish **gold**. She's my sister, but I still know that she's beautiful. She's almost 21 and very angry with life. I'm 17 and look younger but feel older. I'm not beautiful but I have a tidy face.

I think we are like girls in **novels**, living in this strange, quiet place. Rose sees nothing **romantic** about living in an old castle. I agree that our home is not comfortable, but I love it. It was built in the 1600s and has two round towers. The gatehouse is still standing. Belmotte Tower, part of an older castle, stands on a small mound close by.

I'm keeping this **journal** in an old **exercise book** to teach myself how to write a novel. I plan to **capture** all my family in words. "You're trying too hard," Father told me a few months ago, after reading one of my stories. "If you **relax**, the words will **pour** out of you."

But how can we get the words to pour out of Father? Many years ago, he wrote a book called *Jacob Wrestling*.



It did very well in America, but then he stopped writing. Mother believed that this was because of something which happened when I was about five.

We were living in a small house by the sea at the time. One afternoon, when we were having tea in the garden, Father started **arguing** with Mother just as he was cutting a cake. He pointed the knife at her and one of our neighbours

jumped over the garden wall to save her. Father knocked him down and went to prison for three months. When Father came out, he stayed away from people and decided that he wanted to live in a house without neighbours. He saw Godsend Castle, which he **immediately** rented.

His plan was to begin a new book here. But time went on and we **realized** that he wasn't writing anything. Now he spends most days in the **freezing** gatehouse reading novels that Miss Marcy, the village librarian and school teacher, brings to him. He stays away from us and seems **depressed**. Oh poor Father, he really is very sad.

Mother became ill and died eight years ago. Three years ago, Father went to London and came back with Topaz, our new mother. She's a famous artist's **model** and very beautiful, with lots of blonde hair and skin like snow. She's 29, she's kind and I like her very, very much. I'm pleased that I just wrote that because she has appeared in the kitchen in an orange dress saying, "Ah, girls . . ."

As Topaz puts wood on the fire, Rose looks up from her ironing and watches her unhappily. I usually know what Rose is thinking. I'm sure that she's jealous of Topaz's dress.

Oh dear! They are arguing. Rose wants Topaz to go to London and make some money **modelling**. But Topaz doesn't want to leave Father. Also, she doesn't like the artist that she **modelled** for in London. "I've had a lot of trouble with him," she tells Rose.

"I think that it's OK to have a little trouble if you're earning good money for it," said Rose.

“Then *you* have the trouble, dear,” replied Topaz. “Perhaps you should marry a rich man.”

At this, Rose began to cry because she never meets any rich men. Topaz went to her and put her arms round her.

It’s raining again. Stephen is coming across the courtyard. He’s lived with us since he was a little boy because his mother was our maid. When she died, he stayed. He sleeps in a small room next to the kitchen. He grows vegetables, and does a hundred other jobs for us. He’s 18 now and handsome with **golden** hair. I know that Stephen likes me in a romantic way, but I don’t feel the same.

My brother Thomas has come in from school in our nearest town, King’s Crypt. He’s a large boy of 15 with thick brown hair.

My goodness! Topaz is cooking eggs. Oh, excellent chickens! We usually only have bread and butter for tea. It’s so strange to remember when “tea” was what you ate before a big evening meal. Now it’s our *only* evening meal.

Stephen carries a **lantern** to the table as Father appears. He’s still a good-looking man, but his face is getting a little fat and his skin is white. He’s talking to Topaz, who loves him very much, but he never seems very interested in her.

I shall have to get off the draining board. Actually, I have never felt happier in my life – it doesn’t matter that my family have sold most of our **furniture** for food.

Maybe it’s because I’ve enjoyed writing this. Or maybe it’s because we’re having eggs for tea.

CHAPTER TWO

Money problems

I'm writing this in bed. I'm quite warm as I'm wearing my coat and have a hot **brick** for my feet. I don't like the little metal bed that I'm in. Rose and I take **turns** to sleep in the large wooden one. Rose is sitting in it now, reading a library book which Miss Marcy brought her.

Miss Marcy is small and about 40. She loves Father and always gives us the newest library books first. She visited us earlier this evening, and she asked us, "How is he?"

"He's fine but still doing nothing to help," said Rose.

"Rose is depressed about money," I explained.

"Maybe I can help?" Miss Marcy replied, taking out a pencil and paper. "Let's look at what you spend first. How much rent do you pay?"

"It's £40 a year, but we haven't been able to pay it for three years," said Topaz. "Mr Cotton didn't care. He still gave us a **ham** for Christmas."

Mr Cotton, a rich old man who lived five miles away at Scoatney Hall, was the owner of Godsend Castle. He died last November and now his big house is empty.

"I heard that someone is coming to live in Scoatney Hall again, so perhaps they will ask you for rent," said Miss Marcy. "How much money do you need to live on?" she continued. "And how much do you have coming in?"

"No money has come in during January or February,"

I said. “Last year, Father got £40 for selling *Jacob Wrestling* in America, but we don’t think that it will sell as well this year.”

“I could get a job,” said Stephen, quietly. “Mr Stebbins will have me at Four Stones Farm.”

“But we need you in the garden, Stephen!” I cried, because our vegetables are almost our only food.

“Spring is coming. I can work on the garden in the evenings,” he replied.

“Thank you, Stephen,” said Rose.

I’m in our bedroom again because Topaz and Rose are in the kitchen. They are filling the bath with green **dye** because they’re going to **dye** some old dresses.

Oh, what will we do for money? Surely it’s possible for one of us to make some, or to marry someone with money. I’m talking about Rose because for me, getting married sounds like death. But how will she meet anyone? Before Father met Topaz, we went to London every year to stay with his Aunt Millicent. She has a house in Chelsea, and she knows lots of artists. But she was angry with Father for marrying Topaz. So we don’t get asked to London now.

I feel very depressed. It’s so cold and it’s raining hard outside. I can’t wait for it to be June and for Rose and me to be on the mound doing our **Midsummer Eve** rites.

I can hear Stephen getting the hot water ready. How wonderful, tonight it is my turn for a bath. And now it is teatime so I shall go down and be nice to everyone. Being kind, and hot baths, are the best thing for **depression**.