

Part 12, Chapter 1

Githa Sowerby, Rutherford and Son

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People :

Author : Emma Goldman

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THE ENGLISH DRAMA: GITHA SOWERBY RUTHERFORD AND SON

THE women's rights women who claim for their sex the most wonderful things in the way of creative achievement, will find it difficult to explain the fact that until the author of "Rutherford and Son" made her appearance, no country had produced, a single women dramatist of note.

That is the more remarkable because woman has since time immemorial been a leading figure in histrionic art. Rachel, Sarah Bernhardt, Eleanore Duse, and scores of others had few male peers.

It can hardly be that woman is merely a reproducer and not a creator. We have but to recall such creative artists as Charlotte and Emily Bronté, George Sand, George Eliot, Mary Wollstonecraft, Marie Bashkirtshev, Rosa Bonheur, Sophia Kovalevskya and a host of others, to appreciate that woman has been a creative factor in literature, art and science. Not so in the drama, so far the stronghold exclusively of men.

It is therefore an event for a woman to come to the fore who possesses such dramatic power, realistic grasp and artistic penetration, as evidenced by Githa

Sowerby.

The circumstance is the more remarkable because Githa Sowerby is, according to her publishers, barely out of her teens; and though she be a genius; her exceptional maturity is a phenomenon rarely observed. Generally maturity comes only with experience and suffering. No one who has not felt the crushing weight of the Rutherford atmosphere could have painted such a vivid and life-like picture.

The basic theme in "Rutherford and Son" is not novel. Turgenev, Ibsen and such lesser artists as Sudermann and Stanley Houghton have dealt with it: the chasm between the old and the young,- the tragic struggle of parents against their children, the one frantically holding on, the other recklessly letting go. But "Rutherford and Son" is more than that. It is a picture of the paralyzing effect of tradition and institutionalism on all forms of life, growth, and change.

John Rutherford, the owner of the firm "Rutherford and Son", is possessed by the phantom of the past - the thing handed down to him by his father and which he must pass on to his son with undiminished luster; the thing that has turned his soul to iron and his heart to stone; the thing for the sake of which he has never known joy and because of which no one else must know joy,- "Rutherford and Son."

The crushing weight of this inexorable monster on Rutherford and his children is significantly summed up by young John:

John. Have you ever heard of Moloch? No. . . . Well, Moloch was a sort of God . . . some time ago, you know, before Dick and his kind came along. They built his image with an ugly head ten times the size of a real head, with great wheels instead of legs, and set him up in the middle of a great dirty town. And they thought him a very important person indeed, and made sacrifices to him . . . human sacrifices . . . to keep him going, you know. Out of every family they set aside one child to be an offering to him when it was big enough, and at last it became a sort of honor to be dedicated in this way, so much so, that the victims came themselves gladly to be crushed out of life under the great wheels. That was Moloch. *Janet*. Dedicated-we are dedicated-all of us-to Rutherfords'.

Not only the Rutherford children, their withered *Aunt Ann*, and old *Rutherford* himself, but even *Martin*, the faithful servant in the employ of the Rutherfords for twenty-five years, is "dedicated," and when he ceases to be of use to their Moloch, he is turned into a thief and then cast off, even as *Janet* and *John*.

Not love for *John*, his oldest son, or sympathy with the latter's wife and child induces old *Rutherford* to forgive his son's marriage with a shop-girl, but because he needs *John* to serve the house of Rutherford. The one inexorable purpose, always and ever!

His second son *Richard*, who is in the ministry, and "of no use" to old *Rutherford's* God of stone, receives the loving assurance: "You were no good for my purpose, and there's the end; for the matter o' that, you might just as well never ha' been born."

For that matter, his daughter *Janet* might also never have been born, except that she was "good enough" to look after her father's house, serve him, even helping take off his boots, and submitting without a murmur to the loveless, dismal life in the Rutherford home. Her father has sternly kept every suitor away, "because no one in Grantley's good enough for us." *Janet* has become faded, sour and miserable with yearning for love, for sunshine and warmth, and when she at last dares to partake of it secretly with her father's trusted man *Martin*, old *Rutherford* sets his iron heel upon her love, and drags it through the mud till it lies dead.

Again, when he faces the spirit of rebellion in his son *John*, *Rutherford* crushes it without the slightest hesitation in behalf of his one obsession, his one God-the House of Rutherford.

John has made an invention which holds great by means of it he hopes to shake deadly grip of the Rutherfords'. He wants to become a free man and mold a new life for his wife and child. He knows his father will not credit the value of his invention. He dare not approach him: the Rutherford children have been held in dread of their parent too long.

John turns to *Martin*, the faithful servant, the the confidence of *Rutherford*. *John* feels himself safe with *Martin*. But he does not know that *Martin*, too, is dedicated to Moloch, broken by his twenty-five years of service, left without will, without purpose outside of the Rutherfords'.

Martin tries to enlist *Rutherford's* interest in behalf of *John*. But the old man decides that *John* must turn over his invention to the House of Rutherford.

Rutherford. What's your receipt? *John* . I want to know where I stand. . . . I want my price. *Rutherford*. Your price-your price? Damn your impudence, sir. . . . So that's your line, is it? . . . This is what I get for all I've done for you. . . . This is

the result of the schooling I gave you. I've toiled and sweated to give you a name you'd be proud to own- worked early and late, toiled like a dog when other men were taking their ease-plotted and planned to get my chance, taken it and held it when it come till I could ha' burst with the struggle. Sell! You talk o' selling to me, when everything you'll ever make couldn't pay back the life I've given to you!

John. Oh, I know, I know. I've been both for five years. Only I've had no salary.

Rutherford. You've been put to learn your business like any other young fellow. I began at the bottom- you've got to do the same. . . . Your father has lived here, and your grandfather before you. It's your inheritance-can't you realize that?-what you've got to come to when I'm under ground. We've made it for you, stone by stone, penny by penny, fighting through thick and thin for close on a hundred years. . . . what you've got to do-or starve. You're my son-you've got to come after me.

Janet knows her father better than *John*; she knows that "no one ever stands out against father for long-or else they get so knocked about, they don't matter any more." *Janet* knows, and when the moment arrives that brings-her fathers blow upon her head, it does not come as a surprise to her. When old *Rutherford* discovers her relation with *Martin*, his indignation is as characteristic of the man as everything else in his life. It is not outraged morality or a fath love. It is always and forever the House Rutherford. Moreover, the discovery of affair between his daughter and his workman comes at a psychologic moment: *Rutherford* is get hold of *John's* invention -for the Rutherfords, of course - and now that *Martin* has broken faith with his master, his offense serves an easy pretext for *Rutherford* to break faith with *Martin*.. He calls the old servant to his office demands the receipt of *John's* invention, entrusted to *Martin*. On the latter's refusal to betray *John*, the master plays on the man's loyalty to the Rutherfords.

Rutherford. Rutherfords' is going down-down. I got to pull her up, somehow. There's one way out. . . . Mr. John's made this metal -a thing, I take your word for it, that's worth a fortune. And we're going to sit by and watch him fooling it away -selling it for a song to Miles or Jarvis, that we could break tomorrow if we had half a chance. . . . You've got but to put your hand in your pocket to save the place and you don't do it. -You're with the money-grubbing little souls that can't see beyond the next shilling they put . . . When men steal, *Martin*, they do it to gain something.

If I steal this, what'll I gain if I buy it? If I make money, what'll I buy with it? pleasure maybe? Children to come after me-glad o' what I done? Tell me anything in the wide world that'll bring me joy, and I'll swear to you never to touch it?....If you give it to me what'll you gain by it? Not a farthing shall you ever have from me-no more than I get myself.

Martin. And what will Mr. John get for it?

Rutherford. Rutherfords-when I'm gone. He'll thank you in ten years-he'll come to laugh at himself -him and his price. He'll see the Big Thing one day, mebbe, like what I've done. He'll see that it was no more his than 'tw,-ts yours to give nor mine to take It's Rutherfords'. Will you give it to me?

Martin. I take shame to be doing it now. . . . He worked it out along o' me. Every time it changed he come running to show me like a bairn wi' a new toy. Rutherford. It's for Rutherfords'.

Rutherfords' ruthlessly marches on. If the Rutherford purpose does not shrink from corrupting its most trusted servant, it surely will not bend before a daughter who has dared, even once in her life, to assert herself.

Rutherford. How far's it gone?

Janet. Right at first-I made up my mind that if you ever found out, I'd go right away, to put things straight. He wanted to tell you at the first. But I knew that it would be no use It was I said not to tell you.

Rutherford. Martin...that I trusted as I trust myself.

Janet. You haven't turned him away-you couldn't do that!

Rutherford. That's my business.

Janet. You couldn't do that . . . not Martin. . . .

Rutherford. Leave it - leave it . . . Martin's my servant, that I pay wages to. I made a name for my children - a name respected in all the countryside - and go with a workingman.... To-morrow you leave house. D'ye understand? I'll have no light ways under my roof. No one shall say I winked at it. You can bide the night. To-morrow when I come in I'm to find ye gone. . . . Your name shan't be spoken in my house . . . never again.

Janet. Oh, you've no pity. . . . I was thirty-six. Gone sour. Nobody'd ever come after me. Not even when I was young. You took care o' that. Half of my well-nigh all of it that mattered. . . . Martin loves me honest. Don't you come near! Don't you

touch that! . . . You think that I'm sorry you've found out- think you've done for me when you use a on me and turn me out o' your house. out o' You've let me out of jail! Whatever happens to me now, I shan't go on living as I lived here. Whatever Martin's done, he's taken me from you. You've ruined my life, you with your getting on. I've loved in wretchedness, all the joy I ever had made wicked by the fear o' you. . . . Who are you? Who are you? Who are you? A man-a man that takes power to himself, power to other gather people to him and use them as he wills -a man that'd take the blood of life itself and put it into the Works-into Rutherfords'. And what ha'you got by it -what? You've got Dick, that you've bullied till he's a fool-John, that's waiting for the time when he can sell what you've done-and you got me-me to take --your boots off at night-to well-nigh wish you dead when I had to touch you. . . . Now! . . . Now you know it!

But for the great love in her heart, Janet could not have found courage to face her father as she did. But love gives strength; it instills hope and faith, and kindles anew the fires of life. Why, then, should it not be strong enough to break the fetters of even Rutherfords'? Such a love only those famished for affection and warmth can feel, and Janet was famished for life.

Janet. I had a dream -- a dream that I was in a place wi' flowers, in the summer-time, white and thick like they never grow on the moor -- but it was the moor -- a place near Martin's cottage. And I dreamed that he came to me with the look he had when I was a little lass, with his head up and the lie gone out of his eyes. All the time I knew I was on my bed in my room here -- but it was as if sweetness poured into me, spreading and covering me like the water in the tarn when the rains are heavy in the fells. . . . That's why I dreamed of him so last night. It was as if all that was best in me was in that dream -what I was as a bairn and what I'm going to be. He couldn't help but love me. It was a message -- couldn't have thought of it by myself. It's something that's come to me-here (*putting her hands on her breast*). Part of me!

All that lay dormant in *Janet* now turns into glowing fire at the touch of Spring. But in *Martin* life has been marred, strangled by the iron hand of Rutherfords'.

Martin. Turned away I am, sure enough. Twentyfive years. And in a minute it's broke. Wi' two words.

Janet. You say that now because your heart's cold with the trouble. But it'll

warm again -- it'll warm again. I'll warm it out of my own heart, Martin -my heart that can't be made cold.

Martin. I'd rather ha' died than he turn me away. I'd ha' lost everything in the world to know that I was true to 'm like I was till you looked at me wi' the love in your face. It was a great love ye gave me -you in your grand hoose wi' your delicate ways. But it's broke me.

Janet. But -- it's just the same with us. Just the same as ever it was.

Martin. Aye. But there's no mending, wi' the likes o' him.

Janet. What's there to mend? What's there to mend except what's bound you like a slave all the years? You're free-free for the first time since you were a lad mebbe. We'll begin again. We'll be happyhappy. You and me, free in the world! All the time that's been 'll be just like a dream that's past, a waiting time afore we found each other -the long winter afore the flowers come out white and thick on the moors Martin. Twenty-five years ago he took me. . . . It's too long to change. . . . I'll never do his work no more; but it's like as if he'd be my master just the same till I die --

Janet. Listen, Martin. Listen to me. You've worked all your life for him, ever since you were a little lad. Early and late you've been at the Works -- working --working -- for him.

Martin. Gladly!

Janet. Now and then he give, you a kind word -- you were wearied out mebbe--and your thoughts might ha' turned to what other men's lives were, wi' time for rest and pleasure. You didn't see through him, you wi' your big heart, Martin. You were too near to see, like I was till Mary came. You worked gladly maybe-but all the time your life was going into Rutherfords'- your manhood into the place he's built. He's had you, Martin,- like he's had me, and all of us. We used to say he was hard and ill-tempered. Bad to do with in the house -- we fell silent when he came in -- we couldn't see for the little things,- we couldn't see the years passing because of the days. And all the time it was our lives he was taking bit by bit -our lives that we'll never get back. . . . Now's our chance at last! He's turned us both away, me as well as you. We two he's sent out into the world together. Free. He's done it himself of his own will. It's ours to take, Martin -- happiness. We'll get it in spite of him. He'd kill it if he could.

The cruelty of it, that the Rutherfords never kill with one blow: never so merciful are they. In their ruthless march they strangle inch by inch, shed the blood of life drop by drop, until they have broken the very spirit of man and made him as helpless and pitiful as *Martin*,- a trembling leaf tossed about by the winds.

A picture of such stirring social and human importance that no one, except he who has reached the stage of *Martin*, can escape its effect. Yet even more significant is the inevitability of the doom of the Rutherfords as embodied in the wisdom of *Mary*, *John's* wife.

When her husband steals his father's money a very small part indeed compared with what the father had stolen from him -- he leaves the hateful place and *Mary* remains to face the master. For the sake of her child she strikes a bargain with *Rutherford*.

Mary. A bargain is where one person has something to sell that another wants to buy. There's no love in it only money -- money that pays for life. I've got something to sell that you want to buy.

Rutherford. What's that?

Mary. My son. You've lost everything you've had in the world. John's gone-and Richard-and Janet. They won't come back. You're alone now and getting old, with no one to come after you. When you die Rutherford's will be sold --somebody'll buy it and give it a new name perhaps, and no one will even remember that you made it. That'll be the end of all your work. just -- nothing. You've thought of that. . . . It's for my boy. I want -- a chance of life for him -- his place in the world. John can't give him that, because he's made so. If I went to London and worked my hardest I'd get twenty-five shillings a week. We've failed. From you I can get when I want for my boy. I want all the good common things: a good house, good food, warmth. He's a delicate little thing now, but he'll grow strong like other children. . . . Give me what I ask, and in return I'll give you-him. On one condition. I'm to stay on here. I won't trouble you-you needn't speak to me or see me unless you want to. For ten years he's to be absolutely mine, to do what I like with. You mustn't interfere--you mustn't tell him to do things or frighten him. He's mine for ten years more.

Rutherford. And after that?

Mary. He'll be yours.

Rutherford. To train up. For Rutherford's?

Mary. Yes.

Rutherford. After all? After Dick, that I've bullied till he's a fool? John, that's wished me dead?

Mary. In ten years you'll be an old man; you won't be able to make people afraid of you any more.

When I saw the masterly presentation of the play on the stage, *Mary's* bargain looked unreal and incongruous. It seemed impossible to me that a mother who really loves her child should want it to be in any way connected with the Rutherford's. But after repeatedly rereading the play, I was convinced by *Mary's* simple statement: " In ten years you'll be an old man; you won't be able to make people afraid of you any more." Most deeply true. The Rutherfords are bound by time, by the eternal forces of change. Their influence on human life is indeed terrible. Not withstanding it all, however, they are fighting a losing game. They are growing old, already too old to make anyone afraid. Change and innovation are marching on, and the Rutherfords must make place for the young generation knocking at the gates.

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