

SALT WIND IN OUR HAIR

Recollections
of Childhood



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by

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• DOREEN. • WINIFRED. • ME. •
• (DORRIE) • (WENDY) • (KATRINA). •

FOR MY
GRANDCHILDREN.

INTRODUCTION

While rummaging through an old trunk recently I came upon a faded photograph of "Balrowan", the house in north east Scotland which my father built and in which my sisters and I spent our childhood. My rummaging stopped right there as memories came flooding back, one leading to another, of daft days, noise and laughter and the endless succession of happenings that centred around 'Balrowan'.

it was a black and white photograph, of course, which did not show the pinkish-red local granite of which the house was built or the blue gray slates of the roof, the creamy casements on the wide windows or the crimson of the flowering currant bush by the gate. Nor did it include the surrounding fields and country road which led to the town or the grand panorama to the north, of the river mouth, the golden beach and the everchanging sea; but it was all there in my mind's eye and I sat on the floor, grinning like an idiot and re-living all those happy-go-lucky golden days.

I thought of my grandchildren, leading such a different life in an entirely different setting, in which modern technology provided such a diversity of ready, made, entertainment, in contrast to our need to rely on improvisation and make-believe. What youngster, I wondered ever gave a thought to its grandparents in their childhood? My grandchildren, if they ever considered this at all, probably had a picture of me primly embroidering samplers or disporting myself in a genteel game of croquet. How far from the truth'.

I must write it all down, I thought, as I remember it - simply, just as I have been reliving it now, so as to leave some record of the rich amalgam of our family life which made "Balrowan" what it always was, a happy house.

CHAPTER 1

ANYONE FOR KIPPERS?

On this particular afternoon Dorrie and I were standing on tiptoe on top of the dog's kennel and looking over the back wall to get a glimpse of our young sister, then about five, as she pushed the old pram down the cinder path which led to the neighbouring housing estate. She was making heavy work of the pushing and stopping every now and then to fuss over the pram's occupant. This was no baby, not even a doll, but Carlos, our idiotic springer spaniel who was so much a children's pet that I don't think he realised that he belonged to another species. Now, decked out in a baby's bonnet and shawl he lay back among the pillows and accepted his role without protest.

Having followed our young Sister's progress with some amusement we, her seniors by about five and seven years, now turned our attention to the field of plump swede turnips that lay beyond the garden wall.

They'll be pulling them up soon', said Dorrie, "I think we better have a final feed while they're still there. Besides, I'm ravenous". Even after a midday dinner with two helpings of everything, borne was always starving.

"Well, the coast's clear", I said encouragingly. Dorrie was over the wall in one bound, landing lightly, like the dancer she was. on the hard earth. Furtively she scouted around and uprooted the biggest specimen she could find.

"Look out.", she called as it came hurtling over the wall, Then, scuttling round the corner she returned through the front gate and soon we were sitting under the washing on the back green and munching contentedly at our booty, which had been scrupulously divided. Our performance was in fact nothing but a pretence. Mr Carrie who owned the field had told my mother to "take as many neeps" as she wanted but as stolen fruit is supposed to taste sweeter we found that a bit of pantomime added relish to this hard and tasteless vegetable, more suited to the soup pot. We were making heavy work of finishing our snack when we heard the click of the side gate.

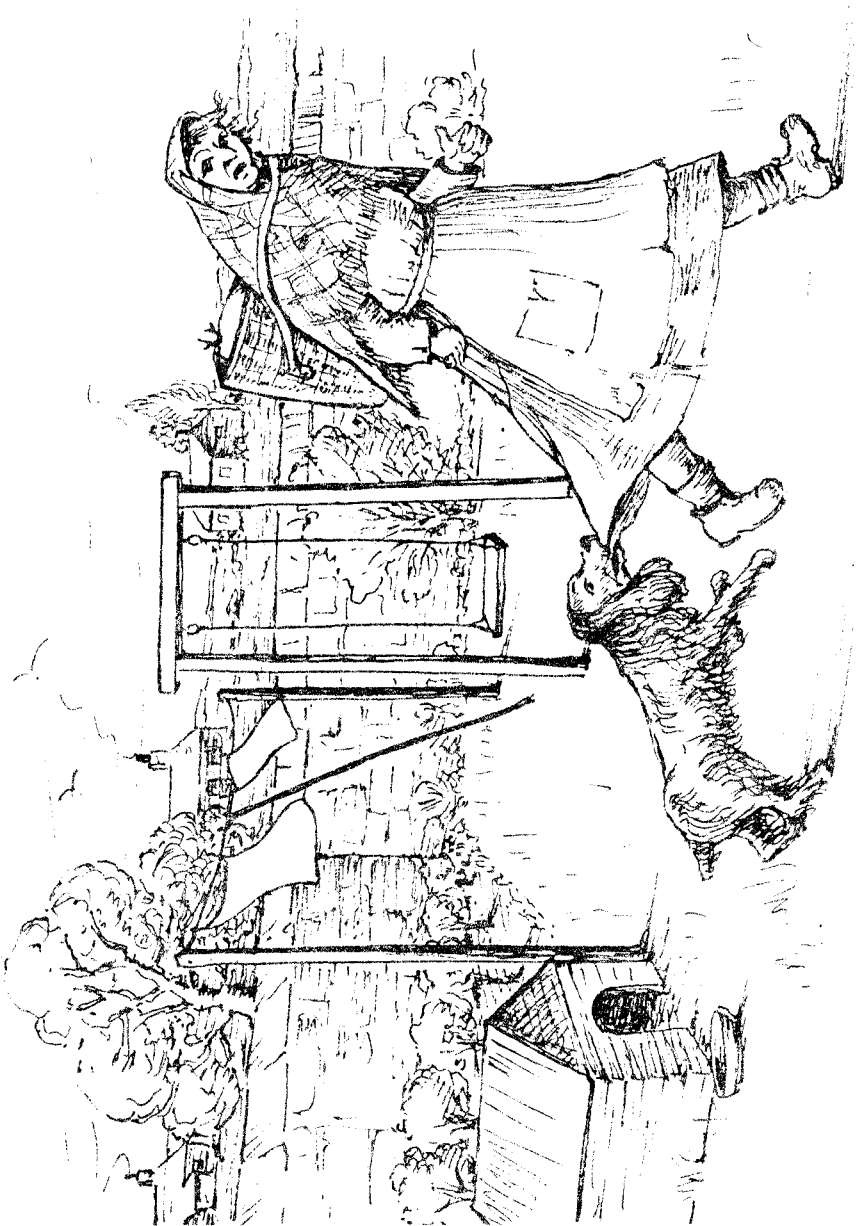
"Oh. glory!", I whispered. "It's Kirsty. Tell mum, quickly'." , But it was too late. Kirsty the fishwife, creel on back was already heading for the back door, and now, here came Wendy, back from her walk and manipulating the pram through the side gate. Carlos usually the most docile of animals, simply went wild at the sight of Kirsty, and now he leapt from the pram still wearing the ridiculous bonnet and snapped and snarled and tugged at her many petticoats.

'Get that bliddy baist off me", she yelled, kicking out with her heavy boots.

"Carlos, down " we shouted and grabbed him by the collar, while he continued to growl. Meanwhile Kirsty, never one to observe the formalities, had let herself through the door and made straight. for the kitchen, carrying her load.

Here I should explain that fish was always a plentiful commodity in our home. Our town was a busy herring fishing centre and my father and grandfather had a fishcuring business which exported salt herrings to the continent. In addition to herrings my father frequently arrived home with a variety of choice fish off the boats. The fishwives still called however and my mother liked to support them because they worked so hard and tramped long distances carrying their heavy creels. We particularly looked forward to visits from a Mrs Strachen, a quietly spoken, spotlessly clean woman whose fish was always fresh.

Our present caller, however, was a different kettle of fish, if I may be forgiven the expression. At one time Kirsty must have been a handsome lass. There were still traces of the fine features in the dirt-ingrained lines of her weather beaten face; but now she was always filthy and to make matters worse she had become definitely queer - or "glaiket", in the local vernacular. Once in the house there was no getting rid of her and now, here she was, easing her smelly creel off her shoulders and calling out in a loud voice for my mother.



"Whaur are ye, Mistress Scott?", she yelled as she plunked her massive body with its layers of clothing onto the nearest chair, and proceeded to mutter to herself, We had followed her into the kitchen, having first tied Carlos to the kennel. There was a certain bizarre fascination about Kirsty for us, and we didn't want to miss anything.

From her knitting seat by the parlour window my mother had seen Kirsty arriving, and, now, knitting in hand and resigned to a session, she came into the kitchen, outwardly composed.

"Well, Kirsty, I see you've let yourself in", she said.

"Aye, yon booger o' a baist was about tae tear me apairt - me, a puir harmless body. Tore ma skirts and a' ", and she lifted her tattered tartan skirt to show holes that had been there for years. This gesture also revealed layers of dirty flannel petticoats and holey woollen socks that stopped slightly above the top of a pair of men's boots, spattered with mud and half laced. She looked utterly out of place in our clean kitchen with its great gleaming range, chequered linoleum, scrubbed table top and varnished oatmeal barrel in the, corner.

Dorrie and I had perched ourselves on the table where we sat silently, dangling our legs. Wendy had edged herself as close to Kirsty as she dared, her cheeky little face agog, while Kirsty proceeded to expound on her sair back and her "rotten bad legs". She presented her "varicose" for inspection, sniffing and hawking continually and wiping her nose with the back of her hand. Long wisps of grey hair hung over her eyes.

My mother was anxious to hasten the inevitable transaction in order to speed Kirsty on her way. "Well, Kirsty, what have you with you in your creel today?" she asked.

"Well, noo!" Kirsty removed the piece of old oilcloth that, covered her fish, and the smell became more potent. "Whit about some bonny kipperies ta yer tay, then?", and she proffered a couple for inspection, turninlq them this way and that in the hands which had just wiped her nose.

"Yes, kippers will be just fine", said say mother, anxious to expedite

the deal.

"I'll just have half a dozen then, thank you".

"Ye will not. Ye'll need a puckle mair than that", said Kirsty. "Yer man will eat laf a dizen himsel', I'll warrant".

"Well, we'll make it a dozen then, that's all".

A dish was produced, the correct money handed over, and the kippers banished to the pantry.

"Now, Kirsty", said my mother, "we won't keep you. I'm sure you have a lot more calls to make".

"Ach, nae hurry!" said Kirsty, "I'll just sit a while and rest ma banes and hae a bit crack".

My mother sat down resignedly and picked up her knitting.

"The truth is, Mistress Scott, I've rot a real drouth on. -I'll have tae weet ma thrapple, I'm thinkin

"Well, the kettle's just on the boil, Kirsty, I'll make you a cup of tea", said my mother. "Ach, weel' I'm no for the tea, Mistress Scott, ma dear, but I would be takin' a dram, noo, since ye've askit me".

"All right, Kirsty. A dram for the road and then you must be off", my mother said firmly.

The dram, however, didn't have the desired effect - quite the reverse. Kirsty became more and more talkative as the spirit loosened her tongue. Her voice became more shrill and her words more incoherent. No response was necessary. We just sat there on the table, swinging our legs. My mother's knitting needles clicked on and the clock on the mantelpiece ticked on and on. Now Kirsty was singing, her head thrown back to show the gaps in her teeth.

"Tar the yawl again, the yawl again, the yawl again.
Tar the yawl again, the new tarr'd yawl.
Bonny Buchanhaven, Bonny Buchanhaven
Bonny Buchanhaven's new tarr'd yawl"

she sang, then having got into her stride she heaved herself onto her feet, sair back, 'varicose' and all, gave a great "Heuch!" lifted up her



petticoats and started to dance. Her hair fell loose, and we could hear the floorboards creak as her heavy boots clomped across the room in a sort of highland Schottische step.

"Di-da dah, di-da dah, di-da dah di dah", she sang, to the rattling of the cups on the dresser and the furious barking of Carlos outside. Wendy had shrunk off to stand behind my mother's chair.

In the middle of this uproar there came a sharp ring at the front door. Dorrie sprang off the table but my mother said, "You stay here and look after Kirsty, I'll go".

We heard her open the front door and say some words of greeting. Then she was talking in an unusually loud voice to someone in the hall.

"If you'll just wait in the parlour for a minute, I'll be right back. My visitor in the kitchen is just going".

Then she came hurrying back into the kitchen.

"I'll have to say goodbye to you now, Kirsty", she said. "I'm sorry but I've got a visitor. Girls, will you help Kirsty on with her creel and see her out. Don't worry, Kirsty, Carlos is safely tied up".

So Kirsty was finally ushered out, but not without protest. Then curious to know who our new visitor was we returned to the house.

There was my mother in the kitchen, opening the window as wide as it would go. 'Poof:', she said, "Let's have some fresh air;" Has your visitor gone, Mum?" we wanted to know.

"Oh, it was only the boy with the paper. You're not the only ones who can play games", she said with a grin. "Here, girls", she said as she fetched the dish of kippers. "Take these out in the garden and bury them - in the rhubarb patch'.

As we dug the fish deep into the mulch of the rhubarb bed Dorrie said, "We'll be getting kipper-flavoured rhubarb from now on".

"Well", I replied, "that's better than eating Kirsty-flavoured kippers'

Wendy meanwhile was struggling with the rope tied to Carlos's collar.

Always quick to try out a new "swear" when my mother was out of earshot, she was saying. "Keep still, Carlos, you bliddy booger of a dog"

oooOOooo

CHAPTER 2

THE BIG SPLURGE

It was worth while climbing the slippery sloping roof of "Balrowan" just for the view, though that was never the object of the exercise. Dorrie was always the pioneer and she set out to scale the roof simply, I suppose, because like Everest, it was there. Where Dorrie led i followed, petrified but game. By starting at the low wood-shed roof we could work our way onto the main roof of the house, and in our 'jimmynastics', whose rubber soles had a good grip on the slates, we could move in a slanting direction towards the ridge-capping. Then we eased ourselves onto the front gable, slid clown it carefully (that was the tricky bit) and dropped onto the tiny balcony outside the spare



bedroom window, Having climbed through that we dashed down the slates and sometimes started all over again.

Now, sitting astride the ridge caps, with the swallows swooping and darting around us, and the salt breeze blowing through our hair, the whole world seemed to stretch below us.

"There's a steamer right on the horizon", said Dorrie, "and look, that could be Mrs Summers over on the golf course. It looks like her red tammy"

I was gazing in the opposite direction, however, across the fields to the Baird's farm with its low stone steading and sprawling barns. "I say, there's Sandy the grieve putting Baird's bull in amongst the cows. What do they want that great surly brute in with them for?"

"Goodness only knows," said Dorrie, "I asked Sandy what use the ugly beast was, it didn't give milk or anything, and he said, 'Weal, lassie, he just keeps the cows happy', but he was having a grin to himself so I think. there's more to it than that. I'm going to ask Annie next time we go over there".

"Listen", I said, "that must be mum feeding the hens. hear them clucking away down there - and I can hear Wendy talking away to Rufus. She's the only one who likes him. I wonder if she knows we're having him for Sunday dinner"

"That depends on whether dad can bring himself to do the dastardly deed.

You know what he's like! Hey? - Sunday? - that's tomorrow".

"Of course it is, Idiot. We wouldn't be sitting up here if this wasn't Saturday".

"Saturday! Hurrah! Come on. we'd better get down. We have to get our Saturday tuppences. - Get a move one! - Here, I'll go first".

My mother and Wendy were returning to the kitchen just as we bounded in. My father was there also, reading the local 'squeak' and having a fly cup.

"Mum", said Dorrie, "please may we have our pocket money so that we can go down to Arty Watts for sweeties".

"I want to go too", said Wendy.

"Well, I'm sure the girls will take you", said my mother. "James, can you give the girls some money, please. Tuppence to each of them"

"Tuppence each", said my father, trying to look stern. "Mighty! that's a lot of money. Well, here you are then' - going through all his pockets. "That's your tuppence, Dorrie, and two to you, Katrina, and let's see - yes, here's two for Wendy - and don't go spending it all in one shop, mind" That was his standard joke as we were handed our precious pittance.

Dorrie still had something on her mind. "I say, dad, when are you going to do Rufus the rooster in? Are you going to chop his head off or wring his neck? Can we watch?"

"Really, Dorrie, I'm surprised at you, said my mother. "It will be all over by the time you get back. Off you go then. You can take Wendy in turns on your carriers. No, Trina, Carlos must stay behind. You know what he does to Mr. Watt's potatoes".

R.T. (Arty) Watts' small corner store in the main street stocked a bit of everything. Outside the shop door there was always a sack of potatoes on which all the local dogs liked to lift a leg. Carlos was no exception. We never bought Arty Watt's potatoes, but we girls were all agreed that he had the best variety of sweets in town, so we favoured him with our custom.

Setting off two abreast along the road with Wendy on the carrier behind Dorrie we discussed the important matter of our impending purchases.

"I can't make up my mind", said Dorrie, "whether to splurge the lot on a bar of chocolate nougat or to have a bit of this and that. Bulleyes last the longest. I'll decide after I've had a look in the window".

"I'm going to have licorice straps and jujube babies. Yummee." said Wendy. "Well, I think I'll have a sherbet sucker, and a ha'penny chewy and a pennyworth of chlorodine lozenges", I said, "only don't tell mum about the chewy, will you". For some reason, despite our almost unlimited liberty in most things, chewing gum was taboo. So we chattered as our wheels carried us merrily along. The road was quite

deserted, and we got a real start when a voice hailed us from out of the hedgerows.

"Hey; lassies. Ye're in an awful hurry!" and we caught a fleeting glance of Curly Willie, the local tramp, lying hack between two hawthorn bushes and having a good scratch.

"Keep going", whispered Dorrie. Curly Willie was harmless enough but usually drunk and we pedalled all the faster. "He must have been there all night", she added.

Soon the hedgerows gave way to stone dykes and a little farther on we came to the top of Belview Terrace, which we always called 'the brae'. This was a steeply sloping thoroughfare edged by fine granite houses with imposing railings. Many of our friends lived on 'the brae' and my grand- parents' house was about half-way down. They occupied the large upstairs flat along with Aunt Sarah, their unmarried daughter, while Aunt Jean and Uncle Frank lived on the ground floor. We let the momentum of the steep slope carry us quickly past their house, as my grandmother often knocked on the window to summn us as we passed. We were in a hurry to spend our money.

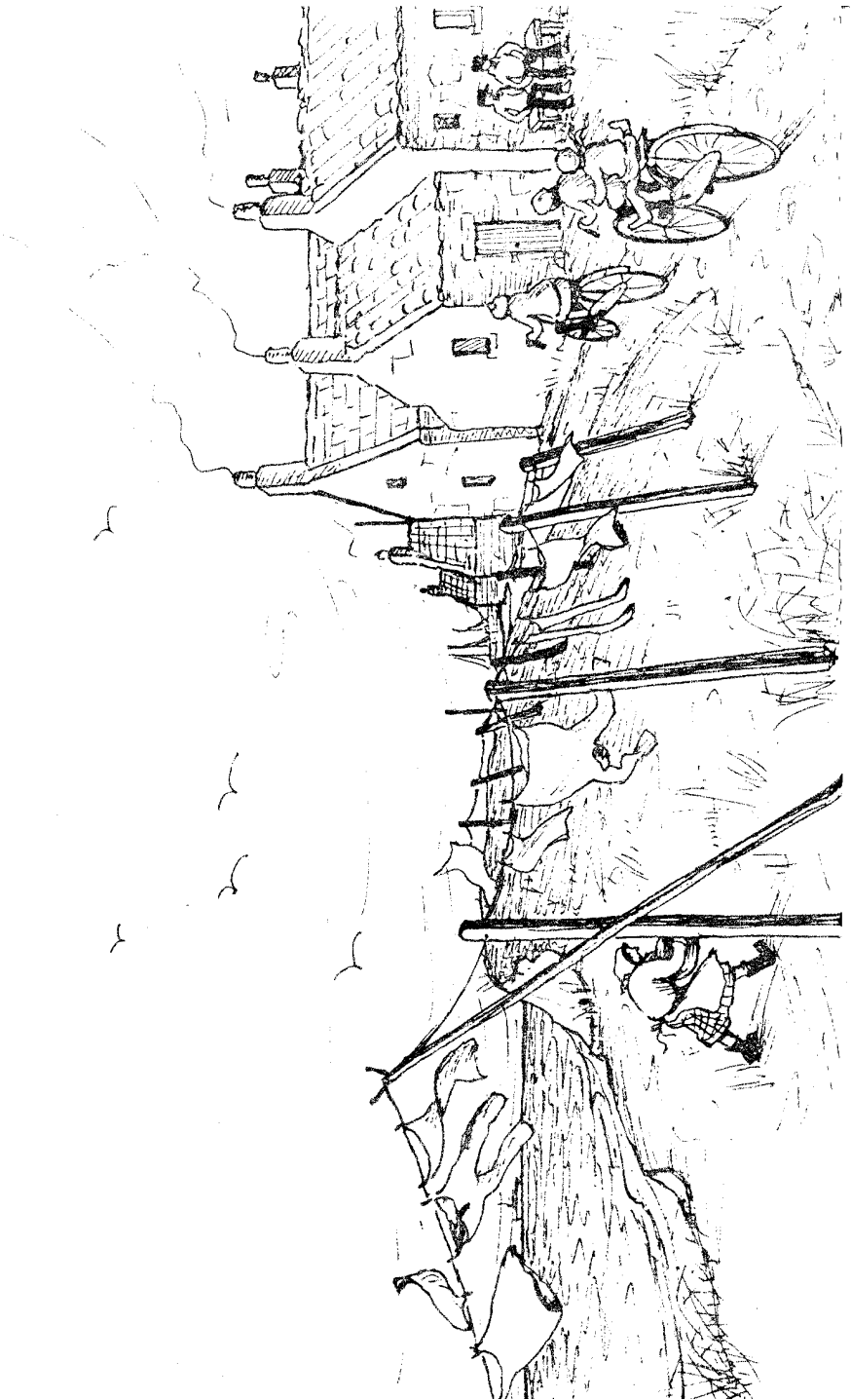
At the foot of 'the brae' the road levelled out. Pedalling along we passed the recreation ground and then the railway station. There was the station cab, the town's only public transport, waiting outside. By this time Wendy was getting restless.

"Wendy, stop wriggling", said Dorrie.

"I can't help it. My botty hurts".

"Oh! - Well, we're nearly there now", and soon we were propping our bikes up against the wall of Arty Watt's shop. We spent some time studying the sweet window, jingling our pennies and deliberating. Then purposefully we stepped inside to be greeted by a conglomeration of odours with cheese, smoked bacon and paraffin predominating. Arty Watt was fussing about, attending to his customers. There was Andra Mair, the sailmaker in for his weekly tobacco, which he didn't smoke, but chewed.

"Good strong plug that, Andra," said Arty, chopping off a length of rather foul looking dark brown twist and popping it in a bag.



up at random, and had no yards of their own. A communal clothes line ran along the high bank which fringed the coast, with heavy posts planted at intervals. A colourful and spotless array of washing was always on the lines and today the clothes were flapping almost horizontally in a strong breeze. Fortunately the prevailing wind was off the sea otherwise some of the garments might have ended up in Norway. Usually a group of fisher-boys would chase us and yell all sorts of abuse about 'the granders', as they called us, though no family could have had less claim to grandeur than ours. Today the boys were busy kicking a ball around and just hurled a few names at us.

We were now on the last stretch of our way home and Wendy was becoming a dead weight. Her plump little legs were drooping and knocking against the wheel, as we turned off the road into the tinder path that was a short cut to "Balrowan". We swept into the driveway and parked our bikes against the dining room window. I removed my chewy and stuck it in the corner of the window ledge for future use. Carlos came bounding out to meet us and we all went skipping round the back to tell my parents what we had seen. Even after a short time away it was exciting to come home. My mother was sure to enjoy the bit about Mrs. Wilson-Browne and the potatoes.

My father was busy working in the vegetable garden. "Hello, dad." we all greeted him. We thought he was looking slightly self-conscious.

"Have a chloridine lozenge", I said,

'Have a jujube baby", said Wendy.

"Have a bullseye", said Dorrie.

"Don't talk to me about bullseyes", said my father. "I could have done with one a little while ago, though".

"Dad, have you given Rufus the go-bye yet? we all wanted to know.

"Um:" said my father in an evasive way that made it obvious that something was up. "Well, let's just say we'll be having poultry for tomorrow's dinner. Your mother is in the shed plucking it now", and he resumed his digging with a sheepish grin on his face.

In the shed my mother was seated on a stool surrounded by speckled feathers as she plucked away at a fowl. Another one lay at her feet.

"That's not Rufus, we said.

"No, it's not Rufus", she replied, shaking her head as if in despair, but her eyes twinkled. "That father of yours." she said and started to laugh. Bit by bit the story came out. When it had come to the point of execution my father had shrunk from the usual methods. He just couldn't bring himself to wring Rufus's neck or even swing an axe. A good clean shot would be far more humane. So he got his rifle out and took aim. Rufus, however, turned out to be a moving target with the result that the bullet missed him and went right through two of our best laying hens.

Well, we simply hooted with laughter and my mother couldn't help joining in.

Sunday's dinner of roast fowl and stuffing with lots of home-grown vegies was consumed with special relish. My father came in for some good natured ragging, but by this time he was beginning to think that he had done something rather clever if not unique.

"I suppose you could almost say, he remarked, that I shot three fowls, for the bullet went right through an unlaidd egg in one of the hens".

Out in the fowl run Rufus, the cocky, overbearing and bad-tempered rooster crowed his loudest. "I'm afraid well have to put up with him till he dies of old age", said my mother with a sigh.

oooOOooo

CHAPTER 3

EDUCATION AND RECREATION

Breakfast at "Balrowan" always started with porridge made from the local oats, and was enjoyed by everyone but me. The milk was poured into individual bowls the night before and stood in the pantry to let the cream come to the top. At the table I would toy with my small helping, trickling golden syrup over it in a delaying action while Dorrie would scoff a substantial plateful followed by scrambled eggs or fish, and be dispatched off to the parlour to do her piano practice. As I gradually transformed my blob of porridge into an island surrounded by milk, with mountains and craters and rivulets of golden syrup, I would listen to Dorrie bashing away at the piano keys, to vocal accompaniment. She would start with a bit of nonsense that we all played on the black keys with two fingers and which had no place in our Tutor. It had words which went like this:-

"Oh, I can wash a sailor's shirt,
Oh, I can wash it clean.
Oh, I can wash a sailor's shirt
And bleach it on the green".

Given half a chance she would then move on to 'Chopsticks' but at this stage my mother usually intervened. Then followed the whole laborious gamut, of scales before she tackled her 'pieces'. My porridge by then being completely inedible, I would be required to join Dorrie at the piano for our duets and while she battled with the melody at the top end I would be stretching my fingers to provide the chords at the bass. Dorrie's hesitant melody and my monotonous 'oom-pa-pa, oomp-pa-pa' rarely synchronized and neither we nor the piano benefitted in any way from our practice sessions.

Our lack of musical ability must have been a big disappointment to my mother who sang and played well but my father was almost tone-deaf and our leanings were all in his direction. I believe music, lessons were the only things we approached with anything less than complete gusto. In school I gave the three Rs everything we'd got and dancing lessons got all that and a little bit extra.

The primary school which I attended was a square, institutional looking building with no embellishments. Not a tree or even a blade of grass adorned the grounds, which were divided into two playgrounds, one for the boys and one for the girls. Stone walls topped with tall spiked palings enclosed the whole area. A row of toilets ran along the back of the block with a high wall concealing them from the playgrounds. This was very necessary as the waterclosets, commonly called the "wateries", had no doors, and, in our modesty, we generally arranged to visit them in pairs so that one girl would stand in the doorway holding out her skirt while the other got down to business. The 'wateries' worked on a rather primitive plumbing scheme, so that a pull on one chain sent the water charging through the whole row. In the boy's section one daring youngster was inspired to flush a lighted newspaper through the system with sensational results and no doubt his own seat was burning by the time the headmaster had finished with him.

In the classroom everything was learnt by rote. The curriculum dealt strictly with facts, and ideas were not encouraged. We droned or chanted our tables, our spellings, our dates and our poetry, and as the same poems were taught year after year with exactly the same inflexions we could generally rattle them off in advance from hearing them recited by older sisters or friends. If one was sent on a message to another part of the school one could hear the pupils chanting away at their own particular levels in other classrooms. We were fed such a diversity of data during our primary school years that we became like little automations and in retrospect one could almost classify us as the precursors of the computer. There were no buttons on us to be pressed, but on request we could spout forth the answer to eleven times twelve, name the five great lakes of Canada, the kings and queens of Scotland and England in sequence and the cotton towns of Lancashire, rattle off the ten commandments, and the tables of weights and measures or recite "Abou Ben Adhem".

Classroom discipline, of necessity, was strict, as each class had up to sixty pupils, fairly evenly divided between boys and girls. For minor offences written lines were imposed such as "I must not put blotting paper in my inkwell" or "I must not eat in class", but for insubordination, unpunctuality or slovenly work, the offender received an appropriate number of "cuts" of the strap. Being a goody-goody in

school I was never given the "cuts", but I think my father must have had his share in his day for among his trophies in the studio cupboard were three straps which he had "nicked" from school.

Straps varied in style, some having three thongs, others up to six, but all were made of thick, coarse leather and could deliver a stinging lash. The summoning of a pupil out the front to get the cuts provided a welcome diversion in the classroom and at the risk of a reprimand we would stop our work and sit, pens poised and eyes raised. Some victims would come out licking their hands (a lurk reputed to make the lashes less painful), others would burst into tears in anticipation. A few would walk out defiantly, hand outstretched, then withdraw it as the strap descended, in which case they would receive six more of the best. The teachers were all women, elderly we thought, but probably they were not even middle aged. One particular teacher would swing the strap with such force that strands of her hair would come adrift and hang down her back, and we'd watch fascinated as one leg of her flannelette bloomers would slip farther below her skirt with each stroke.

Some such punishments brought repercussions the following day in the form of an irate parent (usually the mother) who would burst into the classroom unannounced and berate the teacher for raising blisters on her Jimmy, Johnnie or Jessie, as the case might be. When teacher and parent had left the room to continue their battle in private" paper pellets and bits of india rubber would fly across the room amid general uproar.

At recess the grim gray playground did little to inspire our choice of games, which seemed to follow a seasonal pattern. Skipping ropes would begin to appear everywhere in the playground and soon we were all skipping. With a girl at either end of a rope 'cawing', we'd tuck our skirts in our navy bloomers and go through such routines as "Follow the Leader", "All in Together this Fine Weather", and 'Boaties'. In this we'd jump back and fore over a low swinging rope, with the height being gradually increased. 'Londoners' was a game only for the skilled in which one had to keep skipping between two ropes being 'cawed' in opposite directions. Then suddenly skipping was out and 'stotting' was in. We would all turn up with rubber balls and bounce them to certain chants, putting a leg over the ball at

regular times. There were several variations, all very dull and I was always thankful when the 'stotting' season was over.

Singing games went on throughout the year and seemed to combine the maximum of song with the minimum of game. Usually two lines of girls, holding hands, would converge and retreat, singing, of course, and in some games there was an exchange of members and some sort of climax. The most ridiculous of the lot was meant to be a tragic tale but was sung to an inappropriately lively tune. The first side approached the other singing:

1st side:	"I've come to see Georgina, Geor-Geor-Gina, I've come to see Georgina, and how is she today?
2nd side:	She's upstairs washing, washing, washing
replies	She's upstairs washing and you cant see her today.
1st side:	approaches again repeating the same request.
2nd side:	She's upstairs ironing and you can't see her today.
1st side:	repeats request to see Georgina,
2nd side:	She's upstairs i-ll, i-ll, i-ll She's upstairs i-ll, and you can't see her today.
1st side:	I've come to see Georgina, - etc., etc., and how is she today.
2nd side:	She's upstairs d-ead, d-ead, d-ead She's upstairs d-ead, and you can't. see her today".

And that was it. No-one ever saw Georgina, or really gave a hoot about this poor girl who seemed to spend her life upstairs, toiling away, languishing, and finally dying, and it is to be hoped that she was eventually brought downstairs and given a decent burial.

In the boys playground marbles seemed to take precedence over all other games, though the boys did kick balls around, engage in fights and call rude names at the girls through the railings.

When school was over for the day we all poured through the gates in noisy disarray as we gave vent to our pent-up spirits. Dorrie had gone up to the Academy when I was in my second last year at primary and she would wait at the Academy gate for me to come along. If we were walking, and wanted to let off steam we would ring the doorbell of the station-master's cottage as we passed and then make a dash for the nearest corner. Once we bumped right into the station-master as he was returning from the station, and ran all the faster. "Balrowan" was

CHAPTER 4

SO MUCH FOR EXPERIMENTS

I was literally tickled pink with my new combinations. We had been taken into town to be fitted out with warm underclothing and footwear for the coming winter, and in the drapers I was instantly attracted to a shelf of woolly combinations in a vivid pink. These seemed to me far more, exciting than the fine cream cashmere ones we normally wore, and I made my wishes clear in no uncertain fashion. In the end, rather than have a scene in the store, my mother gave in to my demands, My eye for colour being satisfied, I looked forward to getting into these new undergarments with impatience, even though they would blush unseen under several outer layers of clothing. Alas! My moments of glory were brief, The pink. 'combies' were made of a coarse, inferior wool and I found all too soon that they induced a frightful itch which nearly drove me mad. After my performance in the drapers I was too ashamed to admit that my skin was rapidly becoming as pink as the combinations. I think my mother had her suspicions, and would gladly have disposed of the things, which took twice as long as the rest of our clothes to dry, and was always the last piece of washing hanging on the line.

"There go Trina's pink 'abominations':" Dorrie would chant, as they dangled limply from a couple of clothes pegs, like a deflated balloon, and I secretly willed them to shrink, or blow away. In fact, the matter was resolved very satisfactorily one day, when a bold tinker woman, a frequent and unwelcome caller, having had the door shut in her face, whisked them, off the line as she headed for the gate.

As winter approached it became more and more of an effort to leave a warm bed and face the routine of washing and dressing for school. As "Balrowan" was beyond the town boundary we were not connected up to the council gas or electricity supply. Hot water for the whole house was heated from the kitchen stove and stored in a large hot-water tank in a cupboard in the bathroom upstairs. We made good use of the hot surface of the tank to warm our underclothes on frosty mornings and our pyjamas at night. As soon as we had performed our ablutions we would snatch our piping hot garments from the cupboard and wriggle into them before the heat wore off. Then, our toilet

completed we'd be sliding down the bannisters, one after the other, ready to start the day.

However, we were obliged to fore-go the luxury of the hot-water tank as a clothes-warmer for a time when my father Idecided to try out one of his brilliant ideas. His fertile imagination was always devising some new outlet, and he had been contemplating the hot water tank for some time with a view to an experiment in incubation.

He reasoned that the constant heat would make it ideal for this purpose, my and mother was easily prevailed upon to co-operate even though she had far more faith in a broody hen than an airing cupboard as a propagator of chickens, and treated the experiment with some scepticism. She produced a shallow woven basket, a roll of cottonwool and a clutch of eggs. My father duly wrapped these up snugly in the cottonwool, placed the basket, carefully on top of the tank and impatiently awaited results. The cupboard was of course out of bounds for the duration but we were always eager supporters of my father's capers and readily cooperated eventhough it meant getting into cold pyjamas.

"What will happen when they hatch out?" Dorrie asked rne. "Will they have to live in the cupboard, with the tank as a sort of mother hen?"

"Don't know",I said. "Perhaps they'll run all over the bathroom floor.

"What if they get in the' bath?"

"Do you think duck eggs might have been better?"

And so we speculated as the days wore on, and my father kept paying sly visits to the bathroom and lifting an end of the cottonwool expectantly.

When the incubation period was up and there were no signs of life in the basket my father, ever an optimist,decided a few more days should be allowed in view of the exceptional conditions. We had agrownup cousin, Janet, staying with us at the time, and my

mother and she together rummaged through drawers until they found a little fluffy chicken off an easter egg. They made a pretty convincing job of inserting it into one of the eggs, leaving just the beak and a little bit of the head protruding. Then came the moment when, after one quick peep in the basket, my father was yelling down the stairs. "Hey! Kitty, come and look at this. Its worked".

When disillusionment came, my father admitted that this was not one of his better experiments, and the eggs went the way of Kirsty's kippers, into the vegetable garden.

Shortly after that my father decided to install a generator to supply electric light for the house. though lamplight had a mellow charm all of its own, the lamps required constant attention and there was always a risk of fire. It was decided that the henhouse would be the ideal spot to house the generator and as the hens had always presented more problems that. ptulit.us they were distributed among friends and neighbours without a sigh of regret.



Mercifully it was the end of the hen's pail era, and what my grandmother did with her scraps after that we neither knew nor cared, Wendy was given the fowl run as her special vegetable garden, already richly manured by its previous occupants, and the business of installing the generator was in progress, but not without its growing pains.

One problem. in addition to the initial fluctuation of the lights, was that the generator had a particularly noisy exhaust. My father tried to solve

this by making a hole in the back wall and putting the exhaust pipe through this, hoping that the noise would expend itself before it reached our nearest neighbours across the fields. But mechanical noise was unfamiliar in these quiet parts and soon a complaint was received, and another solution had to be found. Never lacking in ingenuity, my father then had the inspiration to run the exhaust pipe through the lid of the cesspool which was situated just outside the henhouse, and to let the sound go underground. This seemed to be the ideal solution. The noise was reduced to a mild subterranean purr, but a few days later there was terrific explosion and the lid and contents of the cesspool were scattered afar. I prefer not, to describe the results of this incident in detail.

Eventually the teething problems were overcome and our new lights were efficient and labour-saving, At the same time they were utterly impersonal. Looking back now I realise how much lamplight contributed to the homely atmosphere of "Balrowan". While I cannot recall a single detail of our electric fittings, I can remember each lamp as a friend and companion and can still see them vividly in my mind's eye. In the daytime they stood together on a wide shelf on the back porch, a dignified assembly, like icons on an altar and tended with equally loving care. There were no foolish virgins in our household, and the wicks were trimmed, the bowls filled, the glasses polished and the brasswork burnished till it gleamed. There were the small sturdy ones that we carried upstairs to bed, the ornate china one that stood on the landing, the larger one with a red glass bowl that belonged in the kitchen, and which shed its light on the breakfast table in the dark winter mornings.

Two tall stately ones served the parlour and the dining-room. They had tall glass funnels over which were placed circular globes of etched glass. One of these was constantly with us. It stood on the centre of the table as we did our homework or childish scribbles and we ate our evening meal by its friendly light. At times it stood on the mantelpiece while my mother sat by the open fire knitting and my father in his favourite chair opposite busied himself converting bits of silk, feathers and hooks into fishing flies. Best of all I like to picture it as it stood on the piano top while we all gathered round my mother at the key board for our frequent singsongs. In retrospect I realize that these embodied all that was rich and precious in family life.

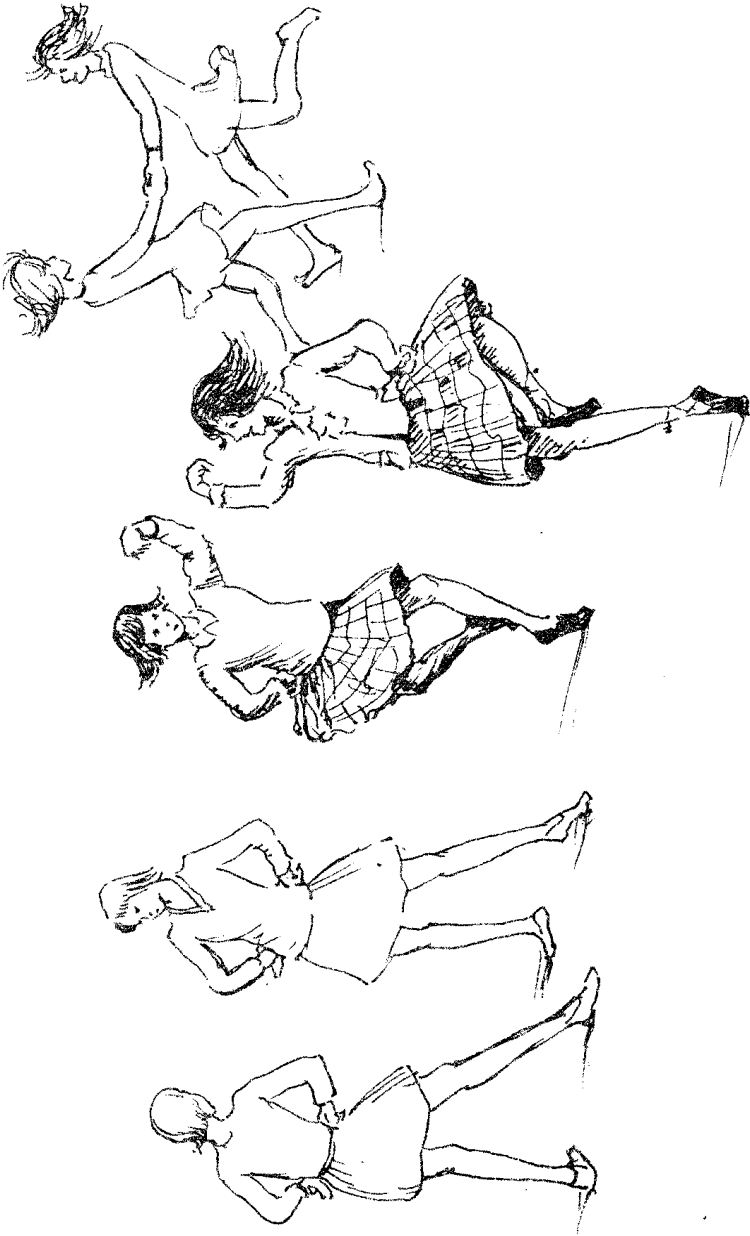
Carlos would seize his opportunity to monopolize the fireside and bask in the glow of the peat fire with its earthy fragrance. He would join us in the high notes with an unearthly howl and our voices would dissolve in laughter. My mother's rich contralto and fine touch on the keys helped to keep us on course and like a good skipper steer us safely into port. We would all request our favourites from among the traditional Scottish songs and the Students' Song Book, and the pages of the Church hymnary were well thumbed, particularly those of the children's hymns which we all sang lustily, though more for their simple melodies than their spiritual role. As with most of our activities, our singsongs would develop into a pantomime.

"Let's have some 'sorry' songs" one of us would suggest. This was a word misused by a foreign visitor in place of 'sad' and which had immediately become part of our vocabulary. We'd lay on the pathos as we wailed our way through "Danny Boy", "Jock O'Hazeldean" and "Banks of Allan Water" with appropriate gestures. Fair Maidens who wept by the tide and pined and died for false lovers received no compassion. Fairy tale characters had more reality to our callow minds than lovelorn damsels.

My mother knew exactly when and how to bring our clowning to a halt. She'd play a loud chord, and break into "The Keel Row", and we'd be pushing back the table, kicking off our shoes while Carlos scurried for cover under the window seat. Then Dorrie and I would take up our positions in the middle of the floor, and with the back of our hands on our hips and stockinged feet as 'a quarter to three', we'd bow from the waist, and spring and skip our way through the lively movements of the Highland Fling while the lamplight flickered and trembled in time with our steps. Dancing was a thing to be treated with respect and precision

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CHAPTER 5

A HORSE OF A DIFFERENT COLOUR

Dorrie had a natural aptitude as a dancer and in our Scottish National dances was our dancing master's pride and joy. She had the right physique and bearing and her footwork was a treat to watch. I enjoyed dancing none the less for being a lesser light and we never missed an opportunity to rehearse our steps. We might be in the process of cleaning our teeth or halfway through a game when our feet would start itching. As extraverts we delighted in performing to friends and visitors who no doubt were bored to death with our exhibitions.

When we were at a loss for an audience we'd skip across the fields to Baird's farm where Annie and her older sister Bessie would be busy in the byre. We'd shove our heads over the closed half-door and ask if we might come in and dance to them.

"Come awa in", Annie would say, without pausing in her milking and we'd nip inside, and dispensing with any preliminaries, would get on with our performance. Though the byre, cobblestoned and none too clean, was hardly an ideal dancing platform, we skilfully dodged the buckets, brooms and cow's pancakes as we worked our way through our entire repertoire. Our only accompaniment was the steady rhythm of the jets of milk as they hissed against the iron bucket, and the occasional "moo" from a restless cow. Our captive audience was completely at our mercy, but there was no doubt that Annie enjoyed our visits. Her head in its leather cap would nod in time to the beat as it nestled against the cow's flank, and she'd voice her appreciation loudly at the end of each item. Now and then a cow would leave off its steady munching and eye us superciliously as if to say "What extraordinary goings-on". If it flicked its tail it would get a sharp dig in the ribs from Annie.

"Keep still, ye bissom' she'd mutter, but not unkindly.

Sometimes we'd arrive in an assortment. of cast-off finery, unearthed from the cupboard beneath the stairs, arid, inspired by our improvised garb, would create dances on the spot. I can remember Dorrie, all tizzed up in some diaphanous outfit and trailing a long wisp of pink

silk from the family scrap bag, announcing, "I will now dance 'La Scarfe de la Rose" and going through a series of sinuous contortions which progressed through pirouettes and much scarf waving to a grand climax, loudly acclaimed by Annie.

"Hey, Bessie, what do you think o that non?" she'd ask her sister, who would just give a non-committal grunt and get on with her milking. We were never quite sure if she approved of us. When we had exhausted our extensive repertoire and thrown in all our school recitations for good measure, we'd reluctantly but politely accept a drink of warm milk from a metal dipper and set off tripping and skipping back across the fields with our bits of frippery-floating in the breeze.

Early the following morning Annie, in her big boots, tammy and overcoat would be round with her horse and cart delivering the milk, which she brought right to the door. Rain, hail or snow she never failed to turn up, and always found time for a friendly chat. Being of an impressionable nature her remarks were usually complimentary, always frank.

"Eh! Mistress Scott" she'd exclaim impulsively. "Ye're as bonny as a picture:" then she'd refer to our visit the day before.

"Eh, those twa, they're real keen, and richt bonny dancers. They're twa toppers, nae doobt aboot that".

My father and she always exchanged a bit of banter. He'd ask her what she was doing on her day off, knowing jolly well that she never had one., and if there were signs of rain he'd say, "You better get the lids off your milkcans, Annie. There's a fine shower coming up".

"Ye're an awfu' man, Mr Scott!" she'd say, and off she'd go, all smiles, with cheeks like polished apples, to deliver milk and friendly pow-wows at the next house. On our way to school we'd see Annie at her deliveries on the "brae'. As she chatted away brightly to her customers the horse would pull the cart right on to the pavement, and put its head over the railings as if to join in the company and, no doubt to accept titbits offered, for her horse was as much of a favourite as Annie herself.

Now and then we'd prevail upon old Mr Baird to lend us a large and ancient draught horse that had long outlived its usefulness. We were usually joined on these occasions by some neighbouring friends all eager as we were for a ride. As Rosie, the mare was tall and broad and none of us was very big, we had to mount her by, leading her to the nearest gate and hoisting ourselves aloft from that. Rosie's enormous back could accommodate three of us quite comfortably, and we'd wriggle into position, each hugging the one in front or hanging on in any way we could. Our short legs were unable to grip Rosie's great girth and stuck straight out on either side like the oars of an ancient galley. With one leading in front and another offering encouraging pats from the rear, we'd proceed slowly and solemnly along the road. The old mare was completely docile and had only one failing. She insisted always in going in one direction and could only be diverted from her course by much cajoling and a persuasive push or two.

Only once was Rosie known to turn in her tracks of her own free will and that was the day when we encountered the local cavalry trotting briskly out from town. Without any warning Rosie swung round and started to follow them with amazing agility. Caught completely off our guard we found ourselves bobbing helplessly on a heaving sea. We grasped the air, floundered and slid one by one to the ground. Rosie, sweating and riderless was later led back meekly to the home paddock, but who knows, perhaps for a few brief moments of her fading years a lifetime dream had been realised.

Time came however, when our excursions on Rosie's hold back were just too tame. We hankered after a real horse, a fine sleek thoroughbred with plenty of spirit. We talked about an Arabian high stepper as if by wishing one it could be wafted across the continent on a magic carpet and landed right on our front lawn. The whole thing became an obsession.

"Why can't we have a horse, dad?" we'd ask ad nauseum, knowing how futile our requests were.

"A horse? What's wrong with old Rosie, he'd ask.

"Och, Rosie" we'd reply with scorn, forgetting the many hours of pleasure she had afforded us. "She's got to be pulled along. We want

a horse that will move. If we cant have one of our own, couldn't we just hire one now and then to practise on?" Then one Saturday morning my father came home with the surprise announcement that he had arranged for a mount to be brought along this afternoon. Our excitement knew no bounds.

"It's not just another Rosie, is it?" asked Dorrie suspiciously.

"Och, no, Its not a draught horse at all".

"Is it an Arabian high stepper?" I asked hopefully.

"Now, Trina, where would you get an Arabian high stepper in this part of the world? Just you wait till you see him. Away you go now and play".

We were so anxious to share our good fortune with others that we dashed off on our bicycles to invite a couple of our friends from the





Brae to join us. Back home we delved amongst the treasures of the cubbyhole and came up with some old breeches of my father's and a couple of old bowler hats and rigged ourselves out as we thought fitted the occasion. Our friends Jane and Nancy arrived and we were drawing lots for who'd have first turn when a young lad arrived leading a donkey, the shaggiest and most miserable creature one could imagine. How my father chuckled!. The laugh was certainly on us this time, and it must be said to our credit that when we had recovered from the shock, we laughed too. We even decided that a donkey was better than nothing ,and attempted to have some donkey rides. The stubborn animal however had quite different ideas. He had been dragged from his familiar grazing patch at the other end of town, and neither fresh young carrots from the garden nor 'lumps of sugar would induce him to budge, and in the end we wearied of trying and left him to munch the front lawn in peace.

When teatime came and the lad had not come to collect him, my father said we'd better take him home. We protested loudly, but it never occurred to us to let my father get himself out of this difficulty. Dorrie conveniently found herself with other pressing duties, and Jane, Nancy and I were faced with the slow and embarrassing task of leading the pitiful creature home. This entailed going right through the main streets while passers-by stopped and smirked. At the far end of town we were joined by a couple of local youths who jeered and guffawed all the way to the junk yard where the donkey belonged, and it was with sheer relief that he was handed back to his owner.

It would be a nice touch to say that our donkey uttered a loud "Hee Haw" on parting but he maintained his silence. It is only in retrospect that we appreciated the fact that this shaggy flea-bitten creature had been the star of the show and that my father and he between them had made donkeys out of us. It was a very long time before we ever brought up the "horse" question again.

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CHAPTER 6

WHEELING AND DEALING

When my mother attended an auction sale one morning and bought a second-hand pram no doubt she set the local busybodies' tongues wagging.

"Mr Scott will be after a son to carry on the business, after those three girls", would be their conclusion. "But what a pram: Surely the Scotts could afford something better than yon old thing"

The fact was that the pram, which had been knocked down to my mother for a few shillings by the auctioneer, was being bought at Wendy's request to provide a pair of wheels for her 'hurley'. When Wendy had commandeered the hensrun as a vegetable garden it was clear that she would need a quantity of sand to mix with the local clay to make it, workable. A trip to the rivermouth with her toy wheelbarrow was enough to show her the futility of fetching sand this way. There was a large whitewood box in the shed which only needed some wheels and shafts to be converted by my father into an ideal handcart. It was he who suggested a pram as a source of wheels, and Fury mother who was detailed off to the sale to get one, and soon, Wendy was the proud owner of a fine new 'hurley',

She lost no time in putting it to use, and made several trips to the river mouth, running sturdily between the shafts on her short legs, and trudging back with the cart piled high. With a bit of assistance from everyone her garden got established. For Wendy, however, this was only the beginning.

Dorrie and I, with less than two years difference in our ages, were team-mates in nearly all our activities leaving Wendy. so much our inn ire to find her own amusements. Our young sister showed, however, at a very early age that she was quite capable of going it alone, and in or own individual manner. She was quick to see the potential of her strong new handcart and announced that she was going into the carrying business.

With considerable amusement Dorrie and I helped her to print - 'W. SCOTT, CARTAGE CONTRACTOR in bold letters on the side of the

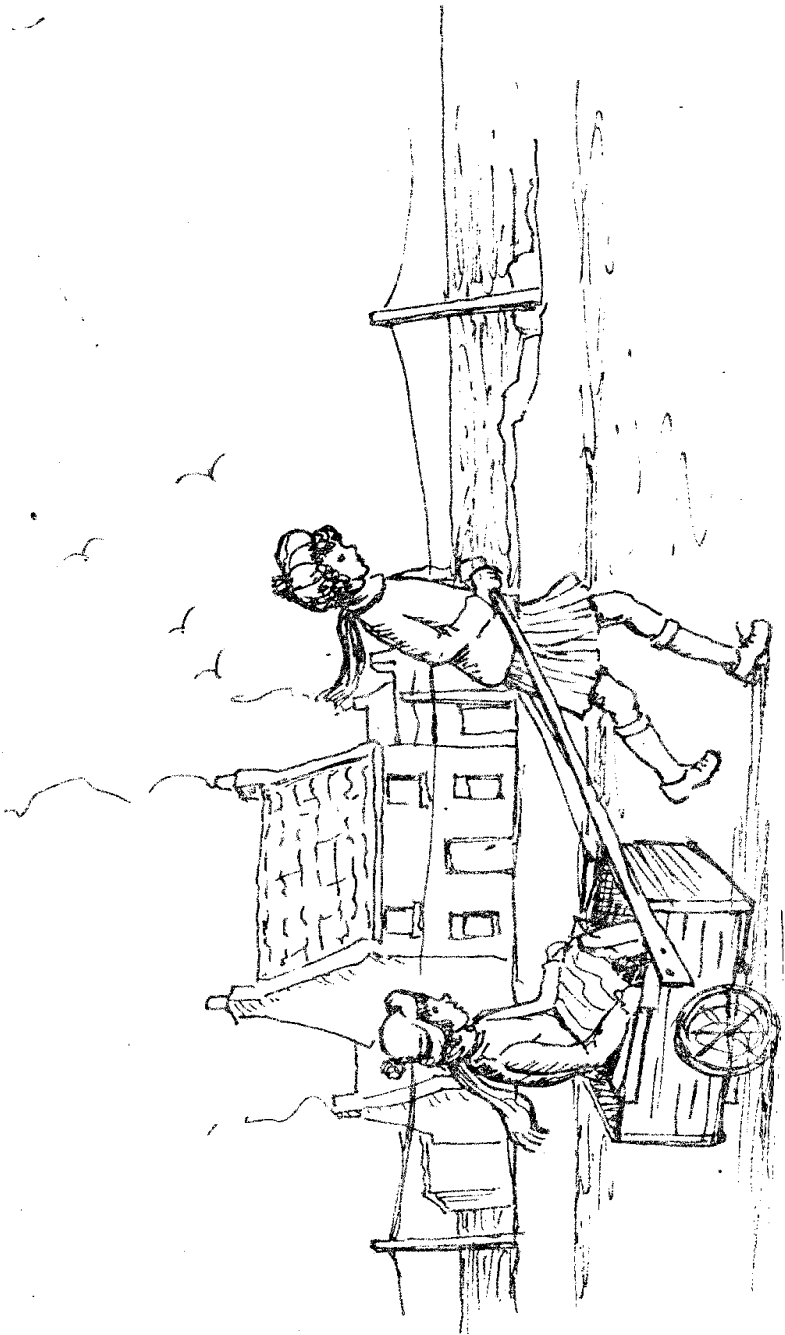
cart and she set about canvassing for orders, undertaking to cart sand at a penny a load. Friends and relations, tickled at her initiative, were quite prepared to humour her, and orders poured in.

Her money was hard earned as she trudged back and forth over long distances with her laden cart. When she needed a break or became bored with her commitments, she sub-let her contracts to Sheila, a second-cousin for a halfpenny a load. Dorrie prepared a set of books for her, setting out a list of debits and credits, and to everyone but Wendy it, was quite a joke.

Meanwhile her garden, boosted by its rich fowl-manure content, was making good progress. As her vegetables became ready for use she supplemented her small quantities of carrots and turnips with extras from the kitchen garden, and added a vegetable round to her sand deliveries. Most of the profits from these dealings were spent at the popular bakery in the fishertown. A board was placed across the top of the hurley for these expeditions, and Wendy, as befitted the owner of the vehicle, took up her seat on this, with a rug over her knees, while Sheila ran between the shafts, pulling. The positions were occasionally reversed but only as a special favour on Wendy's part.

A tempting aroma of warm bread, buns and pastry would greet them as they reached the entrance to Mackie's bakery and they'd park their cart and join the crowd of customers inside. People from all over town came to this small shop for the quality and variety of its wares all of which were referred to by their local names. There were parkins, abernathy biscuits, "sair herdies", cheat-the-bellies (made from a very porous puff pastry), fly-cemeteries, Paris Medals, farthing biscuits, (which cost a halfpenny) and a whole range of sugary cookies, soda scones, and loaves. The two girls would make their selection with some deliberation and set off to the Stinking Wood where they had set up house.

This small coppice was wedged rather incongruously between a small housing estate where Sheila lived and a number of old farm houses. The reason that the wood had been left undeveloped was probably because of the foul-smelling drain which ran right through the centre. The trees grew so close together that not a blink of



sunlight ever relieved the stygian gloom. Even the birds seemed to shun it. Rank grass grew in clumps around the base of the trees and outsize midges hunted in swarms. In one corner was a large pigsty and the combined smells of it and the drain were no doubt responsible for its name.

In the heart of this unsavoury spot Wendy and Sheila had their cubby house. Arriving back from the bakery with their foodstuffs they would light a fire from fallen twigs, boil water in an old tin can, and make a sickly brew from cocoa and condensed milk to complete their banquet. My mother had serious misgivings: about Wendy's choice of resort and eventually the Stinking Wood had to be declared "out of bounds".

In the meantime two wheels still remained on the old pram and it was a familiar sight to see Wendy pushing it over the Brae to my grandmothers with Carlos curled up inside in a sunbonnet and a pair of knickers. Having only two wheels the pram couldn't be made to stand and had to be kept on the move until it arrived at its destination. Then Carlos would be tipped out, and in his ridiculous gear would go slithering up the highly polished stairs to the flat and sending my grandfather's beloved cat scurrying for cover. Wendy would sit down sedately in the living room, and stay long enough to dispose of a glass of lemonade, and a piece of fruit cake with all the aplomb of a visitor making a social call, thank her grandmother politely, and take her leave. My grandmother was most adept at keeping a straight face and would contain her amusement until Wendy and her charge were careering down the stairs.

Wendy did not always go it. alone, of course. There were times when Dorrie and I were prevailed upon to include her in our outings, though 'drag her along' was, to our shame, the term we used. Our visits to the pictures, for example, on Saturday afternoons were conditional on our taking Wendy with us, otherwise the sixpences for admission would not be forthcoming. The town's only picture palace at that time was anything but palatial. The only adornments on the building, corrugated iron walls were posters of matinee idols pasted at intervals among the cobwebs. The floor was bare boards and the seats were rows of forms with a thin padding covered with American cloth in the sixpenny section and bare wooden benches for the

cheaper ones in front. A tawdry curtain covered the screen, in front of which was a narrow strip of stage.

The same children attended week after week, and the hall echoed with babbling voices and shuffling feet until the pianist thumped out "Blaze Away" on a tinny piano. The curtain would be drawn aside and Pathe's Gazette would appear on the screen. Following this would come a slapstick comedy in which crazy characters silently plastered each other with paint and custard tarts and fell off ladders all in a series of quick jerky movements. We screamed with laughter. During the interval we were treated to a "turn".

The piano would strike up again and a third rate performer would appear from behind the curtain and render a song or some music hall type act while we fidgeted in our seats, waiting for him to finish and the serial begin. For a week we had waited to see the hero come to the rescue of the heroine who had been left facing a terrible fate. She may have been lying unconscious in the path of an oncoming train or in the clutches of some hideous monster, but by the end of today's episode she would have been rescued by the hero only to face another ordeal. We had to follow "The Perils of Pauline" or "The Exploits of Elaine" through to their conclusion.

Sitting between us on the edge of her seat Wendy would keep asking what it was all about. "What does it say?" she'd ask as the captions came up.

"Shush." we'd whisper.

"What did it say?" she'd persist, and we'd reply in loud whisper, while our eyes stayed glued to the screen. We were too engrossed even to delve into our bags of Saturday sweets. The fact that the actors all moved in quick, unnatural jerks, that no sound came from their lips and that even in the most gruelling situations the heroine's clothes remained immaculate and her hair intact, made it none the less convincing. It was a sad day for us when the picture palace was demolished, and when it was later replaced by one that was far more presentable, the thrill of those early movies had gone.

Another regular haunt of ours was the public swimming baths, near the harbour, which were heated and open all the year round. Certain

hours were set aside for juniors, girls at one time, boys at another, and it was there that we all learned to swim. When we took Wendy along for the first time the water at the shallow end came up to her shoulders. We left her splashing around there with some other 'littlies' while we set off to get some practice in, but as usually was the case with Wendy, things took a more sensational turn. Bored with all this child's play at the shallow end she worked her way around on the rail and soon she was standing on the springboard, grinning defiantly.

"Grab me when I jump!" she called out and while Dorrie and I were both protesting furiously she was off the springboard and into the deep water. The nearest swimmer grasped her shoulders and swam her to the rail, spluttering but triumphant. Our reaction to this encouraged her to go one better. Soon she was up on the high diving board, bouncing it up and down, and aware of a gaping audience, she jumped again. She came up from the bottom spluttering and was again dragged to safety. This performance would have gone on indefinitely had not the baths' master suggested that she first go down to the shallow end and at least learn to float.

When my mother was told of this she just shook her head in despair, but my father laughed delightedly.

"Go on he exclaimed. It was obvious that his youngest daughter was a chip off the old block.

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CHAPTER 7

REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY

There is little doubt that our visits to the old picture palace yielded inspiration for many of our games. Using umbrellas as parachutes we jumped off the garage roof, making painful landings on the concrete drive. We shot the rapids by clattering down the stairs on tin tray canoes (an operation so noisy that it had to be made taboo) and the large double bed which Dorrie and I shared became a recreation ground for all kinds of stunts.

Our favourite among these was called 'faint-falls' which we executed from the edge of the bottom bed rail. In turn we walked tight-rope fashion along the rail until we received a bullet wound through the heart or a blow on the head or were overcome by an attack of vertigo, when we would sway, topple and plunge the full twelve inches to our death on the patchwork quilt. Like Lazarus we rose from the dead and started all over again, the object being to introduce as much variety as possible into each performance and to make each death dive more sensational than the last. The bed springs groaned and reverberated with each landing and we lost quite a few buttons from our wincy pyjamas.

In the middle of these high-jinks Wendy would totter in half awake, hoping to snuggle 'in beside the middle', as she put in, for a bit of company. Finding the bed in turmoil she'd wander out again and if it happened to be a Sunday she would seek out my father who would be having a "lie in", and crawl into bed beside him asking for a story. My father would lay aside the Sunday papers, scratch his head



and sav...."A story, eh! Well, um: Let me see now..... Once upon a time....." and it was one of these occasions that the saga of little Johnnie began and continued for many Sunday mornings. Each week, having been reminded by Wendy of Johnnie's previous adventures, my father would conjure up fresh hazards for his brainchild. Johnnie bobbed from one end of the globe to the other from one week to the next, encountering giants, gorillas, pygmy tribes and dragons or whatever would ;pr-ng to my father's fertile mind.

My mother who never treated herself to the luxury of a 'long lie' would eventually call up the stairs.

"Breakfast in five minutes, everyone" At this Wendy would prod my father, saying "Go on, Daddy. Do 'that Kruschen feeling'."

This was the signal for him to throw back the bedclothes, give a loud "Whoopee" and take a flying leap out of bed, closely followed by Wendy. Then both would bound around the room giving their version of the joy of life.

It was usually about this time on a Sunday morning that a young neighbour who was learning the cornet would stand at his attic window and shatter the Sabbath calm with hideous blarings. The whole neighbourhood would be aroused by the noise which carried across the open fields and intruded into every house. This continued week after week and seemed likely to be a permanent infliction until during one particularly painful dose my father decided to retaliate, he disconnected the large horn-type loud speaker from our early model wireless set, carried it upstairs to a window directly facing the noise and started off in opposition. His imitations came trumpeting through the loud speaker and mingled with the cornet blasts to produce unearthly discords. The whole district must have wondered what was up. Our young cornet player apparently got the message however for he withdrew right away (without: sounding a retreat) and afterwards practised behind closed doors..

After breakfast my mother would busy herself setting the Sunday dinner in progress before going to church. Dorrie and I would reluctantly don our best dresses and hats and accompany her there. My father frequently opted out, having apparently had a surfeit. of church-going in his single days, There was plenty of evidence of this in

a number of small sketch books filled with pencil studies obviously done to relieve the tedium of lengthy sermons. Most of the drawings showed back view of stiff-necked women in an infinite variety of Sunday hats. The bearded minister hadn't been neglected either. He stared grimly out of some pages, glasses on the end of his nose, thumbs tucked into the front of his vestments. My father had studied art before choosing to go into partnership with his father and never missed an opportunity to sketch.



My grandparents were usually seated in the family pew when we arrived at the church, my grandmother looking resplendent in her sable furs and muff and a confection of a hat guaranteed to outshine any other in the assembly. In his dark Sunday serge and high stiff collar, my grandfather was there under sufferance. He couldn't hear, couldn't sing and hated all this dressing up business.

Dorrie and I usually found ourselves on either side of my grandmother, who would see that there was no fidgeting. We would have much preferred to sit at the far end of the pew by the little cupboard containing hymn books and bibles, for any blank spaces in these had also been adorned with my father's pencil sketches. During the singing I would listen with pride to my mother's voice and I tried to follow her if a note or two behind. She was the only one in our pew to make any vocal contribution to the service.

Just before the minister was about to commence his sermon my grandmother's gloved hand would fumble in her muff and she would surreptitiously pass each of us a pandrop. One of these round peppermint sweets if sucked discreetly could be made to last throughout the sermon. Any crunching or slurping would bring a sharp nudge from my grandmother's elbow. I always tried conscientiously to follow the gist of the sermon but the pedantic voice of the minister and the soothing influence of the pandrop would make me lapse into one of my frequent daydreams. These could be triggered off from some part of the text and they then followed their own course, leading me through strange paths, both pleasant and sad. I'd be brought back to

reality by the congregation rising for the closing hymn, and after the black velvet bag with the wooden handle had been passed along the pews and we'd popped in our offerings, we'd all move out slowly to the droning of the organ.

By the time we arrived back at "Balrowan" Dorrie would be starving. One pandrop between breakfast and dinner was a poor substitute for her usual mid-morning piece of bread and jam. We would help to speed things up by laying the table while my mother busied herself at the stove, and Wendy would come down from the studio wearing the face of doom. My father had been modelling a head of her in clay and she had been sitting for him most of the morning with dwindling patience and a growing resentment. Poor Wendy, she was often singled out as model as she was most readily available, and my father would become so absorbed in his work that he'd forget the sitter. As Wendy's spirits became lower and lower her mouth would develop a pronounced pout, which appeared in plaster heads, paintings and sketches alike, - Wendy's kettle spouts, we called them.

Neither Dorrie nor I escaped our share of posing, but on my twelfth birthday I was given a box of oil paints and from then on I was expected to be on the producing end. Still life groups were set up for me in the studio over which I laboured painstakingly while listening to the laughter down in the garden and wondering what I was missing.

Frequently on Sunday afternoons the car would be cranked up and backed out of the garage, and we'd all take up our seats, my mother in the front and we three girls in the back. I always had to have an outside seat because I suffered from car sickness even in an open car. I also was subject to sea sickness and train sickness and I believe I was even capable of being sick in the station cab, so these outings were not all pleasure for me.

Our first car is just a vague memory. The back was shaped like a dogcart and we entered from the rear. This was followed by a huge Crossley with a brass horn and great brass headlights and seats which seemed to be miles above the ground. For most of our days at "Balrowan" however we had a small Fiat tourer which could chew up the miles. My father still preferred to ride his bicycle to the yard but in the weekends., weather permitting we usually went for a drive We

went mushrooming in season, visited country friends or just picnicked in some pleasant spot along the river, usually selected with a view to its fishing or sketching potential.

It was quite a familiar sight to see my father bending right over with his legs wide apart looking at the landscape upside-down between his knees. He'd call out....

"Ney, Trina, just come and look at this"

Of course I would follow suit, and Dorrie and Wendy would join in, not wanting to miss anything. Even my mother, tucking up her skirts would line up for a view. We all agreed that the colour of the landscape was intensified this way, and a new beauty added. The reflections in the water seemed deeper, the sky more blue. "

"Michty! There's a sight for you!" my father would exclaim. quite carried away. If it had been at all possible I think he would have painted it standing on his head.

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CHAPTER 8

PIES FOR A CHANGE

The shoals of "silver darlings" which directly or indirectly were responsible for the prosperity of our thriving fishing town, followed a migratory course round the waters of Britain at predictable times each year and fishermen, fishcurers and their crews moved to widely distant centres to reap their harvest. We had curing stations as far, apart as the Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland and the east coast of England as well as the main one in our home town. This meant that my father was absent during the fishing seasons in these centres. One of the busiest of these was Yarmouth on the Suffolk coast and before we reached school age the whole family would travel down to England and live in a rented house for the duration of the curing.

However, when school put an end to these visits my father was obliged to go alone and live in lodgings, a circumstance not at all to his liking. The Yarmouth landladies made a thriving business out of the influx of Scottish visitors but few could provide the hearty wholesome meals to which my father was accustomed. The porridge was a watery, saltless gruel at which any true Scot's stomach would rebel. The basic meals consisted mainly of sausages, with little to support them, the rooms were cheerless and the general lack of home comfort was painful to a man as indulged as my father.

The Stornoway lodgings were even worse and my father come home with lurid tales about his Gaelic speaking landladies, whose English took some peculiar turns, particularly in respect to pronouns. "

Ach, Mr Scott, the room he is sm-a--al and the lamp will soon w-a-rm her up", said one landlady when my father had remarked that .hors was no fireplace. "And would she please not to pe smoking in ped to prevent safety."

Once he sent a telegram to himself to return home urgently and moved in with a fellow-curer who was more favourably placed. When he happened to bump into his former landlady some time later he muttered something about having come back.

"Ach, herself wass never away at-a-ll!" she replied.

As we grew older it was possible for us to be left in the care of a housekeeper while my mother accompanied my father to Yarmouth and though we couldn't have put it into words, "Balrowan" became much less of a home without the easy companionship which we shared with our parents. Conditions varied with each housekeeper and we adapted to suit them or at least tried.

Miss Gordon, a stern but conscientious spinster must have had some anxious moments when she found herself in charge of three high-spirited tomboys. She clamped down firmly from the start, confining all our activities to the kitchen and allowing us into the parlour only for our music practice which she timed to the minute. She fed us well, if unimaginatively, got us off to school in time, and to bed early and saw that we were clean behind the ears.

Finding to her surprise that we really were house-broken she relaxed a little, and one wet afternoon she showed us how to make treacle toffee. The mixture of treacle, butter, sugar and vinegar produced a dark viscous substance when cooked in the saucepan, and when this cooled sufficiently we were given lumps of it in our hands to pull and play with until it, gradually was transformed into long brittle sticks of a pale colour. This was an operation after our own hearts, and even though the toffee was rationed at Miss Gordon's discretion, she went up by leaps in our estimation. By the time she was due to leave we had come to regard each other with a mutual respect, if not affection.

Millie Wallace, the following year's housekeeper, was cast in quite a different mould. In her early twenties, she was a goodnatured, featherbrained girl who had been engaged at the last minute when other plans had fallen through. Millie had as little idea of household management as we had and my mother would have been back on the next train if she could have seen how quickly her smoothly run menage was falling apart.

"Do you like pies?" asked Millie after we had disposed of a number of meals prepared by my mother before leaving.

"Ooh, yes!" we replied enthusiastically, bought pies having rarely found their way onto our table. So pies it was to be. Regularly after school we'd be sent off on our bicycles to Mackie's bakery for pies. In the mornings before school we'd tear off there for hot "butteries", a

form of morning roll oozing fat. Having once rashly expressed a partiality for banana custard we found that that, along with pies and "butteries" formed our staple food during Millie's stay. It was a novelty that quickly began to pall.

Our young housekeeper made no attempt to exert any authority over us. We had never lacked for freedom but it had been a freedom which carried a certain implicit responsibility. Now that responsibility diminished and licence prevailed. Millie giggled at our capers and got up to quite a few of her own with her visiting boyfriend, Frank. Frank was a short podgy young man who was as addle-pated as Millie. Young romance at close quarters was a new experience for us and we looked on fascinated as they flirted, skirmished and chased each other through the house, Carlos, thinking it was all a game, bounded after them. It was all very harmless,.

Once they decided to exchange clothes. This they did from adjoining rooms, passing each garment through the door as it was removed and emerging at last amid shrieks of laughter in which we joined. Another day Millie went to the hairdresser and had her loop chestnut hair cut into a short bob. We came home from school to find her contemplating herself in the mirror.

"What do you think?" she asked us.

"I like it", said Dorrie.

"Me too", I said. "It's much better that way. We had all found long hair a great bother and had been among the first in town to have ours bobbed.

"Frank won't like it, you wait and see, said Millie. He absolutely forbade are to have it off".

Frank did not like it. He took one look at her bobbed head when she opened the door to him that evening, then turned on his heel and stumped off. The following evening he turned up with all his hair shaved off. There were scenes, tears, giggles and reconciliations, all of which we lapped up with relish.

We were left pretty much to our own devices in the evenings while Milli and Frank did their courting in the kitchen and one evening as Dorrie was poking around in the parlour cupboard she said:

"I say, Trina, Dad has left his cigars".

"Go on" I said. Are there any cigarettes?

"No, can't see any. Just cigarette papers.

"Any tobacco?" I asked. "Let's have a look"

There was no tobacco but we took the papers out anyway. There must be something we could use for tobacco.

"In some countries I believe they smoke cow dung", commented Dorrie, leaving the question hanging in the air.

"Nothing doing" said Wendy and I together. In the end we settled peat dust. At least it looked a bit like tobacco. We started crumbling loose fibres off a couple of peats standing on the hearth and with clumsy fingers rolled them into the papers. The result was anything but professional. Dorrie felt it her duty to try to dissuade Wendy.

"Rubbish", said Wendy, and lit up. We both, followed suit, puffing inhaling. The ragged papers flared. The peat caught too quickly then smouldered. It no time our eyes were watering with the acrid smoke. We coughed and spluttered.

"Oh, peat dust is hopeless!" moaned Dorrie.

"Woodbines are much better, said Wendy.

"Woodbines! And how would you know?" Dorrie and I asked together

"Oh, Sheila and I used to buy them with our carting money and smoke them in the cubby"

"WENDY:" we exclaimed.

Well, if Wendy can smoke Woodbines I'm going to try a cigar", said Dorrie.

"What about Millie?" I asked.

"Oh, she and Frank are too busy canoodling in the kitchen", said Dorrie. "She wouldn't give a hoot anyway"

So a cigar was produced, sniffed at and fingered. We cut the end of as we'd seen my father do. Dorrie put a spill to it and after several attempts she got it going. It was solemnly passed round as each of us puffed away in turn like red Indian chiefs smoking the pipe of peace.

Not too bad!" said Dorrie, with a bit of bravado.

"It's terrific, said Wendy.

"I think ill just go and lie down for a bit", I said, and made a dash for the door.

We got very short notice of our parents homecoming. When we received word one day to say that they were returning the following afternoon we went into a flat spin and tried to do everything at once. Carlos was plopped into the wash trough and given a hasty bath. We washed our hair, shoved our dirty underwear out of sight, fought each other for the piano to fit to some last minute practice. Milli, really caught on the hop, enlisted our aid to polish the floors. Even at this late hour we had to make a game of this. We wrapped dusters around our stockinged feet and glided and skated over the long stretch of the hall until the linoleum gleamed. None of us gave a single thought to food.

The station cab delivered my parents to the door. They were tired, laden and as glad to be home as we were to see them. We ushered them into the parlour, sat at their feet, opened our parcels, talked and talked. It was a joyful re-union, We were a family again. At last my mother, ever practical, went through to the kitchen to see what, if anything. Millie had prepared for the family tea. There was nothing in the pantry but milk, stale rolls, potatoes and the remains of some banana custard.

"Well", said my mother, "I can see we'll have to stock up tomorrow. Now, about our tea. I don't suppose it would hurt us to have pies for once. Dorrie, Katrina, I wonder if you wouldn't mind.....".

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CHAPTER 9

SAY "THANK YOU" TO GRANDMA

Grandpa Scott was a quiet man who spoke little because deafness excluded him from general conversations. Apart from his work his interests centred around his grey persian cat and model yacht racing. He made precise and beautiful models of sailing yachts and along with other enthusiasts, raced them all through the year on a local pond. His one colourful touch was a velvet smoking cap decorated with coloured beading which he wore in the house to keep his head warm. As he neither smoked nor drank he rarely carried any money. If we met him on his way home for lunch as we were returning to school he'd go through every pocket to see if he could find a coin or two for us, usually without success.

"Run up and ask your grandmother to give you some pennies", he would say but we never did. One just didn't ask for money.

One day as we were about to leave him after one of these fruitless encounters he said with a twinkle in his eye, "If you come round to the yard after school, I'll have a surprise for you."

This led us to speculate all the way to the academy where I parted from Dorrie, having agreed to meet there after school. My grandfather was in charge of the machine shop where the timber was prepared for making the barrels. In our younger days he had made us wooden spinning tops and boats from scrap timber but we couldn't think what he could produce to interest us now and we hadn't come up with any answers when we met and went round to the yard later that day.

The fishcuring yard, enclosed by a high stone wall, occupied a large area necessary to accommodate the various works. The office building was in the front left corner, and alongside it was the cooperage with barrels stacked in rows outside. Away at the back in a large corrugated iron building was the net factory from which a strong smell of bark emerged. Rows of farlins (large wooden troughs) occupied much of the central area. The herrings were dumped into these straight from the lorries, to be gutted, packed in brine in the barrels and exported to the continent. The machine shop was on the right.

The great noisy motor that generated the power for the machines nearly deafened us as we went in. My grandfather had been looking out for us and yelled above the noise.

"Wait till I get the laddies".

The "laddies" were his two apprentices, of whom he was very fond despite the fact that they enjoyed tricking him by putting the clock back or forwards as it suited them. Soon they appeared, carrying of all things, three pairs of stilts - something that would never have occurred to us. Fancy our quiet, gentle old grandfather coming up with anything so challenging. The stilts had been made from the staves for the barrels and offcuts from the lids and apparently very little shaping had been required to adapt them to their purpose. The "laddies" had screwed the foot pieces on at a reasonable height from the ground and planed the long legs carefully to eliminate splinters. Though neither of us were ever very effusive in expressing thanks our excitement must have been thanks enough. Reluctantly we agreed to let my father bring them home in the car, three long pairs of stilts on two small bicycles being rather tricky.

From the time they arrived it was "operation stilts". Once we had learnt the proper grip and balance we made rapid strides, Soon we were hopping, running, kicking a ball around and even attempting a highland fling on stilts. We prevailed upon my grandfather to make some for our friends who had shared in the fun. In turn their friends and brothers made similar requests. The craze spread rapidly. In no time half the youth of the town, hearing that stilts were being made at old Mr Scott's machine shop, queued up at the entrance asking for them. The "laddies" were inundated with orders and my grandfather had eventually to make a charge of a shilling a pair to try and slow down the demand. Finally, the stilt-making had to cut out altogether in order to catch up on the backlog of essential work. Even when the craze had died down there remained a lingering admiration for Grandpa Scott for his understanding of our young needs.

My grandmother's gifts, though doubtless more valuable, had far less appeal. They were reserved for birthdays when we would all be invited to the flat for tea. There was a puckish streak in my grandmother which at time almost amounted to sadism, and Dorrie after some teasing as a

very small child had once remarked tearfully, "I don't love my dear granny"

Those were my sentiments entirely on one of my birthdays when we were all assembled round the long table in my grandparents dining room where the glass gleamed and the silver shone. We had enjoyed some good rich chicken broth and were in the midst of cold meat and salad. My grandfather had shoved the lettuce to the side of his plate, saying, "I canna be dicing with this girse!", which caused a bit of a grin all round, when my grandmother handed me a small parcel wrapped in tissue paper. "Happy birthday, Katrina." she said.

All eyes were on me as I undid the wrappings and uncovered ,a hideous tartan table centre with a red shiny fringe round it and "A Present from Inverness" embroidered under a sprig-of heather. There was complete silence except for the clicking of my grandfather's badly fitting dentures. My grandmother sat forward, eyebrows up, lips pursed and a gl nt in her eye, waiting for my reaction.

"Now, isn't that nice:" she said not knowing if it was a joke or not, I could only mumble, "Yes, thank you. grandma'.

There was nothing anyone could say, but Dorrie managed to give me a kick under the table. After I had been allowed to wallow in embarrassment long enough my grandmother produced a little satin box containing a silver locket, engraved with my name, but by then my birthday had been spoilt.

Once when we had taken turns in carrying the hens' pail over the brae because it teemed heavier than usual, we found on opening it that we had been carrying two large stones wrapped in newspaper. One of her worst pranks however, was played on my mother when, as a new bride unfamiliar with her mother-in-law's ways and a stranger to the town, they attended a celebrity concert along with my Aunt Sara. Aunt Sarah considered herself one of the town's young cultural set and had booked the seats as a treat for my musical mother. My grandmother in her best furs was on one side of my mother, Aunt Sarah on the other and the vocalist was charming a hushed audience, as visits from celebrities were rare. During a particularly moving passage my grandmother took her hand out of her muff and passed along what my mother though would be a sweet, a thing she would gladly have foregone at that moment. Looking down she found herself holding a

duck's foot, cold and clammy, and complete with webbed toes and a length of yellow leg. She let out a shriek, completely embarrassing Aunt Sarah and making her furious for weeks.

Grandma Scott was not without kindness however, and we stayed with her many times for short periods during family emergencies. She was an excellent cook (a point very much in her favour) and made delicious pudding, for which she invented elaborate names. The same pudding, slightly camouflaged would appear next day under another name. She was a fanatic about cleanliness and always put ammonia in our bath water, It got up our noses and made our eyes water and Dorrie and I agreed that this was carrying hygiene too far altogether. All the dirty dishes were put through the sink twice, the floors were forever being scrubbed and polished, and the close sluiced out with disinfectant. We were intrigued by the number and



variety of my grandmother's aprons. They ranged from dainty white frilly things for her afternoon tea parties, through checked gingham and black lateens to a coarse sackcloth one for the dirtiest work. One would go on on top of another, according to the particular activity of the moment, then a different one on top of that, until sometimes she was submerged beneath as many as four assorted aprons. Even then she looked as skinny as a grasshopper and was not less active.

One day, shortly after she had been allowed home from hospital after a major operation, my parents, concerned for her welfare, called to see if there was anything they could do to help her. Not wishing to bring her to the door they let themselves in and went upstairs to find her in the kitchen, standing on a chair on top of the kitchen table, painting the ceiling.

"Michty" said my father.

"Grandma", said my mother, quite shocked. "You shouldn't be out of your bed. We thought perhaps there was something we could do for you".

"That's very kind", said my grandmother as she continued with her painting. "If you wouldn't mind waiting till I've finished this bit, maybe you would help me to shift the table".

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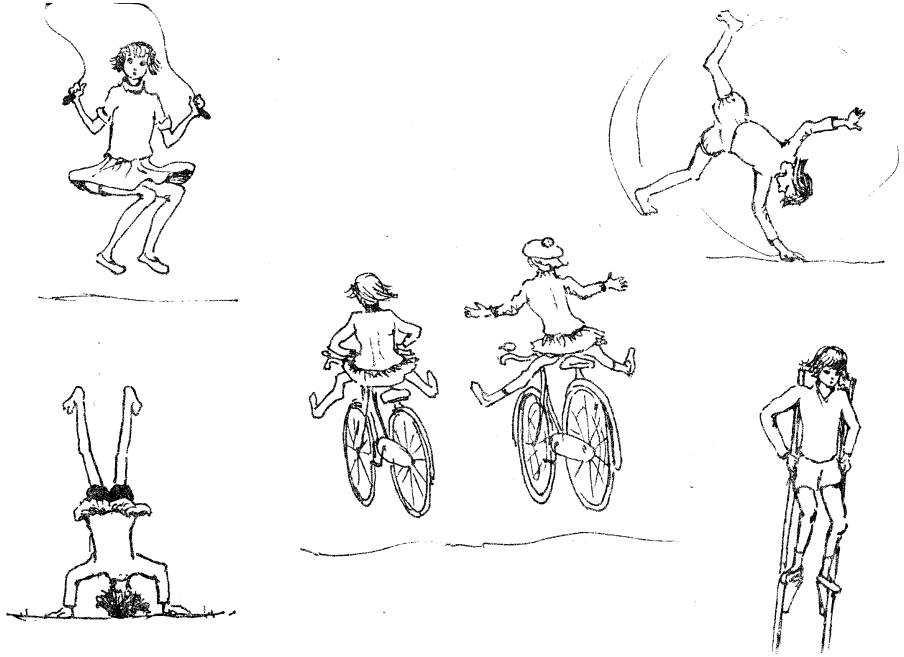
CHAPTER 10

HOLIDAYS SHOULD BE LONGER

Summer Long balmy days when the sun lingered long into the evenings as if reluctant to take its leave. Eight weeks of school holidays was never long enough in which to release all our pent-up energy. We careered down "the brae" on our bicycles, no hands or feet at the controls, until we reached the bump near the bottom of the hill which nearly bounced us off our seats. We practised acrobatics on the lawn, trying out hand-stands and turning cartwheels that ended in the rosebushes. Then, puffing and panting we subsided among the daisies to plan our next move.

Dorrie, as usual, was the ringleader. She could always be counted on to get things moving. In no time she'd be rounding up the gang to play "jumping the bents" or organising a paper chase. The bents, high dunes, that skirted the coast, swept down steeply to the wide stretch of sand below. At our special spot: we kicked off our sandals, tucked our dresses in our pants and in turn took a run and a death-defying leap over the top, the object being to see who could jump the farthest. There was an, exhilarating moment as one swept through space with





the salt wind stinging one's cheeks, before landing far below with a jarring shock to the spine and one's bloomers full of sand. The spot was marked where one's heels had dug into the sand and then one was clambering up the bank to get in line for another turn.

Fortunately there were no litter laws in the days when we tore off on our bicycles on paperchases which took us far into the country, along leafy lanes and bumpy cart tracks, strewing torn-up newspaper from haversacks slung across our shoulders. We laid false trails for our pursuers, lifted our bicycles over stone walls, and stood silent under bridges or behind barns as the hounds pedalled noisily by. Then we turned in our tracks to beat our pursuers back to base. Next it would be our turn to be the hounds. We never received any complaints about the stream of newspaper confetti we left along our path. The strong north easterlies soon whisked it into the hedgerows where it gradually decomposed.

Summer was berry-picking time too. As the different fruits in the garden ripened we were given the not unpleasant task of picking them. A considerable amount went down our throats in the process. In the kitchen the big copper jelly pan was frequently on the stove and

an assortment. of glass jars stood in readiness on the table. The red currants which grew in a sheltered row along the back wall were usually reserved for jelly. The tapering jelly bag was a familiar sight in the scullery as it hung suspended from a walking stick resting across two kitchen chairs, while the rich red fluid seeped slowly into a basin underneath.

There was a plentiful supply of black currants too, from which my mother made jams and jellies and black currant tarts or served thee stewed with cream. "Blood in the Moon" was the rather gory name we had for this colourful dish, which Dorrie went for in a big way.

"N-Yum, blood in the noon, my favourite:" she would exclaim with approval when stewed black currants appears on the table. What was intended to be a gooseberry picking exercise usually developed into a free for all. fortunately a large patch of back garden was given over to gooseberry bushes of different varieties ranging from large green hairy ones and a coarse pink sort to smaller smooth yellow ones. Our young imp of a cousin Neil always seemed to be around during berry-picking and his aim was all too accurate as he took pot shots at us with hard green gooseberries from his cover behind one of the bushes. When we attempted to retaliate he could never be seen, but we fired back at random and soon we were pelting gooseberries at each other willy nilly in an all-out battle, while the container lay forgotten.

The holidays whizzed by as we played tennis. made collections of wild flowers, swam in the cold northern waters and probed the wonders of rock pools. We had also joined a recently formed Girl Guide company, and we and our friends threw ourselves heart and soul into knot tying, morse signalling and woodcraft and set out to gain as many badges as possible to sew on our uniforms. Volunteers were usually enlisted to coach us for our tests which among other subjects included one in first aid.

As the first aid course demanded some practical knowledge of bandaging, a number of guides decided to meet during the holidays to get some practice in this craft. Naturally Dorrie was the one who suggested introducing a touch of drama into this by first enacting an accident, thus lending authenticity to the exercise. What better setting could there be for this performance than the ruined castle of Invercraig, a crumbling relic of the past some miles from the town,

which had no doubt witnessed some foul deeds in its time. We had nothing more drastic in mind than a fractured limb or two, and spurious ones at that.

Dinking Jane and Nancy, who had no bicycles, we pedalled our way to the site, equipped with some standard bandages, a first aid text book and lots of enthusiasm. The shell of the old castle stood back from the road was flanked on three sides by trees. Though we'd visited it many times before, we couldn't resist a quick scramble over the thick stone walls into the decaying confines whose only roof was the sky. We peered through gaping doorways and descended into dank chambers overgrown with moss, listening as our voices echoed eerily in the hollow structure. Eventually we got down to business.

Nancy had volunteered to be the first casualty and now chose a projecting ledge from which to fall onto soft grass below. As she made her "fall" with a convincing scream, five girl guides dashed to her assistance, all concern. Five pairs of hoods prodded her for broken bones, going over her so, thoroughly that her moans turned to giggles.

"Not there!" she spluttered, pushing our hands away from her ribs. "It's my leg, you idiots"

We had planned on treating her for a broken femur but as a search among the trees only resulted in short branches for splints. We switched our diagnosis to a broken tibia. As we worked clumsily with splints and bandages, tying and retying, a group of children dropped their bicycles at the roadside and wandered over to watch. They stood there gaping, apparently taken in by our performance. No one thought, to enlighten them and no one noticed when they left. By the time everyone had tried their skill on Nancy's leg, it was beginning to feel as if it had really received an injury.

"For heaven's sake get me out of these strappings!" she complained, "or I'll be a cripple for life".

After that we went on to treat each other for sprained ankles, broken collar bones and fractured skulls until we reached saturation point and started to roll up our bandages in a leisurely way, preparatory to leaving or home.

Suddenly Dorrie said:

"Good heavens, that looks like the station cab."

Sure enough, the old black cab had pulled up in the roadway, and a lady and gentleman were getting out.

"Oh gosh. Its mum and dad", said Nancy and Jane together. Quite concerned, they ran to meet their parents, who most have been greatly relieved to find Nancy running freely on two sound legs. the news had reached them, through the children who had watched our first aid efforts that Nancy had fallen from a ledge at Invercraig Castle and broken her leg. They had immediately summoned the station cab and urged the cabby to let here "post haste". "

"That poor old horse." said Mrs Groves. "I don't think it's ever had to move so fast or go so far..... Oh! Well, dad", she continued, "We've



always promised the girls a ride in the station cab, so this can be it. They can come home with us now”.

Early in the holidays Dorrie and I had had our first experience of guide camp and this had fired us with the urge to go camping on our own. We hoped to put our experience and equipment to good use but be spared all the parades, duties, inspections and regimentation of a guide camp. My mother was again persuaded to attend an auction, this time to obtain an old bell tent, and under its rather threadbare canvas we spent the last week of the holidays (along with a school friend of Dorrie's) in a corner of a field by an old mill. Our cooking equipment consisted of a temperamental primus stove, a frying pan and billie, tin cutlery and a few enamel dishes. For light we had an old hurricane lamp, and the neighbouring farm provided us with straw to stuff our paillasses. We drew water from the river, fetched milk and eggs from the farm and went native. The primitive life, we decided, was for us. This did not prevent us pedalling four miles to "Balrowan" for a good square meal now and again. Once we returned to find that some boys had undone the guy ropes and the tent had collapsed. Cows had trampled over our gear and left their "cards".

One day it rained and by evening water was dripping through holes in the canvas. Late that night my father arrived in the car to take us home, but we had dug ourselves in quite snugly, by then, using extra ground sheets as bed covers and lay dozing to the sound of water splashing into bowls and buckets around our beds. We refused to budge. Next morning the sun was shining again.

As usual, Wendy was enjoying her own ploys, quite independent of her big sisters. Some friends with a daughter of about Wendy's age were visiting us during the holidays and Wendy took Susie under her wing and showed her all her favourite haunts. One morning they visited the harbour and spotted my father talking to the skipper of the pilot boat which was just casting off. My father waved excitedly to the girls.

"Hey, girls, here's your chance if you want a trip to the city. Mr Downie here is just leaving.....That's all right with you, isn't it, John?" he asked.

"Oh, aye, nan bother, James" said Mr Downie, "but make it snappy for I've got to be off" _

Wendy didn't have to be asked twice and was aboard in a flash. Susie hung back. "I'd rather not thanks", she said, eyeing the big waves beyond the breakwater. '

Well, I'm going, anyway", said Wendy who never missed an opportunity even if it meant leaving her friend standing on the wharf.

"Weren't you sick?" we asked hours afterwards when she had returned.

"Oh, yes, her breakfast had come up right away but she had felt fine after that", she said.

"Weren't you a bit frightened chugging around that rocky coast for nearly two hours?"

"It was terrific", she had replied.

She had sat in the stern and sung every sea song she could think of - "Over the Sea to Skye", "A Life on the Ocean Wave", "Blow the Man Down", and then she had recited "The Wreck of the Hesperus", as much as she knew.

"That would be cheery", Dorrie commented.

Bit by bit we heard the whole story. It was only after the pilot had off-loaded her at the city wharf that it had occurred to her that she still had to get home and that she had no money for her bus or train fare. She'd never been in the city on her own before but she had found her way from the harbour to the main street and entered the first bank she saw, a large imposing building, and asked at the enquiry desk if she could see the manager. The girl had given her an odd look but in due course she had been shown into an office where a large man sat behind a large desk.

"Well, what can I do for you, young lady?" he had asked, and she and proceeded to tell him where she had come from, that she had come down the coast by boat and that she had no money for her fare home.

Her father was James Scott of W. & J. Scott, Fishcurers. He was an important man in the town, and if the manager would kindly advance her half a crown, her father could be depended on to repay it. The manager had behaved rather peculiarly, blowing his nose frequently and wiping his glasses, but she had left the Bank of Scotland with her half-a-crown, no doubt out of the manager's own pocket. She had found her way to the bus depot and had a long wait for a bus.

Meanwhile my mother was getting more and more worried. "You really should have more sense, James" she said, "letting a child off on her own like that, and she can't have a bean on her. However will she get home?"

"Leave it to Wendy", said my father. "She'll manage. You'll see" and of course he had been right.

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CHAPTER 11

A CHANGE OF SCENE

When my mother was more than normally provoked by her three daughters she would exclaim, with her voice rising on the last syllable,

'Now, look you here, you, I'll smack your bot-toms'" "I

"Indeed to goodness! Did you ev-er!" we would say, and dissolve into laughter because the Welsh inflexions in my mother's voice always became more pronounced when she was heated, and also because we had never had our bottoms smacked in our lives.

"Away outside with you, then, and torment Car-los", she'd say, taking a mock swipe at us.

In contrastin the rather guttural speech of our north eastern corner, my mother spoke with a gentle blend of Welsh and highland Scots. This was the result of a childhood in South Wales, where her parents had moved from the highland village, presumably to secure a better living for their eight children, My mother was a young woman when the family returned to their native Caithness, where her time was divided between assisting as a teacher in village schools, and helping in her father's bakery. Shortly after her return to Scotland she received a visit from a rejected but persistent suitor, one Owen Edwards, a young, unordained Welsh minister who made the long journey through Britain by train and finally in an open brake, to reach her home and persuade her to change her mind. In a highly emotional state he used all his Welsh oratory to no avail and made the weary journey home with his mission unaccomplished. It must have been a harrowing experience for my mother.

Some time later, when she was spending a week's holiday with relations in a coastal village near our town. She and my father met at on annual outing, and the attraction was mutual. They managed two more meetings during that week but before my mother left for home they had reached an understanding and my father hastened north shortly after on an early model motor bike to meet her parents and obtain their approval of their engagement. Though they corresponded regularly afterwards they saw no more of each other until the day of

their wedding. My father and his brother had arrived the previous day, on the same primitive motor cycle, but tradition decreed that the betrothed couple should not see each other on that day. My mother was in a complete panic by then.

"Oh, heavens, I can't possibly go through with it!" she wailed, "I can't even remember what he looks like: " But the marriage took place as arranged and a happier partnership could not have taken place this side of heaven.

Meanwhile, Owen Edwards, having heard of the impending marriage, made another pilgrimage north, to take a last lingering look at his love, bearing with him a huge, elaborately framed picture of my mother as a wedding present. He had had the picture enlarged, in colour, from a treasured photograph, and it was quite a faithful likeness except that the eyes had been coloured brown instead of blue, which must surely bear out the maxim that love is blind. Owen Edwards arrived late, to find that the bird had already flown the nest, and when my grandparents refused to reveal her whereabouts he left the portrait with them and dejectedly took his leave. On the train he fell into conversation with a fellow passenger who belonged to our district and knew my father well, and who quite innocently gave Owen Edwards all the information he had been seeking.

"Poor Kitty:" he said in a breaking voice. "She's gone and married a fishman when she might have had a manse"

For a long time after this the new bride kept her dours locked in coc he should turn up on the doorstep, but apparently he had finally accepted defeat, for he never did appear. The portrait eventually found its way down to "Balrowan" where it became quite a conversation piece at the poor donor's expense.

The natural love of music in my mother's family had been well nourished during their long stay in Wales. All sang well, my Aunt Joan being an eisteddfod gold medallist, and all played some musical instrument. Between them they formed a family orchestra and in an amateur capacity played at local gatherings. Grandpa Gair, a staunch pillar of the Free Church of Scotland had a fine rich voice which could be heard every Sunday as he led the church singing in his role of precentor. The Free Church had no use for organs.

During frequent visits to our maternal grandparents we would join the Sunday trek along the winding road which climbed steeply to the far end of the village where the church was situated. We'd mount the steps to the family pew in a narrow gallery, to join a wide assortment of uncles, aunts and cousins. From there we would look down on the venerable figure of my grandfather with his wide brow and snowy beard, and feel a certain pride as he sent the first words of a hymn or psalm ringing through the church. Wendy would be bobbing in her seat.,

"I want to go down and sing with my Granpa", she would persist in aloud whisper, only to be restrained by a firm hand, and Dorrie and I would smother our giggles at the thought of the chubby Wendy adding toneless notes to the melodious ones of Grandpa Gair.

The great oven in my Grandfather's bakery was also a source of delight, We would stand patiently waiting for the heavy iron doors to be opened, to be greeted by the rich smell of newly baked bread and the sight of my Uncle removing the golden crusted loaves one by one with a sort of long handled spatula. Sometimes he'd toss us a lump of dough and a metal mould and let us try our hand at turning out the flat, round shapes which would be baked into farthing biscuits.

If we were lucky enough to be visiting during the annual bringing in of the peats, (a traditional outing), we would join the entire family, young and old, as it set off in the bakery's horse-drawn van and borrowed carts over rough country tracks to the moors where the peats had already been cut and stacked to dry. Delicious steak and kidney pies had been prepared in the bakery for the occasion and every member of the family brought his or her own contribution to the picnic. Everyone, down to the littlest, did his share towards the loading of the peats, and when the carts were all stacked high the party squeezed into any remaining space and in good voice and high spirits set off for home. There was still the wearying job of of unloading and stacking the peats which would provide fuel for the coming winter.

Our Grandparents, Uncles and Aunts all led busy lives, leaving us free to roam at will on expeditions of discovery. There were visits to the little harbour with its fleet of small fishing vessels, so different from our steam drifters, and beyond the harbour was the tinker's cave, with its dark, gaping entrance, We always approached this with caution as it was often the haunt of gypsies and wandering tinkers.

Our favourite haunt, however, was without doubt the Strath. Over and over again we found ourselves being drawn to this enchanted valley that followed the meandering course of the river, nearly to the sea. Hazelnut trees and birches grew in profusion along its bank; tangling here and there with wild roses and gorse, their delicate and heady perfumes mingling. The Strath was usually deserted. The crofts were few and scattered. Occasionally we would encounter a lone angler, or find a couple of boys stooped silently over a deep pool, looking for a flash of silver. Apart from the medley of bird songs and the rush of water in stoney places, a strange listening silence existed all around, as if in the midst of solitude, we were not alone. Our natural, bounding exuberance seemed to desert us here, as we wandered in sort of dream, picking a few hazel catkins, looking for wildflowers, crossing the river on stepping stones and recrossing higher up stream. Further on again we came to a suspension bridge which bounced as we crossed it and kept on bouncing, and there, on a high mound where the river forked was the Picts House, almost hidden in a clump of bushes.

Hesitantly, with Dorrie taking the lead, we stooped low to make our way through the narrow entrance into the beehive room and gazed in awe as we always did at the rounded walls of this ancient chamber. No mortar or supports had been used in its formation two thousand years before. The stones had been skilfully overlapped to meet in a circular stone above. The earthen floor reeked of antiquity. We found ourselves talking it whispers, lest we disturbed the spirits of what may perhaps have been our ancestors. We felt watchful eyes upon us. Feeling like intruders we silently made our way out through the thick walls of the doorway.

Back in the daylight we hurried on our way, the mood still upon us. Even the discovery of a clump of blueberry bushes and a stop to eat our fill, did not relieve it. On we went over tufty grass and heather until suddenly, as we crested a small hill, we startled and were startled by, a whole colony of rabbits. The very meadow seemed alive as hundreds of white tails bobbed their way to cover. With this surprise return to the land of the living the spell was broken. So great was our relief that our laughter rang stridently through the strath and turning, we set off for home.

No other place visited in my childhood had the haunting charm of the Strath, or the power it had to tantalize the memory over the years. Nearly half a century later on a visit to Scotland, I found this gentle valley neglected and overgrown, the suspension bridge was rusted and unsafe, the Picts' House more obscured than ever in a jungle of scrub, but the old enchantment of the Strath was still there, stronger than ever.

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CHAPTER 12

A FINAL FLING

"It's snowing. Its snowing."

There was something quite magical about waking to a white world. The first snowfall of the season found us, bare feet on the linoleum, noses against the window, peering through the drifting flakes at the transformed landscape. The leafless trees looked like pale ghosts, festoons of lace hung from the hedgerows and even Baird's homely farm steadings looked like something straight out of a Christmas card.

The arrival of winter carried more of a promise than a threat to us, as we contemplated snowball fights, sledging, slides and Christmas just round the corner. The disadvantages had to be faced, however. Reluctantly we greased and oiled our bicycles, our faithful steeds, and put them away in the garage to hibernate. From then on we covered the long road to school on foot, wearing wellingtons or our sturdy school shoes according to the weather. When the ground was frozen over we made sure we wore the latter, because from the top of "the brae" to the part where the gradient eased there was always a most stupendous slide. Most of the young folk in Belview terrace lived at the lower end but they climbed the brae to work their way down the footpath until it was like glass. On our way to school we came sweeping down it, one after the other, gathering momentum as we went, often falling over each other where the slide petered out into the gutter. Up we'd climb for another turn and then, at the risk of being late for school, a final one. We knew these pleasures would be short lived, for the brae's" residents, mainly elderly, were afraid to put a foot outside their front gates, and would be throwing rough salt over the ice to melt it overnight. But with the next frost we would have another slide going.

Snow had its hazards for us too. As we turned the corner into the school street we were likely to be bombarded by a succession of tightly packed snowballs from boys hiding in a laneway with a supply of prepared ammunition. These could give a stinging blow on the cheek or the back of the neck and taken unawares, we were obliged to make a humiliating dash for the school gates with our school bags held up for protection. On the other hand we entered wholeheartedly

into an after-school battle of the sexes, a good-natured melee where the snowballs flew hard and fast and the girls gave as good as they got.

As the nights closed in and Christmas approached, the familiar round of parties began, and continued almost nightly until the New Year. The Station cab was in constant demand, and the cabbie, muffed up to the eyebrows, would make a sort of a milk run, picking up children along the route until the cab was packed. We'd file out at the appointed house and be shown up to the spare bedroom to dump our coats and lacy hand shawls on the big bed and replace our heavy footwear with our party slippers which we had brought in drawstring bags. Then in our velvet dresses and unnatural curls we'd join the other young folk among the holly, paper decorations and chinese lanterns to participate in an entirely predictable programme.

I envied Dorrie who now attended parties in the Royal Hotel Ballroom, a venue frequently hired by parents so that their elder children could spend the evening in dancing. Hopefully I would be included in these next year. Meanwhile there was nothing for it but "Twirl the Platter" "Charades" and "forfeits", interspersed with familiar party pieces by the talented and the precocious, and the inevitable "Postman's Knock". For some reason, "Postman's Knock" was regarded as the climax of the evening, but not by me. When I heard my name called, I would rise self-consciously and slink out the door blushing from the knees upwards, to receive a hit-or-miss peck, wherever it happened to land, from an equally embarrassed youth. Then was faced with the ordeal of knocking on the door to name the boy of any choosing, a difficult decision. To select someone I thought, rather nice was too self-revealing, to ask for someone I disliked was out of the question. I usually made a compromise somewhere between the two, and stood with my eyes on my party slippers as the youth approached and delivered a juicy smack somewhere above my left eyebrow. Then I was dashing back into the room looking as if I had been ravished.

Sometimes Nancy and I would slip each other the wink and disappear out the door when we knew "Postman's Knock" was coming up. We'd sneak up to the bedroom, with its big bed piled high with coats and wraps, and worm our way through the flotilla of wellington boots and galoshes arrayed around the bed like boats around a jetty. There, under

the bed, with our noses almost touching the carpet, we lay chuckling and whispering until the music started up and we knew another item was commencing.

At the end of the evening, bloated with sausage rolls, meringues, Christmas cake and lemonade, we'd receive our party bags of sweeties at the door, say our "Thank Yous" politely and pile back into the cab for the homeward journey.

Then it was our turn to give a Christmas party and we would busy ourselves beforehand making decorations and helping my mother to fill the fruit mince pies and beat up the cream for the trifles, but the big night at "Balrowan" was New Year's Eve. Then the doors were open to friends. relations, country callers, casual acquaintances and not a few strangers. People came and went in a wild, rollicking evening when the whisky flowed freely and inhibitions went overboard.

In our younger days Hogmanay was purely for grown-ups and we were sent off to bed before the festivities got under-way. determined not to miss anything we would creep to the top of the stairs and listen to tire babble of voices, the great bursts of laughter and lusty singing round the piano. It was the one night when Carlos kept his distance, preferring to curl up alongside us on the stairs rather than being buffeted below.

Becoming bolder we would move down to sit on the bottom step, intent on sharing the fun. It was easy to identify the familiar voices, the slow drawl of Alick Michie, my father's closest ally in devilment, the infectious laughter of his lively wife, Joan. And Brenda Indles' bright and witty banter as she parried my father's ragging. She and her pal, Marjory Millar, both school teachers and great sports, were among our closest friends. There were fishcurer friends of my former and their wives, my favourite uncles, Aunt Sarah and a host of others.

With our ears cocked in case we missed anything, snatches of conversation would come our way, such as Brenda Indies saying:

"That's five pairs of gloves you owe us, James". (A gift of gloves was a penalty for having been caught under the mistletoe). "There's Marjory and me and Joan and, let's see - yes, Mabel".

"And don't forget me." another voice would pipe up.

"Yes, and you, Polly", went on Brenda.

"That's five pairs now, James. We'll be counting on them".

"On, aye, Brenda", there was no mistaking my father's voice. "I will be delighted to honour my obligations, but I think I will introduce a new custom and give you stockings instead",

"Why stockings?"

Well then we would be needing to have another party to try them on and see that they fitted right".

"A grand idea, James", this was Alick Michie. "But you'll niver be managing all that on your ain. I'll hae to come along and gie you a hand".

And so the banter and nonsense wcruld go on until we were discovered, given a piece of cake and shoood upstairs.

But now it was another Hogmanay and we and our friends were as much a part of it as our elders. Visitors kept arriving, wiping the snow from their feet, While the grown-ups had their drams we drank ginger pop and strawberry soda. The rafters resounded as we joined my mother round the piano to sing the old traditional numbers like "The Road to the Isle", "Bonnie Mary of Argyll", "Comin' Through the Rye" and "Will Ye No Gone Back Again". Old yarns were told again and laughed at as heartily. My father couldn't resist a practical joker or two at the expense of some newcomer. The rest of the company had experienced them in their turn.

People came and went. Drinks were replenished, food passed round. The parlour was thick with tobacco smoke, peat smoke, unrestrained mirth and the babble of loosened tongues,. but our feet were itching to dance.

Shortly before midnight one of the bigger boys said:

"Mrs Scott, would you play us an eightsome reel?"

"Of course I will, Sandy. There's ,just about time before twelve o'clock"

"We'll need a bit of room", said borne, surveying the crowded parlour.

"Hey, why don't we dance on the lawn?" suggested someone. "

"Oh, yes, come on - in the snow", we all shouted, and as my mother struck a few opening chords, partners were grabbed at random and eight of us careered out into the chilly night.

Snow lay thick on the lawn, throwing up a pale light, Added to this we had the twinkling stars and the yellow glow from the casements. The piano was barely audible but the music was all there in our heads,

"On, gin I were where the Gadie rins,
Where the Gadie gins, where the Gadie rins,
Oh, gin I were where the Gadie rins
At the back o' Bennachie"

and with a skirl we were off, circling to the left, circling to the right and sending the snow flying. Then the first lady was in the centre, setting to her partner, swinging, setting to the opposite gentleman, swinging, then the three skipping through a figure of eight, circling again, circling. back - snow in our faces, snow in our shoes, on we went, each dancing to each other in turn. We were swung off our feet as the dance took its own mad course. The "heuching" grew louder as our steps grew wilder, and then the drifters in the harbour started hooting, and went on hooting, their deep insistent notes carrying clearly in the frosty air. This imoment had an excitement all of its own. With sodden feet and glowing cheeks we hurried in to join the circle and clasp hands for a lusty "Auld Lang Syne", followed on by handshakes and good wishes all around.

In the midst of this the door bell rang sharply, and again, and again, and when its summons was answered in strode Alick Michie who had slipped out the back way and come round to the front door, to be our "first foot". With a bottle of whisky under one arm and a cabbage straight from our garden under the other he came in to loud cheers. A "first foot" must never come empty-handed and a dark-haired man was believed to bring luck. Glasses were charged to drink the toast, proposed by my father to "A Happy New Year", and then it was Allick Michie's turn to hold the floor, as everyone stood with glasses poised:

"To 'Balrowan'", he said, "and lang may her lum reek".
"To 'Balrowan' To 'Balrowan' 'To 'Balrowan' "

