

**The House That
Is Our Own**



O. Douglas

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THE HOUSE THAT IS OUR OWN

O. DOUGLAS

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To you, J. B., who, with little liking for mild domestic fiction, read patiently my works, blue-pencilling when you had to, praising when you could, encouraging always, I dedicate this story, which you are not here to read, of places you knew and loved.

The house from which the heavens are fed.
The old strange house that is our own,
Where tricks of words are never said,
And Mercy is as plain as bread,
And Honour is as hard as stone.

G. K. CHESTERTON

The House That Is Our Own

CHAPTER I

My deepest sense, how hard true sorrow hits.

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

KITTY BAILLIE threw down the book she was reading and yawned inelegantly. “Why,” she asked, “does anyone ever read a thriller? They leave such a nasty sticky taste in one’s mind.”

“They leave me scared stiff,” said her companion. “But then, I’m a feeble soul.”

She did not look a feeble soul, this Isobel Logan, as she stood smiling down at her friend, and Kitty Baillie, who had sat herself down on the edge of her bed, said:

“Feeble! You? Why, you look like a pillar of the British Empire.”

Isobel, unimpressed by this tribute, continued. “Why read thrillers if you don’t like them?”

“Oh, just to make a change. I’ve been reading nothing but history lately.”

“Yes. I know. I like the book you lent me last—*Henrietta Maria*. That was more interesting than any novel. But how they could have beheaded that little gentle Charles, I don’t know!”

“Well,” said Kitty judicially, “he was terribly obstinate: *dour* to a degree.”

“As to that, if every obstinate person was beheaded the world would be a shambles. Kitty, if you bounce like that, you’ll make your mattress sag.”

“It sags already,” said Kitty. “I do *hate* to feel the bones of a bed.”

“As bad as that? Mine is quite good, and think what I weigh compared to you.”

“Oh, you needn’t throw your superior height in my face. Am I nothing but low and little? (You know, you and I would make quite a good Helena and Hermia, though I’m too old for the part.) But let me tell you, my girl, you’re much too easily pleased with everything. The world will simply make a footstool of you if you ask so little from it.”

Isobel made no reply, and Kitty gave an impatient jump on her maligned mattress, and continued, “I’m sick of this place.”

“It’s quite good as hotels go,” Isobel reminded her. “It’s well kept, the cooking isn’t at all bad, they keep good fires, and the servants stay. Some of them have been here ever since I came—how many years is that?—five—six?—and that in itself is a

testimonial to the place. It's convenient too for tubes and buses, and near the Park. Perhaps, as you say, I'm too easily pleased, but I confess to a weakness for the Queen's Court Private Hotel."

"Oh, it's all right," said Kitty; "it's simply that I'm sick of it."

She sat staring before her with a look of misery in her dark eyes, and Isobel, who knew her in these moods, turned her back and looked out of the window.

It was not an inspiring outlook, a sort of court, into which the rain was falling in the peculiarly stark way March rain often falls. A van was being unloaded down below, and a quantity of damp straw lay about, a small dog snuffling amongst it. A message-boy relieved the tedium by shrill whistling, while a street-singer with a blatantly black eye bawled:

I am so lonely, years are so long,
I want you only, you and your song.

"Isobel!"

The girl turned round.

"I didn't mean to grumble and be ungrateful," Kitty said. "I haven't forgotten how thankful I was for this refuge when I came back to England last October. All I asked then was to be allowed to lean back and do nothing. I didn't even think. I could read and I could listen, that was about all; I went about in a sort of dream."

"You had had such a long time of strain," said Isobel's quiet voice.

"Two years," said Kitty. "Two years watching my dear Rob suffer and die; wandering from hotel to hotel, from one cure to another. The only comfort was that Rob kept hopeful to the end, always sure that the next place, the next doctor, would cure him. He never knew how difficult it all was. Those foreign hotels are terrified of having a death on the premises, and when they saw Rob they sometimes would hardly let us in. And you couldn't blame them, they had to look after their own interests. Anyway, it didn't matter, for I managed to keep it from Rob: he had enough to bear without that."

"You didn't think of bringing him home when you found he was getting no better?"

Kitty shook her head.

"He didn't want to come. It was easier for him being ill among strangers. I quite understood that. He had been rather a figure in his own set, good to look at, good at everything he tried, one of those buoyantly happy and successful people—how could he go creeping back to the pity of his friends? *'Poor Rob! Have you seen him? Isn't it tragic?'* Banishment was better than that. He clung to me, poor

darling, and that stiffened my back. Before, he had always been the one who did things. I followed, squaw-like, behind. Now I had to stand in front and wrestle with hotel-managers and foreign doctors; worst of all, I had to manage the money. If I had had a brother—but both Rob and I were only children, and almost relationless. But I managed somehow, though not well, and anyway, I never worried Rob with my difficulties. And the only really horrible hotel-manager was the last. Rob had finished with it all by that time, thank God, and that meant that I was past caring much what happened to me. But the little French doctor was all that was kind, helped me with the formalities, arranged everything, and started me on my way home.”

Isobel remembered that October evening when, coming in from some party or mild junketing, she had noticed in the entrance-hall a forlorn-looking little black-clad figure.

Kitty went on. “And you were the first person I met when I got here. You came in behind me, your face rosy with the frosty air, and looking so large and golden that it was if the sun had suddenly risen! It had been a miserable crossing; I was chilled to the bone, tired, and sad beyond measure, but when you crinkled up your eyes and smiled at me, I felt, for the first time in months, a slight lifting of the heart. No-one had smiled at me for so long. Nothing but looks of pity and commiseration had come my way. And how I resented them! I tried so hard not to be sorry for myself, for self-pity is a loathsome thing. Rob never pitied himself—or me either. He and I were one in a way few married people, I imagine, are, and we were fighting together to win through. Even that last day, when all the strength he had seemed to go quite suddenly, when he could hardly speak above a whisper, and every breath was an effort, he tried to say something to me, I couldn’t catch what, about what we’d do when he was better—and smiled.”

“Kitty dear”—Isobel went over and stood beside her friend—“it’s too painful for you to remember.”

“I’m remembering all the time, and it’s a relief to tell it to someone, and you’ve been so good, never asking any questions. But there’s not much to tell. I had dreaded a struggle at the end, a dreadful insufficiency of breath, but there was none: he just stopped breathing. It was a lovely night, full of stars, and the windows were wide open. I knelt beside him, and looked at the lake and the mountains and felt almost happy. It lasted, that exultant feeling, through the painful, crowded days that followed, and through the journey to England—as if I were rejoicing in his escape—and it wasn’t till I reached London and drove through the streets to this hotel that I realised my loneliness. Rob and I had had such happy years in our little house in

Hampstead, and the memory of them rushed over me like a flood. We always took our holiday late, in September or even October, for Rob liked the autumn in Scotland, and I had recollections of driving out from Euston on just such a frosty evening, eager, now that our holiday was over, for our own home. And when the taxi-man rang the bell in the wall, and the green door was opened by our Skye housemaid, Katie, so douce in her long skirt and white cap and apron, she'd say—"Och, Mem, ye're back then, and it's glad we are to see you. It's time you were home, for the leaves are all down." And through the open door we could see Maggie, the cook, hovering. The curtains would be drawn in our living-room, and we'd take just a glance round at our books and pictures, and our chairs drawn up to the fire, before we rushed up to change into something very cosy and shabby, and come down to our little Georgian dining-room and Maggie's dinner, which tasted so good after the more aspiring cooking we had been having."

She stopped speaking, and Isobel said, "If you've sad things to remember, you've very nice things too. Thank you for telling me."

The van had finished unloading, and was departing, pursued by the excited barking of the small dog. The street-singer, discouraged, had left, and his place had been taken by another, a musician of sorts.

As Isobel stood watching her friend, a rollicking tune came up from the court.

Kitty looked up. "Someone's playing a penny whistle—let me see—I knew it. Listen! D'you know what he's playing?" And she repeated some lines of the song.

An ye had been where I hae been,
Ye wadna be sae canty-o,
An ye had seen what I hae seen
On the banks o' Killiecrankie-o.

"Rob used sometimes to shout that—he couldn't *sing*—when he was shaving in the morning. That man must be a Scot. Where's my purse?" And, throwing up the window, she dropped a shilling on the player, who promptly stopped playing to grovel for the coin.

Then Kitty said rather apologetically, "To me there is something about a penny whistle. . . . Was it R. L. S. who described himself as a mighty performer before the Lord on a penny whistle? And that tune. Do you know, all this time I've practically forgotten, or, at least, completely lost touch with, what really means so much to me—my native land. I don't know how I could, except that my one effort has been not to think of anything that recalled the past. Living in an hotel helped me. I could watch the people come and go, and talk to one and another—or rather listen. It does astonish me how people can pour out all their private affairs to strangers, but in a

way it eased one to hear of others' troubles.”

“What helped you most,” said Isobel, “was your love of reading. I never saw anyone devour books as you do.”

“Reading,” said Kitty, “has been a sort of dope to me. I’ve simply read and read through these months. My particular girl in *The Times* gives a resigned sigh at the sight of me. As you know, I visit her almost daily, and demand every new book as it comes out. Novels, biography, travel, history, exploration, all are grist to my mill. She must wonder what sort of life I lead, always with my nose in a book. And indeed I am a selfish wretch, doing nothing for any human creature.”

“No more selfish than the most of us,” Isobel protested, but Kitty shook her head, saying:

“Why, you, my dear, give hours every day to other people—doing Braille books, helping overworked secretaries in charitable work. You write such a beautiful clear hand. I wish I did.”

“I’m thirty, all but,” said Isobel, “a great, big, hulking, healthy person, and I’ve done nothing so far to justify my existence.”

“Why? D’you want a career?”

“Not particularly, and, anyway, it’s too late now to think of it. I forget if I ever told you that when I left school I went to live with my only relation, a great-aunt, who didn’t think a career a nice thing for a girl. I daresay I could easily have overborne the poor old dear’s scruples and gone my own way, but I didn’t care enough. I’ve never had much initiative, and there was no-one to give me a lead. Besides, I knew I wasn’t in the least clever. The only prize I ever got at school was for needlework. Another thing, I had enough to live on, and it hardly seemed fair to take a job perhaps from a girl who *had* to earn her own living—so there it was. I did nothing. My time was spent in the most approved Victorian way, doing the flowers, reading to my aunt, driving with her, playing tennis with some of the young people about, now and again going to a dance or a play. I was twenty-four when Aunt Constance died. After travelling about Europe for a bit with a friend, I came here to Queen’s Court, dug myself in, and that’s all. Nothing much to show for thirty years!”

Kitty sat up briskly and demanded, “But surely you don’t mean to stay indefinitely in this hotel, or any hotel? I certainly do not. I’m tired of living among other people’s things, eating with strangers, talking to them. I’ve suddenly realised that I want my own things about me. D’you know that it’s two years and a half since I saw my belongings? We gave up the Hampstead house when the specialists said that Rob must go abroad for a long time. Everything was stored, and I’ve hardly ever given the poor things a thought. I don’t know what Rob would think of me,

losing grip of myself as I've done. His precious books and prints, the furniture we picked up, a piece at a time, with such pleasure, the family silver and portraits. I must get them all out at once."

"There's not much use getting them out if you've no place to put them," Isobel pointed out.

"That's true. I must start looking for a house at once. But where?"

"I don't suppose you'd want to go back to Hampstead?"

"No," said Kitty.

"A flat would be best, don't you think?"

"If I could run to one," said Kitty; "but aren't they hideously expensive, except the very new ones, which are suffocatingly small? But we might look at them."

"Yes, do let's," said Isobel. "I adore looking at houses."

Isobel was delighted to see a spark of interest in her friend's eyes, a slight colour in her cheeks. She had been such a pathetic figure all winter, so small and black, never caring to go out, except to The Times Book Club, shivering over a fire, speaking when spoken to, but making no advances, receiving confidences, but giving none. Isobel herself had been the one person she had been at all intimate with. They were in the same corridor, and Isobel's room was a fairly large one with a pleasant outlook, and she had taken some trouble to make it home-like. Her bed in the day became a divan, a large cupboard did away with the necessity of a wardrobe, and she had supplied herself with two comfortable arm-chairs and a screen, as well as pretty rugs and hangings and shades. The two friends sat there when the lounge was crowded.

Kitty had shrugged her shoulders in resignation over her own room, and made no attempt to improve it. What, she asked, could be done with a jazz carpet, in shades ranging from brown to orange, ugly fumed-oak furniture, depressed cretonne curtains and covers, and an outlook on a court? Even flowers, she said, were out of place in such a room.

But now, Isobel thought, it looked as if she were rousing herself from the apathy that had held her for months, as if she might now take a grasp of things and remake her life.

"Here's to-day's *Times*," said Kitty. "Let's see what the house-agents have to say—'A House of Unique Character, a Gilt-edged Investment.' That's not the sort of thing. 'Something entirely new in Luxury Service Flats.' 'Flats with a Difference.' They all sound rather prohibitive, don't they? But there's no harm in going to see them. You're sure you don't mind, Isobel? There may just chance to be something about my price. Which reminds me, I must go and see my lawyer and find out how

things stand with me. Not that I understand in the least what he tells me. Are you a business woman, Isobel?”

Isobel laughed. “I don’t need to be—much. It’s all perfectly plain sailing with me. I’ve a certain amount of capital, invested in the very safest sort of things, which brings me in a little more than £700 a year, and I let it alone, and never attempt to make it any larger. Aunt Constance’s income came mostly from annuities. After the servants’ legacies had been paid, there was about £2,000 left for me. I’m keeping that as a sort of nest-egg, in case I should ever want to do something adventurous, like going round the world. I like to feel it’s there, though I may never use it.”

“But, my dear girl,” Kitty protested, “why d’you talk as if you were three-score and ten? You’re only a girl. You will marry.”

“I may,” said Isobel calmly, “but I don’t think so somehow. It’s not that I wouldn’t like to marry, but only that so far I’ve seen no-one I could care for in that way, and I’d very much rather live my life alone than take the second best. But I’m not really preoccupied with the subject. And I’m fed to the teeth with all the sex-talk in books and plays. Wodehouse and the crime-mongers are about the only writers free of it.”

“Not quite,” said Kitty. “I could name at least a dozen—oh, many more than that—whose books never descend. Of course, it’s absurd to object to frankness, but like you, I hate this slaving over sex; you’d think it was the most important thing in life! I don’t think you’d be easy to please, but I do earnestly hope that the right man will come along, for I hate waste.” She laid her hand on Isobel’s. “My dear, the only thing I regret in leaving this place is leaving you. I’m only now beginning to realise what I owe to you. You came and went so unobtrusively I hardly noticed you; I only knew that when you were there you seemed to warm and lighten the atmosphere.”

“You owe me nothing,” Isobel broke in. “All the other way. You gave me another interest in life. Now do stop bouncing on that poor bed. I can see that the hotel management will have to supply a new mattress for the next occupant of this room! The rain is gone, and your penny whistle man has gone too, to get a drink, probably with your money. The sun’s coming out. What about going now to an agent and getting a list of houses? There’s nothing like taking time by the fetlock, as Aunt Constance always put it. And if you would be so kind as to come and see me fitted for my new coat and skirt I’d be grateful. It’s such a help to have a friend to back one if any alteration is needed. I’m so easily spoken down.”

Isobel, as she spoke, brought out from Kitty’s wardrobe a coat, a fox fur, a hat, and gloves.

“Thank you, kind Nannie,” responded Kitty. “How do you suppose I’m going to

stand on my own feet in a cold and draughty world after being made a pet of by you for months?”

“Oh, that’s going to cease,” Isobel told her. “You don’t need me any longer, I know, but I haven’t yet got out of the habit of looking after you. I shan’t be a minute getting ready.”

CHAPTER II

Merely to be alive is adventure enough in a world like this, so erratic and disjointed, so lovely and so odd, and mysterious and profound. It is, at any rate, a pity to remain in it half-dead.

WALTER DE LA MARE

A WEEK later the two friends sat together in Isobel's room. Spring had made appreciable progress in the week; the crocuses were all aglow in the gardens opposite, the buds on the lilac bushes were swelling, the birds busy with their nests.

Kitty's plans had also made some progress.

"It's been a most agitating week," she was saying. "If I look as battered as I feel I must be rather a sight. Who'd have thought it was such a difficult business to find a house to let."

"It's the 'to let' that's the difficulty," said Isobel, who was sitting with her work-basket beside her, placidly mending. "Everything is for sale, and you don't want to buy."

"I don't indeed. Even if I could afford to, what'd be the use of buying? It's different for people with children—and even they wouldn't buy a flat. What places we've seen! Are there really people who would live in a basement, always in artificial light, and be willing to pay £150 a year for the privilege? And these terrible new blocks like penitentiaries, with every new gadget, I grant you, but mere boxes! Personally I don't know any cat-slingers, but if any exist they couldn't indulge their hobby in these mansions. There's no room for a pet; even a canary would feel itself *de trop*."

"What about the one in Westminster?" Isobel asked. "It had quite good rooms."

"But only two of them—one good living-room, one bed-room, an excellent bathroom, and a cupboard of a kitchen. It would mean never having a friend to stay, and, worse than that, no resident maid. Besides, I don't like to eat in the room I sit in. What I'd like in Westminster would be one of those little old houses, but they again have basement kitchens, and, anyway, are seldom to be let. No, the only thing I can see myself in is that flat in Sloane Street, and it's too expensive."

"Have you thought it over carefully, and calculated what it would cost to run?" Isobel asked, looking with satisfaction at the eager face opposite to her, and thinking how beneficial a week of house-hunting had proved.

Kitty rescued a reel of silk and returned it to the work-basket.

"Yes," she said, "I have, and I'm afraid I daren't attempt it. My old nurse used

to say of people who had too large and expensive a house, 'I doubt it'll burn them, not warm them,' and there's a lot of truth in the saying. Of course, in a flat you know more or less where you are. The rent covers everything in the way of taxes and, generally, central heating and constant hot water."

Isobel nodded. "Compared with other flats we saw, I thought the Sloane Street one very reasonable. I liked the whole look of it. There was something so old-fashioned and settled-looking about everything, the entrance, the staircase, the lift. I am sure the people in the other flats are everything that is quiet and respectable. You wouldn't like neighbours who entertained till all hours. And the rooms are large and airy—I expect your furniture would look just right in them—and the neighbourhood is so pleasant."

"Tempress!" said Kitty. "You know quite well I'm simply longing to get that flat."

"Well, go to your lawyer and lay it before him. He should know just what you can afford. Go this very morning. The flat may be snapped up any minute. If you like I'll meet you somewhere for lunch, and we might look at some other places, supposing Mr. Johnson turns down your flat. But I don't believe he will. I've a feeling in my bones that you were meant to live there."

"Bless you for that," said Kitty, rising with alacrity. "I'll go now, this very minute. Where shall we meet?"

"Would Marshall's be all right for you? And when we are out, what about getting some clothes? You said yourself you needed them, and to my mind there's no tonic like a new hat."

"If I get my flat," said Kitty, "I shan't ever again be able to afford any personal adornment. It'll be old clothes indefinitely for me."

Isobel folded up the garments she had mended, and said, "Shall we say one o'clock at Marshall's luncheon-room? I'll try to get a table at a window. Come right up, will you?"

It was nearly half-past one when Isobel, at her table in the window saw a small figure come in, glance round, and, on catching sight of her, come quickly forward.

"She's got it," said Isobel to herself.

"So sorry to have kept you," Kitty began breathlessly, "but I couldn't help it. Isobel, *it's all right*. Mr. Johnson thinks I can just manage it, and he's sending to see about it this afternoon. I'm not pretending that he was very keen about it, and he says they must find out exactly what state it's in before anything's settled, but . . . yes, anything you like. I'm too excited to eat. You know, although Mr. Johnson's rather like a tortoise to look at, he's really quite decent. I was surprised that a dry-

as-dust old lawyer could be so human. He actually seemed to understand how much it meant to me, and I'm pretty sure he'll manage to arrange it. It's a blessing I spent almost nothing all winter, for I've a good deal lying. Perhaps I'd better get some clothes as long as I have any money. How good these sweetbreads are! I didn't know I was so hungry."

While they ate, the conversation circled constantly round the flat.

"I thought," said Kitty, "that I'd examined every bit of it, but when Mr. Johnson asked me questions I found I knew practically nothing. I could tell him about the size and shape of the rooms, and their outlook, but I'd entirely neglected to notice the plumbing, what sort of kitchen stove there was, and so on. It was very shaming to be found so unpractical! Of course, I'll need fresh paint everywhere, whether I pay for it myself or not, and I would like running water in the bedrooms—but I fear that's beyond me. At least, Mr. Johnson says it is."

"And I suppose he ought to know," said Isobel. "Well, before you start squandering all you possess, let's go and look for clothes. I want some myself, and it's the perfect day for shopping, with a hopeful blue sky and a brisk feeling in the air."

As they got up to go, Kitty said, "I believe you love clothes, Isobel?"

"Well, hardly that; but I confess clothes are a great interest to me. I don't spend a great deal of money, but I spend quite a lot of time planning my wardrobe, and getting everything in keeping. And you know how fond I am of knitting, so I can copy jumpers that are too expensive to buy; and I can make blouses and underclothes. It's lucky for me that I've fairly clever hands, for work fills hours that might otherwise be very dull."

Kitty surveyed her friend. "Yes, you always look expensive—or is exclusive the word I want? I only wish I had your gift. I like good clothes, but I'm not clever about them. There is one thing, though, about being small and rather plain, one is inconspicuous. No one notices what one wears. You are rather like a city set on a hill."

"What an awful thought! But you are very far from being either plain or dowdy, Kitty. All you need is to be more clothes-conscious. No, not self-conscious, quite the opposite. When you're sure your clothes are right you can forget all about them. When you're wrongly dressed you're miserably aware of it all the time. Clothes psychology is rather an interesting thing. Let's see what 'Christine' has to-day—round here in Hollis Street. She generally has something amusing."

"Christine," Isobel explained, "was run by a young woman, a friend of her own, whose husband had lost his health. She had to make a living for them both, and

having a flair for clothes, had joined with another woman in taking a shop.

“Joyce Peyton supplied the capital, and Patty does all the work,” Isobel finished.

“Joyce? Patty? Then who is Christine?” Kitty asked.

“Nobody. Only a name to trade under. I’ve known Patty Tisdal for years. She and her husband are such a devoted couple, and they’ve had awful luck. It’s hard for him, poor chap, to lie on his back and see his wife work. He helps, though, in every way he can, keeps the books, and that’s really a big help, for neither Patty nor Joyce has any head for figures.”

When they reached the shop Mrs. Tisdal was just finishing with a customer, and in a few minutes joined them, greeting Isobel with pleasure.

“My dear, it’s ages. Have you been away?”

“No, only leading my usual blameless life in Queen’s Court. Patty, this is my friend Mrs. Baillie, also at present in Queen’s Court. Have you time to show us some things, which we may, or may not, buy? How’s business?”

“Brisking up,” said Patty, smiling at Kitty, “at the thought of the Coronation. Not that it’s been at all bad all winter; we can’t complain. Come and see what I’ve got, Mrs. Baillie. Isobel, I never really thanked you for helping me out with that order for jumpers at Christmas-time. It was good of you insisting on the money going to the girl. It would have meant a big loss to the poor thing.”

“It was nothing,” Isobel said. “Is the girl stronger now?”

“She never looks well, but she’s never failed me except that once when she went down with influenza at Christmas.”

“Well!” said Isobel, “be sure and let me know if ever I can help you out. I love knitting jumpers, and sometimes I get a brain-wave and devise something new. If the girl—what’s her name, by the way? Alice Parsons—well, if she cared to come and see me any time, I might be able to pass on to her some ideas. That’s to say, if she’s not above taking a hint.”

“I’m sure she’d be only too glad, she admired what you made immensely. I’ll give her your message”; then, turning to Kitty, Mrs. Tisdal remarked, “Isobel’s a great helper.”

Before Kitty could reply, Isobel broke in, “And now what about clothes? Wouldn’t a frock and light coat be most useful to you, Kitty?”

Patty Tisdal considered. “Must it be all black, or could you wear this?”

She brought a soft black frock, the top lightly embroidered in white silk, saying, “The little frills give the fullness you need, and the coat is rather pretty.”

Kitty hesitated. “It looks expensive, and I can’t afford——”

Mrs. Tisdal whisked round the price ticket. “It’s just in,” she said. “Twelve

guineas. Is that too much?"

"I thought it would have been more," said Kitty. "May I try it on? And I'd need a coat and skirt of sorts, wouldn't I, Isobel? I've only got this coat, and it's too heavy for summer."

Isobel agreed. "Yes, a well-cut coat and skirt is a great standby. And you can step into it, lucky woman."

Mrs. Tisdal told an assistant what to bring, and led the way to a fitting-room.

The frock was found to need very little altering, the coat nothing.

"It's *very* pretty," said Isobel. "Are these birds embroidered on the top? Rather a nice idea. Now, what sort of hat, I wonder?"

Hats were forthcoming, and one carefully chosen, smart, without being dressed-up: a hat for almost any occasion.

Kitty turned herself round before the mirror until she had seen herself from every angle, and then gave a satisfied sigh.

"I look nicer than I thought possible," she said.

A coat and skirt were also found, and Patty Tisdal assured her that if everyone was as easy to suit and pleasant to serve life would be a great deal happier for shopkeepers.

"That's all I need," said Kitty, as they left the shop. "I've got lots of things to wear up in the house. If it's a hot summer, I can wear my thin dresses: they're mostly white. What have you to get?"

"The tailor wanted to try on that tweed again, you remember? and when we finish with him, would you mind poking about with me until I pick up some ideas?"

"I'd love it," said Kitty.

There are few things more satisfying to the ordinary woman than a good "poke" round shops, and the two friends spent a thoroughly interesting afternoon in Bond Street and Regent Street, finishing up with tea, and a visit to an exhibition of pictures by an artist new to Isobel.

"Don't you know Peter Scott's pictures of wild birds?" Kitty asked. "Rob found them first. He was passing here, saw one in the window, and went in. He came home almost as excited as if he'd been left a fortune, and took me to see them next day. There was one we specially coveted—wild geese leaving the marshes in a winter sunrise—and I bought it for his birthday. It hung over the fireplace in our living-room and Rob used to stand feasting his eyes on it. Have you that feeling about wild geese? To see them fly, to hear them cry, absolutely tugs at my heart-strings. The sound of a penny whistle, the smell of wood-smoke does the same. I can't tell you why."

Isobel was gazing at a picture.

“To me,” she said, “wild swans are even more romantic. Look at that—wild swans flying in a snowstorm. It’s the essence of every fairy-tale ever written. I love these pictures. If I’d a house of my own, I’d have a Peter Scott in each room.”

“Isobel, why don’t you? Have a house of your own, I mean?”

Isobel merely laughed and said, “Hadn’t I better wait and see how your venture turns out?”

“Cautious Scot!”

“Scot yourself! D’you know, Kitty, although I’m absolutely pure Scots by blood, I was born in England, and I’ve only once crossed the Border, to spend a fortnight with some people who had rented a shooting in Perthshire.”

“Breathes there the man with soul so dead?” Kitty ejaculated, and went on, “I really am shocked. Don’t you *want* to go to Scotland?”

“I suppose I ought to be ashamed to confess it, but I never have had much desire. If I had anyone to go with me—but as I told you, I’ve no initiative. My friends were in London, and in London I’ve stuck. The only remarkable thing about me is my faculty for ‘staying put.’ But what about you? You live in London when you might just as well live in Edinburgh.”

“That’s true,” Kitty admitted. “The fact is, though I adore to *think* of Edinburgh, I prefer to *live* in London. Degenerate Scots, that’s what we are, both of us. But I’ve always gone to Scotland part of every year, so I’m a shade less degenerate than you!”

“Oh, well,” said Isobel, “I daresay Scotland can make shift to do without us.”

After dinner that evening Isobel persuaded her friend to sit in the lounge instead of going straight upstairs, and they settled down on a couch, Isobel with her knitting.

A few of the visitors were staying in for the evening, but quite a number, birds of passage, were going out to theatres.

One woman, standing by the fire finishing her cup of coffee, said to Isobel, “It’s so comfortable to see you sitting there knitting. I’d rather sit down beside you than go out to the play to-night.”

“What are you going to see?” Kitty asked.

“Some musical thing. I forget the name. We all felt we needed a little relaxation after last night at *The Seagull*. That was terribly dreary, though the acting was fine.”

When she had gone, Kitty said, “I’d like to see *The Seagull*. Will you come with me? It’s more than two years since I last saw a play. . . . Isobel, I’m almost ashamed of feeling so pleased about those new clothes. When we were out to-day in the sunshine, all the shops so bright, and so many people with happy faces, I felt almost

light-hearted.”

“And why,” said Isobel, letting her knitting lie in her lap, “should you feel ashamed? It’s only natural. When you came back from France last October you were like a plant beaten to the earth by storms, you couldn’t raise your head or take an interest in anything. You had had a great loss, and you were physically and mentally exhausted as well. Now the normal, healthy person that is you is emerging. You enjoyed life before, and, gradually, you’ll come to enjoy it again. Would your Rob want anything else? Because he has gone forward into a new life, must you go mourning all your days? It’s not a case of forgetting. You won’t forget, but you owe it to yourself and to the people you live among, to make the best of what’s left to you.”

Kitty was silent for a minute, then she said:

“I daresay you’re right. But I’m pretty old to start again. I’m forty-five.”

“That’s no crime,” said Isobel stoutly. “I believe that very smart good-looking woman who spoke to us just now is every bit of forty-five, and I’m very sure she doesn’t think herself at all old. And you aren’t the type that ages. When you tried on those things to-day you looked a mere girl. All you need is something to interest you, then your face lights up. To me it’s far more attractive than a sort of stolid handsomeness, or wooden prettiness.”

“Isobel,” said Kitty, “you’re one of the world’s comforters.”

CHAPTER III

What I admire most is the total defiance of expense.

DR. JOHNSON

IT was the middle of the next week before everything was settled and the flat Kitty's. She had been getting anxious, fearing that her lawyer by over-caution was going to lose the chance, so it was with triumph that she ran into Isobel's room one morning and announced that all was well.

Isobel looked as pleased as she was expected to.

"Now we can get on," she said. "What a good thing it's vacant and the painters can start at once."

"Yes. Mr. Johnson says the lift-man or whatever he's called, has the keys. Isobel, could you come with me now? There's so much to see about."

Isobel was writing letters, but she laid down her pen and said:

"Of course I'll come. We'd better take a tape-measure and a pencil and notebook; you'll want to measure and see how you can place your furniture. Isn't this exciting?"

"Oh, *isn't* it? Do you happen to know any good paper-hanger?"

"I don't, never having required one, but the lift-man'll be able to tell us who usually does up the flats. We'd better get ready."

Isobel gathered her letters and put them tidily into a blotting book.

"I'm going to put a coat over an old frock that won't mind grubbiness."

"That's wise. We'll be messing about in cupboards and so forth. I'm all right, 'dressed for drowning' so to speak; this old rag won't take any harm. Gracious! I feel like—I don't know what I feel like!"

In a very short time they were ready; once outside, Isobel suggested that they should walk.

"It's such a fine morning, and it isn't very far and, as we approach it we can study the flat from all points, note the lie of the land, what shops are near, and so on."

Everything and everybody that early April morning seemed to Kitty to be finding life amusing. The shop windows positively twinkled, the girls in the flower-shop at the corner were arranging spring flowers in a way to make the heart sing, the buses were swinging along as if they enjoyed doing it, even a blind man, standing with matches to sell, wore a smile.

"It's a perfect day," she told her companion.

Isobel agreed, and, in a minute, said, "You've only seen that flat once, haven't

you?”

“Yes, that time you went with me. We looked at it pretty searchingly, but then I was only a possible tenant; now I’ll look at it with entirely different eyes; it’s to be my home.”

As they approached Sloane Street, Isobel pointed out how convenient it would be to live so near shops, so much more amusing than living in a dreary square, or a long dull terrace; there was something, she said, so companionable about shops.

“Especially,” said Kitty, “when one is living alone. I’ll enjoy watching the traffic, and it’ll be company at night. I wonder where I could find a decent middle-aged woman who would do everything—cook, do the housework, and wait at table?”

“Ah, now you’re asking! People seek for such a thing as for hidden treasure. I’m told that if they’re at all capable they’ve generally fiendish tempers, and almost invariably drink.”

Kitty groaned. “And if I get a young one she’ll want to dance three nights a week, and probably bring home gangsters and have me murdered in my bed! How I wish I was one of those courageous women who don’t mind living alone. Life would be so simple then. All I’d need would be a day woman. I’d lock my door and go out, and come in without a qualm.”

“Oh, I know. Lots of people say they like having the house to themselves, but to me it sounds most uncomfortable. I don’t see how it could ever feel like a real home unless there was a settled person in the kitchen. There *must* be lots of decent women who would be glad of a quiet situation and a good home, and what we’ve got to do is to find one. Here we are! Kitty, it doesn’t look a bit like flats, does it? More like a very nice private house.”

A middle-aged man, with a limp and a row of medals, waited by the lift. His name, he told them, was Gordon, he came from Aberdeen, and had been in the flats since 1920.

“I was lucky to get the job,” he said, “and to keep it. We live on the premises, the wife and me, so whenever you want anything, Mum, you just let me know.”

Kitty thanked him, and asked, rather nervously, who had occupied the flat before her. It was what she much wanted to know, for, as she told Isobel, she liked to live in a house in which people had been happy. “It’s silly, I know, but I don’t believe I could live in a house where there had been a tragedy—it would haunt me.”

So now she waited, breathless, to know her fate.

Gordon put the key in the lock, and turned round to reply.

“To tell ye the truth, Mum, I could never tackle her name. I know what it looked like in writing, but ye dinna say it that way, so we just called her ‘the Countess.’”

Kitty's mouth fell open. What shady foreigner had inhabited the flat that she had chosen for her own? What orgies had taken place within its door? What secret societies had hatched nefarious schemes?

"Was she Russian?" she faltered.

"No, no." Gordon's voice was reassuring. "She wasna Russian. There was nothing of the Bolshie about *her*. French she was, poor body, a perfectly decent lady, very quiet living. She had a maid who had lived with her all her life—a 'bun' she called her—and she told me that the Countess had been very wealthy at one time, but troubles had come to her. She had a son in London, something to do with the French Government, and she left because her son was sent to another country. They're ay wandering, thae foreigners, but I must say she was a pleasant lady. It's a gey job to be away from your native land. Me being in France I could talk to her about it. She didna like the fog (I dinna like it masel'), and she had a French word for the rain, *treest* she called it, and shook her head at it. I learned her a rhyme we used to say when we were bairns:

Rainy rainy Rattle-sticks, dinna rain on me,
Rain on Johnny Groat's house far across the sea;

and she laugh'd and clap't her hands just like a bairn. Well, here we are, Mum."

"Oh, thank you," said Kitty, "thank you for everything, coming up with us and telling us nice things about the Countess. And you'll introduce me to your wife, won't you? Perhaps she might know of someone who could come and clean up after the painters. Oh, about painters. Do you know who generally does the painting work here?"

"Well," said Gordon, "as a rule each tenant has his own man. But we had those staircases done in the autumn, and I can tell you the name of the firm who did them—Clark and Robinson, in Cleaver Street."

Kitty asked if they had done it well, and was assured that it had been a satisfactory job.

"If ye like," said Gordon, "I could call round and make an appointment for them to see you, mebbe the day. Ye'll likely want it done as quick as possible, and this is the painters' busy time ye must mind."

"Of course it is," said Kitty, "and I'd be very grateful if you'd let them know I'm here for a few hours. But are you sure you can spare the time?"

"Fine that. I'm gaun out, anyway." He lowered his voice suddenly. "The folk above ye are called Boothby, a retired couple, and underneath there's an old lady, Mistress Temple."

He nodded his head several times in a mysterious manner, and withdrew.

“Ought I to have tipped him?” Kitty asked.

“I don’t think so. You can’t tip him every time he comes upstairs. Wait until you get settled, and if he’s been helpful, give him something substantial. After that, tip at set times, as we do in Queen’s Court. He seems an honest sort of man, don’t you think?”

But no answer made Kitty, for she was in her flat.

The hall was only a fairly wide passage, from which rooms opened on either side. The first on the left was the dining-room. “Here we must take measurements,” Kitty announced. “I want the sideboard to stand in the recess, if possible, a carving-table here and—there is more room than I remembered.”

Isobel followed her into the next room, a narrow slip of a room, but well lighted.

“This,” said Kitty, “is going to be my book-room. I *think* the long bookcase will get in along that wall. The writing-table in the window. A sofa in front of the fire—it’s so nice to lie with books piled all around you—and an arm-chair, if I can get it in. My ‘Peter Scott’ above the mantelpiece. This is the room I’ll sit in most, and I want my wild geese beside me. I’ll get the electric man to put a light over it. We had that at Hampstead, and we used to sit in the gloaming, and look up at the lighted picture, and think we heard the geese honk-honk——”

The drawing-room was at the end of the passage, a good-sized room with three windows.

Kitty gave a skip when she saw it. “It’s *quite* as nice as I thought it was. I was thinking I’d have the walls a sort of turquoise-blue paint, it makes such a good background for tulip-wood cabinets and tables. What luck that it has a decent hardwood floor, for I happen to have some quite good rugs, and it’ll save the camel-y carpet for my bedroom. It may not be healthy, but I do like a good thick carpet all over a bedroom floor. It’s so bleak sliding about on rugs—I wonder if my curtains are long enough? Luckily I’ve got three pairs the same, but I’ll need plain net for underneath ones.”

Isobel walked over to the window. “It’s a good thing to be at a corner,” she said, “you can see all round. This room’ll get sun all day—when there is any—so your turquoise walls won’t be too cold. Personally, I always like cream walls.”

“Everything’ll be cream except this room,” Kitty promised; “but blue is so pretty with golden wood. Now for the bedrooms—I’m afraid they’ve been sacrificed to the living-rooms. No—this isn’t bad. I’ll have this one for my own, seeing I’ll always be here. The bed’ll go between the two windows, and, oh! my dear, *two* cupboards! This is riches. They are more than cupboards, they’re closets. Hold that,

will you, and I'll measure the place for the bed. Have you got your finger on it? Then write it down—please. I wonder if the Countess slept here and found it *triste*? What d'you suppose her drawing-room was like? Rather bare, I should think, with a gas-fire. The French have very little idea of comfort."

"If I might make a suggestion," said Isobel, "it would be better to see all there's to see, and then go round and measure methodically."

"Yes. Well, we've only one bedroom to see now, and the maid's room and kitchen. Oh, this is *grim*; Brown paint, and purple and red striped wall-paper. What a guest-room! Truly a 'field to bury strangers in'! I'll tell you what, when you come to stay you'll have my room, and I'll come in here."

"Indeed I shan't," said Isobel. "You'd be wishing me away all the time, in order to regain possession."

"I'm sure I would," Kitty agreed. "But I promise to make this so nice for you that you won't know it again. This isn't a bad kitchen, quite light and cheerful. That, I suppose, is the stove they put in for the Countess; we shall have a gas-cooker as well. With such a good scullery this kitchen would be quite comfortable to sit in."

"Quite. The scullery is as large as most kitchens nowadays. And a nice little bedroom. Any woman might be happy here and not at all overworked."

"And," said Kitty, "I'd give her—my not impossible she—a gas-fire in her bedroom. Only the bathroom to see now. *Well!* This betrays the age of the building. Isobel, I simply must have a new bath. How *could* Mr. Johnson think it would do, squalid old man; and the wash-hand basin's cracked, and brown paint in a bathroom is revolting. I don't believe the place has been touched since the year 1877, when, I understand, it was built." Kitty sat down on the edge of the bath, looking very determined. "D'you know what I've made up my mind to do? Get hot and cold water put into the bedrooms, and gut this bathroom."

"Heil Hitler!" cried Isobel. "Keep that expression for Mr. Johnson. But I think myself you're wise to have everything done at once, and then you'll have satisfaction in your new house. This will make a really superior bathroom when you've finished with it; it's biggish and it's got a window."

"I'd like to have it tiled," said Kitty, "but that's beyond me."

"You can get all sorts of varnished papers now," Isobel reminded her, "that really look very well. And it isn't as if it would have hard usage. Now then, what d'you want measured?"

After an hour's work Isobel straightened herself and remarked that she was hungry.

"Go out and buy some biscuits," said Kitty, still absorbed in planning her new

home.

Isobel, naturally indignant, said, "I'll do nothing of the kind. You say you want to go on later and see about your stored furniture, that'll take us most of the afternoon, and if you think I'm going about all day, hungry, and with filthy hands, you're mistaken. We'd better go to some shop, and wash, and have lunch. Look at my hands! and yours are worse."

"But I want to wait till the painter comes," Kitty protested. "Gordon said he'd send him at once."

"Your faith, my dear, is touching. As we go out we'll get hold of Gordon and see if he's done anything about it at all."

Most unwillingly Kitty put on her coat and accompanied her friend downstairs.

When, after some difficulty, Gordon was discovered in the area. "The painters?" Kitty accosted him eagerly.

"Eh? O aye, the penters. I'm just awa' to him the now. I had to tak' ma dinner early, for the wife's gaun out in the afternoon. Here she is. Jessie! Come 'ere. This is the new lady."

The wife, a comely little woman, very neat and tidy, with a Glasgow accent, said, "Pleased to meet you," and grasped Kitty's hand warmly. "We don't like any of our flats to be empty, and I must say, it doesn't often happen. Gordon tells me you're getting the place done up, and you'd like to get someone to clean up after the painters, and that. If you like, I'll clean up for you. Me being on the premises, I could do it in ma own time like."

"If you would," said Kitty gratefully. "I only wish I saw it ready for cleaning. There's a lot to be done, and plumbers and painters take such a long time. However—Mrs. Gordon, you don't happen to know of anyone, a middle-aged woman would be best, who would take full charge? I mean, cook, clean, wait, do everything? There's only me, so it wouldn't be a heavy place."

"Uch, no!" said Mrs. Gordon, "these flats are that easy worked. You wouldn't like a nice young girl? It would be cheerier like. The older ones are apt to be cranky a bit."

"And the young ones are never in," said Kitty. "On the whole I think I'd be better with an older one. Not elderly, you understand, just a sensible woman who would be glad to be settled and comfortable, and who wouldn't want to leave me alone too much in the evenings."

Mrs. Gordon put her head on one side. "What about a companion?" she asked.

"She'd have to eat with me and sit with me, and I'd hate that. Besides, I'd need to keep another woman to do the work. Do try to think of someone, Mrs. Gordon."

“Oh, I will. I will that.” Mrs. Gordon’s tone was most hearty, and turning to her husband, she said, “Jock, what about Jeanie?” She explained: “It’s Gordon’s step-brother’s widow. She lives out Clapham way with a sister, and she was saying to me just yesterday, when she looked in for a cup of tea, that she whiles feels herself in the way. You see, there’s a husband in the house and three girls, and, uch, you know how it is, when girls grow up. They’ll not take a word, and mebbe Jeanie’s too free with her advice. I’ll be seeing Mrs. Auchinvole (that’s her name; isn’t it a queer one?) this very day, for we’ve planned to go to the pictures to see *Little Lord Fauntleroy*; they say Freddie Bartholomew’s lovely, and if you like I’ll sound her about it and let you know.”

“That would be very kind,” Kitty said, and then rather hesitatingly added, “She can cook, I suppose, your friend?”

“Well, she cooked for her husband for twenty years.”

“Ye-es,” said Kitty, feeling that this was hardly a convincing testimonial. After all, the husband was dead.

Isobel, who by this time was starving, clinched matters by saying, “If Mrs. Auchinvole considers it, she could come and meet you here some day, and you’d find out all you want to know.”

Mrs. Gordon, who was also anxious to be about her own business, chimed in, “That’s it. Any time you were coming to see how things were gettin’ on you could let me know and I’d have her here. I’ll tell her about it, of course, and she can be turning it over in her mind. You’ll not want anybody till the flat’s ready, and the dear knows when that’ll be.”

“We’ll hurry them up,” said Gordon. “Would two-thirty be a good time for you to see the painter, always supposin’ I can get him?”

So it was arranged, and Isobel thankfully dragged her friend luncheon-wards.

“Where shall we go? The nearest? Come on then, for measuring in an empty house is the hungriest work I’ve ever tried. It’s the feeling of bareness, like Mother Hubbard’s cupboard. I’ve been planning what I’d eat for the last hour.”

Kitty objected. “We’re not fit to go into a decent place.”

“We won’t look so bad when we’ve washed, and, anyway, nobody’ll look at us.”

It was as well that they were fortified by a good lunch, for they had an exhausting afternoon seeing the foreman painter, calling on Mr. Johnson to ask him about getting estimates for the plumbing work, and inspecting the stored furniture. Kitty was depressed to see her household gods looking so much less rich and rare than she remembered them, but Isobel pointed out that you couldn’t expect furniture

that had been stored in the basement of a warehouse for two years to look its best.

She said, "Once the chairs and cushions have been thoroughly well beaten, and the cabinets and tables and so on washed and polished, you'll begin to recognise them as your own. I can see you've a lot of most desirable things. I'm quite looking forward to seeing them adorn the flat. And they're really in wonderfully good condition. I heard such stories about storing that I sold most of my things. When I see yours I wish I hadn't, though mine perhaps were not worth keeping—solid, ugly Victorian stuff."

As Isobel watched Kitty moving from one piece of furniture to another, as if greeting familiar friends, she knew how sad her heart must be seeing again the inanimate things that had been part of her happy married life. She knew, also, that it is not wise to allow oneself to indulge in unavailing regrets, so, after a little, she suggested that Kitty should tell the people in the warehouse that the furniture would be required shortly, and give directions about having carpets and rugs beaten, and curtains sent to be cleaned.

"You don't want dirty things brought into your clean flat."

"No," said Kitty, still held by the past. "No. And I suppose they are dirty. Everything was bundled away in a hurry. I didn't care at the time if I never saw them again. I've hardly ever thought of the poor things, and here they are, patiently waiting for me. Now I'm longing to have them all about me. And my books! I'll enjoy putting them all back on their shelves, and reading bits out of one and another."

"At that rate," said Isobel, "you won't get on very fast, but it won't matter. Why should one be in a hurry getting into order when it's such a pleasant process? Well, don't you think you've done enough for one day? I think tea, and a rest before dinner, are indicated. You go at things with such force, my dear, that you wear yourself out."

CHAPTER IV

A blessed thing it is for any man or woman to have a friend, one whom we can trust utterly, who knows the best and the worst of us, and who loves us just the same.—CHARLES KINGSLEY

A NEW interest is a tonic, not only to the mind but the body, and it amazed Isobel Logan to see how the flat and its concerns made a new woman of her friend. Time, doubtless, had been at its healing work, she had been ready to emerge from the dark cloud, and it only needed the stimulating thought of a home of her own to give her back something of the joy of life that had once been hers.

She was now full of plans, and Isobel was there to encourage her in all her projects. With truth Isobel declared that she enjoyed it all immensely. Her life was not so full but that she was glad of a fresh interest, nor were her friends so numerous that she could afford to undervalue one who needed her.

While the plumbers and the painters were in the flat, the two friends worked busily, making curtains and new slips for cushions, and looking over household linen.

“You must remember,” Kitty said, “that I was married sixteen years, and though I always renewed my stock at the spring sales, the life of linen in a laundry is not a long one. I’d clean forgotten what I possessed. Look at that tea-cloth with the deep crochet border. It was given me by a woman I was able to help, at least, Rob got things put right about her pension—her husband was killed in the War—and whose family we took an interest in. I must try to find out what has become of her. I’ve lost trace completely of so many people. My own fault too, for our friends did their very best, writing, and even offering to come out, but we didn’t want them, and after a time I didn’t even answer their letters. There was nothing to say, no progress to report, and gradually, they got discouraged and dropped off.”

“Wasn’t that a pity?” Isobel asked. “Good friends aren’t lying about for the picking up. But I don’t wonder you gave up writing—the world to you was narrowed down to one sick man. You were living for him, and had no thought or interest to spare for outsiders. But you’ll have to try now to remake your world. You’re naturally sociable; you really like people.”

Kitty admitted she did. “Both Rob and I liked our fellow-men and we entertained a good deal in a very modest way. I would like to try to pick up some of the threads again. A lot of kind letters were sent to the old Hampstead address when Mr. Johnson put the notice of the death in the papers, but I hardly looked at them, and only a formal note of thanks was sent. I ought to have replied to each one

myself. It would have given me something to do. I can see now how feeble it was to give way as I did. Other women lose their husbands and have to go out into the world to earn their living. It's good to have to make an effort, and bad to have time to nurse one's grief."

"Remember," said Isobel, "how tired you were, and over-strained. Two years of nursing and constant anxiety would wear out anyone. I think you were very brave, coming to an hotel among strangers and making no fuss."

Kitty looked at her tall friend, and said:

"You sit there and sew placidly at my cushions, saying kind things to me that I don't in the least deserve. How you could have been so patient with me I don't know, but, anyway, it was you who helped me to my feet, and every day now I am getting more able to walk alone."

"Well, don't walk away too far; I don't want to lose you. . . . Have you thought over the question of Mrs. Auchinvole?"

Kitty took the scissors from Isobel's lap, snipped a thread and said:

"I should think I have thought. There's a lot in her favour. She's decent, I'm sure of that, it's written on her face. And in a way it would be an advantage to have a relative of the Gordons (though that might work two ways), but——"

"It seems to me," said Isobel, "that the thing that matters most is whether you like her personally. I don't think you could live in a house with another woman without a certain degree of friendship. A servant to you would always be more than just a person who did your cooking and cleaning, she'd be a human being in whom you were interested."

"Yes, but that's just the point. I quite like Mrs. Auchinvole, but I'm afraid she hardly understands that I don't want so much a sympathetic friend as one who will keep the flat clean, cook and wait a decent meal. There is too much of the we-are-widows-together touch about her for me."

Isobel laughed, and presently asked, "Did you manage to broach the subject of uniform?"

"No," Kitty confessed, "I did not. But broach it I must. Prints in the morning, and a decent dark dress in the afternoon, I insist on, but I'm a little afraid that the widow of Andrew Auchinvole may feel herself insulted by the suggestion. I don't know, though Gordon tells me she was a housemaid before she married, so she may have a cap and apron in her disposition."

"Let's hope so," said Isobel; "I like her face, and her Aberdeen voice. She would give a sort of tone to the flat, go well with the family portraits, and the Georgian silver, and the wild geese."

“Would she, d’you think? I’d certainly be very thankful to have one whose antecedents I knew something of. I don’t really think she can cook much, but an intelligent person (and all Aberdonians are intelligent) can do a lot with a cookery-book. She might even have some lessons. You know I’ve to see her to-day? I gave her a fortnight to think it over.”

“She’ll be wise to come to you,” Isobel said. “Couldn’t you call her a housekeeper? It’s a down-come in a way, for a woman who’s had a house of her own, to come back to domestic service, and I’d always address her as ‘Mrs. Auchinvole.’”

“I shouldn’t think of addressing her as anything else! The truth is, I’m an arrant coward with servants. My instinct is always to cringe. I can’t have had any slave-owners among my ancestors—slaves, more likely. Oh, Isobel! do you realise that we’ll probably see the drawing-room finished to-day?” Kitty gave a jump of excitement. “And that in another fortnight everything’ll be ready? I must say the painters have hustled to some purpose. I suppose it’s because they’ve got so many jobs this spring. And the plumbers have been most expeditious. I hope it doesn’t mean scamped work.”

“Not a bit. It only means that the Coronation is putting a spirit of youth into everything. Black as things look in the world, we can’t help believing that a new beginning will make a difference—and a Coronation is, in a way, a new beginning. I hope there’ll be the same lovely feeling there was at the Silver Jubilee. The world saw Britain rejoicing as one great family. How thankful we ought to be that King George was spared to see it, to know how his people loved him, to realise that the whole world held him in affection and respect. After all, it’s a wonderful thing to be good, just simple good.”

Kitty nodded. “We were in Lausanne at the time,” she said, “and read about it proudly in *The Times*. It made us feel exiled, lonely, like children kept away from a party.”

“All the same,” said Isobel, “I’d as soon be out of London next month. The traffic’ll be a real problem. Of course, it doesn’t really matter to people like you and me. We can walk where we want to go. It seems rather feeble not to try to see everything one can, but I do so hate crowds, and, even if I had a seat, I doubt if I’d ever push my way to it.”

“And you so large!” scoffed Kitty. “A midge like me is better at home. I’d rather see it comfortably in a cinema, anyway, but you are much younger and brisker than I am, Isobel, you shouldn’t evade things. I think you’re apt to.”

“I know I am, and more serious things than Coronation crowds. I’m inclined to

be afraid of what life may do to me, and yet I know in my heart that the people who look for the easy way are very little use. . . . Is that your address-book, Kitty? I'm glad you've found it."

"Yes. I've been looking over it, and almost every name is a reproach. How could I have been so regardless of their kindness! But they seemed so far away, and their sympathy and concern so futile. Now I see how wonderful it was that they should remember, and trouble to write. Some I don't want much to see again, they were merely pleasant people to dine with, there was no tie between us. But others—Bridget Ker and her husband, Tommy and Mary Hibbert, Jessica Irwin—I must write and make my apologies, and ask them to come and see me when I'm settled."

"And I'm sure," said Isobel, "that they won't think any apology necessary, they'll be only too glad to know that you're back in London. It won't be easy, just at first, to meet friends out of the past. Who was your most intimate friend among the people you mentioned just now?"

Kitty thought for a moment. "We were intimate with them all, in a way, but I think, perhaps, Jessica Irwin was the one I felt nearest. She was left a young widow in the War with two babies to bring up, and as she lived quite near, I saw a lot of her. Echo, her girl, was just leaving school when we left Hampstead. She'll be twenty now, and Fred was two years younger. I wonder what has happened to them!"

"A lot can happen in two years—or very little. I'm ceaselessly interested in people's lives, not only my friends'—anybody's. Don't you ever sit in a railway carriage or a bus and try to imagine what sort of homes the people opposite have come from and are going back to, try to read from the expression on their faces if they are happy and contented, or miserably jealous and frustrated? I don't suppose one is right once in a hundred times, for most faces reveal nothing, or give a false impression. Don't you agree? I know a woman who has a positively war-like expression, heavy dark brows, and a scowl, and she is the kindest, gentlest, shyest creature, the adored of her husband and children."

"Oh, I know," said Kitty. "And another, with a sweet, rather pathetic expression and a gentle voice, is a back-biting, malicious little devil, who makes life a burden to her family circle and her friends."

Kitty's voice was so emphatic that Isobel was amused, as well as amazed afresh at the change in her friend. This vigorous, alert little person, she thought, must be the Kitty of Hampstead days, the Kitty Rob knew.

"Talking of people," she said, "Patty Tisdal's coming to dine with me to-night. One of Jack's friends is spending the evening with him, so she can get away. It does her good to get into a different atmosphere once in a while. I haven't taken seats for

anything, for if she's tired, she'd rather sit by the fire and talk, but if she feels like it, we could all three go to a cinema. That new thing with Paul Robeson in it is said to be good."

"Yes, I'd like to see that. Isobel, d'you like pelmets? Or d'you think a valance looks better?"

"Well"—Isobel seemed to realise the importance of the question—"to my mind a pelmet is more suitable for a living-room, but a valance is better for a bedroom, less stiff, you know, and formal."

"I think so too," said Kitty. "What a blessing we managed to get such a good match for the drawing-room curtains; the difference won't be noticed in the pelmet. There—that's all I can do just now. It's nearly luncheon-time, anyway. How quickly the days go when you've got lots to do! Can you possibly come with me to the flat directly after luncheon? There are several things to mention while the men are there."

"Yes, I've a note of them. In another week Mrs. Gordon will be able to begin washing floors. I hope that by that time you'll have settled with Mrs. Auchinvole. I don't think you could do better, and you might do infinitely worse."

"Oh, I know; and if she agrees to come, I'll be very thankful. I don't see why she shouldn't be happy and comfortable, and it would be a boon to know that she had the Gordons to go to if I happened to be out of an evening. It is dull for one person to sit alone in a kitchen; I wouldn't like it myself, and we must arrange what are called in advertisements 'generous outings.' I know she loves a good film."

CHAPTER V

That place that does contain
My books, the best of company is to me,
A glorious Court where hourly I
Converse. . . .

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

By the end of April the workmen had all gone, and Kitty's possessions were piled in a shining, clean flat.

It was an intoxicating sight to the owner, and Kitty rushed from one object to another, exclaiming over each.

The men had laid the carpets, and put the glass and china into cabinets and cupboards. Now they wanted to know where the pictures were to be hung, and Kitty, almost dazed with excitement, tried to bring her mind to the subject.

"The Raeburn above the sideboard in the dining-room," she decreed, and, as the men looked about in a puzzled way, "this one," she said, hauling out the portrait of a young man in a stock. "It's my great-great-grandfather when he was nineteen," she explained to Isobel. "Doesn't he look a lamb? He became a judge in the Court of Session. It's the only family portrait I've got, except the water-colour drawings of my father and mother; they'll hang in the drawing-room."

"And the Peter Scott in the book-room," Isobel prompted.

"Yes, and the mountains—Kinchinjinga and the Matterhorn and the Canadian ones. The Medici prints will go to the bedrooms. *Will* you look at the Infante Don Balthasar Carlos? Aged not more than six, and such a man, with his feathered hat, and long boots, and plump curveting steed! . . . That picture of Holyroodhouse and the two water-colours of Mull on this wall." (They were in the drawing-room now.) "The Queen Anne mirror above the mantelpiece, with my parents on either side—pale gilt frames on the turquoise walls!"

Isobel studied the pictures of Mull, and Kitty asked, "What about the turquoise walls? Do you really like them or would you have preferred cream? Honestly now."

Isobel took time to consider and said, "Honestly, I like them better than I expected, but I'll reserve judgment until the room's finished. While the men are hanging the pictures, shall we find places for some of the books? You'd rather do that yourself, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, I must, or I wouldn't know where to find anything. The nuisance is so many of them are numbered—the Pentland Stevenson, for instance, but there are long rows of Hardy and Meredith that can be put in in any order. (They've both slumped

badly in value, poor dears!) There are first editions of all Conrad's works, and that's Barrie in green morocco—I can't think why. I'm sure Jess wouldn't know herself in such a grand dress. And Sir Walter so shabby in faded cloth! That pile of blood-red books are, appropriately enough, murder trials; terribly interesting if you have the nerve to read them."

"Here are beautiful vellum-bound books."

"Yes, Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, from the Medici Society. They go into the glass bookcase. But it's not the imposing vellum that are the really valuable ones. Some of the grubbier-looking little books are worth their weight in platinum. Mr. Johnson has in his safe one or two that Rob treasured above everything. But I like ordinary books best, in open shelves, close to my hand, that I can browse amongst. This bookcase between the fire and the window is to be my special one. Jane Austen will go in here, and *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Middlemarch*, and—and——"

Kitty grappled on the floor with books for a few minutes, then said, "I must lay the different authors in piles as I find them, before trying to put them into shelves. You'd think they'd been stirred round and round, fiction, poetry, history, fairy-tales!"

"As long as you know what you ought to have," said Isobel. "I'll cope with the complete editions, they're easy."

She finished several shelves, and turning round to ask if they were right, found that her companion, instead of getting on with the job in front of her, had succumbed to temptation, and was deep in *The Golden Age*.

She dropped the book on hearing Isobel's ejaculation, and said apologetically:

"It's so long since I saw it, I'd forgotten how good it was. There should be four Kenneth Grahame's: *Pagan Papers*, *The Golden Age*, *Dream Days*, *The Wind in the Willows*. If you come across any, heave them over."

"I will," said Isobel obligingly, adding, as she fitted in tall volumes with care, "Everything Kenneth Grahame wrote was perfect of its kind. Many writers achieve perhaps one—or two—very good books, and then mysteriously decline and become quite different."

"It's because they try to be versatile," said Kitty. "You don't see any fat red Thackerays over there, do you? I've got *Vanity Fair* and *Esmond*——" She began to turn over leaves.

"Here's *Pendennis*," said Isobel, after a few minutes. But Kitty had found another treasure. "It's *Goody Two-shoes*," she cried, "and here's *The Will-o'-the-Wisps are in Town*, *A Flat Iron for a Farthing*, and *Jackanapes*—all my meek little books go together. The next shelf should be modern poetry, but the poets are buried at present. Isobel, did you ever, by any chance, hear of a writer called

Margaret Veley? I think she must have written round about 1880. I don't possess a word she wrote, but when I stayed as a young girl in the Scottish Borders, I found her books in an uncle's library, a thin volume of verse, and a novel called *For Percival*. I'd give a lot to find them again, especially the book of poems. One—*A Japanese Fan*, it was called—I learned by heart, but that's all I have of her."

Isobel shook her head. "I don't think I ever heard of those books. I wouldn't be likely to, for in my aunt's library poetry was conspicuous by its absence. It was her husband's library, really, and mostly consisted of law books, lightened here and there by history and travel. The books I possess are my own choosing, books I liked and wanted to have."

In a couple of hours the shelves were full, and the floor more or less cleared, and the two women stood back to admire the result of their efforts.

Kitty was delighted. "Nothing," she cried, "furnishes a room like books. Already I feel at home here."

"It is delightful," Isobel said warmly. "I like your blue carpet, Kitty, and that big sofa. What a jolly winter room it'll be, as well as a cool summer one. Let's see if the men are ready to hang your wild geese."

They found the drawing-room practically finished, the curtains up, the pictures hung, the furniture placed, even the rugs laid, and, after putting some touches here and there, Kitty asked:

"D'you like it, Isobel? Is it a room that strikes you as pleasant when you come in?"

Isobel looked round at the graceful furniture, the old china in the cabinets, the soft glow of the Bokhara rugs, and said:

"An exceedingly pleasant room, Kitty dear. Of course, it's a drawing-room, a room for company, for one's best clothes and prettiest manners, a formal room. For ordinary, I'd much prefer your book-room, it's an any-time-of-the-day room; this is for tea drinking and after-dinner talk—a noisy sherry-party would be quite out of place."

"There shan't be any," Kitty promised, her eyes wandering round her room. "I so much prefer a tea-party, all women, from choice, with everything of the finest, china, thin Georgian teaspoons, round complacent teapot, delicate sandwiches, wafers of bread and butter, small light cakes, with talk to match."

Isobel straightened a Dresden china pot-pourri jar, and asked:

"What kind of talk?"

"Well," said Kitty, "certainly nothing rude or ugly. The present state of the world would not be mentioned, nor gas-masks. I saw a wise man said the other day that

what the world wanted was to get back to the time of the horse, for that was the proper rate of speed. He thought the combustion engine at the bottom of all the present misery and unrest—too rapid travelling, submarines, aeroplanes. I do so agree, don't you? We'd talk of books, of course, and plays, and—oh, lots of things."

"And where'll you find guests for such a tea-party? Wouldn't bridge-playing, cocktail-drinking females find it dull?"

"Not for a change. Jessica Irwin, I know, would love it. She and I had many a genteel tea-party in old Hampstead days, as well as many a cheerful mixed gathering with Rob and his friends. I expect I'll get to know the other people in this place, the retired couple (unless they are also retiring), and the old lady downstairs." She looked at her wrist-watch. "It's almost time for Mrs. Auchinvole to pay her promised visit of inspection. Am I very untidy?"

"Considering everything, no," said Isobel. "There's a smudge on your nose. Let me—Here's a comb."

"What'll I do if she turns me down after all?" Kitty asked nervously.

"Start on a round of registries. But she won't. Your last was a very successful interview, and she seemed pleased to come."

"Oh yes, and she had no uniform complex at all; said she'd never think of wearing anything but a dark dress in the afternoon, and seemed positively to like an apron—said it was a 'freshener.' Of course, she feels that she's quite out of the ways of domestic service, but—there's the bell."

"I'll open the door," said Isobel, "and bring her in here. You will be discovered seated on a high chair."

It was quite half an hour later that Kitty came into the book-room where Isobel was still arranging books, and flinging herself on the sofa announced, "For better or worse, Mrs. Auchinvole is mine."

"She looks a dear," said Isobel. "Did she like the flat?"

"Well, I doubt if she admired my drawing-room."

"Ome don't seem 'ome without a h'aspidistra," Isobel quoted.

"But what was more to the purpose, she thought highly of the kitchen and her own bed-sitting-room. The gas-fire specially appealed to her. We didn't dwell too much on the subject of cooking. What she can do—or can't do—will be revealed in time, but I can see that she's keen on housework. She looked with real housewifely eye on the new paint. She looks a fresh, wholesome creature. I do hope she'll be happy here. She did say that it would be a treat to have a place of her own—at present she has to share a room with two nieces. I asked her if she cared for

reading, and she said, ‘Not just that awfully much,’ she likes to sew and knit, and enjoys films and shop windows. All the rest I’ll find out in due time. I shan’t expect perfection, neither must she.”

Isobel said, “My only fear is that you’ll spoil her. But that’s better than the other way.”

Kitty went on, “She says ‘Madam,’ which is rather surprising. At least she said it once, when she came in. When her first shyness wore off I could see her quite settling down for a nice confidential chat, so I got up and said I was sure she’d like to see her own room and the kitchen.”

“Oh yes, but once you’ve listened to the complete story of her life, that’ll be that. You can keep clear of it afterwards.”

“I daresay. I don’t want to seem uninterested or unkind, and I’ll certainly listen with patience—sympathy, too, I hope—to one recital, but she must understand she’s a working house-keeper not a companion.”

“So she will,” Isobel said soothingly, “and I know you won’t ever let her feel herself snubbed; that rankles. When is she coming?”

“I said Tuesday. Two or three days longer with you at Queen’s Court will be very pleasant. Really, it’s difficult to see how I can possibly get on without you, Isobel. You’ve been my rod and my staff so long. You’ll come and see me every day, won’t you?”

“Love to—as long as I’m in London.”

Kitty looked inquiringly at her friend, who went on, “I don’t seem to like the thought of the Queen’s Court without you. I suppose it’s seeing all your nice things and realising what fun it is to make a home that has made me dissatisfied with my homeless condition. I’ve got a sort of feeling that I’d like to settle down too, not in London, though, somewhere in the country, and make a place for myself.”

“Oh!” Kitty’s tone was flat. “I always thought of you as being near. . . . But that’s sheer selfishness on my part. You’re right, you know. You ought to have a place of your own. Where would you go?”

“I thought Scotland.”

“Oh, my dear, right away from me! I thought you didn’t care much for your native land.”

“I don’t know it. My idea is to go away now, next week, and stay some weeks somewhere, and see how I like it.”

“Where, I wonder?”

“It’s all the same to me, Highlands or Lowlands, but I think on the whole I’d rather be in the Lowlands. My people were Lowland, and I don’t think I’ve much

feeling for far islands, and seals, and sad Hebridean songs.”

Kitty laughed. “I believe you. Neither have I, really. I’m Edinburgh, cold, east-windy Edinburgh, with nothing of the Gael in me. Isobel, you should go to the Borders. The country there’s as beautiful as there’s any need for, and the people are hard-headed but kindly. I believe I know just the place that would suit you—a village called Glenbucho. Some far-off cousins of mine—Veitch is their name—live there, or lived, perhaps, for they may be all gone—in a jolly old white-washed house. The old laird must be dead now, but there was a son, a red-haired little boy called Gideon! I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll write to the parish minister and ask if there are any rooms to let. He’ll be sure to know.”

“No, don’t,” Isobel cried, rather alarmed at her friend’s precipitate ways. “I must think it over first. It’s just an idea at present. Tell me more about the place before I decide.”

“I don’t know much,” Kitty confessed, “which isn’t surprising, seeing that it’s more than twenty years since I was there; but I can tell you lots about the Borders, if that’ll interest you. Did you ever read Jean Lang’s *Land of Romance*? It’s somewhere here. I’ll rout it out.”

CHAPTER VI

When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

By the end of the next week Isobel was in the Royal Scot on her way to Glenbucho.

Kitty had been the hustler. Shocked by her own selfish desire to keep her friend near her, and convinced that this break in Isobel's life was the best thing that could happen to her, she had written to the parish minister of Glenbucho, asking if there were any suitable rooms to let in or near the village, and at the same time begging for information about the family of Veitch of Glenbucho Place. The reply she got (written on paper headed "Agnes Home, Merchant, Glenbucho") explained that the minister being away on holiday, he had sent Mrs. Baillie's letter to the present writer to answer. She begged to state that there were comfortable rooms to be had at the house of Mrs. Bruce, whose husband was the grieve on Glenbucho Place. The old laird had been dead for over a year and most of the land had been sold. The young laird, Mr. Gideon Veitch, had kept only the house itself, and the home-farm, and, shortly after his father's death, had gone out to Canada, leaving Bruce, the grieve, in charge. The writer was certain that anyone would be very satisfied who took Mrs. Bruce's rooms.

Kitty, having handed the letter to her friend, said:

"The Veitches, like so many others, seem to have fallen on evil days. They were never rich, but, unfortunately, they lived as though they were, so I expect the boy found everything in a sad muddle. When I say 'boy,' I forget that he must be thirty and over."

Isobel read the letter, and said, "I like the sound of Agnes Home, Merchant, and I believe I'll take Mrs. Bruce's rooms. Glenbucho sounds quite a good place to view Scotland from. I needn't stay there long, of course. I'll journey about till I find what seems to me the ideal place to make a home."

"I'd like to come with you," said Kitty, "but I can't. This flat's going to take every penny I possess—and more."

"But you don't regret it?"

"Not yet," said Kitty cautiously. "Already I'm fond of it. When I wake in the morning and see my own things round me; when I take my bath in my own spotless bathroom; when I eat my dinner with my Raeburn great-great-grandfather watching me; when I read and write letters in my book-room, and drink tea in my modish drawing-room, I can't be sufficiently thankful that you gave me courage to take the plunge. And now you're taking the plunge."

“Yes,” said Isobel, rather bleakly, and went on, “but you don’t know how reluctantly! I’m safe here in London at the Queen’s Court, with my own small circle of friends, my little jobs of work safe and happy. But what I’m going to I don’t know.”

“That’s the fun of it,” said Kitty, polishing a Jacobean glass goblet as she spoke. “You’re going out to meet adventure.”

“Are there likely to be many in Glenbucho?”

“You never can tell. I’m sorry Gideon Veitch has gone to Canada. I’d have asked him to look after you. I expect the little red-haired ruffian has grown up a good fellow.”

“I’m rather glad,” said Isobel, “that there’s no one ‘to take me up.’ I’ll be entirely on my own, and if I need help or advice, there’s always Agnes Home, Merchant. But it’s to be hoped that a woman of thirty, large and muscular and sane, can look after herself! Have you seen anything of your neighbours?”

“Have I not,” said Kitty. “The ‘retired couple’ called yesterday. They have no family, and when Mr. Boothby retired (he is—or was—a barrister), they got rid of their house and settled in here. They go away for the summer, so they told me, so it suits them very well. They’re both very easy to get on with, smiling and agreeable. There must be thousands of such couples in London. Mrs. Boothby dresses well, and looks after her hair and complexion. They were very nice about noticing things, picking out this and that to admire. I’m sure they will be pleasant neighbours, though I doubt at the end of a year if I’ll know them any better than I do now.”

“They sound ideal flat dwellers,” said Isobel.

“Mrs. Temple, on the ground floor,” Kitty went on, “sent up a note asking if I’d waive ceremony and call on her. I went at once, and found a real old lady, a thing I thought had vanished from the world in these days of night-club-haunting grandmothers. White hair, and a cap—a cap, I ask you—the most seductive thing in cream lace, and a black silk dress and shawl. Eighty-five, she told me she was, and so pretty, with a pink and white face, and blue eyes hardly faded at all. She’s been a widow for twenty-five years, has had six children, and lived a very busy life until, five years ago, she broke her leg, since when she has been more or less a prisoner in the house. But she still knits, and collects for her pet charities, and keeps herself very contented.”

“Where are all her family?”

“Oh, I heard all about them. Two sons were killed in the War, the third is in London, I think she said in business. The three daughters are married; one, the youngest, is in China with her diplomatic husband; one married a man in the I.C.S.,

now retired and living in Devon; the third I got no information about except what I gathered from the fact that she was alluded to with a sigh as ‘Poor Monica.’”

“You must have had quite an entertaining visit,” said Isobel.

“I had. I protested that I must be tiring Mrs. Temple, but she really seemed to enjoy telling me all about everything as much as I enjoyed listening. She is what in Scotland we call ‘innerly.’ Just the opposite to the Boothbys. You can cry and laugh with Mrs. Temple and talk about real things without embarrassment. Pleasant as the Boothbys are, you’d never think of talking to them of anything but surface things. In ten minutes I felt as if I’d known Mrs. Temple all my life.”

Isobel was thinking over that conversation, as she looked on the Westmorland hills, and wondered how she could have been so foolish as to spend so many spring days in a crowded city, missing so much. Kitty would be quite happy with a circle of old friends, and Mrs. Temple to visit daily and devise interests and amusements for. She wouldn’t miss her friend of the Queen’s Court Hotel, except just at first. Isobel realised, without bitterness, that nobody would miss her much. Patty, a bit, perhaps, when she got depressed about Jack’s helplessness. (By the way, she must remember to send Patty’s jumper-knitter any ideas she had.) The Hospital people had said she would be a loss, for she had been dependable, but she had got a girl to promise to take her place there; and various lonely people might feel a little more solitary because her visits had stopped, but these she could write to from time to time. In a way, Isobel thought, it was rather a good thing to be alone, to have no-one to worry about, though, she admitted, it must be rather wonderful to have people of one’s own, whom one had a right to agonise over, to rejoice over.

A short stop at Carlisle, and they were over the Border. Lockerbie, Beattock, the uplands of the Clyde, and then, at last, Symington, the station at which she had to change.

The guard of the train, who had shown a fatherly interest in her from Euston, came to her help, and soon she was standing among her boxes on a windswept platform. She pulled up the collar of her coat, for though the sun was still bright the May air was snell, and asked the porter when and where she got a train for Glenbucho.

“Ower the bridge,” she was told. “It’s the Tinto Express frae Glesgae that ye get. She’ll be in in anither twenty minutes. I’ll bring yer luggage.”

For half an hour Isobel walked up and down the platform, wondering what this exposed station, lying among moorlands, would be like in winter, when the land was held in icy grip, and blizzards swept down from the hills. It must be fine, thought the city-bred girl, with a thrill at her heart.

At last the Glasgow train came in, and away they went. It was a soft pastoral country she saw, rounded green hills and spreading fields, farm-houses and white-washed cottages; here and there the glint of water. One and another small flowery station was passed, till they pulled up at Glenbucho.

To the porter who came to collect her luggage, Isobel said, "I'm going to Glenbucho Place. D'you know if there's anyone meeting me?"

The porter nodded his head towards the gate, and said, "Aye, Jardine's man's here wi' the big car. Wait you here an' I'll get a barra'."

"Jardine's man" was called Dan, a friendly person who fitted Isobel and her belongings into the shabby Daimler, and with a parting salutation from the porter of, "Weel, that's a' richt, then," they were off.

Glenbucho Place was about a mile from the village, and the grieve's house, Isobel found, stood beside the stackyard, some distance from the cottages of the shepherd and the ploughman, and had a neat garden in front, at present bright with wallflowers, forget-me-nots, and tulips.

As the car stopped, a middle-aged woman came down the path to the gate, and, holding out her hand, said, "You'll be Miss Logan. Come awa' in, and Dan'll bring the luggage. Ye've had a lang journey, a' the way frae London. What the's weather like there?"

"Rather stormy," said Isobel; "it's to be hoped it clears before the Coronation. You know London?"

Mrs. Bruce seemed almost affronted at the question, and said hastily, "No' me. I've never had the time for gallivantin', nor the money either. But a'body travels now whether they can afford it or not. It's thae motor-cars and buses and things that make folk restless. I was born two miles from here, and I've never been further than Glasgow and Edinburgh, and once to Melrose when the Big Show was there."

"Will I carry up the boxes, Mrs. Bruce?" the chauffeur asked.

"Aye, ye might, Dan. Davy's no' back from Lanark yet."

Isobel opened her purse and was startled when Mrs. Bruce hissed in her ear, "A shilling's plenty, mind."

Feeling that she must not allow herself to be intimidated, Isobel took out half a crown, and handed it with a smile to Dan, who was not out of earshot when Mrs. Bruce entered her protest.

"There was no sense in giving him half a crown, when a shilling was plenty. It's a pity to spoil folk."

"But he carried up my boxes," Isobel said.

"And what for no'? . . . Here's your room. And here's the bathroom. Hot and

cold,” she added proudly.

“Oh, the window looks out on the hillside,” Isobel cried. “I’m so glad it isn’t obscured glass.”

“Nobody’ll see you but the sheep,” Mrs. Bruce assured her. “They wanted to put in that kinda glass, but I wouldna have it. It’s dearer, anyway.”

“This looks like a new bathroom.”

“Aye, it was only put in a year syne, and ye may say it’s hardly been used. The laird was compelled to put bathrooms in here and in the cottages. Sic a norie! And him no’ well off. And he never lived to see them either. Mr. Gideon saw them, of course, and he said it was but right that everyone should have as comfortable a house as possible. Poor lad! I wonder what sort of place he’ll be living in in Canada. A wooden hut as likely as not. . . . I’ll put your towels in here, for there’ll be nobody using it but yourself.”

“But——” Isobel began.

Mrs. Bruce broke in. “We’ve a place downstairs that suits us better. It’s done us for thirty years and it’ll do us to the end. D’ye think I’d let Davy—tha’s ma man—gang up ma stair carpet every time he wanted to wash his hands? When would ye like your tea?”

“Oh, thank you. I had tea on the train.”

“Eh? Oh, you mean ‘afternoon tea.’ We’ll call this supper, then, or tea-and-till’t.”

“‘Tea-and-till’t’ sounds delightful. What is it exactly?” Isobel asked.

“Just tea and till’t—tea and something to it. It’s ham and egg, as a matter of fact. Ye’ll get your dinner at one o’clock every day, for Davy comes in for his at twelve. I hope ye don’t expect London cooking? I can give ye good broth and meat, or mince or stew, or whiles a roast, but nothing fancy. We’d better understand each other from the first.”

Isobel replied meekly that she was sure everything would be delightful, but Mrs. Bruce did not care for soft sayings. “I can promise nothing ‘delightful,’ but I’ll make ye as comfortable as lies in ma power. When you’re ready come downstairs and ring the parlour bell and I’ll infuse the tea. The parlour’s on the left of the front door.”

Isobel, feeling a little like a new pupil under a strict governess, washed her hands, and while drying them admired again the view. Beyond the fence there was a delicious miniature glen, through which ran a burn overhung with rowan-trees, and beyond that the hillside.

Her bedroom was spotlessly clean, and very neat, but it was rather disconcerting to find the toilet-table crowded with all manner of impedimenta—evidently bought at Sales of Work: three pincushions, a handkerchief satchet, a box with its lid

ornamented with coloured sealing-wax, and a hand-glass. She wondered if Mrs. Bruce would be offended if she lifted them all into a drawer and put out her own ivory brushes. There was very little room in the wardrobe, but a large old-fashioned chest of drawers would hold a lot, and there was a cupboard at the side of the fireplace. The room had the same delightful view as the bathroom and Isobel would fain have stayed to enjoy it in the evening light, but remembering that her landlady had seemed to want the supper over, she hurried downstairs.

The parlour she found looked to the garden and the stackyard, and was furnished with a suite upholstered in brown plush. The table was spread for supper, lavishly spread, Isobel considered, with a pile of sliced “loaf” bread, a plate of scones, another of pancakes; oatcakes, also honey, and a home-made gingerbread. Mrs. Bruce added to it a large brown teapot and a covered dish, and withdrew without a word.

“I shan’t starve,” thought Isobel, as she helped herself to some ham and egg, and buttered a scone. She was surprised to find how much hungrier she was for this meal than she had ever been for the rather pretentious dinner at the Queen’s Court. In the window there was a small table, bearing a tall plant which obstructed the view, so she lifted it into a corner and sat happily munching and looking out. It was delightful to be so near the sound of the farmyard, and to be able to see something of the life that went on there. The work of the day was done, the workers had time now for a gossip, for a game, for a walk, or a run on a motor-bike with a companion. When Mrs. Bruce came in to remove she looked round the table, and said, “Ye’ve eaten nothing.”

“Nothing?” said Isobel. “Ham and egg, delicious scones and pancakes, and honey, not to speak of the best gingerbread I ever tasted!”

“Well, it’s mebbe me that’s no used to London appetites. We wouldna call that a tea in Glenbucho. Davy’s away to the bools.”

Visions of matadors floated through Isobel’s mind, and her surprised stare made Mrs. Bruce explain, “The game, ye ken. Mebbe y’re used to hearing it called ‘bowls.’”

“Oh yes, of course. I know about bowls. Have you a bowling-green near here?”

“Aye, at the village. Ye passed it coming from the station, but ye wouldna know to look. Aye, and tennis courts too we have. The young folk waste a terrible lot of time at tennis.”

“But it’s splendid exercise,” Isobel said.

“I daresay,” her companion responded and, with a sniff, added, “It’s surprising what an exercise folk need nowadays. In ma young days our work gave us a’ the

exercise we needed. But we *worked* then. Now they just dawdle through their job till it's time to start amusing theirsel's."

She lifted what was on the table on to her tray, and soon all trace of the meal had disappeared.

Before her landlady left the room Isobel asked her if she might use the table that held the plant to write on.

Mrs. Bruce pulled down her long upper lip, and said severely, "That's a castor-oil plant. I've had it for years, and ye see how healthy it looks standing in the light."

Isobel agreed that it looked healthy, but added that it seemed a pity to block up such a pleasant window.

"I'd like," she said, "to sit there and work and write letters. I promise to put back the castor-oil plant every night before I go to bed, and it'll get all the morning light. Will that do?"

Mrs. Bruce stood with the tray in her hands, looking far from pleased. "It'll have to do, I suppose," she said at last. "Will ye be wanting anything more to-night, milk or anything? And when'll ye want yer breakfast?"

"Nothing more to-night, thank you. About breakfast, would nine o'clock suit you, or perhaps we might say half-past eight? It seems a pity to waste part of a May day."

"I was just wondering how ye were going to put in your time," said Mrs. Bruce, "but half-past eight'll suit me fine. . . . I may tell you I never had a lodger till last summer, but we're terrible anxious to make some money. Ye see, with Mr. Gideon in Canada the place is our responsibility. We canna be askin' the lawyer for every sma' repair, and ye ken fine a place is aye needing something. We've lodgers for five months this summer, so that'll give us something to work wi'. Ye see, Davy's ay been at Glenbucho Place; he was born here where his father was grieve afore him, and he's fair bigoted on the Veitches. The old laird was the kindest, canniest man that ever walked. The tenants had just to ask and they got. It was fair ridiculous, and we knew there was but the one end to it. He had to sell most of his land afore he died—it was that that killed him. Maister Gideon has only the farm here, and the house and garden, and how long he'll have them I don't know. I'm vex't for the laddie, but he's young and he's got his life afore him. I'm vex'ter for ma Davy. He's one of the old kind. I don't believe folk now care much for anything but makin' money, but Davy cares for Glenbucho Place like a mother. As the Psalmist says, 'Its very dust to him is dear'—and whiles I wish it wasna! Mebbe if we'd had a family he wouldna have been so set on the place, but there's just him and me—and Glenbucho. Mercy! I don't know why I'm standin' here deaving a stranger with our

troubles. I beg your pardon, I'm sure. Half-past eight. Good night, then. I hope you'll find your bed comfortable."

CHAPTER VII

It was warm, with a latent shiver in the air that made the warmth only the more welcome.

WEIR OF HERMISTON

ISOBEL slept so deeply that night that when she woke all recollection of the events of the day before had passed from her mind, and she was surprised to hear unfamiliar sounds.

Starting up she found herself looking, not at her net-curtained window in the Queen's Court Hotel, but—the window being wide open—straight out to the miniature glen, with the burn and the rowan-trees. Some calves were looking through the fence at a black-and-white collie, and it, in turn, was watching a yellow cat on the prowl. Two lambs gambolled absurdly; a cock was crowing, someone was whistling; a new day was well begun.

Isobel looked at her watch. Half-past six. Two hours before she could go downstairs. Mrs. Bruce, she knew, would have enough to do getting the room and breakfast ready for the time appointed, without her lodger getting in the way; so, reaching for her writing-pad, she began a letter to Kitty Baillie.

"DEAREST K.," she began. "It is 6.30 a.m., and I have just woken up. I long to dress and go out, for there are all sorts of exciting things to see—calves and pet-lambs (at least I think they must be pet), a collie-dog, a burn with rowan-trees, and a hillside, but the hour is too ridiculous, so, instead, I am starting a letter to you.

"I'll tell you later what I think of Glenbucho as a place, meantime, know that the rooms are all one could desire, clean—such pure white sheets I never encountered before; it must be the soft water and clear air—a comfortable bed, and—luxury!—a bathroom to myself. I had an idea that in Scotland they hadn't even water in the house, and was bracing myself to wash in a tin basin, so the shining new bathroom came as a delightful surprise. It is quite palatial in size, having once been a small bedroom, and has a lovely view. I remember once, at Stratford-on-Avon, having a bathroom from which one saw the Avon and the spire of Shakespeare's church; this one looks out to the hillside. From the sitting-room you see the garden and the stackyard, with the main road (not very 'main') and the hills beyond.

"My landlady, Mrs. Bruce, is fifty-ish, I should think, with a long,

stern face and a most uncompromising manner. She only began to keep lodgers last summer, and she has still the air of not being quite sure how it is going to work, but whether it is herself or me she distrusts I can't tell. Certainly *I* have no complaint to make. Last night she gave me an excellent meal, high tea, or supper, whatever you like to call it: bacon and eggs, scones and pancakes, honey and gingerbread. After hotel food it tasted like nectar. My obvious enjoyment of her cooking seemed to thaw Mrs. Bruce slightly, and she stopped to talk for a little about Glenbucho Place. Her husband was born on the place, and it seems to be a real grief to both of them to see its decline. There is only the home-farm left, and the old house. It was very wise, I think, of Gideon Veitch to go to Canada to make his own way.

"The Bruces are left to look after things as best they can. There is very little money for the upkeep of the place, and they are trying to make a little extra by taking in summer lodgers. I thought all this feudal feeling, this love for a family and a place, had died out. It is interesting to come across it here.

"3 *p.m.*

"I didn't write much this morning after all, and as I find letters leave at 4.30, I'll finish this now.

"It seems a long time since this morning. Then I was a stranger in Glenbucho, now I almost feel as if I belonged.

"After breakfast I sauntered out and made the acquaintance of the collie (he is called Yarrow), and the lambs (they *are* pet), and met Mr. Bruce, who is a slow-spoken, gentle creature, like so many men with managing wives.

"I am interested in the accent here. I find they say 'efternin' for afternoon, 'perk' for park, 'gress' for grass, but some of their words are very broad, 'paurLOUR' and 'ma-an'—never 'mon' as some writers spell it. The effect is soft and beautiful, and I can understand wonderfully well, better than they can understand me. I speak too fast and slur my words.

"To continue. I set out to see the village of Glenbucho, and found that it is in three parts: the post-office, two churches, and a few villa-ish looking houses make one part; the station, a shop, the school, and school-house make another; the third is the real village, a row of houses on either side of the road, a shop, a burn with a bridge over it, and, round a corner, the churchyard. This scattered village lies cradled among

solemn, round-backed hills, and this May morning the beauty of it made my heart leap. The hawthorn is out, and the broom and everything seems white and gold and green: the air is so tonic you feel as if you could walk for miles.

“First I looked for Miss Agnes Home, Merchant. Her shop is the one near the station. It is built on the top of a sharp slope, and the garden runs down to a stream called Glenbucho Water. It’s a real village shop, with a startlingly loud bell as you open the door, and a smell compounded of almost everything under the sun—oatmeal, onions, paraffin oil, soap, brown paper, apples, acid-drops—a most satisfying smell.

“Didn’t you imagine Miss Agnes Home as a gentle creature with a quiet brow? I did. But she isn’t. She is large and broad and rosy, with a friendly, forthcoming manner, a loud laugh, and a most hearty interest in everything that happens, and in everyone who enters her door.

“She greeted me with a wide smile, and a ‘What can I do for you?’ and after I had made a few purchases I thanked her for her kindness in telling me about the rooms at Glenbucho Place.

“‘Oh, ho,’ she said, standing back a little to have a good look at me, ‘so you’re at Mrs. Bruce’s. I saw you pass in Jardine’s car from the six train last night, and I just thought ye’d be going there. And are you comfortable? Ay, I thought ye would be. Mrs. Bruce hasn’t long begun taking lodgers, and she’s not very sure of herself yet, but I said to her, ‘Ma woman the folk that come to you’ll be in clover.’”

“Then she put both her hands on the counter and began to confide in me that she and Mrs. Bruce (‘Beenie Forrest she was then’) had been at the school together, and had walked four miles there and four miles back, and what a struggle they’d had on stormy days.

“‘Eh, my,’ she said (you would have enjoyed her soft Border speech), ‘when I think of the bairns nowadays, jumping into motor-cars, fetched down and sent home again, I take a good laugh to myself. They’ll entirely lose the use of their legs, the poor creatures.’

“I pointed out that a four-mile walk in rain or snow was a bad beginning to a school day, but she refused to believe it, and said it made the children strong and self-reliant. I daresay it did if they survived it!

“Another customer coming in, I had to leave, but I look forward to many more talks with Miss Agnes Home.

“The walk home was lovely, and I walked slowly, enjoying every step

of the way. Going to the village I'd been looking south, to the Drumelzier Hills—I got Mrs. Bruce to tell me some of the names of the places up Tweed, Mossfennan, Stanhope, Crook, Hearthstanes, The Bield, Talla—aren't they nice?—but coming home the scene was different, a wider strath, the hills lower and greener, except where Cardon raised its head. Glenbucho Place stands at the entrance of a lovely green glen which I mean to explore very soon.

"I was back just in time for my midday meal, which was what Mrs. Bruce described as 'broth and meat,' which meant an excellent thick vegetable soup, then the beef that made it served with potatoes. This was followed by an apple-dumpling with cream from the cool milk-house, and I feel as if I'd had enough nourishment to last me all day! Now I'm going to sit in the garden, a pleasant place, both sunny and sheltered, and read *The Scotsman*, which I bought this morning at the shop, and after tea I am going with Mrs. Bruce to see 'the big hoose.' This is the day she airs and dusts it, and she asked if I'd care to go with her while she shuts the windows and saw that it was all right for another week. I'll tell you about it in my next letter.

"You are often in my thoughts, and I long to hear how you are getting on.

"Ever yours,

"ISOBEL."

As Mrs. Bruce and her lodger took their way through the garden to the road, Isobel, by way of making conversation, said that she had visited the Glenbucho shop that morning.

"Ye mean," said Mrs. Bruce, "Agnes Homes's? There's another shop, further up the road, in the village, but mebbe ye werena that length."

"Oh yes, I saw it, and a very nice-looking shop it is, but I particularly wanted to see Miss Agnes Home. It was she who told me of your rooms."

"Oh, aye, Agnes is ay willing to do a body a good turn."

"She certainly did me a good turn," Isobel said politely, but a sniff was her companion's only response, so she went on, "Miss Home seems very pleased with life."

"Oh, she's that. A shop's the very place for her, for she fair lives for news. A'body rins to Agnes. Whiles ye can hardly get into her shop for folk—lassies telling about their lads, mothers about their bairns. I wonder she can be bothered, but she

says if a lone woman doesna take an interest in everybody she turns cankered and thrawn, and she doesna stop at Glenbucho, it's the whole world she's interested in. She got that excited about thae Abyssinians, and ye'd think the Spanish war was gaun on in her ain kailyaird the way she vexes hersel' about it. If it's oor ain folk that's fightin' I'm interested enough, but I canna be bothered readin' about foreigners. For one thing I can never mind their names."

Isobel laughed and agreed that that was a difficulty, then said, "You and Miss Home were at school together, weren't you?"

"Was she telling you that? Agnes is awful fond of crackin' about old days. She sits and laughs and laughs about things that happened forty years syne, and asks me if I mind o' this and that. She was ay lauchin' as a lassie."

By this time they had come to the old gate-posts, with a carved-stone bear on top of each, and entered the short drive that led through a paddock to the house known as Glenbucho Place. A tall, narrow house, with crow-step gables, built in the shape of an L, it was harled pale grey, and the mortar peeling off in patches gave it a weather-worn, shabby look.

Mrs. Bruce hustled up to the front door, and unlocking it stood aside, and Isobel found herself in a small square hall, facing a long window that opened into the garden. The westering sun was flooding in, lighting up the dark portraits on the walls, and the worn tapestry on a settee. On the left was the dining-room—a room that had windows both to the garden and the courtyard. Bare and unused-looking as it was, there was something home-like about it; the thickness of the walls, the old panelling, the wide hearth and low ceiling gave a sense of comfort. On the right hand was a small room looking to the garden.

Mrs. Bruce started briskly to shut and fasten the windows, and Isobel followed her as she went through the house. It was not large and it was very shabby, but the furniture, what there was of it, was old and good, and Isobel felt she could have settled down in it just as it was.

At the top of a short winding stair they entered a small turret-room, containing a narrow bed, a bookcase—obviously home-made—a writing-desk, a cabinet of birds' eggs; on the wall many school and college groups. A boy's room evidently.

"This is Maister Gideon's wee room," Mrs. Bruce said. "He wouldna change it for a bigger one, though he used to say that he had to put one arm up the chimney when he was putting on his coat. He ay said his room had the bonniest view."

"It has," Isobel agreed.

"I daresay, but what about it?"

As they went downstairs Isobel asked how old the house was, but Mrs. Bruce

was uncertain about it.

“I’ve heard tell that it’s gey auld, more than two hunner years. Ye ken about Prince Charlie coming to Scotland?”

“D’you mean the Jacobite Rising in 1745?”

“Aye, the ’45. Well, it was built afore that, for it was here, in this verra house, that the soldiers catch’t one of the Jacobites, Murray of Broughton he was called. If ye come here ye can see where his place was—right ower yon hill. There’s no house now, I think it was burned down, but the avenue’s there that led up to it. His aunt lived here, in Glenbucho Place. I canna tell ye right aboot it, but we’ve got it all in a book.”

“But that’s *frightfully* interesting,” said Isobel. “Will you let me read the story?”

“You’re welcome. Mr. Gideon gave us the book in a present. He was daft about old tales.”

“That’s hardly to be wondered at living in this countryside, and in this house. What a delightful old place it is!”

“I doubt,” said Mrs. Bruce, “it’ll have to be sold. We canna keep it up.” (Isobel liked the “we”: it was as much the Bruce’s affair as the laird’s.) “And, forbye, Mr. Gideon needs money for the job he’s got in Canada. If he could get mebbe £1,500 for the house and the garden, it would be a big help, and there would ay be the bit farm to let him keep the name of Veitch of Glenbucho.”

Isobel stopped and looked back at the old house. Lonely now, and deserted, there was yet nothing desolate about it. It had been full of life, with a hospitable open door; it would be so again. Meantime, it dreamed contentedly in the evening sunshine.

“The lawyer’s going to advertise it, but we’ve had two or three folk here already who’ve heard it might be for sale. Bruce canna bear the sight of them, he’s that sweir’t to let the house go, but I tell him it’s silly. It takes us workin’ hard to make the farm pay. There’s no money to keep up the Place, a house is ay needing something. Some family from Glasgow or Edinburgh might tak’ it and come in summer, and they *might* be nice folk; anyway, they wouldna fash us, and Mr. Gideon awa’ in Canada’ll no’ be vex’t by the sight o’ them. If he can let the house go, surely Bruce can. And it’s no’ as if we were the only ones. Near all the old families have left the district, there are new names everywhere, so we needna complain. Well here we are, I must awa’ to the milkin’, the kye’ll be in.”

Mrs. Bruce vanished to change her black dress for the “short gown and petticoat” that she wore when milking, and Isobel walked slowly through the garden. Her mind was full of the old house she had just left; it had taken a grip of her from

the moment she had entered the gates and seen its crow-step gables and many-paned windows. Grey, scarred, weather-beaten but beautiful, it basked in the May sunshine, but she could imagine it more in its element in the fierce winter blasts that must often sweep down the glen. It looked, above everything, a home, a place that had sheltered many generations, seen them play as children, work, fight, love, hate, weep as men and women, and, the day's task done, sleep.

It had seen many campaigns of this world's life and death. To own such a house and to see it go to strangers must be bitter. Much better, Isobel thought, to have nothing of one's own but a few thousands in gilt-edged securities, to be free to live where one pleased, with no beloved old house to tear one's heart.

"That love of a house which those who live in hired houses and look upon Heaven as their home know nothing of." Where had she read that? But one might be born not knowing what it was to love a thing of stone, and one might learn. It wouldn't be difficult, she told herself, as she looked across the tree-tops to the grey roofs of the Place.

When Mrs. Bruce brought in the lamp that evening she also brought a book, and explained, "It's the one I was speakin' to ye about. Mebbe ye'd like to read about the Place, though I daresay it's just a lee."

Isobel assured her that she was most anxious to read anything about Glenbucho Place, and the moment the door closed, began *North and South of the Tweed*, by Jean Lang. Why, she knew the name. Kitty Baillie had talked of Jean Lang and her books. This was interesting, and she turned to the contents to find the special tale she wanted to read.

This must be the one. *The Lady of the White Cockade*, and, with her arms encircling the book on the red chenille table-cover, she read of the beautiful wife of Mr. Secretary Murray, who so ardently supported the cause of the young Prince who came over the seas to trust his fortunes to his people. It was a tragic story. Her husband, fleeing from the massacre at Culloden dressed as a drover, managed to get over the hills to Tweeddale, but his own house was full of King George's soldiers, and he had to make his way to Polmood in Tweedsmuir where his sister lived. He was tired out and hungry, as was his horse, the evening was cold and wet, and he could not resist turning in at the gates of Glenbucho Place, the home of his aunt, Mrs. Dickson.

Unfortunately the master of the house was away, and his aunt, kindly, stupid woman that she was, could not be got to understand that he was in danger if recognised. A drink in the kitchen with the servants? Whoever heard of such a thing?

"Na, na, you'll have your broth and your saumon, and gigot, and your wine wi'

your aunt and cousins,” and matters were not improved by the good woman chiding her daughter before the waiting servant for calling her cousin by his name.

There were soldiers hanging about the kitchen when the servant went “ben” and reported. “Queer-like drover! Dining and drinking claret wi’ the mistress,” and that pricked their ears and watched. So it happened that the tired fugitive had hardly fallen asleep in his sister’s house thinking, good easy man, that he was safe, when there came a loud knocking on the door, “In the King’s name!” and he was dragged away to Edinburgh, a prisoner.

Isobel could see it all. A weary man on a jaded horse stumbling into the courtyard; would Mrs. Dickson speak a minute to a drover who had a message for her? The shocked exclamations of the lady when she recognised him, her ill-advised hospitality, the misery of that dinner with its good food and its comforts, and the suspicious looks of the serving-man. Then, feverishly anxious to be gone, Murray mounting his horse, the clatter on the cobble-stones, the beat of hooves as he rode into the night.

It was night, indeed, that he rode into, poor Mr. Evidence Murray! How could he ever again lift up his head to the sun, when to save that head he had betrayed his Prince and his Cause? Isobel sat in the lamplight, with the moon coming over Ratchell Hill, and thought about this unhappy story, so far off and yet so oddly near to her. What sort of man was this John Murray of Broughton? Was he so in love with living that to save his life he was willing to send men who had been his friends to the scaffold? Did life mean so much to him that in the scales it weighed down his love, his loyalty, his honour? One could imagine a man in a moment of panic doing some irreparable wrong, but having done it could he go on living with himself? But this man had lived for years, and must have slept o’ nights. Surely the Place had felt that evening that something momentous was happening within its walls. Did it ever hear an echo of the clatter on the cobble-stones, as a decent man rode away to become a traitor? No wonder Gideon Veitch was interested in the old tale: they were his kin, these Dicksons and Murrays.

Isobel blew out the lamp, and went upstairs to bed.

CHAPTER VIII

Gives not the hawthorn-bush a sweeter shade
To shepherds looking on their silly sheep,
Than doth a rich-embroidered canopy
To Kings . . . ?

KING HENRY VI

MRS. BRUCE was up before five o'clock on those early summer mornings, and had the back of her day's work broken before she carried in her lodger's breakfast at half-past eight.

This morning, when Isobel exclaimed over the scones fresh from the girdle, Mrs. Bruce said complacently:

'I'm no' one that likes to lie long in the morning. I'd far rather be up and doing, and now that the good weather's here it's no hardship for a body to get up and work. There's some folk that just *canna* rise, and how they get on I know not, for I find if I miss an hour in the mornin' I never make it up a' day. It's a' a question of method, ye ken. Ma mother brought us up like that. She couldna bear to see us gaun ill-red-up after twelve, so we had to plan our work to be tidied by denner-time.'

Then, with an abrupt change of subject, she asked:

'Can ye eat finnan haddie? The fish-man was round yesterday, and I thought it'd be a change frae ham and egg. There's your letters.'

Left alone Isobel helped herself to some fish, and took up her letters. There was one from Kitty, which she opened first. She had been five days in Glenbucho, and this was the first she had heard of her friend.

The letter was long—Kitty had a facile pen—and was full of details that interested Isobel greatly. She smiled over the description of Mrs. Auchinvole's desire to be companion and friend, rather than working housekeeper.

'Any weakening on my part,' Kitty wrote, 'would mean a suggestion that she brought in her work and sat with me of an evening, a thing I simply could not endure. So I encourage her to ask her friends to visit her, or go down when she is finished to sit with the Gordons, or go to a cinema. As for me, I am perfectly happy for hours together in my book-room, where I always have a fire. Everything is well with me except my financial position—the most important thing of all most people would say. The extra expenses that come along every day! I thought that when, at last, the workmen left we were done with them—but not a bit of it. The times Mrs. A. comes to me, remarking, 'We'll need to send for the plumber, there's something wrong with the hot tap in the scullery,' or 'I doubt that fancy boiler's not working right. It's my

belief it might blow up any minute!’

“The plumber once summoned remains with us for the day, plus assistant. Talk about sitting in a traffic jam watching a taxi tick up tuppences, it’s nothing to this! My income is simply being dribbled away, and I have nightmares about being thrown into a debtor’s prison. How my heart goes out in sympathy to poor Rawdon Crawley! Why did my lawyer allow me to do anything so reckless as take a flat? And yet, I don’t really regret it—if I can only keep out of jail.

“My old friend and neighbour, Jessica Irwin, came to lunch with me yesterday. She is still in Hampstead, and we had a great talk about old days. I had rather dreaded seeing her, but it was most comforting: she said such nice things about Rob, and recalled happenings that I’d quite forgotten. She has her own troubles, poor Jessica. Fred, her boy, is a Communist: she’s had the greatest difficulty keeping him from going to fight in Spain. She says her girl Echo is fortunately quite normal, except that she is a Buddhist. I don’t call that being very normal! What parents have to contend with in these days! But Jessica, fortunately for herself, has a sense of humour, and doesn’t take her young people too seriously. It’s quite true what she says, that from both sides they come of such sane, decent stock, that they simply can’t go on being silly for ever.

“By this time to-morrow the Coronation will be over. I can’t describe to you what London is like now, a seething, but wonderfully good-natured, mass. Even the want of the buses, which must have complicated things badly for thousands, hasn’t broken the temper of the people. The decorations are a riot, flowers and flags everywhere. If only the sun shines to-morrow! That wretched Buchan has been keeping the weather grey and showery. I think I’ve chosen the better part—to listen in by the book-room fire. . . .”

There was a postscript which ran, “Going back to the subject of Glenbucho, has your Mrs. Bruce told you the story of Murray of Broughton dining there the night he was taken by King George’s soldiers? I’d forgotten about it till now.”

Isobel laid down the letter and went on with her rapidly cooling breakfast, congratulating herself that she was far away from London this Coronation morning, away from the tumult and the shoutings, the crowds and the decorations. She hoped fervently all would go well, and looked forward to reading all about it, but felt that there were plenty to celebrate without her. She had liked London very well when living in it, but was now realising for the first time the compelling charm of the country. To one long accustomed to the ceaseless hum of traffic, the yelling of motor-horns, the hurrying of millions of feet, and the all-pervading smell of petrol, it was like entering a different world to breathe crystal air, to look across green fields

to high hills, to hear nothing but the comfortable noises of a farmyard, the song of birds and the sound of running water.

A farm, she found, was an exciting place to stay; “ay a steer,” as Mrs. Bruce put it. On certain days the battered Ford car set off for the market-town, Davy weighed down by commissions and directions from his wife; there seemed always chickens being hatched, new kittens, with their eyes just open, crawling round to view an astonishing world, gangrel bodies calling in for a “piece,” or a copper, or a night’s lodging in an outhouse. And the vans! Bakers’ vans full of new-baked loaves and scones and cookies (a “baker’s scone” was regarded as a pleasant change from the farm girdle-scones, which Isobel found so delicious); butchers’ vans, fish-vans, vans with vegetables and fruit, not to speak of the crockery-cart of the “pig-man.”

“Everything is brought to you,” Isobel remarked, but Mrs. Bruce shook her head.

“Whiles they’re just a nuisance,” she said, “temptin’ folk to spend money. Ye buy things because they’re there, when ye could do fine wantin’ them.”

This morning, when Mrs. Bruce came in for the breakfast dishes, Isobel asked how Glenbucho was celebrating the Coronation.

“Weel, I’m no’ celebratin’ it at all. But the bairns’ll be getting a treat likely. It’s Mistress Whitson that generally takes to do wi’ things like that. She lives at Ormiston-shaw’s, a widow with one girl—awa’ at school in France. She seems to have no lack o’ siller, and they say she’s a nice body, but I’ve never spoken to her myself. She takes to do wi’ the Nursing and the Rural.”

“The Rural?”

“Aye, ye ken, Women’s Rural Institute.”

“Oh, of course. Are you a member?”

“Och, no,” said Mrs. Bruce. “They’re a’ daft about it, but I canna be fash’t wi’ thae things. I’d rather bide at hame. But Mistress Whitson’s a great help in the place. Ye need somebody to tak’ a lead. . . I wouldna put it past Agnes Home to do something about the Coronation. She’s what they ca’ public-spirited. I’m no’.”

“Well,” said Isobel, “I’ll celebrate by taking a long walk. If I go right on through the village and take the drove-road over the hill, can I come back here across the fields?”

“Aye, but ye’ll need to look out for the footbridge across the burn. Tak’ care and no’ lose yourself. Are ye no’ feared o’ tramps?”

Isobel laughed. “Most of the tramps I’ve seen are about half my size! But I’ll take a stick.”

Mrs. Bruce lingered, the laden tray in her hands. “We had a letter this morning,”

she said, “from some folk who’ve heard that the Place may be up for sale. It seems they were stayin’ near here last summer and likit the district. They’re comin’ out the day to look at it—and Davy’s hert’s in his boots.”

“I don’t wonder,” said Isobel, after a pause. “Even I who have known it for so short a time am in love with the Place, so I can realise a little what it must mean to you and your husband. The young laird must need the money very badly.”

Mrs. Bruce sighed, and without another word carried away the tray, while Isobel, her spirits oddly dashed by the news, went to the window and stood looking out. It was horrible to think of the Place being sold. Since going over it with Mrs. Bruce, she had wandered round it daily, and explored the walled garden; wherever she walked she saw the house with its grey walls and crow-step gables, dominating the landscape, and greeted it as a friend. Only the evening before, Mrs. Bruce having trusted her with the keys, she had spent an hour most happily, going from room to room, picturing to herself what she would do with it were it her own. The little turret bedroom had a particular fascination for her, and she had studied the titles on the book-shelves, trying to get from them a clue to the character of the boy who owned the books and who had evidently read and re-read them. Mrs. Bruce had showed her a framed photograph of a round-faced schoolboy, and told her that it was “Mr. Gideon at Eton,” and Isobel had gazed earnestly at the college groups hanging in the turret-room, trying to make him out as an undergraduate.

After a grey morning the sun was breaking through when Isobel started for her walk, and her spirits rose as she drank in the beauty of the scene. On one side of the road, bordered by dry-stone dykes overgrown with moss and lady-ferns, the hill rose steeply, while, on the other, level water-meadows stretched towards the Tweed. The lambs in the fields were playing round their placid mothers, the larks singing at Heaven’s gate, and Isobel’s thought wandered to the crowds waiting in London, and hoped the day was as fair for them.

Glenbucho needed no decorating for Coronation Day; the gardens were gay with tulips, the hawthorn was beginning to come out, the yellow broom to appear, but Miss Agnes Home, not content with Nature’s efforts, had erected a flag in the little front garden before her shop. Miss Home herself was standing beside it in the sunshine, reading *The Scotsman*, which she held wide open in both hands. When greeted she turned a smiling face, and, lowering the paper, said:

“I cannot resist just looking at the headlines when the paper comes in. Of course, I’ve to wait to read it till the shop’s shut, but the headlines keep me going. To me there’s no paper like *The Scotsman*. My father always took it, though he hadna many pennies to spare, and we passed it round the neighbours. The picture

papers are all very well and interesting enough just now, but give me *The Scotsman*. Eh, I have read many a startling thing in it first and last, but the worst was yon December day last year. When I saw the headlines I said to maself, ‘Agnes, ma woman, this is the queerest, saddest thing you ever read.’ . . . I had heard rumours, and they angered me, for it’s a cruel thing to whisper about Royalty—they canna answer back, poor things—but to see it staring me in the face——” She paused dramatically.

“I never broke ma fast that day. Everybody that came in had but one topic, and I couldna speak about it—me that’s so fond of a crack!—and all that week. . . . But never mind, it’s past, and we’ve got a grand King and Queen. This’ll be a great day in London. I’d have liked fine to get a chance to cheer them, but we’re no’ doing so badly in Glenbucho. The bairns and the old folk are all getting a present, and Mrs. Whitson’s invited the school-children to a party at her place, and there’s to be a bonfire on Dreva Hill when it’s dark, and fireworks. You’ll no’ know Mrs. Whitson? She takes a lift with everything. What we’d do without her I’m sure I don’t know, for there’s not that many big houses about here. Now that Glenbucho’s shut up we’ve to depend on her. Her daughter is a Coronation debbytant. You mebbe saw her photo in the papers? Miss Althea Whitson. When she was a bairn she liked fine to come in here and help to sell, by way of. It was a treat to see her weighin’ out a penyworth o’ sweeties wi’ such a serious face! She used to tell me that the London shops werena a patch on ma wee place! She’s been in Paris for a year, and I got cards of some of the places she’d been to, but her heart’s aye in Glenbucho, and she’s that pleased to be coming home for good.”

There was the sound of a car stopping, and, turning round, Miss Home gave a cry. “Mercy, if it’s no’ Miss Althea hersel’,” and the next moment there was a rush and she was being hugged by a tall girl, while an older woman came up the little pathway.

Isobel turned to go, saying she would look in another time, but Miss Home would not allow it.

“Give over, Miss Althea,” she said; “you must mind you’re a young lady now”; then, with great dignity, “Mrs. Whitson, this is Miss Logan from London who’s staying at Glenbucho with Mrs. Bruce. She’s a friend of the Veitch’s.”

Mrs. Whitson’s eyes twinkled at Isobel as she shook hands cordially, and said:

“I’m very glad to meet any friend of the Veitch’s.”

“But, I’m not really,” Isobel hastened to explain. “It was a friend who wrote about the rooms, and *she* is a relative of the Glenbucho people.”

“Well, I hope you like our countryside, for I may tell you, any lack of

appreciation won't be readily forgiven."

Isobel looked at the speaker and liked her on the spot. There was something so comely and pleasant about her appearance, blue eyes in a weather-tanned face, hair beginning to silver, and a generous-looking mouth.

"I shan't need to ask for forgiveness," she assured her, "Glenbucho has me in its thrall already, and I can never be sufficiently thankful to Miss Home for suggesting rooms at Glenbucho Place."

"Isn't it delightful?" said Miss Whitson. "I hear Gideon wants to sell it."

Althea, who was behind the counter examining Miss Home's wares, at that gave a protesting cry.

"Oh, Mummy, no. Gideon wouldn't sell the Place. Why, it would be sacrilege. It's belonged to Veitches and Dicksons for hundreds of years and it's the only interesting house in the district." She turned to Isobel. "Do you know history was made in that house? If Secretary Murray hadn't stopped there to dine with his silly old aunt, he might never have been captured, and his name wouldn't be a by-word now."

"I know," said Isobel, "I've been reading about it. D'you think Murray was really the traitor he seems?"

"Of course he was, a black traitor," said Althea.

Mrs. Whitson changed the subject by asking if Miss Home had any coffee sugar.

"I have that, Mrs. Whitson, the kind you like, crushed candy sugar."

"Oh, good. I want to order some things and we'll call for them on the way back. I've to pay a call at Kirkhill."

"On Mistress Melrose," said Agnes promptly. "I was awful vex't to hear she'd got pleurisy. Jeanie was sent for last night to come home and nurse her mother, and that'll be a worry to Mistress Melrose, for Jeanie's got a good place in Glasgow and wants to keep it. But what can they do? A helpless man and four camsterie laddies. Nurse Ritchie was in twice or thrice yesterday. If it had been the depths of winter ye wouldn't have wondered, but to take pleurisy in May with the sun shining and the Coronation on, is just an awful pity."

They all agreed that it was a pity, and Isobel seized the opportunity to leave.

"Can't we take you anywhere?" Mrs. Whitson asked.

"Oh, thank you, but I'm only going for a walk," Isobel explained. "Exploring a new countryside is most exciting."

"Well, I hope you'll explore in our direction soon. We live about two miles along the road in the Drumelzier direction, if that conveys anything to you. Ormiston-shaw our place is called."

“Thank you so much. I’d love to come some day.”

“Oh, but some day’s no day. What about Saturday, to lunch or tea?”

“Do come,” said Althea.

“May I come to tea on Saturday?”

“Yes, and come early, so that we’ll have a nice long time together. Shall we send for you?”

“Please don’t trouble. I enjoy walking.”

“I’ll take you back,” Althea said, and that being arranged, Isobel departed.

Mrs. Whitson looked after her, remarking, “What a handsome girl!”

Miss Agnes Home smiled complacently as if she had received a compliment.

“Isn’t she, Mrs. Whitson? She comes from London. I’m just wondering what’s she doing here all by herself.”

“Probably wanted to get away from the fuss. By the way, we’re expecting you this afternoon, Agnes.”

“Well, of course I’d like to come, nothing I’d enjoy better as you know, but _____”

“But you *must* come,” broke in Althea. “It wouldn’t be a party at all without you. Just shut the shop and put a notice on the door. Nothing ought to be open anyway on Coronation Day.”

“Get off the counter,” said her mother. “Miss Home spoils you. What am I to do with a grown-up daughter, Agnes?”

“I’m to be presented at Holyroodhouse,” said Althea, leaping from the counter to perform a joy-dance on the very restricted space at her disposal, “and we’ve chosen my dress. You must see it when it comes.”

“White, I hope,” said Miss Home, who knew what was proper.

“Yes, white chiffon, all floating. Won’t it be fine? Oh, Homey, just think of Holyroodhouse and Mary Queen of Scots! Imagine having supper in the room where Prince Charlie held court! It’s too much joy. If only I get through my curtsy without collapsing on the floor. Can you curtsy, Homey?”

Miss Home, looking slightly affronted, said, “Deed no. My legs do ma turn, but they were never meant for that sort of thing.”

“Well, you’re not to use them this afternoon,” said Mrs. Whitson decidedly. “I’ll send the car for you at three o’clock. No, of course it’s no trouble, and you’ll need all your energy for the children. I thought we’d let them play games for an hour—clock-golf and some board-ship games we have—and at four o’clock have a good set-down tea in the dining-room (there are only twenty-five all told), and we’ve got a grand Coronation cake; then races and balloons and some singing, and a short talk

about the Coronation and what it means, and presents when they leave.”

“Grand!” said Miss Home. “If I’d got a treat like that when I was a bairn I’d have been fair demented. The Sunday School trip was about our only red-letter day, and it was just generally a ride in a cart to a farm, and games in a field, and our tea. Now they’re taken in charybangs to Edinburgh to the Zoo, or to North Berwick to have a day by the sea—and they’re not half as pleased and contented as we were with our little.”

“I’m afraid that’s true,” Mrs. Whitson agreed; “but the world must move on, and some of the changes are for good, don’t you think?”

“Mebbe they are, though I whiles doubt it. Well, I’ll be ready at three, Mrs. Whitson.”

“Yes, and d’you know, I think I won’t wait to order the groceries to-day. After we’ve asked for Mrs. Melrose we’ll hurry home to hear the broadcast.”

Miss Home’s face was very earnest as she said:

“I certainly think you should do that, Mrs. Whitson. I only wish I could hear it maself. Mebbe I could just cross to Mrs. Barclay’s for a few minutes, and keep an eye on the shop-door from her window. I’d like awful well to hear the King’s voice. Well, good-day to you both, and thank you again.”

CHAPTER IX

The old strange house that is our own.

G. K. CHESTERTON

ISOBEL greatly enjoyed her walk over the drove-road, found her way through the fields across the Glenbucho Water without difficulty, and was back on the stroke of the hour for her one o'clock dinner.

When Mrs. Bruce came to remove the dishes, Isobel pointed out to her what Glenbucho air was doing for her appetite, and said she didn't know when she had so enjoyed a meal.

"Well," said Mrs. Bruce, "it's a blessing, I'm sure, for it's heartless work cooking for a body that just picks at her food." She dropped her voice and continued, "Davy's cleaned himself, and is waitin' to show thae folk over the Place. I doubt we'll have to offer them tea, coming all that road. Would you be going out mebbe? Then I could bring them in here—if you don't mind, that's to say."

"Of course you must bring them in here. I'll probably sit in the garden all afternoon and write letters. When you're making tea, bring me a cup out there."

"That'll be all right, then!" Mrs. Bruce said in a relieved tone, and added as she went out of the door, "I'm obliged to you!"

Isobel carried out a small table and chair and her writing materials to a sheltered place beside the beech hedge, and settled down to make up arrears. But writing outside she found very difficult, there were so many distractions: one minute a bird that she did not recognise, the next, Yarrow, the collie, craving for a little attention, and even when nothing interrupted, her attention wandered. She kept wondering when "thae folk" would arrive, if they would fall in love with the Place as she had done, if they were worthy of it.

About three o'clock a large car passed with two women in it, and went on to the "big house," where Mrs. Bruce, with the miserable Davy by her side, awaited them.

Then Isobel really made herself concentrate on her letters, until, hearing voices, she peered through a hole in the hedge, and saw Mrs. Bruce in the stackyard beyond with two ladies. One was youngish and thin, the older lady, who was massive, wore a mink coat and a smart hat and white gloves. She looked so absurd standing there regarding the two pet lambs, that Isobel was reminded of the lines,

Why do you walk through the fields in gloves,
O fat white woman whom nobody loves?

"Ye'll take a cup of tea?" Mrs. Bruce was saying.

“Oh, thank you very much,” said the younger woman; “but we’re going to tea with friends near Biggar. We’ll need to hurry, Mother.”

“We’ll write to you,” said the stout lady, “or to the lawyer rather—you have the address, Ella?—if we decide to buy the house. It would need a great deal spent on it, and I don’t care a great deal for old houses, but we like the district, and we know quite a lot of people within easy motoring distance, so we’ll see. I think myself that £1,000 is quite enough for it. The lawyer would be wise to take that just now when old houses are going for a song.”

Mrs. Bruce preserved a dignified silence, while the younger woman said:

“This isn’t quite an ordinary old house. You must remember the historical interest of it, Mother.”

Her mother sniffed, remarking, “I’d rather have good bathrooms than historical interest any day. Imagine at this time of day doing with paraffin lamps! And the rooms are quite poky, Ella, not what I’d call handsome rooms at all.”

“Oh, I don’t know, Mother. That one with the windows at either end would make quite a good lounge.”

They moved away, and Isobel, who had been listening quite shamelessly, heard no more. But she had heard enough to fill her with rage.

Presently Mrs. Bruce emerged. “They’re awa’,” she said, “so you may’s well have your tea in the parlour,” and Isobel obediently picked up her writing things and went into the house.

Mrs. Bruce made no remark either at tea or supper about the visitors of the afternoon, nor did her lodger, but that evening about eight o’clock Isobel sought out Mr. and Mrs. Bruce in their own quarters.

She found a shining clean kitchen, with everything put tidily for the morning, but it was empty, so, after hesitating for a moment, she knocked at a door that stood slightly ajar.

“Whae’s that?” she heard, and cried quickly, pushing open the door, “It’s me, Mr. Bruce. May I come in for a few minutes?”

Mr. Bruce was seated in a shabby horse-hair arm-chair, his collie beside him, doing nothing: his wife, by the window, was getting the last of the light for her mending.

“It’s hardly worth while lightin’ the lamp,” she explained. “We’re beddit that early. . . . Come in and tak’ a seat.”

Mr. Bruce had half risen, and was hovering over his chair, but when the new-comer sat down near his wife, he sank back into it thankfully.

“It’s been a grand day,” he said, “but they say it was rainin’ in London.”

They talked for a few minutes about the Coronation, and Isobel, noticing a wireless, asked if they had listened in.

“Aye,” said Mr. Bruce, “I listened a while at the seven o’clock news. It was verra interestin’, but I’m glad I wasna there.”

“D’you find the wireless useful?” Isobel asked.

“Oh, whiles, whiles; the weather and the prices, ye ken. The mistress there is awfu’ ill at the music, but I dinna mind it masel’.”

Mrs. Bruce clipped a thread, and said, “It’s thae promenade concerts that are a fair sickness. I can be doing fine with a Scots song or a band, and on the Sabbath there’s whiles a rare nice service, but the concerts and the comics I canna bide. I was glad to get a chance to hear about the Coronation, for we’re no’ likely to see another.”

A silence fell, and Isobel, turning to her landlord, said:

“Mr. Bruce, I wonder if you’d mind telling me if you think that the people who came this afternoon really mean to offer for the Place? I’m not asking out of mere curiosity.”

Mrs. Bruce paused in her mending and looked at the girl over her spectacles, while her husband said:

“Weel, it’s ma belief they’d like fine to hev the place if they could get it cheap enough. They were ay lichtlyin’ things, but that was by way of lettin’ on it wasna worth the price asked. Nesty mean folk. I’m no’ heedin’ if I never see them again.”

His wife looked at him, and he shifted uneasily.

“Oh, I ken Mr. Gideon needs the siller,” he went on, “and I’d be glad enough to see it sold if it was somebody who’d like the place, and no’ misca’ it a’ the time.”

“You didna wait long to hear them the day, Davy, ma man,” said his wife, folding up the thick woollen vest she had been mending. “You were off afore we were half through the house.”

The collie looked up into his master’s face, and Davy stroked the dog’s head, as he said shamefacedly:

“I thought ye’d be better wantin’ me. What was the use o’ me hangin’ about when they were just pokin’ and pryin’ and sayin’. ‘Has *nothing* been done in the way of decorating for the past fifty years?’ That was the auld yin—the daughter wasna so provokin’, she whiles said something wasna bad. Mebbe they just came for a ploy. Rich folk hev a job pittin’ in their time. If ye’ve a caur and a shover eatin’ their heads off, ye hev to find a road for them ilka day.”

“Then,” said Isobel, sitting up very straight, “you think they don’t really want it. Because if they don’t, I do.”

Davy's jaw dropped, his wife sat with a half-darned sock suspended in her hand, and they both stared at their lodger.

Isobel gave a little nervous laugh, as she went on, "I don't wonder you're astonished. I am myself. Up to this afternoon I had no more thought of buying the Place than of flying to the moon. I daresay I'm mad to think of it, but when I heard those people today discussing it, patronising it, planning how it could be altered, I just couldn't bear it, for, you see, I love the old house. . . . Perhaps that sounds silly to you. . . ." There was a note of appeal in her voice, but Mr. and Mrs. Bruce were silent, and she went on:

"I must tell you, too, that I'm not a bit rich. I've just enough to keep myself and a little over to help other people, but I've some money lying idle and I don't see why I shouldn't invest it as I please." She stopped, and the husband and wife looked at each other. Isobel read in their faces not jubilation, but doubt. Who was this young woman who wanted to buy their Place? English, by her tongue, a dweller in cities, ignorant of country ways. What would she do with a quiet old house in a sparsely populated district?

"It's ower big for ye," said Davy gently.

"Of course it is," Isobel agreed. "I would just need to roost in a corner of it."

Mrs. Bruce looked up and said sharply, "D'ye mean to keep a boarding-house?"

Isobel repudiated the idea.

"Oh, dear me, no. That's the last thing I'd think of. I can't explain it, but I feel I must own it, whether I live in it or not."

"If a house is no' lived in," said Mrs. Bruce, "it goes wrong. Though I air the place regularly, and look after it as well's I can, it's a lot the worse of being shut up."

"Well, I'll live in it," cried the girl, "and fire a room a day all winter."

"The thing's no' possible," said Mrs. Bruce, flyping a sock. But his wife's air of finality roused in Mr. Bruce a spirit of contradiction.

"I wouldna say that. Na, na. It's better, surely, to hev somebody in the Place that was fond o't and would mak' it their home, than folk that would only use it for the summer months, an' the Place is no' in bad repair. The auld laird kept it wind- and water-tight, if he didna waste siller on decorating. A lick o' paint's a' it needs, outside and in. What about the furniture? There's a lot left, though the best o't was sold."

"Could I decide about the furniture later? The lawyer'll be able to tell me what it's valued at. Will you give me his name and address, please?"

"Aye, I'll dae that. I can say it off—Messrs. Dundas & Dundas, 2 Castle Street,

Edinburgh. That's the firm, ye ken, but the Dundases are a' deid. It's one, Simpson, that comes out here when he's wanted, a plausible young man and a grand cracker. You write to him and see what he says. Of course Mr. Gideon left everything in ma hands, and though I wouldna like to tak' the responsibility of selling the house, I think I might hae some say in wha gets it, me that's been here a' ma days, and ma faither afore me, and his faither afore him, back twae hunner year. And a' things bein' equal, I'd rather hev you in the Place than that auld impident wummun that cam' here the day. What do you say, Yarrow, ma man?"

Isobel rose. "Thank you, Mr. Bruce," she said, "I'll write at once. Good night, Mrs. Bruce, I'm afraid I've disturbed you."

"Ye hevna disturbed me. I was just finishing off some mending afore bedtime. It's lang licht noo, but it'll be the langest day afore we know where we are, and syne we'll be hasting on again to winter."

Isobel went out by the back door, and wandering down to the fence looked over to the little glen, with the rowan-trees, and the water-fall: she could just see the crow-step gables of the Place. It was getting dark now and the birds had long since gone to bed. A cold wind rustled through the little wood, then all was quiet again. In London they would be holding high revel, but Kitty, Isobel thought, would probably be by the fire in the book-room, poring over some tome. Or would she be hearing, like Rawdon Crawley, the feet of the bailiffs at the door? Well, if she, Isobel, got her wish, Kitty would have a companion in anxious fears. She turned and went indoors.

The letter to the lawyer was ready for the postman next morning. Isobel spent an anxious two days, fearing that someone might have snapped up her house, but when the reply came, it did not sound as though Mr. Simpson had been besieged by offers. He noted that she was willing to pay £1,500 for the house, garden, and paddock. About the furniture he would let her know when he had ascertained his client's wishes.

Isobel took the letter to the kitchen, where Mrs. Bruce was baking scones on a girdle hung over the fire.

Mrs. Bruce had no fault to find with Isobel as a lodger, though she thought her idea of buying the Place a "daft-like" one, and she was nothing if not honest and was not going to have the girl cheated by any lawyer.

"It's mebbe but right," she said, "for him to try to get all he can for his client, but Mr. Gideon's own words to me were, 'Let the furniture go with the house,' says he, 'it would fetch little at a sale,' and it's true. The things'll last long enough where they are, but I don't believe they'd stand shiftn'; they're frail, maist o' them. Come ower wi' me this afternoon and see for yoursel'."

“Would this morning do?” Isobel asked. “I’ve promised to go to tea with Mrs. Whitson this afternoon.”

Mrs. Bruce thought for a moment. “Setterday morning’s aye thrang, but if ye’re ready at ten I could go afore I stert the dinner. It’s mince the day and that doesna tak’ long.”

Isobel asked if she could do anything to help, but Mrs. Bruce spurned the notion.

“I daursay no’. It would tak’ longer to show you than to do the thing masel’.”

At ten o’clock prompt she was ready, dressed in a hat and coat to walk the short distance.

“It’s no’ often I’m out at this hour,” she said, her eyes on the fields. “We’re needin’ rain for the turnips. It’s been a dry spring, but the ground got a good soaking wi’ the snow in March. It was the worst storm I ever mind. For a week the vans couldna get through wi’ bread and meat and such like, they just a’ stuck in drifts. And when the roads were cleared on it came again! It was the sheep that we were vex’t about. We couldn’t get near the turnips, and hay was that scarce they were fair starvin’, and hundreds were buried, puir things.”

“We read about it,” said Isobel, “but though it was miserably cold in London we had no snow to speak of.”

As she spoke she was noting everything with excited interest. The old gate-posts with the bears—she hadn’t realised what a dignified entrance it was. The short drive through the paddock needed weeding, that must be seen about, and the doors and window-frames would have to be painted. What an amusing knocker on the door! and an ancient iron scraper by the step. When Mrs. Bruce fumbled with the lock she could have pushed her aside, so anxious was she to get into her own house. Everything looked different viewed from the angle of ownership. How pleasant it was to enter and look straight into the garden, and she was meditating possible improvements to the little square hall, when it occurred to her that such a garden would take a lot of keeping: the grass alone would be almost one man’s work.

“It’s gey rough,” said Mrs. Bruce behind her. “Davy canna spare a man often, and it would need constant keepin’.”

“It’s a large garden,” Isobel admitted. “I might get a man who knew something about gardens, with a wife who could keep the house.”

“Ye *might*,”—Mrs. Bruce’s tone was not hopeful—“but a good couple’s no’ easy got. If the man’s eident, the wife’s lazy; and if the wife’s a worker, likely enough the man’s a waster. But of course ye can try.”

Isobel had brought a note-book and pencil with her, and she now entered the

dining-room prepared to note down what furniture it contained.

A small Chippendale sideboard, a squat mahogany cupboard, a round walnut table, and some chairs were the chief items. But at one side of the fireplace was a rounded recess from the top of the panelling to the ceiling, fitted with shelves and a black oak door.

Isobel, examining it, exclaimed at the beauty of the shell design at the top, and declared, "This room would be thrown away as a dining-room; that small room across the hall is quite big enough to eat in. This'll be my parlour. That recess would look lovely painted pale green, with some old china on the shelves and the door kept open against the wall. It's a beautiful piece of wood. The walls would be pale green too, and the panelling only needs to be oiled, or whatever you do to panelling. This is a perfectly good table, Mrs. Bruce, and the sideboard's Chippendale. I wonder why they were left?"

"Mebbe they've been mended," said Mrs. Bruce, "and are gey frail. There never was a sale, ye ken, Mr. Gideon didna want that. He just got a dealer out to offer for some things he knew were kinna rare. I'm no' heedin' for old furniture masel', things get old soon enough, but I ken that the dealer gave a lot o' money for things he took away, and the rest was just left."

"All the better for me," said Isobel. "Let's see what's in the other room." There they found a sofa, an arm-chair or two, a bureau with a glass-doored bookcase, and a small gate-legged table. On the sofa some rugs were folded, which, when examined, turned out to be Persian, well-worn but in fairly good repair.

Isobel was jubilant. "There, you see, Mrs. Bruce, I've all I want—this room to eat in, the room opposite to sit in, the garden to step into. . . . The walnut table, the sideboard, the bread-and-butter cupboard, and the chairs will come in here; this sofa and these arm-chairs go into the parlour. That bureau will stand against the wall in a good light, and the bookcase will come off its top and stand alone. But I mustn't waste your time, Mrs. Bruce. Won't you go back to your work and leave me to go through the rest of the house? I'll lock up all right."

"Well, mebbe I'd better—Saturday morning and all, and you may be long enough at this job. Here's the key." And Mrs. Bruce departed, to Isobel's great relief.

Now she felt she could really enjoy herself. She took another look at the room she meant to sit in, and decided where the sofa would stand, the bureau, and the bookcase. The sofa was hard with a tight little bolster at either end, and was covered in faded glazed chintz, but it would be kept as it was. The floor, fortunately, was polished, and needed nothing but a rug or two.

The room which was to be the dining-room had only one window which looked into the garden, but it could be lightened with cream walls, and it would look nice at night with candles on the round table. Was it, perhaps, the very table at which Murray of Broughton had supped almost two hundred years ago? It might be, Isobel thought. Tables lasted a long time, and, anyway, the table had been there long before the chairs; they were of a later date, and mahogany, not walnut.

In the little square hall hung a framed map of the district, coloured, with every hill and stream marked. Under it stood a large chest, big enough to hold any missing bride, and, rather apprehensively, remembering that she was alone in the house, Isobel turned the key, and pushed up the heavy lid. There was nothing inside but a copy of the *Illustrated London News*, dated 6 September, 1885.

Isobel pursued her way through the house, noting with satisfaction that the stairs were oak and had never been carpeted. There were only three bedrooms that could be used (the other six being practically empty), and Isobel chose one at the end of the passage, partly because it had a lovely view of the glen, but mostly because it was near the servants' rooms and she felt she might be glad at night of human companionship. She was relieved to find that the servants' rooms seemed to have been left intact, and were airy and comfortable. There were two bathrooms, one quite modern, at the foot of the turret stair which led to Gideon Veitch's room. Isobel found herself mounting the stair, and, standing in the little room, was puzzled to know why she should feel as if it were the heart of the old house.

Going downstairs she opened the door of the drawing-room, a large, bleak apartment, and decided that empty it must remain, at least for the present.

A long passage, punctuated by small windows, led to the kitchen premises, which seemed to have been left just as they had been last used, complete to the canisters on the shelves, and the huge brass jelly pans. In one corner stood a table with such an array of paraffin lamps as the girl had never seen, of every size, from tall table lamps to small hand ones for bedrooms. To town-bred Isobel, who was very chary about blowing out a lamp, and never moved one if she could help it, the array seemed as dangerous as a display of bombs.

The kitchen premises seemed immense, so many long stone passages, and doors leading into places she did not explore. How was it all to be kept clean? Anyway, there was no basement, she thought thankfully, as she unlocked the back door and found herself in the May sunshine.

It was odd how a short distance made such a difference in the view. Here were fresh vistas; she was looking down an avenue of trees which she had not noticed before to another hill-side.

A wooden bench stood against the wall outside the door, and a small solid table. Here, thought Isobel, a maid might peel potatoes and shell peas, and, when at leisure, sew a seam or read. "And," she added, "if I'd no maids, I'd enjoy working myself at this paradise of a back door."

Reluctantly she locked up and went to have a look at the garden, deciding that she would begin at once and do a certain amount of weeding every day. She had never gardened in her life, and was not at all sure that she knew weeds when she saw them, but it would be fun to work in her own garden, and gardening books would teach her something.

It was about three miles from Glenbucho Place to Ormiston-shaw, but that afternoon Isobel's mind was so full of plans that the road seemed all too short, and it was with surprise that she found herself at a white-washed gatehouse, and realised that she had reached her destination.

Althea was playing with a puppy at the front door, and came rushing to meet the visitor, shouting a welcome as she ran.

"Here you are! You found the way all right? You couldn't easily miss it, could you? Mamma's in the drawing-room. P'r'aps we'd better have tea first, and go out afterwards?"

"That would be very nice," said Isobel, thinking that tea would be welcome, for she had been too excited after exploring her new possession to do justice to her landlady's broth and mince collops.

"All right, then. This is Stanley Baldwin," as the puppy lumbered towards them. "Rather an angel, isn't he? I christened himself myself, for I thought we had to do something about Mr. Baldwin's retiring. No, Stanley, you're not going into the drawing-room. You know what you did yesterday. Mamma doesn't like her things chewed."

The butler was standing in the hall, and with a "You take him, Steel," Althea deposited the puppy in his arms. Steel departed, his head held rigidly back as Stanley Baldwin's tongue made affectionate advances to his face.

On closer acquaintance Mrs. Whitson proved even more friendly and simple than Isobel had thought her at their first meeting. Without gush or superlatives, her welcome sounded as if she were sincerely glad to see her visitor.

"You're not as early as we hoped," she said. "Althea and I have been sitting waiting for you since three o'clock. Althea wanted tea outside, but there's still a nip in the air. Come and sit in the window. Now, what shall we talk about? 'Family affairs and ships and things?' It's such a nice change to talk to someone who knows nothing about the neighbours, or the little local affairs we usually discuss."

“Tell me first,” said Isobel, “how your Coronation party went off?”

“Grand!” said Althea, who was kneeling on the floor. “At least, I enjoyed it immensely myself, and I think everyone else did. But oh! how I wish I’d been in the Abbey. It must have been like turning back the pages of history. And there may not be another Coronation for years and years.”

“*Many* years, we hope,” said her mother, and turned to Isobel, saying, “I’m rather sorry now I didn’t take Althea to London. The thought of the crowds frightened me, but that was feeble, because, after all, the crowds were part of the show, and a wonderful sight in themselves. The British Empire keeping festival isn’t a sight to be lightly missed.”

“I know,” said Isobel, “I feel that too. And what it must have looked like to the watching nations! Britain, like a great golden galleon, all lit up and crowded with happy people.”

Mrs. Whitson looked at her guest in an interested way as she nodded agreement, while Althea cried:

“What a jolly idea. The word galleon always makes me see pictures.”

Presently they went to the dining-room for tea, and as they talked, Mrs. Whitson said, “Surely your name is a Scots one—Logan.”

“I am a Scot,” Isobel said; “but I was born in England, and have lived all my life there, mostly in London. It’s only since I came to Glenbucho that I’ve realised how much of a Scot I really am at heart. It’s incredible that I’ve only been here about ten days.”

“Why? Has the time dragged so?”

“Dragged? No. But every day I seem to have sunk deeper into the spirit of the place, until now I don’t feel as if I could bear to leave it. Perhaps that sounds rather silly.”

“Not a bit silly,” said Althea, “only right and proper. No-one who could live at Glenbucho would want to live in any other place. I’ve been at school in England for years, and it’s all right, of course, lovely and all that, but compared to Glenbucho _____”

Mrs. Whitson smiled at Isobel, and said “English school life has made Althea a perfervid Scot. She can hardly forgive me for being English.”

“You’re only half English, Mamma,” her daughter assured her earnestly, “and Daddy was pretty nearly all Scots, and I was born in Scotland, and that counts for a lot.”

“My husband bought Ormiston-shaw when we married,” Mrs. Whitson explained, “so Althea has known no other home. I’m bound to say it’s a countryside

that you become very much attached to, and the people are very likeable.”

“Like Miss Agnes Home, Merchant?” said Isobel.

“Yes, I’m very fond of Agnes Home. She’s friend and counsellor and helper to everyone in the district, and her interest in the children and the young things growing up is wonderful to see. Talk about acidulated spinsters! To my mind there is no-one more large-hearted than an unmarried woman. When someone made a remark about the Mothers’ Union not being intended for spinsters, Agnes laughed the objection to scorn. ‘Havers,’ she said, ‘have the spinsters no’ more time to pray for the bairns than their trauchled mothers?’ Children home from boarding-school, boys and girls on holiday from their first places, all report at once to Agnes Home.”

“Yes,” said Althea, “I never feel settled down till I’ve been to the shop and told Miss Home all my news. You see, she really *cares* to listen, she’s not just being polite like most people. And if she is not pleased with you, she let’s you know it. My goodness! I’ve had some scoldings from her!”

“And no doubt you deserved them,” said her mother. “Now, Miss Logan, tell us frankly what you’d like to do. Shall we sit here and talk? Or would you like to see the garden? Or the house?”

“May I see both?” said Isobel. “Would there be time?”

“All the time in the world,” said Althea. “It’s not much after five. When d’you dine at Mrs. Bruce’s?”

“I don’t dine—I mean to say, not in the evening. One o’clock is my dinner hour, and a very good time I find it. At six-thirty I have a sort of high tea or supper.”

“We won’t let you be late,” said Mrs. Whitson, “for I know Mrs. Bruce is a busy woman, too busy, she says, to come to the W.R.I. Althea will run you over in a few minutes. . . . There’s nothing much to see here really, the house is very ordinary.”

“I’d like to see it,” Isobel assured her, “for at the moment houses are all important to me. I’ve just done an awful thing—I’ve bought Glenbucho Place.”

Althea gave a squeal of delight, and clutched Isobel’s arm.

“Of all lovely things to buy! Mr. Evident Murray’s ghost’ll haunt you.”

Her mother said, “But that’s delightful news, and why d’you call it awful?”

“Because it was a reckless thing to do. I haven’t money to keep it up as it ought to be kept, but I simply couldn’t resist it, especially when I feared some people were going to snap it up; I heard them talking about the changes they would make, and I couldn’t bear it. . . . Happily it isn’t a large house, but even so, I’ll just have to camp in a corner of it.”

Isobel broke off to admire the hall and the staircase, adding, “Georgian houses have always something spacious and serene about them, don’t you think?”

“Oh, but your House isn’t like any other house,” Althea told her. “It’s a house with a story, an historical house. Will you let me come and see all over it?”

“Yes, do, please, and come very soon, and we’ll have a picnic tea at the back door, a delectable spot. Shall we say Monday?”

“Yes, let’s, and may I bring my Mamma? And if you want any outside painting done, I’m quite good. I don’t care *how* messy I get.”

Isobel went back to her lodgings that evening feeling that she had not only had a very pleasant afternoon, but had made two new friends.

CHAPTER X

. . . Letters—not dissertations, not sentimental effusions, not strings of witticisms; but real letters such as any person of plain sense would be glad to receive.

LADY LOUISA STUART

KITTY BAILLIE was having breakfast in bed, not because she enjoyed it—there were few things she liked less—but because her housekeeper, Mrs. Auchinvole, thought it an excellent plan to keep her mistress in her room till about ten o'clock, so that she might put the house to rights in a leisurely manner. What was the use, she thought, hurrying to get the dining-room ready for half a grapefruit, and tea and toast for one? Had there been a man needing a good breakfast before he went out at nine o'clock, it would have been a different matter.

Kitty quite saw her housekeeper's point, and was inclined to agree with her, but, for the sake of her own self-respect, she was always up at eight for her bath, returning to bed to eat her meagre meal.

Mrs. Auchinvole brought it in this morning, as she always did, with everything nicely arranged, the small silver teapot and jug shining, a rack of the crispest toast, marmalade and butter in tiny dishes, and the grapefruit carefully prepared. When she had set the tray on the table by the bed, it was her custom to stay for a few minutes' chat. Kitty could have done without this ceremony, but it would have been cruel not to listen when the good woman was so anxious to tell about "a bit in the paper that said . . ." Kitty herself read *The Times*, but as she took the *Daily Mail* for her maid, there was always something startling to hear.

This morning Mrs. Auchinvole, folding her hands over her apron, said, "Two murders to-day, Madam, and another girl disappeared. We're living in awful times. I really don't know what the world's coming to—ye hardly dare lift a paper for there's sure to be something horrible. Did you notice in yesterday's paper the bit about the old woman who lived alone with six cats? No? Well, of course she died, and her having no friends or relations nobody heeded about her, and she'd been dead two days when the neighbours heard the cats goin' on with an awful yowlin', and saw that the milk bottles were standing at the door. They told the police, and they got in somehow and what d'ye think they found?"

Mrs. Auchinvole paused dramatically, and then said in a hoarse whisper, "The poor old body was lying dead on the floor, and the cats *had commenced for t'eat her!*"

"How very disgusting," said Kitty, taking up her letters from the tray, and

becoming rather ostentatiously absorbed in the handwriting on the envelopes Mrs. Auchinvole went on, "Ye see, the poor beasts hadna had any food mebbe for days, but it makes ye grue to think of it. . . . I can't believe it's right for a woman to live alone, for you never know *what* may happen. The strongest can take a seizure, and if it's not Providence that strikes ye down, it may be one of these terrible lawless men that ye read about. It seems it doesn't matter where ye are, ye may be keeping a wee shop in a crowded street, or live in a lonely cottage, the danger's the same. I can't help thinkin' the pollis are not very good at their job, or there wouldn't be so many murderers going about, and the law's queer too. Who would be a father these days? Ye're liable to be murdered any day by your son. It's enough for the mother to say that he did it for her sake, and any halffin can get away with it; in fact, the jury's very near complimentin' him."

Kitty laughed, in spite of herself, and acknowledged that it was a dangerous world, and her housekeeper, encouraged, lingered longer.

"I was going to ask you, Madam, have ye any news of Miss Logan, that went away to visit Scotland? I was dreaming about her last night, that's why I ask."

"Well," said Kitty, "I see there's a letter from her here. I'll wait to read it though, for my tea's getting cold."

Mrs. Auchinvole moved reluctantly to the door, and paused to say, "We need some things if ye're at the Stores to-day. Parmesan cheese and coffee and some of the thin biscuits ye like. Have ye thought what we'll give the folk that are coming to lunch to-morrow?"

"I haven't, but we must plan something nice. You'll give me a list of things needed before I go out? Thank you."

Kitty ate her toast and drank her tea, then turned to her letters. She opened Isobel's first, and was surprised to find it so short. It ran:

"You always thought of me, didn't you, Kitty dear, as a cautious person, cautious almost to dullness? Not one who would ever be likely to be carried away by a whim, a sudden enthusiasm, a burst of sentiment. What you will think now I don't know, for I have actually gone and bought Glenbucho Place. I am well aware that it was a perfectly crazy thing to do, to saddle myself with a country house, I, a lone spinster with only a very modest competency. It will take every penny of my income and every hour of my days to keep the place going, but, oh, Kitty, to have a place of one's own and such a place as Glenbucho! I simply couldn't have borne to see it go to strangers (that comes well from me, who a

month ago had never even heard of the place); from the first moment I saw the house I knew it meant something very special to me. . . .

“Write me a word of encouragement, Kitty, for though I don’t repent, I have my moments of deep misgivings.—Your loving ISOBEL.”

“P.S.—There are three acres of *obstreperous* garden!!”

“My goodness,” said Kitty to herself, letting the letter fall and sitting up. “Imagine Isobel whistling prudence down the wind like that! This is most exciting. I must write to her at once,” and she leapt out of bed and began to dress.

The moment she got into the book-room she seized pen and paper and began:

“I loved you almost from the first moment, Isobel, my friend, but I never expected to be surprised by you. Steady, dependable, staunch, are some of the words I would have used to describe you, but your letter, which has just come in, gives me an entirely new idea of you. You are capable, I find, of doing *daft* things, and I love you for it. I don’t suppose it was sensible—you a lone woman and a townswoman at that—to buy an old house standing in an obstreperous garden, in a sparsely populated countryside, but it appealed to you, you felt you wanted it, and you were quite right to give it to yourself. You say so little, and I want to know so much that I’d like to dash off to Euston and catch the Royal Scot, and be with you this evening. But why shouldn’t the Auchinvole and I come up and help you to get the place put in order? No reason whatever. Mrs. A. would cope with the oil-lamps and the cooking, and you and I would put the rooms in order and tackle the garden. I do know something of gardening.”

At that moment the housekeeper came in with a list of groceries required, and Kitty, after glancing over it, said, “You were asking about Miss Logan; her letter this morning has some startling news.”

Mrs. Auchinvole raised her hands. “I knew it. She’s going to be married, and a handsome bride she’ll make. I was sure that was what my dream meant.”

“Much more exciting than a marriage,” said Kitty. “Miss Logan’s bought an old country house near where she’s staying.”

The pleased excitement died out of the housekeeper’s face.

“Bought a house,” she repeated flatly, then, brightening, added, “Mebbe she’s met someone who’ll hang up his hat in it.”

“Oh, no, she hasn’t. Such a thing is far from her thoughts. This is a very

interesting historical house that Miss Logan has bought, it goes back to the time of the Jacobites. I stayed in it years ago, for it was owned by distant relatives of mine. I don't expect it has changed at all. I know they still use oil-lamps. I've been thinking it would be rather a scheme for you and me to go and help Miss Logan to settle in."

As she spoke Kitty looked at her housekeeper, and seeing a distinctly blank expression taking possession of her face, asked:

"Don't you like the country, Mrs. Auchinvole?"

"Well, Madam, I don't mind it for a little in summer, that's to say, if it's a house with all modern requirements; but I draw the line at oil-lamps. Ye see, I lived in Aberdeenshire till I was eighteen, so I know what it's like and I wouldn't go back to it."

Looking reproachfully at her mistress, she went on:

"And us so nicely settled here with the flat all newly decorated and all, it would be an awful pity to shut it up and mebbe come back to a burst boiler or something, and the place ruined. Miss Logan's a sensible young lady and kind-hearted, and she knows you're not that awfully strong and would never ask such a sacrifice from you."

"It would be no sacrifice to me," said Kitty. "I'd love it. But we'll say no more about it at present." And when her domestic helper had left the room, she turned back to her letter.

"Alas!" she wrote, "I spoke without Mrs. Auchinvole. When I told her a minute ago about my plan to go to Scotland and help you 'flit,' she resolutely poured cold water on it. It seems she hates the country with its oil-lamps and absence of shops and cinemas, and as I alone would be more of a nuisance than a help, the plan's off. Perhaps you wouldn't have wanted us anyway, but oh! how I would have loved it! I've been thinking what an extraordinary effect Glenbucho must have had on you: the Isobel of the Queen's Court Hotel would never have bought a place on her own.

"I miss you dreadfully, my dear, especially in the evenings when we used to talk and talk, and what you do and say and think matters a lot to me. . . .

"I am gradually finding out old friends and making a little circle. The Boothbys (the people in the flat above me, in case you've forgotten), who are going off till the end of October, asked me to dine the other night. There was a vague barrister there, and his wife, and a good-looking young couple only a few months married, and a man who has some sort

of post on a newspaper, whom I found very interesting. I was quite nervous beforehand, wondering if I'd find anything to say, but I found I could keep my end up, and enjoyed the evening.

"Mrs. Temple I visit every day, between tea and dinner is often a dull time for her. We are both reading *Gone with the Wind*, and compare notes on it excitedly. We've come to where Scarlett kills the Yankee robber, and gentle Melanie helps to bury him. Grand! I don't think I ever read a book that so took possession of me.

"Yesterday I lunched in Hampstead with Jessica Irwin. It was strange to be there again. I stood and looked at our old house, and it was so like itself that I could hardly believe that if I rang the bell Katie from Skye wouldn't appear, and say with a forgiving smile, 'Forgotten your key, again, mem!'

"I didn't see Jessica's Communist son. I expect he was hatching nefarious schemes in some low pub in Soho, but I saw the girl Echo. She looks so ordinary and so completely sensible that I could hardly resist asking her why she felt it necessary to be a Buddhist. But Buddhist or no, she's a good daughter to her mother. One could see how much sympathy and understanding existed between them by the way they could laugh at each other and tell stories against each other. They amuse and interest one another, and are happy together. I confess I felt a little envious of Jessica, for the companionship of a mother and daughter can be one of the most thoroughly delightful things in this life of ours.

"Jessica's lunch was excellent. I must ask for the recipe of an egg and mushroom dish we had. I find I'm very rusty about ordering meals. I haven't an idea beyond the most ordinary things, and the worse of it is, I've lost all my cookery books! I must get some and let the A. try new recipes. She's quite good, and, I think, enjoys cooking.

"My dear, I am *dreadfully* sorry not to be helping you at this time, all the more because you stood by me so nobly. Without you I'd never have had the courage to take this flat, and face all that it meant, and yours is such an immensely greater adventure. Let me know if I can be of use shopping for you here.

"All my love and best of wishes,

"KATIE."

CHAPTER XI

IT was a dry June in Scotland that year, and Isobel was able to get on with her work of taming the garden. She was in her bath every morning by six o'clock, and at the Place by six-thirty.

The second morning, on going downstairs, she found her landlady waiting for her.

"I've poured you a plate of porridge," she announced. "It's a daft-like thing to work on an empty stomach."

So every morning Isobel supped a plate of porridge and cream, and was surprised to find herself ready for a large breakfast at half-past eight.

So far she had not been able to hear of a man and wife to help her to run her new possession, and rather reluctantly made up her mind to advertise.

"Ye'll get a wheen queer characters applying for the job," Mrs. Bruce warned her, and Isobel had to own that she was a true prophet.

Most of the applicants were obviously impossible, only one of the letters seemed worth attention. It was from Glasgow, from a man who had been a gardener and had lost his job on the death of his mistress. They had moved to Glasgow where his wife's people lived, and he had been trying, without much success, to get some gardens to keep.

"That is the only likely one," Mrs. Bruce declared. "They've lived in the country and know what it's like. Ye see, he had to leave when his mistress died. Afore that he would have everything held up to him, a cottage, and coal, and so on. There's nothing in the world as helpless as gentry's servants when they lose their job. Ye'd better see that couple."

"Would they come out here?" Isobel asked, rather helplessly, but her landlady pointed out that it would be cheaper and easier for Isobel to go to Glasgow.

"It's no' that far in the train, about two hours, and the first train that leaves at eight is quicker than that. You're such a grand riser turned, it would be nothing for you to get that one. Write and tell them to meet ye in the general waiting-room at the Central Station at ten o'clock. Ye'd have time to tak' a look at Glesgae, and get the two train, and be back in time for your tea."

"It sounds very easy," said Isobel. "What a splendid organiser you are, Mrs. Bruce."

"Me! Mercy, no. But I've been often enough for a day to Glesgae. They've fine shops there, both good and cheap, and the folk are hearty—no' like Edinburgh. I dinna like to walk along Princes Street, it's that wide and open, ye feel as if ye were

on a platform and everybody was looking at yer country feet and country clothes: ower grand a'thegether. But in Glesgae ye can lose yoursel' among the folk and enjoy the shop windows."

Isobel wrote as directed, and asked Robert Cooper and his wife to meet her in the general waiting-room of the Central Station at ten o'clock on Thursday morning.

She felt rather nervous as the hour approached, for she had never interviewed anyone before, and doubted her own capacity. Mrs. Bruce had suggested some questions to ask, such as, "Are you honest, sober, and good-tempered?" But they did not seem to get one very far, it was so easy to answer them in the affirmative.

"I doubt," thought Isobel, "if I'm any judge of character; but anyway, I must not be sentimental and take them if they look pathetic." And with a stern face she marched up to the door of the waiting-room. Looking round she saw several women with cases, evidently waiting for trains, one tired-looking girl with a baby in her arms, and, in the far corner, a man and woman.

After a minute's hesitation, Isobel walked over to the couple, and asked, "Are you by any chance Mr. and Mrs. Cooper?" They stood up, and the man made a movement as if saluting, while the woman murmured, "Yes, mem."

"Oh, then it's all right. I'm Miss Logan, who put the advertisement in the *Herald* for a couple to look after a house and garden."

She looked at the two people before her. The man was small and thin, with anxious eyes, and the woman small and fat, with a happy look about her. They were tidily dressed, though the clothes they wore looked as if they had seen much service.

Isobel found it very hard to begin launching questions, so she said, "I've had quite a journey this morning and I'd be glad of some coffee. I see there's a tea-room in the station. It would be more comfortable to sit and talk there, don't you think?"

It was certainly easier, Isobel found, to dally with a cup of coffee while she talked, and she hoped that the situation was also eased for the Coopers, who had chosen tea and cakes.

Turning to the man, Isobel said, "Now, will you tell me, please, where you were last employed and what references you can give me?"

Robert Cooper hastily swallowed what was in his mouth, and replied, "I was ten years gardener with Mrs. Johnstone at Hattonknowe in Selkirkshire, with two boys under me. When I went first it was to help the old gardener, and when he died I got his place. My mistress died two years ago—she wasna long ill—and there was nobody to come after her, so everything was sold up. I've a reference from the minister of the church we attended as to ma character, ye ken, and one or two of the gentlemen round gave me references as a gardener. They thought I'd get another

place quite easy, but I couldna hear of a thing. Of course we had to leave our cottage, and Tibbie here thought if we came near her own folk in Glasgow I might get in as a jobbing gardener. But there was nothing doing. Them that have big gardens keep a whole-time man, and in wee gardens the owners do it themselves. And there's hardly ever an advert for a gardener. I go to the Library and look at the papers every day. When I saw yours I wrote at once, and yours is the first answer I've got."

Isobel had been studying the man's face as he spoke, rather liking the look of him. There was something dog-like and honest about his eyes that appealed to her. He did not look as if he would be good at pushing, there was nothing of the hustler about him, but, for all that, he might be a conscientious worker.

"I'll tell you about my place," she said, "and, first, I'd like you to understand that I'm not at all rich, and have no money at all to fling about. I've bought a house with a fairly big garden, in the Borders, about two hours' journey from Glasgow, not so very far, I should think, from your old home in Selkirkshire. The garden has been more or less left to itself for the last year or two, and will need a lot of putting in order, but it could be made a lovely garden. My idea is to have a couple who, with a little help, will run the house and garden. They will live in the house, the kitchen premises are roomy and comfortable. I don't expect to have many visitors, and I mean to help a lot in the house, so there ought not to be such a vast amount of work to do. Glenbucho Place (that's the name of the house) is only about a mile from the village and station, so it isn't at all cut off."

Isobel then turned her attention to the wife, and asked, "Do you like the country, Mrs. Cooper?"

Mrs. Cooper blushed, and nodded vigorously. "I do that," she said. "It's an awful change coming back to Glasgow and livin' in a tenement after havin' a cottage and garden to yoursel'. Everything's that clean in the country."

"You've never been in domestic service, have you?"

"Oh, yes, Mem. I was table-maid at Hattonknowe when Robert there married me. Of course, I'm out of practice, but it would soon come back to me, if I had to do it."

"And can you cook at all?"

"Well, there hasn't been much cooking needed with us lately, but I often used to try my hand if Cook was out, and if I had a cookery-book I might manage not so bad."

Isobel thought for a minute, then said, "I couldn't give you more than £100 a year between you. The work will be fairly hard, but you'll get peace to do it. I don't

think I'm difficult to live with, and I see no reason why we shouldn't be quite happy together. I shall write to the minister who knew you at Hattonknowe, and meantime you might think it over. I'm in rather a hurry to get settled. By the way, you've no family?"

Mr. Cooper's eyes sought the ground, and he wore a look of deep dejection. His wife, after a glance in his direction, spoke.

"Yes, we have," she said with a gulp. "We didna mean to mention him, for near all the adverts say 'no children.' Archibald's six, mem, at the school, and an awful nice wee boy, though I say it mase'. Ma father and mother are quite willing to keep him if we can get a job without him, but he's a country boy born, and he doesna thrive the same in the city. Of course I know it makes a difference, another in the house to feed; but we'd be willing to take less money, and it'll no' be long before Archibald's a help. At Hattonknowe he was aye daft to be out following his father, watching him tie up plants, and learnin' the names o' the flowers. It would be a treat to see the bairn in the country again."

Isobel avoided meeting Mrs. Cooper's pleading eyes, and tried to think what she ought to say. It was foolish, perhaps, to take on a growing boy, probably full of mischief, and noisy, but she was conscious of rather liking the idea. A boy playing about that sunny back door, going off to Glenbucho school in the morning and coming back hungry to a good meal, climbing trees, whistling, how cheerful it would be!

At last she said, "It's a pity to separate a child from his parents, and there's room enough at the place for a small boy. We won't make Archibald an objection."

"Then, there's no need for us to take time to think it over," said Archibald's mother, "is there, Rubbert? If you're willing to give us a trial, Mem, *we're* willing. We've a furnished room that we pay for by the week, so there's nothing to keep us. Ye see, we had to sell our furniture, it took ower much to store it, and there seemed little chance of our gettin' a home of our own again. But of course you'd mebbe . . . likely you have others to see?"

"No," said Isobel. "As I told you, I think we could work together very well. I must wait for a reply from the minister, but that'll be all right, I'm sure. . . ."

"Oh, it will," Mrs. Cooper assured her. "Mr. Stronach thought a lot of Rubbert; he was a deacon, and would have been an elder if we'd stayed on, and I joined the church, under Mr. Stronach. He's an auld man, awful nice, wi' a beard."

"Well," said Isobel, "we can try it anyway for a month. If you've a weekly room it isn't as if you were giving up anything, burning your boats, so to speak. When could you come?"

“This is Friday,” said Mrs. Cooper. “Whit about Monday? It’ll no’ take long to do a washing and pack, and that’s a’ there’s to do. Isn’t that right Rubbert?”

“Ay, that’s right,” Robert agreed. “I’d like to get stertit just as soon as I can, the season’s getting on.”

“Then,” said Isobel, “will you take the two o’clock train on Monday from this station? You don’t need to change with that train, and the station is Glenbucho.” She opened her purse and took out some money. “This is for your fares and any small expenses you may have in leaving. Your train on Monday will be met.”

She rose and shook hands with her new friends, and stood watching from the door of the tea-room as they threaded their way through the crowd to a side-entrance.

Had she done right, she wondered? They certainly looked a decent little couple, but she was no discerner of the heart. Reflecting that time would tell, she went out into the busy streets to do some shopping, after which she lunched at the Central Hotel, and caught the two train for home.

She had made no arrangement to be met, knowing that she would enjoy the walk, and so busy were her thoughts that she found herself round the turn of the road, and gazing at the grey walls of the Place before she felt she had well started.

Mrs. Bruce, in a black dress and a satin apron, was waiting for her on the doorstep. She exclaimed at the sight of the parcels, and said, “Eh, I might have been down the road to give ye a help. Come awa’ in and get yer tea; it’s a terrible tiring thing a day in Glesgae.”

When Isobel had washed, Mrs. Bruce brought in the Britannia metal teapot, and, fitting it into its green wool nest, asked, “Ye got on all right?”

Isobel smiled at her. “I’ll be in to tell you and Mr. Bruce all about it when you’ve time to listen. . . . You might take these parcels with you. I thought you’d be able to use them.”

“Perfect nonsense,” said Mrs. Bruce ungraciously, eyeing a baker’s pasteboard box as if it were a bomb, but Isobel was beginning to understand her landlady.

Later in the evening, when she knew the farmer would have read his *Scotsman*, Isobel went down the passage to the parlour, where she was greeted facetiously by Mr. Bruce.

“Weel, this is a great day for ye, Miss! What d’ye think o’ Glesgae?”

“Well, I only saw the Central Station and a small bit of one street, so I’m hardly in a position to judge that great city. It looked very busy and prosperous, the shops (what I saw of them) were excellent, and I like the women with baskets of flowers at the street corners.”

“I never saw them,” said Mr. Bruce, surprised. “I wouldna hev thought that the Glasgae folk had time for flowers.”

Mrs. Bruce looked up from her mending—she was patching a shirt with skill—and asked if the couple had turned up.

“They did,” said Isobel, “and I engaged them on the spot. They’re coming to the Place on Monday by the two train.”

“Mercy!” said Mrs. Bruce.

“Yes,” said Isobel, “I know it’s a risk, but they’re only coming for a month to try. If they don’t like it they can go, and if I don’t like them——” Isobel paused, and Mrs. Bruce broke in.

“Ay, that’s what I’m feared for. Once they’re there I doubt you’ll never get them away. You’re ower soft-hearted for this world and ye’ll find it doesna pay.”

Isobel protested. “But, Mrs. Bruce, I’m not really such a fool as you think me. They both looked thoroughly decent, and you remember their references were good. And I liked them. The man—Robert I’ll call him—is slightly morose (gardeners often are, I’ve noticed) as if life had disappointed him. Two years is a long time to live in a city away from gardens, and he’s a Border man. His wife would be cheerful given any encouragement, a nice round little woman who’ll give an air of comfort to the house. She is willing to do the cooking and all the other work. There’s a little boy as well.”

“Just the one!” said Mrs. Bruce sarcastically.

“He’s six,” Isobel went on, “so he’ll go down to Glenbucho school. I must say I rather like the idea of a boy playing about.”

Mrs. Bruce sniffed, but her husband supported Isobel.

“A laddie can be a help about a place if he’s no’ ower mischeefious, and mebbe this couple o’ yours’ll turn out no’ so bad efter a’. It’s whiles as well no’ to tak’ time to think.”

“Well,” said Isobel, “I saw the people, and heard their story and believed it, and they seemed worth a trial. It remains to be seen how it’ll work out. Mrs. Bruce, may I stay on with you for another week or so? I think you said your rooms weren’t taken till the beginning of July.”

“Stay and welcome,” said Mrs. Bruce, folding up the mended shirt. “I daresay your new housekeeper’ll hev enough to do getting things in order without thinkin’ about preparin’ denners for the room, and I’ll be glad to think that ye’re getting your meat onyway. Mistress Whitson’s lassie was here the day. She said she’d meant to work in the garden and seemed rale disappointed.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” said Isobel. “Mrs. Bruce, I wonder if it would be a good plan

to lay linoleum on these kitchen passages at the Place? Being stone they give rather a cold look, don't you think?"

Mrs. Bruce considered. "I like flags best mazel'," she said; "but there's no doubt linoleum's less trouble, and it's warmer like."

"I wish I'd thought of getting it when I was in Glasgow to-day," said Isobel, but Mrs. Bruce asked what was wrong with the county town of Priorsford.

"Davy's gaun there the morn in the car, and ye can bring it back with ye. The Priorsford shops are grand, ye can buy onything there."

"Well, if Mr. Bruce will be so kind as to let me go with him, that'll be splendid. But I'm keeping you up. Good night, and thank you both for being kind enough to be interested."

Before going to bed Isobel scribbled a line to Kitty Baillie.

"I visited Glasgow to-day, and engaged a Mr. and Mrs. Cooper, and child to come on Monday as 'staff' at the Place. What do you think of that, my friend? I don't really feel so bold and firm as I sound, but I did like the look of the couple, and perhaps they will settle down and do well. The child is six, and rejoices in the name of Archibald, with the accent on the last syllable, thus—Archibawld. I long to see him. Actually I've never known a small boy intimately. But I'm going to have some young society in Glenbucho, for Althea Whitson, who has just left school and is quite the *youngest* thing I ever saw, is good enough to help me in the garden, and we have great talks. The only moment I have to write (so busy am I!) is the dead of night. Forgive this scribble and accept my love.

"ISOBEL."

CHAPTER XII

Sir, I love the acquaintance of young people.

DR. JOHNSON

THE next day, as they drove to Priorsford, Isobel amused Mr. Bruce by her admiration of the country they passed through. To her delight Tweed sang beside them nearly all the way, and every turn of the road brought new beauty. When Peel Tower came into view, high above the river, she begged her companion to stop just five minutes that she might have a good look at it. This he obligingly did, though the old castle, which Cromwell's army had besieged, meant nothing to him, and he was anxious to point out other objects more worthy of notice, such as "a when grand lambs."

Priorsford itself seemed to Isobel the very ideal of a country town, and as she walked along the High Street in the May sunshine she noticed with interest the blending of ancient and modern. Inns and houses that held some of the graciousness of age were neighboured by shops and a cinema built in a new and fantastic mode, but the prevailing atmosphere was of the past, for on the right-hand side of the street, going towards the Mercat Cross, stood a fine old building with turrets and narrow windows and steep-pitched roof.

Having some time to spare after she had bought the linoleum and other household necessities, she ventured through the archway of this building, and found herself in a quadrangle, on one side of which stood the War Memorial. It was a shrine of white stone surmounted by a copper dome. In the middle was a tall cross, and round the sides were the names of the men, "who, dying, taught us how to die."

While she was standing gazing, a voice behind her said:

"Well, what d'ye think of it?"

Isobel, turning round quickly, found herself addressed by an oldish man, leaning heavily on a stick.

"I like it," she said; "there's imagination in it."

"It cost an awful siller, onyway. That's called mosaic, ye ken, and it was done in Italy. Some folk didna like it put here. Ye see, the town-hall there's let for a cinema, and they thought it was kinna disrespectful; but if they'd built it on the top of a hill, hardly a body would have seen it close. Here in the town it belongs to us a'. I'm here every day lookin' at the papers in the reading-room." He waved his hand. "That's it there, and many a time I see a body come in, whiles wi' a bunch of flowers, and stand and read the name that's hers. It's a kinna comfort to the womenfolk the laddies left."

"I'm sure it is," said Isobel.

"Aye, and speakin' about the cinema, what I say is, if the laddies hed been spared to come hame, they'd hev been often enough at the pictures, and it gives a hamey feeling to see their names written there just in the middle o' all that's gaun on. Their dust's in France and Gallipoli and a' ower, but I warrant their spirit'll no' be far awa' frae their auld Burgh town."

"You have a beautiful town," said Isobel, "and this building gives dignity to the High Street. What was it originally?"

"It was auld Q's town-house," said her companion, evidently delighted to have a listener, "him that owned Peel Tower. The Marquess of Queensberry was his title, and a nasty low fellay he was. About a hundred years syne it was bought and presented to the town by two brothers, Robert and William Chambers, twae wee Priorsford laddies that went to Edinbory and fought their way up to fame and fortune and didna forget their native town. It's no' possible that ye never heard tell o' the Chambers?"

Isobel wilted under his glance. "I'm afraid it is," she confessed. "But, you see, I've lived in England all my life; this is my first visit to Scotland."

"In that case ye mebbe couldna be expected to ken much. Well, the Chambers did well by the town. In this building there's a reading-room, a library, a picture gallery, and a room for—I forget what ye call it—but it's stanes, ye ken, howkit up round here frae Roman camps and Picts and what not. Aye, and there's the Council Chambers along that side, and the Town Hall yonder. It was from the Chambers that Andrew Carnegie got the notion to give free libraries, and he gave Priorsford a lot o' siller to bring this place up to date. Aye, he cam' here and made a speech. I heard it—all about Robert and William Chambers; it was rale guid. Here, see, if you're bidin' here for a holiday you should awa' up and ask the Librarian for the Life of the Chambers. It's grand readin'. Just gang through that door and up the stair."

"But," began Isobel, but any protest she might have been going to make died on her lips, for the old man hobbled before her and she had to follow.

"I'll no' come up the stairs," he announced. "Once a day's enough o' thae stairs for an auld lameter. Gang straight up." Meekly Isobel obeyed, and in a glass-enclosed desk found the Librarian.

Having explained what she had come for, she added:

"I don't really think I've any right to ask for a book, but I made the acquaintance down in the quadrangle of a Priorsford man (he was lame and rather elderly) who told me a lot of interesting things, and advised me to read—insisted, indeed, that I should read—the Life of the Brothers Chambers."

The Librarian smiled. "That would be Rob Lindsay. He's an authority on old Priorsford, and something of a character. He used to be a great fisher—and a great poacher, some say—but now he's crippled with rheumatism and can just manage to get along to the reading-room of a morning to see the papers. There's nothing he enjoys more than giving information about his town to any stranger that is interested. He once said to me, 'I just feel like a mother to it.' Are you making a stay here, may I ask?"

"Not in Priorsford; in Glenbucho. In fact, I've bought Glenbucho Place."

"Then," said the Librarian, "you've got a place of great historical interest for your very own."

"Yes," said Isobel, smiling at him, "isn't it great luck? I'm looking forward to getting to know the countryside. This is my first sight of Priorsford, and I'm charmed."

"I'm glad. This is the book. Will you sign? Thank you, we'll always be glad to supply you with anything we have. Good day."

Going out Isobel looked round the quadrangle for her friend, to let him see she was bearing away the book he had recommended. There was no trace of him, but she lingered, watching a family group that interested her—a leggy boy with a puppy on a lead, a smaller boy, a stout little girl, and with them a middle-aged woman, very smart in good tweeds, and a young woman with golden-brown hair and eyes.

"What a nice-looking lot of people," she thought, as she went in search of Mr. Bruce.

Isobel would have liked to have had the Place thoroughly cleaned so that Mrs. Cooper might see how her new mistress expected things to be kept, but Mrs. Bruce thought otherwise.

"Let her see it as it is," she said. "If she's any use, it'll put her on her mettle."

"But isn't it a pity to discourage her at the start?" Isobel asked.

Mrs. Bruce snorted. "If she's as easy discouraged as a' that, she'd better never unpack her boxes. The rooms were scrubbed after the painters, the men beat the rugs and carpets, the rough work's done, ye may say. Of course the kitchen premises need everlasting scrubbing, that canna be helped."

"I suppose not. Well, anyway, I'll ask the ploughman's wife if she can go in on Monday morning and scrub them well to start with, and polish all the covers in the kitchen, and have their tea ready, so that it will look a little bit welcoming."

Mrs. Bruce gave an exasperated sigh. "I doubt," she said, "you're the kind that spoils servants, and, mind, it's no' a good plan. Give them an inch and they'll take an

ell.”

“But,” Isobel protested, “I couldn’t live with people and not be nice to them.”

Mrs. Bruce had been feeding the hens while conversing, and she now picked up her pail, and, turning to go, said:

“Some folk think far ower muckle about being ‘nice.’ They want to be likit; in ma opinion it’s better to be respected.”

“Can’t one be both?” the girl asked, but got no answer, for Mrs. Bruce was striding through the stackyard to her kitchen.

After early dinner was over, and Mrs. Bruce had rather grudgingly approved of the linoleum and the other Priorsford purchases, Isobel went to the Place where she was joined almost immediately by Althea Whitson, workmanlike in her old “gym” costume under a coat.

“I thought I’d get you in to-day. I’ve a message from Mamma. Will you be so very kind as to dine with us to-night? We’ve got visitors arriving this afternoon, and it’d be a help if you were there to speak to them. They’re relatives in a way, but we don’t know them much. The man, Alan Brodie, was a cousin of Daddy’s, but Mamma is quite out of acquaintance with him—hasn’t seen him for years. He’s got a wife now, he’s bringing her and a little boy. That’ll be rather fun. We’ve been getting my old nursery ready for him.”

“Thank you, I’d like to come. It’s very kind of your mother to ask me.”

“Far from it,” said Althea. “I’ll fetch you and bring you back. I love to drive at night in the summer-time. . . . What were you doing in Glasgow yesterday?”

“Engaging a man and his wife to look after my new house.”

“I say! What fun! Then you’ll be staying at the Place now. Please, Miss Logan, ask me to stay a night with you, and perhaps we’ll hear Mr. Secretary Murray’s ghost riding over the cobble-stones out there.”

Isobel laughed. “If you do it’ll be because you have a vivid imagination. But of course you must come and stay. I’ll be glad of your company. I’m staying on another week with Mrs. Bruce to let my couple get settled down. They’ve a little boy, so we’ll be quite a family.”

“I like boys,” said Althea, grubbing up a handful of weeds and throwing them over her shoulder in the direction of the basket, “it’s an awful thing to have no brothers. My best friend at school had four: it didn’t seem fair. And the funny thing was, she didn’t seem to realise her luck one little bit.” Althea sighed. “Think of the games you could have! The stories you could tell each other, and the secrets! I read all the boys’ books I can get. Books for girls are no use.”

“Would you say that? What about *Little Women* and *What Katy Did*?”

“I liked them,” Althea admitted. “But up in the attic at Ormiston there are books Daddy had when he was a boy, old bound copies of the *B.O.P.* with grand stories in them by Talbot Baines Reed. You might like to read them, Miss Logan.”

“I would like to—some time. Now that you’re grown up, Althea, you’ll find life very full and interesting. Dances——”

“Well, I don’t much look forward to dances. There again, you see, I’ll miss a brother. Perhaps no one’ll ask me to dance. Girls have told me, grown-up girls, that it’s not much fun being grown-up. I know a girl who has no brothers, and when first she went to big London dances, she didn’t know many people, and no-one bothered much about her. She hated to have to sit about, so at one dance she slipped out and wandered through the house. When she came on a particularly inviting looking bathroom, she thought it’d be quite a good way of filling up the time to take a bath, and she did!!!”

Althea sat back on her heels and laughed, and Isobel said, “I hardly think you’ll be driven to such lengths. Your mother’ll see to that. D’you realise how lucky you are to have a mother who can join in all your pleasures, and be a companion?”

“Oh, I realise it all right. Mamma and I have grand giggles, and now that I’m finished with school, we’ve all sorts of plans about seeing the world. Mamma’s been waiting for me. You see, Daddy liked home best, so she hasn’t seen much at all. Now we can see everything together, and that’ll be fun. And when we’ve been about a bit I want a job. I’d hate to hang about waiting to be married. I don’t expect anyone’ll want to marry me, and I’d be the last to blame them. What d’you think I could go in for? I’ve no—what d’you call it?—bent. I’m not musical or dramatic; they could never teach me to draw decently, and I was only passably good at lessons. If I’d had to earn my living I could only have been a char-lady—that’s a solemn thought!”

Isobel wiped her hands against her gardening apron, and sat down on an upturned pail that somebody had left on the path, to consider the question of a job for Althea.

“You don’t want a paid job, and I don’t suppose you want to leave your mother alone, so your best plan is to see where help is needed near home. There are Guides, I gather from Miss Agnes Home, and a W.R.I., and County Nursing, any or all of which would give you work. Few people in these days have the face to be idle. One thing I’d like very much to help with is country holidays for poor city children. I like to see results, and that must be most repaying work, don’t you think? I’ve been dallying with the thought of doing something—in a very small way, of course, perhaps half a dozen boys for a fortnight.”

Althea, who had stopped weeding with alacrity and squatted herself beside Isobel on the pail, said, "Could you get six? I thought they all went in droves to places by the sea. Here they'd only have hills and fields and burns—but they might like it all right."

"The only thing that worries me," Isobel went on, "is the responsibility. Suppose one got drowned, how terrible that would be!"

"He'd be pretty clever if he got himself drowned in that burn, and even Glenbucho Water, when it isn't in flood, is a harmless stream. Besides, wouldn't someone come to look after them? May I speak to Mamma about it?"

"Of course, but it's only the vaguest idea at present. I'll have to see first how my Coopers settle down, and find out how much a month it takes us to keep house, before I take on anything more. We *have* made a little difference on the weeds, haven't we? I wonder if Cooper will be able to cope with the place at all. The grass itself is quite a big job."

"I'd keep it wild," said Althea, comfortably basking in the afternoon sun. "Have flowers about near the house, and the big lawn well kept, and don't worry about the rest."

"Well, I'd like that herbaceous border put into decent order, but I agree that the orchard bit should be left alone. These apple-trees, I expect, are too old to be any good, but they look nice standing among the grass. I love that wall with all the little things growing in it. Mr. Bruce says it isn't in good condition, but as long as it doesn't fall into ruins, we'll leave it alone. I daren't think what it would cost to rebuild a wall like that."

"It must be round the other side," said Althea dreamily, "that Gideon Veitch used to have a workshop. I remember coming to tea with Mamma when I was about seven, and he took me out with him to see it, and gave me strawberries from the strawberry beds. I think he'd be at Oxford then. I remember thinking him enormous, and my eyes never got higher than his knees, but I liked him, and he must have been a kind creature to bother with a small girl. He sometimes came to dinner-parties, and if I were at home and allowed down, he always came and spoke to me, and asked what school was like. . . . I say, do you happen to know the time? I promised I'd be back and tidied up before these Brodies arrive at five o'clock. Gosh! I must rush. I'll be back for you at a quarter to eight. Good-bye."

When Althea came back that evening to fetch Isobel, she was inclined to be gloomy about the newly arrived guests at Ormiston.

"Cousin Alan's all right, of course, but he doesn't speak much, and his wife—well, she's not a *comfortable* person, if you know what I mean. She's good-

looking, like the women Du Maurier drew—we've a lot of bound *Punches* in the attic, and I like to look at them—tall and straight, with a curly mouth and a proud way of holding up her head."

"That sounds very nice," said Isobel.

"Yes, and *she* sounds very nice too, admires things politely, and all that, but I don't like her."

"Nonsense, Althea. One can't judge anyone after an hour's acquaintance."

"I can," said Althea firmly. "I know in a minute if a person's sincere and kind and all that. Mrs. Brodie's bored with her child. He's a nice little chap, but he's got a hunted look. I could see the relief on his face when he was told he'd have tea upstairs with me in the nursery."

"Althea," said Isobel, "I see you becoming a writer of novels."

"Well," said Althea complacently, "I'm really rather good at seeing through people."

"And have you got all the people about here weighed in the balance?"

"Pretty well," said Althea, avoiding a lethargic collie.

"Well, so long as your face doesn't reveal the fact that you find them wanting _____"

"Oh, but they don't look at my face. That's where I score. I'm only a lumpy school-girl, and they don't trouble to be careful before me."

"Little knowing what a dangerous creature is in their midst. . . . You drive very well, Althea, and you can't have been at it long. But your generation seems to have a natural aptitude for cars and 'planes and such things; you are born knowing how. I wonder if you'd give me some lessons? I'll probably need a small car, and I can't afford a chauffeur, and Cooper won't have much time to drive me."

"Of course, I'd love to. Cars are practically foolproof now, anyone can drive. Here we are. D'you want to tidy? Then just leave your coat here. You can see your face in that old mirror, but it's no flatterer, I warn you. . . . This way——"

Mrs. Whitson was in the drawing-room talking to a woman and two men whom she introduced as Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Elliot, and Mr. Brodie.

Presently the door opened and another woman came in, and Isobel recognised "the curly mouth" and Du Maurier set of the shoulders of Althea's description.

"Am I late?" she asked, shaking hands with the two women, and smiling at the man, as Mrs. Whitson said the names.

"*We* were very early," said Lewis Elliot, with a glance at his wife, who said:

"Lewis means that I hustled him away. I admit it. I'm a horribly punctual person, and can't bear to feel behind."

"I once read in an old etiquette book," said Mrs. Whitson, "that it was true politeness for a guest to arrive at least twenty minutes before the hour of the dinner."

"Which would mean, in my house," said Mrs. Brodie, "at *least* twenty minutes' quiet reflection for the guest before the hostess appeared. In London one depends on people not being in time."

They went in to dinner, and Isobel found herself next Mr. Brodie, Mrs. Elliot being on his right hand.

The long twilight of the north still lingered, the curtains were not drawn, and the candles made pools of light on the shining surface of the round mahogany table; a big silver dish held tulips of every shade, from deep purple, which looked black, to palest pink.

This was very peaceful and pleasant, thought Isobel, as she finished her soup, for Mr. Brodie was talking, or, rather, being talked to, by the lady on his right, and her other neighbour, Althea, was applying herself solidly to her dinner. It was always rather an effort for Isobel to speak to men, she was shy of them, never having had much to do with them, except those she could do something to help, like Jack Tisdale, and there she was on her own ground. She looked across the table at Mrs. Brodie, talking vivaciously to the man beside her, who was listening with a kind but rather absent smile. She was really very good-looking, Isobel thought, and beautifully dressed. Too elaborately dressed, really, for the occasion. Isobel preferred Mrs. Elliot's white crepe with a design in wine-red.

The girl listened to the conversation going on beside her, to the monologue, rather, for, as Althea had told her, Alan Brodie did not speak much. Mrs. Elliot was good value as a guest, she decided, and she admired her dark eyes, and the way her black hair was silvering on either side of the centre parting. It was more than a handsome face, there was something fine about it.

Now Mr. Elliot was talking to his hostess, Mrs. Brodie had turned to Mrs. Elliot, and Mr. Brodie made a remark to Isobel about the Coronation.

"I didn't see it," Isobel told him. "I was here."

"Then you were in a better place."

"Still," said Isobel, holding on to the topic, "it wasn't a thing to miss, and children should all have been taken when possible, don't you think? that they might be able to tell their children and grandchildren."

Mr. Brodie said, "I daresay," and helped himself to vegetables, and Isobel went on, "D'you know this district well?"

"I used to come a good deal when my cousin was alive, but when I married we bought a little place in Sussex, and I haven't been in Scotland for about seven years.

My wife prefers to go abroad for holidays. I was born in Scotland, though, and that pulls one back.”

“Yes,” said Isobel, “and even if you’re born in England of Scots parentage. I’ve lived in England all my life, and never felt any desire to go north, but when I came here—only about a month ago—the place seemed to lay hands on me and claim me, and now I hope to spend my life here.”

Her companion nodded. “I want my boy to know Scotland, and Helen”—he bowed across at his hostess—“very kindly says he may stay here for a bit. I’ve got to get back to London, and my wife has all sorts of engagements, but James will have the time of his life here alone.”

“He will. I hope Althea will bring him over to see me. He might like to see the pet-lambs and kittens and puppies, and wade in the burn.”

“That’s good of you. I’m sure he would. We’ve been in London for the last three months, and it’s not much fun for a lonely child.”

Isobel agreed, and added, “Althea will see that he has a good time here. She’s not too old to enjoy being a playmate.”

When the ladies returned to the drawing-room, Althea unobtrusively vanished, Mrs. Whitson engaged Mrs. Elliot in conversation, and Isobel found herself beside Mrs. Brodie, who had settled herself in a corner of a sofa, with a becoming cushion behind her back. She was eyeing Mrs. Whitson and her guest, and, turning to Isobel, said:

“Tell me, who is Mrs. Elliot?”

Isobel laughed. “Did you ever ask anyone a question in a strange place and fail to be told, ‘I’m a stranger here myself’? I didn’t know Mrs. Elliot existed until this evening.”

“Oh! I suppose you’re staying with people in the neighbourhood?”

“Well, I’m boarding at present in a farm-house, but I’ve bought a house, and hope to be settled here permanently.”

“I see,” said Mrs. Brodie, and Isobel had a suspicion that her companion felt she need not waste her energies talking to someone who was quite evidently of no importance. “It seems pretty country,” she added, after a pause.

“Quite,” said Isobel.

“We’re only here for a day or two,” Mrs. Brodie continued languidly. “My husband is a very busy man and can’t be long away from London, and I had to cut simply dozens of engagements to come here. This season is such a specially brilliant one, one hates to miss any of it.”

Isobel agreed that it was a pity to miss anything, and presently the two men, who

had evidently not found many interests in common, came into the room.

The little group rearranged itself. Mrs. Elliot suggested to Isobel that they should sit in the window, and the girl willingly followed her there. As they sat down Isobel said:

“I think I saw you this morning in Priorsford. Were you in the quadrangle where the Memorial is with another lady and three jolly children?”

“Yes, but I didn’t notice you.”

“You wouldn’t. I was going out as you came in, and I couldn’t resist watching you all for a minute.”

A smile came into Mrs. Elliot’s eyes as she said:

“They are my brother’s children—Peter and Alison and Quentin. They *are* jolly. Jean—my sister-in-law—has always shared them with us, and they mean a lot to Lewis and me. They generally stay with us, but just now they’re at Jean’s own little house—The Rigs. They’ve been having whooping-cough and came here to recruit. It doesn’t matter so much for Alison and Quentin, but Peter’s missing a whole term at school.”

“He won’t mind!”

“No, the rascal! I’m so interested, Miss Logan. Mrs. Whitson told me just now that you’ve bought Glenbucho Place. We were very friendly with Gideon and his father, and I’m glad to think that the old house has gone to someone who’ll appreciate it. It has always seemed to me the nicest place hereabout, and I do congratulate you on getting it.”

“I love the Place,” Isobel said simply, “and I’ll do my best for it, but I haven’t much money, and I’ll have to go very carefully.”

“Glenbucho Place has never been accustomed to have money spent on it. It would spoil it completely if someone ‘did it up,’ and made it terribly ‘period.’” The older woman smiled encouragingly at the girl, and went on, “You’ll come and see us, won’t you, in our green glen? Are you very busy, or could you spare an afternoon next week? Mrs. Whitson,” as that lady passed near, “I’m trying to persuade Miss Logan to come to Laverlaw one day next week, and it would be very nice if you and Althea would bring her over. Would Tuesday suit?”

“It would suit me,” Mrs. Whitson said, and looked at Isobel, who replied, “I’ve no engagements at present except weeding the garden, and helping to lay linoleum in the kitchen premises, so it is all right for me. Thank you very much. I shall look forward to Tuesday.”

“I’d like you to meet my sister-in-law, and the children. Shall we say luncheon at 1.30?”

“May we come to tea?” Mrs. Whitson asked, “and would you mind if we brought little James Brodie with us? He’s staying on with us for a little, after his parents leave on Monday. He’s seven—an only child.”

“Why, that’s delightful. Quentin’ll love to show him round. Come early, please, so that the children may have some time together. . . .”

Althea slipped into the room when she thought the party must be nearing its conclusion and regained her usual high spirits once she and Isobel were in the car.

“Was it awful?” she asked. “I went out for a stroll.”

“Not in the least awful. I enjoyed it immensely. Mrs. Elliot is charming, and I liked the look of her husband. I liked Mr. Brodie too.”

“And Mrs. Brodie?”

“I saw at once what you meant by the ‘Du Maurier look’; there is a Mary Duchess-of-Towers touch about her. I don’t think she has much use for ‘mere’ people, but she is quite pleasant.”

Althea’s only response was, “Ha, ha! said the duck laughing.”

CHAPTER XIII

Every one of these islanders is himself an island.

VOLTAIRE

By midday on the Monday that the Cooper family were expected at Glenbucho the Place was looking, in the not entirely unprejudiced eyes of its mistress, a highly desirable residence. The Priorsford linoleum had done something to brighten the passages; the ploughman's wife had scoured and polished the kitchen, and the little sitting-room until they glistened. Before the fireplace in the latter lay a new rug made of a multitude of small pieces of cloth, wrought by the ploughman's wife and purchased from her by Isobel. A cat and a kitten, gifted by Mrs. Bruce, who said she wanted to be rid of them, gave a homely touch, and the table already laid for tea had a yellow cloth and gay china.

Isobel had made up her mind to be at the station when the Coopers arrived, and Mrs. Bruce's opinion that it was perfect nonsense did not weaken her decision.

"They won't be feeling very happy," she pointed out, "coming to a new place where they know nobody; and if I'm standing on the platform—well, it's someone they've seen before."

Mrs. Bruce merely sniffed.

"I'm glad the sun's shining," Isobel continued; "the view from the back door is so lovely in sunshine."

"Folk that hev to work are no' heedin' for views," said Mrs. Bruce, "and that's what you don't understand."

"Say, rather, it's what I don't believe. Beauty *must* make a difference, especially after living in a city street."

"I'm thinkin' they'll miss the street, shops a' round about them, and a cinema nearby, and icecream if they want it! But don't you be pittin' that into their heads, mind."

Mrs. Bruce's tone was almost threatening, and Isobel said soothingly, "Oh, no. I'll assume that they're delighted to be here. But it isn't as if they didn't know what country life means, Mrs. Bruce. I expect they were more out of the world in their last place, and they did say they were sick of the city."

"Oh, well, they'll *mebbe* settle," said Mrs. Bruce, but her tone held no conviction.

Isobel went on. "The car's to be at the station at four o'clock. I'll walk down and drive up with them. Can I get you anything at the shop?"

Mrs. Bruce considered. "Mebbe a half-pound packet of Abernethy biscuits.

Davy likes one wi' a drink o' milk afore bedtime, but never heed if ye're no' going, anyway."

"Oh, but I am. I welcome every chance of a talk with Miss Agnes Home, and there are a few more things to get for the Place."

"Mercy!" cried Mrs. Bruce, "ye've the larder full already. For any favour start them as ye mean them to go on. At this rate they'll soon eat ye out of house and home"; but Isobel only laughed, and said she wouldn't like them to go hungry.

A deep peace lay on Glenbucho in the afternoon. From one-thirty to four there were no trains, the children were in school, the wives in their houses, and the shop-bell so seldom tinkled that Miss Agnes Home had time, sometimes, to read her *Scotsman*.

This afternoon, however, she was rearranging the shelves, and broke off gladly to have a talk with Isobel Logan.

Having given her order and told Miss Home that the car would stop for the parcel on its way from the four train, Isobel explained that she was on her way to the station to meet a man and his wife whom she had engaged to look after her house.

"I've only seen them once, and I'm relying entirely on my own judgment, so I do hope they won't let me down."

"Oh, well, if you liked them and thought they were decent folk, they'll be all right," Miss Home told her. "It's wonderful how you can tell."

"They come from the Borders, a place near Melrose or Selkirk. The man was gardener and married the housemaid, and they lived there till the mistress died. That sounds all right, don't you think? And I did like the look of them. They've got a little boy of six who'll come down here to school."

"That's all to the good," said Miss Home, that incorrigible optimist; "a wee boy at school'll keep them happy, coming in with his bit stories, you know, something always to look forward to. I hope everything'll go well, Miss Logan, for in a way it's me that's responsible, recommending you the rooms at Mrs. Bruce's."

"Indeed, yes. You've got a lot on your head, Miss Home, and I hope I'll never feel anything but gratitude to you. It was you, too, who made me known to Mrs. Whitson and her daughter."

Miss Home blushed and shook her head. "Oh, well—that was just a chance. I mebbe shouldn't have taken it on myself, but Mrs. Whitson's such a friendly lady, and summer visitors can stay a long time here and never know a soul, and I thought you'd like each other, and——"

"I assure you I'm very grateful. As you say summer boarders don't usually get to know people."

“Ah, but you’re no summer boarder now, Miss Logan. You’re the Leddy of Glenbucho Place, and in a wee while you’ll know everybody . . . but isn’t Miss Althea a real divert? I’ve been fond of her since she was a bit bairn, coming out and in with her Nannie. Ormiston-shaw’s a fine place, ye’ll have been over to see it?”

“Yes, it’s delightful. To-morrow Mrs. Whitson is taking me to a place called Laverlaw.”

“I’ve never been there. It’s off ma beat, as the pollis would say. It’s away up the Laverlaw Water. Ye pass the turn of the road as ye go to Priorsford. Have you been there yet?”

“Yes, on Saturday, with Mr. Bruce, buying linoleum and pots and things. It’s a lovely little town.”

“Aye, and did you see the grand new cinema? It’s a braw place, Priorsford.”

As she spoke Miss Home was collecting the different things ordered, preparatory to wrapping them up in stout brown paper.

“Leave out the Abernethy biscuits, please. They’re for Mrs. Bruce. The other things go to the Place.”

“And how’s Mrs. Bruce?” Miss Home asked, popping the packet of biscuits into a paper bag. “Now that the evenings are long I must be up to see her, for I’d wait long enough for a visit from her.”

“She’s always so busy, and she has no-one to help her. Besides, d’you think Mrs. Bruce cares much for company, except, of course, an old friend like yourself?”

Agnes Home smiled and shook her head. “She does not, and that’s a fact. She’s been like that all her life, just doesna seem to need folk. Davy and the farm’s enough for her, though I believe she’s fonder of Mr. Gideon than she lets on. Both her and Davy were terrible vex’t when he went away. He used to make her laugh and nobody else could manage that. He had a nice way with him, Mr. Gideon, he was ‘a’-body’s body’ as the saying is. It’s a pity he had to go away to Canada, where nobody’ll ken or care that he was a Veitch of Glenbucho. . . . But seeing he had to go, of course, it’s awful nice that you’ve bought the old house; it was a pity it should stand empty. Ye mustn’t think we’re no’ pleased.”

“Oh no, but I do feel rather an interloper. Is that the signal down, Miss Home? I’ll have to go. Put the parcel outside, please, and I’ll pick it up.”

“Not at all. I’ll bring it down to you—and then I’ll get a sight of your couple!”

Isobel reached the platform as the train came in, and saw a small group emerge and look round in a lost way. Running up to them she shook the three warmly by the hand, and was leading the way to the car, when the man said:

“This isn’t all our luggage; we’ve a box and a bicycle in the van.”

A porter was called, and soon everything was stowed in or tied on, and Isobel asked the chauffeur to stop for a moment at the shop, where Miss Home was standing with a large parcel and a kind smile.

“Here you are,” she said, adding in a congratulatory tone, “you’ve got a fine day to come to the country.”

“That,” said Isobel, as they proceeded on their way, “is Miss Home, who keeps one of our two shops. You’ll find her very kind and helpful. Then vans call nearly every day—bakers, fishmongers, butchers, and so on.”

Mrs. Cooper said “Ucha,” while Mr. Cooper and his son said nothing. They all looked rather depressed, Isobel thought, though reassuringly respectable. “Archibald” was a thin child with mouse-coloured hair: he wore a tweed suit that looked large for him, and a handkerchief gaily printed with horses’ heads.

“It’s only a short way,” Isobel continued. “I hope Archibald won’t find it too far to walk to school.”

Archibald looked at her, remaining silent, but his mother, nudging him with her elbow, said he wouldn’t find it far at all, and that walking on country roads was an awful lot better than walking on streets anyway.

This speech lasted till the car was going through the gates, at the sight of which Archibald broke into speech.

“Daddy,” he said, pointing to the bears on the gate-posts, “thon’s beasts.”

“So they are,” said his father sadly.

“This is Glenbucho Place,” Isobel said, and there was a note of appeal in her voice. Surely they couldn’t *help* liking it! Mrs. Cooper was collecting her belongings and piling things into her husband’s arms, while her son’s gaze was directed backwards to the “beasts,” so no-one looked at the beauty.

Isobel had debated with herself whether to tell the chauffeur to drive to the front door or the back, and had finally decided to take the Coopers to the front door, and have the luggage taken to the back. She had an idea it would be, in a way, giving them the freedom of the house.

So they all stumbled into the little square hall with its coloured map, and garden window, and Isobel led the family down the long passage to their own sitting-room. She had arranged with the ploughman’s wife to be in the kitchen, ready to make tea and show the new-comers the different places, and, thankfully, she handed them over to her.

“Mrs. Cooper,” she said, “this is Mrs. Newbigging, who will show you where things are. I’m staying on at the farm-house until we get things straight, and I’ll be over to-morrow about eleven, when we can talk over things. You will be quite

settled down by then.”

And as she said it, she thought that anything less settled than the Cooper family at the moment could hardly be imagined. They stood with their arms full of oddly shaped brown paper parcels, making no effort to get rid of them, staring round at their new surroundings.

“C’wa and get your tea,” said Mrs. Newbigging briskly, and Isobel fled. She was rather subdued when she reached the farm-house and Mrs. Bruce’s “Well, what like are they?” brought no very enthusiastic response.

“Oh, feeling strange, I expect. It must be horrid to arrive in a new place. But, anyway, they have come. I couldn’t find a word to say to them, and thankfully left them to Mrs. Newbigging. I told Mrs. Cooper I wouldn’t see her till eleven to-morrow. I thought by then she’d have found her way about.”

“What like’s the bairn?”

“I don’t think you’ll find him a trouble about the place. He seems very silent, but perhaps he’s shy.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Bruce, “it’s to be hoped he’ll keep shy, for bairns nowadays are that impident. It’s a’ that Education Authority pittin’ notions into their heads, and no’ lickin’ them. Did ye make any arrangements about the Coopers sending for their milk?”

“No, I’m afraid I didn’t. What’ll we do about it?”

“They’ve plenty the night, and I’ll put some in a pitcher for them when the cows are milked in the morning, and if they want it they’ll come for it. They’ll have that much sense surely.”

“Oh, I think so,” said Isobel, somewhat doubtfully, because of the picture in her mind of the drooping Coopers and their parcels. It was a picture that came back to her time and again throughout the evening, and when she awoke next morning she lay wondering how the poor little family were greeting a new day, rather dreading what she would find when she went round to the Place. Perhaps the size of the house and the state of the garden had proved altogether too disheartening for them, and they might even now be preparing to leave.

The first bulletin came when Mrs. Bruce brought her breakfast.

“Davy tells me that yon wee man’s been out in the Place garden since long afore six, cuttin’ grass like mad.”

“Oh,” said Isobel, “he *shouldn’t* get up so early.”

“What for no’? It’s sma’ pleasure to lie in your bed when work’s crying to be done. I just hope he keeps it up, and that his wife’s as guid a riser as he is, and then there might be some hope for them.”

When it came near the time appointed, Isobel went through the stackyard, into the walled garden, and was amazed to see what a difference a little grass-cutting made. The lawn, which she had almost despaired of, now looked quite respectable, and she could imagine what it might be with regular attention. The new gardener was kneeling before the herbaceous border, but when Isobel went up to speak to him, he scrambled to his feet.

“Good morning, Robert,” she said, having decided that that was better than “Cooper.” “What a lot you’ve done in a short time. You must have been up *very* early.”

Robert looked down at his feet and was understood to say that it was a treat to get up on a summer morning.

Isobel went on, “I must tell you at once that I’m absolutely ignorant about gardens, so I leave it to you. I expect the vegetables and the grass’ll take up most of your time. If we get this border looking really well, and the little rose-garden, that’s about all we can manage, don’t you think?”

“Mebbe,” said Robert, cautiously. “Of course it’ll tak’ a while to get the place in order (it’s gey rough), but once it’s in order I can plan out ma time better.”

“Yes, and I could help a little, if you’d tell me what to do. I could weed, anyway. How is Mrs. Cooper this morning?”

“Fine, thanks.”

“And Archibald?”

“Oh him!” Robert’s mouth widened slowly into a smile. “He’s ower there wi’ a barra’ cairtin’ rubbidge for dear life!”

Isobel went through the open window into the little square hall. The rooms on either side were swept and garnished, with the chairs all slewed round stiffly: evidently the new housekeeper did not approve of them standing against the wall.

Hearing noises overhead, Isobel ascended, and found Mrs. Cooper, very red in the face, banging a mattress vigorously.

“Good morning, mem,” she said breathlessly. “Excuse me not being better redd-up, but I thought I’d better go through the house and give every room a good do. It’s no’ that they’re dirty, but standin’ empty they’re none the worse of it, and I’d feel satisfied like.”

Isobel agreed on the necessity of a frequent “good do,” and, thinking how nice Mrs. Cooper looked in her blue print and white linen apron, told her so.

Mrs. Cooper ran her hands down the front of her dress, and said, “Oh, well, my mother helped me to run up these wrappers. I used to wear something like them when I was a maid at Hattonknowe. It seems queer to have them on again—but

kinda nice too. Of course, I've a black dress for the afternoon, but seeing there's no meals for the room just now, I thought I'd just keep this on all day. Once things are clean they'll keep clean—the air's that pure."

"I hope you're quite comfortable. Are the beds good?"

"Yes, mem, the beds are fine. Rubbert couldn't get over wakening to hear the birds sing. He's country born and took ill wi' the city. He was away out, and Archibauld after him long afore six. But I was quite glad to get up early too, to get to know the kitchen range and so on. It's an old range, but it's a good one, and the water heats fine."

"I'm glad to hear that. I feared I might have to get an 'Aga' or an 'Esse' or something that performs wonders on a scuttle of coal a week. By the way, what about milk? Did you send for it?"

"Well, ye see, we didna right know where to send. Mrs. Newbigging brought it this morning—wasn't it real kind of her?—and she's showed Archibauld where to go for it, so that's all right."

"Well, I mustn't keep you now. You're sure you've got lots of everything? Did you notice the list I made for you of the vans that call?"

"No, mem, I didna see it."

"Come down with me now and I'll find it. I think I put it on a shelf."

The kitchen, when they reached it, was looking cheerful and inhabited. Something was cooking on the range, and the cat and kitten lay asleep on the rug.

Isobel produced the list from a lustre jug on the dresser.

"That," she said, "tells you the days of the different vans, and there's some money in this jug to pay for what you get, until we start keeping house in grim earnest—when, I suppose, we'll run books."

"Yes, mem, I'll write down what I spend, but there's a lot in the house, so we'll not need that much. Is there anything special ye'd like me to do, or will I just go through the house?"

"I think so, please, Mrs. Cooper. What are the cupboards like?"

"There's a lot of fine big presses. I havena been through them yet, of course, but I'll give them all a good scrub, ye may be sure—but there's a china cupboard out here with a lovely dinner-set; something like the one my mistress was so high about at Hattonknowe, rich, ye know, wi' a lot o' colour—and in a press by itself a tea-set—a beauty."

"*Oh!*" said Isobel, "I didn't know about them. I was going down to Priorsford to get some very ordinary china to keep us going. We'll not use the others until I've asked the lawyer about them. Funny, I never thought of looking at the cupboards! It

shows I'm no housekeeper, Mrs. Cooper.”

And Mrs. Cooper answered politely, “Oh, I wouldna say *that*.”

CHAPTER XIV

Ah, sweet content, where is thy mild abode?
Is it with shepherds and light-hearted swains?

BARNABY BARNES

KITTY BAILLIE was feeling somewhat neglected. It was a week since she had had any word from Isobel, and though her days were well filled, what with little jobs about the flat, planning meals, shopping, seeing friends, yet she missed her friend, and continually wanted news of her. So when a thick letter with the Glenbucho postmark came in with the evening post, she dropped the book she was deep in, and curled herself up on the sofa to enjoy it.

“KITTY DEAR,” the letter began, “your most interesting letter deserved a prompt reply, but you’ve no idea how difficult I find it to settle down and write. When I sat with you in the flat and planned a visit to Glenbucho, I pictured my days filled by walks, a certain amount of knitting and sewing, reading, letter-writing, talks with the people about the place, the greatest excitement a call from the minister. And instead——!

“I put it all down to Agnes Home, Merchant; she is the god in the machine. *She* suggested rooms at Glenbucho Farm, which led to my becoming owner of Glenbucho Place. More, the same Agnes Home introduced me to local society. It was in her shop, while buying some brown boot-polish, that she made me known to Mrs. Whitson and her daughter who have been so interested and kind, and that led to other ‘contacts’—but I am rushing on too fast.

“I told you that I had been in Glasgow interviewing a couple called Cooper, as housekeeper and gardener. Well, they are now installed here with their child, and I do believe it’s going to be all right. They’ve been here a week now, and already Robert talks about ‘our’ garden, the small Archibald pads round everywhere after his father, while Mrs. Cooper is busy making the old house as clean as she can make it—which is very clean indeed.

“Cooper (‘Rubbert’ his wife calls him) has been out of work for some time, and is a sad little man with an inquiring nose and a receding chin. Mrs. Cooper is far from sad, a cheery little Glasgow woman, very thankful that her man has again got a garden to look after, and that they have their boy with them. As for me, I feel quite patriarchal when I think

that I have a family depending on me!

“I am still at the farm, as it seemed better to let Mrs. Cooper clean the house in peace. I’ll be sorry to leave Mrs. Bruce; her comments on men and things are always enjoyable. She, I may say, is inclined to be suspicious of the Coopers, and listens with a baffling expression to all I tell her about them. It isn’t that she can have anything against them; I think it is just her attitude to the whole human race—she thinks ill (though she never *speaks* ill) of everyone until she satisfies herself that she needn’t!

“This last week has been quite an eventful one for me. I think it was Friday I scribbled a line to you, or Saturday Mr. Bruce was going to Priorsford, and offered to take me ‘for a hurl,’ and as I needed some household things, I gladly accepted. A lovely road it is, by the side of Tweed almost all the way, through woods and beech-hedges, and a lovely town when you come to it. When you come we’ll visit it together.

“In the evening I dined with the Whitsons, my first experience of a Glenbucho dinner-party. It was not alarming, consisting as it did of a couple called Brodie, who were staying in the house a rather nice silent man, and a not so nice but very good-looking wife. They’re related in some way to the Whitsons, and are leaving their child, a boy of six, for a time. A Mr. and Mrs. Elliot were the only other guests.

“Mrs. Elliot was very friendly and welcoming, and not only asked me to come and see her, but at once fixed a day, and asked Mrs. Whitson to bring me. As you know, I am stupidly shy about going among strangers, and it made all the difference having Mrs. Whitson and Althea. On Tuesday afternoon, when I drove with them to Laverlaw (the Elliots’ place), I was told all about the people we were going to see, and now I’ll tell you. Some years ago, it must be about sixteen, Mrs. Elliot, who was then Pamela Reston, only sister of Lord Bidborough, had a notion to get away utterly from the kind of life she was living, so she took rooms in a house in Priorsford. Near, in a cottage called The Rigs, lived a family of Jardines, a girl, Jean, and three boys, and they all became very friendly. Then—it sounds exactly like a fairy-tale—Lord Bidborough appeared on the scene and fell in love with Jean. She, feeling that the gap between them was too wide, refused to have anything to say to him, but someone (I couldn’t quite make this out) left Jean a large fortune, and in time she married her faithful suitor. And, that the story might end in proper fairy-tale fashion, Miss Reston discovered in a cousin of Jean’s an old friend

and admirer of her youth—Lewis Elliot—and settled down with him at Laverlaw.

“I was engrossed in the story as told me by Mrs. Whitson, so you can imagine my interest when we got to Laverlaw, to find there Lady Bidborough and her three children. They are staying for the present at the Jardines’ old home, The Rigs, to let the children recruit after whooping-cough, and the odd thing was that I had seen them all in Priorsford on Saturday morning, and had stopped to stare at them, they seemed such a happy family party.

“I’ve seldom enjoyed myself so much as I did that afternoon at Laverlaw. For one thing I had quite a long talk with Lady Bidborough, the heroine of the fairy-tale. She’s the sort of person you know at once. She was most understanding about Glenbucho Place, and said she and her brother knew well the story of Mr. Secretary Murray and had always been thrilled by the drama of it. She asked if she might bring her children to see the Place. Their home is in England, in the Cotswolds, and they all love it, but she is anxious that they should never forget they are partly Scottish, and she brings them at least once in every year to the cottage in Priorsford or to Laverlaw.

“We were a gay party at tea, and afterwards we walked up the Glen, which is wild and green like a glen in a ballad. The house too is like something in a ballad. Mrs. Whitson told me that when Mr. Elliot was a bachelor it was a gloomy, uncomfortable abode, but now it is most charming in every way. You would love it.

“Then, yesterday, the whole party came over to the Place. When I asked them, I explained that I’d very few chairs, and nothing was really in order, but the Bidboroughs are going south very soon, and Peter was determined to come at once. Mrs. Whitson and Althea kindly came to support me, and brought little James Brodie, Mrs. Bruce baked cream scones and a feathery sponge-cake, Mrs. Cooper, rising nobly to the occasion, made ‘drop-scones’ and brandy scrolls, which the children enjoyed and, altogether, my housewarming was very successful.

“As we sat in what had been the old dining-room, and is now the living-room, with one of its windows looking out to the court with its cobble-stones, and the other to the garden, Lady Bidborough (I can’t help thinking of her as Jean) told the story of the fateful dinner. She can talk beautiful soft Border Scots—and she imitated the foolish aunt insisting

that ‘the poor lad’ must get his meal in comfort, and imagined for us the talk in the kitchen among the servants and the listening soldiers, the suspicious eyes watching while Mr. Secretary Murray in his drover’s bonnet and rough clothes mounted his tired horse and clattered over the cobbles on the way to Polmood.

“Before the party left, the children had a great game of hide-and-seek through the premises, led by Althea, who completely forgot that she was grown-up and about to be presented at Holyrood, and rushed about like a young colt. Kind Alison took charge of little James Brodie, and, noticing ‘Archibauld’ looking wistfully on, made him play too, so everyone was happy.

“This, my dear, is a long story about my doings, but I hope and believe that you will be interested. You ought to be, anyway, for after all, this place belonged to your kin. I hear a good deal about the Veitches from one and another, and never anything but good. Mrs. Elliot says Gideon writes to her now and again, and seems to like his life in Canada.

“And now to thank you for your last letter, which I’ve read more than once. I quite understand and sympathise with Mrs. Auchinvole’s attitude. Don’t worry her by suggesting that she come to this outlandish place; she is one who would ‘rather hear the mouse squeak than the lark sing.’ But when *you* feel you want a change from the streets and the noise, leave her in the flat—with the Gordons downstairs she’d be quite all right—and come off to me; with the Coopers I ought to be able to make you quite comfortable.

“It is good to hear that you’re picking up the threads of old friendships so successfully, and enjoying entertaining. I can imagine what good meals you arrange for your friends, always something a little different. I doubt if my Mrs. Cooper will ever rise above the ordinary, and I don’t feel adequate to direct her, never having really kept house before, but when you come you must give us some hints. Some day, I hope, I’ll meet Jessica Irwin and her Communist son and Buddhist daughter, and it would be a privilege to know your friend Mrs. Temple. People who have lived—not merely existed—for over eighty years—are not only interesting to speak to, they’re the greatest value as guides through this dangerous jungle of a world. Though I’m quite aware that my life, so far, has been nothing but a stroll in a highly respectable suburb, that’s not to say I don’t realise how terrifying life can be, and how badly we may need a guide.

“What a lot of reading you find time for! Not at present being in touch with a library, I’ve had to fall back on the books in Glenbucho—Gideon’s library, I think it is. Did you ever read *Ravenshoe*, by Henry Kingsley? I enjoyed that a lot. And I got from the Priorsford Library (on the advice of an old poacher) a *Memoir of Robert Chambers*, which is very interesting. Also I’m reading a book about these parts called *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, by James Hogg, Sir Walter’s friend.

“But I’ve got it in my mind to embroider seats for the dining-room chairs, and if I start it’ll be a case of every spare minute of the day taken up, and reading relegated to the first half-hour in bed. How full life is getting!—Your loving ISOBEL.”

“By the way, you ask about the minister. I’ve never seen him, as he is away on three months’ leave of absence, and, at present, we are having what Mrs. Bruce calls ‘supply’—either very young men who haven’t got a church, or old men who have stopped having a church. It’s a nice old church, with plain glass windows, which I think such a good idea.

“I.”

Kitty Baillie smiled as she laid aside the letter, remembering the Isobel she had known at the Queen’s Court Hotel, always contented, to be sure, always occupied with something, but leading a somewhat dull and circumscribed life. It was true, she thought, what Isobel often said of herself—she lacked initiative. Left to herself, she might have stayed there, the years passing over her almost unnoticed, losing, gradually, her golden look, and perhaps finished up by marrying some invalidish man, probably a soldier, yellow of skin and querulous of voice, simply to take care of him.

“It was my flat,” Kitty told herself, “that did it. It gave her a desire to own something, to make a home for herself. It was the Scots blood in her that drew her over the Border, and Glenbucho was sheer inspiration on my part. Our fathers would have called it foreordination, and I believe they’d have been right. Looking back, it’s quite clear often how we’ve been led, step by step, to the place appointed for us.”

And as Kitty thought of Isobel with a house of her own, her Coopers, her increasing circle, the fear came to her that with all these new possessions she herself would not mean so much to her friend. It was an ugly little fear, and one to be got rid of, so she turned to herself, asking:

“And what does that matter? Be thankful, you wretched little dog-in-the-manger,

that Isobel's life is getting richer. Her instinct was right—to go away, to stand by herself, to take on new responsibilities. And you're really glad, you know you are, so answer that letter at once in a way that'll encourage her, not daunt her.”

CHAPTER XV

Brave flowers! that I could garrant it like you
And be as little vain!

HENRY KING

ON the Friday of that week Isobel's belongings were taken in a cart to the Place, and in the late afternoon she walked over to take up residence in her new home.

It had been a warm, bright day, and though the courtyard was now in shadow, the garden still lay bathed in sunlight, and Isobel walked through the square hall and out into the evening glow. The lupins were out in the long border, and made a brave show with Iceland poppies, pansies, and columbines. The lawn was beginning to do credit to Robert's efforts; against the house clematis grew, and the scarlet creeper, *tropæolum*, while on either side of the hall window grew a rose-bush, one of small yellow Scots roses, very prickly as to stems, the other of white Jacobite roses.

Already the Place had a cared-for look, and Isobel had a passing wish that Gideon Veitch could see it now, and know that the present owner loved and valued it as it deserved.

She followed the path that led to the far gate, and at the side of the house found Archibald and his father busy carpentering.

"It's a hutch," Robert explained, while Archibald, sitting on his heels watching, volunteered the information that Jimmie Newbigging was going to give him a pair of rabbits, and that he would feed them and clean the hutch himself.

"Well, see you do it," said his father.

"But I will, Daddy, sure's death. If I didna feed them they'd dee."

"They would," said Isobel. "It's a great responsibility. The garden's looking wonderfully well, Robert."

Robert, evidently feeling that his position was not very respectful, rose to his feet, and stood in his favourite drooping attitude before his mistress.

"No' so bad," he said; "but there's a terrible lot that canna be done till the back-end. The fruit's comin' on, plenty currants and gooseberries, and the apples and plums are promising well. . . . I see there's a fair hedge o' lavender ower by the tennis-court, and there's a guid when flowers to be goin' on wi' in the borders. It's been a nice kinna place at one time, ye can see that."

"And will be again, Robert, I hope. . . . I'm glad you're going to have rabbits, Archibald. Are they white ones?"

"No' a' white"—Archibald's tone was solemn—"the faither yin has black patches; that's how I ken he's the faither, and the mother yin has one patch."

"They're ill for eatin' their young yins," said Robert sadly.

"Do lions and tigers eat their young yins?" Archibald asked, staring at Isobel, who replied:

"I never heard that they did, though you'd expect it from such fierce animals, rather than from the gentle rabbit."

Robert shook his head, murmuring, "It's an awfu' world," while Archibald said:

"I'll gie ma rabbits such a lot o' meat that they'll never be hungry."

Isobel asked him how he liked the Glenbucho school.

"Fine," he said; "there's a pond ower the hedge in the playground, an' a water-fall. It's gey wee the noo, but in a flood it'd droon ye."

"Well, I hope you'll be careful," Isobel told him, and added, "I'll look forward to seeing the rabbits in their own hutch. Good night to you both."

When she came down to dinner, dressed in white, she found the candles lit in the small white dining-room, and a simple, well-cooked meal awaiting her. As she drank her coffee and looked out at the westering sun, she told herself that all she wanted was someone to enjoy it with her; when Kitty came it would be perfect.

The living-room was gay with big bowls of flowers, and Isobel sat down on the sofa with its hard chintz bolsters, and admired her handiwork. The room was quite as nice as she had hoped it would be. The recess, with the black oak door left open against the wall, was much improved by its pale green varnished paint that reflected the few delicate bits of china on the shelves; through the glass-doors of the bookcase glowed mellow bindings, and the bureau by the west-looking window absolutely invited one to sit down and write. She liked the space and pleasant bareness, though, she admitted to herself, a few more chairs would be necessary if any entertaining was to be done. But chairs were an expensive item, and no money beyond what was necessary must be spent in the meantime.

She didn't yet know what her weekly bills would be. Mrs. Cooper seemed careful and economical, and Robert, so far, had asked very little for the garden, but that there would come times of spending Isobel well knew, and she must have reserves. Living in an hotel, or boarding with Mrs. Bruce, she had known almost to a penny where she stood, but a household, even a small one, she had never before coped with. Her first order to the grocer had been an eye-opener. If you began with bare shelves, what a heap of things were needed for a store-room! Flour, sago, tapioca, lentils, peas, beans, sugar of all kinds—loaf, granulated, sifted, and brown—dried fruits, spices, cheese, bottles of essences, bottles of vinegar and ketchup, all kinds of tinned things to help out in an emergency. And cleaning things!—there was no end to them, all with funny-sounding names, a positive tank of paraffin oil, candles

galore, and matches. And after she and the grocer had concocted a formidable list, they found a multitude of things had been forgotten, things like pepper, salt, and mustard, bacon, biscuits, marmalade.

Mrs. Bruce had very kindly sent over a dozen pots of her own jam, remarking that she had too much, and that the jam-making time was coming on again, and that would keep them going till their own fruit was ready. And it would, Mrs. Cooper had told her mistress, for she had already made some rhubarb jam “to keep Rubbert and Archibauld going,” and the gift jam would be dedicated to the dining-room.

It was all great fun, Isobel considered, and Kitty and she would laugh together over their difficulties—poor Kitty with her dread of a debtor’s prison! But she held that her flat was worth it, and, certainly, thought Isobel, Glenbucho Place was worth any sacrifice. To be able to sit in this room—a room that was part of history—and look on one side into the shadowy courtyard, on the other to the lupins, and feel that it was her very own, hers to have and to keep! She had come home, here she would live and die—always supposing, she reminded herself, that she could keep solvent.

Mrs. Cooper had put a lamp and matches on a table, but there was no need to light it, and by ten o’clock Isobel was wending her way up the uncarpeted oak stairs to bed. When she came to her own room she stood for a minute in the doorway looking at it, wondering if it were going to be a kind room to her, giving her good nights and sweet dreams, and wakening her to being each day with fresh vigour and hope.

It was a meek-looking room, with a clean but faded wall-paper of blue flowers on a silky white ground, a small mahogany four-post bed with a valance, and a petticoated dressing-table. She had chosen it for three reasons; it was near the rooms occupied by the Coopers, a good thing in case something “went bump in the night”; she liked the thought of sleeping in a four-post bed, and, thirdly (and mostly) because it had—or so it seemed to its owner—a peace all of its own. The other rooms were larger, and would probably be used for guests. The big room at the end of the passage she was sure had been occupied by the reigning laird and his wife; there was an importance about its large bed and opulent wardrobe, and about the dressing-room that opened out of it. But this meek room of hers had been used, she thought, by a succession of daughters of the house, who had lived quietly happy days, dreaming dreams and waiting.

The windows had been left wide open, Isobel’s dressing-gown was lying neatly over a chair, her nightgown on the turned-down bedclothes. She sniffed the sheets that had never seen a laundry, knowing only the sun and wind of Glenbucho. Homespun, Mrs. Bruce said they were, made by some eident housewife a hundred

or more years ago.

It was wonderful to get such things!

More by token she had not yet paid for them, Isobel remembered with a start. Mrs. Bruce had promised to write to Mr. Gideon Veitch, but, so far as she knew, no reply had come. Probably young Gideon was a poor correspondent, or, perhaps, he didn't like to be compelled to think of his old home now that it belonged to a stranger. Should she wait his time, or should she write herself and say she would be glad to get things settled?

Gideon Veitch. It was odd how often she found herself thinking of him, how she listened when Mrs. Bruce or Davy told some tale of his "faulty tattered past." "A wild laddie," Davy said he had been, up to every mischief under the sun, but, he admitted, as he grew older he had become "rale wise."

"Ye see," Davy had explained, "it wasna easy for Maister Gideon; there was just his faither and him, and the auld Laird wadna hear o' him leaving the Place, and kept him hingin' about when he felt he should ha' been out in the world makin' a living. He kent fine how things were gaun, but the Laird was failing fast and couldna tak' it in, so we didna worry him, just tried to keep things in their usual as lang as he was here, and he died without a thought but that there would ay be a Veitch in Glenbucho. Faur better. What good would it have done him to ken that the Place would be sold, and the last Veitch work for his living in Canada?"

"The world's a different place sin' the War, our verra ways o' thinking are different, but there's some folk canna change, and the auld Laird was one o' them. A' the things he'd been taught to believe in when he was a callant he believed in to the end, what he didna want to see he just didna see. Maister Gideon whiles tried to argue yon wi' him, but it was worse than useless. And, mind you, he was wonderfu' happy, readin' the papers he believed in, wanderin' about the place, seeing the faces he'd ay kent. Whiles he'd be a wee thing worried about unemployment in this country, and the daft-like way foreigners were behavin', but no' for long. He would say to me, 'You're a bit of a Socialist, Davy. You and your kind would send our country to the dogs,' and then Maister Gideon would mak' up a lee about me bein' a Bolshie and in league wi' Stalin—he was a daft laddie. Me a Socialist! I'm yin o' the auld Liberals; there's practically nane o' them left noo, mair's the pity."

Isobel tried to picture in her mind the old Laird in his fool's paradise. It seemed incredible, for even the "respectable" papers admitted to the house must have told him of the frightful things that were happening, the massacre by poison gas of a helpless, half civilised people, Spain tearing itself to pieces, and he must have wondered what Britain was doing. Then, she supposed, he would wander out to the

peace of the garden and the fields and the quiet running water, and forget all the distressing things he had read, and when he came in somebody would have removed the papers, and all would be well.

It could not, she reflected, have been very easy for young Gideon to remain inactive and watch things crumble, while he spent his days trying to keep his father happy, but he would be glad now that he had done it. After all, he was still young, only thirty-two (his father had married late), and he had plenty of time to make good.

Probably he was more glad than sorry to leave the Place, which must have seemed, for some years at least, a sort of prison, and go across the seas to be with men, and work.

Would he ever come back? she wondered, and assured herself that it was extremely unlikely. All his interests now would be in Canada, his friends, and in time, doubtless, he would marry and perhaps tell his children about his childhood in the old house at Glenbucho.

For some reason Isobel felt a great dislike to these children. She hoped they would never come to the Place and want to see the turret-bedroom that had been their father's. That was hers, and having it, she felt she owned something of Gideon Veitch.

The cry of an owl roused the girl to the fact that she was standing dreaming by the open window when she ought to be in bed. Briskly she began to undress, and, wide-awake now, lit the lamp by her bedside, and settled down to a chapter of the *Memoir of Robert Chambers*.

CHAPTER XVI

The things that do attain
The happy life be these, I find,
The riches left, not sot with pain,
The fruitful ground, the quiet mind.

EARL OF SURREY

THESE were happy days for Isobel Logan.

Every morning the pleasure was fresh to wake in her four-post bed, and look across the lawn to the rowan-trees round the water-fall. What a brave new world it was that contained her house, her garden, and her Coopers! She liked to breakfast on fine mornings at a table set out on the paved path before the hall-window, and watch the birds get daily bolder as they picked up crumbs round her feet, and listen to the sounds from the farm, pails clattering, cocks crowing.

Housekeeping was still an adventure, not a dreary duty, and she would not have missed taking her way each morning down the long passage with the small windows to the kitchen where Mrs. Cooper was waiting. There was little to arrange, for Isobel liked the simplest of meals, but there was always lots to hear, for Mrs. Cooper enjoyed talking, and found her mistress an interested listener.

“Hev ye heard, Mem, that Archibauld’s gotten his rabbits? Aye, they came two days syne and he’s fair killing them wi’ kindness. Rubbert says that’ll soon stop and the poor beasts’ll hev to depend on him, but we’ll see. Archibauld’s a faithful sort of boy, too, you’d be surprised at the way he sticks at things, and he’s fair daft about thae rabbits. They’re the first animals he’s ever had to do wi’, for in Glasgow we couldna even keep a cat, not in a single room, and he canna mind of Hattonknowe much, for he wasna five when we left. He thinks he can mind about the Christmas trees, but it’s mebbe just me talking to him about them. Mrs. Johnston (our mistress, ye know) used to give a Christmas tree every year to the children that went to the village school, only there was no village, just a school, and the children came from farm cottages all round about. All the children of the estate workers, whether they were at school or no, got a present from the tree, and a grand tea wi’ pastries and crackers. And as well as a present each child got a lovely picture-book and some sweeties. We looked forward to it all the year, the mothers as well as the bairns. It began early, about two o’clock, for everybody had a good bit to walk home, and Mrs. Johnston was awful thoughtful for them. She dressed the tree herself, her and one or two of the maids, and oh! it was grand! And when there was snow outside it was like a picture on a Christmas card, the school-room with a fire at each end, and

the tree in the middle, and all the happy faces, and Mrs. Johnston smiling at a'body."

"Was Mrs. Johnston fairly young?" Isobel asked. "I had an idea she was quite old."

"She was near seventy, but she was that straight and elegant she ay looked young. And her dresses were lovely. She wasna the kind that goes about all the time in a tweed skirt and a jumper; her dresses came from London, and when she was dressed for the evening she was a treat."

Mrs. Cooper's tone was so full of pride and admiration that Isobel felt she was getting a revealing light on the duty of the Lady of the Big House; she was expected, it appeared, to dress the part. She had thought vaguely of the Coopers' former mistress as a very stout old lady who might pant round the garden at a time, and who probably drove daily with an obese doglet, so this revelation of a straight, slim, fashionable woman was somewhat startling. What would be expected from herself, Isobel wondered? Then remembered with relief her friend Mrs. Whitson. Glenbucho was already supplied with all it needed in the way of a fairy godmother. She need not compete. *Could* not compete, she reminded herself. Aloud she said, "How very interesting! It must have been a great loss to the countryside when Mrs. Johnston died."

Mrs. Cooper shook her head. "Something terrible. We couldna believe it at first, for she was such a short time ill. There she was, walking about wi' the dogs, with a blithe word for everybody, and before the end of the week the funeral and everything was over. And there was nobody to come after her, that was the sad thing. It meant that everything had to be sold, of course, and the whole household thrown out of a job. A' well, it's all past, and I'm that glad to see Rubbert back in a garden, and, though I say it who shouldna, he's no eye-servant is Rubbert. He'll do his best, all the more because you canna direct him—living in London you couldna be expected to know much about country things."

"No," Isobel agreed. "I'm quite sure Robert will do his best. He's made an enormous difference in the place already, and he's got all sorts of ideas, like making a rockery in that rather unsightly patch above the kitchen garden—it seems there are some stones he can use. Well, what are we going to eat to-day? This isn't a butcher's day, is it?"

"No, Mem, but we've plenty," and Mrs. Cooper went into details about curry and croquettes, finishing up with, "and there'll be a fish-van some time in the afternoon. We're that well off with plenty of butter and milk and cream. If ye were in Priorsford any time ye might bring me a bottle of rennet for curds. You'd get it at the chemist's."

“Rennet for curds,” repeated Isobel, making a note in a small book. “I’m going to Priorsford to-morrow. Is there anything else you need?”

“Well, if anybody was coming to stay, we’d be short of hot-water cans; there’s just the one holds in, the one you use.”

“Or don’t use. I prefer to wash in a bathroom where I can splash. But we must certainly get some cans. Three, perhaps? Had you running water in the bedrooms at Hattonknowe?”

“No, the mistress said she was old-fashioned, and liked brass pans brought in by tidy housemaids; but fixed-in basins must be a great convenience where there’s an awful lot of folk—in an hotel like.”

“Indeed, yes. The only visitor we are likely to have at present is a great friend of mine in London. I hope Mrs. Baillie will come early in July, and we must do our best to make her comfortable. By the way, have you met Mrs. Bruce yet?”

Mrs. Cooper nodded. “Last night in the stackyard, when I was out with Archibald. She’s a wee thing, remote in her manner, is she no’? Coming from Glasgow, where everybody’s very easy and frank, I notice it, but some folk are like that wi’ strangers, and she’s been very kind to Archibald. She gave him three duck eggs last night when he said he’d never tasted one, and takes an interest in his rabbits. Mr. Bruce is awful nice, and Mrs. Newbiggin’s a kind neighbour. I can ay get a crack wi’ her, so we’ve all the company we need.”

“That’s good, but you must all go down to Priorsford one Saturday, and see the shops and the cinema. We must find out when there’s something good coming. What sort of film d’you like?”

A smile wreathed Mrs. Cooper’s face as she said:

“I’m awful fond of Shirley Temple. She’s a real wee treat, but Rubbert he likes gangsters and police cars, and Archibald likes something wi’ animals. We took him to ‘Elephant Boy,’ and he was fair daft to get awa’ to India and have an elephant to sit on! The next thing was we had to take him to the Zoo to see one close. We thought it’d put him off them, but no fear! You start him on elephants and he’ll fair deeve ye. That’s why we’re thankful he’s ta’en up wi’ rabbits.”

Isobel went away wondering if rabbits would ever adequately fill the place in Archibald’s affections now occupied by elephants, and in the afternoon she discussed the question with Mrs. Whitson and Althea, who took a kindly interest in all that went on in the Place.

“Oh yes, they will,” said Althea. “They’re his own, you see, and he has to feed them and look after them, and they’re near him, as elephants couldn’t be.”

“That’s true. You think, then, the elephants are merely the desire of the moth for

the star, so to speak?”

“If you put it like that. Archibald must be a funny fellow, a nice funny fellow.”

Mrs. Whitson, who was sewing a fine seam while she listened, said meditatively, “I can’t say that I’ve ever met a really nasty little boy.”

“Any nasty little girls?” her daughter asked.

“Well”—Mrs. Whitson’s needle was suspended—“not nasty exactly, but precocious and self-conscious and unlikeable. Like that child who came with the Challoners the other day, and peacocked about.”

“Oh, that brat,” said Althea. “Wouldn’t deign to gambol with Stanley Baldwin, and was very sniffy to poor James when he brought his treasured new engine to show her.”

“Where is James?” Isobel asked.

“Gone out to tea,” said Althea, “but he’ll be back soon. I took him to see Miss Agnes Home to-day. He’d never been behind a counter before, and, my goodness, it was a treat to him. He weighed potatoes in the big scales, and sweeties on the counter scales, and peeped into biscuit boxes. . . . Mother, I really believe that Miss Home is as much excited as I am about my presentation. I ‘share’ with her every item of information about it. She brooded over the card of invitation—command, rather—reading it over and over in an awed way, and she knows every article that I’m going to wear on the great night, down to my semmit.”

“What is a ‘semmit?’” Isobel asked. “I don’t think I ever heard the word.”

“You wouldn’t,” said Althea. “A semmit’s peculiar to Scotland. It’s what in England is known as a vest. Mother, couldn’t we have Miss Home up to see a dress-rehearsal? I’ll need to try everything on before we go to Edinburgh.”

“Why not? An excellent idea; and I’m sure Miss Home would be pleased.”

“May I come too?” Isobel asked. “I daily bless Miss Agnes Home. But for her I might never have known you except in a formal calling way.”

“Of *course* you must come,” cried Althea, embracing her friend’s legs from her lowly position beside the puppy. “I only wish you were going to Holyroodhouse too. But p’r’aps you’ve been presented already.”

“Oh dear, no. I never was important enough to think of going to Court—a Court at Buckingham Palace must be an intimidating thing—but now that I’m settled in Scotland, I must say I’d rather like to make my curtsy at Holyroodhouse. Some day I may, but meantime I’d love to share Miss Agnes Home’s ‘audience’ and see you dressed. D’you know where I’m going to-morrow? To Priorsford, to have tea with Lady Bidborough.”

“Oh, *lucky* you!” Althea cried. “I wish I was going.”

“You can’t have all the treats,” Isobel told her. “You’re going to Holyroodhouse to see the King and Queen.”

“Yes, but you simply can’t think how much I admire Lady Bidborough. I could sit and listen to her voice for hours. Wasn’t it lovely that day at the Place when she told the children about Murray of Broughton? Lucky little beasts! I don’t expect they appreciate her in the least.”

“What I’m selfishly hoping,” said Isobel, “is that it won’t be a party, and that I’ll get a chance of a talk with my hostess. A stranger at a party of old friends is a great nuisance, don’t you think? No-one wants to talk to her because it’s a case of beginning at the very beginning and finding topics, and everyone would very much rather be deep in talk on some interesting local subject about which the new-comer knows nothing.”

“Yes,” Mrs. Whitson agreed, “there is something in that; but, on the other hand, we’re frequently very tired of local topics, and it’s rather stimulating to meet someone fresh to the scene, who looks at things from a different angle. Don’t you think that is so!”

“Perhaps!” Isobel looked gratefully at her hostess as she added, “Anyway, it’s a comfortable doctrine for the stranger.”

Next afternoon Isobel made her way across Tweed Bridge in search of The Rigs. Her directions had been, “Cross the bridge and keep to your right till you come to a house with a stork on the lawn, then turn left up the hill, and The Rigs is at the end of the road, with its back to the town and its eyes to the hills.”

Yes, there was the stork, and here was the hill, and that small grey house in the flowery garden couldn’t be anything but The Rigs. A placid-faced elderly woman opened the door, and said, “Oh aye, come awa’ in, mem; her leddyship’s expectin’ ye.”

Isobel found herself in a room, long and rather low-ceilinged, with a window that was like the bow of a ship. The pale yellow walls were hung with coloured prints in deep rosewood frames, and old Persian rugs lay on the polished floor. Tea was laid in the window, and as her hostess rose from the sofa to greet her, Isobel congratulated herself that there were only two cups on the tray.

“Come and sit on the sofa and admire the view,” Lady Bidborough said. “I’m selfishly having you all to myself to-day. Even the children are out. They’ve gone to tea to the Hamiltons’ farm, Drykeld, a place they adore. Mrs. Hamilton was Muriel Duff-Whalley, and lived in that red turrety house called The Towers. Haven’t you met Mrs. Duff-Whalley yet?”

“No,” said Isobel, smiling in sympathy with the wicked glint in her companion’s eyes. “Is she—impressive?”

“She used to be the terror of my young life, and even now, middle-aged as I am, I wilt before her. And the annoying thing is that there’s no reason to be impressed by her. It isn’t that she’s better than other people, or cleverer or kinder, it’s merely that she’s got a domineering manner, and a sort of ferret-like way of finding out her neighbours’ quite innocent secrets and making them seem rather discreditable. And she is such a snob that it is really funny. Muriel found a way of escape when she fell in love with Patrick Hamilton, and became a farmer’s wife. She has three little boys and—one of Time’s revenges—Mrs. Duff-Whalley is wax in their hands. She can still intimidate meek souls, but she’s a mere crushed worm before Fred and Archie and small fat George! But you don’t know Priorsford people yet, so I mustn’t bore you with talk of them.”

“Oh, but please tell me about them. I expect I’ll get to know them in time, and it would be a help to have some knowledge of them beforehand, especially of the fearsome ones.”

“Oh, you won’t find many fearsome ones. The sad thing to me is that the people I was fondest of are no longer here, the people who took a real affectionate interest in me and mine. When I come back now, there are so many closed doors. I rather envy you coming fresh to the place, not realising what you have missed by not knowing those who have gone, ready to make friends with the people who have taken their places. I should think you’d be interested in your fellow-men.”

“I’ve got to be,” said Isobel. “Being an utterly solitary person, I depend on the people round me in a way that I don’t suppose you can understand. It makes me very grateful when friendship is offered to me.”

Jean nodded. “I think I understand, and I’m glad you’ve bought The Place; it’ll be the beginning of so much to you.”

Isobel laughed. “Don’t I realise that? I came casually to Glenbucho to spend a few weeks, and look about me. That was the first step. The Place took hold of me, and when the chance offered I—very rashly—bought it, second step. I needed someone to look after it, and Providence sent me the Coopers, Mr., Mrs., and Archibald. If I go on acquiring at this rate——”

Isobel stopped as tea was brought in by the same elderly woman who had opened the door to her. She laid everything out very deliberately, and then, her head on one side, said, “Is that right, d’ye think? I’m out o’ the way of this work now.”

“It’s perfectly right, thank you, Mrs. McCosh,” Lady Bidborough said, and turning to her guest, as the door closed behind the housekeeper, added, “The other

two maids have gone to see Edinburgh this afternoon. That is our dear Mrs. McCosh, my great support when we lived here. She lives on in The Rigs, and her welcome is always one of the best things about coming back.”

“I can well believe it. I thought, when she opened the door to me, what a kind welcoming face she had. How delightful to have tea in this window; it feels as if we were sailing.”

“Yes,” said Jean, “I’ve always liked this window. We used to play it was a ship.” She looked round the pleasant, shabby room. “Every dent and scratch reminds me of the grand times we used to have.”

“You and your three brothers?”

“Well, Gervase is an adopted brother, but just like our own. Davy is the eldest, he has a wife and one boy. Jock is married too and has a baby of two. Thomas, the *angriest* child I ever saw, with a dark scowl perpetually on his face. It is so odd, for Agnes and Jock are the mildest, gentlest of creatures. Jock’s real passion is for beetles, but Agnes doesn’t mind. They live near us in the Cotswolds, which is a joy. Gervase—Mhor we call him—is a soldier, and in Egypt at present. We have great reunions at Mintern Abbas and at Laverlaw, and try to forget how terribly old we are all getting. To think that I’ve a boy of fourteen and that I’ll soon be forty! And the odd thing is I don’t really feel any older than when I was Jean Jardine, keeping house on a very small income, and trying to lead three boys in the way which they should go.”

“It was a big task for a young girl.”

“Oh, I don’t know. We had great fun, and responsibility sits lightly on young shoulders. I’ve had a good, good time. . . . But why am I talking about myself when I want to hear about you.”

Isobel laughed as she said, “But there’s nothing to hear. Blessed is the country that has no history. I don’t know whether it’s equally blessed for a woman, but that’s my case. Few people can have had a more entirely uneventful life, until, six weeks ago or so, when I suddenly determined to go to Scotland. I am Scots, you know, but I’ve always lived in England.”

“Then what decided you suddenly to come?”

“Well—you’re sure it doesn’t bore you?—I made friends with a Scotswoman in the Kensington hotel where I was living, a Mrs. Baillie. She came to the hotel last October, very sad, and worn out with nursing, having just lost her husband; but when the spring came she roused herself and decided that she must have a house of her own again. She let me help her look for a flat, and when she found one, it was fun getting all her possessions out of store and putting them into their places. I’d never

really thought of having a house of my own, perhaps I was too lazy, but when I saw Kitty Baillie's pleasure in getting her own things round her, I realised what I was missing living in an hotel. But the odd thing was, I had no desire to make a home for myself in London, where I had spent some quite happy and contented years. Although I have never lived in Scotland, except for a fortnight one summer, I felt it was there I must go. Both my parents were Scottish-born. I suppose that must have had something to do with it."

"Of course. But what made you hit on this part of the world?"

"That was Kitty Baillie. The Veitches were connections of hers. She had visited them as a young girl, and had always remembered Glenbucho Place. She wrote to the clergyman to ask about rooms in Glenbucho village, and he, being away on sick leave, sent her letter to Miss Agnes Home, Merchant—you know, the little shop standing in a garden?—who suggested Mrs. Bruce's rooms at Glenbucho Farm, and so it all fell out."

"And so it all fell out," Jean repeated. "How can anyone help believing in foreordination! It was fore-ordained that you should meet Mrs. Baillie and that she should send you here, and that you should buy the Place."

"Ye-es," Isobel agreed, rather doubtfully. "But if you believe that everything's settled beforehand there's not much use trying to do anything about anything, is there?"

"Oh yes, there is"—Jean wagged her head wisely—"because there is free-will as well as foreordination. We were brought up by a Calvinist great-aunt who taught us that the two doctrines were perfectly reconcilable. What you have missed, Miss Logan, being brought up in England!"

"Indeed, yes," said Isobel, and wondered, as she looked at Jean's golden-brown eyes that lit and sparkled and saddened as she talked, if her husband appreciated this little Calvinist mate of his.

"Here come the children," Lady Bidborough cried, as voices were heard in the garden, and the next moment the three burst in, paused when they saw a stranger, then recognising Isobel as their hostess at Glenbucho, came eagerly forward.

"Enjoyed yourselves, duckies?" their mother asked.

"Grand," said Peter. "Mrs. Hamilton let me ride Okay and we had a Calgary stampede. Quentin and Archie and Fred were steers and I lassoed Quentin."

Jean glanced at her younger son, who was standing looking particularly stolid, and asked how he had liked being a steer.

"Not much," said Quentin, and added, in the slow sagacious way that was peculiarly his own, "I don't think I'll play that game again until I'm big enough to do

the lassoing.”

“I see,” said his mother. “This seems to have been Peter’s afternoon,” and she shook her head at her schoolboy son.

Isobel rose to go, and was escorted to the gate by the whole family.

“We’ll all look forward to seeing you on our next visit,” Jean told her. “I have enjoyed this afternoon.”

“And I,” said Isobel, as she turned to go down the hill.

CHAPTER XVII

Twa clear candles
Bonnily they shine.
The loaf is o' the wheaten meal,
The cloth o' the linen fine.

MARION ANGUS

WHEN the July days came, and London was hot and airless and dusty, Kitty Baillie began to think longingly of the freshness of Scots moors, and of tall flowers in walled gardens, and even to talk of them to Mrs. Auchinvole.

“Well madam,” said that worthy, “I’m not one of these people that are ay needing a change and talking about fine air and so on. I never feel no difference in air myself, and I’m very well content in London. But you go, madam. It’ll be a nice change for you to be with Miss Logan, and I daresay she’ll make you quite comfortable, though I don’t fancy an old house in the country myself. Never give me a thought, madam, I’ll be all right here. It’ll be a fine holiday for me to go out when I like and sit in the Park, and see the shops, and be late in the morning, and just have a snack when I please. How long d’you think you’ll be staying? A month, mebbe? Och! it’ll be fine for ye.”

So Kitty addressed an envelope to

MISS LOGAN
GLENBUCHO PLACE
TWEEDDALE

and wrote:

“Isobel, my dear, can you take me next Wednesday as ever was? London is horrid, the shops have begun sales, the trees are looking dull and dusty, even the flat has lost its first rapture and the thought of the Scots express steaming out of Euston is bliss. The Auchinvole is willing to stay here alone; indeed, she is eagerly looking forward to having the place to herself, and of course it will be very nice for her to get rid of me for a little, and be able to plan her days as she pleases. I offered her a fortnight at the seaside, but she would have none of it. London for her every time. So, you see, I feel I can leave with an easy mind.

“My only regret is leaving Mrs. Temple. When one is always in the house, a visitor coming in at the same time every day is something to look forward to. Mrs. Temple knows she hasn’t to make any effort for me; if

she feels tired I sit and sew beside her, and we don't trouble to talk, but generally she has lots to tell me, for she is a good correspondent, and gets letters from friends in all parts of the world. Old age has no terrors if one likes to read and write, and Mrs. Temple portions out her day—so much time for reading, for letter-writing, for knitting, for visitors, for listening to the wireless—and enjoys every hour of it. Sometimes she gets a little down and says she leads a useless life, helping no-one, then one has to remind her of all the people at outposts of Empire who are so glad of her long, interesting letters, letters that younger, busier people haven't time to write. Without her faithful letters some people would almost lose touch with home.

“Jessica Irwin and her girl have gone to Switzerland for two months; the Communist son is, very suitably, visiting Moscow. I visited ‘Christine’s’ with Jessica before she went away, and she got some things. Your friend Patty was most helpful and kind, I gather that her husband feels the summer a trying time. They can't take him away, and a small flat is bound to get hot and stuffy. She returned an evasive answer when I asked when *she* took a holiday. I expect she hates the thought of leaving ‘Jack,’ but it won't improve matters if she breaks down. She told me how good you were about writing to Jack and sending him flowers and books. I only wish I could think of some way of helping them.

“Isn't it odd how quite useless, in fact, positively deleterious, people get the best of good times, rollicking about with money to burn, full of health and spirits, while really deserving people have their noses pressed firm to the grindstone, hardly getting a chance to look round them? I try to tell myself that there are compensations that we don't know of: the butterfly is enjoying his brief day before the night comes; the poor worker may have a life that is very rich within—but I don't know. Anyway, it is terribly hard for your friend Patty to see her husband broken in his youth. But I don't think she is to be consoled with on having to work. I expect she realises it is the saving of her in every way.

“I'm tremendously interested in all you tell me of your neighbours, and am looking forward to meeting them. It is splendid that in the Coopers you seem to have found just the couple you needed; and how obliging of them to have an ‘Archibauld.’

“Till Wednesday at 6.15. That, I believe, is the moment when the Tinto express draws into Glenbucho.

“Yours,
“KITTY.”

Isobel rose early on the day of her friend’s arrival, feeling that it was no ordinary day, and that she ought to be out and about seeing after things.

Everything was ready for the expected guest. Robert had been working early and late to have things looking their best; the lawn was a credit to him, green and velvety, hardly to be recognised as the shaggy thing it had been when he came; the beds were free of weeds, the paths raked, the box edging trimmed. It was satisfactory to know that one could look all round the premises now, for bonfires had burned up the disfiguring rubbish, and “a lick” of green paint applied by Robert to outhouse doors and windows had helped vastly. If only, Isobel thought, she could afford to have the house re-harled, but there was no use thinking about it in the meantime, and she resolutely turned away her eyes from the broken patches. After all, it simply looked what it had every right to look, old and weather-beaten: freshly harled and cream-washed, it might look like an aged woman with her face lifted.

Coming in from the garden, Isobel visited once more the room that was to be Kitty’s. The best of everything she possessed in the way of fine towels and pretty covers had gone to its comfort and adorning.

The eiderdown on the bed was new, fresh chintz curtains hung at the two windows, and if the carpet was rather bare, there was a really lovely, warm rug at the bedside. Isobel was sure Kitty would like the two pictures that hung on the walls. One, above the mantelpiece, was a charming coloured drawing of two girls in profile, with meek, down-looking eyes, and ringlets; the other, above the bed, was done in needlework, and portrayed a gentleman with a fair beard, a golden circlet round his head, holding aloft in his hands cymbals, while, from a small round tower, a female figure regarded him with evident distaste.

It took the mistress of Glenbucho fully an hour that morning to do the flowers to her liking. A large mixed bowl was put on the chest in the hall, another on the bureau in the parlour, the dining-room was filled with sweet peas, while mignonette in deep green glass dishes scented the air everywhere. Sweet peas and mignonette also adorned Kitty’s bedroom.

Mrs. Cooper was anxious for instructions about the tastes of the expected guest, and found her mistress rather provokingly vague on the subject.

“Yes, soup, I think, Mrs. Cooper.”

“Yesterday, mem, you said sole and no soup, so I ordered it to be sent up by the bus.”

“Oh did I? Well, that’ll be all right. Anything will do really. Mrs. Baillie isn’t at all fussy.”

“Mebbe not, but we want to have things nice for her.”

“Oh, of course. Well, sole and lamb and red-currant fool make a good meal, don’t you think? Mrs. Baillie likes good coffee, and you make excellent coffee.”

Isobel looked out of the window. “Oh, I’m so glad it’s a good day. We’ll be looking our best this evening, and first impressions matter so much. D’you know, Mrs. Cooper, I think we’ll have a fire in the parlour to-night, even though it is quite warm. There’s nothing so welcoming when you arrive at a place. A fireplace filled with flowers, no matter how pretty it is, gives one a chilled feeling. I find, too, that there’s something about being a visitor that makes one feel cold. In one’s own house one rushes up and down stairs, and out and in of the garden when the fancy takes one, but so much energy is out of place in a guest. Knitting, embroidering, and writing letters are their recognised pursuits, and they’re not heat-producing, are they?”

“No, mem.” Mrs. Cooper looked rather bewildered. “If it’s a fire you want, we’ve a fine lot of logs. Rubbert has a fair stack of them—and they make a nice summer fire, not so hot as coal.”

“Perfect,” said Isobel. “A fire of logs will give the finishing touch to the parlour. And you might ask Robert to be within call about half-past six to carry up the luggage.”

“Yes, mem. And about breakfast? Will the lady have hers in bed?”

“No, I think she’ll get up; in fact, I’m sure of it; but I’ll let you know definitely this evening. What did we arrange for breakfast? Bacon and poached eggs, and you ordered extra milk and cream? Well, I think that’s all at the moment.”

Isobel strolled down the passage and out of the back door, wondering, not for the first time, how anyone could prefer scraping potatoes and shelling peas in a stuffy kitchen to doing them out here in the sunshine, with her eyes to the hills. She had spoken to her housekeeper about it, pointing out how much better it would be for her, mind and body, but Mrs. Cooper, while remaining perfectly respectful, was firm.

“Thank you, mem, but I’m quite content indoors. Ye see, I’ve got everything round me here, I’m not just that awfully fond of the open air except when I’m taking a walk like, with ma hat and coat on.”

On Isobel pointing out how easy it would be to carry out everything that was needed, Mrs. Cooper had replied, “It would be an awful skittle,” and there the matter rested.

The sun was still shining when Isobel saw the “Tinto express” come round the

curve, and in another minute she was hugging a small, excited figure.

“Oh, Isobel, *how* I’ve missed you! . . . I must see that the porter gets the proper cases. . . . Isn’t it glorious that the sun’s shining! No, that’s not mine, that belongs to a woman who’s going on to . . . *yes*, that’s it. . . . Well, now, that’s the hazardous journey over, and I’m safe. D’you know, this station is exactly the same as it was about thirty years ago. I remember the stove-pipe sprouting calceolarias, and the sweet peas and Canterbury bells along the paling.”

“Is it thirty years since you saw it, Kitty?”

“Must be, or perhaps not quite; twenty-five, anyway. I was about eighteen, *very* grown-up, and Gideon Veitch was a small boy in a tweed kilt, with a shock of red hair. But there are changes,” she went on as they entered the hired Daimler; “you couldn’t have hired a car in Glenbucho then, only a wagonette with an ancient horse. I remember the Veitches had a heavy old car called Wilfred the Gazelle, because it stuck on hills. How it all comes back to me, as Slightly said. Eighteen and forty-five, Isobel—what a gulf divides them!”

Isobel leaned forward and waved her hand.

“That’s Agnes Home, Merchant,” she explained. “She knew I was expecting a guest and was on the look-out. She’s specially interested in you because of your connection with the Veitches; but, indeed, she’s interested in everybody, and that gives her a very exciting life.”

“Take me to see her, will you? How is the uninterested Mrs. Bruce?”

Isobel laughed. “Quite well, and perhaps not so uninterested as she appears. She sent over one of her feather-light sponge cakes this morning to greet your arrival. Do you remember this road?”

“Vaguely. But it seems much shorter. We’re almost at Glenbucho Place, aren’t we?”

“Yes. That’s Mrs. Bruce’s house, and—here we are. Hoot, Dan, to let them know.”

But before Dan could sound his horn Mrs. Cooper, looking rather flushed and anxious, appeared in the doorway, and Robert shyly emerged from some hidingplace, and in a trice Kitty and her luggage were in the house.

Isobel’s heart beat high with pride as she listened to her friend’s delighted ejaculations, and certainly, with the westering sun lighting up the old rooms, and the windows wide to the garden, the Place looked its very best. Kitty was everywhere at once, exclaiming, praising, noticing everything Isobel had hoped she would notice. She was preparing to go through the hall-window into the garden, when Isobel caught her arm.

“Come upstairs now and let me help you unpack. The garden can wait till the morning. . . . This way. We’ve no carpet, you see, so please walk delicately coming downstairs. This is your room, next mine,” and Isobel threw open the door and began at once to point out the merits of this guest-chamber.

Kitty sniffed appreciatively, saying, “There’s nothing so nice as the smell of a country bedroom, sheets dried in the sun, lavender—oh, a sewed picture! What is it?”

“I wish you’d tell me: I can’t make out. Is it Shakespeare?”

Kitty studied the scene depicted, and cried, “Why don’t you know your Bible? David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and his wife, Michal—Michal, Saul’s daughter—despising him in her heart! I call that very clever. How can a few stitches give an impression of disdain?”

Isobel leaned forward to look, and remarked, “How well you know your Bible, Kitty. I’d never heard of Michal, Saul’s daughter.”

“Hadn’t you? You miss a lot if you don’t know Bible stories. They are just about the most dramatic things in literature: Jezebel, leaning out of the casement and asking Jehu, ‘Had Zimri peace who slew his master?’ That’s an awful story. . . . I like this room, especially the west-looking window-seat. I’ll sit here when the sun sets and read a good book, and listen to the swallows chattering above me. It was wonderful of you, Isobel, to have the courage to buy this place.”

“If only I can keep it up. I haven’t much of a margin, you know.”

“Well, if the worst comes to the worst, we’ll go together to a debtors’ prison. Meantime, let’s enjoy ourselves. How many rooms are furnished?”

“The four bedrooms on this landing, and the little turret-room, which Mrs. Bruce tells me was Gideon Veitch’s room.”

“Oh, may I see it? I can remember going up a winding stair with Gideon to see some treasure, birds’ eggs or something. . . . Oh, what a nice funny room—a real boy’s room!”

Kitty went forward to inspect the framed photographs on the wall.

“There he is in his College boat. See—rowing stroke. He must be a much better-looking man than he promised to be as a child; he was really ugly then, and his red hair was always on end. . . . I can’t think why I let myself get completely out of acquaintance with the Veitches. After Mrs. Veitch’s death there was no-one to write to, I suppose that was why. I’ve a mind to write to Gideon from here. I should think he’d like to know what sort of female is living in the Place.”

“I shouldn’t think he’d care,” said Isobel. “I expect he’s put all this life behind him, and means now to be a good Canadian.”

“Well, anyway,” said Kitty, “I’ll write. You can get me his address, can’t you?”

CHAPTER XVIII

I should have there this only fear:
Lest men, when they my pleasure see,
Should hither throng to live like me,
And so make a city here.

ABRAHAM COWLEY

KITTY did write, the very next day, seated at the bureau in the parlour, in the late afternoon.

“DEAR GIDEON,” she wrote, “don’t look for the signature at the end of this letter, for you won’t know it: read on and you will discover who I am. Do you by any chance remember a girl coming to stay at Glenbucho one summer I think in 1910, called Kitty Oliver, a kind of cousin? I don’t suppose you do, but I remember very well the small red-headed boy in a tweed kilt that was you.

“I never was at Glenbucho except that once. I married in 1913 Robin Baillie, who died in Switzerland last October after a long illness.

“All winter I lived in a private hotel in London, not having enough spirit left to make any plans, and there I met a girl called Isobel Logan. We became friends, she managed to give me confidence in myself, and encouraged me to take up life again, so I took a flat and gathered my household gods about me once more. Then Isobel thought she would like to visit her native land—she was born a Scot but had always lived in England—and I, remembering my visit to Glenbucho, suggested she should find rooms there. The rest you know. The Bruces will have told you about their lodger who came, and saw, and was conquered by the charm of the Place.

“So you see what came of that visit of mine in that long-past summer!

“I don’t know how you look at things—so many young people to-day scorn sentiment and will own to no tenderness for the haunts of their youth—but I think perhaps you may care to know that Isobel Logan is a most appreciative owner of Glenbucho. At heart—not in appearance—she is an old-fashioned creature, with loyalties and instincts not very common in this hard-boiled age, and this house with its traditions naturally appeals to her. Honestly, I don’t think anyone else would have cared so much. She bought it because she heard a possible purchaser talking rather slightly of the old house, and planning how it could be improved. Improved! In

Isobel's eyes it is perfection.

"I was taken this afternoon to see your friends, the Bruces, and they gave me your address. They *are* friends of yours! 'Davy' is a dear, but life is too short to try to break down Mrs. Bruce's armour of reserve. They told us they had had a letter from you saying what was in the house was to go with the house; but Isobel thinks you must have forgotten how much is in it, and fears you are cheating yourself. Anyway, she asks me to tell you that the china, which she feels sure is valuable, and everything else will be taken the greatest care of, and will be waiting for you if you should want it back.

"I hope you are enjoying life in Canada, and that things will prosper with you there.

"Your cousin-twice-removed,

"KITTY BAILLIE."

As she put her letter into the envelope, she saw Isobel coming across the lawn accompanied by a small boy.

"Finished writing?" she called. "Archibald wonders if you'd like to see his rabbits?"

"I would. What kind are they, Archibald?"

Archibald stared solemnly for a moment, then said, "They're both black and white, but one's a father and one's a mother."

"I see. Well, I'm ready if you are."

It took them quite a long time to reach the rabbits, it was so pleasant in the warm evening air to wander round the herbaceous borders and discuss the flowers therein, and Kitty had to admire the old wall with its wealth of little climbing plants, and give her advice about some small improvements which Isobel had in her mind.

Archibald was a stolid child, but he began to be a little impatient of their leisurely progress. With rabbits as a goal, why waste time on plants, and he walked a little way in advance and kept looking back as if to lure them on, until Isobel took pity on him and their footsteps hastened. The hutch was duly admired.

"Ma daddy made it; it's got leather hinges: see!"

"So it has. It's a most comfortable house. What d'you call your rabbits?"

"I don't call them nothing," said Archibald, bringing out a large rabbit by the ears. Its paws scrabbled against his jacket for a foothold, as he held it clutched to his bosom, soothing it with "There now. What's up with ye? Nobody's gaun to hurt ye. They ken me," he said proudly over his shoulder to the two women.

“Of course they do,” said Isobel. “That’s because you feed them and look after them so carefully.” She peered into the hutch. “Where’s the other one?”

“It’s there all right,” said Archibald. “I’ll bring it out in a minute.”

“Which is the father?” Kitty asked.

“I canna mind,” Archibald confessed, “they’re that like each other, but it doesna matter, onyway.”

“That’s true,” said Isobel. “Are you going to feed them now? Then we’ll walk on. Come round this way, Kitty, and you’ll see the view from the back door.”

“I like Archibald,” said Kitty, as they strolled in the evening sunshine through the garden-gate. “He has no fine flower of manners, but he’s an honest little soul.”

“And a happy one. These long summer days are all too short for him. He gets his school holidays next week, and is looking forward to putting in some really hard work on the farm. Mr. Bruce lets him ride in the carts and he feels himself of great use. . . . Now, isn’t this a delectable view? You see, right over there, that’s where Murray of Broughton’s house stood, in a most lovely glen. There is still a well called Prince Charlie’s well, with a giant trout in it, but whether the Prince ever visited there I don’t know.”

“Not likely, poor lad. He had little time for peaceful visiting. I’d like to walk over there some day, if you’ll take me. What about to-morrow?”

“To-morrow I’ve promised to take you to lunch with the Whitsons, where we shall hear all about Althea’s presentation. I think you’ll like the Whitsons. Then on Friday we’re lunching at Laverlaw with Mrs. Elliot.”

“What a round of gaiety!”

“You may say it! But it finishes there. These are about the only people I know at present, but some have called and found me out, so we might hire Dan and the Daimler, say on Saturday, and return their calls. One lady I’m much interested to see, Mrs. Duff-Whalley by name. Rather a warrior, I gather. I’d be glad of your support, when I beard her in her den! And I’m longing to show you Priorsford. Oh, Mrs. Cooper, here you are. Isn’t it luck that Mrs. Baillie has begun with this lovely weather?”

“It is that, mem. It’s a pity good weather ever does harm, for it’s awful nice. We hevna really seen this place in rain, it’s been wonderful.”

“Ah, but it can rain—and storm—and snow. Mrs. Bruce has great stories of the winters here.”

“Never mind,” said Kitty. “If you’ve a good roof over your head you needn’t fear winter and rough weather.”

“Well, that remains to be seen. I hope our roof’s all right, but it’s been there a

long time, you know. What'll we do if it leaks, Mrs. Cooper?"

"I couldna say, I'm sure," Mrs. Cooper smiled uncertainly. "It'd be an awful business right enough. I mind once at Hattonknowe—it was gey old too—they had to do something to the roof, and it took weeks, and it was awful awkward going under ladders."

"Are you superstitious about that?" Isobel asked.

"Well——"

Mrs. Cooper hesitated, and Kitty broke in, "I expect you're like me, Mrs. Cooper. I never walk under a ladder, not because I'm superstitious exactly, but because it seems a pity to tempt Providence. The ladder might fall on one."

"It might easy," Mrs. Cooper agreed, and added, "I'm just going across to the milk-house. Mrs. Bruce said she'd leave the cream on the shelf for me. You didna happen to see Archibauld, mem?"

"We've just left him busy with his rabbits. Do you think they're taking the place of elephants in his heart? Kitty, isn't it delightful; Archibald has a passion for elephants."

"For all beasts," said his mother, "but elephants in particular. Ye see, we took him to the film about the Elephant Boy."

"Oh, was that Kipling's story of Toomai and the elephants? I wonder how many small boys have had their imaginations fired by that story! And to see it as a picture must be wonderful. You've got a nice son, Mrs. Cooper: I hope you will all be very happy here."

"I hope so, I'm sure," said Mrs. Cooper. "I'll be going then——"

Looking at the retreating back of her housekeeper, Isobel said, "D'you think she sounds as if she had settled down?"

"I do. She's too sensible a woman not to know when she is well off, and you've been fortunate too. You might have got some incapable creature who couldn't cook, or a competent woman with a difficult temper or chronic indigestion. There's something extraordinarily comfortable and reassuring about Mrs. Cooper's face and figure, and with her husband and her boy happy and contented here, she must be returning thanks all the time. . . . Let's walk through the fields. We've time, haven't we?"

Kitty Baillie found it very interesting to meet her friend's new acquaintances, and to see how much Isobel was appreciated by them. Althea Whitson obviously adored her in school-girlish fashion, and her mother seemed to approve and encourage the friendship.

She told Kitty, “Nothing so nice has happened for ages as Miss Logan coming to Glenbucho Place. She’s our nearest neighbour—only two miles away—and Althea would like to be at the Place every day. I’m very grateful, for it’s a difficult time for a girl when she first comes back from school, especially if she has no sisters or brothers. Indeed, I was quite dreading these first few months, but Miss Logan has just made all the difference.”

Kitty turned to look at the girl, who was pouring into Isobel’s ears an excited account of the Holyrood Court, and said, “She seems delightfully unspoiled, and oh! isn’t she deliciously and pathetically young! I hope life is going to be kind to her, but she doesn’t look as if she’d let life get her down.”

“No, Althea has always had a stout heart. The only thing that made her cry as a child was what she felt to be injustice; and if she came across any form of cruelty, it seemed to shock her very soul. She is bound to suffer, for one can’t blind oneself to the fact that the world is full of cruelty and injustice.”

She sighed, and Kitty said, “It never was fuller than now. Abyssinia was dreadful, a practically unarmed people! And the poor Emperor behaved so well—which made it so much worse. I never thought I’d live to be ashamed of my country. And now Spain, tearing itself to pieces, and in Germany the persecution of the Jews. And the awful thing about it is things are bound to get worse. Hitler isn’t likely to have a change of heart. He is going to work out *Mein Kampf*. What I can’t understand is why as a nation we don’t take it seriously and prepare. He’ll get us down, and we’ll deserve it.”

Kitty spoke with so much emphasis that Isobel turned round and asked, “What do we deserve?”

“What’s coming to us,” said Kitty grimly.

“They’re talking politics,” Althea warned her friend. “Don’t let’s listen. I haven’t a vote for years, anyway, so I can’t do anything about it. D’you read the papers, Isobel?”

“Not as intelligently as Miss Home, I fear; but I always read the headlines. Mrs. Whitson, I took Kitty to see Miss Agnes Home this morning, and they immediately fell into such a confidential talk that I felt very much left out in the cold.”

“Agnes Home is a woman after my own heart,” said Kitty, “interested in everything in heaven and earth, with humour and sympathy and any amount of tolerance for poor human nature. What an asset to a neighbourhood such a woman is!”

“Yes,” Mrs. Whitson agreed. “Glenbucho without Agnes Home is almost unthinkable. Winters are long here, and there’s not very much doing—though much

more than there used to be—the W.R.I. is a great source of interest and pleasure—but on dark, wet days the sight of her broad, interested face behind the counter, her welcoming voice, and a glimpse through the half-open door of the comfortable parlour with *The Scotsman* lying with spectacles on it sends you away with a warm glow at your heart. I don't quite know why it should, but it does."

"I've had tea in the parlour," said Althea.

"Boastful creature!" Isobel retorted. "Kitty, I'm afraid we must go." Turning to her hostess she asked, "I wonder what day next week you and Althea could lunch with us? Any day, so far as we are concerned."

Mrs. Whitson thought for a moment. "Shall we say Wednesday? Thank you very much. You'll like that, Althea."

Althea's reply was to throw her arms round her friend's neck in a bear-like hug, then she protested, "Oh, but you musn't go without seeing James, he'd be so disappointed. I should have gone for him before, but I'd so much to tell you about Holyroodhouse," and she ran towards the house.

Mrs. Whitson explained to Kitty who James was, adding, "We aren't to have him much longer, I'm sorry to say. His parents are coming to fetch him next week."

"Althea will miss him," Isobel said.

"Yes, it's been good for her to have James to amuse and look after a little, and she's become very fond of him. There is something very attractive about the child. Althea declares he is too gentle, and she has been trying to make him what she calls 'a proper boy'; makes him climb trees with her, and run races, and, I'm afraid, urges him to rebel against his Nanny. She really is much too strict and set in her ways, quite a middle-aged woman; a younger nurse who would enjoy playing with him would be much better. As Althea says, imagine a boy not being allowed to get himself dirty!"

"Absurd," said Kitty. "Dirt is children's natural element. I don't believe they'd ever wash if they weren't made to. Here they come!"

Althea came flying across the lawn, followed closely by James.

"You almost beat me that time," she panted, "and you hadn't so very much of a start."

"W-were you running your fastest?"

"Ab-sol-ute-ly my fastest. You'll make a sprinter when you've grown a bit, won't he, Mother?"

"I'm sure of it. Meantime, James, you might shake hands with the ladies."

The boy grinned at Isobel, who was an old friend, and approached Kitty shyly.

"Mrs. Baillie comes from London," said Isobel helpfully.

"Does she?" said James, eyeing the stranger.

“You don’t think it’s much of a place to come from,” said Kitty, “not like Glenbucho. I’m staying at Glenbucho Place. You’ve been there?”

“Oh yes, often; three times, anyway.”

“And have you seen Archibald’s rabbits?”

“I’ve seen the hutch.”

“Well, the rabbits are in it now.”

“Oh! What are they like?”

“White with black patches, two of them. Perhaps Archibald would let you hold one.”

“Would he? I’ve never seen a live rabbit close, but Althea lets me hold the kittens, and they crawl up my sleeve—they’re too young even to see.”

While this conversation was going on Isobel was asking Mrs. Whitson to bring James with her to lunch at the Place.

“It will be my last chance of seeing him at this time. I do wish he could stay with you longer, for he’s a different boy in these few weeks, so much more independent and sure of himself.”

Mrs. Whitson smiled. “That’s Althea! I only hope his mother won’t object. We would gladly have had him longer, but naturally his parents want him back. I’m sorry for the child, for he seems to be left a good deal to Nanny, and she is not an exhilarating companion. The poor soul suffers from indigestion, which makes her fractious, and sometimes she hardly speaks except to grumble. I don’t like to seem to interfere, but I think I must speak to his parents. They are both so much away, in London, that they don’t realise that James needs more than Nanny, even though she is dependable, and, I daresay, fond of him in her way. He is supposed to do lessons every morning, but I wish he could go to a small school where he would meet other children. Good afternoon, Nanny. Where are you going to walk this lovely day?”

Nanny, a middle-aged woman with a sallow complexion and an ill-natured mouth, pursed her lips. She was extremely tidy, and when she spoke it was with an air of conscious gentility.

“Towards the village, I think, madam.”

“There’s a very nice road through the woods which brings you out into Glenholm. Have you been that way?”

“Oh no, madam. We never venture into woods or fields, you never know what you may meet, tramps and bulls and what not. The country is *so* dangerous.”

Nanny sniffed, and Mrs. Whitson said, “Well, the *roads* certainly are dangerous; one has positively to hug the hedges.”

“That is so, but the roads are safer to my mind than fields and hills. Mrs. Brodie

particularly warned me not to be venturesome. Say good-bye to the ladies, James. I hope you've been a good boy, and not tiresome."

Isobel was rather silent on the way home, thinking of the small James going away resignedly with his grim guardian, and when Kitty said, "I was sorry for that little boy. What's his mother like?" she replied with some bitterness, "The sort of woman who has no right to have children."

"Oh, that sort," said Kitty.

CHAPTER XIX

At ilka turn a bit wanderin' burn,
And a canty biggin' on ilka lea—
There's nocht see brow in the wide world's schaw
As the heughs and holms o' the South Countrie.

J. B.

ON the Saturday afternoon the two friends set off with Dan in the hired Daimler to return calls in Priorsford.

"How terribly sociable we are," Kitty remarked, settling herself comfortably in a corner; "the third day running we've set off 'on pleasure bent,' like John Gilpin."

Isobel, who had been gazing back at the Place, said, "Would you say we were bent on pleasure to-day? Paying calls, to my mind, is a dismal business, and waste of a good day. We might have had tea in the garden."

"If we get no-one in we'll be back in time for that. But I hope to meet some Priorsford people to-day. So far I give this neighbourhood high marks. Althea and her mother I like immensely; the Laverlaw people are interesting, but they could hardly help that, living in such a place. I don't wonder they can't tear themselves away from it."

"They had a place, Mrs. Elliot told me, in the West Highlands, but they gave it up, preferring to live entirely in the Borders. I wish you could have met Lady Bidborough. Mrs. Elliot is an interesting, a fascinating woman; I like to watch her as she talks, all her movements are so graceful, but she is a little awe-inspiring, don't you think? Her sister-in-law isn't a bit. She looks at you with such kind eyes, her voice is so gentle, and she seems so sincerely interested in you and in anything you tell her, that you are at her feet in a minute—at least I was! Lord Bidborough is a *lucky man*."

Kitty looked kindly at her friend as she said, "She must be a charmer. I hope I'll meet her some day. By the way, where are we going now?"

Isobel took a card from her bag, and read,

"MRS. DUFF-WHALLEY
THE TOWERS
PRIORSFORD

"What do you suppose she's like?"

"Large," said Kitty dreamily, watching the cloud shadows on the hills; "stout, upholstered rather than dressed, with a hearty manner and a loud voice."

Isobel nodded. "Well, we shall see. I'm getting quite curious to see Mrs. Duff-Whalley; it'll be sad if she isn't in. Kitty, don't you think this is a lovely road? Look at the way Tweed winds through this green strath, and the cows with bells, and the corn beginning to turn—Mr. Bruce says it'll be an early harvest. I'm looking forward to seeing these woods in autumn."

"And in winter," said Kitty. "Then they're at their most beautiful, I think. I love the bare branches against the sky. But every season has its own beauty. July is really the least beautiful month—except in the flower-garden—for the leaves are heavy and dull. I could find it in my heart to envy you, Isobel, living here all the year round."

There was scepticism in Isobel's laugh. "Oh no, my dear. When autumn comes, London and the flat will seem very alluring. London in autumn can be very attractive: an afternoon of slight frost, the shop windows twinkling, everyone walking briskly, and you going home to hot muffins by the fire in the book-room, with perhaps the prospect of a pleasant little dinner followed by a play! I daresay I'll often envy you when the roads here are heavy with mud, and the rain pours day after day, and no-one comes near, and there is no cinema to slip into for an hour or two."

"Then you must just slip off and catch the London express at Symington and come to me for a long 'stop.' I'm looking forward to that. I know Mrs. Auchinvole will do her best for you, and we'll go to all the plays that are any use, and——"

Isobel suddenly leant forward and banged on the glass, crying, "Stop, Dan, please!" Then, turning to her friend, said, "Do forgive me interrupting you, but this is Peel Tower, and you really must get out and look at it. Doesn't it stand marvellously, with Tweed sweeping round it, and the wooded hills beyond? 'Can you beat it?' as the American asked when shown a sword in Exeter Guildhall, still in crape for Charles I."

"It *is* wonderful," Kitty agreed. "These terraces, I suppose, were part of the pleasaunce, and that avenue of old yews. Didn't Queen Mary once stay here?"

"Well, they show you her room, and from the window she must have looked out on what we are looking at now. No change in how many hundreds years? It is something to be thankful for in a world that is changing all too rapidly for the worse."

"Thankful indeed! It might have been covered by a growth of bungalows. I hate those things, don't you?"

"I hate the way they ruin beautiful places, all round Edinburgh it's pitiful; but when I think of them as the cherished homes of decent people, who have longed for years to get out of the city and have a little home of their own, and a garden to work in on Saturday afternoons, then I'm glad of them. They're nearly all so prettily kept."

“Oh, I daresay,” said Kitty; “and goodness knows I’ve no right to grudge any poor mortal his heart’s desire. But one thing I do think they might do, to agree in the semi-detached houses to have the same curtains. It gives me such a shock to see half of what looks like a Moorish villa hung with purple curtains and the other half with cerise. Couldn’t they both compromise on cream?”

“One would suppose so, but if one’s soul cries out for cerise curtains—I wonder if Dan knows where to find The Towers? I’ll have to knock on the glass again. ‘The Towers, Mrs. Duff-Whalley’s house?’ He hears, he’s nodding. . . . Now we’re going down the Old Town, Kitty. The stream under this bridge is called the Cuddy by all except the genteel, who give it its proper name of Eddleston Water. . . . Now, look. Isn’t the view lovely, both up and down Tweed? If I couldn’t have had Glenbucho, I’d have lived in Priorsford. That’s the way, on the right, to The Rigs, Lady Bidborough’s little house. . . . The Towers must be up this hill.”

There were villas on either side of the road, each in its own garden, and presently the car turned, and, passing through very ornate gates, they found themselves stopping before a large, red stone house, picked out with white, and glistening with bow windows.

Dan rang the bell, which was answered by a smart parlourmaid, dressed in beige, and presently Dan returned and, putting his head into the window, said in a throaty whisper, “She’s in.”

They went through a tiled hall richly strewn with rugs, up a broadly carpeted staircase into a drawing-room boasting three bow windows, a great many tables covered with china, framed photographs and hot-house plants; large arm-chairs and sumptuous sofas. Kitty went straight over to one of the windows and exclaimed at the view of the hills.

“And what a beautifully tidy garden,” said Isobel. “Poor Robert would completely lose conceit of Glenbucho if he saw this. Had we better sit down? Or shall we be discovered admiring the view? I do hope we aren’t disturbing Mrs. Duff-Whalley’s rest.”

With that the door-handle rattled as if grasped by an impatient hand, and a smallish, grey-haired woman came quickly into the room.

Isobel had so confidently expected someone large and stout, that she hesitated for a moment before saying, “Mrs. Duff-Whalley? I’m Isobel Logan from Glenbucho Place. I was sorry to miss you when you were good enough to call on me. My friend, Mrs. Baillie, who is staying with me.”

“*How* d’you do? *How* d’you *do*? Well, I’m glad I happened to be in this afternoon. It’s not often that I have a free afternoon, especially in the summer, when

all the houses round are occupied; always something going on you know. Where will you find seats?"

"May I sit here? It seems such a waste not to sit where one can see the hills. We've been admiring your garden."

"Yes, it's looking very well just now—as well it might, with two gardeners giving all their time to it. I often wonder how they manage to fill their days. But one man can't manage it, and I must have it absolutely *perfect*: it's the way I'm made, I can't help it."

"I'm afraid," said Isobel, "I can't afford to have such high standards. I've only one man to do everything at Glenbucho."

"Is that so? But, of course, Glenbucho Place has never been what you'd call well kept. The Veitches had no money, not that I ever knew them, but so I've been told. There was only the old man and the son, of course, and they didn't pay calls, or bother to entertain. I once met the son at Lady Tweedie's, but I had no conversation with him. He's gone to Canada, I hear. I hope he'll manage to make a living there."

Isobel glanced at her friend, remarking, "Mrs. Baillie is a cousin of Gideon Veitch."

"Twice removed," said Kitty pleasantly. "I haven't seen Gideon since he was a small boy, a very nice small boy."

"He has red hair," said Mrs. Duff-Whalley, "but I never heard anything against him. I don't suppose he'll ever come back now that the Place is sold. How d'you think you'll like the district, Miss Logan? Have you met many of the people round?"

"A few. My nearest neighbours, the Whitsons, have been goodness itself to me, and I can go any time to Ormiston."

"Indeed! She's quite a nice woman, Mrs. Whitson, but a little apt to bury herself. I hope for the girl's sake she will entertain a little more now. I saw she was presented at Holyroodhouse. Is she pretty at all?"

"Very pretty," said Isobel, "and quite unspoiled."

"Fancy! Well, that's a blessing, for some of the young girls are past speaking about. Insolent brats, that's what they are. My word, I wouldn't like to bring up a daughter in these days. I've two, married, of course, and I'm a grandmother five times over and *all grandsons*. What d'you think of that?"

Isobel contented herself with smiling in a congratulatory way, and Kitty said, "Very useful for the Empire."

"D'you mean in a war?" their hostess asked suspiciously.

"Not necessarily; we need good men in peace."

“Well,” said Mrs. Duff-Whalley, “speaking for myself, I’m for no more wars. It’s a perfect disgrace if at this time of day nations haven’t the sense to live at peace. And I’d take no nonsense from Dictators. Set them up!”

“But,” Kitty reminded her, “if we don’t give them what they want they’ll fight, and if, to pacify them, we hand them this and that, Britain will soon be like a plucked turkey.”

“What!” Mrs. Duff-Whalley reared her head. “I hope we’ll give away *nothing*. That would be a bonny-like thing.”

Afraid of what Kitty might say next, Isobel broke in.

“What a delightful place Priorsford is. You must be very fond of it.”

Mrs. Duff-Whalley sat very upright in her chair, and pursed her lips as she said, “Well, I am, of course, in a way. My husband built this house more than thirty years ago. Yes, strangers are always surprised when they hear that—they think it looks quite new. That’s because we’ve never allowed any ivy or creepers. Mr. Duff-Whalley said that at the start. ‘The Towers is a thoroughly well-built house,’ he said, ‘and we don’t want to cover it up.’ The gravel comes right up, no plots of flowers to make a mess. I often think if Father could see it now, still so fresh, he’d be pleased. But he didn’t live long to enjoy it, and for some years I and my daughter Muriel—Mrs. Patrick Hamilton, you know—had it to ourselves, and now I’m alone, and it’s far too big for me. Oh, yes, Priorsford’s all right in a way, but it’s a sleepy little place. Apathetic’s the word. I’ve done my best to waken it up. I’ve run Community Drama and I don’t know what else, but now I’m getting tired of hustling people that don’t want to be hustled. I’m going to let them alone.”

She stopped, folding her lips tight, and Isobel, feeling it necessary to say something, began, “It is discouraging——”

“Oh, I’m not in the least discouraged. It was for their good I was working, not my own. I’ve plenty to occupy my time, too much indeed. I was just saying to Lady Tweedie yesterday, when she was trying to fix a day for me to lunch there, ‘Really, I don’t know when I had a meal by myself.’ I assure you it’s a positive treat to me to get up in the morning and think, ‘I’ll be lunching alone to-day.’ Not that it isn’t a pleasure to me to entertain—what’s the use of keeping the four maids and having everything of the best if you don’t entertain, that’s what I say—and I like to go out too, and sample other people’s cooking, and hear what’s going on. I’ve got a large circle of acquaintances right down the Borders, and up Lanarkshire way too, but you soon lose touch with people unless you’re careful. My daughter, Mrs. Patrick Hamilton, sometimes says to me, ‘Mother, no-one expects you to give constant luncheon and dinner parties. Content yourself with tea and bridge,’ and in time I

daresay I'll have to give in to that, but not yet. I'm only seventy-five, and I feel as brisk as ever I did. It's a great thing to be small and light, and I haven't a touch of rheumatism."

She looked at her visitors with something of triumph, and Kitty said, "You are lucky. No need for you to give up anything. There's nothing like holding on and continuing to do things if you want to keep young."

"That's what I say. I don't see why I shouldn't see ninety. I mean to have a try anyway. As I was saying to Lady Bidborough when she was here in June—I don't suppose you've met Jean?—a little friend of ours in Priorsford who married Lord Bidborough."

"Yes," said Isobel, "I met her at Laverlaw, and I had tea with her at The Rigs."

"Oh, really! Have the Laverlaw people been to see you? Pamela Elliot is an *old* friend of ours; indeed, I think I was more or less the means of her meeting her husband. They had known each other when they were young, and met again in Priorsford—quite a romance! And little Jean, too. There was quite a novelettish touch about her courtship. But she really does very well, fills her position wonderfully, I'm told, and has three fine healthy children. The queer thing is she never forgets Priorsford, and likes to come back and stay in that little house. People pretend to find that very sweet, but I don't know. There's such a thing as keeping up your position, and I don't think The Rigs is quite the setting for a baron's lady. I said that to Lady Tweedie just the other day."

"And did she agree?" Kitty asked.

"Oh, she just said, '*Dear Jean!*'" Mrs. Duff-Whalley gave an exasperated snort, and added, "I often think there's something awfully silly about those people who've always lived on their own land, on money that was left them, *soft*, you know. If you've made your own fortune, it shows at least that there's something in you. My husband could never be bothered with men who were thinking all the time about shooting and fishing. Not that he knew many of them, for, as I told you, he only lived about a year after we got into The Towers, and it took me a good ten years to get into society. . . . I hope, Miss Logan, that you'll like Glenbucho Place. You'd get it very cheap, I daresay, for I hear nothing's been done to it for years, no electric light even. You'll have to spend a lot of money to make it habitable."

"Oh, but it is habitable," Isobel protested. "Isn't it, Kitty?"

"To my mind it's perfect," said Kitty; "but then, I *like* paraffin lamps."

Mrs. Duff-Whalley bounced in her chair. "In summer, mebbe, but wait till winter comes. Where d'you suppose you'll get a servant to clean at least a dozen lamps every day?"

“I’ve got one,” said Isobel in a meek voice. “The husband of my housekeeper. He’s the gardener really, but he does all sorts of jobs about the house, and he says he rather likes cleaning lamps.”

“And will do them very well, I expect,” said Kitty. “It’s odd how well men do women’s work.”

“I don’t think so,” said Mrs. Duff-Whalley. “I wouldn’t have a man-servant in my house; they’re bad enough as chauffeurs and gardeners, but at least you can keep them outside there, and I make it a rule that they don’t come in to the servants’ hall. I keep four maids, and I pay them well and give them every comfort and I expect them to do well by me.”

“And do they?” asked Kitty interestedly. Her hostess hesitated for a moment, then said, “Well, it depends on the type of woman I get. At the moment I’m fairly fortunate. The cook can cook, and has been in good houses, and the parlourmaid’s quite smart, but the other two are—are precarious. But, Miss Logan, d’you tell me that you’re running your house with one woman? I’m afraid you’ll find it won’t work. How can you entertain?”

“I’m not worrying about that. Any friends I’ve made seem quite pleased with my simple efforts, and I wouldn’t want people who expected more.”

“Oh, well, so long as you know what you want. But I’m bound to say I think it’s a pity people are so lazy about entertaining. You ask people, and it may be months, and even years, before they ask you back. What one wants in a neighbourhood is a brisk interchange of hospitality.”

“Wouldn’t that be rather tiresome?” Kitty asked; “like a merry-go-round?”

“Not in the least like a merry-go-round,” said Mrs. Duff-Whalley, rearing her head. “What could be nicer than a frequent meeting of acquaintances at luncheons and dinners and even sherry-parties? I’ve heard the expression, ‘Keep your friendships in repair,’ but how can you do that if you aren’t given opportunities for meeting? I declare to goodness some people disappear into their houses like rabbits into a burrow, and seem content to remain there, though how they pass the time I’m sure I don’t know.”

“But time passes so quickly,” Isobel pleaded; “a day is never long enough for all one wants to do.”

“Well, of course, if you *read*,” said Mrs. Duff-Whalley, and from her tone one would have gathered that she was alluding to some obscure form of crime.

With that the handle of the drawing-room door was turned several times and two small boys burst into the room.

“Mercy!” said Mrs. Duff-Whalley, “Fred and Archie. Where have you come

from? Is Mummy with you?"

"She's helping George upstairs," said the elder boy. "He thinks he can walk, but it takes him a long time."

Presently the rest of the party appeared, a very fat, good-natured-looking baby, clinging to his mother's hand.

"Oh!" said Muriel Hamilton, "you have visitors, Mother. I'm so sorry to butt in like this, but the boys were determined to come. Patrick's away to St. Boswells, and we wondered if we might have tea with you, perhaps."

She turned to the strangers, smiling, and her mother said, "This is my daughter, Mrs. Patrick Hamilton. Mrs. Baillie and Miss Logan. I was telling you about Miss Logan buying Glenbucho Place."

"Yes, and I was very interested, for I always like the look of that house. My husband knew old Mr. Veitch and his son, and always enjoyed shooting there, but I never saw inside the house."

"I hope you will come now," Isobel said cordially.

"I'd like to, but with three boys on my shoulders I don't get much time for visiting."

"Bring them with you," said Isobel, "there's nothing I'd enjoy more."

As she spoke her eyes turned to the group on the sofa. Fat George was on his grandmother's knee, and the other two boys were leaning confidently against her, looking up into her face, while she talked to them. She had forgotten everything but the children, and Isobel, with a glance at Kitty, got up to go.

This awoke the indefatigable hostess in Mrs. Duff-Whalley, and she said, "Ring the bell, Muriel, for tea. You mustn't think of going, Miss Logan; after tea I want to show you the garden."

"Please stay!" Mrs. Hamilton urged, as she moved to the bell.

"Tea in the dining-room at once," was the order given to the maid, and in a surprisingly short time they were all seated round a table, shining with silver, and laden with food.

"I'll sit beside Gran," said Fred, "because I'm the eldest."

"And I'll sit at the other side," said Andrew, "and George beside Mummy, for he's only a baby."

"You'll sit where Gran tells you," their mother told them.

"But," Fred insisted, "I *must* sit beside Gran, for I've a secret to tell her."

"Have you, my lamb?" said Mrs. Duff-Whalley. "Then of course you must sit beside Gran."

As the friends drove home that evening they exchanged views about the people

they had met.

Isobel said, "I'm thinking what a different idea of the formidable Mrs. Duff-Whalley we'd have carried away if we hadn't seen her with the grandchildren. Lady Bidborough spoke of her to me as a sort of Priorsford Dictator when she was a young girl at The Rigs, imposing her will on everyone, very snobbish and overbearing when she dared to be disliked and feared by many."

"I can well imagine it," Kitty replied. "She's a formidable woman with a lot of driving force. She has forced people to receive her and visit her, until, as she told us, she has a wide circle of acquaintances. I can't help thinking that the daughter must have had a pretty cheap time, for she looks a sensitive creature, who would feel the snubs that her mother ignored."

"Yes, but she was strong enough to marry the man she cared for in spite of her mother, and it has not only made all the difference in the world to her, but also to her mother. Mrs. Hamilton looks a happy woman, perfectly contented with her man and her boys and her position—and one can see what the boys mean to Mrs. Duff-Whalley."

Kitty smiled. "Her eyes as she looked at them, the tone of her voice as she addressed the fat baby as 'my lammie,' her pride as she told us that though Fred was only six he is top of his class at the little school he attends. What a blessing the daughter had the courage to do as she did, otherwise they might still have been living together at The Towers, pursuing an endless social round, while the years took away the daughter's looks, and she grew more unsatisfied, more unhappy."

"Yes," Isobel agreed, "she did the best thing for both her mother and herself, but she wouldn't be thinking about that. I expect all she thought of was that she loved the man and was going to be his wife, no matter what happened. Oh, Kitty, look up Drumelzier Glen. Did you ever see such softly rounded hills? And the Powsail Burn linking between them! Let us go one day and spend hours and hours exploring. . . ."

CHAPTER XX

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend . . .

OMAR KHAYYÁM

MRS. WHITSON was sitting awaiting the arrival of Alan Brodie and his wife, and thinking with no special pleasure of the coming guests.

Alan himself, her husband's cousin, she had liked from the first time they met, and it had been a surprise and disappointment to her when he became engaged to a girl quite obviously unsuited to him in every way, Alan had always been a serious, rather dull fellow, a little wanting in imagination, somewhat narrow in his sympathies, but as straight and reliable as a pine-tree, the sort of man with whom the ordinary "nice" girl would have been perfectly happy. Why need he have fallen temporarily in love—it was only a passing infatuation—with a girl so unlike himself? And what had induced Frances to marry him? To be sure, Helen reminded herself, he was very well off, but Frances might have seen that he was no husband for an ambitious woman. Social life was her passion. She wanted to entertain constantly, to be seen everywhere with the right people, to be a power in her own set. Alan had to be in London for his business, but he much preferred his country home; parties bored him, as did the conversation of his wife's friends.

Helen Whitson sighed at the way lives got muddled. Frances, she thought, should have married a man who wanted a wife to wear his jewels well, to display his wealth to advantage. (She could see him with her mind's eye—a corpulent little man with an important voice and a K.B.E.) While Alan would have been so content with a country-loving creature, who would have played with her babies, enjoyed housekeeping, and taken a vivid interest in how much fruit had been bottled and made into jam; who would have known every man, woman, and child about the place, and got all the excitement she wanted from the mild festivities of the neighbourhood.

The sound of an approaching car roused Mrs. Whitson from her musing on the inscrutable decrees of fate, and she went out to the front door to welcome her guests.

Mrs. Brodie said at once she would like to go straight to her room. It had been a horrid, sticky journey, the train so crowded that they couldn't have a compartment to themselves, and she felt tired out. She went off to have a bath, and a rest before dinner, and her hostess, after seeing she had everything she wanted, joined Alan Brodie on the lawn.

They talked a little about the weather, about the young King and Queen and their

triumphal progress, about the war in Spain, but Helen soon saw that her companion was not in a talkative mood, and they fell silent.

Suddenly Alan flung away the cigarette he was smoking, and said, "Helen, I find I must go to Canada next month."

"That will be interesting, Alan. Will you be away long? Frances will remain at home, I suppose; I know she hates a voyage."

"No, Frances will go with me."

The tone of his voice made Helen suspect that there had been trouble before the decision had been come to, but she only said, "Then James must stay on here. We love to have him, and I think the place suits him. I do think you'll see a difference in him. He and Althea are at Glenbucho Place, but they'll be back any minute now."

Alan opened his cigarette-case, and said, "It's very good of you, Helen, but I've made up my mind to take James with us. Don't you think he's old enough to enjoy seeing things? The fact is, I don't see enough of the boy. I'm at work most of the time, Frances has a hundred things to take up her attention, and it isn't fair to James. He's a nice friendly little chap, I'd like to get to know him better."

Having delivered this speech he lit a cigarette, and lay back in his chair.

"I think you're right," Mrs. Whitson told him. "James is getting too big to be always with a nurse, and Nannie, although she's thoroughly dependable, and anxious to do her best, is a dull companion for a boy. You should see James and Althea together. He's a most repaying child to try to amuse. Will you take Nannie with you to Canada?"

"I thought not. As you say, it's time he had a more companionable person with him, someone who could interest him, and teach him a bit. I was hoping you might know of someone suitable."

Mrs. Whitson considered. "A happy sort of girl who would be interested in everything and interest James? There must be any number of girls who would gladly take on such a job, the difficulty is knowing where to find them. When do you sail?"

"In three weeks."

"Dear me! That doesn't give us much time. You were always a sudden creature, Alan. We'd better advertise. Ah, here comes James at last."

The boy was out of the car in a moment, and racing across the lawn to his father, who professed himself astonished at the change a few weeks had made.

"He seems taller and broader, and I never saw him with so much colour."

"Glenbucho air," said Althea, "and lots of exercise."

"And have you had a good time?" her mother asked.

"Splendid. It was a party. Mrs. Hamilton brought her three boys, *and* her

mother. You know, Mrs. Duff-Whalley. But she didn't interfere much to-day, Mrs. Baillie kept her in check. It was great fun, we had a treasure hunt all over the garden."

"And I got a prize," cried James, "and you won't guess where it was—in a bird's nest."

"Yes, it was," Althea corroborated, "and it was very clever of James to find it."

"Well, I was really looking to see if the nest was empty; I'd forgotten about the hunt, and then I *saw the little packet*."

James's eyes were shining like lamps, and Mrs. Whitson said, "Well, now, after all this excitement, will you go to the nursery and wash your face and brush your hair, and then go to your mother's room? You know where it is, you helped me to put flowers in it this morning. I'm afraid Mummy will be wondering why you are so long."

"Yes," said James, and looked at Althea, who, jumping up from the grass where she had thrown herself, said:

"I'll come with you, for I'm rather a mess myself; it was sliding down the shoot in the granary. I'll race you, James."

Alan Brodie watched the two until they disappeared into the house, then turned to his companion and remarked:

"Althea's still very much of a school-girl."

"In some ways, yes; but she is quite a wise child at heart. It surprises me sometimes how observant she is. She sums people up and pronounces judgment on them with all the cocksureness of extreme youth, but I'm bound to admit there is always a grain of truth in her summing up. Of course I do my best to suppress her in those moods, and, on the whole, she is what Agnes Home calls 'a biddable bairn.'"

"Is Agnes Home still in the little shop? I used to go there with Althea and buy her striped balls, and things she called 'silk sweeties,' when she was about the age of James."

"A long time ago!" Helen sighed, and then smiled. "But Agnes Home is still in her place, and that gives one a feeling of security in a rocking world. You must look in and shake hands with her, Alan. She remembers you well, and has taken such an interest in James."

"I'd like to. . . . When do we dine, Helen? Eight. Then I think I'll go for a short walk now. This air is a delight after London grime."

After dinner Alan asked if he might go to the library to write letters, Althea slipped away without offering an excuse, so Helen had to sit alone in the drawing-

room with her guest.

Frances Brodie lay back listlessly in a large arm-chair and returned somewhat short answers to Helen's attempts at conversation. "Evidently doesn't want to talk," Helen told herself, "in which case she might hold a book, and pretend to read. We can't sit idle and dumb through a whole evening. I'd better keep up a trickle of small talk that needs no answer."

She began again, "Alan tells me you're off shortly for a trip to Canada. That should be most interesting. It's a place I've always wanted to visit; indeed, I mean to take Althea there some time. The 'fall' is the best time, I'm told, the colours are so wonderful. You will enjoy the trip."

This brought an answer.

"That I certainly shan't," said Mrs. Brodie, in no uncertain voice. "It's a loathsome trip. I hate sailing, and the Atlantic's the worst thing that you can sail on. I hate sight-seeing, and it gives me a headache to look at 'places of interest.' *Interest!* And I don't want to meet Alan's stodgy old business friends and their dull wives. What could I have to say to them? They don't know London, and London's my life."

"But, Frances, think what pleasure it'll give Alan to have you with him, and _____"

Frances Brodie sat straight up. "Alan doesn't want me," she cried, her voice shrill; "he'd much rather go alone, but he daren't leave me. If you must know, he's found out something—somebody must have told him, for he's not naturally suspicious, I'll say that for him—so I'm to be dragged away to Canada, out of harm's way. How everyone'll laugh!"

Helen turned, and, lifting the lid of an old mahogany work-table, very deliberately took out a bit of knitting.

"Oh no, Frances," she said in her quiet voice, looking down at her work as she spoke, "you're imagining things. Our affairs aren't of so much importance to outsiders as we believe. That always amuses me in novels, the way a whole countryside is supposed to get worked up about the behaviour of one person. I don't believe Alan has any thought except for your pleasure, and the boy's—I hear James is going with you—and I don't think you will be able to help enjoying it."

The look Frances turned on her cousin by marriage was one of mingled pity and contempt—that anyone could be such a fool! But Helen went on knitting calmly, not looking up to see the effect of her words.

Presently she said, "People nowadays are very fond of the word amusing. I daresay there are more 'amusing' companions than Alan; he has a way of taking

things to the foot of the letter that sometimes exasperates, and his feet are set very solidly on the ground. But amusingness is a quality that can be overrated. It is only for life's brighter moments; it shrivels and dies when reality steps in, and there's a lot of reality in life. As one grows older—I'm a good ten years older than you, Frances—one is more and more thankful for the steadfast people, who don't change or blow hot and cold, but are there to stand by us if the need arises. If you throw away the substance for the shadow——”

But Frances, jerking a cushion round, broke in:

“My dear Helen, who is talking about throwing away the substance? I hope I'm not such a fool. But one wants more than what you call ‘substance.’ I want the frills as well. What's the good of being beautiful—I am, you know, when I'm properly dressed—what's the good of living at all, if one's not allowed to enjoy life? One might as well be dead as shut up with Alan down in Suffolk. How I hate the country! And Alan is quite ridiculous about James; he thinks the child should fill my life, that I should simply revolve round him.” She laughed. “James and I have very little to say to each other; I never could make a fuss about children. And you needn't pretend, Helen, that you think I'll be radiantly happy on this trip with Alan and James. To think that I might have been yachting with Jane Delaney and her husband, and Jane has asked—all the people I like best to be with. That would have been perfect, if you like, and while I count the hours dragging past I'll have to think of the wonderful time *they* are having. And they won't miss me, that's the rotten part of it. Nobody cares long, and someone'll take my place.”

Her voice broke in self-pity, and Helen saw that she was torturing herself with pictures her imagination conjured up. Poor Frances! Poor Alan! Poor James!

Helen went on knitting, with sorrow in her heart.

Presently she looked over to her companion and said:

“Frances dear, I don't know what to say, so I'd better hold my tongue. But you won't think me impertinent if I beg you to try to make the best of things. You're too sensible not to see that, if you go on this trip reluctantly, like a sulky child, Alan will be sulky too, and it'll all be miserable.”

Frances smothered a remark, and then said, “I might have known you wouldn't understand. You live in a backwater (if you can be said to live at all), quite content with your home and your girl and your neighbours, putting all your energy into Girl Guides and Women's Institutes——”

She paused.

“Quite true,” said Helen mildly.

“Well, I can't understand it, that's all. I need excitement. I like to take risks. I'd

hate above everything to rust out—but now that I’ve got rid of some of my chagrin by telling you, I feel better. After all, six weeks will pass, and perhaps no great harm will be done. I must see about getting clothes at once. We’re sailing on the *Empress of Britain*, and there may be some amusing people on board; we’ll hope for the best.”

“Alan tells me you’re thinking of getting someone in Nannie’s place to go with you, someone who’ll be more of a companion for James.”

“Oh yes, that’s another of his ideas. I’ve told him he must find her himself. Poor old Alan! He does make things difficult for himself. It’s such a pity not to let well alone——” Frances glanced up at the clock. “Ten o’clock. D’you know, I think I’ll go to bed. It’s been a tiring day.”

“Yes, do. Have you anything to read? Althea chooses the books for the guest-rooms, and I’m afraid it’s her own taste she consults.”

“Oh, thanks, I’ve got quite a good thriller. You won’t expect to see me at breakfast?”

“No, indeed, take a good rest. Good night, and sleep well.”

CHAPTER XXI

It's rainin' weet's the garden-sod,
Weet the lang road where gangrels plod. . . .
R. L. S.

THE next day the weather broke in a thunderstorm, and, as often happens, found some difficulty in taking itself up again.

Isobel now saw what Glenbucho could look like in bad weather. Day after day they woke to the drip-drip of rain, and after having remarked on the marvellous freshness of the garden, there was nothing for it but a fire in the living-room, and needlework and books.

"Not that I mind," said Kitty. "To a person of my temperament this weather offers a delightful opportunity for sheer sloth. I enjoy doing nothing."

"You read all the time," said Isobel. "You're improving your mind. You can't call that doing nothing."

"Not consciously improving my mind, that would take away quite half of the pleasure. I sometimes feel that my passion for reading amounts almost to a vice. At home I ration myself severely. In the morning I read the papers, the leaders, and so on. (I can depend on Mrs. Auchinvole to give me details of the murders and robberies with violence!) After that I read some solid book. After dinner (always supposing I am alone) I allow myself modern fiction till bedtime, and in bed I have twenty minutes with Jane Austen or Thackeray or Sir Walter."

"And very nice too," said Isobel, taking up a book that was lying beside her. "I wish you'd look at this, Kitty. It's the book Mr. Elliot lent me about Murray of Broughton."

"I'd like to. Is it interesting?"

"Well, the first part is much taken up with quarrels Murray had with people like Drummond of Bohaldie and Lord Traquair, and negotiations with slippery loyalists. He is driven into reflections on human nature. This: 'Men are like Watches, some of a finer and more delicate make than others; the one goes justly, the other not.' I rather like the description of Murray: 'A well-looking little man of a fair complexion, in a scarlet dress and a white cockade.'"

"Yes," said Kitty, "I daresay he wasn't all bad, poor Mr. Secretary Murray."

"No," said Isobel, going back to her book. "It says here that certain things must be put 'to the credit side of his strangely involved account with honour.' I expect it was a case of a weak man tried too high. A friend wrote of him that he had such a fear of death that he might be brought to do anything to save a wretched life. . . ."

You might look at it, Kitty, and I'll send it back. I'm always afraid that a book lent to me will be put into a bookcase, become lost to sight, and never be returned to its owner."

"I know. Who was it said that books should be crossed with homing pigeons? . . . That is a good opportunity to get on with your chair-seats. I can't say you work very steadily at them."

"The chair-seats, my dear, are more or less a task of a life-time. The end is too far off for more than a very mild effort. When I'm alone I daresay I'll stitch at them quite a lot, while I listen to the wireless. The odd thing is, I can't listen-in with any comfort unless my hands are occupied. Do you find that?"

"Oh, I'm not a very good listener at any time. Some of the talks are interesting, and I enjoy the concerts and plays, and, as one can turn it off at will, I never see any cause for complaint."

"That's true, and it's always pure magic——"

The door opened, and Mrs. Cooper came into the room. There was a slightly anxious look on her face, and her first words were:

"Isn't this an awful rain? Rubbert says, please, mem, could we have a man for to see about the roof? He thinks there must be slates off, for there's patches of damp here and there."

"Oh," said Isobel, Mrs. Cooper's anxiety reflected in her face. "What kind of man looks after roofs?"

"It'll be a slater, mem. Mebbe Mr. Bruce could tell us where to get one. He'll likely have to be in Priorsford."

Isobel got up. "I'll go now and ask Mr. Bruce, and then I'd better telephone from the post-office. Would you care for a walk in the rain, Kitty? No, I don't believe you would. Stay by the fire. I shan't be gone very long. I hope the roof isn't going to lie down on us!"

"Dear me, no; old roofs always leak," Kitty said comfortably, and settled down to her book.

Having got the name of a slater, Isobel splashed along the wet roads to the post office and rang him up, and, after some argument, extracted a promise that someone would be sent up the next morning without fail.

On her way home she went into the shop for something, and remarked to Miss Home on the bad weather.

"Aye, it's a pity, but what can ye say? We've had a lot of fine days, and I warrant ye've made the most of them with your friend. Mrs. Baillie's a rare nice lady, and her conversation's awful entertaining. I fair enjoy when you bring her in, she'll

keep you cheery at the Place.”

Isobel agreed, and added, “I’ve been telephoning to Priorsford for a slater; the roof’s leaking.”

“That’s a bad job, but this rain’s no’ ordinary, it would seep through anything, and an old roof’s ay needing something.”

“I’m afraid so, Miss Home. D’you keep pan-drops? Mrs. Baillie was saying last night that she wished she could taste one again.”

“Well, that’s a wish easy gratified,” said Miss Home, bringing a bottle from a shelf, and filling a small bag with its contents. “You give that to Mrs. Baillie and say it’s a poke of pan-drops with my respects.”

“Oh, but how kind of you. Mrs. Baillie *will* be pleased. When we were talking the other night she realised that she and Gideon Veitch must have bought pan-drops at this very shop, probably from you, more than twenty years ago.”

“She might easy. Let me see—say twenty-five years ago. Ma father was living then. Not that he troubled the shop much. He did the garden and looked after his bees, but he was a fisher—and when ye’ve said that ye’ve said everything. Fish! He knew every burn from Stirkfield to Badlui and every hole in Tweed. I tell ye I whiles used to envy him when I saw him go off, wi’ sic a contented look on his face, to spend a long summer day by the water-side. And in winter of course there was the saumon. Ma father couldna bide in the house when he lookit out of the room window and saw the lights on Glenbucho Water. Up with his cleek and away. Ou, aye, but there’s no harm in poachin’ if you’re no’ found out. Na na. He was a canny man, ma father, and I missed him sore when they took him round the corner to the churchyard.”

Agnes Home’s face suddenly crumpled like a child’s and tears filled her eyes, but in a moment she had brushed them away with the back of her hand, and was saying cheerfully:

“Oh, aye, but it’s what we’ve all to come to, and he got away just as he would have liked, quite well seemingly one minute, and then gone. If he had recovered from the stroke to sit helpless, no’ able to go out, it would have been terrible hard for him, but as it was, he was fishin’ up to the last—but we were crackin’ about pan-drops and Mrs. Baillie. Often enough Maister Gideon came in here for sweeties, a real nice frank laddie he was too. Well, well, it’s raining ‘auld wives and pipe-staples’ as the saying goes. No wonder the Place roof’s leaking!”

The next day was what Robert described as ‘showery, but no’ so much rain atween the showers.’ It was cold, and Kitty was enjoying sitting close to a good fire,

when Isobel came in, and sitting down beside her said:

“I knew there was a catch somewhere. Everything was going too well. I was too pleased with my house and my Coopers, so this had to come.”

“*What* had to come?” Kitty asked crossly. “Nothing, I’m sure, to account for your tragic face.”

“The slater says the roof’s done,” said Isobel with the calm of despair.

“And what may he mean by that?”

“A new roof, lock, stock, and barrel; there’s dry-rot and I don’t know what else.”

Kitty was at once all sympathy. “Oh, poor Isobel, poor darling. What’ll it cost, do you suppose?”

“Don’t know; hundreds of pounds, I should think,” said Isobel gloomily.

“And all the mess and turn-up workmen make! But I don’t believe this man knows what he’s talking about. It’s an expert you want.”

“Yes, he says he’ll have to get ‘the boss’ up; but *his* report may be even worse.”

“Why, Isobel, this isn’t like you. You knew when you bought the Place something like this might happen, and you risked it. If there is anything wrong, it’s better to know at once and have it put right. It would have been worse in the winter, much worse. When is ‘the boss’ coming?”

“Mebbe the morn,’ the man said. It isn’t his roof, you see; he’s in no hurry.”

“Oh, but we’ll ring him up,” Kitty jumped to her feet. “It’s better to know the worst at once. Come along, my dear, to the post office.”

As they tramped down the road, Isobel said, “I rather wish we weren’t having the Ormiston people this afternoon. Mrs. Cooper’s so worried about the roof I fear she won’t make a success of her baking.”

“Oh, I don’t know. Baking for visitors will take her mind off the roof. It’ll be as well to hear the ‘boss’s’ verdict before the people arrive. Let me speak to him, Isobel. You’re far too easy with people. I’ll demand his presence at once.”

“Demand away, I shan’t hinder you. This is one of the snags of a country existence—twelve miles from a slater. It means an expensive job.”

“Ask for an estimate,” said Kitty, with an air of being extremely practical.

“Will that make it less expensive?”

“It’ll look more business-like anyway.”

“I see.”

Isobel studied picture-postcards of the district, while her friend wrestled on the telephone with the chief of the slaters.

“Glenbucho Place. You sent a man this morning to look at the roof, and he

seems to think it requires a lot. Could you possibly come up yourself this afternoon and tell us what is needed? What d'you say? G-l-e-n-b-u-c-h-o; Glenbucho. *You* know, about twelve miles up Tweed from Priorsford. What? Yes, I daresay, but this is very urgent, and we would be greatly obliged if you could come at once. Tomorrow? *Couldn't* you make it to-day? Oh, that is good of you. It will be such a relief to get an expert's opinion—about two o'clock? Thank you so much."

"So far so good," said Kitty, hanging up the receiver. "Now we'll soon know where we stand. . . . I believe it's going to clear. Look at the mist rising from the hills."

The "boss" kept his word and arrived to the minute, but his report was even less optimistic than that of his man.

After he had gone Isobel came into the parlour and sat heavily down on the hard sofa with the chintz bolsters.

"Well?" said Kitty.

"There's no 'well' about it, it's all bad, I couldn't understand half of what he said, but I gather that the whole roof would have to be renewed, and he muttered darkly about dry-rot. When workmen begin, there's no end to it."

"Don't I know it," said Kitty feelingly.

"Well, it can't be helped. As you say, I took the risk." Isobel jumped up and straightened her shoulders. "Now we've got to entertain Mrs. Whitson and her friends. Don't let's make the roof a topic of conversation. I'll be interested to hear what you think of Mrs. Brodie."

When the party had departed, the two friends thankfully drew low seats to the fire.

"It went well," said Kitty, "and no-one would have suspected that you had just had a crushing blow, you poor dear."

"If it had only been the Whitsons, I'm afraid I'd have poured out my plaint—I did tell Mrs. Whitson when she was leaving—but I couldn't bore the Brodies with my roof. Mrs. Brodie made quite an effort to be pleasant to-day; the only other time I met her she seemed to consider me too 'mere' to notice. Isn't she very good-looking?"

"Very, and so well dressed. Her husband seems a good dull soul, with an equally yoked look about him. Are they happy, d'you suppose?"

"I haven't the least idea. All I know is that Mrs. Brodie is not an appreciative mother, and shows very little affection for James. It's interesting to hear that he's going with them on this trip to Canada. He will be happy, poor child; he seems to have been left so much alone. Now I'm going to get out a chair-seat and do some

slow, patient work, and try to keep my mind off slaters.”

At dinner that evening at Ormiston, when the fruit was on the table and the servants had left the room, the talk turned on the visit to Glenbucho Place, and Alan Brodie said:

“It’s an interesting old house. I didn’t know the story of it till James told me. He seems to have got it all correct. ‘Murray of Broughton dressed like a drover,’ ‘King George’s soldiers.’ Did you tell him it, Althea?”

“No, Isobel did. She’s splendid with children. I tell her she should be a matron in a boys’ school. She interests James in all sorts of things, and he’d do anything for her.”

“Poor Isobel,” said Mrs. Whitson, “she was telling me as we left that she has had workmen to the roof, and they say it will all have to be renewed. It’s a great blow to her.”

“Oh Mamma, how awful!” Althea cried. “She’s been hoping so that the roof wouldn’t fall down on her, for she’d only just enough money to buy it. Will it cost a great deal? And will she be able to live in the house? Couldn’t we ask her to come here till it’s done? That would be fine.”

“It would,” her mother agreed. “I don’t think it would be very comfortable for her living in the house, but you must remember, darling, that we are new friends, and I’m afraid older friends will put forward a claim. But we’ll certainly ask her.”

Mrs. Brodie looked up from the strawberries she was sugaring and said:

“I’ve got an idea! Alan wants someone for James when we go to Canada. Mightn’t Miss Logan be persuaded to take on the job? We could make it worth her while, and it would be a great thing to have someone James already knows and likes. Just as you like of course, Alan, but Miss Logan wouldn’t be half as much trouble as an unknown young girl who had to be looked after.”

Althea’s face had got red and lowering during this speech, and before anyone else could say anything, she broke in:

“You’re not going to ask Isobel Logan to go with you as a nurse-maid? What awful cheek!”

“Althea,” said her mother.

“Well it is, and if——”

“My dear child”—Frances’s voice was amused and condescending—“give me credit for not being a clumsy fool. It’s no question of a nurse-maid. Miss Logan may have to leave her home for some weeks, and I should think she’d be quite glad to have the chance of a trip to Canada. Of course, she’d be treated exactly as any

other member of the party—an honoured guest, if you like. Only, James would be her responsibility, and from what you say she would like that.”

“I don’t know,” said her husband uncertainly. “It would certainly be splendid for James, but perhaps, as Althea says, Miss Logan might consider it impertinence. What d’you think, Helen?”

“Well, I’m sure of one thing, Miss Logan wouldn’t be insulted by the suggestion. She’s far too sensible; but whether she would ever consider it I don’t know. Would you like me to ask her, Frances?”

“If you would; but it’s not really my concern at all, except that it would be easier for everyone to have Miss Logan, who could entertain not only James, but Alan.”

“How do you mean entertain me?” Alan began, with some heat, but Helen Whitson, warned by the malicious amusement in the eyes of Frances, rose and suggested that it might be pleasant to stroll out of doors for a few minutes. “You have your fur, I see, Frances. Althea, bring me something, will you? It seems a pity to miss the delicious freshness of the first fair evening after a storm!”

CHAPTER XXII

The ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes. . . .

FROM OMAR KHAYYAM

THE next morning the sun was shining on a clean-washed world, and the two friends were able to have breakfast in the garden.

“Marmalade or honey?” Isobel asked, and sighed. “How perfect this would be if that old roof weren’t causing a depression. I’m glad, though, that they can’t begin at once, for it means that we have a fortnight to ourselves. It’s too bad that your holiday should be spoiled.”

“Not in the least spoiled; that’s as long as I would have stayed, in any case. I tell you what, we might go on a small tour to the West. You’ve never seen Skye or Mull? You’d love them, and it would be so peaceful, you and I wandering round together, staying anywhere that took our fancy, and leaving when we pleased. Oh! an idea! Have you ever ridden a bicycle? Then why shouldn’t we have a cycling tour? At least, take bicycles with us in case we want them? We might live in a farmhouse, and cycle all round Mull. When Rob and I were there with our car I thought how much more suitable bicycles would have been. And we could cross to Iona—there’s simply no end to what we might do.”

Isobel laughed, as she threw some crumbs to a shy chaffinch, and said, “It does sound delightful. Now that I think of it, a bicycle would be of the greatest use to me here. I meant to get a small car, but if the roof costs an awful lot, I mayn’t be able to afford it, and bicycles are very cheap. What a good thing you’re here, K.—without you I’d have been flattened out, and now, what with the sun shining, and your talk of islands, I feel I can stand up to anything. Shall we walk over this morning to see the glen where Murray’s house stood?”

“Yes, let’s. Do we pass Miss Home’s shop? I want to thank her for her gift of pan-drops.”

“We’ll go that way. I’ve to see Mrs. Cooper. Will you be ready in an hour?”

As they started on their walk, Kitty asked how Mrs. Cooper was standing the thought of a new roof.

“She’s quite calm about it; says she’s thankful it has happened now, in the summer-time, for it would have been a ‘skittle’ in the winter. I daresay it’ll be quite an interest to them all—certainly to Archibald—but Robert says, ‘They’ll no’ need to mak’ a mess o’ my garden.’ Don’t you think it’s wonderful to get so attached to a place that isn’t your own?”

“No, I don’t. It’s his as long as he has charge of it, and puts his best into it—

much more his than yours really. To possess doesn't mean much when we've got such a pathetically frail tenure of anything in this life. It matters nothing to us who owns these hills; because we love them they are ours."

"Yes," said Isobel, "in a way that's true, but . . . I'm afraid I must be a 'possessive' person, for it gives me a real thrill to look at the Place and say 'Mine'! You see, I've never had anything of my own before."

"And you've every right to enjoy it now. Don't listen to me. I'm only 'talking for talking's sake,' as my old Nannie so often used to tell me."

It was a perfect day for a walk, but so bright that it was with relief that they turned off the high-road into the shadow of a drive thickly bordered with trees.

"It rises pretty steeply now for fully half a mile," Isobel told her companion. "This is the beginning of an avenue that continues right up to the glen: the trees must be very old. That house you see is the farm-house. Someone told me it was built with the stones of the Big House."

"But I thought the Big House was burned?"

"Well, that's the tale, but perhaps there were enough stones left to build a small house. I don't know. There doesn't seem to be any picture or print in existence of Murray's house, so Mr. Lewis Elliot tells me. I don't suppose he ever came back to his home after the trial, but he must have thought of it often. I like the burn running down beside us, and as we get higher the hills seem to crowd round."

The avenue finished at a white gate; beyond that there was a rough track leading through the glen. A cottage stood on the hillside to the right of the gate, with a little garden in front full of vegetables and berry-bushes; there was no sound but the trickle of water, and now and again the bleating of sheep, or the cry of a wild bird.

"Here is peace," said Kitty, sinking down on a heather-bush. "The house would stand where that cottage is. What a situation! And perhaps this was the garden. If I'd money I'd build a house here, something that would look as if it had grown into the landscape; some windows would look up the glen, some away over the hills beyond Glenbucho—what is the big one—Cardon?—and some to where Tweed rises. How lovely it would be on a winter evening to sit by the fire and hear the wind howling down the glen!"

Isobel shook her head. "Very nice to think about, my dear; but you would be much happier in your own flat. At heart you're a Londoner."

"Am I? I believe you're right. I'd never be happy for long away from London, much as I love Scotland. You don't feel like that?"

"No, I don't. I liked London when I was in it. I'll always enjoy going back for a visit, but I'm infinitely happier here."

“Then it’s a blessing we’ve both got what we want. Here’s somebody coming! Why, it’s Mrs. Whitson and her girl.”

“Tracked you down,” said Althea. “Agnes Home told us you were here, so we followed you.”

“Isn’t this a lovely place, Mrs. Baillie?” her mother broke in.

“Perfect. I’ve just been telling Isobel about the house I’d like to build here, every room with a different view, and every one beautiful, but she scoffs at the notion, and says I’m not worthy of this glen.”

“I didn’t say that exactly,” Isobel began.

“Something very like it, anyway. Told me I had an urban soul. Althea, let’s go and explore up there. I’d like to see if there are traces of the old house.”

“Let’s,” said Althea, who hated to be still, and as they walked off Mrs. Whitson said:

“I followed you this morning, Isobel, with a purpose. In fact, I’m on a sort of diplomatic mission, to ask on behalf of the Brodies if you would consider going with them on their trip to Canada. They are taking James, as you know, and when they heard that your plans might be upset by the new roof and all it involves, they wondered if you could be persuaded to take on the care of James. Alan thinks (so do I) that the child is left too much to nurses, and that he ought to be with someone more companionable, but the time is short and the right person difficult to find. You would be *absolutely* right. I assure you Alan and Frances well realise what a favour you would be doing them if you consented to go, and they will try to give you a pleasant time, and it would be a way of seeing something of the world.”

“But—oh, it’s impossible!” Isobel cried. “To begin with, I don’t want to go to Canada. I’ve had no training in looking after children—though I’m fond of James, and I haven’t, to tell the truth, much desire to go anywhere with Mrs. Brodie.”

“That I can quite understand. To be quite honest with you, Frances Brodie is going this trip most unwillingly—whether Alan is wise in insisting on her going is doubtful—and it would make all the difference if you were there to—to——”

“To act as buffer?”

“Well, to make it happier for James and his father. You would really be doing a very kind act. Althea, I may tell you, is furious at the suggestion, and regards it as cheek! She and I had made a lovely plan that you would come to us while the Place was in a turn-up.”

“Oh, thank you very much, but it won’t be for long, and Kitty suggests that she and I should go a cycling tour in the West Highlands—to Mull, perhaps.”

“That would be very pleasant, but you could go there any time. Think over the

Canadian plan, won't you. Sleep on it and let me have your definite answer tomorrow. It's only for about six weeks, you know, and it'll be an interesting trip."

Isobel agreed, then asked, "Who suggested that I might go?"

"Frances," said Mrs. Whitson.

"Oh!" said Isobel.

"There's nothing at all to see," shouted Althea, bounding across the burn. "I think they must have ploughed it and salted it like the people in the Bible did the groves."

"Where have you left Mrs. Baillie?" asked her mother.

"Talking to the woman in the cottage. We'd better walk up to the gate and meet her. Let us drive you back, Isobel."

"If you'd drop us at the end of our road it would be kind. We had meant to walk across the fields, but it's a long way on a hot day."

Kitty emerged from the cottage, full of admiration for the courtesy and kindness of the mistress of it.

"She invited me in to rest, and offered me a drink of milk, and showed me everything she had. It's a very old cottage, with very small windows blocked by geraniums in pots. The room was almost entirely filled with an enormous wardrobe. How it ever got in I know not."

"Perhaps they built the house round it," Althea suggested.

"I almost think they must. My friend said it was there when she came, so it evidently goes with the house."

Mrs. Whitson asked if it might not have come out of the Big House.

"Not a hope," said Kitty. "It was a vast Victorian thing. I do wish I could find out something about Murray's house. Haven't you got any books of local history?"

"Indeed we have," said Mrs. Whitson. "If you like, I'll bring you three large and handsome volumes to dig in."

"*Please* do, there's nothing I'd enjoy more."

That evening they sat at dinner with the windows open and the candles lit.

"Extravagance," said Kitty, "candles in broad daylight!"

"I know," Isobel admitted; "but I am such a fire-worshipper that when it's too hot for a fire in the grate I must have the flames of the candles on the table. It makes all the difference to me between bleakness and comfort. Kitty, when you were exploring with Althea this morning, her mother made an extraordinary suggestion—that I should go to Canada with the Brodies on a six weeks' trip, to keep an eye on James."

“That’s a quaint idea. Whose bright thought was that?”

“Mrs. Brodie’s, it seems.”

““Curiouser and curiouser,”” Kitty quoted. “What made Mrs. Brodie think you wanted a job as a nurserymaid?”

“Oh, well, it’s not quite like that. They heard, I suppose, that the house was to be in a turn-up, and that I might be at a loose end, and thought that it would not only give me a treat, but that it would get James off their hands.”

“Have you any desire to go to Canada?”

“No, none.”

“And you’re not at a loose end, for you’re going with me to Mull, so the answer is in the negative.”

“Of course, I told Mrs. Whitson so, but she asked me to sleep on it and tell her definitely to-morrow. She seemed quite keen about it. I hate to appear ungracious when she has been so very kind to me, but I really couldn’t do this. It isn’t as if I even liked Mrs. Brodie.”

“Don’t give it another thought,” Kitty advised.

“But I can’t help thinking about it; it’s a most unsettling suggestion,” Isobel complained.

That night Kitty lay long awake. For a time she tried to go to sleep, then lit her candle to read herself sleepy; finally, she propped herself up with pillows, so that she might look into the garden in the half-darkness of a northern summer night. Lying there she thought of the Veitches, her kin, who had lived so long in this house, of Gideon across the sea in Canada. *Canada!* That was what was keeping her awake. Canada and Isobel. That absurd suggestion. But was it so absurd? Thinking it over, Kitty was at a loss to understand why she had been so against the scheme when Isobel had told her of it. Sheer selfishness she supposed, the desire to keep her friend to herself. Mr. Brodie would see that Isobel had a good time, and taking charge of James would be a real pleasure to her. It would cost her nothing—all the other way—and she would see much that would interest her. And then, Gideon Veitch was in Canada. There seemed more than mere blind chance in this unexpected suggestion coming from the Brodies. Suppose they met, Gideon and Isobel! It wasn’t likely, of course, Canada was a very large place, but if they did—two Scots far from home, both loving the same old house, well—and the next thing Kitty knew was Mrs. Cooper’s voice, “Another fine day, mem.”

Isobel seemed rather subdued at breakfast, reading her letters and putting them down without comment.

“Anything interesting?” Kitty asked.

“Two invitations to sherry-parties, and some printed things. I don’t believe this day’s going to keep up.”

“Oh, I think it is,” said Kitty comfortably. “Mrs. Auchinvole is having the time of her life without me. Care to see her letter?”

Isobel put out her hand for it, and Kitty went on, “D’you know, my dear, I was thinking things over in bed last night, and came to the conclusion that I’d given you bad advice. This trip to Canada is really a fine opportunity to see something of the world, and I’d no right to discourage you. It’s for such a short time too. You’ll be back to your beloved Place most before the summer’s over.”

Isobel poured some water into the teapot, looked at her friend curiously, and said:

“Well, this is a change about! What has happened?”

“Nothing has happened, only last night I couldn’t get off to sleep, and I started thinking, and realised how selfish I had been advising you to turn down this invitation; it was simply because I hated to lose you.”

“But I don’t want to go.”

“That’s only because you dread change; you need to be bullied into doing things.”

“I came to Scotland on my own.”

“The idea was yours certainly, but I don’t believe it would ever have been more than an idea if I hadn’t written to Agnes Home, Merchant, and clinched things. And just think what you’d have missed if you’d stayed on placidly in the Queen’s Court Hotel!”

“I agree; but having found my desired haven, why can’t I be allowed to stay in it?”

“Because you’re far too young to settle down. Why, you haven’t begun to live yet, and you behave as if you were a staid sixty. You may not enjoy the trip, but it’ll be experience.”

Isobel looked far from convinced. “It’s experience enough for me to go with you and two bicycles to Mull; and it’s there I’m going,” she added.

At this, Kitty, who was never patient in argument, cried, “Now, don’t be mulish. We can go to Mull any old time; next spring, perhaps. Spring must be lovely there.”

“But I tell you, I don’t like Mrs. Brodie, and I can’t imagine anything I’d hate more than to go to sea with her. And if I’m seasick how can I look after James? And I’d need to buy a lot of clothes—and oh! the whole idea’s ridiculous.”

“Well,” said Kitty, “have it your own way. But before you decide, what about walking over to Ormiston and talking it over with the Brodies. Take a look at Mrs.

Brodie from a new angle——”

“You mean as my employer?”

“If you care to put it like that?”

Isobel thought for a moment. “Yes, I shall,” she said, “though it’s a horrid bad job. You’re a wretch, Kitty, to force me to do this.”

But Kitty, waving to her friend as she walked down the drive, felt that her efforts to persuade would not have prevailed had there not been in Isobel a lurking desire to be persuaded.

A few minutes before luncheon-time Isobel arrived home.

“To be or not to be?” asked Kitty dramatically.

“Oh, you needn’t ask. You knew I’d succumb at once if pressure was brought to bear. It’s hot and I’ve walked fast. I’ve time to change, haven’t I?”

Later, when they were drinking their coffee, Kitty said, “I was afraid you might be persuaded to stay at Ormiston.”

“Not likely! They asked me, of course; Helen Whitson is always hospitable, but I escaped away like a bird out of the fowler’s snare.”

“What was Mrs. Brodie like?”

“She was out to charm. For some reason she wants me to go this trip. I would have enjoyed disappointing her, but James and his father also seemed to want me to go, and, to tell you the truth, Kitty, I find that I do rather want to see Canada, and may never have another chance, so it’s settled. We sail on 6th August, and return about the end of September.”

“And very nice too.”

“I don’t know about nice, but I realise what a croquet ball must feel when it is prepared to trundle peacefully through a hoop, and suddenly finds itself smacked violently in a different direction.”

CHAPTER XXIII

The smell o' the simmer hills,
Thyme and hinny and heather,
Juniper, birk and fern. . . .

J. B.

ABOUT a week before the day of her departure, Isobel went out one morning to the garden, where Kitty was lying in a long chair, with a letter in her hand.

"Kitty, what do you think? Mrs. Elliot writes that the whole Bidborough family are coming to Laverlaw, and she wants us to go to lunch with them on Thursday."

Kitty sat up all excitement. "Then I shall really behold with my own eyes the heroine of the fairy-tale! I am glad. How nice of Mrs. Elliot to include me."

Isobel, holding the letter as if it were precious, went on, "I was afraid I was going to miss seeing Lady Bidborough. I wonder if you'll feel about her as I do?"

"Well, I won't promise; it's sometimes difficult to be enthusiastic about one's friends' friends. By the way, I've got an interesting letter too. From Gideon Veitch, a reply to the one I wrote reminding him of my existence. Very civil of him to write by return."

Isobel took the letter held out to her and read:

"DEAR COUSIN KITTY,—

"I remember you quite well, and our fishing excursions, and your engaging way of laying in stocks of sweeties at Agnes Home's shop. It is interesting to hear that you are once again at Glenbucho Place and that the new owner is a friend of yours.

"I am glad to know that Miss Logan likes the old house. Please tell her that I am pleased to think that she is finding a use for the china and other things that were left. I rather wanted them to stay where they belonged—but I knew I could trust Mrs. Bruce to remove them if the new owner seemed unlikely to appreciate them! There was no sense in bringing old china out here; as you can imagine we need only the most ordinary workaday things.

"It's a good life, and a grand country. If ever you come out here, let me know. I'd enjoy seeing you again, for there are few people less rich in relations than I am.

"Thank you for writing, and with all good wishes,

"Yours,

"GIDEON VEITCH."

Gideon Veitch. Isobel stood looking at the name, till Kitty said:

“It’s a nice letter, don’t you think?”

“Yes. Kitty, you see he says that Mrs. Bruce would have removed all the china and things from the Place if she hadn’t approved of the new owner. D’you suppose that means that she thinks well of me?”

“Would you go so far as that? Shall we put it that she thinks less meanly of you than of some others? No, honestly, Isobel, I think Mrs. Bruce quite likes you, but she doesn’t believe in fair words. She’s like the Scot who, after listening to the most extravagant praise of the saintliness of his minister said, ‘Oh, I daresay there’s nothing positively vicious about the man.’ I don’t believe she would even let herself go about Gideon Veitch, and I’m sure Davy has seldom heard a word of commendation from her. If she survives him she may own, ‘He was a canny soul,’ or ‘a good man to me.’

“I think it’s dreadful,” said Isobel, “to live with people and grudge them praise and appreciation; it must make life so chilly.”

“Not a bit. Mr. and Mrs. Bruce understand each other. I don’t suppose the word love has so much as been mentioned between them. They probably consider it an affronting word—‘It’s an awful-like word love when folk are well’—but they’ve got on very well without it. Last Sunday I was admiring Mrs. Bruce’s hat, and Davy, looking at her admiringly, said, ‘Ye’re a braw body, Beenie,’ and there was actually a sort of unwilling smile on her face, though all she said was, ‘I wonder to hear ye, Davy Bruce.’”

“That was rather sweet,” said Isobel.

“Well, don’t let Mrs. Bruce hear you say so,” Kitty warned her. “What are you busy with this morning?”

“I’m finishing the last of the new night-gowns; everything else is ready, so I can begin to pack. I must get my heavy luggage away in good time. I hope I have enough clothes; after all, in my position I’m not expected to be smart, only tidy.”

Kitty laughed mockingly, and when Isobel had gone back to the house, she got up and walked through the garden, and across the stackyard to the farm-house.

Mrs. Bruce was coming from the milk-house, carrying a jug of cream and a glass dish of curds.

“Were ye coming in?” she asked.

“May I? It’s not your dinner-time, yet?”

“It’s no’ far off it,” said Mrs. Bruce, “but come in if ye like.”

Kitty sat down on the parlour sofa, and said, “I had a letter from Gideon Veitch this morning.”

Mrs. Bruce, standing bolt upright, said nothing, so she went on: "Have you any idea how far this place he lives in—Lever's—is from Quebec?"

"No' me. I ken nothing about foreign parts."

"You can hardly call Canada foreign parts," Kitty reminded her mildly.

"Mebbe no'; but I'm no' like Agnes Home that takes an interest in all the world."

"I was just wondering. . . . What a beautiful plant that is, Mrs. Bruce. What is it?"

"It's a castor-oil plant."

"Is it really? I don't think I ever saw one before. Well, I was wondering if there would be any chance of Gideon Veitch seeing Miss Logan when she is in Quebec."

"What would he see her for? He doesna ken her."

"No, he doesn't, of course; but it must be rather lonely for him out there, and he might be glad to have the chance of meeting the new owner of Glenbucho."

Mrs. Bruce sniffed. "Mr. Gideon doesna sound lonely; we had a letter from him no' that long ago. To ma mind it's a daft-like thing for Miss Logan to go away about Canada ranging when she has a home here. And she has nothing to do with Mr. Gideon, they've never seen each other between the eyes. What would be the use of telling him to go mebbe as far as frae here to Aberdeen to meet a stranger?"

"But there would be no harm in telling him—I'll be writing anyway that Miss Logan will be in Quebec at a certain time, just in case he would like to meet her."

Mrs. Bruce sniffed again, and said grudgingly, "Well, just as ye like. There's no saying, mebbe Mr. Gideon would be glad to hear the news of Glenbucho from somebody that's been there. And there's no harm in Miss Logan, she means well, though she's awful ignorant, at least, she was when she came here first; she's pickin' up a bit now."

That afternoon Kitty wrote a letter, which ran:

"DEAR COUSIN GIDEON,—

"It was nice of you to reply to my letter by return, but I wish you had told me something about where you are. For instance, if you had told me how near you are to Quebec, I would know if it were worth while to tell you that Isobel Logan is sailing for Canada on the *Empress of Britain*, and will be at the Frontenac Hotel from about 12th August for a week. She is going out with some people called Brodie for a short trip. She knows no-one in Canada.

"Of course, you must not feel that you have to make a point of calling

to see Isobel (always supposing that you are within calling distance of the Frontenac); she doesn't even know I am writing; but I'm sure she would be interested to meet you and talk about Glenbucho, and it would be a real pleasure to me to hear from her about you. You are my kin, and like you, I am not rich in relations.

"Glenbucho is lovely these summer days, and the heather will soon be out. I know you have a wealth of everything in Canada, but have you heather?"

"Yours,

"KITTY BAILLIE."

"By the way, the reason why Isobel is going to Canada is that the roof of the Place threatens to come down on her, dry-rot or something, and she has to vacate."

Kitty read over what she had written. "It's badly expressed," she told herself, "but I'm going to send it; at least, it gives them a chance to meet, and if Gideon doesn't take it, or if distance makes it impossible—well, then it just hadn't 'been to be.'"

After some showery days Thursday broke clear and fair, with a mist in the hollows that told of heat to come, and when Dan and the Daimler arrived to take them to Laverlaw, the sun was shining from a clear sky.

"As fine a summer day as ever I saw," said Kitty. "Luck for our last day at Glenbucho."

Isobel groaned. "Don't remind me. I'm not going to think about it, but just live in the moment."

It was a perfect day for Laverlaw, even the grim grey walls looked mellow in the summer radiance. As the Daimler drew up, there were shouts of welcome from the three children who had raced up from the burn at its approach.

"Hullo, Miss Logan!"

"Hullo, Peter. And Alison and Quentin! How nice to see you again. Real holidays this time, not whooping-cough holidays. This is my friend Mrs. Baillie. Oh, Mrs. Elliot!"

"Have you been waylaid by these brigands?" said their hostess. "Run off, children, and wash your faces. What have you been doing?"

"There's green stuff in the burn," Alison explained, "and they stuck it on for beards and moustaches because they're pirates. It was dirty, slimy stuff."

“No, it wasn’t,” said Peter, “it was as clean and clean. How could anything growing in water be dirty?”

“Well, why did it make your face black?” Alison asked.

“Girls,” said Quentin, “are afraid of dirt,” and ran into the house, pursued by his sister.

Pamela Elliot turned to Mrs. Baillie. “I am glad it’s such a fine day for your last visit to Laverlaw at this time. We seldom get it so deliciously warm. The heat is bringing out all the scents; smell the warm turf and the thyme!”

“Yes,” said Kitty, sniffing appreciatively; “to-day it doesn’t seem as if there had ever been, or ever could be, such things as bitter winds and dead flowers and leafless trees.”

“And the cold Atlantic,” Isobel put in.

“It may be like a mill-pond,” Mrs. Elliot assured her. “It often is at this time of year. But why am I keeping you inhospitably on the doorstep? We’ll go and find Jean. She and Biddy have been for a long tramp over the hills this morning. After Mintern Abbas they enjoy this wild glen.”

They went into the drawing-room, a cool flower-scented place, and presently Jean came in. She greeted Isobel like an old friend, and when she heard Kitty’s name, she exclaimed:

“I know who you are. You’re the wise friend who sent Miss Logan to Glenbucho. We’re all grateful to you.”

“Well,” said Kitty, “I certainly suggested Glenbucho, and I did write to Agnes Home, Merchant, for rooms, but after that Fate took a hand. Even with the prospect of the roof falling in—have you heard about that?—I consider Fate and I did well.”

“In another year we’ll know more about that,” said Isobel; “it’s early days to talk . . . Where have you been walking, Lady Bidborough?”

“Oh, a grand walk, up to the top of the glen and over the hill called the Dead Wife, and down into Bell’s Pool, where the car met us and brought us home by the road.”

“The ‘Dead Wife’!” said Kitty. “What an odd name for a hill.”

“A woman escaping with the Highlanders in the ’45 died there,” Mrs. Elliot explained. “It is rather a grim name.”

Kitty turned to Jean and asked how Laverlaw compared with her home in the Cotswolds.

“They don’t compare at all,” said Jean. “They’re utterly different and both perfect. When I’m at Mintern Abbas I feel I never want to leave it, and when I come to Laverlaw I wonder how I can stay away from it. . . . But, Miss Logan, I’m

terribly sorry to hear about the roof at Glenbucho. It *is* a nuisance for you.”

“Say rather a blessing in disguise,” said Mrs. Elliot. “It’s going to give her a trip to Canada. Here and now, Miss Logan, I’m going to book you for a ‘Talk on Canada’ to our Rural next winter. We’re making up the syllabus now, and are at our wits’ end for speakers.”

“Oh, Pamela, what a shame! Bullying a guest! But if you do consent, Miss Logan, could you bear to come and give your ‘Talk’ to our Institute at Mintern Abbas? I’m just as much at my wits’ end for speakers as Pamela is.”

“But,” Isobel protested, “I can’t speak. I’ve never in my life said a word in public. Besides, I’m going to Canada to look after young James Brodie, and I don’t suppose I shall have time or opportunity to see anything worth talking about.”

“Well,” said Jean, “whether you speak or not, you must come and stay with us. Here is my husband. Biddy, come and help me to persuade Miss Logan to come and visit us at Mintern Abbas.”

Isobel found herself shaking hands with a tall man with greying hair and a weather-beaten face. Lewis Elliot was with him, as well as Alison and Peter, and presently they all went down to lunch.

Kitty was on her host’s right hand, and at first, found the going difficult, but when she began to talk about the district and her visit to the glen where once had stood Secretary Murray’s house, there were no more pauses.

“The house was called Littlehope,” he told her.

“Rather an ominous name,” said Kitty.

“‘Hope’ means a glen; we’ve many ‘hopes’ all about—Hundleshope, Leithenhope, Hopehead. The house was burned, you know, about 1746, and almost nothing seems to have been saved. When I was a boy I remembered being told by a rabbit-catcher in Glenbucho that when he was howking one day on the site of Littlehope he found an oak dish and a silver fork, and there are some papers still in existence telling about the farmer of Cloverhill being invited by Murray to drink to Prince Charlie. There are tales, too, about Highlanders coming over the hills starving, and being taken in at the farm of Kirkbank, and eating oatcakes as fast as they could be taken from the griddle.”

“Old unhappy times,” said Kitty. “To me it’s all terribly interesting, for I’m connected with the Veitches and they were kin to the Dicksons and the Murrays. But my friend Isobel Logan, with no connection at all with the district or anyone in it, bought Glenbucho Place simply because she was fascinated with the house and its story.”

Lewis Elliot nodded. “I’m not surprised. It’s pleasant to find a young woman

with a feeling for the past. Logan. It's a place-name here. The Logan Water . . . You are connected with the Veitches; d'you ever hear from Gideon?"

"I wrote to him from Glenbucho and had a reply a few days ago. He seems to like his life in Canada."

"I'm glad of that. We had a line from him last Christmas, but it didn't tell us much. He had a very hard time, compelled to stay at home with his father, and having to watch day by day the old man failing in mind and body. Few young men would have been so patient and cheerful. A particularly nice fellow, Gideon."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. He was a particularly nice small boy when I knew him twenty-odd years ago."

"I've known him all his life," said Lewis Elliot. "I used to be a lot at Glenbucho Place, but latterly they didn't want visitors, it worried old Mr. Veitch when he felt he ought to know people and didn't. Towards the end Gideon and Bruce, the griever, were the only people he knew."

"He wouldn't forget Bruce," said Kitty, "he's part of the Place. I daresay it means even more to him than it does to Gideon."

"In a way, perhaps, and yet, I don't know. Gideon felt leaving it very badly, but what was he to do? He had to make a living and there were few jobs to suit him here. And Canada appealed to him. I'm glad, though, he kept on the farm and has still a foothold in Tweedside; it will bring him back."

Kitty agreed, and seeing that her companion seemed inclined to fall into a muse, turned to observe the rest of the party.

Lady Bidborough and Isobel were so deep in talk that they appeared oblivious to their surroundings. Mrs. Elliot was engaged in a dispute with Peter about fly-fishing, to which Lord Bidborough was listening with an amused smile.

"It's a great mistake to argue with the young," he said, turning to Kitty.

Kitty laughed. "It's a hard world for the middle-aged, don't you think? Never was youth such an asset as now. If you're young you can get away with anything. It was far different when I was in the bloom of youth. I looked up to my elders in the most touching way, never doubting they were my betters."

"You must have been well brought up, or perhaps you were naturally right-thinking," said her companion, glancing across at his own small daughter. "Look at Alison. She might have walked out of a Victorian story-book. She simply can't help being good; there never was a more conscientious, dutiful child. Jean and I sometimes feel that we can't possibly live up to the high standard she sets for us, and yet she's not in the least a prig; she is far too self-distrustful for that—Peter and Quentin, on the other hand, are full of original sin."

“So you’re perfectly at ease with them?”

“Perfectly.”

Kitty thought what a likeable grin her companion had, and, later, as she and Isobel drove to Priorsford to do some last-minute shopping before going home, she remarked on the good fortune of Lady Bidborough.

“*All* the good fairies must have been at her christening,” she said. “Good looks, health, a happy disposition, rank, money, a delightful husband, two handsome sons, and a dutiful daughter—what a shower of blessings!”

“I thought you were getting on well with Lord Bidborough,” said Isobel, “and you liked his much-blessed wife when you talked to her, didn’t you?”

“Oh yes, I liked her, it would be difficult to help doing that, and I found her much more of a *person* than I’d been led to expect. From your description I gathered that she was one of those very sweet, sympathetic women who charm everyone at a first meeting, but who are so full of the milk of human kindness that they are apt shortly to pall—at least, on the unregenerate. But about your friend there is strength as well as sweetness; nothing, I should think, would make her swerve from what she considered the right path.”

“Jean told me—I use ‘Jean’ in inverted commas—that she and her brothers had been brought up by a Calvinistic grand-aunt, and that she had never been able to get away from her teaching, had not, indeed, wanted to.”

“That,” said Kitty, “explains a lot. It makes her a little different; more, as I said, of a person. You can see that her husband is not only still in love with her, but that he depends on her as a comrade.”

“I wondered,” said Isobel, “if he could possibly be good enough for her, but when I saw them together I knew it was all right.”

“Oh, dear me, yes. He is certainly good enough for her. Don’t get sentimental about your new friend. My own opinion is that no woman is quite good enough for the best type of man.”

“D’you really think so? Now, I often think that women marry beneath them; but perhaps I’ve never been lucky enough to meet the best type of man.”

“You haven’t met enough men of any kind, my dear; that’s why I’m glad you’re going on this trip to Canada.”

Isobel laughed. “What d’you suppose I’m going to do in Canada, Kitty? Live in a whirl of gaiety? Why, I doubt if I’ll meet anyone at all, my time will be taken up with James. It’ll be interesting, of course, to see a new land, and I want to learn as much as I can about it, but all the time, I expect, I’ll be thinking how wonderful it’ll be to get back to Glenbucho Place. I *know* I’m only going for a few weeks, that it’s

merely a short break in my uneventful life, but I can't get away from the feeling that this is a permanent break—d'you suppose it means the ship's going to sink?"

"It simply means that you've stayed so long at home that you're beset with fears about even a small adventure. You'll forget them all when you're once away. Well, here we are! Have you got your list? Who's that waving?"

"Goodness! It's Mrs. Duff-Whalley."

"How odd," said that lady, "to meet you like this. I quite meant to call on you this afternoon and wish you *bon voyage*, but Lady Tweedie simply insisted I should go to tea with her. It's a tennis-party, really, but, of course I just sit and talk. I'm on my way there now, after I take a look at Muriel and her boys. Well, so you're off to-morrow, Miss Logan. I'm sure I hope you'll enjoy your trip and come back none the worse. It seems a pity to go just now when the houses round are all full, and things are getting a bit brighter. I hear the Bidboroughs are at Laverlaw."

"Yes, we've been lunching there to meet them."

"Oh, have you? I must call at once and ask them to something, but I've hardly a meal free for the next ten days. Jean is *such* an old friend, almost like another daughter to me!—I hope, Miss Logan, you've left a responsible person in charge at Glenbucho Place, who'll keep an eye on the workmen."

"Indeed, I have; my good couple, Mr. and Mrs. Cooper. I can depend on them."

"Well, I hope so; but I could tell you some queer stories about 'dependable' couples. And I hope you'll get on all right with Mr. and Mrs. Brodie. I can't say I took to either of them when I met them at Ormiston. He's speechless, practically, and has a sulky look, and she's an affected piece. However, they may improve on acquaintance; you never know. Good-bye, then, and good luck. Good-bye, Mrs. Baillie. You must come to The Towers on your next visit."

Mrs. Whitson and Althea, returning from Lady Tweedie's party, called at Glenbucho Place to say good-bye.

"I wish you'd been at the party this afternoon, Isobel. You'd have seen Mrs. Duff-Whalley at the top of her form," Althea announced. "You'd have thought she was the hostess. Lady Tweedie was put completely in the background and——"

"Nonsense, Althea," her mother broke in; "Mrs. Duff-Whalley was trying to help by making things go, and she succeeded amazingly. So you're going back to-morrow, Mrs. Baillie?"

"Yes, I want to have Isobel with me for the two nights she is in London, and I'll go to Hampshire on Saturday after I've seen her off on the boat-train from Waterloo."

“It’s *horrible*,” said Althea. “Already the house looks all forlorn. And we haven’t done any of the things we planned, Isobel. You promised I’d come and stay, and we’d listen for the sound of hoofs on the cobbles in the dark night.”

Isobel protested. “Althea, please don’t talk as if everything had come to an end. Why, I’ll be back in September, actually next month, silly girl. It’ll be autumn then, with shortening days and fallen leaves, much the best time to see a ghost.”

But Althea refused to be comforted. “You were settled here, and you were happy, and you’ve spoiled everything by going away. What am I going to do all August and September?”

“What you would have done in any case,” said her mother. “We have people with us all August, and you know you’re going yachting in September, and staying with the Campbells for the Oban ball. That will be your first ball, and very exciting.

“But don’t let me come home and find you too grown-up, Althea. I like you as you are.”

“I won’t change,” Althea promised.

When the Whitsons had departed, Isobel and her friend walked across to the farm-house to say good-bye to the Bruces.

They found them in the parlour, Mr. Bruce, in his springless arm-chair, reading the morning paper, while his wife sat in the window, mending a garment already much patched. To discard anything as past repair seemed to Mrs. Bruce a pitiful confession of failure.

Mr. Bruce raised himself slightly from his chair, by way of showing some politeness to his visitors, and when they were seated, sank down, saying, “Well, ye’re for off, I hear. Tired of Glenbucho already?”

“Driven out,” Isobel corrected. “But only for about six weeks; by the time the harvest’s in I’ll be back. You’ll hardly have time to notice that I’m gone.” She turned to the silent mender in the window. “I wonder, Mrs. Bruce, if you’d be kind enough to advise Mrs. Cooper if she’s in a difficulty? I know she’ll do her best, but if anything unforeseen happens, may I tell her to come to you?”

“If she wants me I’m ay here,” said Mrs. Bruce, holding up a needle and thread to the light. “I’ll say this for your couple, they bother nobody. He’s an anxious wee man, that Cooper, and his wife’s an eident body too.”

This was high praise from such a stern critic, and Isobel said gratefully, “You’ve been very kind to the Coopers, you and your husband. It’s so good of you to let Archibald ‘help’ about the place, he does enjoy it.”

“He’s a dependable kind of a laddie,” said the farmer, “and no’ as impident as most o’ them. I kinda like a laddie about the place. . . . Ye’ll likely come across Mr.

Gideon in Canada.”

“Not very likely,” said Isobel. “Canada’s quite a large place.”

“Well, if ye see him, tell him I was spierin’ for him. I’ll be writing him ere it’s long; he’ll be keen to hear what we got for the lambs at St. Boswells.”

CHAPTER XXIV

I propose writing you every day. My opinions and descriptions will depend on the health and humour of the Moment in which I write, from which cause my Sentiments will often appear to differ on the same subject.—THE JOURNAL OF A LADY OF QUALITY

“KITTY DEAR,—

“We have been three days at sea, and I’m told by to-morrow morning we shall be at the mouth of the St. Lawrence, so it is high time I began a letter to you. I meant to write the moment we got settled on board, and make a diary of my letter, but—well, I just didn’t.

“I hated leaving you last Saturday at Waterloo. That was a grim moment! The Brodies seemed so utterly unknown, somehow, I couldn’t believe I was going away with them, and I was thankful for James’s hand clutching mine. Once on board it was all right. James and I have a beautiful airy cabin, an electric fire with a Chinese rug before it, a large sofa as well as two proper beds, any amount of space to move about in, and a luxurious bathroom.

“To my surprise I found a sheaf of telegrams for me, several boxes of flowers, and two books. One, sent from the Elliots, is the *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, the account of a voyage from Scotland to the West Indies in 1774, written by one Janet Schaw of Edinburgh. In moments of self-pity—the sea has given me no excuse to be really ill, but I never feel entirely happy—I try to realise what Janet Schaw must have endured in a cramped, dirty, pitching ‘packet’ and count my blessings. She says at the start, as they leave ‘Burnt Island Road’: ‘I have laid in a store of resolution to be easy, not to be sick if I can help it, to keep good humour whatever I lose; and this I propose to do by considering it, what it is, merely a voyage.’ And she had need of all her resolution, for it was a stormy voyage of seven weeks, from which they barely escaped with their lives—a most encouraging book to read on board ship.

“You may ask, when do I find time to read, with a small boy to look after? But Mr. Brodie is most kind, and takes him away after luncheon for about two hours, shows him things about the ship, and plays with him at deck games. The *Empress* is so beautifully spacious that you can play tennis on the top deck, and, elsewhere, all sorts of games.

“A ship is a grand place for a small boy, and James is busy all day. Every morning, as we come up from breakfast, we gaze long and earnestly at a painting on the staircase depicting somebody called Champlain introducing his bride to Canada. In the background is a curly-looking ship, and Champlain in ruffles and knee-breeches is sweeping off a feathered hat, while his bride in wide-spreading skirts is curtsying to a group of people comprising nuns, Indians in full war-paint, with their squaws, and others. James never tires of studying this work of art, and marvelling at the Indians. What I marvel at is how these elaborate costumes got into such a very small ship!

“There are very few children on board. James gets his meals in the dining-room, except his six o’clock supper, which he has in the cabin. There never was a more friendly child; he is on speaking terms with almost everyone, passengers and crew. A very nice, middle-aged couple, Canadians, called Lamont, have taken a great liking to him, and if he disappears, I generally find him with them.

“It is interesting to sit and watch the women on board. Some have such a sense of what is seemly in clothes and always look absolutely right, but others let themselves go in an unfortunate way. One very fat lady (by no means young) appeared to-day in blue slacks, a short Eton jacket, and a jaunty yachting cap stuck on a mop of golden curls. This poor dear lady is as kind as she is absurd, and affronts James by calling him ‘darling,’ though he isn’t proof against the chocolates she showers on him so prodigally.

“James was immensely intrigued by the life-boat drill on Sunday morning. He looked so funny sticking out of a life-belt, and listening earnestly to the little officer who told us what to do. ‘Go quietly to your cabin, put on your warmest clothes and life-belt, and walk to your boat-station.’ It all sounded so dignified and orderly, but one wonders!

“I always thought a life-belt was a round thing that you got inside, but those are made of cork and hang round your neck in a suffocating sort of way. A man near me said to someone, ‘Never jump with your life-belt on; you’re apt to break your neck. Jump with it in your hand and put it on in the sea!’ As if one would be able to do anything in the sea but sink! I was feeling pretty miserable on Sunday, anyway, and, as I stood with the cork thing round my neck, I feared that any moment I might be publicly and ignominiously sick.

“I rather think Mrs. Brodie is finding the voyage much pleasanter than she expected. Her days are short, as she doesn’t appear till just before lunch. In the afternoon she sits in her chair with a book, and is seldom alone, as she has already made acquaintance with quite a lot of people. Between tea and dinner, she plays bridge, and after dinner there is a cinema. I hear it is very good, but as it doesn’t begin till 9.30, I don’t go. James might wake up and want me.

“Whether Mr. Brodie is enjoying the trip it would be difficult to say. He sometimes plays tennis, and has lots of men to talk to, but he moons about a good deal by himself. I think he is pleased to see James so happy, and enjoys explaining things to him.

“I don’t much care to make a third at meals. It’s all right at lunch when James is there, he talks and has to be answered, but at dinner it is sometimes trying. Mrs. Brodie has a way of ragging her husband, half-playful, half-mocking, which, one can see, irritates him intensely. He goes absolutely silent, and I have to pretend a keen interest in people at another table, turning my head towards them and gazing intently. I’m bound to say, though, that Mrs. Brodie is behaving very decently to me, urges her husband to take me to play games, and politely hopes at intervals that I don’t find the company of her son too utterly boring.

“*Wednesday*.—Now we are in the St. Lawrence and can see land quite distinctly. James spends most of his time staring solemnly through his father’s glasses, and says, in a tone that brooks no contradiction, that he can see bears and buffaloes and Red Indians, and something that looks *very* like a beaver.

“It is beginning to get warm, and they say Quebec may be very hot. I am wondering if I have thin enough clothes. We were told, you remember, that Quebec was often quite cold, rather like an English summer, but now I hear that it is sometimes 100° F. in the shade.

“Mrs. Brodie is looking charming to-day in white and blue. I expect she has an inexhaustible supply of cool frocks. We walked together before luncheon, and talked most amicably. She says she is really quite sorry the voyage is so near an end, for she doesn’t at all look forward to our time in Canada. The choice seems to be, staying in an hotel in Quebec, or travelling with Mr. Brodie. The first, she says, would be deadly dull but comfortable, the second deadly dull and most uncomfortable, for the distances are enormous.

“Then Mrs. Brodie revealed to me that the people she has been most friendly with on board, a Major Lauriston and his wife, are going to a place called Murray Bay, and have invited her to visit them there, promising her a very good time.

“Alan is so absurd,’ she went on ‘wanting us all to keep together. You wouldn’t mind staying in Quebec with James, would you? I’m told the Frontenac is a very good hotel, and you could go excursions all round. I’m sure there are heaps of interesting things to see, and when Alan is back from his journeyings, he could take you round.’

“I said, with truth, that I wouldn’t mind at all staying in Quebec with James, and James’s mother beamed on me approvingly, and said how fortunate they were to have been able to persuade me to accompany them. So that is that.

“*Later.*—Mrs. Lamont has been instructing me, as we leant on the rail and looked at the land we were passing, about the history of Canada, and I am beginning to realise my abysmal ignorance. Canada as a country always spelt romance to me, chiefly because my old aunt had a photograph in her room of a pretty girl with long plaits of flaxen hair, seated in a toboggan, which I as a small child greatly admired.

“My god-daughter, Paulina Park,’ my aunt told me, when I asked who was the pretty girl. ‘She lives in Montreal: that is a blanket-suit she is wearing.’

“‘Paulina’ and ‘Montreal’ and ‘blanket-suit’ were to my childish ears horns of Elfland. What a strange, happy life for a girl, to sit in a toboggan in a blanket-suit in a place with the lovely name of Montreal?

“And to-day I’ve been hearing how Montreal got its name. It seems that this Champlain, whose picture James and I study every morning, was the first white man to come to Canada. A Frenchman, a courtier, he set out on a voyage of discovery (some time in the sixteenth century), and came sailing up the St. Lawrence, as we are sailing now. What a lonely little ship his must have been! And, landing where Montreal now stands, he planted a cross in the primeval wilderness, and started his work of civilisation. It’s a wonderful story, and Mr. Lamont is going to lend me a History of Canada, so that I can read it for myself. I must tell James. He and I shall look with greater interest than ever at the picture. I must say I’m glad to think that with all he had to do and endure, Champlain found time to go back to France and bring a wife!

“James and I have been busily packing to-day, and are pretty well ready. I must say it is very nice to have a little boy to do things with. I shall feel quite bereft when I give up my guardianship.

“*Frontenac Hotel, Quebec.*

“I am writing this in my dressing-gown at 11 p.m. We arrived in Quebec about noon, a lovely shining day, and it was very fine looking from the river at the Heights of Abraham, which Wolfe and his men scaled, when they took Quebec from the French. As far as I can see they didn’t take it very far, for French is spoken everywhere. It is built on a steep slope and is full of old houses and churches and convents, a most interesting place. I look forward to exploring it with James. This is a delightful hotel, with most marvellous views up and down the St. Lawrence, and away to the hills of Maine. Now with all the lights shining on the other side of the river it is like fairyland.

“My friends, Mr. and Mrs. Lamont, are staying here for a day or two, and also Mrs. Brodie’s friends, the Lauristons, and we all dined together to-night.

“I heard Mrs. Lauriston speaking to Mr. Brodie about his wife going with them to Murray Bay. He looked rather gloomy and unwilling, and said little, but I expect he will let her have her own way. It’s all one to me. I don’t care much what we do. I shall enjoy anything for the few weeks we are here, knowing that at the end of them I’ll get home. Home! Even now, with this marvellous panorama spread before me, I’m thinking of my room at the Place, looking out on the quiet garden and the rowan-trees by the burn-side, and *wishing* I was there.

“I know what you think, and I agree.

“I’m not worthy of the chance I’m getting.

“Much love, my dear,

“From ISOBEL.”

CHAPTER XXV

I see the grass shake in the sun for leagues on either hand.
I see a river loop. . .

RUDYARD KIPLING

ABOUT thirty miles from Quebec, and ten miles from the nearest village, there stands on the banks of a wide, brawling river a lumber-mill known as Lever's. It has been in the Lever family for several generations.

The present owner, though a man of seventy, was still known in the district as "Young George." A bachelor, he lived alone in the house built by his great-grandfather, but he was far from lonely. Caring little for cities, interested in all country things, proud of his lumber-mill, he was very well content with his life. He was a young man for his years, but, having no-one to succeed him, he had recently made provision for the future by taking into the business the son of an old friend of his in Scotland, Gideon Veitch of Glenbucho.

On this August morning the young man had been out riding early, and was now at breakfast in his own house, which stood on the banks of the river near the mill, dividing his attention between some excellent trout caught by himself and the English mail which had just come in. One letter seemed to worry him, and when George Lever looked in, as he often did, to walk with his young partner to the mill, he said:

"Here's rather a nuisance. A cousin writes that my successor at Glenbucho, a Miss Logan, is coming out here with friends for a trip—*is* here, as a matter of fact; for she must have arrived on the *Empress* yesterday—and is putting up at the Frontenac, and my cousin seems to think I should do something about it."

"Well, I should hope so. Quebec is only thirty miles away. What's to hinder you running up and paying your respects to the lady? And if she and her friends have any craving to see a lumber-mill, ask them all down here."

Gideon looked blank. "Oh, surely there's no need for that? It's not as if I even knew these people."

"Hospitable, aren't you?"

"I don't believe I am," Gideon confessed. "But of course I'll go and call at the Frontenac. To-morrow, perhaps?"

"Better go to-day," George Lever advised him. "You go right now—and don't look as if you were a blessed martyr at the stake either."

Gideon protested, "But I've got a lot to do this morning. I'll go after lunch. Afternoon's the proper time to call, anyway," adding, as he got up from the table, "It's a pity people can't stay where they belong."

“Well, I’d be kind of sorry if you’d stayed where you belonged.”

Gideon looked like a large bashful boy as he said, “That’s very nice of you, sir. It’s great luck for me to get in here. Don’t think I don’t realise that. Can I do anything for you in Quebec? It seems a pity to go sixty miles for nothing.”

George Lever’s only reply was a chuckle.

It was after five when Gideon, with some trepidation approached the Frontenac. He had no desire to meet this Miss Logan, and fervently wished his distant cousin had not let him know of her arrival. Lever’s was now his home and his interest. He did not want to talk about Glenbucho; it was unsettling to go back even in thought to old days and old places.

The Brodies and Isobel, with Mr. and Mrs. Lamont, were having tea after a day’s sight-seeing, when Gideon’s card was brought to Isobel. She stared at it in astonishment. How did Gideon Veitch know she was in Canada? What had brought him to call?

She turned to Mrs. Brodie, holding out the card.

“Mr. Gideon Veitch,” that lady read. “Why of course, Glenbucho. I’ve often heard Helen Whitson speak of him.”

Gideon, standing watching the going and coming of people in the hall, started when a voice said, “You are Mr. Gideon Veitch, I think?” and, turning, found a tall, fair girl smiling at him. “I’m Isobel Logan. Do come and have some tea.”

When Gideon had been introduced all round, Mrs. Brodie appropriated him, and Isobel could not but admire the way she set the rather shy young man at his ease. All the same she felt it was rather hard that, when Gideon Veitch had taken the trouble to come and call on her, she was not being allowed to speak to him. She could look at him, however, and told herself that she would have recognised him at once from the boyish photograph on Mrs. Bruce’s parlour mantelpiece.

Gideon, on the other hand, was feeling that things were turning out rather well. Mrs. Brodie was pleasant to speak to and charming to look at; the new owner of Glenbucho looked a good sort, pretty, too, in an honest way that appealed to him, and he liked the look of the small boy.

Dallying with a cup of cold and bitter tea, he answered questions about his new home, and suddenly Mr. Lamont said:

“What did you say it was called? Lever’s? Why, I know it, and I know ‘Young George’—a grand fellow. I’d like to see him again.”

Then Gideon was inspired to give George Lever’s message.

“If any of you’d care to come and see the place—it’s only thirty miles, and a

good road—Mr. Lever would be delighted.”

“Oh, I’d *love* to see a lumber-mill,” Mrs. Brodie cried.

“Then, please, do come, as many of you as possible, and spend the day.”

But that was more than Mrs. Brodie felt she could support, and it was arranged that they would leave after lunch, and have tea at Lever’s, and, with the relieved air of a man who has done his duty, Gideon departed.

As he bade good-bye to Isobel, he said, “I only got Kitty’s letter saying you were coming this morning.”

“I had no idea she had written,” Isobel said carelessly.

But she felt dissatisfied all evening. Gideon was very much what she had pictured him, but she hadn’t expected to see him absorbed in Frances Brodie. He seemed farther away from her now that she had met him in the flesh, than the “child of air” in the turret-room at Glenbucho. She looked forward with no pleasure to the next day’s jaunt, but, as often happens when one starts with no anticipation of pleasure, she enjoyed the visit to Lever’s.

The drive was lovely, and Mr. Lamont, who was in the car with Isobel and James, was delighted to point out to them all the beauties.

Isobel said, suddenly, “I do feel ashamed to think I’ve lived so long in the world knowing practically nothing of Canada.”

“And Canada and Scotland so closely linked!”

“I know, it’s dreadful. And yet, in a way, I’m glad I’ve heard it here on the spot. I never look at the mighty St. Lawrence now, but I think of that little lonely ship sailing up, as Parkman says, seeing no life but the wild birds and the white whales turning over in the sunlight.”

“And there they are, still at it,” said Mr. Lamont, pointing.

“Not really? The same white whales that Champlain saw? James, look! You see these flashes in the river? They’re white whales.”

James gazed solemnly, remarking, “Whales must live a long time if they’ve been there since Champlain sailed up.”

“Not the same whales, ducky, descendants, perhaps. Isn’t this a lovely large country, James? We’ll feel cramped when we go home.”

“Daddy told me that all of England, Scotland, and Wales could go into a Canadian lake and not be noticed.”

“Goodness! It makes us feel small, doesn’t it? But we mustn’t forget, James, that small as our island is, its sons are all over the earth, and everywhere British rule means justice.”

“W-well——” said Mr. Lamont.

“Don’t you believe that?” Isobel asked quickly.

“Why, yes on the whole I do. The British *mean* justly all the time, but sometimes they’re sort of dense.”

“I daresay. We blunder along, and get into holes, and say the wrong thing, and are no good at all at propaganda, but there must be *something* about us, something rather likeable and trustworthy, for if we’re attacked, look how even the people we have conquered rally to our aid. They’d rather be under British rule than any other.”

“That’s true. Well, it seems to me we’ll need all the help we can get before long.”

“D’you mean we’ll be fighting again? I can’t believe it. We couldn’t be so insane. Why, we’re still paying in every way for the last war. No country wants war, no country has any money to fight.”

“It’s a queer thing,” Mr. Lamont said slowly, “but want of money never stopped a war yet. But we needn’t get rattled; something may happen to teach us all sense. . . . Tell me about this house of yours in Scotland. Did you say you bought it from the young man we’re going to see to-day?”

“Yes, I did, and the next time you and Mrs. Lamont come to Scotland, you must come and stay with me at Glenbucho.”

“That’ll be fine. Why did the young man sell it?”

“He had to, more or less. They had had to sell most of the land. There was only the house, and the home-farm left. His father’s death left him free to live his own life, so he came to Canada. That was more than a year ago, and in May I happened to visit Glenbucho, saw the house, found it was for sale, and bought it.”

“Then you’d never met the young man till yesterday? He will be interested to hear news of his old home.”

“Ye-es,” said Isobel. “He seems to have settled down very happily here, and perhaps he doesn’t want to be reminded of what he left—at least, I thought, yesterday——”

“He hadn’t much chance to show what he wanted yesterday. You’ve never seen a lumber-camp, Miss Logan?”

“Is it like a lumber-room?” James asked, “full of old things and boxes?”

“Not a bit like that, sonny. It’s trees, thousands of them, brought down the river and made ready for pulp. That’s what newspapers are made of. Did you know that?”

James looked puzzled. “I don’t see how trees could ever look like newspapers.”

“Neither do I,” said Isobel; “but perhaps we’ll understand better later.”

“I think,” said Mr. Lamont, “that we must be near the place; this is the river, anyway.”

In a few minutes they turned in at a gate, and at the end of a short drive found a comfortable-looking house. George Lever was waiting to receive them, and his welcome was echoed by a chorus of dogs.

“Come right in. Gideon, where are you? He was here a minute ago. Why, Lamont, I’m glad to see you again!”

While Mr. Lamont introduced his party, the other car arrived, and they all trooped into a large room, half library, half living-room.

Mrs. Brodie, as she sank into a large chair, said, “You men do know how to make yourselves comfortable. What a delightful room! Flowers too! What lovely roses!”

“They’re in honour of our guests. I prefer to see flowers growing.”

“Oh, but, Mr. Lever, one wants them in the house too. The life of a rose is so short.”

“That’s true enough. Mrs. Lamont, wouldn’t you like a more comfortable chair?”

Mrs. Lamont smiled and shook her head. “This suits me. These low chairs are a snare to old women. Does Mr. Veitch live with you, Mr. Lever?”

“No, he has his own place. It’s better that we should both feel quite free, but he’s a lot here, and I’m a lot with him. Here he is! Where did you get to Gideon?”

Gideon, shaking hands with everyone, said rather breathlessly, “I was seeing if my place was tidy, in case anybody wanted to see it.”

“And was it?” asked Mrs. Brodie.

“Not very.”

“All the same, we must see it,” Mrs. Brodie declared.

“You can’t help it if you’re at the mill,” said Gideon; “it’s quite close. I’m glad it’s such a good day for your drive.”

“But isn’t the weather always good here in the summer?” Mr. Brodie asked.

“Well, we’ve more sunshine than we have at home, much more, but we get some wet, cold days, and quite a lot of thunderstorms. The autumn’s lovely here, and I enjoy the winter.”

They talked for a little in groups, then George Lever took James by the hand and announced that they were going off to the mill, and everyone followed.

First they saw the logs lying out in the river and then watched them in the mill churning round and round, gradually losing their bark and becoming smooth and white in the process. James was engrossed, and he and Isobel stood gazing after the rest of the party had gone on.

Isobel thought they were alone, and started when, above the roar of water and machinery, she heard Gideon’s voice at her ear.

“What did you say?” she shouted, but he laughed and shook his head, and presently he led James to a different part of the mill to see men removing any hard bark that remained on a trunk.

“You see,” he explained, “the trunks must be quite smooth before they go on.”

“But I don’t see how they can ever be newspapers,” James insisted.

“You’ll need to see them pulped and you’ll have a better idea,” Gideon told him, and turning to Isobel asked, “Don’t you like the aromatic smell?”

Isobel sniffed. “Delicious. What kind of trees are these?”

“Mostly spruce; it’s best for this work.”

“Do you enjoy it?”

“Yes, I do. Of course, you know, this only lasts for about six months, the winter frosts stop it.”

“And what do you do then?” Isobel asked.

“Oh, well, we arrange for the trees to be used next season; that means long expeditions, very interesting. And then there’s a certain amount of routine work to be done here, and there’s skating and ski-ing and any amount of fun. It’s a grand life. Much better for me than sitting in an office. You see, I hadn’t been trained for anything; I was jolly lucky to fall into this.”

“You were lucky. Working with trees must be very pleasant, and this place looks so home-like. Except that it is all so large, it might almost be Tweedside.”

“Does that strike you? I think that is what appealed to me from the first. I never felt a stranger, but that was largely due to Mr. Lever. He and my father were friends, and he used sometimes to come to Glenbucho when he was across on business, and he wrote when he heard of my father’s death and asked if I’d care to come out on a visit. I’d always had a wish to go to Canada, so I jumped at the proposal. He was at Quebec to meet me, and brought me straight here, and here I’ve remained.”

James, who was gazing at the jostling logs in the river, so closely packed that they looked like one great raft, asked:

“Couldn’t we walk across the river on these trees?”

“I wouldn’t try,” Gideon advised him. “They’re not so solid as they look. . . . Miss Logan, I was sorry to hear that the roof of the Place had threatened to come down on you. I don’t remember any trouble with it, but roofs aren’t immortal, and it’s very old. You like the Place?”

“I love it,” said Isobel, and added after a pause, “I wanted to talk to you about the things you left, furniture and china. We shan’t do much harm to the furniture, but the china is really valuable, and with the best will in the world we mayn’t be able to keep it whole. I’m scared to use it.”

“What’s the use of keeping it? There’s always Woolworth’s.”

“Oh, don’t talk like that! Old things to me are terribly precious. You’ve no idea what real pleasure I get out of your beautiful bits of furniture, and tea tastes ten times better out of a Worcester china cup. That’s why I’m so utterly happy and contented at the Place, it’s got traditions and age-old memories. I can never be sufficiently thankful to Kitty for sending me there.”

“And isn’t there some gratitude owing me for turning out to make way for you? How does Mrs. Bruce treat you?”

Isobel laughed. “With a certain reserve, as she treats everyone. But ‘Davy’ is very friendly. He is going to write to you about the price of lambs at St. Boswells—that was his message by me.”

“Good. Davy’s letters are worth getting. Have you ever seen him write a letter? Mrs. Bruce spreads *The Scotsman* over the table-cloth, and Davy spreads his elbows over them both, puts on his spectacles, and with his tongue sticking out a little writes for dear life. No wonder he only writes me a letter about twice a year. Besides, I don’t deserve any more. I’m a bad correspondent myself, and somehow the moment never seems to arrive when I want to write.”

Isobel told him, “You’d write oftener if you knew how your letters are prized. Have you never described Lever’s to them? They’ve no idea that you’ve found such a pleasant down-setting.”

“I say, I must be a wretched letter-writer! But it’s so queer out here, nothing seems to matter but the job in hand. British politics, London, even Glenbucho, are small and far away, as if one were looking through the wrong end of a telescope. Hullo! Here’s Mrs. Brodie.”

“Here you are! I began to be afraid James had got in among the logs. What a charming place you have here, Mr. Veitch. I had no idea Canada was so attractive. But this is summer; how do you get through the dreadful winter?”

“Dreadful winter! I’ve just been telling Miss Logan what fine times we have—winter sports, with no Channel to cross, and all sorts of jollities.”

“Then you have neighbours?”

“Plenty, scattered a bit, but distance doesn’t seem to matter here.”

“And have you bridge-parties and dances?”

“As many as we want—that doesn’t mean very many, I’m afraid.”

“But you’re snowed up for months and months.” Mrs. Brodie made a face. “I shan’t stay the winter, Mr. Veitch. What do you say, Isobel?”

“I’ll stay,” said James quickly. “I’ll stay with Mr. Veitch and help to poke the logs. You stay too, Isobel.”

Isobel knew to her annoyance that she was blushing, but she said lightly, "You'll come back, James. Perhaps when you're grown up Mr. Veitch will employ you. Come and see what's round here," and she led James away.

Round the corner was a white house with a green door, and James was at once seized with a desire to enter it.

"It's Mr. Veitch's house, and I want to see inside. The door's open; he won't mind: *come on, Isobel.*"

Isobel felt that she should wait until she was invited, but the temptation was great, and she followed James.

A small hall with a bearskin on the floor—a fairly large room opened off it, well lit by a window looking to the river, and another with a view of the wide country. There was only one picture, a water-colour of Glenbucho from the garden side of the house. A big arm-chair stood on either side of the fireplace, and a table with pipes and books and papers. There was an overflowing bookcase, and a writing-table on which stood a large glass bottle of toffee-mints.

"He likes peppermints," thought Isobel, smiling unconsciously.

James was pretending that the buffalo rug on the couch was alive, and was approaching it with caution, and Isobel glanced over the books. The Edinburgh edition of R. L. S., several little green volumes of Sir Walter, *Esmond*, *Vanity Fair*, the red-leather edition of Kipling—a long row; Chesterton's *Poems*, the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, some old books of ballads, as well as more solid works—very much what she had expected to find.

It was a friendly room, and evidently Gideon Veitch was more than content with this new life of his. She need not feel that she had taken his inheritance. Indeed, it was a good thing the Place had her, for Gideon was finished with it. He had got a new country and a new home, and all his interests were here at Lever's.

It was a very satisfactory state of affairs, Isobel told herself; but all the same, she felt oddly depressed as she and James returned to Mr. Lever's house, where a wonderful tea was provided.

"Yes," Gideon said, as he helped the guests; "I had an idea that Scotland was the home of good teas, but Canada runs her close."

George Lever took a sandwich, remarking, "I never minded about tea till Gideon came. I took it or not, it didn't matter. But he's got me into bad ways. I'm getting quite dependent on it. James, try the chocolate cake."

James was trying everything, and his mother, regarding the enormous slice of cake he was cheerfully attacking, said, "I didn't realise what a *greedy* child I had."

George Lever denied that James was greedy. "He's appreciative, and that's the

kind of guest we like.”

“And you’re the kind of host we like,” said Mrs. Brodie prettily. “Mr. Veitch, do come and tell me *all* about yourself. I shall have to answer so many questions when next I’m with Helen Whitson.”

Gideon had been standing beside Isobel, but now he crossed the room and sat down beside Mrs. Brodie, while Mr. Lamont moved over to Isobel.

“Well,” he said, “and what d’you think of Lever’s? Does it beat Glenbucho?”

“The odd thing is, that it somehow reminds me of Glenbucho. I think it’s a lovely place to stay, and the river and the logs and the clatter of machinery must be so cheerful. I’d like to see it in winter.”

“I doubt you can’t manage that this trip. Just how much of Canada d’you expect to see, Miss Logan?”

“Round about Quebec, and perhaps Ottawa. You see, Mr. Brodie is travelling about, and Mrs. Brodie is going with her friends, the Lauristons, to Murray Bay, so James and I shall probably stay on at the Frontenac for a fortnight or so. It’ll be rather nice, I think; we’ll amuse ourselves very well.”

Mr. Lamont took Isobel’s empty cup from her, and when he had put it down said, “But what’s the good of taking the trip across if you’re not going to see more than that?”

“Well, I’m only here to look after James. When Mrs. Brodie suggested it, it seemed a chance to see a bit of the world. I’m a dreadfully untravelled person, so everything is new and interesting to me.”

“That makes it all the more imperative that you should see as much as possible. . . . Here are more visitors.”

Two very pretty girls had come in through the window opening on the garden, and stood making apologies for having crashed into a party. They refused tea, and explained that they had just looked in to see if Gideon would care to go with them to tennis at the Hughsons. No, they couldn’t wait. Gideon stood talking and laughing with them for a minute, and then, waving a greeting to the company, they ran out again. Later, when Mrs. Brodie declared it was high time they were getting back, their host and Mr. Lamont were so deep in conversation that the departure was delayed.

“What *can* they be talking about?” Frances Brodie said to Isobel. “They look like conspirators hatching a plot! I must say this is quite a nice place to live—in the summer, and Mr. Lever has charming neighbours. Did you ever see anything prettier than those two girls? Canadian girls are very attractive, I think, so well turned out. No wonder Gideon has settled down so happily, and it will please Mr. Lever if he

marries a Canadian.”

CHAPTER XXVI

West and away from here to heaven still is the land.

A. E. HOUSMAN

THE next day Mrs. Brodie was superintending the packing of her boxes for Murray Bay, trying to decide what to take and what to leave.

When a knock came to the door, she rather impatiently said, "Oh, *come in!*"

"Am I disturbing you?" said her husband.

"Of course not. Anything wrong?"

"No, merely that I want to speak to you about something."

Frances Brodie turned to the maid, busy with the boxes, saying, "That'll do just now, Amy," and when the girl had left the room, said, "Well, what is it?"

"You know the Lamonts are going a trip to the North-West?"

"Yes, I wish them joy of it. Imagine weeks in a train!"

"They have their air-conditioned coach; it's a delightful way of getting about."

"But you didn't interrupt my packing to tell me that, did you?" Frances asked.

"They want Miss Logan and James to go with them. Lamont says, what is quite true, that it's a pity Miss Logan shouldn't see as much as possible when she is here. I must say I didn't like the idea of leaving her in an hotel."

"Better for James than spending a fortnight or more in the train."

"They wouldn't be in the train all the time. I understand they mean to stop at different places for a few days."

"Well, it was your idea to bring James. You must decide this yourself. The Lamonts seem to have fallen for Isobel, and I expect she will jump at the chance of this trip."

"The idea is," said Alan, "that I meet them at Edmonton and bring them back (the Lamonts are going farther on), and then we'd all go to Ottawa. How long d'you want to stay at Murray Bay?"

"It depends on how well amused I am. I may tire rather quickly of the Lauristons."

"I certainly did—vapid, cackling couple!"

"Well, we can't all be brilliant, darling. It's a pity you can't go with the Lamonts' party, you'd enjoy that."

"I would. I like the Lamonts, but I've my work to do. You're willing, are you, that James should go? You'd better speak to Miss Logan."

"Isn't that your job? I'm not responsible for anything on this trip except my own enjoyment, and I'm seeing to that."

“Oh, all right. I must say I’m glad Miss Logan’s having this chance. I don’t believe she looks on the care of James as a nuisance. She said to me seeing things with him made them more interesting. He really is an intelligent little chap. I found him quite a companion on board ship.”

Alan glanced at his wife, but she was studying her face in a hand-mirror and made no response, so he went on:

“I hope you’ll enjoy Murray Bay. I was thinking we might motor you down, all go together; it’s a lovely run. We would have a few hours to see the place and be back before it was too late for James. I don’t have to leave till the night train.”

Frances laid down her mirror and yawned.

“Just as you like. Amy can take the luggage by train. And we meet again in about a fortnight? Well, this detached holiday will give us something to talk about when we meet. It’s so dull to go about together like a girls’ school.

“I’d better find Miss Logan,” said her husband, “and see if she wants to accept the Lamonts’ invitation. I expect she will.”

“So do I, but run away and find her,” said Frances.

Alan went, wondering rather resentfully why Frances so often made him feel a fool. In his own world of men and business he knew he was counted a sound man and far-seeing, his opinions were listened to with respect. Why did his own wife appear to despise him?

When Isobel heard the news her first thought was James. This would be an enormous treat for him. Like most small boys, he was passionately interested in trains; to live on one would be perfect bliss. For herself she was not so sure. She had been quite content at the thought of staying in Quebec, a place that attracted her greatly, and had been rather looking forward to being left with James. But she never for a moment hesitated about accepting the invitation. As Mr. Brodie said, it was a wonderful chance.

“Surely it’s amazingly kind of Mr. and Mrs. Lamont,” she said, “to ask strangers to go with them on such a trip.”

“That’s Canada,” said Alan. “It’s the kindest place on earth, and, what’s more, the Canadians are kind in an imaginative way. They don’t do you to death with hospitality, but they give you real treats, make things possible that you just couldn’t have done by yourself. This trip now—they are going away up to Churchill. I’ve never been there, but I’ve always wanted to go. You’ll see a Canada that the ordinary tourist never sees.”

“That is splendid. We’ll enjoy every minute of it, shan’t we James?”

“I’ll say we shall,” said James, who had made the acquaintance of a small

American and was rapidly picking up his talk and his tone.

When they all met at luncheon Isobel tried to express her gratitude to her host and hostess to be, but they assured her the benefit was theirs.

“You’ll come?” said Mr. Lamont. “That’s great.”

“It will make all the difference to me,” his wife assured Isobel, “having you and James. You’re doing us a favour. Don’t bring any smart clothes, my dear, only things you can be easy in, for one lies about a lot on the train. It’ll be cold at Churchill, so see that you have warm coats and pullovers. Yes, what you wore on board ship. How long is the trip, Jim?”

“A fortnight to three weeks. Depends on how we get on. I’ve a good deal to get through. Take lots of books with you, Miss Logan. I notice you’re a great reader, and on the train you’ll get through a lot, believe me.”

“It’s knitting I get through,” said Mrs. Lamont, “and sleeping. I hope you won’t feel the motion too much; some people can’t sleep at all.”

But Isobel was sure that they would feel no inconvenience. She and James had an afternoon’s shopping with Mr. Brodie, and amassed a quantity of light literature, and a store of sweets for the journey; also some games for James, and a pistol, which looked murderous but only fired caps.

“You see,” he told his father, “my new shorts have a hip-pocket, and it’s a pity to have *nothing* in it. Pitney says his father always carries a loaded revolver—a real one—because of gangsters. What are gangsters, Daddy?”

“Wicked men.”

“Oh! England’s safer, isn’t it, Daddy?”

“And Scotland’s safest of all,” said Isobel.

“It is,” James agreed; “but I’d like to see a gangster just once.”

A few days later Isobel began a letter to Kitty Baillie.

“On the train.

“. . . I haven’t been able to write since the very early morning when I wrote you a description of Gideon Veitch’s new home, and told you we were just starting to motor Mrs. Brodie to Murray Bay, and, later, were departing with the Lamonts for a train trip.

“Murray Bay was delicious. It’s a fairly long run, so we had only a few hours there, quite enough to make us long to go back. It is at the mouth of the St. Lawrence, backed by hills and beautiful rolling country. A lot of people have summer houses there, and there are some very interesting old houses. We went to see one. A high white fence shut in an

old garden with some great trees, shady walks, and old-fashioned flowers. The house itself made me think of Glenbucho. There was a portrait by Raeburn over the dining-room mantelpiece of the man who built it in 1790, Colonel John Nairn. Our hostess, to whom the house now belongs, asked me if I'd care to read his 'Letters,' and most kindly made me take the book away with me.

"I had a feeling that a train might not be an easy place to write from, and it isn't. In fact, it's impossible to write unless it's standing. I'm seizing such an opportunity now.

"Up to now a train journey to me—as to most people—was merely something one had to take in order to reach a destination, hardly a thing to be enjoyed—but to live in a train is quite delightful. The Lamonts' coach is a most comfortable thing to travel in, and attractive, with fresh chintzes and really cosy chairs. It is attached to whatever train they mean to travel by.

"On Wednesday last we started for Winnipeg. It was wonderful to wake the next morning and sip one's tea, looking out on seemingly endless forests and great lakes. I hadn't realised the size of Canada; I can only gasp at everything I see. We got to Winnipeg on Friday morning and stopped for two hours. Mr. Lamont took us for a drive, and, instead of the cow-town I had ignorantly expected, I found a city with wide streets full of great shops, many handsome buildings, a fine park, and a zoo.

"Since then we have been attached to a train which goes once a fortnight (I think) to Churchill, and we have been ambling along for two days and two nights, and ought soon to arrive—Please forgive the squiggly writing. The train is going again, and the writing jumps because the train jumps, reminding one of the train in *Through the Looking Glass* that leapt ditches! But what amazes me is, not that these trains are less smooth than our Flying Scotsman and such like, but that, with such enormous distances to cover, railway travelling is so comfortable.

"When we halt to get water, or ice for the air-conditioning, all the passengers get out and walk about and talk to each other. There are all kinds—botanists, biologists, school-teachers, trappers, hunters, mounties—who are taking the trip from Churchill to the Arctic on the *Nascopeie*. That little ship is making its last trip before the winter closes down, carrying stores for places like the Hudson's Bay Posts.

"I never tire looking out of my window at woods, water, clearings,

and meadowland. Now and again we pass a village, a few houses, a small store, a tiny graveyard. For a time we passed though great flat fields of crops. They have had shocking luck with their crops lately. I do hope this year may help to make up.

“Now we are in what the Indians call the land of little sticks,” stunted little trees and miles of bent, most curious country.

“You will be astonished to hear that Gideon Veitch is also a guest of the Lamonts on this trip.

“I told you of his duty-call at the Frontenac, and of our excursion the next day to Lever’s to see the lumber-mill, and that, I supposed, was the end of Mr. Gideon Veitch so far as we were concerned, but to my great surprise he turned up on the platform at Quebec to join our party.

“I really don’t know what right I had to be surprised. After all, Mr. Lamont invited me because he felt it a pity that I shouldn’t see what I could of Canada, and probably, for the same reason he asked Gideon Veitch. Anyway, it is no business of mine. Actually, it makes things ridiculously easy for me, for James has developed such an affection for the new-comer that he never wants to leave him, so I have as much time as I please to read and work and write letters. Of course I protest, but Gideon declares that the company of a small boy is a treat to him, and I believe he is speaking the truth.”

Isobel laid down her pen as James squeezed himself through the sliding-door.

“We’re almost there,” he announced, “and Mrs. Lamont says that after tea we’ll all go down to the quay and see the *Nascopie* come in.” He gave a caper of anticipation. “I’ve been out on the conservatory car with Mr. Lamont and Gideon. Why don’t our trains have conservatory cars?”

“Observatory cars? I suppose because we haven’t enough to observe. Why, we’re stopping. Is this the station? There’s no platform!”

“They don’t bother to have platforms everywhere in Canada,” James explained, “it’s too big. This is pretty near the end of the world, you know; Gideon says so. There’s a shed anyway, rather like the one at Glenbucho station. I can see wooden houses—and the sea!”

It was after dinner before the *Nascopie* came in, but James was allowed to stay up, and ploughed with the others through the sand to the quay. It was twilight, and bitterly cold. The quay was crowded with people, train passengers, officials from the Elevator, Mounties, Eskimos, with their ruddy, cheerful faces, Indians, all watching

the lights of the little ship coming nearer. Gideon had James on his shoulder and was pointing out to him that the *Nascopie* was an ice-breaker.

“Is that why its nose is so blunt?” James asked, and Gideon laughed and agreed. The next morning, in the stationary train, Isobel finished her letter to Kitty Baillie.

“Now we are in the Frozen North, a place of wonderful clear light that gives the flowers (I don’t know what they are) growing over the sandy turf an extraordinary brilliance. The sea is dark green, and on the horizon is what looks like a belt of cloud, but which, I am told, is ice. This morning we sailed to Fort Prince of Wales, an eighteenth-century fort, once taken by the French, and returned to us after Waterloo. Nobody stays there now.

“Last night we watched the boat come in from the Arctic. I shall never forget it; the starlight, the breath-taking air, the faces of Indians and Eskimos, the growling of the huskie-dogs, above all the *newness* of it, seemed to transport one out of oneself. This afternoon we went over the *Nascopie*; the accommodation seemed very comfortable, if rather cramped. I spoke to a young man who had been a year in the Arctic, and said I supposed he was overjoyed to be back. In a way, he said, but he had enjoyed every minute of his year. It was interesting to hear that he had a great admiration and respect for the Eskimos. Where he was there was only one other white man, and for a year they lived together in perfect unity.

“Could you stay a year in a snowy waste, cut off entirely from letters, newspapers, and friends? One would need to be very good friends with oneself.

“Anyway, thank you, Kitty dear, for encouraging me to venture on this trip. I can’t bear to think how easily I might have missed it.

“Your

“ISOBEL.”

And when Kitty had read the letter, one rather chilly evening beside her book-room fire, she laid it down and pondered over its contents.

“I couldn’t have arranged it better myself,” she decided; “Mrs. Brodie safely out of the way, the interest of seeing new places together, uninterrupted companionship. It’s giving them every chance—if they don’t take it I wash my hands of them.”

CHAPTER XXVII

Go softly by that river-side, or when you would depart,
you'll find its every winding tied and knotted
round your heart. . . .

RUDYARD KIPLING

“DEAREST K,—

“There has been no chance of writing since we left Churchill. The train brought us to Edmonton where we stayed a night in an hotel, and shopped the next day at the Hudson’s Bay Stores, where you can buy every sort of thing, from gorgeous furs to six-penny thrillers. Mr. Lamont said we must have a glimpse of the Rockies, and I bless him for it. We were in Jasper from Friday to Sunday evening, staying at a most wonderful hotel.

“Imagine a great park of velvet-green turf set among mountain scenery which beggars description. Through the park are dotted log huts, of all sizes. There the guests sleep, and they feed in the central cabin, a great big place, with a huge dining-room, and various other rooms for reading and writing, dancing and playing bridge. James and I were in a hut with the Lamonts, and Gideon alone in a small one. You can imagine what a thrill it was for James, for there were bears, real bears, in the surrounding woods, and deer and other wild things. He slept with his pistol ready loaded beside him, and assured Mrs. Lamont and me that we need have no fear!

“I’ve heard all my life of the Rockies, but I never imagined such beauty existed as we saw at Jasper Park. We drove to the Athabasca Glacier (such hairpin bends and such a long way to fall! Our driver told us one turn was called Poison Corner, because one drop was enough!), and the sight of these great icy peaks, and the colour of the lakes, sometimes rose-pink, sometimes turquoise-blue, then green, took speech from me. I could only look and look and hope that something of the beauty would remain in my memory. One beautiful peak, always snow-white, is called after Edith Cavell. How little she thought, the English nurse, that lonely morning when she buttoned herself tidily into her uniform and went away so quietly to be shot, that for all time people would gaze at the grandeur of the peak that bears her name, and remember that she said ‘Patriotism is not enough.’

“On the Saturday we drove a very long way, crossed a lake in a steam-launch, walked for three miles through a forest, and fished for several hours in Beaver Lake. James and I had a rod between us. I caught nothing, but the boatman got a trout on the hook, and manœuvred the rod into James’s hand. That catch has become a saga!

“G. V. is a good man with a rod, his early training in Tweed, I expect.

“What delighted us most was the sight of a moose. We had longed to see one, but hardly dared to hope, when, suddenly, out of the forest that came right down to the edge of the lake, stepped a moose. James nearly fell out of the boat in his excitement, and the creature most obligingly stayed and posed like a film-star, I liked the boatman’s remark, ‘The moose is a homely animal!’ ‘Homely’ is such a much nicer word than ‘plain,’ don’t you think?

“And the bears! There are big black bears in the forest, but round Jasper they are quite tame—so long as you don’t tease them—and seem to enjoy clowning before the visitors. There is a wood behind the kitchen premises where rubbish is thrown, and it is quite a show to watch the bears rummage. G. V. said they looked like stout old ladies in shabby fur coats. One got a marmalade jar on the end of her nose, and pirouetted clumsily round in a very funny way. The baby bears were delicious, climbing up trees and looking down on us. Poor James nearly wept when he was dragged away.

“Now we are on the train again, on our way to the Peace River District, where Mr. Lamont has business. This district, I gather, is the last big wheat-growing district before cultivation more or less ceases. I think we are going to visit one or two of the centres and make some excursions. Whatever we do will be pleasant, I know. The sun never stops shining, and everything is so new and interesting.

“Kitty (I say this solemnly), I simply can’t understand how I could have been contented to remain in London for years with nothing at all to keep me there, not even a house of my own! I began to live when I got to Glenbucho, and now I’m becoming absolutely daring. Actually I *flew* to see a gold mine. Can you believe it of me?”

“*Two days later.*—I have just heard that we are leaving the train at Austin’s Creek, and going to stay at a place called Great Prairie, with people called Johnstone.

“So many of us! It seems a dreadful invasion. Don’t you always feel like Mr. Salteena when you go to pay a visit, a sort of ‘I-hope-I-shall-enjoy-myself’ doubtful attitude?”

“*Later still.*—I needn’t have been doubtful. Mrs. Johnstone welcomed us with enthusiasm, and I found that she and her husband both come from the Borders, Hawick way.

“Mrs. Johnstone is a big woman with a broad, happy face, the very person to pioneer, with three boys and two girls, all at present home for holidays. She tells me that in these bad years they have lost a lot of money, but money or the want of it doesn’t seem to make much difference in a place like this. Nobody competes with anyone else in the way of entertaining (Mrs. Duff-Whalley would find her occupation gone in Peace River), and nobody needs to be smarter than they can afford. The house stands on a ridge, looking over an immense wide plain that gives you a marvellous feeling of space and freedom. Away in the far distance are the peaks that lie beyond Jasper.

“I do like these Canadian wooden houses, with one big living-room, a wide verandah, which in summer is a withdrawing room, and the bedrooms upstairs.

“Mrs. Lamont and I are sleeping in the house, Mr. Lamont, G. V., and James are sharing an annexe. James was so anxious to be with ‘the men’ that I hadn’t the heart to refuse him, and G. V. can be trusted to look after him.

“The youngest Johnstone boy is nine, and is called Dan. The soul of James has become knit to his, and he gazes at Dan as David must have gazed at Jonathan. Happily, Dan is a good-natured boy who, concealing the fact that he thinks James an awful ‘sissy’ for his age, initiates him into farm matters, and is teaching him to ride.

“To James, knowing few children of his own age, and accustomed to dull weeks with a dyspeptic Nanny, this must seem a glimpse into a golden age. Not that it astonishes him—at seven one is surprised at nothing—but he has lost that slightly lost and wistful look and is the busiest thing that ever was, out from morning till night.

“As a housekeeper (albeit a very inexperienced one) I am interested in the food provided for us; most excellent it is. The Canadians are much cleverer with vegetables than we are, they wouldn’t stand our

monotonous round, and their salads are as varied as they are delicious. As you know, tea is *my* meal—anyone who likes can have my lunch and dinner—and though the Canadians don't make a meal of tea as we do in Scotland (very disappointingly they hardly eat anything at all), they provide lovely things. Mrs. Johnstone being a Borderer knows all about a good tea, and gives us sponges so light that they could almost float, and shortbread that couldn't be bettered in Edinburgh, not to speak of girdle-scones and blackberry jelly. . . .”

Isobel's room looked to the garden, and as she paused, pen in hand, the scent of it came up to her. She shut her writing-case. Letters could be written at any time, but flowers must be enjoyed in the sunshine.

A few minutes later, Gideon, coming in from the stables, stopped, and thought an artist might have painted her standing in her blue frock among the larkspurs, with the sunlight glinting on her hair.

What he said was, “Well, this is a fine wide day.”

Isobel turned round at the sound of his voice, and said:

“That describes it exactly. It's grand. I do like a wide view.”

“And yet,” said Gideon, lighting a cigarette, “you are content to settle down in a glen, with nothing to look at but hillsides.”

“Oh *no*. Hills give one the same feeling that distance does, of something beyond. Besides, it's only on one side we have the narrow glen. Glenbucho strath is wide.”

“You're very loyal to your home, anyway.”

“How could I help it! I loved it from the first moment I saw it, and if it hadn't been for Kitty Baillie, I wouldn't have left it to take this trip.” Isobel looked into the blue distance, and went on. “But how thankful I am Kitty pushed me away. If I had missed this and Jasper and Churchill! You see, in my life I've seen so little.”

“Same here,” said Gideon. “It's only now I'm beginning to see the world. My father began to fail soon after I left Oxford: I was ten years with him after my mother died.”

“Well, you couldn't call that time lost,” said Isobel.

Gideon glanced at her as he said, “I didn't feel I could leave him, and he was quite happy as long as he was in his little world composed of Bruce and me and one or two familiar friends, and could walk in his own fields and look at his own hills. But it was an idle life for a young man; there wasn't enough to keep me employed.”

“But you were keeping your father happy, didn't that make up?”

“Oh, I don't regret it. If we are to spend years fighting, I'll count myself lucky to

have had those ten peaceful years of home.”

“Fighting? You’re as bad as Mr. Lamont. *Nobody* wants war!”

“China’s fighting, Spain’s fighting, Abyssinia has been brutally conquered, Germany is arming at top speed. No sane persons wants war but—hullo! here’s James. An important errand, to judge by his face. What is it, old man?”

“Please,” said James, panting after his run, “Dan says will you lend us your watch. We can’t get on without one, it’s *very* important. We’ll return it *sure* at lunch-time.”

“Yes, but in what condition?” Gideon asked. “I tell you what, I’ll come along *with* my watch. Will that do?” and, smiling back at Isobel, he walked away.

“He always walks away,” thought Isobel. “That was the nearest to a talk I’ve had with him. Perhaps he doesn’t like me because I’m in Glenbucho. But he wanted to be rid of it, and he’s not a dog-in-the-mangerish person. It must be something about me, my face or my manners or something. Well, it can’t be helped, and it doesn’t matter anyway.”

She sighed though the sun was shining, and every prospect pleased.

“*Monday.*

“Letters take a long time to get written here, but to-morrow we leave, so finish it I must.

“We seem to have seen a lot of country in the last few days, and met all sorts of people. One day, on the banks of the Peace River, we saw the place Sir Alexander Mackenzie stayed the winter before setting off on his explorations. There is a stone commemorating his stay. The words on another memorial stone interested me:

““ *A friend of all, he never locked his cabin door.*”

“Some of the little townships are exactly like old-fashioned films of the west, one dusty street of wooden houses, with some horses in buggies tied up before the store. Mrs. Johnstone tells me that some of the people are *very* poor. They have nothing behind them, and if their crop fails, they are more or less finished. Some of the children hardly know the taste of sugar. Doesn’t that sound unbelievable? The families are so terribly isolated, their farms many miles from a doctor or nurse or a school. It must be rather terrible, and I was interested to hear of a sort of correspondence Sunday School run by an Englishwoman, in which are 6,000 children. This same lady has interested so many friends in Britain that she gets great supplies of knitting wool and warm clothes, as well as

books and games, that are distributed from the different little towns.

“Yesterday we had a very full day. We left early and drove sixty miles, then crossed the Mighty Peace (in a sort of raft that can carry several cars at a time) and went on again I don’t know how many miles, till we stopped at a village consisting of a few houses, an inn, and a store. James told me, very importantly, that now there was nothing between us and the North Pole! Our civilisation stops at this point.

“We lunched with a friend of the Lamonts, a Miss Hester Clarke, who has settled in the district and built herself a house. It seems she came out to visit a brother who had bought some land there. He died, but she stayed on, having found that she could be of great use. As I’ve already told you, where the distances are so great it is pretty well impossible to get a doctor or nurse, or go to a hospital, and the people have to depend largely on each other. A capable woman with leisure, and some training in the care of the sick, is a boon to a district, and Miss Clarke seems to give her help unstintingly. And she brings girls out from England to help her, and they are as keen about the country and the work as she is herself.

“I was greatly interested to see Miss Clarke’s house, which is built of logs, and stands on a plateau with a marvellous view. Everything in it is for use, not ornament, but the effect is beauty. A few yards from the house is a chapel. It is also made of logs, a rough little place, but possessing in a wonderful way the spirit of worship.

“Miss Clarke herself is both gentle and capable (the two qualities don’t always go together!), with a soft voice and a humorous mouth. She is a woman who could have a thoroughly good time at home in England. Indeed, loving music and pictures and books and plays as she does, one would think that she is missing a lot. But she says no. A month or two at home and she begins to feel cribbed and cabined, and longs to get back to her friends and her life here. And the girls say the same. Jolly creatures they looked in their loose shirts and riding-breeches! They came out, as a rule, for two years, but often want to stay on.

“I must say it did me good to meet Miss Clarke, and to hear from Mrs. Lamont of other English women who live out here from choice and find their pleasure helping when and where they can in this vast marvellous country. I’m not surprised either. There is something very charming about the women I have met in these districts. You would think, seeing how frightfully busy they must be in their homes, that they would be harassed

and over-driven; instead of that they give one the impression of having all the time in the world to be courteous and welcoming to strangers.

“I am so grateful to have seen these parts, and am much down in spirits at the thought of leaving our kind hosts of Great Prairie. I have been begging Mrs. Johnstone to pay me a long visit at Glenbucho, but she only laughs and asks how people with five children to educate could afford a trip home. I don’t really believe she wants to leave Great Prairie. Why should she, after all? Where the treasure is, there the heart is also.

“Well, I must stop writing and begin to pack.

“Ever your loving

“ISOBEL.”

“I must pack,” Isobel told herself, but she sat on at the writing-table, looking out across the garden to the far distance, until the supper-bell roused her to action.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Feather-beds are soft,
Pentit homes are bonnie;
But a kiss o' my dear love
Is better far than ony.

ROBERT BURNS

ISOBEL spent most of her time on the way from Edmonton to Ottawa wondering why she had not been deliriously happy on the journey out. Then she had had it all before her, these chill clear days at Churchill, the beauty of Jasper Park, the fine wide days of the Peace River country. She had had the comfortable company of Jim Lamont and his wife—and Gideon had been there.

Not that Gideon had showed any particular desire for her company, rather the reverse, but Isobel was not one who expected people to fall down before her. He had been there, that was enough. She could watch him as he played with James, talked and argued with Mr. Lamont, and paid court to Mrs. Lamont, to whose gentle charm he had fallen a victim. It was odd, Isobel thought, how ill at ease both she and Gideon were when they talked together; something seemed to be keeping them from being friends. Looking back, she realised that from the moment Mrs. Bruce had said, "This is Mr. Gideon's room," and she had walked into the little turret chamber, she had felt that there was a link between the owner of the Place and herself. But he was obviously unaware of any link, so there was nothing to do about it.

Very shortly her trip would be over, and she would be back in Glenbucho. With her days full of work, and no chance of seeing Gideon, it would be quite different. She would forget. One forgot everything pleasant or painful in time. But she hoped she would never have to meet Gideon's wife.

The engine pounded on through forests, by lakes and pastureland; meal followed meal, night followed day. Isobel carried on long conversations with Alan Brodie. He was pleased that they had had such a good time, and listened delightedly to James's descriptions of life with the Johnstones.

He told Isobel, "I never saw such a change in a child. Ormiston and Althea started it, and this trip has done a lot for him."

James was watching the flying landscape.

"See that red flower, Daddy? That's called fire-weed, because it comes up where there has been a fire. There's a lot of fires in Canada."

"It's almost the same as the plant we call 'willow-herb' at home," said Isobel.

“And these fences, Daddy,” James went on, “they’re called snake-fences, and they don’t need any nails in them. P’r’aps the settlers hadn’t any nails, and the Indians taught them how to do without. When’ll we get to Ottawa? Will Mummy be there?”

“She’ll be there to-morrow morning. Yes, I expect Mummy’s at the hotel in Ottawa now.”

Isobel was suddenly aware of a tired look on Alan’s face, and said, “I believe you’ve had a very tiring time while we were enjoying ourselves.”

“Oh no, it was all quite satisfactory, but the heat was great. I always enjoy a trip to Canada, but you’ve seen places I’ve never had a chance to see.”

“Yes,” said Isobel, “we’ve been lucky.”

Isobel to Kitty Baillie.

“. . . Now we are in Ottawa. Haven’t the Canadian cities lovely names—Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, Quebec? We have rooms at the Château Laurier, a large luxurious hotel in the middle of the city.

“It was very sad to say good-bye to the Lamonts. I never met nicer people. I am for ever in their debt. I do hope you will meet them some day: you would like them, I know.

“Gideon Veitch left Edmonton the day before we did, and went happily back to his lumber-mill. It was luck for him to fall into such an exceedingly suitable job, and he loves the life. It is by no means all work. We caught a glimpse of two very pretty girls, neighbours, who help him to play.

“James and I felt rather down about parting from our new friends, but now we have Ottawa to explore.

“We didn’t see Mrs. Brodie till lunch-time, and then she didn’t seem in a very good temper. She said Murray Bay was quite delightful, very gay, and she had met all sorts of charming people, but I gather her new friends, with whom she lived, did not improve on closer acquaintance. Mrs. Lauriston turned out to be ‘spiteful,’ and Mrs. Brodie feels sorry for ‘that poor husband of hers.’

“Mr. Brodie seems to know a good many people in Ottawa, and invitations have come in for all sorts of things, in spite of the fact that it is holiday-time, and many people are away.”

“Two days later:

“It is a beautiful city, Ottawa, with the river sweeping round it, and the Rideau Canal intersecting it, and the impressive Parliament Buildings and Peace Tower standing over it. The suburbs are so pretty, because there is none of the-Englishman’s-house-is-his-castle idea. The houses are built among trees, with no walls or fences or even hedges to shut them in, so that they look as if they were standing in a park.

“It is all so much brighter and prettier than any city in the old country, I suppose because of the clear air and sunshine.

“James tells me he has definitely made up his mind to settle in the Peace River district and be a farmer along with Dan Johnstone the moment his education is finished. He wants to know if education is really necessary when you intend to spend your days riding round a ranch on a horse. I wish the child was old enough for school. I don’t like to think of him going back to a life with much-occupied parents.

“The night we arrived here we went out to dine with some friends of Mr. Brodie’s. I didn’t want to go, feeling that I’d be in the way, but was told that I was asked specially. I would certainly have been sorry to miss the opportunity of meeting one of the nicest women I have ever met. Mrs. Compton is her name, a little, fragile creature, all spirit. When she found I was interested, and wanted to see as much as I could, she suggested that we should take a picnic lunch with us, and go out into the Gatinau woods, and she would tell me about the flowers and birds. So we spent all yesterday away up the Gatinau River, Mrs. Compton and her boy Arnold, James and myself. The flowers here have such odd, delightful names, like:

“Pipsesewa, blue capash, Dutchman’s breeches.

“We saw a hundred things that interested and amused us, the only thing I could have done without was the mosquitoes; they did bite. Mrs. Compton assured me that they are nothing just now compared to what they are in June.

“James could hardly bear to hear of all the fun the children have here in winter. I heard him telling Arnold that at home he had no fun at all.

“I have taken to waking very early these bright mornings, and am employing my time reading the books lent me.

“You will be glad to hear that I am now much more intelligent about the history of Canada, being half-way through Francis Parkman. Isn’t this great?

“In those ancient wilds, to whose ever-verdant antiquity the Pyramids are young and Nineveh a mushroom of yesterday; where the wanderer of the Odyssey, could he have urged his pilgrimage so far, would have surveyed the same grand and stern monotony, the same dark sweep of melancholy woods, here, while New England was a solitude, and the settlers of Virginia scarcely dared venture inland beyond the sound of a cannon-shot, Champlain was planting on shores and islands the emblem of his faith.’

“I want to get up and cheer when I read that!

“With Parkman I sandwich Col. John Nairne’s Letters of 1790. They are delightful. I do feel with him when he says:

“But pray allow me to sink into poetry to help to fill up this paper,’ ‘Sink’ is good.

“And his advice to his son, ‘All our family have ever been temperate, not practising even the Debauchery of smoking tobacco, a nasty Dutch custom, a forerunner of idleness and drunkenness; therefore, Jack, my lad, let us hear no more of your handling your pipe, but handle well your fuzee, your sword, your pen, and your Books.’

“Mrs. Brodie has recovered her spirits, and is having a very gay time, getting all her pretty frocks worn.

“The women in Ottawa dress well, and the young girls are quite charming, with a high standard of looks, and so gay and unspoiled.

“Was it Mr. Choate (do you remember?) who said we heard so much of the Pilgrim Fathers, and all the trials and privations they endured, but nothing of the Pilgrim Mothers, who not only endured the same trials and privations, but had also to endure the Pilgrim Fathers! I don’t think the present Canadian or American women would endure much from anybody. They are upstanding, fine, independent women, who work hard and play hard, and enjoy life to the full.

“I have made friends with a woman also staying in this hotel, an elderly woman, who tells me very interesting things about her life. She helped her husband to work up from rock-bottom, and you can see by her face how rich she is in experience and wisdom. She has a sense of humour too. She was telling me of the arrival of a young minister and his bride to the little country place where she lived, describing how all the women in the congregation arrived with gifts, stocking the larder with eggs and fowls and pies and cakes, and laying down home-made rugs, and so

on. One depressed-looking woman brought a large patch-work quilt, which she spread out before the bride, remarking with a sigh:

“I thought it would be nice for your bed. The patches are all from garments belonging to members of the congregation now in the churchyard.’

“Rather a gruesome present for a bride!

“I don’t think you can complain of the length of this letter, and I haven’t had to ‘sink’ into poetry either.

“It will be about my last letter; we have barely another week.

“Sitting in the living-room at the Place, I thought the day I left Canada would be the happiest in my life, but I find that my feelings are going to be very mixed. Canada is so much more wonderful, so much more lovable than I expected, that I can hardly bear to think how much I am leaving unseen, and I don’t suppose I shall ever be back. I couldn’t afford it, for one thing.

“What is *very* good about returning is the thought of seeing you.

“Your loving, I.”

CHAPTER XXIX

All, World of ours, are you so grey,
And weary, World, of spinning,
That you repeat the tales to-day
You told at the beginning?

AUSTIN DOBSON

It had been arranged that they would go straight from Ottawa to Quebec, getting the boat-train at Montreal, and Isobel had felt a twinge of regret that they would see no more of Quebec. James, too, was regretful.

“Daddy, I did want to see Pitney again, to tell him I rode on a tall horse at Peace River, and I did want another ride in a calash if there was time. Why can’t we go to Quebec?”

“Your mother wants to stay here for a party on Friday. It’s something rather special, isn’t it, Miss Logan?”

“I believe so, a dinner and a dance out in the country somewhere: a good-bye party. Aren’t you going?”

“Not unless I have to,” said Alan. “Frances hasn’t said that I’ll be wanted. Have you enjoyed Ottawa, Miss Logan?”

“I have indeed. Your friends have been so kind including me in their invitations. I am going home feeling how far short we Britons come in hospitality after seeing how the Canadians keep open house for strangers. They must think our efforts so niggardly, and so they are. The fact is, most of us are too selfish to put ourselves out to be hospitable; we think a dinner, or a luncheon, meets the case, and trouble no further.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” said Alan.

The next day Frances Brodie announced that after all she was not going to wait for the party, she was sick of Ottawa, and wanted to go to Quebec and wait for the boat there.

Her husband looked at her when she said this, but made no comment, and Isobel thought he must often have seen it happen before. Someone had upset Frances, and she was paying that someone out.

“Well, that’s all to the good,” Alan said; “for Jim Lamont writes that he and his wife are at the Frontenac now, and hope to see us before we sail.”

“Really?” Frances looked supremely bored. “I don’t know that I’ve any particular desire to see the Lamonts again: a very pedestrian couple, to my mind. Besides, it’s Isobel they really want to see.”

She turned to the girl, "If you play your cards well, my dear, they might adopt you. No family of their own and no end of money. There's a possibility for you!"

Isobel smiled vaguely, but made no reply, while Alan said hastily that he would see about rooms.

James wanted to know if he might take a jar of cream and some chocolate and visit a young bear, that at the moment was chained up at a petrol-station outside Ottawa. Someone had brought it in from the woods, and both James and Isobel were very anxious about its future.

"We must try to see it," Isobel promised, "and find out what they mean to do with it. It's miserable for it in the heat and the dust. And, James, we must say good-bye to the Comptons, and oh! there's a lot we must do, besides pack up again. . . ."

On the evening of the same day, Gideon Veitch was dining with George Lever. Dinner was over, and Young George was playing Patience, while Gideon sat at an open window, smoking a pipe, looking out on the evening landscape.

Suddenly George Lever said, "What's wrong with you, Gideon? You haven't been yourself since you came back from that trip with the Lamonts: mooning about as dumb as a post."

Gideon removed his pipe, and said, without turning round, "I'm sorry. I hadn't realised I was such bad company. There's nothing wrong with me at all. I'm perfectly well and in excellent spirits."

"That so? . . . I saw the Lamonts in Quebec to-day. They're at the Frontenac to see the Brodie party before they sail on Saturday. They're mighty fond of that Miss Logan. I liked her too, what I saw of her. I had the feeling that the better one knew her the more one would think of her; you can't say that of everyone."

Gideon was silent, and Young George went on:

"I'd kinda like to see you married, Gideon."

"You aren't married yourself," Gideon reminded him.

"That's a fact—and I very seldom regret it. It just happened so. 'Some of 'em expected it, and that disgusted me: and some of 'em didn't, and that disgusted me, too.' It was quite a wise man who said that. I've a liking for you, Gideon, and I'm looking forward to having you here as I get older, and if you had a wife to keep us both in order, and some children to play around, why, things would be pretty nearly perfect."

"That would depend largely on the wife."

"We'd be all right with Miss Logan."

Gideon got up quickly. "Do get that idea out of your head, sir. Miss Logan isn't

for me. As a matter of fact she's engaged to someone at home."

"Eh! Who told you that?"

"Mrs. Brodie told me, the day they were all down here. She asked me not to speak of it, as it wasn't to be announced till they got home."

"She told you that, did she? What was her game, I wonder? Perhaps she saw you look at the girl, and resented any glance away from herself."

"D'you mean to say she was lying to me?"

"I think she was. But you can easily find out. You go to Quebec and ask Miss Logan herself. She will be straight with you, I'm sure of that."

Gideon was silent for a minute, then said, "But whether she's engaged or not makes no difference. She would never look at me."

"I'm not so sure of that, Gideon. She'd time to get to know you on that trip."

"And was only friendly in a very cool way. I had the feeling that all the time her thoughts were at home. She wrote a lot too. . . . If I burst in on her and demanded to know if she weren't engaged to anyone else, if she'd marry me, she would, she would——"

"You're a fool, Gideon. Did any woman ever think less of a man because he had the good sense to fall in love with her?"

"I don't know. I've no experience."

"I can see that. A monk in a monastery couldn't have less. But I've a notion that Miss Logan won't object to that. What I liked most about the girl was that honesty looked out of her eyes. She had the air of belonging to a placider, kinder age than this, not cocksure and as hard as a gimlet, as so many girls are. I'd hate to see you marry one of these uppity, nippity brats; they're pretty, I grant you, and *terribly* neat, and they suit the boys they fly about with, but. . . . D'you suppose I haven't noticed the change in you since you came back? Hardly a word to throw at a dog, restless, uninterested——"

"I say! Was I really! Why did you put up with me?"

"I was young once myself. But I can't stand by and see you ruin your whole life—and not only your own, perhaps—and do nothing about it. If the lady turns you down, well, there's an end of it, there's no more to be said, but for goodness' sake, man, give her a chance to refuse you!"

George Lever's tone was so irate that Gideon began to laugh helplessly, and after a minute Young George joined in.

"That's better!" he said, "You're getting back your sense of humour. Cry on the dogs, and we'll go out for a stroll and talk about lumber."

It gave Isobel a sort of melancholy pleasure to be back again in Quebec, and able to look once again at the magnificent panorama of the St. Lawrence. She was very busy buying presents to take home, for there were many to remember.

Was there anything Mrs. Bruce would like? A brightly coloured rug, perhaps, not too easily soiled, for 'the room'? Soft, furry moccasins for Althea and her mother; a gay rug and some carved figures for Mrs. Cooper, and some Indian things for Archibald.

"Are you glad to be going home?" Mrs. Brodie asked her, after she had cast a glance over the result of the shopping.

"Oh—yes, but not so glad as I expected to be."

"Well, I'm thankful anyway to be going back, though I'm bound to confess it hasn't been as bad as I expected. But to be back again in London! . . . I do hope we shall find some amusing people on board. By the way, what about that man, Gideon Veitch? Isn't he coming to see us off?"

Isobel bent over her parcels as she said, carelessly, "I should think it very improbable. I don't suppose he even knows when we are sailing. I'm glad, though, to be able to take back news of him to Tweedside."

But that evening, as they sat with the Lamonts after a late tea, Gideon Veitch walked in. He was carrying a parcel and looking grimly determined.

The Lamonts welcomed him warmly, James ran to him, Mrs. Brodie smiled into his eyes, while Isobel, after one startled glance, shook hands with him calmly, and went on talking to Alan Brodie.

Gideon had worked himself into such a state that the calm friendliness with which he was received astonished him. He would not have been surprised had they run at him with cries. Finding himself beside Mrs. Brodie, he proceeded to make vague replies to her numerous searching questions about the trip.

Mrs. Lamont interrupted them to ask Gideon if he had had tea.

He replied, "Yes, thanks, I mean no, but I don't want any. I had rather a lot of lunch."

"And you stayed with people in the Peace River District," said Frances Brodie, resuming her cross-examination. "Did you go moonlight picnics and dance a lot?"

"I don't think so."

"You seem rather uncertain what you did."

"Well, we didn't really do much, now that I think of it—walked about, and rode a lot, oh! and went excursions, and played with the children."

"Quite idyllic! Isobel would be in her element. She's quite the old-fashioned woman where children are concerned, that's why we brought her out to look after

James. I think she has enjoyed the trip, but her delight at going home is obvious—and that's as it should be, of course."

She shot a sharp glance at her companion, and, when he made no answer, went on:

"I suppose you've quite made up your mind to settle out here? Of course, you're frightfully fortunate to be taken in with George Lever. And Canada's full of pretty girls, you will have no difficulty in finding a charming wife."

"What's that?" said Mr. Lamont. "Are you match-making, Mrs. Brodie? That's a risky business. By the way, I wonder if you would give us your advice about something? Bessie and I wanted to give Isobel a little present, and we'd like you to tell us which of the things we've selected would be most suitable. Where are they, Bess?"

"In our sitting-room. D'you mind coming up now, Mrs. Brodie?"

Isobel saw Frances Brodie being led away captive by Mrs. Lamont, Mr. Lamont removed Alan Brodie, James ran after them to remind his father about a promise made that he would get Grey Owl's books for the voyage, and she was alone with Gideon. Fixing her eyes on the parcel which he held on his knee, she asked if he had been shopping.

"Yes," said Gideon, grasping the parcel tightly. "I wonder if you'd take this home to Mrs. Bruce? It's a fur, I think they called it a stole. I know she doesn't go out much, but she could wear it on Sundays."

"Of course she could," Isobel agreed, "and the fact that it came from you will make it very precious. It was nice of you to think of it."

Gideon had the grace to blush, for it was Young George, that arch plotter, who had suggested it as a reason for the call, and he said hastily:

"I hear you're frightfully pleased to be going home."

"Am I? Who said that?"

"Mrs. Brodie. No wonder, of course."

"Why, no wonder?"

"Well, aren't you going back to the man you're going to marry?"

Isobel sat up very straight, and stared at her companion. "It's the first I've heard of it. Do you often invent such stories?"

"But—isn't it true? Oh, I know I've no right to question you like this, but it means so much to me."

"No, it isn't true."

"Well?"—Gideon gave a relieved sigh—"that's something anyway, though I don't suppose it makes things any better for me. The fact is—I mean to say—Isobel,

could you ever think of marrying me?”

“But—I thought you didn’t like me, you seemed almost to avoid me on the trip.”

“Wasn’t that because I was told you were engaged? I tried to keep out of your way, for the more I saw of you the more I cared for you, and . . . But you can’t mean that you care for me? *Isobel!*”

“Of course I do,” said Isobel, with what she knew to be indecent bluntness. “I’ve cared for you ever since——”

Gideon broke in, “Ever since that day at Lever’s when we watched the logs? That was when I knew you were the one woman in the world for me!”

“Long before that,” said Isobel. “I began to care for you first when I looked at your face in the school-group in your little turret-room at the Place.”

There was a long pause, then Gideon said, “But darling, what about the Place? Won’t you hate to leave it?”

“The Place,” said Isobel, “will always be my home of dreams. It has fulfilled its mission. It has given me you, Gideon, my love.”

“Say that again,” said Gideon. “I’ve never been anyone’s love before.”

“Neither have I, for that matter. We’re beginning late, two staid, matter-of-fact Scots of thirty-odd. Do you realise, I’ve only just remembered, that we part tomorrow?”

“But you can’t go *now*. Let’s be married at once, we’ve nobody to consult or consider.”

“No, I insist on everything being done decorously. I must go back and set my house in order; I couldn’t bear to leave everything in a tangle.”

“And how long will that take you?” Gideon asked jealously.

Isobel’s heart gave a leap. She was wanted. She was necessary to someone as she never had been before, and that someone was Gideon Veitch.

She looked at him in sudden doubt.

“Gideon, are you sure? You’ve known me such a short time, only that time in the train——”

“More than a fortnight! D’you think I needed all that time? Why, I guessed it when I walked in here, hot and bothered at having to pay a duty-call, and saw you, and I knew for certain when we looked over Lever’s together. Then Mrs. Brodie said you were engaged, but they weren’t speaking about it till you got home, and that toppled over my dreams.”

“But you must have taken her up wrong. Mrs. Brodie couldn’t have said that, she doesn’t know——” Isobel stopped as there came back to her Frances Brodie’s remark about the pretty girls at Lever’s, and she thought, “Didn’t she want me to be

happy?" Then, with the tolerance of one who has much to another who has little, she added, "Poor soul."

Oblivious of time and place Gideon and Isobel sat, sometimes talking, more often merely looking at each other, in supreme content, until the entrance of the rest of the party brought them down to a workaday world.

James came first, waving as he ran a brown paper parcel and shouting, "I've got them, Isobel. Now we'll read all about the beavers, won't we?"

"Careful, darling, your feet are wound up in the string. Yes, we'll read them on the boat. Won't that be fine?"

James was followed by the Lamonts and the Brodies and Gideon rose to his feet. Isobel, glancing at him, saw to her surprise that he did not look sheepish (as she certainly felt), but eager and proud.

"I say," he began, but got no farther, for Jim Lamont, grasping the reason of his elation, said, "Hullo, young man! Have you and Isobel settled it?" Whereupon his wife proceeded to embrace Isobel.

Alan Brodie, genuinely puzzled, turned to his wife, who said, very sweetly, smiling as she spoke:

"We're getting such a dull old couple, Alan, we didn't realise what was happening. No wonder Isobel is enthusiastic about Canada, having found romance here. You're quite sure it's the right one *this* time, Isobel?"

Isobel said nothing. Gideon did not hear, and Frances Brodie did not repeat her remark.

"But have you actually to part to-morrow?" murmured kind Mrs. Lamont. "Stay on with us, my dear."

Isobel shook her head. "No, I must go home to arrange about things, but—I shall come back."

"If I know George Lever, he'll send Gideon over to fetch you," said Jim Lamont.

"But, what about *me*?" said Frances Brodie. "How am I to meet the Glenbucho people when it is my fault that Isobel is lost to them and the district? You've no idea how popular she is already."

"I've a very good idea," Mrs. Lamont said, "but you can't expect us to deplore it. Scotland's loss is Canada's gain."

CHAPTER XXX

We may have to choose between barren ease and rich unrest, or rather, one does not choose. Life somehow chooses.—WINIFRED HOLTBY

SIX days later the *Empress of Britain* reached Southampton, and Isobel, after taking a reluctant leave of James, and a quite cheerful one of his mother, arrived at Kitty's flat.

As the lift creaked upwards she thought of the Isobel Logan who had mounted in it only six months ago, an Isobel Logan who had never seen Glenbucho, who did not know, poor, ignorant creature, that Gideon Veitch existed!

Kitty was on the doorstep to meet her, arms outstretched; there were flowers on the hall table, firelight came through the open dining-room door; it was a real welcome home.

Later, as they sat over rather a late dinner, Isobel, looking round, said, "How delightful everything looks, as fresh as when you came in."

"It would be a disgrace if it weren't. Two women can't make much of a mess. Do have some more of something."

"No, thank you, but *how* good home food tastes after even the very best board-ship food."

"Well," said Kitty, "the Auchinvole and I put our best foot foremost to-night. We wanted to impress you. She really has improved, don't you think, with the lessons she has had? Let's have coffee in the book-room, and sit on the sofa and talk and talk. There's so much I want to know, that I couldn't get from letters."

When Mrs. Auchinvole had departed with the coffee-cups, "Now then," said Kitty, "what first?"

Isobel held out her left hand. "This first," she said.

Kitty stared at the signet-ring on the third finger.

"Whose is that?" she asked.

"Gideon Veitch's."

"Oh, you *cheat*! You hardly mentioned him in your letters; pretended he was nothing to you."

"I didn't mention him because he was so much to me, and I feared I was less than nothing to him."

"And did you think that right up to the end?"

Isobel nodded. "Till the night before we sailed—less than a week ago."

Kitty snorted angrily. "Gideon must be a fool. What was he thinking about?"

“It wasn’t Gideon’s fault. Mrs. Brodie was the wicked witch in the fairy-tale. She led Gideon to believe that I was only waiting to go to announce my engagement to someone, and made me think that Gideon was in love with a pretty Canadian.”

“So! What was the idea?”

Isobel shook her head. “Can’t think, and it doesn’t matter since she didn’t succeed in making mischief. Several people took a hand in the game. You didn’t tell me, Kitty, that you’d written to Gideon saying I’d be at the Frontenac? That was the beginning. Then it turned out that those very nice Lamonts who went out with us in the *Empress* and afterwards came to the hotel, knew Gideon’s chief, Mr. Lever, and they invited Gideon to go with our party on the train.”

“I gathered you weren’t entirely happy on that trip. I sensed it—to use an expression I dislike—in your letters.”

“Did you, K.?”

“Yes, I did. And later, when I got the letters from Ottawa, you quoted me chunks from books. You wouldn’t have done that if you hadn’t had something to hide.”

“You’re too clever for me. And I thought I was writing such enjoying letters. And I *did* enjoy the train trip tremendously; no-one could have helped enjoying it, if only Gideon hadn’t so obviously avoided me. I thought he had taken a dislike to me, or that his thoughts were so full of the Canadian girl that he had none to spare for anyone else.”

“And all the time he was thinking of you as the bride of another! Did Mrs. Brodie make any effort to explain away her statement?”

“No, and I didn’t want to make a fuss. After all, it doesn’t matter.”

“But it might have mattered—terribly. If Gideon hadn’t made an attempt to see you before you started!”

“Oh, I know. I don’t like to think of it. Kitty, Gideon is such a darling. He still looks exactly like his schoolboy photographs, his hair stands on end at the slightest provocation, and he has the widest, kindest smile.”

“And you are willing—glad—to go off to Canada and leave your beloved Place because of a shock of red hair and a grin?”

“Yes, I am. I shall always love the Place and it will always belong to a Veitch, I hope. I’m not clever enough to explain, but I *feel* that what the Place means to me will be in any house Gideon and I share. ‘The house that is our own.’ You do know what I’m trying to say?”

“I think I do. When is Gideon coming for you?”

“In November, if he can be spared, and I think George Lever will see to that.

Mr. Lamont told me privately that he saw no reason why we shouldn't go back to Glenbucho every winter for a month or two, which would be splendid. Anyway, my Coopers will take care of it, I know. We don't want to wait a minute longer than we can help, Kitty. Life is so uncertain."

"It always was."

"Yes, but more uncertain now than it ever was. Gideon thinks that war is practically certain sooner or later. It's a time to snatch at happiness, and that's what we are doing. Two months! It's a long time to wait."

"Why, Isobel, these few weeks have changed you out of knowledge. I hardly know you in this guise."

"Because I've been lifted out of myself. I've had very dear friends—you, Kitty, first and foremost—but I didn't know what it meant to care so much that life became both a rapture and a torment, rapture because we belong to each other, and torment in case anything tears us apart. So many things *can* happen; I lie and think about them at night."

"Bless me! Where is the placid, steady Isobel? She wouldn't have lain awake about anything. Where's your philosophy, woman?"

Isobel laughed. "Oh, I know. I wouldn't talk like this to anyone else. I'll try to trample on my fears, because, in spite of them, I'm blissfully happy."

It was breakfast time at Ormiston. Mrs. Whitson and Althea were looking at their letters.

Suddenly Althea pounced on one, crying, "One from Isobel. A London postmark. She's home."

She tore open the envelope, and after skimming the sheets, threw them down, remarking, "If that's not the limit."

Her mother looked up, surprised at the tone, and asked if there was anything wrong.

"Wrong! I should think there is. Those interfering Brodies! Why did they want to take Isobel to Canada? See what's happened."

"What *has* happened?"

"She's got engaged, Isobel has. Of all the silly things to do, when she was having such a good time at the Place. We'd planned so many lovely things to do. It's ghastly."

"But, darling, do tell me who is she engaged to."

"Gideon Veitch, of all people."

"Oh, but how *nice!*" said Helen Whitson, with real pleasure in her tone.

Althea glared at her mother.

"Nice," she echoed. "She will have to live in Canada and we'll never see her."

"But we mustn't be selfish, Althea. If Isobel is to be happy——"

"I'm not selfish. It's Isobel I'm thinking of. She couldn't be happier than she was at the Place. She loved it, and I think it's very fickle of her to switch off like this to a new love."

"Perhaps it is the same love. Isobel has simply extended her love of the Place to the man who was born and bred there. I think it's perfect, and when you've stopped feeling aggrieved on your own account, you won't be able to help being happy for your friend. May I see the letter?"

Rather grudgingly Althea handed it over, remarking, "There's one thing, she hasn't gone all silly like some people do, and you see she can't help regretting the Place, and the fine time we were going to have."

"And she invites you to visit her. You will enjoy that."

"Not much, with a husband in the offing."

"Your old friend, Gideon. Not even a stranger!"

But Althea refused to be comforted. "I wouldn't have thought Gideon would have behaved like this," she muttered, and snatching up her puppy, now growing lanky, cried, "Come on, Stanley Baldwin, we'll see if a race'll make us feel better," and the next minute, Mrs. Whitson saw them tear across the lawn.

Mrs. Bruce also had a letter. It came in the morning when she was occupied, and she waited till the twelve o'clock dinner was over before handing it to her husband, remarking, "You read it; you've on your specs."

Mr. Bruce laid down *The Scotsman*, and tidily slit the envelope with his penknife.

"She's a grand plain writer," he said, "maist as plain as print."

While he was slowly perusing the letter he suddenly chuckled, remarking, "I kent it. She's nabbit him."

His wife stopped folding away the table-cloth, and stared at her husband.

"What ails ye, man? What's in the letter?"

"Just this, that Miss Logan's gaun to marry oor Mr. Gideon. What d'ye think o' that?"

"Naething," said Mrs. Bruce, putting the table-cloth into a drawer. "You needna' think you've surprised me. When yon Mistress Baillie cam here asking for his address, I kent what would happen. Is he coming back to the Place?"

Mr. Bruce read on.

“He’s coming back to be mairrit, but they’re to live oot there. Weel, weel, I’m gled. She’s a nice kinna wumman, and sensible, and ye never ken what sort of a besom a man’ll pick up wanderin’ about the world. For one guid, there’s twenty bad.”

His wife sniffed.

“Little you ken about the world, Davy, ma man. But he might hev made a waur choice. She had the sense to like the Place from the first moment she saw it, and they’ll likely come back here to settle ere it’s long. Eh, Agnes Home’ll mak an awfu’ speak about this: she’ll greet wi’ pleasure, I wouldna wonder!”

Agnes Home opened her letter as she sat at breakfast in her little room behind the shop, and after reading it, she sat in a muse.

It was a clear September morning, the sun bright on the Glenbucho Water. She could hear the voices of the children as they passed to school on this, the first day after the holidays. The news in the letter not only made her “greet wi’ pleasure” for her friend, but sent her thoughts back to her own youth, and the young man who had gone out into the world to make a fortune, and had not come back. Jake had had red hair and blue eyes, and many a time she had watched Gideon Veitch as he rode or walked past, because he reminded her of the boy who had gone. Jake and she had made a good-looking couple as they danced together in reels and country dances. “Hooch again, Aggie,” Jake had cried, laughing and flushed in the fun of the revels, and now Jake was forgotten, and she was a heavy, broad-faced woman whose dancing days were long since done.

For a minute angry rebellion rose in her heart at the awards of Fate. What had she had in life? A father to look after, a shop to keep, hard, unceasing work summer and winter. It wasn’t much: it wasn’t *enough*!

But the rebellion passed, and she was ashamed of having harboured, even for a moment, such thoughts.

“Was anyone better off?” she asked herself. True, she was alone, and she often missed her gentle, contented old father, who had been so happy with his bees, his flowers and his fishing, but she had hardly a care in the world. A business that brought in enough to live on, that was something to be thankful for in these days, and the shop brought her into contact with so many, filled her life with interest; she could pet the children, listen sympathetically to the confidences of the young people, sigh over the worries of the middle-aged, and comfort the old.

To live in Glenbucho was boon enough for anyone, and outside was the great striving, struggling world of which she read daily with such absorbed interest.

And if wonderful things did not happen to her, they happened sometimes to her friends, and that was almost as good. Miss Logan and Mr. Gideon! How truly glad she was!

So she dried her eyes, and stood all day in her shop, Agnes Home, Merchant, dealing out her wares, and giving each customer something that they did not pay for and were only dimly aware of—a beam of loving-kindness from an honest heart.

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings have occurred, the spelling used in the majority has been employed.

Some inconsistencies in punctuation have been maintained. However, all written correspondence has been presented as indented letters to distinguish them from the oral text.

A cover was created for this eBook.

[The end of *The House That Is Our Own* by O. Douglas (Anna Buchan)]