

Chapter - IV

ROSIE - DISPENSING JOY

I - Cakes and Ale

II - Rosie - Dispensing Joy

I
Cakes and Ale

Cakes and Ale is Maugham's favourite novel. It was published in 1930. It is :

"... the record of a long ... but abortive romance, recollected with warmth and pleasure; for the element that accompanies and follows a deep love had disappeared by 1929 when he wrote the book ..."¹

There are three writers in the novel. Willie Ashenden is one of them. He narrates the story. Alroy Kear, who is also a writer, requires Ashenden's help in the work of writing a biography of the late Edward Driffield. Driffield's second wife, Amy Driffield, requests Alroy Kear to write the biography of her late husband. Alroy Kear needs Ashenden's help because Ashenden knows about Driffield's early life.

Through the use of the flashback technique Maugham shows the early life of Driffield. Ashenden remembers the past. Edward Driffield was a young writer. He was the son of a bailiff. He lived in Blackstable with his beautiful wife Rosie. She is an ex-barmaid. She is promiscuous. The people in Blackstable with their conventional bend of mind do not respect the couple.

Driffield has tried his hand at many trades. When he takes to writing, his novels are thought to be worthless. He is not thought to be a 'gentleman'. His marriage to Rosie heightens his fall in estimation.

But this does not affect Driffields' gay manner of life.

After his acquaintance with the Driffields, Ashenden enjoys their company. But after some period Ashenden comes to know that the Driffields have left Blackstable without paying their dues. Later Ashenden comes in contact with them in England. Ashenden is now a young man and he begins to admire the beauty and charm of Rosie. But after some period Rosie elopes with her former lover George Kemp and goes to America.

Mrs. Barton Trafford, Driffield's patron and admirer, takes great pains to keep Driffield in the limelight. He later marries the nurse Amy who nurses him in his illness. Amy tries to make him a gentleman. But her desire to transform him into a gentleman becomes only a compulsion to him. When he comes to be recognised as a distinguished writer Amy gets the credit for being the woman behind his success. But Driffield's art of novel writing has flourished when he was in the company of Rosie. It means she is the true force behind his writing.

People believe that Rosie is dead. But in fact she is alive. Ashenden knows this fact.

Maugham has used two plots in this novel - the main plot and the sub-plot. To weave the two stories into one smooth flowing narrative, Maugham has used the flashback technique, which is well appreciated :

"... Jerome Weidman gives Maugham credit for being the first to employ it in a novel."²

It was said that Maugham drew the characters of Edward Drifffield and Alroy Kear from the images of the writers Thomas Hardy and Hugh Walpole respectively. But Maugham has disclaimed this.

Cakes and Ale has another title also : The Skeleton in the Cupboard. Cakes and Ale has been acclaimed as one of the best novels of English fiction :

"... The rich characterisation, the humorous asides, the skilful shuttling between past and present, the warmth and cheerfulness of the story, the deceptively simple and colloquial style ..."³

add to its charm. The great attraction of this novel is the character of Rosie, drawn by the writer with a rare affection and warmth.

II

Rosie Driffield

"... Rosie Driffield ... came directly from the author's experience and emotion. In spite of her faithlessness and promiscuity he writes of her in the novel always with affection and admiration, though without romantic glorification ..."⁴

Maugham's Rosie is quite notorious in Blackstable for her promiscuity. Even after her marriage to Edward Driffield, her love affairs with George Kemp, Ashenden and even others, continue. She does not think this to be gross and improper. She does not bother about the backbiting and critical comments about her behaviour. She merely wants to give happiness to others. In fact it is her philosophy of life :

"... She loved to make people happy. She loved love."⁵

She is known for her promiscuity. But she is not a woman of mere lust. She loves other men but there is not a tinge of lust in her love for them. Precisely for this Driffield loves her. When she deserts him he is very unhappy. Driffield knows that Rosie is good at heart :

"... She was like a clear, deep pool in a forest glade, into which it's heavenly to plunge ..."⁶

Rosie has been a constant force of inspiration to Driffield. All his writings take shape when he is in her company. Rosie has tried, like a catalyst, to bring out the best talent in him.

She elopes with George Kemp. It makes Driffield very unhappy. Alroy Kear, the writer, does not think highly of Rosie. But he acknowledges her contribution in making Driffield the Grand Old Man of Letters :

"... All Driffield's greatest books were written when he was living with her ..."⁷

Though Rosie deserts Driffield, she still admires him. Because she has loved him she speaks sympathetically about him. Rosie had a daughter by him. Rosie loved her intensely. But the daughter dies. And then she elopes with George Kemp.

Rosie's physical beauty and the charm of her personality has created an impact on many. She is beautiful and attractive even though she does not have very good features - a little thick, short nose, small eyes and large mouth. But her dark blue eyes smile with her red lips. And this smile is very

gay, friendly and very sweet. Her silvery gold skin and pale gold hair add to her charm. But her beauty does not turn her head. When she is made aware of her beauty, she is a little surprised and amused, but she remains untouched by vanity. She remains so even when she becomes very rich in her old age.

Rosie is not very extrovert. She speaks seldom and she is serene. But she exerts a charm through her company. She is suffused with a liveliness that does not emanate loneliness.

She does not dominate others. She is a good-hearted, simple and artless woman. She is not a hypocrite.

Rosie is very fond of reading history. She does not take much interest in literature, and she likes to read about real things. She particularly prefers to read about the queens and mistresses of royal men and in this regard she has a prodigious appetite.

Rosie is not very intelligent nor is she stupid. She is clever. She has good analytical powers, a fact easily discerned from her skill at playing cards :

"... her uncanny skill at whist had impressed me ... I knew the sort of bridge player she was, quick, bold, and accurate; a good partner and a dangerous opponent."⁸

Rosie is concerned with her own way of life. She does not bother about conventions. She, like her husband Driffield, gives more importance to humanity rather than to the fetters of conventions and traditions. She does not consider it to be below her status to talk joyfully with a bar-maid nor does she try to make a gentleman of her husband Driffield.

Rosie does not bother much about what is good and what is bad. She is concerned with the present and not with the future. She has her own philosophy to fall back upon :

"... Why not be happy with what you can get? Enjoy yourself while you have the chance, I say; we shall all be dead in a hundred years, and what will anything matter then ? Let's have a good time while we can."⁹

She never feels anything in offering herself to others :

"... She gave herself as naturally as the Sun gives heat or the flowers their perfume ... It had no effect on her character; she remained sincere, unspoiled, artless."¹⁰

Maugham says she is the most engaging heroine he has ever created. Her beauty, her ease and her wish to give happiness to others - all combine to make her a memorable character. Rosie is a prototype of a young, beautiful woman who had come in the life of Maugham and whom he loved. When he wrote this novel, the affair between them had come to an end. But Maugham never had a tinge of bitterness for her. Instead, when he describes her in the novel, he does it with warmth and affection.

Rosie is a woman of her own principles and her own ways of life. Like a self assertive woman she has her own views. She wants to make others happy for which she is ready to sacrifice her own joys. Unlike Julia in Theatre Rosie makes others happy. Though she loves others, at the core of her heart she loves her husband. Dispensing joy is her sole aim.

Chapter - IV

CAKES AND ALE

References

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