The meaning of how girls wear rings

Ah, me, Ernest Darling, sun-worshipper and nature man, there are times when I am compelled to envy you and your carefree existence. I see you now, dancing up the steps and cutting antics on the veranda; your hair dripping from a plunge in the salt sea, your eyes sparkling, your sun-gilded body flashing, your chest resounding to the devil's own tattoo as you chant: "The gorilla in the African jungle pounds his chest until the noise of it can be heard half a mile away." And I shall see you always as I saw you that last day, when the Snark poked her nose once more through the passage in the smoking reef, outward bound, and I waved good-bye to those on shore. Not least in goodwill and affection was the wave I gave to the golden sun-god in the scarlet loin-cloth, standing upright in his tiny outrigger canoe. It had been a pretty crowded day, even for so busy a sinner as little Joan. It was springtime, and they had gone into the country for her mother's health. Maybe it was the season: a stirring of the human sap, conducing to that feeling of being "too big for one's boots," as the saying is. A dangerous period of the year. Indeed, on the principle that prevention is better than cure, Mrs. Munday had made it a custom during April and May to administer to Joan a cooling mixture; but on this occasion had unfortunately come away without it. Joan, dressed for use rather than show, and without either shoes or stockings, had stolen stealthily downstairs: something seemed to be calling to her. Silently—"like

a thief in the night," to adopt Mrs. Munday's metaphor—had slipped the heavy bolts; had joined the thousand creatures of the wood—had danced and leapt and shouted; had behaved, in short, more as if she had been a Pagan nymph than a happy English child. She had regained the house unnoticed, as she thought, the Devil, no doubt, assisting her; and had hidden her wet clothes in the bottom of a mighty chest. Deceitfulness in her heart, she had greeted Mrs. Munday in sleepy tones from beneath the sheets; and before breakfast, assailed by suspicious questions, had told a deliberate lie. Later in the morning, during an argument with an active young pig who was willing enough to play at Red Riding Hood so far as eating things out of a basket was concerned, but who would not wear a night-cap, she had used a wicked word. In the afternoon she "might have killed" the farmer's only son and heir. They had had a row. In one of those sad lapses from the higher Christian standards into which Satan was always egging her, she had pushed him; and he had tumbled head over heels into the horse-pond. The reason, that instead of lying there and drowning he had got up and walked back to the house howling fit to wake the Seven Sleepers, was that God, watching over little children, had arranged for the incident taking place on that side of the pond where it was shallow. Had the scrimmage occurred on the opposite bank, beneath which the water was much deeper, Joan in all probability would have had murder on her soul. It seemed to Joan that if God, all-powerful and all-foreseeing, had been so careful in selecting the site, He might with equal ease

have prevented the row from ever taking place. Why couldn't the little beast have been guided back from school through the orchard, much the shorter way, instead of being brought round by the yard, so as to come upon her at a moment when she was feeling a bit short-tempered, to put it mildly? And why had God allowed him to call her "Carrots"? That Joan should have "put it" this way, instead of going down on her knees and thanking the Lord for having saved her from a crime, was proof of her inborn evil disposition. In the evening was reached the culminating point. Just before going to bed she had murdered old George the cowman. For all practical purposes she might just as well have been successful in drowning William Augustus earlier in the day. It seemed to be one of those things that had to be. Mr. Hornflower still lived, it was true, but that was not Joan's fault. Joan, standing in white night-gown beside her bed, everything around her breathing of innocence and virtue: the spotless bedclothes, the chintz curtains, the white hyacinths upon the window-ledge, Joan's Bible, a present from Aunt Susan; her prayer-book, handsomely bound in calf, a present from Grandpapa, upon their little table; Mrs. Munday in evening black and cameo brooch (pale red with tomb and weeping willow in white relief) sacred to the memory of the departed Mr. Munday—Joan standing there erect, with pale, passionate face, defying all these aids to righteousness, had deliberately wished Mr. Hornflower dead. Old George Hornflower it was who, unseen by her, had passed her that morning in the wood. Grumpy old

George it was who had overheard the wicked word with which she had cursed the pig; who had met William Augustus on his emergence from the pond. To Mr. George Hornflower, the humble instrument in the hands of Providence, helping her towards possible salvation, she ought to have been grateful. And instead of that she had flung into the agonized face of Mrs. Munday these awful words:“No,” answered Joan. “I hope you’re not. I’m generally in about this time; and it’s always nice to gossip over a dish of tea.”