The Weight of Small Hours

A. N. Author

Copyright © 2026 A. N. Author
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher.

Chapter One

The letter arrived on a Tuesday, which was the first thing wrong with it. Nothing of consequence had ever arrived on a Tuesday in the eleven years Miriam had kept the post office at Harrow Cross, and she had come to trust the shape of the week the way a sailor trusts a barometer.

She turned it over twice before setting it on the counter. No return address. The stamp was foreign — she could not place the country, only that the ink had run in one corner, as though the envelope had been carried through weather.

"Anything for us?"

Tom Bellamy filled the doorway the way he filled most doorways, hat in hand, rain still beading on the shoulders of his coat. He had asked the same question every morning for six years and had never once received the answer he wanted.

"Not today," she said, and slid the strange envelope under the ledger without deciding to.

Tom nodded as though this were news, put his hat back on, and went out into the rain. She heard him stop on the step, as he always stopped, to look at the sky over the Hollins and decide whether the day was worth the trouble. Then the gate, and his boots in the lane, and the morning closed over the place where he had been.

The post office at Harrow Cross was one room and a back room, with a counter that had been varnished so often it had a depth to it, like water. Behind the counter were the pigeonholes, forty-two of them, one for every house in the parish and one marked SUNDRIES that held string, a magnifying glass and the parish's only copy of the railway timetable. In front of it was the village, which came in one at a time and stayed longer than its business needed.

Mrs Pargeter came at nine for her pension and stayed to say that the vicar's sermon had been too long, which it had. The Doyle boys came for stamps and a bag of humbugs and left with the humbugs and no stamps. A man from the water board asked the way to the reservoir and was given it three times, by three different people, none of whom agreed. By eleven the floor was a map of wet footprints, and Miriam had sold forty stamps, weighed six parcels, and not once, in all that time, looked under the ledger.

She was aware of it the whole time, though. It sat there the way a held breath sits in a chest: not heavy, exactly, but present, taking up room that something else should have had.

At one she turned the sign to CLOSED and ate her sandwich standing at the counter, which her father would have called common, and which she had done every day since he died precisely because he would have called it common. The rain came and went. Through the window she watched the Hollins vanish behind the weather and come back, and vanish again, as though the hill could not make up its mind whether it was wanted.

At half past two she lifted the corner of the ledger, looked at the envelope, and put the ledger down again.

Tom came back at four with a parcel for his sister in Leeds, which he could have posted in the morning and had not, and which they both understood to be a reason rather than a parcel. He watched her

weigh it. He watched her lick the stamps, which she did because the sponge had dried out, and which she noticed him noticing.

"You're quiet," he said.

"I'm always quiet."

"You're quiet differently." He counted out the coins, exact to the penny, as he had for six years. "Is something the matter?"

It was the first time in six years he had asked her anything but the one question, and she was so surprised by it that she very nearly told him. Then the bell went over the door, and it was the vicar wanting a postal order, and the moment folded itself up and went wherever such moments go.

The vicar's postal order took a quarter of an hour, because he wanted to explain what it was for, and it was for the organ fund, and the organ fund had a history. Miriam listened to the history with the part of her mind that listened to the vicar, which was well practised, and with the rest of it she thought about the envelope, and the foreign stamp with the ink run in one corner, and who in the whole of the world would think to write to her at all. There was nobody. That was the plain fact of it, and she had arranged her life around it so long ago that she no longer felt it as a fact, any more than she felt the floor. And yet here was a letter, and the floor was moving.



By evening the rain had settled into the kind of steady, unhurried fall that meant it would go on all night. Miriam locked the door at six, drew the blind, and took the letter out again.

The paper was heavier than modern paper. When she held it to the lamp she could see the watermark — a bird of some sort, wings folded, facing left. She had seen it before. She could not think where.

Miriam Vale, the envelope said. *Harrow Cross*. Nothing more. No street, no county, as though whoever had written it trusted the world to know where she was, and the world had obliged.

She sat with it at the kitchen table until the lamp wanted trimming. She weighed it in her palm, from habit — a little under an ounce — and held it to her ear, which was foolish, and smelled it, which was more foolish still. It smelled of nothing but paper and, very faintly, of the sea.

Twice she took up the paper knife. Twice she put it down again and went to do something else — fill the kettle, wind the clock, look out at the lane, where there was nothing to see but rain coming down through the light over the door — and came back to find the letter exactly where she had left it, which was somehow worse.

She did not open it that night. She told herself this was patience. It was not.

Chapter Two

The bird on the watermark was a corncrake, and she remembered where she had seen it at twenty past four in the morning, sitting up so suddenly that the cat went off the end of the bed like something poured.

Her father's writing case. The one thing of his she had kept and the one thing she had never been able to open, because the key had gone into the sea with him along with everything else that had been in his pockets that March.

It was in the cupboard under the stairs, beneath a box of Christmas things she had not looked at in four years. The leather had gone stiff. The corncrake was stamped into the flap, wings folded, facing left, and it matched the watermark the way a signature matches a signature — not identically, but unmistakably.

She sat on the cold floor of the hall with the case on her knees until the window went from black to grey.

She tried, once, to remember the last time she had seen him open it. She could see the case on his desk, and the desk in the front room, and the front room on a winter evening with the wireless low; she could see his hands, square and freckled, resting on the flap. She could not see the case open. In all those years she had never once seen what was inside it, and it had not occurred to her until that morning that this had been arranged.

"You could force it," Tom said, when she showed him. He turned the case over in hands that had spent thirty years persuading things open. "Two minutes. Less."

"I know."

"But you'd rather not."

"I'd rather know what's in the letter first," she said, and was surprised to hear herself say it, because until that moment she had not admitted that the two were connected at all.

Chapter Three

The letter took her four days to open, which she considered restrained, and Tom considered a form of illness.

Inside was a single sheet, folded twice, and a smaller envelope inside that, unsealed. The sheet said:

If you are reading this, the arrangement has ended. I am sorry it took so long, and sorrier that it took me. The rest is yours to decide. — H.

That was all. No date, no address, and a hand she did not know: small, upright, careful in the way that careful people are careful, every letter finished before the next was begun.

She read it eleven times. On the eleventh she noticed that the paper had been folded twice but creased three times, and that the third crease ran across the middle of nothing at all, as though something had once been folded in with it and taken out again.

Tom came in at noon and found her at the counter with the sheet flat in front of her, the shop not yet open and the kettle cold. He read the sheet upside down, which he could do faster than most people read the right way up, and did not ask her anything at all. He put the kettle on. He turned the sign round to OPEN and gave Mrs Pargeter her pension, counting it out twice under her eye, and sold a book of stamps to a girl from the farm, and all the while Miriam sat with the letter and the smaller envelope beside it and did not touch the second.

She did not touch it until he had gone, and the light had gone, and there was nobody left to see whether her hands were steady.



The smaller envelope held a key.

It was brass, and small, and green at the shoulders with the particular verdigris of a thing kept in a pocket for years by someone who did not use it. She did not need to try it in the writing case to know. She tried it anyway.

The case opened without complaint, the way things do when you have spent four years assuming they never will.

Chapter Four

There were nine letters inside, and every one of them was addressed to her.

The earliest was dated the spring she turned six. The latest was dated the March her father drowned, and had never been posted; it had no stamp, and the flap was still gummed and unbroken, and she held it for a long time without opening it, understanding that once she did there would be no more.

The others had been opened and read and folded back along their own creases, which meant her father had read them. All of them. For twenty-two years he had read letters addressed to his daughter and put them in a case she could not open and said nothing.

She was not angry yet. That came later, and it came in a way she did not expect: not at him, but at the smallness of the case, that a man could fit twenty-two years into a thing the size of a book and carry it about.

She read them in the order they had been written, and then in the order she wanted, which began with the one in which a woman described, in great detail and to no apparent purpose, a pair of red shoes in a shop window in a town by the sea, and asked whether they would fit a girl of nine. They would have. She had had red shoes at nine. Her father had said they came from a jumble sale in Buxton, and she had worn them until her toes curled.

"Who is H?" Tom asked.

They were in the back room with the fire going and the nine letters laid out on the table in the order she had decided they belonged, which was not the order of their dates.

"My mother," Miriam said.

Tom did not say *your mother is dead*, which she had expected, and which is what everyone in Harrow Cross had believed for as long as there had been a Harrow Cross to believe it. He said, "Ah," and then, after a while, "Tea?"

That was the moment, if she had been asked afterwards to name one, that she decided she would marry him.

Chapter Five

The address on the last envelope was in a town she had to look up in the atlas, and the atlas was eleven years out of date, and the town had changed its name twice since it was printed.

She went anyway. She closed the post office for the first time in eleven years, hung a card in the window that said BACK THURSDAY in her own careful hand, and took the six-forty from the halt with the writing case on her knees and Tom's coat over her shoulders, because he had put it there and she had not argued.

He had walked her to the halt in the half-dark, carrying the case, which she had not asked him to do either. The halt at Harrow Cross was a platform, a lamp and a bench with a brass plate on it in memory of somebody nobody remembered, and at twenty to seven on a weekday it belonged to the milk churns and the rooks. Tom set the case on the bench and stood beside it with his hands in his pockets, looking up the line as though the train might come sooner for being watched.

"You'll telephone," he said.

"There won't be a telephone."

"There's always a telephone. You find the post office and you ask." He considered this. "You'll know what to say to them."

She did, as it turned out, though not in the way he meant.

The train came out of the cutting with its lamps still lit, and slowed, and seemed for a moment to consider not stopping at all. Tom

handed the case up after her and then, when she had found a seat, stood on the platform outside her window with his hat in his hand, exactly as he stood in the doorway of the shop, and she understood with a jolt that he was going to ask it. He was going to stand on the platform at Harrow Cross, in front of the milk churns and the rooks, and ask whether there was anything for him.

He did not. He put his hat on, and raised a hand, and the train took her away while he was still lowering it.

For the first hour she did not read anything. She sat with the case on her knees and Tom's coat round her shoulders, and watched the valley go by in the grey light, the farms she knew and then the farms she did not, and felt the distance open behind her like a door left ajar.

The train went east into weather. She read the ninth letter somewhere past Ely, and then read it again, and then put it away and watched the fen go by flat and brown and enormous, and thought about how a person can be posted like a letter, and carried, and delivered late.

She had changed at Sheffield and again at a junction whose name she did not catch, and somewhere after that the hills had given up and the land had laid itself down flat to the edge of the sky. She had not known there was so much sky in England. It sat on the fields like a lid, grey and enormous, and under it the dykes ran in straight lines to nowhere and the occasional farmhouse stood up out of the flatness with an air of having been left there by mistake.

The woman across from her had eaten an orange segment by segment and offered her one, and Miriam had taken it, and they had talked for a while about nothing — the weather, the trains, the price of oranges — with the particular freedom of two people who will never meet again. When the woman got off at March, she leaned back

in through the door to say, "I hope you find it, whatever it is," and was gone before Miriam could ask how she knew.

The town, when she reached it, had a market square, a church too big for it and a name on the station sign that matched neither of the names in the atlas. She asked at the ticket window for the street on the envelope. The clerk read it, frowned, and read it again.

"They changed that," he said. "After the war. It's Mill Lane now. Past the chapel, over the bridge, and keep the river on your left." He handed the envelope back through the gap in the glass and then, unexpectedly, added: "Mind the bridge. It's slippery in the wet."

It was wet. It had been wet since Ely.

She did not go straight there. She found the post office first, because Tom had told her to and because she could not think of anything else to do with her hands, and stood in the queue behind a man sending a pair of boots to his brother, and bought a stamp she did not need. The postmistress was younger than Miriam and kept her pigeonholes in a disorder that Miriam found painful to look at. There was a telephone in a booth by the door. She did not use it.

Then she sat in the window of a tea shop on the square for the better part of an hour with a pot of tea she let go cold, and watched the town go about its business in the rain, and tried to imagine her mother crossing the square: buying bread, posting letters, nodding to people who did not know that she had a daughter, and had had one all along. She could not do it. The woman in her imagination had no face, only hands, and the hands were her own.

At four the girl came to say that they were closing. Miriam paid, and took up the case, and went out past the chapel and over the bridge, which was slippery, as promised, and kept the river on her left.

Mill Lane was a row of brick cottages with their backs to the water, each with a scrubbed step and a boot-scraper and a window full of

somebody's geraniums. She walked the length of it once without stopping, as though she were only passing, and then turned at the end and walked back, counting the doors.



The house, when she found it, was smaller than the handwriting had suggested.

There was a corncrake on the door knocker. It was worn nearly smooth, and it faced left, and she stood in front of it for some minutes in the rain before she raised her hand.

Chapter Six

The woman who opened the door was seventy or thereabouts and had Miriam's hands.

They looked at one another for the length of time it takes a kettle to begin, and then the woman said, "You'll be wet through," and stood aside, and that was the whole of it. No speech. No explanation offered on the doorstep in the rain. Just a door held open and a hall that smelled of coal and apples.

Miriam went in.



Afterwards — a long time afterwards, when there was a shop with two names above the door and a child who could not be persuaded that letters were interesting — she would try to describe that afternoon to people and find that she could not. It came out as a list of small things. The kettle. The apples. A clock that ran four minutes fast and was never corrected because correcting it would have meant admitting it was wrong.

What she never said, because it sounded foolish, was that the room had been full of paper. Every surface. Drafts and half-sheets and envelopes addressed and never sent, twenty-two years of them, and

among them somewhere the third fold of a letter that had been written and unwritten more times than either of them would ever count.

They did not talk about any of it that first afternoon. They talked about the train, and the bridge, which was slippery, and whether the rain would hold off for the market on Saturday, which it would not. Her mother asked whether she took sugar, and Miriam said no, and her mother put one in anyway and then looked at the cup in dismay, as though it had done it on its own. Miriam drank it. It was the worst cup of tea she had ever had, and she would have defended it to anyone.

"I did write," her mother said, once, near the end of the afternoon, not looking up.

"I know," Miriam said. "I have them."

And that, in the end, was the arrangement: not the one that had ended, but the one that began that day, in a small house with a corncrake on the door, over a pot of tea going cold between two pairs of the same hands.

Chapter Seven

She stayed until Thursday, and then until the following Thursday, and by the third week she had stopped putting a date on it altogether.

The card in the post office window went from BACK THURSDAY to CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE in Tom's hand, which was rounder than hers and leaned the wrong way, and which she thought about at odd moments with a warmth she could not account for.

There was a routine, of a kind. Her mother rose at five and did not speak until seven. Miriam learned to do the same, and found that two hours of shared silence in a small kitchen tell you more about a person than a year of letters.

In the afternoons they walked. Her mother walked the way she wrote, small and upright and careful, and stopped at every gate to look at what was on the other side of it, and named the birds without being asked. There were no corncrakes. There had not been corncrakes in that part of the country for forty years, she said, which was why she had chosen one: a bird that had been everywhere once and then, without anybody noticing the moment, was gone.

Miriam wrote to Tom on the fourth day, a postcard of the church, and again on the eighth, a proper letter, two sides, in which she described the river and the bridge and the market and said nothing

at all about why she was there. He wrote back by return. His letter said that the shop was shut, that Mrs Pargeter had opinions, that the cat was fed, and that he hoped she was keeping dry. It was the longest thing she had ever known him to write, and she kept it in the writing case with the others.



On the ninth day she asked the question she had been carrying since Ely.

"Why did he keep them?"

Her mother was at the sink with her back turned, and she did not stop what she was doing, and the pause went on long enough that Miriam had begun to compose an apology.

"Because I asked him to," she said.

Chapter Eight

The arrangement, when it was finally explained, was so small and so stupid that Miriam had to go out into the garden and stand in the cold for a while.

There had been a debt. Not a large one — the sort of sum that in another family, in another year, would have been settled with a word and a handshake and never mentioned again. There had been a man who held it and a condition attached to holding it, and the condition had been that Helen Vale went away and stayed away, and that nobody explain to the child why.

"And he agreed to that," Miriam said, when she came back in.

"He agreed to it for a year." Her mother had not moved. "Then he wrote to say the year was up and the man wrote back to say it was not. That is the whole of it. Everything after that is just the same letter, twenty-two times."

"Who was he?"

Her mother told her a name. It meant nothing to Miriam, and her mother seemed to find this the strangest part of the whole business: that a name she had carried about for twenty-two years, like a stone in a shoe, could be set down on a kitchen table and turn out to be nothing more than a name.

"He kept a shop," she said. "Hardware. Nails by the pound. He was a churchwarden and he gave to the lifeboats. People liked him."

She turned her cup a quarter turn on its saucer. "I expect they would have gone on liking him whatever I said. That was rather the point."



"He could have told me," Miriam said, later, in the dark, to the ceiling. "At any point in twenty-two years, he could have said one true sentence."

Nobody answered, because there was nobody in the room, and because the answer was obvious and no better for being said: he could have, and he did not, and now the sea had him and the question was closed on his side and open for ever on hers.

Chapter Nine

The man who had held the debt had been dead since the spring of the year Miriam turned fifteen.

She found this out from a parish record in a county library on a wet Tuesday, which she noted, and which she decided to take as a joke rather than an omen.

Seven years. For seven years there had been nothing to keep either of them to anything, and the letters had gone on being written and gone on being not sent, and the case had gone on being locked, out of nothing more than the momentum of a habit that had outlived its reason.

She sat in the library with her coat on and her hands flat on the table and thought: *this is how it happens*. Not through malice, or even cowardice. Through a door that was locked for a reason, and then locked out of habit, and then simply locked.

She stayed until the library closed. The librarian, a young man with ink on his cuffs, brought her the burial register as well, unasked, and stood at a little distance while she found the entry: a Tuesday, as it happened, in April, and a hymn, and the name of the man who had preached. There was nothing else. Nobody had written in the margin that two people had gone on keeping his conditions for seven years after he was in no position to enforce them. There was no column in the register for that.

She thanked the young man, and he said it was nothing, and she walked back over the slippery bridge in the dusk thinking that it was not nothing, and that she would not have known how to explain to him what it was.

"You'll want to go back," her mother said that evening. It was not a question, and it was not an accusation, and it took Miriam a moment to recognise it as permission.

"I'll want to come again," she said.

"Yes." Her mother turned a page. "Well. That's the other thing."

Chapter Ten

Harrow Cross had managed nine weeks without a post office and had opinions about it.

The opinions were delivered over the counter in the first four days, in order of seniority, and were unanimous in substance and various in phrasing: that she had been missed, that she had been talked about, that it had all been very inconvenient, and that nobody had liked to ask.

The Doyle boys had grown, or appeared to have. The vicar had begun a series of sermons on the minor prophets and was only on Hosea. Somebody had painted the pillar box, which had not needed painting, in a red so bright that it seemed to hum, and nobody would admit to it, and the subject had divided the parish more cleanly than anything since the bypass. Miriam listened to all of it. She weighed the parcels and sold the stamps and filled the pigeonholes, and found that she had missed it — the smallness of it, the way a village goes on talking to itself whether or not anybody is listening — more than she had known it was possible to miss anything so ordinary.

The writing case went back into the cupboard under the stairs, but not beneath the Christmas things. On top of them, where she could see it when she opened the door for the brush.

It rained on the first evening, the long fine rain that comes down off the Hollins in the autumn and does not so much fall as arrive.

Miriam swept the floor, which did not need sweeping, and squared the forms in their rack, and stood for a while at the window watching the lamp come on over the door and the lane shine under it, and the pillar box, which was too red, glowing in the dusk like something that had been left on.

Mrs Pargeter, who had known her father and disapproved of him on principle, waited until the shop was empty.

"Is she well?"

Miriam looked up. "You knew."

"I knew a woman went away," Mrs Pargeter said, "and I knew a man stopped speaking about her. I am seventy-nine years old. I did not need it explained."

She took her pension and folded it into her purse and snapped the purse shut, which was the sound, in Harrow Cross, of a conversation ending. Then she did not leave.

"Your father," she said, "was a difficult man and a good one, and I never knew which he was going to be on any given Tuesday. He bought a pair of red shoes in Buxton once, the year you were nine. Paid full price. Came in here to post the box back to the shop because they'd sent the wrong size, and stood where you're standing and asked me what size a girl of nine takes. I've thought about that," said Mrs Pargeter, "on and off, for twenty-three years."

Miriam found that she had to hold on to the edge of the counter.

"He said they were from a jumble sale," she said.

"I daresay he did." Mrs Pargeter looked at her for a long moment, not unkindly. "Men will say almost anything rather than be caught caring. You'd do well to remember that, with the other one."

She did not say which other one. She did not need to.

That night Miriam wrote to her mother. It was the first letter she had written in her own hand to anybody but the regional office in

eleven years, and it took her until midnight, and most of it was about the pillar box. She told her mother about the paint and the parish and the minor prophets and Mrs Pargeter's opinion of the vicar, and she told her that the writing case was on top of the Christmas things now, and she did not tell her about the shoes, because some things are better said across a table than across three counties.

In the morning, before Tom came, she walked down to the pillar box in her coat and slippers and posted it herself. It was still too red. She stood beside it for a moment in the half-dark with her hand on its cold wet top, the way you might stand beside a horse, and thought that for twenty-two years the letters had all gone the other way.

Her mother's answer came on the following Tuesday, which Miriam had by then stopped holding against Tuesdays. It was one side of a sheet, in the small upright hand, and it said that the river was up, that the market had been rained off, that the clock was still four minutes fast and would remain so, and that she was glad about the pillar box. At the bottom, under the initial, was a line that had been written and crossed out so thoroughly that not one letter of it could be read. Miriam held it to the lamp, from habit, and then did not try. She knew the shape of a sentence like that by now. She had written a good many of her own.



He had come every morning since she got back, and every morning she had told him "Not today," because that was the answer, and he had nodded and gone. It was not that she did not know what she wanted to say. It was that the words *not today* had been worn so smooth by six years of use that they came out on their own, the way a

key turns in a lock it has turned in a thousand times, before the hand has quite decided to turn it.

On the ninth morning she was up before five, as her mother would have been, and had the floor swept and the stove lit and the forms squared in their rack by half past, and then there was nothing to do but stand behind the counter and listen to the rain and wait for the sound of the gate.

Tom came at six, as he had come at six every day for six years, and stood in the doorway with his hat in his hand.

"Anything for us?" he said.

And Miriam, who had rehearsed nothing, found that she had been ready for weeks. "Yes," she said. "As it happens."

Chapter Eleven

They were married in the spring, in a church with a roof that leaked over the third pew from the back, which everyone knew and nobody mentioned to visitors.

Helen Vale came on the six-forty and sat where the roof did not leak, and was introduced to Harrow Cross as *Miriam's mother* without qualification, and Harrow Cross — which had been rehearsing its astonishment for a fortnight — discovered when the moment came that it had no appetite for it, and simply shook her hand.

The writing case was on the table with the cards and the cake. Somebody asked what it was and Tom said, "Family," and the conversation moved on, and that was the last time anyone in the village asked.

Mrs Pargeter wore a hat with a bird on it, which some people thought was a pheasant and some a grouse, and which she said, when pressed, was neither. The Doyle boys were made to carry chairs. The vicar married them in eleven minutes, which was thought to be a record, and nobody minded, because the rain had begun to come through over the third pew and the people sitting there were being very brave about it.

Tom said "I will" as though he had been asked whether there was anything for him, and Miriam, who had expected to cry, laughed instead, and could not stop, and did not try.

Late, when the hall had emptied and the chairs were stacked and the rain had started again, Miriam found her mother outside under the porch, looking at nothing.

"You'll have the ninth letter," Helen said. "The one I never sent. You never opened it."

"No."

"Are you going to?"

Miriam thought about it properly, which she felt the question deserved. "No," she said at last. "I know what's in it."

Her mother nodded slowly. "Yes," she said. "I suppose you do."

Chapter Twelve

The child, when she came, was called Anne, after nobody, which was a decision they made carefully and defended often.

She grew up in a shop that smelled of paper and string, and was bored by letters in the way that only a child raised among them can be, and once — at nine, in a temper — announced that when she was grown she would live somewhere where the post did not come at all.

"There is no such place," said her grandmother, from the chair by the window that had been hers for six years by then.

"There is."

"Then it is not somewhere you would like."

Helen had come to live with them the winter Anne was three, when the house by the river grew too large for one person and too damp for anyone. She brought the clock that ran four minutes fast, and the corncrake from the door, which Tom fixed to the door of the shop, facing left; and she sat by the window in the afternoons and watched the village come and go, and wrote letters, a great many of them, to people she had known and people she had not, and posted every one of them herself.



Anne was eleven when she found the case, and twelve when she asked, and by then the answer had been worn smooth by telling — the debt, the condition, the year that was not a year, the case, the key kept in a pocket by a man who never used it.

What she remembered afterwards was not the story. It was that her mother told it sitting down, with her hands still, and did not cry, and at the end of it said only:

"It was a small thing. That is the part to remember. It was a very small thing, and it took twenty-two years, and nobody meant any of it."

Then she got up and opened the shop, because it was ten to nine, and the post did not care.