

A
PRINCESS
IN TATTERS

ELSIE J.
OXENHAM



COLLINS

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IN TATTERS



ELSIE J. OXENHAM

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A PRINCESS IN TATTERS



“Oh!” said Eilidh, “what a dear wee coat”

A
PRINCESS IN TATTERS

BY
ELSIE JEANETTE OXENHAM

Author of "Goblin Island."

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CHAPTER I. CONCERNING A WEDDING PRESENT.

The silence of hard work filled the studio. The painter stood at his easel putting finishing touches to a portrait. From time to time he glanced at the child sitting stiffly in an arm-chair, and frowned or nodded as he critically scanned his work.

She was very young, so he could not expect a long sitting, and had to make the most of his opportunity. A dainty little maiden, with fair hair, pink cheeks, and a little round face, she made a pretty picture, and he had produced an excellent likeness. Clad all in white, silk and lace and frills, with a big hat and tiny white shoes, Miss Iris Munro, though only thirteen months old, already accepted admiration from every one as her rightful due.

Her French maid, Lucienne, sat close by, ready to coax her back to good humour if she should grow restless. She sat by the window, looking down on the crowded main road, and watching its hurrying crowds, its cabs, carriages, and carts, and the endless procession of bicycles and buses. But Lucienne had brought Iris there several times while the picture was in progress, and had soon made friends with the painter, and when Lucienne was among friends she was never silent very long.

For a time she respected Mr. Raby's request for peace while he was working, but it was tiresome to sit there silent when there was so much to be said. For a while she conversed in French with a black Pomeranian, who sat by her on the window-sill. But Sambo's replies were difficult of translation, and referred chiefly to other dogs down in the street, or errand boys with baskets. Lucienne was interested in even more exciting matters, and at last her patience came to an end. She tripped across the room to look at the painting, by way of opening the conversation.

"Oh, but it is sharming—*de*-lightful! It is perfect! It could not be better—eh, Monsieur? Madame will surely be enraptured when she comes."

"It's not Madame's way to be enraptured over anything," Raby remarked. "But I must say I think it's pretty good myself. I can't do much more to it. Suppose we give her a rest. Have a sponge-cake, Iris. You really are very good for a kiddie."

Iris accepted a cake graciously, and proceeded to scatter crumbs over her dainty frock, while Lucienne turned eagerly to Raby.

"And ze wedding to-morrow, Monsieur? Is all complete—ready? Has Miss Rosamond received any more most sharming presents? Ah, she is fortunate, truly! Ze ornaments!—ze jewels!—ze exquisite china!—Ah, it is well for a bride when she has such friends."

"She's had some very pretty things, certainly. People have been very good to her."

"Madame she said to me, 'You will take Miss Iris round to see Miss Raby, Lucienne, and she will show her ze presents her sister has received.' Zey are most sharming—*de*-lightful!"

Raby laughed. "Much Iris cares about the presents! But Isabel has been taking quite a sisterly interest in Rosamond's wedding. Ah! Some one at the door downstairs!" as the Pomeranian rushed across the room, barking excitedly. "Perhaps it's Isabel herself. She said she'd be round to-day to see the picture. And I expect Rosamond and Captain Archie to look in during the afternoon."

"Ze bride and bridegroom? Ah, zat is sharming—*de*-lightful! Zen we shall see zem once again."

"Ah!" said Raby. "It's neither. It's Mollie. Good old girl! I knew she wouldn't fail me. Well, my dear! Tired out?"

"Well, you see, I never managed a wedding before," Mollie said smiling, as she drew off her gloves. "And of course Rosamond's far too excited for anything."

"I hope, for the Captain's sake, she'll sober down a little once they're fairly off to-morrow."

"Oh, she'll be serious enough to-morrow. Now, what shall I do? I'm delighted to be your housekeeper for once, Bernard."

Mollie Raby bent to kiss Iris and give her another cake, spoke to Lucienne, and patted Sambo. Then she took off her hat and smoothed her hair and set to work.

She lit a spirit-lamp and put the kettle on to boil. From the cupboard came cups and saucers, and in the basket she had brought were flowers and dainty tablecloths. Lucienne sprang up to help, and they cleared a small table and laid it for afternoon tea, while Raby watched and smoked and made remarks.

"Handy to have girls about at times. When it comes to tea, sisters are a necessity. You look nice playing with a tea-pot, Mollie. I'd have felt like a fish out of water alone. But I suppose Isabel will expect tea."

"Of course. How is the picture getting on?" and Mollie crossed the room to look. "Oh, Bernard! It's just splendid! Isabel will be pleased."

"Hope so."

"She'll want you to paint Baby too."

"I'd like to paint Madame herself *and* Baby! The young lady is rather young to sit for her portrait alone."

"Six weeks yesterday, isn't that it, Lucienne?"

"Yes, six weeks yesterday, Miss Raby. Ah, she is a beautiful baby!—a darling!—a pet!"

"What's her name to be?" said Raby carelessly, while Mollie stood gazing at the portrait.

"I do not know. I sink zey have not yet decided. Madame, I believe, says one name, and Monsieur Munro, he says anoizzer, and so you see——!"

"I'll back Isabel to get her way in the matter," Raby laughed.

Mollie gave him a congratulatory clap on the back.

"You're a genius, old boy. I always knew it, and Iris's picture has removed my last lingering doubt. I never doubted the fact, mind you, but only whether the world would recognise it."

"And you think it will? I hope your judgment is correct, my child."

"It always is. No one could help being delighted with that portrait. Send it to the Academy, and you'll have heaps of orders."

An outburst of barking from Sambo announced another arrival, and Lucienne, glancing out of the window, said, "It is Madame. I see ze motor-car."

Isabel Munro had been Isabel Raby before her marriage with the American millionaire two years ago. Munro was, of course, a Scotsman, but he had come from the United States, and beyond the one great fact of his wealth, and the knowledge that he had made his money out West, no one knew very much about him. He had risen from the ranks, as any one could see. His wife had done her best to rub off his corners and polish the manners which were at times undeniably not those of her own position in life.

Her sisters, Mollie and Rosamond—step-sisters in reality—agreed that she secretly looked down on him for the occasional awkwardnesses which betrayed him, and they blamed her in

her turn because she had married him for his money. But it had been a fair bargain. She, though not rich, was well-born. His marriage with her helped to strengthen the position to which his wealth was the first step. Both were well satisfied with the arrangement, Isabel the more so, since her father's death soon after her marriage left Mollie and Rosamond dependent on their brother, and Bernard, though with great hopes for the future, was finding his chosen path a slow road to fortune.

Mollie looked up eagerly as Mrs. Munro entered.

"Isabel, just come and see Iris's picture! It's the best thing Bernard has done yet. I think he's best at portraits, you know, but Rosamond always sticks up for his landscapes."

Isabel Munro gazed critically at the picture. Bernard waited anxiously, and Mollie paused, with the tea-pot in one hand and a spoonful of tea in the other, and watched her face intently.

"Yes, on the whole, it's not at all bad—for you, Bernard," was the condescending verdict at last. "One or two little points might be improved, perhaps, but on the whole it's very satisfactory."

Mollie drew a long breath of relief.

"Good! More than that no one could expect," she murmured, and proceeded to make the tea.

"Think Mr. Munro will like it?" Raby inquired anxiously.

"Oh, he'll like it, of course! Duncan likes anything that makes a pretty picture," Isabel said carelessly. "And you could hardly have painted Iris without making a pretty picture of her."

She looked round for a seat, and Raby lifted a pile of sketches out of a big chair.

"There, Madame! That's the kind of chair you like—something big and stately. Now Mollie looks best on a footstool, or on the fender or hearth-rug."

"What a shame!" Mollie cried, laughing. "And what about Rosamond?"

"One expects to see Rosamond on the edge of the table, or the arm of the sofa. Sambo wants to speak to you, Isabel."

Isabel pushed the Pomeranian away with the tip of her dainty shoe.

"Don't come to me! I don't like you. Keep away now! I hate dogs that are always jumping up."

"Oh, I like it! I take it as a compliment," said Mollie. "How is Baby to-day, Isabel?"

"She gets more like Iris every day. I hoped she would take after me. They would make such a pretty pair if one was fair and one dark. But she has Iris's eyes, and pink and white complexion, and her hair is almost white at present. I'm so glad neither of them is carroty! They take after their father, of course, but well, not too far."

"And what is her name to be?"

Isabel frowned and hesitated. She glanced at Lucienne, but Lucienne, Iris, and Sambo had retired to the window-seat, and were counting the different coloured omnibuses, and apparently paying no attention to their elders.

"We haven't decided on her name yet," she said, with more than a touch of vexation in her voice. "In fact, we can't agree about it. It's very absurd. I want to call her Helen. It was my mother's name, and has always been a favourite of mine. But Duncan won't hear of it. He gives no reason, but simply says he doesn't like the name and won't have it. It's too silly."

"If he's made up his mind, you'll have to call her something else. Helen must have some unpleasant association for him that we know nothing about."

"Then I shall call her Daffodil."

"Isabel!"

"I shall. He won't like it, of course, but he says I may call her anything I like but Helen. He hates fanciful names. Iris was my choice, of course, and he didn't approve of it at all. If I can't get my own way—just half a cup, please!—'Iris and Daffodil' will be rather pretty. Don't you think so?"

"I don't care for such very odd names. But they are pretty, in a way, of course."

"You might call her *Polyanthus*, or *Gladiolus*," Raby suggested.

Isabel turned from him impatiently. "Has Rosamond had any more presents, Mollie?"

"Here she is to tell you herself," Raby said, as Sambo rushed to the door with shrill staccato barks. "That dog's as good as an electric bell. I always know when there's someone at the door, though it's down three flights of stairs."

Isabel put her fingers to her ears. "I cannot stand that piercing bark! It goes through and through my head."

"Ah, ze bride and bridegroom! Zat is sharming—*de*-lightful!" cried Lucienne softly, as the door opened.

Rosamond Raby was very like her elder sister, with dark eyes and dark brown hair, tall and slightly made, dressed like Mollie, too, in a dark skirt and pretty silk blouse. But, for the time, Rosamond was the more striking-looking of the two—her face glowing with happiness, her eyes bright with excitement and anticipation. Mollie's preparations for the morrow had tired her, and she was quieter and not so bright as usual. Captain Archie was a fit match for Rosamond—taller than she and a few years older, dark, with a sunburnt face which told of recent service abroad.

When the greetings were over, and Raby had received hearty congratulations on his picture, Rosamond turned to him eagerly.

"Bernard, what about my picture? My wedding-present, you know. What is it to be? And when are you going to paint it for me?"

"As soon as this is off my hands. Name your subject, my dear. Landscape, I suppose? I shall have to get away for some sketching. Shall it be Wales again? That thing you liked so much of mountains and mist and water—would you care for one like that?"

"There's something I want very much. You'll give it me, won't you, Bernard?"

"Anything in reason you shall have, my child, under the circumstances."

"That's very nice of you." She perched on the edge of the big table with Sambo in her arms, and spoke eagerly. "It's just this. I want a picture of Loch Ruel, in the Highlands."

"I never heard of it. Scotland's a long way off, Rose."

"Not so very much farther than Wales. I must have my picture, Bernard! It's the loveliest place in the British Isles."

"But, my dear girl," he said laughing, "where is Loch Ruel? And how am I to get there? And what put it into your head?"

"Lady Avery. I met her at Isabel's last night, and she told me about it. She has taken a house on Loch Ruel for the summer, and is going there almost at once with little Lord Clarence. She asked us to pay her a visit before we settle down. I told her you were going to paint me a picture, and that I wanted it to be of hills and water, like those Welsh landscapes that were so fine, and she said, 'Coax him up to Scotland and make him paint Loch Ruel. He couldn't have anything finer.' I said I was sure you would do it for me without any coaxing."

She looked at him persuasively, and he laughed.

"It's a long way——"

"You can make heaps of sketches, and work them up when you get home. They'll be sure to sell if it's such wonderful scenery, and you'll have a splendid holiday, and I'll get my picture as well. You might take Mollie with you. She'd enjoy it ever so much, and she's needing a holiday."

"I couldn't go till the end of the term, you know," said Mollie quickly. "And I'm going up to Yorkshire to the Estyngs in August." For in spite of Bernard's remonstrances, and Isabel's rather grudging offers of help, Mollie had sturdily insisted on earning her own living, so as to lessen her brother's burdens.

"And how am I to get there, Rose?" Bernard asked.

"You take the boat to Darmidale, and then——"

"But where on earth is Darmidale?"

"You take the train—oh, how he made me jump!" as Sambo broke into furious barking again.

"Another visitor! This is most unusual! Mollie's tea-pot will be running dry. Why, it's the brother-in-law himself! We are honoured indeed."

Isabel raised her eyebrows in surprise at sight of her husband, and little Iris gave a cry of delight as she recognised her father. Duncan Munro—big, red-bearded, and with hair turning gray—did not greatly care for artists and their surroundings, and had never visited the studio before. But he had heard that the portrait was nearly finished, and had come to see it.

Raby led him to the easel and waited anxiously. But there was no doubt as to Munro's pleasure.

"It is excellent—excellent! A perfect likeness! You have caught her expression exactly. It is charming. Don't you think so, Isabel?"

"Yes, it's really not bad at all."

"Not bad! It's splendid!" Rosamond cried indignantly.

"Sharming—*de*-lightful!" murmured Lucienne, from the window-seat.

"Bernard is going to paint me a picture for our house, Duncan. It's to be a landscape—a view of Loch Ruel, in Scotland. I don't suppose——"

"Loch Ruel?" Munro exclaimed, and glanced quickly at Raby. "Have you been there, then?"

"Not yet. Rosamond is trying to send me, but I'm not sure—it's a long way, Rose——"

"Oh, Bernard! You promised——"

"It is a long way," Munro assented quietly, "and it's really not worth the journey. There's nothing to see when you get there. If you go you'll grudge the time and expense, Raby. There are far finer places nearer home. Try Wales. Or if it must be Scotland, try Loch Katrine, or there are some lovely spots in Perthshire. Loch Ruel—tuts! There's nothing there worth a twenty-four hours' journey. It's very dreary and out-of-the-way, and always raining."

"H'm! Doesn't sound attractive, certainly."

"Then you know Loch Ruel, and Darmidale and Glenaroon?" Rosamond demanded, turning sharply on Munro.

He hesitated, then said slowly,

"I have been there, but no one would go twice. There's nothing to go for."

"But Lady Avery said——"

"Are you coming home now, Duncan?" asked Isabel, interrupting carelessly. "Lucienne, it is high time Iris was at home."

“Oui, Madame. Come, petite! Ah, it is sharming—*de*-lightful! she murmured again, casting a last glance at the portrait as she left the room.

“If you’ll take my advice you’ll not waste your time on Loch Ruel, Raby,” said Munro, as they parted. “It’s a sleepy primitive place, with no scenery to speak of.”

“But you’ll go all the same, won’t you, Bernard?” Rosamond cried, as the motor-car rolled away. “I don’t know what Duncan means. Both he and Lady Avery can’t be right, and her word is as good as his. Besides, she’s been there and she knows. One of them must be fibbing, though I can’t see why.”

Raby looked thoughtful. “One place is as good as another,” he said at last, “and I’ve never seen Scotland.—It’s possible to be too clever at times.—Yes, I’ll go to Loch Ruel, Rosamond.”

CHAPTER II. HE, SHE, AND IT.

He sat on a camp-stool on the shore, painting busily.

She crouched in the bracken on the bank above, and gazed at him.

It lay on the stones at his feet, and kept watch.

He sat up and looked at his painting, then glanced down the loch. He seemed only quiet and busy, but inwardly he was exulting in his discovery. This lonely nook was off the beaten track. He would paint it, and the world would learn from his picture that such a lovely spot was to be found.

The loch was a smooth, unbroken stretch, gleaming silver in the sun, dark with reflections near the shore. On his right the hills rose steep and rugged. Across the water the lower slopes were clothed with dense woods of feathery larches and sombre firs, but the rounded crests above were bare. The shining water between stretched away to the mouth of the loch, where, instead of the sea, rose the fiery purple hills of a great island, with a tiny green islet at their feet. Above the heathery crags were two twin mountain peaks, palest blue against the sky.

She was more interested in the painter than the painting. The loch, the hills, the peaks, were part of her life, but the arrival of a stranger was a rare event. She wondered when he had come, and why, where he was living, how long he would stay. He must have come yesterday, though she had not heard of it, for there was the morning steamer only leaving the pier now.

It lay, nose on paws, with one eye closed and one on the sea-gulls. A fish rose with a splash and sent widening ripples to the shore, and one black ear cocked watchfully. For *It* was a black Pomeranian, small and quick, with silky hair, upstanding ears, sharp nose, and bright, dark eyes.

He was not painting now, but doing something mysterious on the flat thing in his hand. She was curious, and crept nearer. Bare feet on grass tread very lightly, and she stood behind him, holding her breath, but undiscovered.

Horses' feet in the distance, a rumble along the road, the barking of dogs and tooting of a horn, and the Glenaroon coach bumped heavily past, with its scarlet-coated driver and crowd of tourists bound for the old church and castle up the glen.

It sprang up, barking excitedly. He turned quickly and looked into the little face peeping over his shoulder.

"By—Jove!" escaped him, and then she was gone.

He laughed, and went on with his painting. But he could not forget what he had seen. A lovely child's face, great, wistful, gray eyes, fair skin lightly tanned, and a cloud of sunny hair waving about cheeks and shoulders and nearly to her eyes. He tried to keep his mind to his work, and to think only of the trees, the colour of the heather, the gleam of the water. But he was conscious of a sudden new desire. What a picture she would make, with those great, shy eyes and all that tumbled, red-gold hair! He had come seeking no models but those of hill, and loch, and shore, but these already failed to satisfy them.

He rose abruptly. "Sambo, my boy, I'll leave you in charge. Watch, Sambo! Now, where shall I find her? I saw no cottages or farms, but she was a cottage child. I saw bare legs as she went up the bank. Did she think I'd bite, I wonder? I shall have to search for her. Well, she's worth it."

He sprang up the bank and strode off along the road. On the right hand lay shore and loch, on the left a rocky cliff, every cranny filled with fairy-like ferns or clinging heather. She was nowhere to be seen, but just in front the road turned a sharp corner. She might be among the trees beyond.

At the bend of the road the cliff on his left hand fell away in a steep bank, and here, on the hillside, stood a tiny white farm. It seemed to cling to the hill, so steep was the slope, and the ground all round was rocky and thinly covered with grass. Two hungry-looking cows were feeding in the bracken, and up on the hill were a score of sheep. Where the ground was level and rather less stony, were small fields, but it was a poor site for a farm, for the slope was steep from crest to waterline, and offered little hold for dwelling or cultivation.

But he did not glance twice at the forlorn little homestead. On the shore was a group of children. A little river—a broad “burn”—ran across the road after watering the farm, and streamed through the stones into the loch. Across the brown stream was a heathery knoll, and playing at the foot of this, among the stones, were half a dozen babies. All were dressed alike in scarlet frocks and blue pinafores, all had thin flaxen hair and bare heads and feet, all seemed about the same size. With them on the shore were some cocks and hens, pecking among the stones, and a couple of colliers asleep in the sun.

On the knoll among the heather sat his hoped-for model. Her hands were clasped round her knees, she was gazing out across the loch, a wistful look in her eyes. By her side sat a great sandy-coloured cat, watching the gulls wheeling and screaming over the water.

The painter sat down on a rock behind a screen of blackberry bushes, and pulled out his sketch-book. She sat quite still, paying no heed to the noisy babies playing by the burn-side. He was drawing her face, noting approvingly the curve of the little nose and chin and parted lips, but his eyes took in the details of her dress, and he drew his own conclusions.

A short blue skirt, much darned and patched, scarcely reached her brown knees. Over her shoulders, and crossed on her breast, was a fringed shawl of green and black tartan. Her neck was bare, save where the bright waves of hair fell heavily over it; arms, legs, and feet were brown with sun and wind.

“Belongs to folk who try to be tidy, but find it hard even to keep her decent.—What neat little hands and feet!—Lives at the farm, probably. If they have all these youngsters to provide for, it must be a hard fight. It looked a poor place.—They can’t all be one family; they’re all the same size. Perhaps my lady keeps a school.—Wonder what she’s dreaming about? ‘I want’—she’s saying—‘I want’—what? Ah!”

One of the scarlet babies had ventured too near the stream at last, and had fallen in. He sprang up, but the girl had the breathless child out before he had left the road, so he withdrew into cover again to watch. She shook the sobbing boy vigorously, then stumbled off up the bank with him in her arms, while the other five watched stolidly from the shore. She went towards the farm, and the painter, satisfied that he would find her now, went down the beach to speak to the scarlet tribe.

At sight of him they drew together in a frightened bunch, the biggest boy valiantly in front. The youngest baby stood up, anxiously but unsteadily, then plumped down on the stones for a rest.

“I want to know your sister’s name, young man?”

They gazed at him blankly. Three babies put their fingers in their mouths in preparation for a howl.

“Your big sister—who has just gone home with the baby—what is her name?”

The biggest boy, who looked about five years old, made some unintelligible remark, and the others stared vacantly.

"Heavens! Is it possible they don't understand English? Within half a day's journey of Glasgow? Then there's nothing for it but to follow her home."

He turned towards the farm. The five-year-old said a word to the next-in-age, which probably meant, "Don't let any more babies fall in the burn!" and sped off to give warning.

A stony road led up to the little farm. The buildings were thatched and whitewashed, and more or less out of repair. As he climbed the steep slope, a little figure rushed from the door of the nearest cottage and down the brae. He put out his hand to stop her, but she swerved aside and dived under his arm. He saw tears on her face and a red mark on one cheek, and thought it wiser to let her go. She was shaking with angry sobs, and he knew it would be useless to follow her. So he watched her dart up the road and out of sight, then turned to the farm again.

At the cottage door a woman met him. She was short and stout, with tired eyes and an always-worried look. Her skirt was turned up and her sleeves rolled past her elbows, and, like the children, she was barefoot.

Hoping that she at least spoke English, he said politely,

"Good-morning! I saw your little girl fall in the stream, and came to ask if she was hurt."

To his relief she answered, with a broad Highland accent,

"It iss a boy t'at will fall in the burn. He iss all right, I thank you, sir. It iss not the first time, whateffer. But it wass ferry wrong of Eilidh. She iss not careful at all."

"Eily? That is your eldest daughter, who was in charge of the little ones?"

"She iss not one of mine, inteet, sir, but she wass watching the weans—oh, yess!"

"And where does she live, may I ask? I want to see her parents."

"She hass none, sir. She will live here with us."

"Ah! Then it is you I must ask. I am an artist—my name is Raby—and I have come here to paint the loch and hills. I saw the little girl—Eily, did you say?—and would like to paint her. If you can spare her to sit to me, I will pay her for her time, of course."

The woman's anxious eyes brightened, and he guessed that she would be thankful for any help.

"Oh, I woul't be glad! But she hass not a good enough dress. You see, it hass been a ferry bad year, an' the sheep haf died an' the hay wass poor, and when my man went to the town to buy dresses for the weans there wass ferry little he could get, and——"

"I want her just as she is, please."

"Oh, then! I will be pleased, sir."

"And how soon can she come?"

"I ton't know where she hass gone to shust now. She ran off, and mebbe she will not come back till efening. She iss angry so quick, wheneffer she iss punished. She iss a good girl most times, iss Eilidh, but she iss careless wi' the bairns—oh, yess! You will understand how I wass angry, sir. It iss the washing day"—by way of apology for her bare feet and arms—"an' it iss hard work washing for so many, and hot too, whateffer! An' then Eilidh she lets wee Jimmy fall in the burn."

"It is trying, certainly. But it might have been worse. Eh, Jimmy?"

Jimmy, who had been hurried into a dry nightgown and wrapped in a plaid, stared at him stolidly, and the mother laughed.

"Bless you, sir, he ton't know a word of English. They will be learning that at the school, but they're no' shust big enough for that yet. 'Deed, I wish some o' them were! They only

speak the Gaelic. We will be talking that at home, you see.”

“But Eily? Doesn’t she speak English?”

“Oh, yess! She will go to the school this six month past—on the fine days. But it iss six mile to the school, and as far to come home, so you see—— And there are the babies to mind, whateffer! And shust now it iss the holiday.”

“Then will you send her to me this afternoon? I shall be on the shore, just where I was this morning. She saw me, so she’ll know.”

“Oh, yess, sir, that I will, if she hass come home, but——”

“Oh, she’ll surely come home to dinner!” said Raby, and presently strolled away back to his work and Sambo.

CHAPTER III. IN HIDING.

Raby sat impatiently waiting on the shore, but Eilidh did not appear. He was tired of the loch and hills, and hungry for his new model.

"Eily!—a form of Eileen, I suppose.—Helen! I'd like to see her properly dressed. I'd like to see her grown up. But she doesn't know how to keep an appointment. I shall have to look her up."

He rose and stood looking down the loch. "Now, what did Duncan Munro mean? He did his best to put me off coming to Darmidale. I wonder why? For all his talk was rot, you know, Sambo. The loch is just perfect. The water—the hills—the heather—those splendid trees—all reflected—it's magnificent. Munro was talking utter rubbish. Wonder why? As for the rain he promised—nonsense! Tommy-rot! Wasn't it, Sambo? I would like to know——! Now, I wonder what this young lady has to say for herself."

Mrs. Maclachlan at the farm greeted him with troubled face. The child had not come home, and might not appear till late. More than once, when in disgrace, she had stayed away all day. They did not know where to find her, or they would send——

Here the five-year-old baby tugged at her skirt and gave some information in Gaelic, and her face cleared.

"Jock will be saying he can show you where she iss hiding, sir. If you woult go with him ——"

"Certainly! Come along, Jock!"

"Will it be troubling you if the weans go too, sir? I cannot haf them apout the kitchen."

He laughed. "Let them come, by all means, if it's not too far."

The youngest baby chose to stay at home, as he could only just stand alone. But the five elders—ranging in age from two to five—led the way down the stony brae and along the road.

Beyond the tiny fields the rocks rose again in a sheer cliff, its brow crowned with rowans and brambles, its face tufted with ferns and heather. Between road and loch was a thin screen of trees, and through the leaves shone the silver gleam of the water.

The five scarlet-clad babies trudged on solemnly, without a glance at the stranger behind. He followed, studying the backs of their sturdy little figures with much amusement. Jock, the eldest, was a stolid youth of five. Then came another boy, very little younger or smaller, but lacking Jock's calm air of leadership. Then two small girls, walking hand in hand, and undoubtedly twins; and lastly, a tiny fellow who could just run alone—Jimmy of the burn. They were almost startlingly alike in their round solemn faces and colourless fair hair, and there was certainly not more than a year between the ages of any two. Raby did not wonder at Mrs. Maclachlan's weary face, and forgave her momentary anger with Eilidh.

The curtain of trees at the edge of the shore ended abruptly, and the road ran by the water. Looking towards the sea, Raby saw that they had rounded a point, which shut out the lower end of the loch. It had widened again into a quiet stretch of water, surrounded by wooded hills, and all very lonely, with no steamers or fishing-boats, and scarcely a cottage among the trees. He wondered much that there was no pier on these upper reaches, but he had no Gaelic, and the babies had no English, so conversation was impossible.

Jock stopped suddenly.

“Eilidh!” he said, and pointed.

A break in the cliff showed a rocky glen, narrow and shut in by the rugged hill behind. The rocks were covered with heather, between the boulders were rowan trees heavy with berries, and everywhere was waist-high golden bracken. Eilidh was nowhere to be seen, but she might easily be hiding here.

“You think she’s in there?” he asked, and laughed at their blank looks. “Here, do you understand these?” and he pulled out a handful of coppers and gave one each all round.

The stolid faces broke into smiles, and Jock responded with shy Gaelic thanks. Then they sat down in the road to discuss this sudden wealth, and he laughed and turned into the glen.

It was some time before he found her, but traced her at last by means of the trampled bracken. A silver line of water fell over a rock, and splashed into a pool among the stones. Eilidh was crouching in a corner at the foot of the rock, but he could scarcely see which was rock and which her dark dress, which was bracken and which were the brighter shades of her hair.

“Eily!” he said quietly, “I want to speak to you. Won’t you come out?” but she did not move.

He spoke again, but received no answer, and at last turned away, wondering what to do. Was she shy?—or sulky? Should he fetch her out? But that would not make for future friendship.

On a stone sat the big sandy cat, watching with bright, unwinking eyes a bird bathing in the pool. With a sudden thought he sat down on a rock and pulled out his sketch-book.

For a while there was silence, save for the splash of the water and the soft touch of brush on paper. Then he sat back and looked critically at his work. The sandy cat was there in all its delicate shades, from white and palest yellow, through gold to light brown. And from behind came a little gasp of surprise, and a delighted whisper,

“Oh, that *iss* good! It *iss* shust like Sandy!”

“Yes,” he said quietly, “I think it is. Shall I put in the water and the bird?”

He painted steadily, and she watched, breathless.

“There! It makes quite a nice little picture. It’s for you, Eily.”

“For me? Oh, that *iss* good of you!”

The soft, shy voice trembled with eager gratitude, and he felt he had made a good beginning. He took out his pencil, and wrote beneath the picture—“For Eily. Sandy by the Pool.”

“Oh, how ferry nice! But you haf not put my name right.”

“Oh? What’s wrong?”

“It *iss* E-i-l-i-d-h, you know,” she explained importantly.

“Oh? I didn’t know. I never met it before. What has the *dh* to do with the rest of it? You don’t say them, do you?”

“No. It *iss* shust Eily to say. I ton’t know why they are there. But Miss Anderson at the school, she said that wass the way.”

“Is that so? It’s never too late to learn. Well, now, let’s get to business.” He took one little brown hand so that she should not escape again. “Eilidh, I want to make a picture of you. Will you let me?”

“A picture—of me?” The great gray eyes opened to their widest in astonishment.

“Yes. Your mother—Mrs. Maclachan—says I may. You’ll only have to sit still. Will you do that?”

“But—but—I ton’t see why you want me! And I haf no pretty dress——”

“You’ll do first rate as you are.”

“And I haf to mind the babies——”

“And let them fall in the burn?”

She reddened. “Jimmy’s a bad wee boy. He knows ferry well——”

“If you had come home to dinner, Mrs. Maclachlan would have told you that I was waiting for you on the shore.”

“I didn’t want any dinner, and—and—she slapped me.”

“Well, you hadn’t been doing your duty, had you, Eilidh?”

“What iss that? I ton’t know what you mean.”

He guessed that her English was limited to the necessities of everyday life, so he explained gravely.

“Mrs. Maclachlan is very worried with all those babies to look after, and it’s washing day and very hot, and she was tired, and the babies had all got on clean frocks, and then you sat dreaming instead of looking after them, and gave her ever so much more trouble. Don’t you think it was too bad?”

“I’m—ferry—sorry!” and Eilidh hung her head.

“And then, instead of being sorry, you ran off in a temper, and left all those babies on her hands for the rest of the day,” he said severely, though inwardly much amused. “As if she wasn’t busy enough already!”

“I ton’t like being slapped!”

“She doesn’t like being worried.”

She glanced at him from under the thick lashes which had not escaped his notice; saw the smile in his eyes, and took courage.

“Why will you be wanting to make a picture of me? No one effer did before.”

“That’s good!”

“But why?”

“Whenever I see a strikingly ugly person, or place, or—or cat, Eilidh, I always make a sketch of it in my book—a kind of collection of uglies, you know.”

She looked at him suspiciously.

“Oh, ferry well! I ton’t want to be in that kind of book. Wheneffer I meet men who are ferry rude, I ton’t let them make pictures of me.”

He laughed. “When shall we begin?”

“I ton’t think I want to.”

“Shall we say to-morrow morning?”

“We’ll say not at all! I ton’t want to come.”

She pulled away her hand and was off among the bracken again.

He laughed. “I shall have to mind how I offend my lady. Hope she’ll soon come back.”

But the minutes passed and there was no sign of Eilidh. He grew impatient and called her once or twice, and thought he heard a delighted chuckle somewhere near. But he could not see her, and among the rocks were many shadowy corners where she could lie hidden.

“Very well, young lady! If I’m not mistaken you’ll think better of it presently. If you think I’m going to run after you you’re wrong. We’ll see who gets tired first.”

He turned to the sketch he had begun in the morning, and set to work filling in the outlines and colouring.

For a while there was silence, and he began to wonder if Eilidh was really sulky and had run off home. The babies had gone long since, but the big cat still lay sleeping in the sun.

Then across the glen he saw a little figure in the bracken. He worked on without looking up, and she crept out of hiding and waited to be called. He took no notice, and she wandered about among the rocks, trying to attract his attention, but unwilling to make the first advances.

"He iss ferry angry," she was saying to herself. "He won't speak to me. Oh, suppose he should go away?"

At the thought she crept nearer, and sat down to fondle the cat. She was only a few yards away, but he did not look up.

"Sandy," she whispered, "I hate him! I ton't like him at all. He issn't ferry kind, Sandy. He iss ferry cross—oh, yess! He must haf seen I am sorry, but he won't speak to me, whateffer."

Suddenly she was standing by his side, not looking at him.

"Intee—I'm—ferry sorry," she faltered.

He looked up smiling, and held out his hand.

"I want to be friends, Eilidh, but it isn't very easy when you get angry and run off like that."

"Why will you be wanting to make a picture of me?"

"Sit down on that stone, and I'll tell you."

She sat down eagerly, clasping her hands round her knees and shaking back the hair that would fall into her eyes.

"I'm reaty to listen," she said, and gazed up at him with a hungry look in her gray eyes.

"In London, every year, Eilidh, they have a great exhibition of all the very best pictures
—"

"What iss that—an ex—?"

He explained. "And of course every painter wants to have a picture of his there, too."

"Do they always haf yours?"

"They haven't so far," he confessed. "But I've only tried twice, and the third time's lucky, you know. I want to paint you and see if they won't hang you up in the very biggest room. You must look just like that—as you are now—as if you were wanting something very badly, and then they'll say, 'Dear me! Here iss Eilidh Maclachlan come all the way from Glenaroon, and she wants to go up on the walls so ferry badly that we really must put her there!'"

The wistful little face broke into a smile, then she laughed, then grew sober again.

"You are laughing at the way I speak," she said reproachfully. "It issn't my fault. It iss how I haf been taught. It issn't ferry kind to laugh."

"I can't help it, Eilidh. It's so pretty."

She gave him another quick, suspicious look.

"Why will you always be saying one thing and meaning another? We neffer do here. I ton't quite like it."

"It's a habit—a very bad one," he said gravely. "Will you help me with my picture, Eilidh?—so that I will get rich and famous, and everybody will want me to paint pictures for them?"

"Aren't you rich? I thought English people were always ferry, ferry rich."

"Dear me, no! I'm as poor as anything. I make pictures to get bread and butter."

"We ton't get butter most days," she said regretfully. "It all hass to be sold to help pay the rent. But we haf porridge and potatoes, and a bit herring now and then from the loch, or a bit salmon from the river."

He laughed. "Then you'll help me with my picture, Eilidh? And not get angry and run away twice in every day?"

She reddened. "I'll try not to. And I will help you—oh, yess! I would like to."

"That's all right. What is it you are wanting all the time, Eilidh?" he asked presently, as the wistful look returned to her face. He was sketching her in various positions, making studies for the big picture.

"I want efferything," was the somewhat startling reply. "I want to know such a lot of things, and you can tell me effer so many of them. When you were cross shust now, I was shust scared that you woult go away. I want to know about the place you live in, and people and things far away, and all about London and the big towns, and what rich people are like, and what iss written in books, and about the pictures people paint, and—and—efferything in the world. I haf neffer been away from here, I haf seen nothing but the loch, and nobody but the babies and the folk at the school. I hafn't any books to read, and I can't read quickly if I had, and I want to know things! You are different from the folk here, you think and speak different, you know things—I ton't know how to say what I mean, but ton't you understand?"

"I live in one world, you live in another. You want to hear about mine?" and Eilidh nodded vehemently.

"Your world iss the big one where great things happen, mine iss a wee hole where we are all half asleep——"

"But it's very beautiful, Eilidh! You mustn't despise it."

"Oh, I won't! It iss beautiful, an' I love it all, but it iss not enough alone. It iss like that pool in the bit burn"—she pointed to the still brown pool into which fell the splashing stream over the rocks.—"You haf come tumbling into it. Before you go hurrying away to the loch and the sea, where wonderful places and people are, won't you tell me all about it?"

He gazed at the eager little face.

"She'd pay for educating. Wish I was a millionaire!—Have you thought all that out since I came, Eilidh?"

"No. Most of it long ago. I want effer so badly to go away and see things and know efferything, and I sit and think about it till I'm—hungry! Won't you tell me—*please*?"

"I'll do what I can. I wish I was someone else who'd do it better! When did you lose your mother, Eilidh?"

"When I was born. I neffer saw her."

"Ah! And your father is dead, too?"

"I ton't know. I hafn't seen him either."

"Don't know? Where is he, then?"

"He went away. I will tell you apout it. He lived in Glasgow, and my mother lived here with her sister, who had a wee farm. When they were married she went to Glasgow, too, but when he had his holiday they came here to live with Aunt Jeannie. I wass born here, and my mother died that same night. My father was ferry sorry inteet, and he went right away and left me with Aunt Jeannie, and we haf neffer heart a word of him since. When I was fife years old my auntie died, an' Mrs. Maclachlan took me to live with her, for she had no weans then. But now I am eleffen, and effery year since there hass been a baby, and one year there were two, and it iss ferry hard to look after them all."

"I wish I was a millionaire," he said thoughtfully again, and she looked puzzled.

"What iss that? And why do you want to be one?"

"It's odd about your father, Eilidh."

“Oh, he iss dead, of course! I ton’t care apout him at all.—What iss a lord like, Mr. Raby?”

“A lord, Eilidh? Much like anybody else, I should imagine. I’ve never seen one. Why?”

“There iss a lord and a lady coming to live here, t’at iss all. Mebbe I shall see them soon.”

“Oh?” he said, pausing to look at her. “And where are they going to live?”

“At Darmidale Hall, in Glenaroon. Haf you not seen the big house yet? It iss shust a fine place—effer so big, with gardens and a farm of their own, and flowers and fruit in the gardens that we haf neffer seen anywhere else.”

“What’s their name?”

“I ton’t know. I do so want to see him! I wonder what a lord iss like! Will he be ferry grand and ferry fierce, do you think?”

“He’ll probably be an old, old chap, with gout and rheumatism, and he’ll drive about in a closed carriage, and hobble with a stick, and swear at every one who goes near him. I’d keep away if I were you.”

Eilidh’s eyes grew round. “Iss that what lords will be like? I thought——”

“Mind, I’m expecting you to sit to me to-morrow. You mustn’t keep me waiting while you go running after these grandees. I mean to work in earnest, and I shall need you.”

“Ferry well. I shall be there wheneffer you want me,” Eilidh nodded.

“And now let’s go home to tea. Sambo will be tired of waiting for me.”

“Let me carry your paints! Oh, I woult so like to!” she pleaded.

He laughed and handed her the box, and she clasped it in her arms and ran along by his side as he strode off down the road.

CHAPTER IV. EILIDH MEETS A LORD.

A kingfisher sat on a willow-bough just above the water. With bent head and ready beak he waited for a fish to come within his reach, but he was not more motionless than Eilidh. In the long grass on the bank she lay hidden from sight, and waited patiently, her attention divided between the fascinating green and orange bird, and the plank bridge a few yards up stream.

It was very early morning. Mr. Raby would not be awake for a couple of hours, and did not want her till ten o'clock. Though lonely she was not quite without friends, and the little bridge was the meeting-place.

A curtain of white mist lay over loch and distant shore. The twin mountains and the heathery island were out of sight. Up here in Glenaroon, where the brown salmon river ran swiftly to the head of the loch, everything was drenched in dew, but Eilidh cared little for a wetting.

The birds were singing everywhere—larks, blackbirds, thrushes, robins, wrens—golden birds, blue birds, red birds, many whose English names she did not know. The gulls were screaming as they sailed over the loch, great black “hoodiecrows” were circling over the meadows looking for breakfast, for their hunting-ground on the shore was under water at high tide—and the kingfisher sat waiting for that minnow. He was her favourite because of his brilliant colouring, but it was difficult to see him well because he was so shy. She held her breath and watched him in delight.

Suddenly he was gone, a flash of green and blue and orange, and she sat up, wondering resentfully what had startled him. Then a footstep on the road explained his flight, and a boy tramped down the bank to the bridge.

Eilidh sprang up. “Oh, why did you come shust then? You haf scared him away. You are a clumsy thing! Great heafy feet——”

He was four years older than she, and tall, and brown, and strong—the lad with whom she had walked those six miles to school every day till the holidays came, every day, that is, that he was not wanted on the farm where he lived, and she was not needed with the babies.

She met him on the bridge above the hurrying water, eyeing him wrathfully. But he was full of other matters to-day.

“Eilidh,” he said, “I’m going away. It iss good-bye. I came yesterday to tell you, but you weren’t here.”

“Going away, Rory? But—but—why? Where?”

“My uncle in Arran has written for me to go to him. He has a fine big farm now, and no son to help him, so he wants me. I’m sorry to go—I’m ferry sorry to say good-bye, but it means learning, and perhaps having a farm of my own some day, and here I haf no chance of getting on.”

“But—but—what shall I do without you? I shall miss you effery day, Rory. I ton’t know whateffer I’ll do.” She gazed down at the river, but could not see the water for her tears. “You haf been so ferry good to me, helping me an’ telling me things——”

“There’ll be nobody to lift you ofter the burns now, or teach you your lessons on the way to school, Eilidh. Well, you must shust get on without me, and I’ll try to get on without you, but

we'll both be a bittie lonely at first. Eilidh, you mustn't cry. I ton't like to see you crying. Let's talk of something else. It iss our last time together mebbe, and we must be happy. Eilidh, the great folks have come!"

"What? The lord and lady?" she cried eagerly, and forgot her grief for the time.

"They came last night, in a shut-up carriage——"

"I know! He iss ferry old, an' walks with a stick, an' swears——"

"*How* do you know?"

"Somebody told me. Did you see the lady?"

"I didn't see anything, but I was told they had come. You must write an' tell me what they're like, Eilidh."

"Oh, yess! I'll write—when I learn how! It would be funny writing shust now! I would like to see the lord! Would it be any use going to the house and peeping through the gates, do you think? Will he be in his bed still?"

"Yess, for effer so long yet. English folk and town folk rise effer so late."

"I would like to see him! What iss his name, Rory?"

"Lord Avery. I heard it at the inn up Glenaroon."

"What a ferry funny name!—Oh, Rory, there iss someone riding on the road!"

She darted up the bank and stood gazing excitedly. A boy, no bigger than herself, and a year younger, reined in his pony at sight of her. He was well dressed, in Norfolk suit, and knickerbockers, and little cap, and had a handsome, clear-cut face. Eilidh looked at him approvingly, then gazed eagerly at the pony. Such a beauty, with his glossy skin and long silky tail, she had never seen before.

The boy returned her gaze with interest, for her sudden appearance from the shadowy river-glen had startled him. He looked her over from her loose bright hair to her bare feet, and laughed. Rory, coming up behind, saw his laugh and grew suddenly angry.

But the boy was asking in a crisp English voice, "Can you tell me the way to Darmidale Pier?"

"Yess, intee!" and Eilidh's eyes sparkled naughtily. "You will go back to the big stone bridge and cross the river, and go straight on along the road till you will get there. It iss not ferry far on a fine morning like this."

"Thanks!" and he waved his whip and rode off.

Eilidh sat in the grass and laughed. Rory looked down at her severely.

"You haf sent him on the wrong road, and the wrong side of the loch, you ferry bad girl. He will neffer get to Darmidale to-day. He will be miles and miles away, with all the loch between him and the pier——"

"Yess, an' he will ask someone else, an' they will point across the water an' say, 'There it iss! But there iss no ferry-boat, and you can't swim a quarter of a mile!' Then he'll haf to go all the way back again. Who will he be, Rory, do you think?"

"I ton't know, but it iss ferry wrong of you, Eilidh."

"Then why didn't you stop me?"

"I hadn't time, as you know ferry well."

"He shouldn't haf laughed at me. I ton't like him."

"No, it iss true. He had no right to laugh," and Rory frowned again.

Eilidh sat thinking hard. Suddenly she sprang to her feet.

"I want to know who the boy iss! He was English, so he iss living either at the inn in Glenaroon, or with the lord and lady. There iss no other place. I'll go up to the big house, an'

perhaps I will ask if he lives there, or perhaps they will tell me. Perhaps I shall see the lord or the lady, whateffer! Why shall I say I haf come?—Be quiet, Rory! Ton’t speak!—I know! Of course.”

She sped off up the road. He sprang after her, but she reached the great iron gates just in time, ran through, and up the path to the back door.

Rory shrugged his shoulders and waited at the gate.

“She iss a wild lassie. I hope she doesn’t get into trouble.”

Even the servants’ entrance at Darmidale Hall seemed imposing to Eilidh. She gazed round, frightened at her own daring. A great doorway and big windows opened on a paved courtyard. All round were other houses—one with open doors showed a grand carriage inside, from another came the neighing of horses.

She hesitated, not liking to knock, yet unwilling to go back to Rory and confess herself afraid. Then the door opened suddenly and a maid came out. She was neat and pretty, dressed in blue, with a white cap and apron, and Eilidh gazed at her round-eyed.

“If I could be like that some day, an’ wear a pretty dress, and live in a big house with a lord and lady, it would be fine whateffer! I wonder if I could! I’ll ask Rory—or Mr. Raby.”

The girl stopped at sight of her, and asked in rough, quick English,

“Well, what do *you* want? What are you doing here, I’d like to know? My word! I’ll put you out in a jiffy, Miss Rags-and-Tatters——”

“I haf come to ask,” said Eilidh, with dignity, “if the lady woult like some eggs or milk from our farm, or some honey from the garden, or some scones——”

“Eggs! Milk! We have our own farm, thank you!” with a scornful toss of her head. “Scones—honey—I don’t know. She might fancy them. You wait there, and don’t stir a step till I come back.

“Yes,” she said, returning presently, “we’ll have a pot of honey and some scones. Bring them this afternoon——”

“The scones will only be baking then. I coult come in the efening,” said Eilidh, mindful of her engagement for the day.

“That’ll have to do, then. By the way, have you seen the young master anywhere about? He’s gone out, and we don’t know where he’s off to.”

Eilidh’s eyes sparkled, but she asked quietly,

“Who iss he? An’ what iss he like?”

“Lord Avery, to be sure,” said the girl importantly. “He’s riding his pony and wearing a gray suit——”

“A boy? A boy as big as me?” gasped Eilidh. “Iss he the lord?”

The girl laughed. “He is about your size. Oh, yes, he’s my lord now, since his father died.”

“He iss riding—I saw him on the road”—Eilidh stammered, and turned and fled.

“Rory!” she gasped. “Rory! The boy was the lord himself, an’ I haf sent him miles away on the wrong road. Oh, what shall I do? Why effer did you let me do it? You might haf stopped me, Rory. It was too bad of you!”

CHAPTER V. BABY RABBIT.

"And why will you haf come all the way from London to paint Loch Ruel?" asked Eilidh.

Raby had set up his easel on the shore, on the lower side of the tree-covered point which shut out the upper reaches of the loch. Eilidh was sitting on the stones, her eyes fixed on the smooth stretch of water and the distant hills. Behind her was a bank of black rock, gay with ferns and tufts of heather and swinging bluebells, while at her feet a burn ran down to the loch. The six scarlet babies were playing on the shore some distance away in charge of a small girl from one of the farms in Glenaroon, who watched their every movement, and drove them back if they came within ten yards of the burn.

"Ah, that needs some explaining. Suppose we wait till I've made a good beginning. Then you shall rest, and I'll tell you all about it."

Eilidh sat motionless, and her face grew wistful with longing, as it always did when she was thinking deeply. He nodded, well satisfied, and worked away rapidly. Her eyes wandered over the scene, and one thing after another caught her notice. She watched a boat steal out across the loch, then gazed at the sea-gulls and curlews wading in the shallows. The morning steamer crept up to the pier and lay there for a moment, then turned and crept out of the loch again in a wide curve, leaving two long trails of smoke across the face of the hills.

"Hello!" said Raby, as the splash of waves ran along the shore, and the water rushed up almost to his stool. "What's up? A sudden storm?"

"No," laughed Eilidh, "only the steamer leaving the pier. And here comes the coach for Glenaroon."

"Why is there only one pier on the loch, Eilidh? That upper stretch, where it opens out again beyond this point, is perfect, and you don't see it at all from the steamer. Why don't the boats go right up to the head of the loch?"

Eilidh laughed. "I would be sorry for them if they did. Hafn't you seen it at low tide? Then shust climb up the bank here and look."

"Not just now. Later on," he said, and worked busily.

"You see," he began at last, "I have three sisters, Eilidh."

"Yess?" she said, looking surprised.

"I'll tell you about them. The eldest is Isabel, and she is only a step-sister. Know what that is?"

Eilidh shook her head, looking deeply interested.

"Her father was our father, but her mother wasn't ours, and she takes after her mother. She's older than the rest of us, and always looked down on us, and showed it. She was never very fond of us at all. Two years ago she married a millionaire—that's a very, very rich man, Eilidh. He's a Scotsman like yourself, called Munro."—Eilidh turned to him with startled eyes, but he was painting steadily, and did not notice.—"Then my father died and left me the two younger girls—my own sisters—to look after. The younger is Rosamond, and she's only twenty—quite a child still," he laughed. "She was married a month ago to Captain Grant, who's very well off now, and going to be more so, some day. They're off to France and Italy for their honeymoon.

“Well, before their marriage we were talking one day, and I told Rosamond I’d paint her a picture as a wedding-present, if she’d say what kind of picture she’d like. She said she’d like something with hills and water in it, and then she asked me to come here and paint your loch, for a friend had said to her, ‘You coax him up to Scotland and make him paint Loch Ruel. He couldn’t choose anything finer,’ Therefore, you see,—”

“I see. It iss a present for your sister.”

“Yes. She’ll like it. Now we’ll have a rest. By the way, have you heard the name of your lord yet?”

“Yes,” said Eilidh reddening.

“They are the Averys, I suppose?”

“How effer did you know? Was Mrs. M’Culloch at the inn telling you?”

“No. I guessed.”

“You *must* be cleffer!”

He laughed and rose to his feet. “Let’s have a walk. What was I to look at? Oh, the upper loch! Show me the best way up the rocks, Eilidh. Guard my things, Sambo!”

“This iss how I will go,” and she went up the rocks like a squirrel up a tree.

He followed laughing, and they stood together among the trees at the end of the point.

“You see,” said Eilidh eagerly, “if a steamer came up there—”

“By Jove, yes! I didn’t know. You wouldn’t believe it at high tide.”

The waves had withdrawn from the belt of trees and shingle that encircled the head of the loch, leaving wide stretches of sand. Behind the trees the hills fell away in a great crowded ring—the distant peaks blue, the nearer ones green and brown and purple—and between them lay a wooded plain, through which ran the road to Glenaroon. The little salmon river ran down through the woods to the shore, and then, losing its course, spread through the shingle and over the sand and found the loch at last.

The birds had collected in crowds on the sands, and were gravely promenading, singly, in pairs, in small flocks—gulls, curlews, crows, wild ducks—all intent on early dinner. The air was full of their shrill cries and screams, but distance softened their harshness and the noise came pleasantly across the water.

Raby whistled. “If a boat came up at high tide without a pilot, and her captain didn’t know the loch, she’d stick fast on those mud-banks. Has it ever happened?”

“No, but I will always be thinking it iss going to some day. Three miles the tide will run out, they say. But no boats come, you see, but the steamers to the pier, and sometimes a fishing-boat. An’ it iss not mud-banks either—mostly. It iss ferry good sand.”

“I shall be careful when I come yachting up here,” he laughed. “Come, let’s get back to our work.”

Eilidh was the first to reach the other side of the point.

“Oh, look! look!” she screamed. “Just look! Oh, did you effer see anything so pretty?”

A great white yacht was creeping up the loch. Her funnel was yellow, her small boats were white, she was gaily decked with flags. Raby whistled again in astonishment, and Eilidh gazed in eager delight.

“What iss it? What kind of boat, Mr. Raby? It iss higher than the steamer, an’ it hass no paddles. I haf neffer seen one shust like it. Oh, issn’t it pretty?”

Raby scrambled down the rocks and crossed the shingle to the water’s edge. The great yacht came steadily on, and Eilidh cried,

"It issn't going up past the point to be wrecked on the sands, surely! Oh, we must stop it! There issn't water enough for such a ferry big boat."

"She's not going any farther," said Raby, and just then the yacht came to a stand, and the anchor rattled down.

From the funnel came a shrill "toot!" A boat slid down, and presently came speeding across the water.

"It iss coming here!" gasped Eilidh. "Oh, shust think! It iss coming to us!"

"Rosamond, by all that's wonderful!" said Raby. "I thought they were in Italy. What on earth will that girl do next?"

Eilidh's shyness overcame her suddenly. In a moment she was up the bank and hidden among the bracken. From her corner she watched the boat draw in to the shore. The two sailor-boys—white-clad and wearing big straw hats—rowed together in perfect time. Four white oars dipped and rose and flashed in the sun at the same moment.

In the stern sat a tall man in navy blue, and a girl in a blue yachting costume. The man was very brown, and lay back lazily in his seat. The girl was—oh, so pretty! thought Eilidh—with dark eyes and hair, and an eager laughing face. She leaned over the side and waved her hand to Raby, who met them at the water's edge.

"Well, young people? What is the meaning of this? I thought you were in Venice. Whatever brings you here?"

"We stood it as long as we could, and then we really had to have a change of company," Rosamond explained, as her husband helped her ashore. "At the end of three weeks we were thoroughly tired of one another, so we came home to look some of you up."

"As a matter of fact," said Captain Archie gravely, "we found Italy too crowded—couldn't get away from friends—met someone we knew at every hotel. Rose didn't like it. She wanted a quiet corner to mope in; she's been dreadfully low-spirited. So she insisted on my taking her to some more lonely spot. I thought perhaps dad's yacht, and a Highland loch, and only sea-gulls and herrings for company, might cheer her up. So here we are."

"You know, Bernard," said Rosamond, turning her back on him; "the truth is, he wanted an excuse for two holidays instead of one, so after I'd put up with him for all that time in the hope that it would soon be over and we'd be able to settle down, he dragged me off here for another holiday, and ever so much more of his teasing and nonsense."

"No, it was this way, Raby. She wasn't looking well—it was awfully hot down there—and I thought a cruise in more bracing air would do her good. I couldn't begin my married life with a sick wife, could I now?"

"Really and truly, he wanted some fishing, and it had nothing to do with me at all. I just had to come along. He takes me about like he does his portmanteau——"

"My dear! I leave my portmanteau with the porter. Did I ever——"

"I've come to see how my wedding-present is getting on, Bernard," Rosamond laughed. "Lady Avery was right, wasn't she? You couldn't have a much finer subject. Are you making progress?"

She stepped daintily across the shingle to the easel, and Raby laughed.

"O-o-oh! Why, Bernard! What a lovely child! Is she real? Where did you find her? Is this picture for me?"

"No, my dear, it's for the Academy. It's going to make my fortune. That's Eilidh. Yes, she's a beauty, but she doesn't know. Don't tell her! I made friends with her yesterday. That's an awfully rough sketch yet, of course, but it just gives you an idea, I think. She was here

when you came, but she's as wild as a baby rabbit, and just as quick in getting away. You must see her. I'll try to catch her for you, but she's very shy."

"What did you call her?"

"Eilidh. It means Helen, I believe. Gaelic, my dear. We all speak Gaelic here. The babies don't speak English. See them playing on the shore over there? All those red spots are babies. All one family, too. There's Jock, and Tam, and Aggie, and Maggie, and Jimmy, and Alexander, and the cat is Sandy. I know all about them. I'll introduce you——"

"No, thanks!" said Captain Archie hurriedly.

"I think another day will do," Rosamond laughed, and sat down on a rock. "How nice it is up here!"

"How long are you going to stay? And what exactly are you doing here?"

"Why, we've told you!"

"And which of your many explanations——"

"You see," Rosamond said confidentially, "it's this way. We thought—that is, Archie thought—well, perhaps we both did—that it would be nice to have a cruise among the lochs. It *was* hot and crowded on the Continent. So we asked Archie's father to lend us his yacht, and, of course, he was delighted. We begged him to think of an excuse for a three or four weeks' cruise—you see, I'm being quite frank this time—and he said he'd been thinking of building a house somewhere on the Firth here, and we might try to find a suitable spot. And he did say something nice about letting us have the house next year if it was finished, so, you see, we really have most important business here. It's only right we should choose the site for our own house. We've only just arrived, and we're going to sail up every loch and into every corner till we find a perfect place. It is really lovely here! I don't believe anywhere could beat this. It's all so quiet and peaceful, and yet quite wild and lonely. Don't you think, perhaps——?" and she looked at her husband with raised eyebrows.

"Not a bit of it!" he said firmly. "It wouldn't do at all."

"Oh! Why not?" she pouted.

"No place will do till we've seen all the others. Do you think I'm ready to go back to London yet?"

"Oh, well!—Neither am I," she laughed. "We won't make up our minds in a hurry, of course, but it is beautiful here. I hope you are painting my picture, Bernard?"

"I began it yesterday, but Miss Eilidh peeped over my shoulder and drove it out of my head."

"Don't forget it altogether. I want it badly. Are there good places for picnics here, Bernard?"

"I should imagine so, but I really haven't had time to explore yet. At the head of the loch, Glenaroon runs away up among the hills. I should think it was just made for picnics."

"Then we'll have one to-morrow. Archie and I will invite you—and Eilidh! We'll go off to-day and find the very best place. Archie, let's start at once! Ever since we came into the loch, I've been longing to get away up among the hills."

"My dear girl, it's almost lunch-time, and I'm hungry," remonstrated the captain. "You wouldn't ask me to go without any lunch, surely?"

Rosamond sighed. "Not I. I know you too well by this time. Then we'll go on board at once, and you shall have your lunch, and we'll start directly after. We'd have had to fetch our bicycles anyway. Will you come, Bernard?"

"No, my dear. I'm not on my honeymoon. If you're to have the pleasure of my company to-morrow, I really must work to-day. Good-bye! Don't lose yourselves up in Glenaroon."

The white boat sped away to the yacht, and Raby went back to his easel.

"Come along, Eilidh! I can see you hiding there. It's quite safe now. There's really no danger, I assure you."

She came reluctantly down the rocks and seated herself as he had arranged, half ashamed and wholly distrustful, ready for instant flight if the strangers showed signs of returning.

"What a silly girl you are!" Raby said severely. "Did you think they'd eat you?"

"I ton't like people I ton't know."

"Evidently! It's very silly."

Eilidh sat gloomily silent, unable to justify her conduct by explaining her feelings, and Raby painted on steadily, trying to maintain a severely displeased air. She glanced at him occasionally, but he showed no sign of relenting, and did not break the silence. At last she sighed deeply.

"It issn't ferry cheerful. I shust wish Sandy was here, t'at I do!" she murmured plaintively. "I think I shall fetch him. Or Lizzie could bring the babies an' I could talk to them. I shall tell them all to come this afternoon."

Raby's eyes twinkled, and he surrendered hastily.

"Eilidh, you've seen the dear little baby rabbits up the road?"

"Oh, yess!" she said, brightening at once—"effer so often."

"Never caught one, I suppose?"

"Oh, yess, I haf! Many a time."

"H'm! Well, they run away whenever I go near them."

"I ton't wonder, if you are looking cross."

He regarded her seriously. "Now you're getting cheeky. I didn't think you knew how. Well, Eilidh, the rabbits are very silly, for I wouldn't dream of hurting them. I just want to look at them and stroke them and be good to them, but they run away so quickly that I can only see their little white tails."

She nodded. "They are afraid of you."

"You're a regular baby rabbit yourself, you know."

"It iss a ferry nice thing to be," she said calmly. "They are ferry pretty an' ferry soft, an' warm an' funny, an' shust nice to kiss and hug."

She sat silent again, the hungry look in her eyes once more, and Raby worked hard, wondering what she was thinking of now.

"Nobody hass effer kissed me and loved me like I do the baby rabbits!" she broke out at last. "At the farm there are so many babies there iss neffer room for me. It iss the thing I want most of all, I think—to haf somebody ferry, ferry fond of me. An' I ton't see how I am effer to haf it."

Raby was silent in his turn, for he did not see how he could satisfy this craving.

"How did you like my sister?" he asked at last.

"She iss ferry pretty!"

"Could you hear all we said?"

"Oh, yess! But it was hard to understand. You talk the English so quick, an' it issn't easy. Why does she laugh so much?"

"I suppose because she's having a good time."

"I ton't like people who laugh too much," Eilidh said thoughtfully.

“You’d like Mollie—my other sister, you know. She’s older than Rosamond, and has a lot more sense. She teaches little girls in a school.”

“What, little girls like me?”

Raby glanced at the ragged little figure, with the bare arms and legs and tumbled hair, and smiled.

“Yes, little girls like you. They are very fond of her, I believe, but they give her a lot of trouble. Just now she’s visiting friends and having a rest. I shall bring her up here some day if I can. She’d like it. She’s a real good sort, is Mollie.”

“I woult like to see her!” Eilidh said wistfully. “We neffer see anybody new here.” She grew suddenly sober at thought of the morning’s encounter.

“When you do see them you run away!”

“But I like to see them, if they ton’t speak to me.”

“Baby rabbit!” said he, and went on with his painting.

CHAPTER VI. LORDS AND LADIES.

As the shadows filled the glen Eilidh trudged soberly up the road with a basket on her arm. The long evening had tempted Raby, and he had taken advantage of it. Captain Archie and Rosamond had cycled off towards Glenaroon soon after mid-day, and had not yet returned. Eilidh had proved a patient and obedient sitter, so the picture was making good progress.

She was very thoughtful as she set out with her basket of scones and honey. She had not dared to keep back the message or refuse to go. Every help was needed at the farm of the six babies, and Mrs. Maclachan's worried face had brightened wonderfully on hearing of the new customers. If she could hope to find a regular market at Darmidale Hall it would be a very great relief.

The words of praise which Miss Eilidh had received for her thoughtfulness had made her blush shamefacedly, and she was by no means anxious to return to the big house in the evening. But there was no one else to go, and she dared not confess and explain her reluctance to Mr. and Mrs. Maclachan. So with considerable apprehension she took the basket and set out.

The bright morning had been followed by a dull afternoon. There had been no sunshine since mid-day, and the wind had risen, blowing up cold and damp from the sea. As Raby sat painting on the shore, Eilidh had remarked suddenly, "It iss raining in Arran. Soon we shall haf it here too." And glancing over his shoulder he had seen the twin peaks fading into mist, with a stormy sky behind.

"A bad lookout for Rosamond's picnic to-morrow," he said, and worked on hurriedly.

The rain held off till evening, but there was that in the wind which said it would come before daylight. Eilidh, setting out for Glenaroon, took a great green plaid from a peg and wrapped it round her shoulders. Hardy as she was, she had no wish to be soaked, and she knew how it could rain on Loch Ruel.

She was decidedly nervous as to the result of this second visit. The boy—she could not think of him as Lord Avery, for the title filled her with something very like reverence and fear—would certainly have told his mother. He would be very angry—so would everybody. If she ventured near the house again, they would be sure to keep and punish her. Perhaps she would be put in prison for playing tricks on a lord—for her ideas as to his rights and privileges were of the vaguest, and all erred on the side of exaggeration.

Never—no, never—would she speak to a stranger again. If only she could meet Rory and coax him to do her errand! But he would be at home preparing for his early start to-morrow. She must go alone. So she trudged on, as bravely as she could, but with a heavy heart.

Drops began to patter on the branches overhead. The trees arched and met above the road, and it would be some time before the rain came through. Eilidh drew the plaid round her shoulders, and walked on doggedly. She would get wet, but that was nothing. What she dreaded was the welcome awaiting her at Darmidale Hall.

Ting! ting! went a bicycle bell, and she sprang to the side of the road, and made herself small against the rocks. As the riders passed, hurrying to escape the coming storm, Eilidh caught a glimpse of Rosamond Grant, laughing as if the race for shelter was a great joke. And Rosamond, by the light of her lamp, saw the little figure, clad in the long plaid hanging

loosely about her like a cloak, with slim bare feet, and bright hair falling about her shoulders and into her eyes. She knew her in a moment from Raby's sketch, and called out cheerfully, "Good-night! You'll get wet!" But she was anxious to reach shelter, so she did not stop, and Eilidh sped off into the shadows again.

Rain was falling heavily now. She put down her basket, and pulled the plaid over her head and round her face. She pinned it beneath her chin, and hurried on to the end of her three-mile tramp.

"I haf brought the scones and the honey from Mrs. Maclachlan. If you will take them and gif me the basket, please, I must go home at once."

The maid carried the basket into the kitchen, and Eilidh stood in the rain, devoutly hoping she would be allowed to go unmolested. But the girl returned in a moment.

"My lady wants to see you. Come along quick, now! Clean your boots on the mat. My! Cook, just see! She's got no stockings on. Did you ever! A great girl like that! What a country! Come along, Miss Bare-legs!"

Eilidh reddened resentfully. "She hass no right to be rude, shust because she iss dressed up like a fine lady," she thought indignantly. "She issn't the kind of lady I would like to be some day, not a bittie. An' it iss a ferry fine country, whateffer."

Her heart thumped painfully as she followed the girl along the passage, up a stair, and across a great hall. The lights were low, and she could see little of her surroundings, but was too anxious to look about her.

The maid opened a door.

"Here is the child, ma'am.—Come along!" she said sharply, as Eilidh hung back, overcome with shyness and fright. "Come on! Nobody's going to eat you. The little master is there. You needn't be afraid."

This information did not lessen Eilidh's nervousness, but she could not delay any longer. The girl closed the door, and her heart sank as she felt her retreat cut off.

The lamplight dazzled her for a moment, and she stood, hesitating and afraid. As her eyes grew accustomed to the light, she saw, looking at her curiously, a lady and a small boy. They were sitting by the hearth, where the fire, though laid, was not lit. Lady Avery sat in a big chair, working at some dainty needlework. The boy lay on the rug at her feet, with an open book, from which he had been reading.

At sight of the lady Eilidh almost lost her fear. For she was small and slight, with gentle face, kind, grave eyes, and gray hair brushed back from her forehead. Dressed in black, with white lace round her shoulders and knotted on her breast, she was both dainty and motherly, yet not without a certain quiet dignity. Eilidh had never seen anyone at all like her, and, in spite of her fear, was irresistibly drawn to her. Shyness would soon have vanished before Lady Avery's friendly gaze, but her conscience was uneasy, and she waited nervously for her scolding.

The little lady looked up brightly from her work as the maid announced Eilidh's arrival.

"Is this your fairy, Larry? What a very tiny one!—Come here, my dear, and let me have a look at you."

Eilidh went forward shyly. The boy lay on the rug and looked up at her, his eyes twinkling mischievously. She met his gaze, and reddened in discomfort.

Lady Avery looked in amusement at the little figure draped in the big green plaid, which framed the small brown face, and was still fastened tightly beneath her chin. Then she gave a cry of dismay.

"Why, the child is drenched! Take off that wet shawl at once, my dear! Is your frock wet? And your poor little bare feet! We'll soon have you dry again.—Larry, tell Susan to put a match to the fire. It's chilly to-night, and I don't care if it is August.—Give your shawl to Larry, my dear, and he'll take it down to the kitchen."

She tossed her work aside, and insisted on unpinning the plaid and feeling the short skirt and tartan shawl to be sure they were dry. She ran her fingers gently over the mane of bright hair, and laughed with pleasure as she felt how soft and heavy it was. Eilidh submitted in dumb surprise. She had had several strange experiences lately, but surely none stranger than this—that a great lady should really care about such a little thing as whether her clothes were wet.

She sat down as directed, close to the fender, and while Susan, with disapproving face, grudgingly kindled the fire, she looked round the room.

It was a revelation to her, as the sight of Lady Avery had been. She had never seen anything like it before. It was by no means richly furnished, for the Averys meant to spend only a couple of months there, but after the farm of the six babies, it seemed luxurious to a degree of which Eilidh had never dreamed. There were rugs spread over the carpet—white curtains at the windows—pictures, books, a piano—little tables, cosy chairs, and a big sofa. Flowers stood on every table—bluebells in dainty vases, heather in great china bowls, branches of meadow-sweet and bracken in tall pots, and great bunches of roses from the garden.

Eilidh gave a long look round, taking in everything. Her eyes rested at last on the dainty little lady who was watching her with amusement, and she felt dimly that they suited one another—the beautiful lady, and the beautiful house—and the kindness with which she had been treated seemed only natural, after all.

She reddened under Lady Avery's gaze, and her eyelids drooped shyly at once. She sat looking down at the soft, furry rug, and wondering when the scolding would begin. Lord Avery returned as Susan left the room, and she waited nervously. He would surely have something to say about their first meeting. But Larry's thoughts were all in another direction.

"It's scrumptious honey, mummie! Can I have some now? And ripping scones! Let's pretend it's supper-time, and taste 'em at once. Do! All right. I knew you'd like to," and he ran off before his mother could speak.

She laughed, and turned to Eilidh. "I'm sorry you came on such a wet night. To-morrow would have done quite well. Have you far to come?"

"It will be t'ree mile from the farm, ma'am," Eilidh said shyly.

"Why, you'll be tired out by the time you get home! And you'll be drenched, child!"

"We won't be minding a bit shower. There iss rain here nearly effery day, so it iss no creat matter if we get wet," Eilidh explained shyly.

Lady Avery laughed. "What is your name?"

"Eilidh Munro, ma'am."

"My little boy met you this morning, I think?"

"Yess!" Eilidh murmured, and blushed guiltily and hung her head. The scolding was coming now. How would they punish her?

"He said a little girl had told him the way. But the silly fellow took the wrong turning after all, and found himself half-way round the head of the loch before he discovered that he was going away from Darmidale all the time! Wasn't that foolish? He can't have understood your directions."

Eilidh gave her a startled glance. Was it possible she did not know? Had the boy not told her? Her astonishment was so evident that Lady Avery laughed, and asked what was the matter. But Eilidh reddened in sudden confusion and hung her head once more, realising that her guilty looks might betray her.

Larry's entrance at that moment relieved her embarrassment. He carried the pot of honey and a plate of scones, and Susan followed with a tray, on which were butter, jam, biscuits, cake, and a jug of milk. Lord Avery intended to enjoy himself, and knew what, to his mind, was the best means of doing it.

"Down here, Susan, please. Right! Now I'm going to eat bread and honey."

"Aren't you hungry, Eilidh, after that long walk? Suppose you try Larry's biscuits while he eats your scones."

Eilidh's eyes sparkled. If not actually hungry, she was quite ready to taste the "English food," the biscuits, and cake, and jam, which were strange to her, but looked very delightful. At the farm of the six babies there was never time for cake or jam making, and the family expenses were too heavy to allow of such luxuries.

So she sat on the rug by the fire with a plate on her lap, and took all that was offered her with a frank enjoyment which much amused her hostess. Lord Larry was too intent upon the honey to pay much attention to her, but occasionally he gave her a glance, and whenever their eyes met she understood his wink to mean, "Don't think I've forgotten the trick you played on me this morning! I'll speak to you about it by-and-by." So he kept her in a constant state of apprehension, and every time he began to speak she thought, "Now he iss going to tell!"

Lady Avery asked many questions about her home and school. Eilidh answered them all in a soft, shy whisper, and kept to "Yess!" "No!" "I ton't know!" whenever she could. They found that she was very ignorant for her age. Her attendance at school had been very broken, owing to the six-mile walk and the very wet days, of which she confessed there were many. Then there were the babies to mind at home, and, as she said,

"Wheneffer one will get big enough to walk, there iss another wee, wee one to carry about, an' there iss only me to do it. If we shoulth haf another baby soon I ton't know when I shoulth get to the school at all."

She could read, but slowly, and was only learning to write. She had made scarcely any progress in arithmetic, and knew nothing of the other ordinary school subjects. Larry forgot the honey in his astonishment, and stared at her till she realised that her ignorance was something to be ashamed of. It had troubled her greatly, as she had explained to Raby, but until now it had seemed natural and necessary. Now she began to see that to some people it was surprising, and therefore wrong, and her craving for knowledge and understanding deepened.

They let her go at last, glad at heart because of a commission to bring scones to Darmidale Hall three times a week, and with the payment for the first basketful tied up in a corner of her little shawl. Lady Avery exclaimed again at thought of her long walk alone in the darkness and rain, and offered to lend her an umbrella, at which Eilidh laughed in spite of her shyness.

"They woulth neffer be done laughing at me at home. I haf my plaid, ma'am, an' it iss not a wetting that will do me any harm."

"Wrap your plaid tightly round you, then, and run all the way.—Larry, take her downstairs and see that she gets her basket all right.—Eilidh, think how cold and wet your poor little feet will be!"

"It will be no worse than if I had been walking in the burn, whateffer!" said Eilidh, with round eyes, and Lady Avery laughed, and then sighed pitifully.

Larry closed the dining-room door, and they were alone in the great hall. His eyes were full of mischief.

"Don't be in such a hurry, Miss Eilidh! I've something to say to you."

She stopped and looked at him apprehensively.

"What did you mean by playing such a trick on me this morning? If I hadn't happened to know rather more than you thought I did, I might not have got home for hours. Luckily, I knew where the pier was, and saw that I was riding away from it. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"I'm ferry sorry, intee I am! I will neffer do it again."

"I should jolly well think not. Mummie—my mother—would have been in fits if I hadn't turned up till the afternoon."

"I didn't know——"

"You knew you were telling me wrong."

She reddened. "Yess! I am sorry."

"Did that boy put you up to it? The fellow who was with you?"

"Rory? Oh no! He wassn't ferry pleased. It was only shust me."

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I am!"

"I should think so, indeed. I've a good mind to tell your father."

Eilidh looked at him. Yesterday she would have believed and trembled, but she was learning by experience. The mischief in his eyes betrayed him, and she knew he was only teasing.

"Will you make a bargain, please? If you tell my father I ton't care ferry much, but will you promise not to tell your mother?"

"My mother? I don't know. Why not?"

"I ton't want her to know. She iss kind to me."

"And your father isn't? Is that what you mean? But in that case surely you'd rather—What would your father say?"

"Mr. Maclachlan at the farm, do you mean? He woult be ferry angry. He might not *say* much," Eilidh said suggestively.

"You don't mean he'd hit you—a girl?"

"He might. He will be ferry angry. But you won't tell your mother, will you?"

"She wouldn't say much," said Larry, speaking from experience, "and she certainly wouldn't hit you. You wouldn't really rather I told your father, would you?"

"I woult so! He hass been angry before—oh, yess! But your mother—t'at iss different. She iss kind. I ton't want her to be cross."

"Well, you are rummy!" and he looked at her in frank astonishment. "I won't tell anyone at all, of course. I'm not a sneak. But I must say I don't understand."

"Oh, it iss good of you! Thank you ferry much intee!" cried Eilidh, greatly relieved.

And as she trudged off along the road she said to herself,

"I coult not haf Lady Avery saying, 'She iss a bad, wild lassie, iss that Eilidh Munro, an' I ton't want effer to see her again any more!' No, that woult not do at all, whateffer!"

CHAPTER VII. A RAINY DAY'S DISCOVERY.

Raby stood at the window in deep disgust. The rain was falling in a steady downpour, which was most depressing. His room looked out on the loch and the inn was built so close to the water that he could have fished from the window. The dismal effect of the rain was heightened by the "swish!" of the drops in the water and the surging waves on the rocks below.

Everything was dripping. The trees were heavy with rain. The road was a swamp, with firm spots between the pools and great puddles stretching right across. The burns were foaming torrents, rushing downhill and streaming across the road to the loch. The strips of level ground were rapidly becoming marshes; the water was running down the face of the rocks.

"At least," he said to himself, "it doesn't do things by halves on Loch Ruel. When it's fine it's very, very fine, but when it does rain there's no mistaking the fact."

He looked down at the pier, which lay close to the inn. The tide was ebbing, and the higher parts of the posts were uncovered and clothed with shells and bright green seaweed. The planks and coils of rope were sodden with rain. Across the loch no hills were to be seen. Indeed, there was no loch. He could see the water just below his window, but beyond was a curtain of mist shutting out everything. The hills round the head of the loch, the tree-covered point, even Captain Archie's big steam yacht, were hidden in the dull white cloud. It was very depressing, and Raby told Sambo what he thought about it.

"Disgusting, Sambo! Weather like this, when we've come all the way from London to paint the view. The view! Look at it! If I had Eilidh here I might get on with her, but I can't go to fetch her. It wouldn't be decent to take her out on such a day, anyway. As for Rosamond's picture——" he laughed, and glanced at the white wall where the hills ought to have been. "Duncan was right on one point, at least. If it's not always raining, it certainly rains pretty hard when it does begin, and there *is* nothing to see—to-day. Nobody would come twice—who had only seen it in this state. He must have come on a rainy day, and gone on a rainy day, and had no dry ones in between. That would account for his spite against it. But—it hardly satisfies me, all the same. I don't believe his extreme anxiety to keep me away from Darnidale was solely for my benefit. And yet—it's not easy to see— Yes, Mrs. M'Culloch?"

"There's a wee lassie here wanting you, sir. She says you told her——"

"Not Eilidh Maclachlan? Why, my dear child, I never expected you on a day like this. Are you soaked?"

"It iss only my plaid that will be wet," Eilidh explained. "Will you undo the pin, please? I think it iss caught somehow."

He bent to wrestle with the safety-pin under her chin, and looked into the eager little face.

"I'm sorry you came, Eilidh. It's not fit for you to be out. I hope you'll be none the worse for it."

"I will neffer be minding the rain. But ton't you want me, then?"

"Indeed I do!" he said hastily, as her face filled with disappointment. "I was just wishing you were here, but I never thought you'd be brave enough to venture out. Let's hang this up to dry. Why, what's that? Sandy?"

The big cat jumped down out of her arms, where he had been crouching, and shook himself, sneezing in disgust at his own dampness. Sambo sat up suddenly, and looked. Sandy's back arched, and his great tail began to lash. Sambo's little ears stood erect, and his hair began to bristle. The cat spat angrily, and Sambo, with a sharp bark, dashed forward. Sandy gave him a smart box on the ear and a slap in the face, and with one leap was on the mantelpiece. Sambo yelped with pain and surprise and started back, then ran to the fireplace, barking furiously, and jumping about on his hind legs. Sandy spat once or twice from his point of vantage, and Raby laughingly dragged the dog away and told him to be quiet.

"I brought Sandy so I coul't talk to him on the road. It iss lonely all alone," Eilidh explained.

"If he stays up there it's all right, but I don't want Sambo's eyes scratched out. I think Sandy would win if it came to a fight."

"Oh, do you? I am so glad. He iss a ferry fine cat, iss my Sandy," said Eilidh, seating herself on a footstool. "You will be able to paint me in the house, won't you? It doesn't haf to be out on the shore?"

"Not a bit. You're just the same wherever you are. Now we'll make the most of a rainy day."

For some hours he worked steadily, and from time to time, growing impatient of the silence, she gave him scraps of family intelligence.

"Mr. Raby, shust think! This morning wee Alexander ran out in the rain, an' when I caught him an' whipped him he wass as wet as if he had been in the burn."

"I don't wonder. Why did you let him do it?"

"I wass minding Jimmy shust then. An' while I wass drying him, Aggie and Maggie they ran away out, too, an' Aggie tumbled in the duckpond, an' Maggie tried to pull her out, an' fell in too."

"Dear me! Were they hurt?"

"Oh no! It iss not the first time. But they were *wet*!"

"So I can believe. Why weren't you looking after them?"

"I tolt you I wass drying Alexander. An' Tam—he iss a bad boy!—shust think! He threw the griddle down the well!"

"Whatever is the griddle, Eilidh?"

"Why, ton't you know? You bake scones on it. An' Jock, he was playing with Jimmy, an'—shust think!—he shut him in the byre with the cows, an' we neffer found him for an hour!"

"You've had a lively morning."

"It iss always like that," she sighed.

From the window they watched the steamer appear suddenly out of the mist and draw in to the pier. The decks were empty and running with water. The captain, purser, and sailors looked exceedingly unhappy. A couple of passengers ventured out of the cabin, looked at the drenched road and dripping trees, and decided to stay where they were. A few soaked tourists, who had landed the day before and spent the night in Glenaroon, hurried across the gangway and sped away into shelter. The ropes were thrown off, and the great steamer passed into the dreary mist again, leaving the waves surging on the rocks below the window, and they heard the beat of her paddles long after she was out of sight.

"They'll go away and tell all their friends there's nothing to see on Loch Ruel, and they're sorry they ever came, and it's always raining at Darmidale," Raby laughed. "Eilidh, you must

stay to lunch with me.”

“Oh——! Not really?”

“If you will. I’d like to get on this afternoon, and you can’t go home and come back again. I’ll be glad of your company. Miss Rosamond might have come to see me, but I suppose she and Captain Archie are quite happy out there together.”

“Then the big white ship has not gone away?”

“Oh no, she’s still there. Don’t you hear her ringing her bell to keep the steamers away?”

After lunch Eilidh had another taste of the sweets of civilisation in the shape of a great bag of chocolate drops which Raby took from his portmanteau and placed on the window-sill.

“Climb up and tuck into those,” he said. “I carry them for Sambo. He’s crazy for them. You’ll see”—and as if he had heard the words Sambo trotted up and begged hungrily, his little paws crossed in front, his sharp ears erect, and his eyes snapping eagerly.

Eilidh laughed and threw a chocolate. Sambo caught it and continued to beg, never taking his eyes off the sweets.

Raby brought out another bag.

“These,” he said, “are *my* refreshment. I nibble them while I’m working. They’re a wonderful help. Never tasted almonds, I suppose? Here you are, then.”

Eilidh proved as hungry for almonds as Sambo for chocolates, and while they rested on the window-sill and nibbled out of the bags in turn, Raby brought his sketch-book and let her look through it.

Outside the window the patter of the rain on the water continued, and when they glanced out, the dull white wall still hid everything from sight. But suddenly Eilidh gave a cry.

“Oh, shust see! Oh, Mr. Raby, look! A wee, wee boat! Iss it from the white ship it will be coming?”

Raby glanced at the boat creeping out of the mist.

“Rosamond and Captain Archie! Good girl! She’s coming to see me, after all.”

“Your sister? Then—then you will not be wanting me any more to-day, perhaps? Can I go away now, please? I—I think they will be wanting me at home.”

Raby laughed. “Don’t be a little goose! Rosamond wants to see you. I shall certainly want you again. Now mind, you’re not to run away. It would make me very angry, Eilidh. I’ll go down and meet them. You wait here till we come up.”

Eilidh, left alone, made for the door, but paused on the threshold.

“He would be ferry angry, an’ I ton’t like him when he iss cross. An’—an’—it issn’t as bad as last night! I hafn’t done anything to be scolded for. I—I—suppose I’d better stay.”

She heard the greetings at the door downstairs, and Rosamond’s merry laugh rang out at some remark of Raby’s. Then they began to climb the stairs, and Sambo ran barking to the door to meet them. Eilidh’s fear overcame her suddenly. She rushed across the room, and slipped under the bed as they entered.

“Why,” said Rosamond, pausing on the threshold, “I thought you said the loch-fairy was here? Has she flown out of the window?”

“I left her here. The monkey! She must have run away. I told you she was just like a baby rabbit.”

“But we didn’t see her on the stair. She must be hiding.”

“I’ll soon find her,” Raby said, and strode forward. “Let me see now! Will she be in the cupboard, or behind the curtain, or under the bed? I’ll find out——”

"No, Bernard, don't! She won't like it. Leave her alone!" Rosamond cried. "She'll come out of her own accord presently. If you make her come she'll hate you. I would myself. She'll soon find out we're not dangerous. Well, as I was telling you, we're going to call on Lady Avery. We must do something, you know. We wasted all morning waiting for the rain to clear, but it evidently doesn't mean to to-day, so we're going to make the best of it. I suppose the Averys have arrived? Have you heard at all? The woman downstairs might——"

"Oh yes, they've come. Baby Rabbit told me so."

"Don't call her names! I won't have it. Then that's all right. We'll go and have tea with her and little Lord Larry, and thank her for inveigling us to such a place. Did you ever see such rain?"

"How are you going to get there? It's a good four miles, Baby Rabbit says."

"Yes, but there's a closed carriage downstairs that we can hire. Mrs. M'Culloch told me so last night. I thought then it looked like raining for a week."

"Well, Duncan warned us. We can't complain that we didn't know."

"Ah!" Rosamond threw herself into a big chair and looked at him. "I want to speak to you about the brother-in-law. I've been thinking—what a splendid cat! But why does he sit on the mantelpiece? Does he belong to the house?"

"No, he's Baby Rabbit's property. Came through all the rain to keep her company."

"Stop calling her that, Bernard! It's silly, and she won't like it.—Well now, about Duncan. What do you think he meant? He didn't exactly tell the truth about Loch Ruel, did he? Why do you suppose he talked such nonsense?"

"It wasn't all nonsense. I agree with what he said about the rain."

"But yesterday was perfect. And he said there was nothing to see, and no one would come twice, and it wasn't worth the journey! What did he mean, do you think?"

"Well," Raby said thoughtfully, "I'll admit that it's been puzzling me, too. Either—Munro had only been here on a day like this, and honestly thought there was nothing to see—there is nothing to see to-day—and wanted to save me trouble—think that was it?"

"No. It was more than that. He spoke as if he knew the place well."

"Then—he didn't want me to come to Darmidale. And that, I must say, is what it seemed like at the time. He was so very eager to point out all the difficulties."

Rosamond nodded. "I remember. But why, Bernard? What could be the reason? Why shouldn't you come to Darmidale? And all the rest of us, too, for that matter?"

Raby laughed. "Ah, that's beyond me. I can't tell you. Perhaps he lived here once, and doesn't want us to know. He certainly lived somewhere in Scotland before he went to America."

Rosamond nodded thoughtfully. "Perhaps there's something he's ashamed of. Perhaps his relatives live here, and he's ashamed of them now he's so rich. Wouldn't you hate him if that was it? Wouldn't you despise him? Have you heard of any Munros living near here?"

"No. There are Campbells and Maclachlans and Morrisons. I've not heard of any Munros, and Baby Rabbit hasn't mentioned any either." He began to laugh. "Perhaps Munro murdered Helen up in Glenaroon, and is afraid——"

"Helen! What *do* you mean?"

"Didn't you hear that? Isabel wants to call the new baby Helen, and Munro won't have it. Gives no reason, but simply won't hear of such a thing."

"How very odd!"

“Well, it rouses one’s curiosity. There must be some reason. Perhaps Munro came courting Helen up on Loch Ruel, and she wouldn’t have him, and that was why he went to America.—That’s possible enough.—And now he doesn’t want Isabel to hear of it.”

Rosamond laughed. “What a thing it is to have imagination! You’d better find Helen and let us see her. It would be interesting. But I would like to know what was his real reason.”

“Tuts!” said her husband, who had been playing with Sambo and the chocolates. “There isn’t any reason. It’s all Raby’s imagination, as you just remarked. My child, if we mean to get to the Averys this afternoon, it’s about time we started.”

Rosamond sprang up. “All right. Good-bye, Bernard. I’ll think about Duncan, and let you know if I solve the puzzle.”

“If you wait half a minute I’ll find Baby Rabbit. She’s a silly child——”

“No, I’m going at once. Don’t make her come while she’s still afraid. But when you do find her, tell her I want to speak to her, as I would like to be friends. How well the picture is getting on! They’re sure to accept it, Bernard.”

Raby accompanied them downstairs, and when he returned found Eilidh sitting on the window-sill, watching the carriage drive up the road.

“You little goose! You don’t deserve to have friends.”

She reddened. “If the other man had not been there I would haf spoken to her, mebbe. But—I am frightened of him——”

“How silly!”

“Mebbe it iss, but I can’t help it. It iss how I will feel always.—Mr. Raby!”

“Yes?”

“Your sister was speaking of a man called Duncan Munro.”

“Yes?” he said, looking at her. “Little pitchers! I forgot you were there. So you understood English this time? It’s not polite to listen to what is not meant for you.”

“You knew I wass under the bed!” she cried, indignant at his tone of reproof.

He laughed. “I didn’t. I didn’t know where you were.”

“It wass not so ferry hard to understand the English to-day. I heard what you said, an’ your sister too, whateffer.—Mr. Raby!”

“Yes, child?”

“My name iss Eilidh Munro, not Eilidh Maclachlan, like you always say, though some folks will be calling me that, too. But my own name iss Eilidh Munro. Didn’t you know?”

“Oh? I always forget you don’t belong to the babies. Are there many Munros about here then, Eilidh?”

“I ton’t know any but me here, but there will be effer so many up at Inverary, Mr. Maclachlan says.—Mr. Raby!”

“Well?” he laughed. “Say it out, Eilidh, whatever it is.”

“My father’s name iss Duncan Munro. Issn’t that ferry funny?”

He laid down his brushes and looked at her.

“Is that a fact, or are you making it up?”

“I haf a pile of letters at the farm, that my father wrote to my mother, an’ ‘Duncan Munro’ iss at the end of effery one, in big black letters, ferry easy to read.”

Raby gazed at her. “I’d like to see those letters.—What was your mother’s name, Eilidh?—her first name? What did your father call her? What is her name on the letters?”

“You can see them, if you like. I haf a picture of my father, too, but there iss none of my mother. Her name on the outside of the letters iss Miss Morrison, but inside it iss Helen.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FARM OF THE SIX BABIES.

The rain was still falling heavily as Raby and Eilidh set out for the farm of the six babies. The road was a succession of ponds and swollen burns, through which Eilidh's little bare feet splashed cheerfully. But Raby had forgotten the rain. For himself he did not mind it, but he had carefully pinned Eilidh's plaid beneath her chin and wrapped it tightly round her. She carried Sandy in her arms, hugging him closely under the plaid. Raby had offered to carry him, but she explained that she did not think he would like to be carried by anyone but herself. He was not heavy, she declared, and she was always pleased to have him in her arms.

She talked a little at first, as they splashed through pools and puddles, but he told her gently that he was thinking hard and did not want her to chatter. At which she looked astonished, but presently became thoughtful also, and ran along holding his hand and wondering why he was so anxious to see those old letters.

The mile's walk to the farm did not take long, and soon they were climbing the steep brae to the farmhouse, which stood out against a background of white mist. The clouds had come down to rest on the rugged hills and rocks behind, and shut out everything but the whitewashed cottages close at hand.

And as they drew near to the first cottage a strange noise met their ears, growing louder as they approached. Such a noise! A din, a clatter, a rattle, then all together, and shouts and baby-laughter, and a long-drawn wail.

"Whatever is going on?" cried Raby. "Is somebody being killed, Eilidh?"

"It iss the babies, t'at iss all!" Eilidh sighed. "They will be in the house all day, you see, an' mother, she will be nearly crazy. I will haf to help her."

"It certainly sounds as if one of them was being murdered."

"It iss always like that. They will shust be hafing a bit game, t'at is all."

The uproar increased suddenly as she opened the door. Raby stood and looked round in dismay.

Mrs. Maclachlan stood by the big table ironing pinafores. Her lips were pinched into a frown, there were wrinkles in her brow, her eyes, as she looked up, were dull and tired.

The babies were all in the little stone-floored scullery, with strict injunctions not to get into mischief. Five-year-old Jock was armed with a big tray, and an iron spoon for drumstick. Tam had a tin mug and another spoon. The twins, Aggie and Maggie, held instruments of torture—round tin boxes containing a few pebbles from the beach, which made a noisy rattle. Wee Jimmie had the poker and was pounding valiantly on the floor. Alexander, the baby, was empty-handed, but contributed his share to the uproar by shouting at the top of his voice.

At sight of Eilidh he gave a scream of delight, which ended abruptly as he caught sight of the stranger behind. The rest of the babies dropped their playthings and stared blankly. Mrs. Maclachlan gave a sigh of relief.

"It iss coot to haf a minute's peace! Oh, the noise they will be making this day! It iss enough to trife a body fair silly. Hass Eilidh been a bad girl, sir? Iss t'at why you will bring her home so soon?"

"No, indeed. She has been very good. But—I wanted——" He hesitated.

"He will be wanting to see the old letters of my mother's an' the picture of my father. Where iss it I can find them, please?"

Mrs. Maclachlan looked astonished. "I haf put them away to be safe. I will fetch them to you, sir. Eilidh, if you coult hush the weans a bittie it would be a ferry coot thing."

"May I take them ofer to the wee byre?" cried Eilidh, with a sudden inspiration. "They coult play there, an' we woult hardly hear them."

"It iss a coot idea. I did not think of it. Take them away, do! I will be glad," said the worried mother. "They will get wet wi' the rain, but t'at iss no creat matter. They will dry."

"I'll carry them across," said Raby. "Show me the way, Eilidh," and before the astonished Alexander could object he was in the stranger's arms.

The cow-byres stood just across the yard. The larger held the few cows belonging to the little farm, but the smaller was empty. Raby dropped his startled burden on the stone floor, and hurried back for Jim. Then the elders, realising what was required of them, ran across in a body to escape being carried by the stranger. Eilidh followed with the tins, spoons, and other playthings, and threw them on the door with a word of Gaelic.

The byre was used as a storehouse, and made a fine play-room. In one corner was a pile of tools, in another a heap of potatoes and some old sacks. A great tub of water stood in the middle of the floor, in which Mrs. Maclachlan had been soaking some little garments, but of other furnishing there was none.

"What were they playing at when we arrived?" Raby asked. "I never heard such a row."

"It wass a band," Eilidh explained laughing. "One day a steamer at the pier had a band of soldier-boys wi' drums and trumpets, an' effer since, Jock an' Tam will be playing at a band. You see, there are so many of them, they can do it ferry well."

"Very well indeed," he agreed gravely. "They certainly make a fine noise."

"They haf not many things to play with, you see, an' when they can't go out all day they must play with something—oh, yess!"

She addressed the babies in Gaelic, her face and tone very severe, but they did not respond. Their eyes were fixed solemnly on Raby, whose presence evidently had a depressing influence on their spirits. Jock and Tam stared at him dourly, Aggie and Maggie put their thumbs in their mouths, wee Jimmie's face drooped ominously, and Alexander suddenly gave vent to a howl of dislike. So Raby laughed and withdrew, and Eilidh followed when her scolding was finished.

"They will be ferry good now," she said eagerly to her foster-mother, as they entered the kitchen. "I haf tolt Jack I will slap him if he tares to touch the tools, an' Tam I will whip him if he meddles the tub, an' Aggie an' Maggie I will shake them if they play wi' the potatoes, an' Jim t'at he iss not to go out in the rain, an' Alexander t'at he must not hit anybody wi' the poker. I ton't see what else they *can* do."

"If there iss anything else they will find it out," sighed the distracted mother. "Here be the letters, sir."

"Thanks! May I sit down? I want to examine them carefully. I fancy they may be rather important."

Eilidh sat down on the floor at his feet. Mrs. Maclachlan forgot her irons on the fire, and stood leaning on the table, watching his face curiously.

The letters, each in its envelope, were tied up neatly with a piece of string. As he untied them a photograph fell out, and he examined it eagerly.

"It iss my father," said Eilidh, and wondered greatly why his face hardened suddenly in an angry frown. It was very strange, but Mr. Raby was behaving very strangely to-day, and was not like himself at all.

"Yes, t'at iss Duncan Munro when he will be marrying Helen Morrison eleffen—no, twelf years ago," said Mrs. Maclachlan, and wondered greatly also.

Raby looked long at the portrait, though a glance had told him what he wished to know. There were the same straight, heavy brows, the same keen, hard eyes, which he knew so well. The big red beard was wanting, and the lack of it altered his face somewhat, but not sufficiently to leave any reasonable room for doubt. And across a corner were name and date, in a bold, unmistakable hand—"Duncan Munro, September 188—."

Raby's face was black with disgust as he glanced down at the little figure sitting at his feet, her hands clasped round her knees, her head thrown back, and her eyes fixed on him. Her face clouded at his look.

"Why are you so ferry angry? What iss it I haf done wrong?" she asked wistfully.

"It's not you, Eilidh. It's—it's—somebody——"

Through the open door came the sound of screams, shouts, and frantic mewing and barking. Eilidh and Mrs. Maclachlan rushed out into the rain, and Raby threw the precious letters on the table, and followed hurriedly to see who was being killed this time.

The byre was in an uproar. Jock was brandishing a hoe and shouting wildly. Aggie and Maggie, instigated thereto by Tam, had crept into a couple of dirty sacks, and were giggling gleefully as they crawled about the floor. Tam had caught Sandy, and with Jimmie's help was forcing him into the tub, while Alexander sat on the floor bombarding everybody with potatoes, and the two collies were jumping round him, barking with excitement at his shouts and at Sandy's piteous cries for help.

"Well, I neffer did! It iss too bad to haf such weans!" groaned Mrs. Maclachlan, and leant against the door-post in helpless despair.

It was Eilidh who grappled with the situation. She rushed forward, seized the hoe, and boxed Jock's ears. Aggie and Maggie she left alone—they were safe enough, though dirty. She rescued Sandy and dropped him outside the door, then seized Tam and shook him soundly, scolding in angry Gaelic all the time. Having reduced him to tears, she turned on Jimmie and whipped him, at which Alexander set up a wail of sympathy. Then she picked up the terrified Sandy and dried him tenderly on her short skirt, with soothing, pitiful words. When he had stopped trembling, she looked up at Raby and Mrs. Maclachlan, with a smile, which was a strange contrast to her anger as she dealt out punishment.

"They will be good now. I ton't think they will do it any more. They will know now it iss bad, you see. My poor Sandy! He wass nearly trowned, whateffer."

"I think," said Raby, "you had better wait with the babies, Eilidh, while I look at the letters and have a talk with Mrs. Maclachlan. I'll call you presently," as her face fell.

He went back to the kitchen and sat down to examine the letters, but they could tell him little more than he knew already. There was little more to tell. They were all addressed to "Miss Morrison, Stonefield Farm, Darmidale," and were all signed in the same unmistakable writing. It had not changed much in twelve years. The millionaire still signed his cheques so.

Among the letters he found the certificate of the marriage—which had taken place in Glasgow, and would, he guessed, be easy to prove—and of Eilidh's birth, which had occurred at Stonefield Farm, Loch Ruel. He took out his notebook and copied dates and addresses and

made several notes. Then he turned to Mrs. Maclachlan, who stood watching him in puzzled surprise.

"Would you mind telling me what you can about Eilidh's father? She does not know very much herself, and I am anxious to find out what I can."

Mrs. Maclachlan's face was full of eager curiosity. "Iss it possiple Duncan Munro iss not dead? Do you know him, sir? He went away when Eilidh wass shust born, an' we haf neffer heart a word o' him since. But he woult go to London—oh, yess! An' haf you met him there?"

"I don't know," he said guardedly. "I can't say anything yet. But I think perhaps I know something about him, so will you tell me all you can, please, and about her mother?"

"There iss not so ferry much to tell. Helen Morrison, she lived with her sister Jean, who wass marriet to Donald Macrae. They had a bit farm not far from here, but it wass a poor place, stony an' rocky, an' nothing woult grow, an' there wass no grass for the sheep. Duncan Munro wass head engineer on one of the steamers t'at come up to Darmidale Pier effery day. Helen, she used to go effery few weeks ofer to Dunoon by the steamer, to see an old lady there, an' to take her flowers from their bit garden, and butter an' eggs.

"And on the boat she made friends with Duncan, an' used to talk to him effery time she went to Dunoon. He wass a creat man on the boat—oh, yess! Quite a shentleman almost, an' had good wages, whateffer, so Jean Macrae wass ferry pleased he shoult be fond of Helen. He lived in Glasgow, but when the steamer season wass ofer, he had his holiday, an' came here one October to stay at Stonefield Farm wi' the Macraes an' Helen Morrison, and we all saw him, because we knew he wass going to be Helen's man. She had been at the school with me, so we were coot friends. She was the bonniest lass in Glenaroon, but neffer ferry strong. Eilidh iss like her ofer again, with her red hair an' gray eyes. And Duncan, he wass a fine man, ferry big and strong, with red hair, too, but not like Helen's. Hers wass like Eilidh's, yellow with a bittie red in it, but his was ferry red—we called him Duncan Roy.

"Well, Jean was ferry pleased her sister shoult marry a head engineer, an' we all thought he wass a fine shentleman for Helen. So they went up to Glasgow, an' there she wass marriet to Duncan Munro. They lived in Glasgow for a year, an' then Duncan had his holiday again, in November this time, an' they came to Stonefield to stay with the Macraes. But it iss cold an' wet here in winter, and Helen, she caught cold an' wass ill, an' then when the baby came she wass ferry ill inteet, an' when the poor wee Eilidh was shust a few hours old, she died. Duncan Munro wass ferry unhappy about it. He had been ferry fond of her—efferybody wass—an' he didn't care to stay in Scotland any longer when she wass gone. So he went right away, an' said he woult come back some day when he had got used to being alone.

"He didn't care about the wee baby, so Jean Macrae took care of her, as she had no bairns at all. But her man died in three years, an' she had a hard time wi' the farm. When she died, too, Eilidh wass only five years old, an' there wassn't a penny left for her when efferything wass paid. There was—a—a something on the farm—I ton't know the English word——"

"A mortgage?"

"T'at iss it. An' John McCluckie up in Glenaroon, he held the mortgage, an' he shust took the whole farm an' all there wass in it. I took the wee Eilidh to lif with me, for Helen Morrison's sake, an' because I had no bairns then, an' wass glad to haf a lassie. But effery year since, there hass been a baby of our own, an' now there issn't room for them all in our bit house. But Eilidh she helps to take care of them, an' I ton't know what I shoult do without her. She will lif here, I suppose, till she iss big enough to marry, an' then she will find a man quick enough because she iss pretty—oh, yess! There iss Rory Campbell—he iss fond of her alreaty,

an' iss always good to her, an' helps her an' takes care of her. He hass shust gone away to Arran, but he will come back—oh, yess!”

“If things turn out as I think they may,” Raby said slowly, “Eilidh will have plenty of friends. And you heard no more of Munro?”

“Nefferr a word, sir. We haf thought surely he wass dead. An' haf you seen him in London?”

“I can't tell you yet,” he said, rising. “I must go and find out. Don't speak of it to Eilidh yet. I would like to be quite sure first. Will you take charge of these letters again, Mrs. Maclachlan? Keep them very safely; they may be important. I'll take the photograph with me. Now I'll say good-bye to Eilidh.”

As he opened the door he found that the rain had ceased at last. Everything was dripping still, but the clouds were breaking, and the wall of mist was melting away. Thin wreaths of cloud still hung over the hill-tops, but the great hills round the head of the loch were looming big and mysterious through the softening curtain of mist.

He pushed open the door of the byre and looked in. The babies were seated on the floor in a half-circle, all gazing solemnly upwards, their big eyes fixed on Eilidh, who sat on an upturned pail, her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands. She was talking to them in Gaelic, and they were listening in rapt attention. Sandy sat by her feet, and whenever Tam or Jimmie looked at him he spat at them angrily.

“Eilidh,” said Raby from the doorway, “I've come to say good-bye.”

She jumped over the babies and ran to him.

“Will you not be wanting me any more to-day, then? I was shust telling the babies all about Sambo an' Sandy, an' the shocolates an' the almonds, an' they shust wish they'd been there too, Mr. Raby! And shall I come to-morrow morning ferry early?”

“I'm going off to London, Eilidh, but——”

“To London? You are going away from the loch!” she cried, in blank dismay. “An' shall I not see you again any more?”

“I have to go—on business. But I shall come back very soon—in a few days, I hope. So we won't say good-bye, Eilidh. I'm coming back to finish the picture.”

“An' when will you be going?” she asked piteously.

“By the morning steamer. I'll see you again very soon. And—Eilidh! If my sister should want to make friends, I hope you won't run away. You heard the message she left for you this afternoon? I would like to find you very great friends with her when I come back.”

Where the stony brae runs down from the farm of the six babies to the coach road, Raby waited to meet Rosamond and Captain Archie on their return from Darmidale Hall. The coachman saw him and pulled up, and he opened the door and jumped in, to their very great surprise.

“I'm going to dine with you on the yacht. Will you have me?”

“Bernard! Why, of course! Whatever are you doing here?”

“I've been seeing a young lady home,” he explained, as they drove on.

“It doesn't seem to have agreed with you,” Rosamond said, staring at him. “What's the matter? You look as cross as two sticks—as if you wanted to hit somebody.”

“I do. I want to knock him down, but I hardly see my way to do it. And yet I'm not sure. I rather think I'm going to hit him very hard indeed. I'll tell you all about it when we get on board. I've been making discoveries. Has Lady Avery anything special to say?”

“She wants to be introduced to you.”

"Kind of her. I don't wonder."

"She called on Isabel after we had left home, and saw your portrait of Iris. Of course she was delighted with it——"

"Of course. And she wants me to paint his little lordship."

"Perhaps, but not till they get back to town. They are staying here till the middle of September. She is finding Lord Larry rather a handful, so he is to have a tutor, who is to come up here in about a week to look after him. That's her chief news, and Larry doesn't at all approve of it.—Do tell us what's up, Bernard!"

Captain Archie looked puzzled and curious. Rosamond teased and questioned. But he would not speak till the white boat had carried them to the yacht, and they were sitting in the luxurious little cabin.

"I've solved the puzzle. I've found the answer to the riddle."

"What *do* you mean?"

"I know why Duncan was so anxious we should not come to Loch Ruel. I know why he wouldn't have his daughter called Helen."

"Well!" laughed the captain. "And you find, after all, it was nothing to make such a fuss about?"

"No, he finds we were right! He's made some great discovery. I can see it in his face!" Rosamond cried breathlessly. "See how serious he is! What is it, Bernard? Is it a murder? Or have you found his relations? Is it his old father and mother, whom he's ashamed of now? Tell us the worst at once, Bernard!"

"It is very serious," Raby said gravely. "It's just this. Munro stayed here for a while twelve years ago. In fact, he was married, and lived here with his wife Helen——"

"Is she dead?"

"Yes, eleven years ago."

"Then that's all right!"

"Not quite. When she died, he went away, and has never been here since. Everybody thinks he must be dead. But—he left behind him a child—a daughter."

The captain whistled. Rosamond raised her eyebrows.

"Oh? And the child is——"

"My loch-fairy, my model, my Baby Rabbit—Eilidh."

"You—don't—say!"

"Yes. He left her with an aunt, who died a few years later. Now she lives with some people who took her in out of pity, and have kept her because she had no other home."

"Have you proof of all this, Raby?" asked Captain Archie sharply.

"Of course, or I wouldn't say it. See that!—signed, too!"

They examined the photograph, and Captain Archie nodded, while Rosamond cried,

"It's Duncan, of course. It's very like him."

"There's a pile of old letters up at the farm, all written before their marriage and signed by himself; also the marriage certificate. It's all as clear as print, and easily provable. He can't get out of it."

"And what are you going to do?" asked the captain anxiously.

"The poor child! Does she know?"

"Not yet. Don't tell her till we see how things are going. I'm off to London by the first boat. I'll have it out with Munro, and then—we'll see!"

"The Munros are in Perthshire for the shooting."

"I'd forgotten that. Thanks! Well, I'll go after them and just see what he has to say for himself. If he tries to deny it, or refuses to do her justice, I shall go on to London and put the whole matter before—let me see! I've had no use for lawyers. Whom shall I go to, Grant?"

"Go to my father. If he can't act for you himself, he'll send you to the next best man. Then if Munro kicks and denies the whole business, you'll fight it for the child? Against your sister?"

"Yes, if it comes to that. I've been thinking it out. I couldn't see such a thing and not try to set it right. Her father's a millionaire, and she runs about barefoot! She can't write—she knows nothing—and she wants to learn. It's not as if she was contented. She shall have her chance. I don't like Munro, never did, and I won't let him do such an injustice while I can prevent it. She's his eldest child, and she shall have her rights. But I don't for a moment think he'll let it go so far, you know. Those proofs are conclusive. Any one would tell him in a moment he has no case. If he wants to fight, we'll fight too. But he won't, he has too much sense. He'll give in and try to keep the matter as quiet as possible. If I should go to London, I shall look Mollie up. I had a note from her this morning, saying she's back in town."

"But she was going to stay with the Estyns in Yorkshire till almost term-time!" Rosamond cried in surprise.

"I know. I don't know why she's home again so soon. She doesn't say. Perhaps they've changed their plans."

"She'll be lonely in town alone," Rosamond said, looking troubled. "I'm sorry. You must try to cheer her up."

"I'll tell her this story. It will make her open her eyes a bit."

As the steamer left the pier next morning Raby leant over the stern railing to see the last of Darmidale. And as he glanced at the pier there came a cry of farewell, and Eilidh ran down the road and through the gate, a baby in her arms. The other five followed, Jock and Tam dragging wee Jimmie between them. It had been a sudden thought on her part, and they had arrived too late to say good-bye.

He waved his hand, and they shouted and waved in reply. As the steamer rounded the point and the islands hid Loch Ruel from view, he could still see one dark figure and six scarlet spots standing on the pier and watching till he was out of sight.

CHAPTER IX.

“MR. LORD LARRY” IN TROUBLE.

Rosamond tripped daintily up over the shingle from the boat which had brought her ashore. As she stepped up to the road the Glenaroon coach came rumbling along, and she drew back to let it pass, keeping at a safe distance from the flying mud. The road was still full of puddles, and the hills across the loch were misty and doubtful. The steamer, carrying Raby away to Glasgow, had just disappeared behind the islands, and Rosamond meant to lose no time in making friends with Miss Eilidh Munro.

She climbed the steep brae to the farm of the six babies, and at the cottage door was confronted by a tall, thin man, with a face like copper, and a short pipe in his mouth—Mr. Maclachlan himself. His cap was on the back of his head, his hands were in his pockets, and he came out of the kitchen and lounged against the door-post, ready for a chat.

“Coot tay, mem! Will ye pe wantin’ a glass o’ milk, or some cream, mebbe?”

“I want to see the little girl Eilidh, please.”

“Eilidh? Oh, ay! But Eilidh iss off wi’ the weans to see the steamer away. An’ what will I say to her when she comes back?”

He looked her over from her big straw hat to trim little shoes, and smiled. In her dainty blouse and neat yachting skirt, held high out of the puddles of the yard, she was as pretty as a picture, an unusual sight in that lonely place, and Mr. Maclachlan’s approval showed in his broadening smile.

“Tell her that I—Mrs. Grant—want to speak to her, and that if she will wave something from the end of the point for a signal, I will come ashore again to see her.”

“It iss coot of ye to trouble ofer the lassie, mem. I will tell her wheneffer she will come back—oh, yess! An’ you will haf come to the loch in the big white yat? A ferry fine poat she iss, I am sure.”

“You’ll be sure to tell Eilidh?”

“Oh, yess, mem, yess! I shall be here. You see, Mrs. Maclachlan, she iss not feeling shust ferry well to-day, so I must pe near to see if she will want the toctor.”

“Oh, I’m sorry! What’s the matter?”

He slowly looked her over again, and smiled broadly.

“Oh, she iss shust not ferry well, mem, t’at iss all. But I must pe near, you see——”

“So you’re having a holiday?”

“Holitay! I haf not had a holitay for seffen years,” he said, and smiled lazily.

“Humph!” said Rosamond to herself, as she ran down the brae. “He looks all holiday. I guess he doesn’t work very hard.”

Some hours later Lord Larry, walking up the road, came to the little glen in which Raby had first made friends with Eilidh. From it came sounds of chattering and baby laughter. He climbed up the rocks and looked in.

The six scarlet-clad babies were playing shop with the coppers Raby had given them. Eilidh, at Jock’s suggestion, had asked the baker to change the pence into farthings, so they had now a fine jingling handful. None of the coins had been spent. They were far too precious to be lightly parted with. The babies had never possessed a penny before.

Jock was selling scraps of bread and oatmeal cake to Aggie and Maggie and Tam. Wee Jimmie and Alexander had been informed that they were too small to play and must not interfere. But their farthings had been confiscated and added to the common store, and the little ones quite appreciated the fact that they were receiving nothing in return. So Alexander had armed himself with handfuls of green blackberries, hard as bricks—since Eilidh had forbidden stones—and from a corner in the rocks was bombarding shopkeeper and customers. But his aim was very wild, and they paid no attention to him. Jimmie lay hidden in the bracken till a favourable moment, then, when all backs were turned, he made a dash at the shop and sent the goods flying in all directions, and secured two big handfuls for himself. The indignant elders threw themselves upon him, and Eilidh rose wearily from the rock on which she had been dreaming, and went towards the confused heap of arms and legs, scarlet bodies and flaxen heads.

As she turned, after scolding and shaking them all round, she found herself face to face with Lord Larry.

“Well, you are a chump!” he said frankly. “I’m glad to have a chance to tell you so.”

“I ton’t know at all what t’at iss,” said she with dignity, understanding his tone, however. “An’ I ton’t want to know, whateffer. I ton’t see why you shoul’t call me names.”

He laughed. “Why didn’t you signal to Mrs. Grant as she told you to? We’ve been expecting you all day. She was going to take you out to see over the yacht. I’ve been there all morning, and had a jolly good time, I can tell you. Why didn’t you come?”

“It iss ferry good of her,” Eilidh said thoughtfully. “I knew she had been here, but I did not know what she would be wanting with me. But I coul’t not haf gone anyway. You see, I must mind the babies. Mother issn’t ferry well, an’ they must not make a noise in the house.” But in her heart she knew that she had been glad of this excuse for ignoring Rosamond’s message.

“Oh, you’re the nursemaid, are you?” said Larry, with a laugh. “Look here, I want to know something. I was just looking for someone to ask. Is it possible to climb the hill behind our house? Have you ever done it?”

“No, but I haf climbed it here, an’ it iss all the same hill.”

“Isn’t it jolly at the top? Is there much to see?”

“Effer so much. Loch Fyne, an’ Arran, an’ all the islands, an’ Glenaroon, an’ the steamers, an’ the fishing-boats——”

“Is there a road?”

“A path, I coul’t show you.”

“Do! Come! Let’s go now. Mother doesn’t expect me back till tea-time, so we’ve heaps of time.”

And Eilidh, charmed with her new playmate, and flattered that a lord should ask for her company, even if he was younger than herself, forthwith forgot all about the babies, and set out with him for the hill-top.

Left to themselves, the six played on happily, quarrelled, fought, made it up, and played again, till long past their usual meal-time. Then they all realised at once that they were hungry, and turned to Eilidh for satisfaction. When they grasped the idea that she had deserted them, one and all, even manly Jock, set up a howl of dismay. They were cold, too, and yesterday’s mist had come back and was falling in drizzling rain. The babies were too unhappy and bewildered to think of finding their way home. They huddled together in a corner by the rocks, and wailed for Eilidh, mother, father, anyone to come and help them.

"It iss a steep path," said Eilidh, as they set out up the hill, "and ferry wet wi' the rain, whateffer. I ton't care, but mebbe you do?"

"Goodness me, no! The wetter the better," said Larry stoutly. "It all adds to the fun."

But he found it rather worse than he expected, for the only dry spots were where rocks and stones lay bare to the wind. In a very few minutes both children were thoroughly soaked, and Larry began to wonder what his mother would say to the state of his knickerbockers. But Eilidh climbed cheerfully on through knee-deep mud and bog and heather, and brushed past dripping bracken and through sodden gorse bushes without a thought for her clothes, and where she could go Larry must follow. To be sure, as he said to himself, with a touch of scorn, her dress did not matter a bit—her little shawl would dry easily, and her short skirt was already stained and torn, while if her bare feet were muddy, who cared? Certainly not she.

But after a time, as they neared the hill-top, there was no more bracken, but only rocks and stones, all with a generous clothing of purple heather, and Eilidh scrambled on more easily and did not pause even to take breath. Larry was tired out and panting, but he would not ask her to stop, but followed with a very red face, and stumbled out at last on the broad, bare summit. He dropped on a flat rock and lay in the wind, fanning himself with his cap, while Eilidh stood and let the breeze blow through her hair and gazed about her.

They stood on a great rocky ridge. On each side the hill fell away in steep slopes to the water. Before them lay a wide shining loch, far bigger than Loch Ruel, and running up among the hills till it lost itself among them. Beyond it lay a range of hills, blue in the distance, and the stretch of water between was dotted with brown-sailed fishing-boats.

On the one hand were the blue peaks of Arran, and the lower rounded slopes of the islands, green and purple. On the other were the hills of Glenaroon, and many others which could not be seen from the shore—hills crowding together, green, and brown, and gray, and purple; some clear, some shadowy; some smoothly rounded, others bold and rugged, of many different shapes and outlines—and beyond them mountain peaks, faint and blue in the distance. Behind lay Loch Ruel, its farms and cottages mere white dots on the hillsides, its tiny pier and inn almost hidden among the trees. The great white yacht looked like a toy; the afternoon steamer seemed to Larry no bigger than the little tin boats he had seen in London shops.

Eilidh sat down presently on a dry rock and glanced at her companion.

"Why, you are ferry tired! Did you think it woult not be so far, then? Or haf you neffer climbed a hill before, Mr. Lord Larry?"

Larry sat up hastily. "I'm all right. I was only pretending. But I'd like——"

Eilidh regarded him gravely. "T'at issn't true, you know. You shoult neffer say untrue things. You are ferry tired."

"What rot!" Larry cried indignantly. "Don't you give me any cheek, miss, or I won't bring you with me again."

"It seems to me," said Eilidh, laughing slightly, "t'at it wass me brought you, an' showed you the way, whateffer."

"What bad English you speak! Talk about grammar!"

Eilidh reddened resentfully and was silent. She did not know what grammar was, and would not say so. And she rather disliked his patronising tone, till she suddenly remembered that he was a lord, though he certainly did not look like one in his present dirty and draggled state. But he was rich, and a gentleman, and had lived in London, and knew everything, or at least a great many things, and presently she turned to him eagerly.

“Tell me about London, please, an’ the places you haf seen, an’ the creat people you haf met, an’ the books you haf read, an’ efferything! I want to know all you can tell me.”

Larry could not understand this thirst for knowledge, but he was very willing to satisfy it. It had nettled him to find her, though only a girl, yet undoubtedly stronger than himself and a much better climber. So it was pleasant to boast of his knowledge and experience, and to dazzle her with tales of the splendours of London and other cities. She listened hungrily, believing every word, and her wide eyes and evident admiration and envy eased his wounded pride, and restored his good opinion of himself.

They sat there—he talking, she listening—both too much absorbed to pay any heed to what was happening around them. The clouds crept softly round the peaks of Arran, and soon all the hills were wrapped in mist. It hid the water on both sides of the ridge, and presently thin rain began to fall and Eilidh awoke to a sense of their position.

She started up, and looked in dismay at the white wall which shut them in.

“I think—we had better—go home! And—and—the poor babies! I had forgotten them altogether! An’ I wass minding them! Oh, what shall we do? Come away down at once! They will be wet, an’ cold, an’ hungry, an’ they will neffer think of going home without me! Oh, dear! oh, dear!”

“I forgot them, too,” Larry said ruefully. “I say, isn’t this rain horrid! We’ll be drenched.”

“I ton’t care if we are! But shust think of those poor, wee babies! Nobody will know where to look for them, an’ mother, she will be worrying, an’ it will make her iller an’ iller——”

Larry did not correct her this time. He was fully occupied in trying to follow her down the steep slope without falling. The rocks had been hard to climb, but the descent was still more difficult, and in the mist he could not see a step before him. Eilidh scrambled on recklessly, falling and bruising herself, but always starting on again at once, and Larry had to follow or lose sight of her altogether.

“Bother the babies!” he exclaimed at last. “Can’t you go slow? You’ll break both our necks if you don’t look out.”

She turned on him indignantly. “How can you! How tare you! An’ we haf left them alone and out in all this rain, an’ it iss our fault! Alexander he will be coughing all night, an’ the twins will be ill, an’ mother iss ill alreaty, an’ we are to blame, you an’ me! Come on quicker, or I will leaf you behind alone.”

But suddenly she came to a stand, with a sharp cry. Larry hurried up and found her peering over the top of a cliff, where the rocks fell away in a sheer wall. The bottom of the chasm was hidden in mist—it might be five feet, or fifteen, or thirty.

“We can’t go down there, you know. It’s no good staring at it. What must we do now?”

“We haf lost the path,” she said, with wild, frightened eyes. “It iss not the road we came up. We must find it again. There are some ferry bad places like this where we woult be killed if we fell ofer, so be ferry careful.”

They skirted the cliff cautiously, but found no spot where descent was possible. Nothing but a goat could have gone down safely, and Eilidh had to admit it. With every step the path along the edge became more difficult and dangerous, till at last she came to a stand.

“I ton’t know what to do!” she wailed, and sank down exhausted in the heather. “There iss shust the one safe road, an’ we haf lost it. Till the mist iss gone we can neffer find it again.”

“But it may last for hours, or even all night!” Larry cried in dismay.

“Yess. We shall haf to wait.”

"But we can't! Don't be a donkey, Eilidh! Feel how hard it's raining! What will mother say? I say, this is beastly, you know!"

"Shust think of those poor wee babies!" moaned Eilidh, and hid her face in her hands.

"How like a girl! I'm going to find a way down."

"You will fall an' preak your neck," she said, with calm despair. "You had better mind where you are going."

"Is there nothing we can do?"

"You can shout if you like, but there iss no one to hear. If only I thought they would find the babies!"

"Bother the babies! I'm thinking about us. I wish I hadn't come. I couldn't have come if you hadn't shown me the way."

Eilidh's eyes flashed angrily. "It wass you asked me to, an' you know it. I had neffer thought of it. How can you say it iss my fault?"

Larry said nothing, but sat down a little way from her, hungry and cold, with bruised limbs and aching feet. Used to being petted and spoilt, he felt now very ill-used and unhappy. It never occurred to him that Eilidh was as badly off as himself, or worse, because less warmly clad. All his pity was for himself. It was too bad of this silly girl to have led him into such a fix. He had some very hard thoughts of poor Eilidh, who knew it, and blamed herself exceedingly, in spite of her self-defence. What would Lady Avery say? How frightened she would be! She would never think Larry could be to blame at all. It would all be Eilidh's fault, of course. As for the babies, she dared not think of their plight, nor of Mrs. Maclachlan's anxiety.

She crept close to a rock for such little shelter as it could give, and drew her tiny shawl tighter round her shoulders. Larry shivered and crouched in his corner in dull despair, and would not look at her. The mist would last for days, and they would starve or die of cold. The shepherds would find their bodies and carry them down, and his mother—— And he gave a little sob. Eilidh glanced at him scornfully. After all, he was only a wee laddie, and just like other laddies, though he was a lord. He was neither stronger, nor braver, nor cleverer than the laddies she met at the school. She would not cry, or, if she did, he should not see it.

A couple of hours later they were still crouching there, half asleep and utterly miserable, when the bark of a collie close at hand brought Eilidh to her feet in sudden hope. She shouted eagerly, and received an answering shout, and presently a couple of men and a great sheep-dog came through the mist on the hill above them.

She ran to meet them, and then, with a cry of joy, sprang into the arms of the first comer.

"Rory! Oh, I am so glad! So ferry, ferry glad to see you, Rory. But I thought you were in Arran? I knew you would find me if you were here."

"I came back for some things I left behind. I coul't not carry them all at once. An' the ferry first thing I hear iss that Eilidh iss lost, an' the lord-laddie, an' the babies too, whateffer, an' efferybody iss searching for them!" He took her in his arms. "Will you take the laddie, sir? I'll see to this bad lassie."

Captain Archie lifted Larry, and Rory set Eilidh on her feet again.

"I can't carry ye ofer the rocks, Eilidh, but I'll help ye all I can."

"We coul't not find the path. It iss ferry easy when you show us the way. Oh, what apout the babies, Rory? Haf you found them? I haf been so afrait——"

"An' so you shoul't be, too," he said severely. "Why did you leave the poor bairns, Eilidh? Oh, they are all right *now*! We haf found them an' taken them home. But they were wet, an'

cold, an' hungry, an' their mother wass nearly out of her wits with fear for them. Now she iss so ferry ill that Mr. Maclachlan iss away for the doctor, an' Mrs. M'Culloch from the inn iss with her. I shust hope she will get better an' not die. Yess, I think you shoul't cry a bittie, Eilidh. But mebbe it woult be the lord-laddie's fault? He iss a bad boy, they say. Wass that it, Eilidh?" and his face hardened.

"I—think—it wass both of us together!" Eilidh sobbed, too honest to throw all the blame on Larry. "He asked me to go, an' I—forgot—the babies!"

CHAPTER X.

MOLLIE SCENTS DANGER.

Mollie Raby sat on the fender, feeling lonely. She had not even a fire to cheer her up, for it was August, and London was hot and sultry; nor a cat to keep her company, for when Sambo was at home there was no room for cats in the little flat. But Sambo was in Scotland with Bernard, and Rosamond was in Italy with Captain Archie, and Mollie felt very lonely.

Bad news had unexpectedly cut short her visit to friends. She was alone in London, for everybody was out of town. She had just come in from a discouraging round of business visits, and was tired out and in unusually low spirits.

"I don't think I want any tea. Tea all alone isn't very cheerful. I shan't have any. I'll go out to a tea-shop and sit there and watch the people. No, I won't, I'll stay at home and feel grumpy. . . . Mollie, you little goose! you don't generally go on like this. That kettle's boiling."

She sprang up, laughing ruefully at herself, and fetched the kettle from the gas ring. She made tea for one in a tiny tea-pot, cut three slices of thin bread and butter, and put a spoonful of jam into a crystal dish.

"It seems ridiculous to make tea just for one's self. It looks so silly! Bernard always says I eat like a sparrow. I don't really want it, you know, but I suppose I ought to. Why didn't I think of bringing in something with me to make it more festive? And I haven't even a story to read. I must go to the library to-morrow."

She sat down to her lonely meal, and ate and drank in gloomy silence. The day's events had been disappointing. She was worried and undecided, and had no one with whom to discuss her troubles. A letter from her brother or sister just now would have raised her spirits, and given her new courage. But she had only had a picture postcard from Bernard since he went north, and had not heard from Rosamond for some days.

A step on the stair outside—perhaps it was a letter after all! But that would be too good to be true.

What was this? A latchkey? She ran to the door of the sitting-room, and in a moment, with a cry of amazement and delight, was in Bernard's arms.

"Bernard! Oh, I am so glad! I was so lonely. I was almost ready to cry. I've no one to speak to, and I'm just longing for a talk. But whatever are you doing here? You didn't mean to come home so soon, surely. Come along, and I'll give you some tea. It is nice to see you! I'll have fresh tea in two minutes. I wish I had some cake in, or something tempting, but I didn't care just for myself, you see. Have you heard from Rosamond lately? I've not had a letter for an age, so I suppose she's enjoying herself. What have you done with Sambo? Didn't you like Scotland? Is the picture finished already? Or did it rain all the time, as Duncan said it would?"

He laughed. "I'll answer a dozen of those questions presently, but first I want to hear about you. What are you doing here when you're supposed to be away enjoying yourself? You know the only reason I didn't take you along with me was that you were so keen on going to Yorkshire. I told you to be sure and have a good holiday, and here I find you moping alone in London. What do you mean by it, Moll?"

She frowned as she made the tea. "It's rather a sore subject. I was having a lovely time with the Estyns in Yorkshire, and just wishing you were there to enjoy it with me, when I had

a letter from Miss Barlow. She is anxious to find a post for a very old friend, and would like to make room for her in her own school, so would I forgive her for not giving me a term's notice?"

"The mean old——!"

"I really don't think she knew last term, and it's only natural, of course, that she should want to have her friend in the place, but it's very upsetting for me. I've been out all day at agencies and registries, and all the last few days, too, but so far I've had no luck. It's sickening to begin it all again, isn't it? Just when I was so comfortable and thought I was settled for good."

"But, Mollie, she hadn't any right to do such a thing! Did she give you a term's salary?"

"No," Mollie admitted, "she never mentioned it."

"But you're entitled to it, child!"

"Of course I know that, but, you see——"

"Did you ask her for it?"

"I couldn't, Bernard. She hasn't anything to spare. I know she finds it hard enough to run the school as it is. I couldn't ask her for anything. I said I was very sorry, of course, but that was all I could do."

"I'll talk to her! Girls are so soft——"

"No, you won't. Of course they are! She's been good to me on the whole. I couldn't turn round on her and be nasty."

"Why didn't you let us know? We couldn't imagine why you were back in town."

"I didn't want to spoil your holiday. I knew you couldn't do anything. But don't worry about it. I'm sure to find something soon. Have another cup of tea, and stop scolding, like a good boy, and tell me all your news. Where have you come from last? Not Scotland surely? Have you only come south to-day?"

"I've been spending the week-end with the Munros in Perthshire," he said slowly.

"Oh! But why? Whatever were you doing there?"

"That," he said, looking at her solemnly, "is part of the tale I have to tell—a very dreadful tale—a very interesting tale—a mysterious, romantic, thrilling tale—a tale of hidden marriages, millionaires, and a fairy who lives by a Highland loch—a tale which explains why Duncan Munro tried to keep me away from Loch Ruel, and why he would not call his baby Helen—and a tale which concerns you, Miss Mollie, very closely, and which makes me exceedingly glad that Miss Barlow has seen fit to dispense with your valuable services."

"Oh!" Mollie sat down and gazed at him breathlessly. "What—*do*—you—mean? Tell me quickly, Bernard. Is it all a joke? Or whatever has happened?"

"I'll tell you the whole story when I've had something to eat. After a ten hours' journey a man must have something, if it's only bread and butter. No, it's all right; don't look so distressed, child. I knew you wouldn't be expecting me, so I had lunch on the train. I think I can hold out till supper-time. But I want my tea, so you really must try to wait for two or three minutes."

Presently he settled himself in a big chair, and Mollie took her place on a footstool at his feet, looking up at him expectantly. And while she listened in great surprise, he told her of his meeting with Eilidh, of Rosamond's arrival, and of his great discovery.

"But," she gasped, as she understood its full meaning, "are you sure, Bernard? Have you proof? It's very serious, you know. Whatever will Duncan say? Bernard, it *can't* be true!"

"My dear, it is. We have proof, and what's more, Munro has practically admitted it to me. You see, I left Darmidale on Friday morning, and went straight to Perthshire to find him. They have a big house party for the shooting, and are very busy, but I told Duncan I must see him on business, and we had it out. At first he denied the whole thing, of course, and laughed at me and talked a lot of rot. But I told him what proofs I had—letters, and papers, and photos and things—and after a bit he had to climb down. He practically admitted it, but said he must consult his lawyers before doing anything.

"He had to come up to town for a day or two on business, anyway, so he left at once on Saturday morning, and didn't get back till last night—Monday evening. I spent the week-end with Isabel and her friends, and would have had a very good time if I hadn't been worrying over this affair. However, Munro came back in a very reasonable frame of mind. He had evidently come to the conclusion that he couldn't fight the matter. There's really nothing he could fight, you see. The proofs are conclusive. He wouldn't do all I wanted, certainly, but he yielded a good deal.

"I wanted him to acknowledge Eilidh at once, and give her her proper place and education. But he wouldn't have that. He doesn't want Isabel to know—naturally. I think he's a bit afraid of her. I would be myself under the circumstances. But there's reason in the way he looks at it. As he says, Eilidh is absolutely ignorant and untrained, and would be miserable if taken straight from the farm to live with Isabel in her great house. The child is as shy as a little wild animal. Madam Isabel would say her manners are impossible—I rather like 'em myself. But you see what I mean. She has everything to learn, and it would be cruelty, not kindness, for the Munros to take her at present."

Mollie nodded. "Poor little thing! I see. But what's to be done? Isn't he going to tell Isabel?"

"Not at present. I tried to insist on it, but found it was no use. He's willing to provide for Eilidh, and have her educated—civilised, he said—and, later on, he will acknowledge her all right. You see? Of course, he only wants to put it off, but perhaps it's the best arrangement for the present."

Mollie nodded again. "And how is it to be managed?"

"Ah, now *you* come in, my dear. He said I must find some lady who would take the entire charge of her and educate her thoroughly. I suggested you, and——"

"Oh!" Mollie cried. "But that would be too good to be true!"

"You'd like it, then? Thought it would just suit you, but I didn't know how to get you out of Miss Barlow's clutches. I knew you wouldn't throw her over, and Eilidh needs you at once."

"But am I really to teach her? Was he willing? Oh, of course I'd like it! There's nothing in the world I'd like better. It just seems too perfect to be possible."

"He made no objection. Said it would be rather a good scheme to keep it all in the family. I promptly told him his family and mine were very different things, and we were in no hurry to claim relationship with his—or words to that effect. I couldn't help it. I felt like kicking him all the time. He's going to give you fifty pounds a year salary, and another hundred and fifty pounds to keep yourself and Eilidh."

"It seems a great deal!" Mollie said thoughtfully.

"It's nothing to him. You're to live in Scotland at present. He insists that Eilidh shall stay there—doesn't want her brought up to London, you see. How long will it take you to get your things ready?"

"It's rather sudden!" Mollie cried, in consternation. "I shall need ever so many things. You'll have to give me a few days, Bernard."

"I'll give you two, then we'll go north together. Just get what you need at once, and for the rest you can run up to Glasgow and take Eilidh with you. Shopping would be a new experience to her, and would do her heaps of good and open her eyes a little. Till you've seen Loch Ruel and Glenaroon you can't realise how little she knows. I didn't believe such lonely places existed so near the cities. The sight of a train would probably frighten her almost out of her wits. But she's a clever child, mind you, and eager to learn. You'll enjoy teaching her.—Now, suppose we go out and begin your shopping. I made Munro pay in advance, of course, so here's the first instalment of your salary, my dear."

"I don't like to take it before I've done anything for it. I haven't even seen the child!"

"Tuts! Don't be a little goose! Come along and spend it. I know you love spending money. What shall we get to-night? Hats? Do let it be something interesting while I'm with you. You shall go alone to-morrow."

"I should think so, indeed! My dear boy, I can't just walk out and begin buying hats like you do cigarettes. I must think, and plan, and consider what I have already that will do, and what can be altered——"

"Well, get things that won't hurt with rain. It knows how to rain up there! And—of course! I was forgetting. You must get clothes for her, Moll, and take them north with you. Her things are almost rags. She needs everything."

"But how can I, till I've seen her? I don't even know how big she is."

"We'll guess. I've painted her for three days, so I've looked at her pretty well. Come along, and we'll get her a regular trousseau. I told her father she'd need everything, and you'd have to get a lot in the way of books and things as well, and made him give me another fifty pounds to give her a good start. He didn't mind the money—would agree to almost anything I asked, if only I'd promise to keep it quiet.—Get your hat on, and we'll see to it at once."

Late in the evening they sat together, Bernard talking of the beauties of Loch Ruel and Glenaroon, of the Averys, of the six babies, Mollie busy at a pile of little garments, for, as she explained, "You can never trust a shop-sewn-on button, you know." Presently Bernard took up the evening paper, and she sat, thinking and stitching busily. She had forgotten her own needs in her interest in Eilidh's outfit, and had thoroughly enjoyed the work of choosing the daintiest and prettiest things obtainable.

But suddenly she looked up. An idea had been working in her for some time and demanded utterance.

"Bernard, how long did you say Duncan was away while you were in Perthshire?"

"From Saturday morning till Monday night. Why?"

"That didn't give him long in London, did it? You see, it takes about twelve hours each way. He can only have had Sunday here, and he couldn't do very much on Sunday."

Bernard laid down his paper and stared at her.

"What are you driving at, Mollie?"

"Only thinking. Does Duncan know that Rosamond and Captain Archie are there?"

"No, I purposely didn't mention it. Thought I'd keep them up my sleeve and only bring them out in case of need. If he'd said I could do nothing alone I'd have informed him that they knew all about it, too. But why, Moll? What's troubling you?"

"I was just wondering.—Those letters you spoke of—which prove that Eilidh is his daughter—I suppose they would be valuable to him if he could get hold of them? He could

deny the whole thing, and you couldn't prove it."

Bernard sat up. "What do you mean? What is it, Mollie? Out with it—quick, child!"

She looked at him. "I suppose he could get from Perthshire to Loch Ruel in a few hours?"

Raby sprang to his feet. "And you think—— But he wouldn't, surely. Of all the dirty tricks——!"

"I think," said Mollie quietly, but with eyes bright with excitement, "that you had better go back to Eilidh at once, and see if those letters are safe. She doesn't understand their value, I suppose? He could very easily get them from her. And he doesn't know Rosamond is there."

"And a man who could do the one thing might do the other. When is the next train?"

CHAPTER XI. THE MAN.

Eilidh had many visitors that Saturday which Raby spent in Perthshire.

First came Rory, very early in the morning. He was on his way to the steamer, and carried a bundle, which he set down at the door of the farmhouse.

"I shust cam' roun' to see how ye were feelin' the morn, Eilidh. Are ye better?"

Eilidh looked up from the porridge pot, which she was stirring vigorously.

"I was neffer ill. Oh, I am ferry well, Rory. An' are you going away again so soon? Can ye not stay shust for a day or two?"

"No, I must get back to-day. I haf to catch the Arran boat at Innistrave Pier, so I haf the long walk roun' the loch. I wish the steamer woult come up to Darmidale, so we woult not haf to walk ten mile or so."

"An' haf you come t'ree mile out of your way shust to see me?" cried Eilidh, in dismay. "Oh, why effer did you come, Rory? Now you will haf twice three mile as well as all the rest. Surely it wass long enough alreaty."

"I thought ye might be ill after being lost on the hill, so I shust cam' to see. Oh, the walk will neffer hurt me. It iss a fine morning for a walk after all the rain. I'm glad you're no' ill. I shoult haf been sorry to go away if you had been."

"It iss shust a coot thing I'm not ill," Eilidh said with energy. "There iss enough to do.—Oh, Rory, will you please take Alexander off the table? That bad Jock hass helped him to crawl up, an' he will spill the milk-pail, an' I cannot leaf the porritch or it will boil ofer. Thank you so much! Whip him a bittie—t'at iss enough!—or he will cry an' wake mother."

"How iss Mrs. Maclachlan?"

"Oh, she iss all right *now*, but the toctor wass here for effer so long, an' Mrs. M'Culloch iss upstairs still. But she iss going home when she hass had some porritch. Oh, yess, mother iss better, an' *all* the babies are ferry well!"

"That iss good. You will neffer do it again, will you, Eilidh? I can't go away to Arran an' think of you getting into trouble such as this. I shoult worry effery day about you. Ton't haf too much to do with the lord-laddie. He will haf you in mischief all the time. Promise me, Eilidh, please!"

"I will try, inteet I will! An' I shall haf no time now. I shall be ferry busy—oh, yess!"

Rory nodded. "It iss good for you to be busy. I shall write to you soon, Eilidh. Now I must go or I shall miss the steamer. Good-bye, an' ton't be a wild wee lassie any more."

Soon after Mrs. M'Culloch had set out for the inn to attend to Saturday morning's business, a small girl climbed the brae to the farm. It was Lizzie, who lived up in Glenaroon, and had been sent for more than once on similar occasions to help Eilidh.

Eilidh sighed thankfully at sight of her.

"I am glad you haf come at last! There be the babies! Take them away, do! They haf had their porritch and are all reaty to go out, an' I will be glad to haf them out of the way. Take them down to the shore, an' mind, whateffer you do, not to let them fall in the burn. Watch them effery minute, an' ton't even look at the sea-gulls or steamers or anything, or they will be in the water, sure."

"May I see—shust for one minute——"

"No," said Eilidh promptly. "Take the babies away. Mebbe if you are ferry coot all day I will let you haf one wee peep before you go home. She iss sleeping shust now."

So Lizzie drove the scarlet flock down to the shore, and Eilidh turned to her housework. She washed up piles of dishes, many of which had waited for her since the night before. She made the beds, and folded up and put out of sight the baby clothing which was lying about. She cleaned pots and pans, and prepared Mr. Maclachlan's dinner. Then she went out into the yard, with her arms full of baby garments, for, while she was stirring the porridge, Aggie and Maggie had escaped from her watchful eye, and had wandered across the farmyard, and enjoyed a game of hide-and-seek among the pig-sties. She rather enjoyed an hour's washing, so set to it with a will, singing cheerily while she worked.

The sun outside was hot and the ground muddy, so she filled the tub in the little byre and did her washing there, instead of out in the burn. She was beginning the second pinafore when a shadow fell across the tub, and, looking up, she saw Lord Larry standing in the doorway. So she stood with her hands in the tub and her bare arms all over soap-suds, and looked at him.

"So you're no' ill to-tay, Mr. Lord Larry? I wass afrait you woult be, mebbe. Was your mother ferry cross? Did she gif you a whipping?"

"No, of course not. She was too jolly glad to get me back safe. I told her we might have been killed up there."

"It wassn't ferry kind of you, then. You shoult haf said nothing about it."

"Were they very angry with you?"

Eilidh nodded, and began to rub Maggie's pinafore vigorously. Larry sat down on a pail and watched her.

"You'll make a first-rate washerwoman some day. Did your father whip you? You once said he would."

"Iss it likely I woult tell you if he did?" said she scornfully. "He wass angry, of course, for I had made mother ferry ill. I wass ferry angry with myself for being so silly.—We haf a new baby here, Mr. Lord Larry! Issn't that fine? A wee, wee lassie, a sister for the twins——"

"Another baby! How awful! I thought you had your hands full already."

"They can be a bittie fuller yet. We haf always room for a baby here, an' mother, she iss so pleased to haf a lassie. We are tired of boys altogether."

Larry changed the subject.

"I shan't get a bit of fun once my tutor comes. It's just hateful——"

"What iss that?"

"A man who teaches you all kinds of things, and never lets you——"

"I wish I coult haf a tutor! It iss shust the ferry thing I haf been wanting for effer so long!"

"You!" Larry laughed, with a touch of scorn in his voice, and she reddened and finished wringing out the little garments in silence.

"I am going to hang these out to dry. You see, the twins ran into the pig-sty. Then, if you want to talk, you must come into the kitchen, an' be ferry quiet, for baby iss sleeping, an' mother too, whateffer."

He wondered if he should help her to carry out the basket of wet clothing, then lazily decided that it was too much trouble. After all, it was hardly worth while being polite to her, and she would certainly not expect it.

"Now," said Eilidh, when the little things were dancing bravely in the breeze, "I am going to make scones, so you must not talk too much, or they will not be ferry coot to eat."

"Can you make scones?" and Larry's respect for her increased, as he watched her business-like way of setting to work.

"I suppose Lady Afery woult like some to-night, as it iss Saturtay? If they are coot enough I will send them by Lizzie when she iss going home. I shall not haf time to go myself. There will be the babies to put to bed, you see, an' it iss bath-night, an' six baths are not done in fife minutes—no, inteet!"

"I don't care who brings them, but mind you let us have some. And say! Make 'em as good as the last lot. They were ripping."

Eilidh laughed. "I will try. I will do my ferry best."

"Mind you do," he said, and presently strolled away and left her to her work.

Lizzie and the babies were sitting on the shore, listening while Jock gave an excited and highly-coloured account of the adventure of the evening before, when Jimmie gave a scream and pointed to the water. The others scrambled to their feet, and stood gazing at the white boat, which had crept in while they were not looking and was now grounding on the shingle.

Rosamond stepped ashore and came up the beach, laughing at their surprise.

"You did look so nice all sitting there in a ring, and the biggest little one waving his arms about and shouting! What was he saying? And where is Eilidh?"

They withdrew hastily behind Lizzie, who looked and felt ready to run, herself. She did not speak, but pointed to the farm, and Rosamond laughed.

"In the house? On a lovely morning like this? I'll soon fetch her out."

She passed on to the road, leaving them gaping. The sailor-boys in the boat grinned and grimaced and invited them nearer, but not even Jock would venture.

The cottage door stood open, and Rosamond glanced in. Eilidh was sweeping out the kitchen, and she watched her unnoticed for a few moments. Such a sober little face, so intent on her work, such ragged clothes, such brown little feet! She had plaited her thick hair loosely because it was in her way while she worked, and it hung over her shoulders in a long, bright rope, and she had thrown off her tartan shawl, for the kitchen was hot, and wore only a tattered cotton petticoat-bodice, which left her brown arms free from the shoulders. She was very busy and very much in earnest, as she swept the dust out of the corners into a neat little heap in the middle of the floor, and Rosamond smiled and tapped on the door.

Eilidh turned quickly, and her look of surprise changed immediately to one of the deepest dismay. Her eyes grew shy and her face troubled, and she glanced at the stairs as if meditating flight. Then common-sense came to the rescue, and she went forward doubtfully, the long broom in her hand.

"How very busy you are, Eilidh!" and Rosamond's smile was as friendly as she could make it. "Couldn't you leave the work to some one else? I want to show you my yacht."

"There iss no one but me to do it, mem."

"Oh, dear! But there must be some one else, surely! Mrs. Maclachlan——"

"She iss in bed," said Eilidh, leaning on her broom and looking up at her visitor, "an' she hass to stop there to take care of the wee baby. It woult cry all the time, if she came to help me an' left it all alone."

"Not another baby besides the six on the shore, surely!"

"Yess, mem," smiled Eilidh, "a new ferry wee one, a lassie."

"Their poor mother! How is she?"

"Oh, she iss ferry well, thank ye, mem."

"And so you have to take care of the house?"

“Yess! An’ I shoultnot stand talking here. You see,” she explained shyly, “in an hour the babies will be wanting their dinner, an’ I must make the porritch, an’ the cows must be milked, whateffer.”

“Oh, dear! Couldn’t I do something to help? I don’t like to think of you doing it all alone. I’m afraid I couldn’t milk the cows——”

“They woultnot like to haf a strange body insteat of me. Oh, no! There iss no need for anybody to help, mem. I haf done nearly efferything, an’ Lizzie, she iss minding the babies, so I haf not them to trouble me——”

“Could I mind the babies, and send Lizzie in to help?”

Eilidh laughed. “They woultnot be afrait of you, mem. They woultnot run away.”

“I’m afraid they woultnot. But I woultnot like to do something.”

“But there issn’t any need, mem, no, inteet! It iss ferry kind of you, but I will get on ferry well alone. It iss not the first time! When the babies haf had their dinner I will wash the floor an’ do the grate, an’ then efferything will be done.”

“You needn’t do all that, surely, Eilidh! Don’t attempt to wash the floor, child! I’m sure it couldn’t be any cleaner.”

“Oh, but mother, she woultnot be happy in her bed if the floor had not been washed. I must haf it shust as clean as if she wass here herself—oh, yess!”

“Well, don’t do too much and get knocked up yourself,” said Rosamond, and went thoughtfully down the brae, while Eilidh, feeling mightily important, swept up her dust, and then, taking the milking-pail, ran across the yard and into the bracken to call the cows.

An hour later came Lady Avery. The smart carriage and pair drew up at the foot of the brae, and the little lady got out and picked her way daintily through stones and puddles to the cottage. The door stood open as usual, and from within came cheerful chatter and laughter, and subdued Gaelic scolding. She peeped in, and smiled at the sight.

On each side of the big kitchen table was a wooden bench, and on each bench sat three scarlet-frocksed babies. Six flaxen heads were bent over six big bowls, and each baby had a horn spoon in one hand and was busily making the porridge disappear. At the foot of the table sat Lizzie, as hard at work as any of the babies. At the head sat Eilidh, in Mr. Maclachlan’s big chair, a treacle jar and a plate of oatmeal cakes before her, looking sober with the responsibility of giving the children their dinner and keeping them reasonably quiet, for the “new, ferry wee baby” upstairs was asleep.

Lady Avery tapped on the open door, and Eilidh looked up quickly, and started to her feet. She was growing used to receiving visitors, and was no longer afraid of Lady Avery. But suddenly she remembered the escapade of the day before, and hesitated, dreading a scolding. The babies dropped their spoons and stared in dismay, and Lizzie gasped, “My cootness!”

“I want to speak to you just for a moment, Eilidh. I won’t keep you.”

Eilidh came to the doorway. “I will come out to you, mem. Then the babies will not be shy.” She drew the door close behind her, and presently the chatter began again.

“I came to tell you not to trouble about making scones for us to-day, Eilidh. You must have quite enough to do without that. Larry ought to have had the sense to tell you so.”

“Oh, but they are reaty, mem! I woultnot have liked you not to haf them—no, inteet! I hope they will be good. I haf done my best.”

“I’m sorry you troubled, child.”

“It iss no trouble, mem, an’ mother she will be glad I haf done them.”

“How is she? Larry told me——”

“Oh, she iss ferry well now, but she wass ill last night—oh, yess! An’ did he tell you we haf a wee baby?—a dear wee lassie?”

“Why, are you glad, Eilidh?” smiled Lady Avery, “when you have all those babies already?”

“But, of course, anybody would be glad to haf a baby!”

“What about school?”

Eilidh looked sober. “I ton’t know. I shall haf to stop at home an’ nurse the baby. But the winter is coming, mem, an’ it iss always wet, so I coult not haf gone anyway.”

Lady Avery laughed. “And what about yesterday, Eilidh?”

She reddened. “I am ferry sorry, inteet I am. But he issn’t ill, iss he?”

“I quite expect it was Larry’s fault, and I came to tell you so, for fear you should think I blamed you. Now don’t say any more about it. I am quite used to Master Larry’s pranks, and am not the least surprised. And I brought a little present for the baby. Will you give it to your mother? Now, run away back to your dinner. I must go home, or I shall be keeping Larry waiting for lunch.”

The babies crowded round Eilidh as she opened the parcel in the kitchen and displayed a soft white shawl, and many were the cries of admiration, as she let them feel and stroke it, before it went upstairs to Mrs. Maclachlan.

And, as if all these visitors were not enough, in the afternoon came the Man. Not till many years afterwards did Eilidh understand who he was, but she was questioned so closely about his visit, and had to repeat all its details so often, even to his very words, that she never forgot it.

She was on her knees on the floor, washing busily and singing softly as she worked. She had scrubbed the table and tidied the dresser, and the kitchen was the picture of neatness. The scones and honey were packed in a basket, ready for Lizzie to take to Lady Avery. Eilidh felt she had done a good day’s work to atone for yesterday’s prank, and was quite pleased with herself.

A knock on the open door made her look up. On the threshold watching her, stood the Man. He was a very fine gentleman, there was no doubt of that, dressed in a dark suit, and with very shiny boots—as tall as Mr. Maclachlan, but with big broad shoulders, hair turning gray, and a big red beard with gray hairs in it.

Eilidh knelt on the half-washed floor, and, shaking back her bright rope of hair, gazed up at him. He looked down at her gravely, almost sternly, she thought.

“This is Mr. Maclachlan’s farm?”

“Oh, yess, sir!”

“Is he in?”

“No, sir. He iss away up in Glenaroon, an’ will not be in till late. I am ferry sorry——”

“Never mind. Are you called Eilidh Maclachlan?”

“No, sir. Well, yes, inteet, I am called that, but I am Eilidh Munro,” and she sat on her heels and looked up at him in astonishment.

“I have a message for you from a friend of yours, called Campbell?”

“Rory? Oh, yess! But he wass here the morn. What for woult he send me a message, whateffer?”

“I’ll tell you about it,” and the man walked in and sat down in Mr. Maclachlan’s big chair, satisfied that there was no fear of interruption. “I was driving round the loch from Innistrave. I came down by steamer this morning——”

“Rory was to get the boat at Innistrave.”

“As I came round the head of the loch I saw a young fellow sitting by the roadside. He seemed in some trouble, so I told my man to pull up and ask what was the matter.”

“T’at wass good of you!” said Eilidh appreciatively.

The man smiled slightly. “I found that he was in trouble—was in a hurry to catch the boat, but had a bad foot and couldn’t walk.”

“But his foot wass quite well this morning!”

“I offered to give him a lift, so we got him into the carriage and drove him round the loch to Innistrave.”

“Oh, how good of you! How ferry kind you must be!”

“He would never have got the boat. When he heard I was on my way to Darmidale, he asked if I would mind stopping here and giving you a message. ‘You will find Eilidh Maclachlan at the farm,’ he said. ‘Tell her from me not to be too friendly with the lord-laddie, for he is a bad boy.’ Then he asked me to tell you about his foot. It seems that when he left you this morning he was passing the big house—Darmidale Hall—when from one of the trees came a shower of peas, and hit him on the face, hands, everywhere. I suppose the ‘lord-laddie,’ as he called him, was having a game with his pea-shooter.

“Of course the peas did no harm, and young Campbell walked on, as he could not get at the other boy. But, when he was fairly past, the young rascal threw a stone—a large one, and sharp—which caught him on the back of the ankle, and gave him a nasty cut, I fancy. He had bound it up, and was doing his best to get along when I met him, but it was evidently very painful, and he would certainly not have got the boat without my help.”

Eilidh’s eyes were blazing with wrath. “I will neffer, neffer speak to the lord-laddie again! I would not haf thought he would do such a thing! An’ did not Rory catch him?”

“He couldn’t, because of his foot. But he wanted you to know, and so he sent the message.”

“I will mind. I coult neffer be friendly with Mr. Lord Larry again—no, neffer!”

“Who is he?”

“He iss called Lord Avery, but he iss shust a wee laddie, an’ a bad laddie, whateffer!”

“Evidently!—Well, now, that was your friend’s message. I have one of my own as well. I came to Darmidale on purpose to see you.”

Eilidh’s eyes opened wide. “To see me? But what did you want with me? An’ how did you know I would be here?”

He looked at her keenly. “I know your father.”

“Oh!” she gasped. “But—but—issn’t he dead? Iss he alive? An’ you know him!—oh!—An’ will he come to see me?”

“Perhaps, if you are good. He asked me to bring you a message.”

Eilidh’s eyes grew rounder. Her father had sent this fine gentleman with a message! She waited breathlessly to hear it.

“I think you have a bundle of old letters belonging to your father?”

“They will be my mother’s letters. But I haf them—oh, yess!”

“Your father wants them. Give them to me, and I’ll take them to him. But be quick, or I shall lose the boat.”

“I will get them, sir. They are upstairs to be safe. I will only shust be a minute,” and she sped away upstairs.

The Man smiled. He had not dared to hope for such easy success. Certainly, he had been wonderfully fortunate so far. Now, if only the child would be quick! And he sat waiting for her to come.

CHAPTER XII.

CAPTAIN ARCHIE TO THE RESCUE.

“What iss it, Eilidh? What will you be after? An’ who iss it you haf in the kitchen?” asked Mrs. Maclachlan.

“It iss a man—a ferry fine gentleman—my father hass sent him. He wants those old letters we showed to Mr. Raby. Will they be in this box?”

“Yess, but—Eilidh! I ton’t think you should gif them to him. Wait a bittie! If he wants them ferry badly, he won’t run away. How do you know he hass come from your father?”

“He said so!”

“Oh, yess, yess! But mebbe t’at isn’t true, lassie. What woult your father be wanting wi’ some old letters?”

“I ton’t know! But if he wants them, he must haf them.”

“I’m not shust so sure,” said Mrs. Maclachlan wearily. “Let me think a bittie, Eilidh. Mr. Raby, he said, ‘Keep the letters ferry safe. They may be ferry important.’ I ton’t know why, but it iss what he said. If we gif them to this man, an’ Mr. Raby he comes back an’ wants them —,”

Eilidh’s face filled with distress. “I did not know Mr. Raby had said that. You neffer told me. What shall we do? The Man said my father had sent him——”

“But we ton’t know if it iss true. We ton’t know who he iss, but we do know Mr. Raby.”

“Yess, intee!—Oh, I ton’t know what to do!”

“I wish I coult go down an’ see this man! I woult soon fin’ out who he iss, an’ what he iss after!—I will tell you what to do, Eilidh!” she said, with sudden decision. “You run an’ ask the leddy, Mrs. Grant, what you must do. She iss Mr. Raby’s sister, she will know what iss best.”

“I’ll go at once! It iss a coot idea!” Eilidh cried in delight. “She will know—oh, yess! She iss ferry cleffer. But—the Man iss down there! He will want to know where I am going.”

“Say we are looking for the letters, an’ will he please to wait a bittie.”

The man rose quickly as Eilidh’s bare feet pattered down the wooden stairs.

“We haf not found the letters, sir. If you could wait a wee bittie we will not be long.”

He sat down again, frowning. Eilidh went towards the door.

“I suppose the big yacht out there belongs to the Averys?” asked the Man.

“Oh, no! It will belong to Mr. Raby’s sister an’ her Captain-man. I will fetch you some milk, sir. You will be tired after riding so far, an’ I woult like to gif it to you. You were good to Rory—oh, yess!”

She slipped out, and drew the door close behind her. A look of blank dismay and an ugly scowl had filled the man’s face at mention of Rosamond. Eilidh, trembling suddenly and terrified, escaped before he could stop her.

When she had gone he started to his feet. Was it safe to stay, with Rosamond and Captain Archie out there on the yacht? But the letters! He must have them, if possible. He would risk it. It would be strange if the Grants chose this particular moment to visit the farm. He sat down again, feeling very uneasy, however.

Eilidh sped down the brae, then stopped in surprise, for here stood a closed carriage—the carriage which had brought the Man. Then she ran past it and across the shore, carrying in her hand one of the little pinafores which had been hanging out to dry. Standing in the water at the

edge of the point, she waved her flag vigorously, and watched anxiously for some sign that she had been seen.

But no notice was taken of the signal, and she grew desperate. What if the Man should follow, and drag her back? If he had not been telling the truth, as Mrs. Maclachlan feared, he would certainly not wish Mr. Raby's sister to hear of it. And that look on his face!—she was sure he was angry. She began to listen for his footstep on the stones. Oh, why did not Mrs. Grant come? Surely she could see——

Then along the road came the sound of feet, and Eilidh sprang into the bracken, and lay trembling. The steps came crunching down the shingle. Would he find her? Oh, what would he do to her? That look on his face—he was very fierce and angry. He was coming round the point——

She gave a sob of relief as Lord Avery stood by the water's edge, looking round in puzzled surprise. In a moment she was by his side.

"I thought—I thought—it wass the Man! Oh, I'm so glad it iss shust you! I want to go to the boat—to Mrs. Grant—but they ton't seem to see me. What shall I do, Mr. Lord Larry?"

"I couldn't think where you'd got to. Why, whatever's up? What's scared you? You are in a state! What's the matter, Eilidh?"

"I must go to the boat. I'll tell you after. Can you make them come?"

In much surprise he pulled out a whistle and blew a shrill blast. Eilidh glanced apprehensively over her shoulder, but the Man did not come.

"Now wave that thing again. That's it. Here comes a boat. It'll be here in five minutes. Now what's the row?"

"There iss a Man at the farm, an' I am afrait of him. I want to tell Mrs. Grant."

"Isn't your fater there?"

"No, there iss nobody but me, an' mother iss in her bed, an' we ton't know what to do."

"We'll send Captain Archie after him."

"Yess," said Eilidh, and watched the slow approach of the white boat. It seemed to crawl. At any moment the Man might come striding down the beach, and she had not much faith in Larry's protection.

But at last the keel grounded on the shingle, and she ran forward eagerly.

"I want to go to Mrs. Grant, if you will take me, please, an' as quick as you can."

The sailor-boys grinned and winked at one another as she scrambled in and sat down, pulling at her short skirt to cover her knees. Larry tumbled in after her.

"I'm going to see the fun and hear all about it."

Eilidh glanced at him, suddenly remembering Rory's message. She had something to say to "Mr. Lord Larry," but this was not the time for it. So she did not speak to him at all, but turned to look at the sailor-boys. Now that she was in the boat, with the distance from the shore lengthening every moment, she felt safe, and able to look about her.

How funny the shore looked from the middle of the loch! What a wee place the farm was! She laughed at sight of the babies on the shore. She had not seen them before because of the trees of the point. They looked like a flock of great red birds settled on the beach.

Then the boat bumped against the side of the yacht, and Rosamond leant over the railing.

"Well, Eilidh, I'm glad to see you here at last! Is anything the matter, dear? I hope Mrs. Maclachlan isn't worse?"

One of the sailors let down a ladder, and Eilidh ran nimbly up.

"Oh, she iss ferry well, an' the new wee baby, too, whateffer! But I haf something to ask you, mem. We ton't know what to do."

"Come and let my husband hear all about it, too," and she led Eilidh along the deck, Larry following curiously.

What a wonderful place this ship was! Eilidh's eyes were very wide by the time she reached Captain Archie, who was lying lazily in a deck chair, with Sambo, the black Pomeranian, at his feet. She had never seen any place like it before. How beautiful everything was! And how clean! But she had not time to see much, for Rosamond, sitting down in her own chair, asked,

"Now what's the matter, Eilidh? Tell us all about it."

Larry seated himself on the deck at her feet, and they all waited for the story. Eilidh glanced shyly at Captain Archie, of whom she was still rather afraid, because to her mind he looked so fierce, with his brown face and big moustache. But, after all, that might only be because she had heard Mr. Raby say he was a soldier. Then she turned to Rosamond.

"It wass Mrs. Maclachlan told me to come to you, mem. Up at the farm there we haf some letters and papers of my mother's, an' before Mr. Raby went away we let him see them, an' he said, 'Keep them ferry safe. They may be ferry'—something or other. We ton't know what he meant, but it iss what he said."

"Yes? He told us about them too. I hope nothing has happened to them, Eilidh?"

"I hope not, indeed!" said the Captain, so suddenly and vigorously that Eilidh jumped, and was confirmed in her opinion of his fierceness. "Take care of them for your own sake, Miss Eilidh!"

"They are safe shust now," she said shyly, "but there iss a man there asking for them. He says my father sent him to fetch them."

"*What?*" and the Captain sat suddenly upright, looking fiercer than ever.

"Oh, Eilidh! You haven't given them to him?" cried Rosamond breathlessly.

"You couldn't be such a little fool, surely!" began the Captain.

"Hush, Archie! You're frightening her. Tell us quickly, Eilidh, dear."

Eilidh looked bewildered. "I did not gif them to him——"

"Thank goodness!"

"But I haf come to ask you what I must do, please. If my father wants them he shoult haf them, and this shentleman says my father sent him to fetch them. But mother—Mrs. Maclachlan—she says mebbe t'at issn't true, an' mebbe when Mr. Raby comes back he will be wanting them again. There iss no one at the farm but her an' me an' the wee baby, an' we ton't know what to do. So will you tell us, please?"

"You're a clever girl, Eilidh. The very best thing you could do was to come to us. Of course he mustn't have the letters. Bernard would be very angry if they were gone when he came back. Archie, what must we do?"

"I'm going to interview the gentleman. Where shall I find him, Eilidh?"

"Up at the farm, sir, sitting in the kitchen."

"What's he like?"

"A ferry big man, with a red beard and gray hair, ferry nicely dressed."

Rosamond and the Captain looked at one another. Then he sprang up.

"He surely wouldn't dare——"

"Perhaps he doesn't know we're here."

"He did not know, but I told him," Eilidh said anxiously. Perhaps she had done wrong to tell. It was all so very strange.

Captain Archie laughed. "Wait here till I come back, Eilidh. I want a few words with this gentleman."

"Mayn't I come too, Archie?"

"No, my dear. What's the good? Perhaps there'll be a row, and you'd be in the way. Don't be frightened. Nothing very dreadful will happen. I think I'd better bring those letters out here and lock them up for safety. It's not right to leave them up at the farm, if we're to be subject to this kind of thing."

They watched him go off to the shore in the white boat. Then Eilidh turned to Rosamond.

"Whateffer iss it all about? Why do those old letters matter so ferry much, mem? I ton't understand at all."

"Neither do I. What's the row?" asked Larry curiously.

But Rosamond did not know how much to tell Eilidh, and did not mean to tell Lord Avery anything at all at present, so she only said gravely,

"We think the man was trying to cheat you, Eilidh. Probably there was not a word of truth in what he said. He wanted to steal your letters, which don't belong to your father at all, you know. They were your mother's, and now they are yours."

"But my mother's—my father's—iss it not shust all the same thing?" asked Eilidh, with round eyes.

"Thought your real father was dead long ago?" said Larry wondering.

"So did I. But yon shentleman said no."

"We are trying to find out all about it, Eilidh, but till Bernard comes back we can't be sure of anything. So be a good girl, and don't tease. Would you like Larry to show you over the yacht?"

"I shoul't go back to the babies, mem. I haf to gif them their tea early, for there are so many of them to haf baths to-night, an' I cannot haf more than two in the tubs at once, even if Lizzie waits to help me."

Rosamond laughed. "I think you must wait till Archie has driven that man away. Sit down here in my chair, and Larry can take the other one. There, is that comfortable?" as Eilidh lay back restfully in the deck chair.

"It iss ferry nice—oh, yess! It iss ferry coot of you, inteet, mem."

"You're tired, Eilidh. You've been working too hard to-day, I'm afraid."

"But there wass shust me to do the work, an' I wass glad to do it, whateffer. I am tired a bittie, but it iss no creat matter, mem."

"Have a good rest now. Larry, I'll leave her in your charge. Don't let her fall overboard."

She walked away and stood by the railing, gazing anxiously at the shore, and wondering what was happening there. Eilidh turned to Larry. It was the time for explanations.

"Why did you throw a stone at my friend Rory this morning, an' make him lame?"

Larry stared. "What d'you know about it? You weren't there?"

"But I know all the same. A robin told me—t'at iss what I will always say to the babies! What did you mean by it? It wass a wicked thing to do, a ferry, ferry—I ton't know the word—a ferry *unbrave* thing to do, to hide out of sight, an' then throw stones! I'm ashamed of you! I ton't——"

"I didn't! I didn't do it!" cried Larry, getting in a word with difficulty.

"You did! Oh, you know ferry well you did, an' I know it too—oh, yess!"

“Who told you?”

“Neffar you mind. It iss true, or you woult haf said at once it wass not, insteat of shust saying, how did I know? I ton’t want to haf any more to do with you. You ton’t speak the truth, an’ I ton’t like you.”

This was more than Larry had expected, and he hastened to excuse himself. For Eilidh was his only possible playmate on Loch Ruel, and to lose her altogether would be serious.

“Look here, Eilidh, that’s not fair! You haven’t heard my side of it yet. I—I—only threw the stone at a rabbit I saw at the other side of the road! I wanted to see if I could hit it, but I threw wide and hit him instead. I was really awfully sorry, for I never meant to hit him.”

Eilidh looked at him steadily. “Are you quite sure, Mr. Lord Larry? Shust now you said you neffer did it.”

Larry reddened. “Well, I didn’t mean to. It’s all the same.”

She shook her head doubtfully and sat silent, her chin in her hand, her elbow on her knee.

“An’ you shot at him with peas, too.”

“Oh, well! They don’t hurt. I was practising when he came along, and I wanted some fun. You like fun yourself now, Eilidh, you know you do, and it did no harm.”

“I ton’t like that kind of fun. You had no pissness to shoot him—no, intee!”

“Oh, well, never mind now! It’s not worth worrying about,” Larry said easily. “Come and see over the yacht. I’ll show you everything. I know all about it.”

Eilidh hesitated. She would have liked to be dignified and refuse to go, but the temptation was very strong. She looked round at the spotless deck, the shining wood of the little cabin, the gleaming brasswork everywhere, all as bright as scouring and polishing could make it—and gave in.

“I will go with you an’ see,” she said soberly, “but you are not shust the kin’ o’ laddie I like, Mr. Lord Larry.”

He laughed. Her displeasure did not greatly trouble him. He was sure she would soon forget.

They were going down to see the engines, Larry acting the part of showman with great delight, when Eilidh glanced towards the shore.

“The wee boat iss coming back!” she cried, and ran to the side to hear what Captain Archie had to say.

His face was full of anger and disgust.

“He’s gone,” he said briefly, as he reached the deck. “Made off in a carriage when he saw me coming. Didn’t want to face us, evidently, so I suppose we shall never know. I’ve brought those letters, Eilidh. The little girl who was with the babies fetched them for me. You’d better let me keep them for you till Raby comes back.”

“I woult be ferry glad, sir,” she said shyly.

Captain Archie stood frowning at the shore.

“Couldn’t we catch him somewhere? Where’s he making for, I wonder?”

“He will get the boat at Innistraive,” cried Eilidh eagerly.

“What, just round the point? Right!”

Before they had guessed his thought, he was over the side, and the boat was speeding across to the opposite shore of the loch.

“He’s going to try to catch him. He’ll get ashore long before a carriage could drive right round,” cried Rosamond eagerly.

“Well done, Captain!” shouted Larry, and Eilidh said shyly,

“It iss a coot idea, an’ it iss ferry kind o’ him to take so much trouple shust ofer me.”

She did not understand in the least what it was all about, but Rosamond was Mr. Raby’s sister and she had perfect confidence in her.

They waited anxiously for something to happen. But Captain Archie disappeared among the trees, and the boat lay waiting by the shore, and it was a long time before it began to creep back again.

The Captain climbed on board, annoyed and disappointed.

“It seemed no use waiting any longer. There’s not a sign of him anywhere. What do you suppose has become of him?”

They looked at Eilidh, as the only one who knew the district. She stood puzzling over the matter for a time, then cried,

“He will haf taken the other road an’ gone away through the hills to Dunoon. It iss a good fifteen mile, an’ it iss not the way he came. But he woult guess, mebbe, that you woult wait for him ofer there.”

“Well, he’s gone for good. There’s nothing else we can do. I wish I’d seen him just for one minute!”

“Please, I must go home! The babies will be crying for their tea, an’ mother she will want to know what you say about it. I think I had better go at once, if you ton’t mind. I shoult not haf left the babies so long, you see.”

CHAPTER XIII.

EILIDH HEARS THE NEWS.

Eilidh sat on the doorstep, her knitting needles flying busily. It was a good central position, with many advantages. If Mrs. Maclachlan called from upstairs, or if the “new ferry wee” baby cried more loudly than usual, she would hear in a moment. If any trouble befell the six babies, playing just across the yard, she would be close at hand to set matters right. If Mr. Maclachlan came in from the fields, or if any visitor came to the farm—a not unlikely event, now that she had so many new friends—she would be ready to receive them. If the kettle boiled over in the kitchen, or the cows wandered down to the road, she was prepared to fly to the rescue.

From her seat she could see up and down the loch, along the road, and up the hill. The great white yacht still lay off the tree-covered point, and she looked at it longingly. Her brief visit on Saturday had been so interesting, but so short. She would have liked to go again, but could not leave the babies.

Soon the afternoon steamer would come creeping through the islands into the loch, and up to the pier—when would Mr. Raby come back? It was Thursday, nearly a week since he went away. How long would his business take?

The babies were playing in the yard. Jock had seized the empty cow-byre for his castle, with Alexander as garrison. The garrison did nothing but sit on the shore and shout and wave a duster, certainly, but Jock was a host in himself. The twins and wee Jimmie, led by Tam, were trying to carry the castle by assault, and some hard knocks were being given and taken. They all believed in noise as an aid to warfare, and the shouts, screams, and cheering could have been heard far up the road.

Eilidh watched them complacently. They were quite happy, and at the moment in no danger of anything worse than a few bumps and bruises. These were such everyday matters that no one paid much heed to them, and as for the noise, the tiny baby would have to get used to that sooner or later.

Steps along the road made her look up. It was Lord Larry, and on the whole she was glad to see him. He was some one to talk to, and he had not been near the farm since Monday.

She waved the sock she was knitting for Mr. Maclachlan, and Larry came slowly up the brae.

“Coot tay, Mr. Lord Larry! An’ hass your mother said you may go out to-tay, then?”

Larry reddened. “I’m going to the yacht. Care to come? Come on, and we’ll have a good time. It’s jolly out there, but a bit slow for me alone. We could have some rare larks, you and I. Come on!”

“I coult not leaf the babies. I woult like effer so much to go, but it issn’t possiple, you see.”

“Bother the babies! Do ’em good to look out for themselves for a bit. Come on!”

“I can’t,” said Eilidh, knitting harder than ever.

“You’re afraid of being scolded. You’re afraid Mr. Maclachlan would whip you again.”

“An’ he woult be quite right, too, if he did—yess, intee!—an’ mother in her bed, an’ a wee baby needing me!”

“Nursemaid! I believe you like it!”

"Of course I do. It iss no good, Mr. Lord Larry, I can't go. Besides, I'm not so sure t'at I want to, either. If I went with you I would be lost, or trowned, or killed, or something."

"Rot! Don't be a goose! What d'you know about it, anyway?"

"Oh, efferything! T'at robin he told me; now I'll tell you. On Friday we were lost, you an' me, up the hill. On Saturday you threw a stone at Rory—oh, yess, you did! Ton't say you didn't! On Sunday afternoon you went for a walk by yourself, and went wading out on the sands up the loch, an' were caught by the tide an' nearly trowned, whateffer! If Mr. M'Culloch on his way home from Glenaroon had not seen you, you woult haf been trowned, an' serf you right—on a Sunday, too! On Monday——"

"I say, shut up! Who told you? It's too bad!"

"T'at robin, you know. What wass on Monday?—oh, I know! On Monday you found a boat on the beach an' got in—shust for fun, I suppose! But you pushed it out with an oar—shust for fun!—an' the river water caught it an' carriet you off to the middle of the loch, an' the Captain-man had to fetch you in his boat. I shoult think you would be ashamed! And on Tuesday——"

"Look here, Eilidh, stop it, or I'll go away——"

"There are lots of robins round here!—On Tuesday you were down by the road when the coach came past, an' you jumped out, an' scared the horses so they shied, an' the people were nearly thrown off. Oh, it iss a bad boy you are—yess, inteet! They shoult not let you out without a collar roun' your neck, like a little dog. An' so yesterday Lady Afery she kept you in bed all day, an' said if you did not stay she would ask the Captain-man to whip you, an' quite right too, whateffer! Oh, yess, t'at robin he told me all about it. Good-bye! Ton't get drowned or killed to-day if you can help it!" she called, as Larry walked off, deeply offended.

"Now he will be ferry angry, but I ton't care. He hass no right to trouple his mother so. When she wass here yesterday to ask if mother wass better, she said to me she woult shust be glad when the tutor-man came on Saturday. And Mrs. Grant, she only asks him out to the big boat because there he must be good, an' it will gif his mother a rest. I know ferry well it iss shust that. I shoult think she issn't ferry fond of Mr. Lord Larry. He iss—what wass it she said?—a pickle, t'at he iss! Oh, but I woult haf liked to go!"

She dropped her knitting into her lap and watched with wistful eyes while Larry waited at the end of the point for the boat to come. But as it touched the shore Rosamond jumped out, and hurried up the shore and brae.

"Eilidh! Eilidh! We've had a telegram from Bernard—my brother, you know. He's coming by the afternoon boat, and we're going to row down to the pier and take him back to the yacht for tea. Don't you think you could manage to come, too? Isn't Lizzie here to look after the babies?"

"Oh, I would like to, mem! But Lizzie, she isn't here to-tay. Her own mother needed her, so I ton't think I coult come. I would like it effer so much. I do so want to see him! But I must not leave the babies."

"Wouldn't they be all right just for an hour or two?"

Eilidh shook her head. "You ton't know Jock an' Tam."

"Could we take them with us, and just leave the tiny ones? They couldn't get into much mischief alone."

"Oh, but they woult! Jimmie he iss shust Jock an' Tam ofer again, an' both put together. And Aggie and Maggie woult run right to the pig-sties if I wass not here. They do so love the

wee pigs! No, mem, I coult not come, but I am ferry, ferry sorry. Will you tell Mr. Raby? Perhaps he woult come up here——” she paused wistfully.

“Of course he will. I’ll send him up this evening,” Rosamond said heartily, and, to Eilidh’s astonishment, bent and kissed her. “Now I must hurry back to that monkey of a boy. I have to keep my eye on him the whole time. And now I shall have to send him home. We can’t have him about while Bernard is telling all his news.”

How many times Eilidh glanced down the brae and across at the yacht! How often she looked through the doorway during tea-time, and ran out for another look while she was washing up the dishes! But Mr. Raby did not come, and at last she had to begin putting the babies to bed. It must be confessed that she was less patient with them than usual that night, and not quite so careful over their evening toilet as Mrs. Maclachlan might have wished.

When the last baby was tucked up in bed she ran downstairs to see if Mr. Raby was coming yet, but there was no one in sight. The yacht lay out in the loch with no sign of life about her—were they all asleep?

She sat down on the doorstep and took up her knitting again with a puzzled sigh. Why did he not come? She felt lonely and sorely disappointed.

With a tentative “Pr-r-r?” Sandy stalked up and laid an appealing paw on her wrist. She moved her arm, and he sprang into her lap and lay purring noisily.

Then somewhere along the road came familiar staccato barks and yelps and the deeper note of the collies, and presently Sambo came racing round the corner and up the brae, the big sheep-dogs running round and round him, jumping on him and rolling him in the dust, and all enjoying it immensely. Eilidh sprang up, sending Sandy flying, and ran to meet them.

“Oh, Mr. Raby, I am so glad you haf come back! I haf wanted you so much! An’ will you stay a long while now? You won’t go away again, not for weeks and weeks?”

He laughed. “How is Baby Number Seven, Eilidh?”

“Oh, ferry well intee! But I ton’t see how I can effer come for you to go on with the picture, for I haf so ferry much to do now.”

“So Rosamond tells me. We must manage it somehow. Are they all away to bed?”

“Oh, yess! So the house iss quiet at last. They haf been so noisy this day!”

“Eilidh, I want a long talk with you. I have something to tell you. When would you like to hear it?”

“Oh, *now*, please! Shust at once!”

He laughed. “Were you sitting here? All right,” and he sat down on the step. “Sit down again, Eilidh. I waited till the babies would be in bed so that we could talk quietly.”

“I haf things to tell you too, sir,” she said eagerly. “Did you hear about Mr. Lord Larry an’ me up on the hill? An’ about yon Man an’ the old letters? Did the Captain-man tell you?”

She tried to lift Sandy into her lap again, but he refused with dignity. He did not like being wakened out of a sound sleep to find himself flying through the air towards the door of the cow-byre, and he was deeply offended. With his tail lashing indignantly he sat severely upright on a big stone a few yards away, and would not condescend to any closer quarters. The dogs raced about, barking and yelping, but Sandy’s manner said so plainly, “Ton’t you tare come near me! Shust you try it, an’ you’ll see!” that they kept at a respectful distance.

Eilidh took up her knitting again. “Now I am ready, Mr. Raby. Oh, it iss so nice to haf you back!”

“Eilidh,” he said gravely, “some wonderful things are going to happen to you.”

“To—me?” She dropped her knitting and looked at him. “But nothing effer happens to me. What do you mean, Mr. Raby?”

“Eilidh, I have been to see your father.”

“Oh!” and she clasped her hands in delight. Every one seemed to be talking of this mysterious father. Now Mr. Raby would tell her all about him. Her words tumbled over one another in her eagerness. “Then he issn’t dead? Where iss he? Will I see him? What iss he like? Why has he neffer come back? How did you know where to find him? Oh, please tell me all about him!”

“You won’t see him just yet, Eilidh. I’m sorry, too”—as her face fell—“but there are reasons why he can’t come to see you at present. You’ll hear all about it later on. He isn’t coming himself, but he is being very good to you, Eilidh. He is going to give you a great many things.”

For her sake he thought it best to put the matter so. She nodded, and, childlike, accepted the facts and was satisfied at once.

“Yess? Oh, I am sure he is good! An’ where does he live? In London?”

“Sometimes. He has a great deal of money——”

“Iss he a ferry fine shentleman, my father? I thought mebbe—because of yon Man—but—but—then he won’t like me a bittie! For I’m not a fine lady, an’ I ton’t know how to be one. A lady—like your sister—oh, I neffer coul’t! An’ shust look at me!”

She glanced down at her tattered skirt, and eyed her brown arms and feet, then looked doubtfully at Raby.

“I’m ferry much afrait my father woult not like me if he coul’t see me. I ton’t efen speak nicely like you do. But it issn’t my fault! Oh, Mr. Raby”—and her face filled with distress—“oh, what shall I do?”

“I’ll tell you,” he said quietly. “We’ll soon put that all right, Eilidh.”

She turned to him eagerly for help and comfort, and listened breathlessly while he told of the plans which had been made for her.

“Your father told me to find some lady who would come and live with you, and teach you.”

“Shust what I haf wanted always! Oh, how *good* of him!”

“You will learn a great deal out of lesson books, and a great deal more that is not in any books at all. You must be a good girl and work hard, and do what she tells you, and try to remember everything——”

“Oh, I will intee!”

“And by the time you are grown up, I should think”—he laughed—“I should think you’ll be a very nice lady indeed!”

“Oh, do you think so? Do you think I effer coul’t? A whole lady, not shust a half one?”

“What is a half lady, Eilidh?”

“Ton’t you know? Up at Lady Afery’s house, the girls there, the servant lassies, are dressed up like grand ladies, with white aprons an’ long white ribbons to their bonnets”—at which description of her best afternoon cap Miss Susan would have opened her eyes very wide indeed—“an’ when I saw them I thought, if only I coul’t be like that some day! But it iss only in their dresses they are ladies, not all through. They laughed at me because I had no shoes on, an’ I ton’t like them a bittie, an’ they had no pissness to laugh, whateffer! Your sister an’ Lady Afery, they are different. They are ladies altogether.”

“Good for you!” Raby said, looking at her thoughtfully. “Oh, we’ll make you an out-and-out lady, never fear. There’s no half-way about Mollie.”

“Mollie?”

He laughed. “Aren’t you going to ask who the lady is to be who is to teach you all these things? She’s coming on Saturday.”

“O-o-oh! On Saturday? But—but—I shall be afraid of her!”

“No, you won’t. You couldn’t, if you tried. We’ve chosen my sister Mollie—I told you about her once before. It’s her business to teach little girls, you know, and she likes doing it awfully. Makes a good job of it too, I believe. You’ll like her, and you needn’t feel shy.”

“Iss she nice? As nice as—as your other sister?” She had been going to say—“As nice as you?” but somehow hesitated at the last moment.

“She’s the nicest of us all. You simply can’t think how nice she is. She sent her love to you, and told me to say she felt quite fond of you already, and was in such a hurry to see you that she should dream of you every night till Saturday.”

Eilidh laughed and reddened. “She won’t like me so ferry much when she does see me, mebbe. I will try to be ferry coot, Mr. Raby, an’ please her all I can.”

“That’s right. You’ll be very fond of her. She’s going to bring you lots of things——”

“For me? What kind of things?” and the gray eyes opened wide.

Raby laughed. “Oh, dresses and things. Everything a little girl wants. Don’t ask me what they are.”

“For *me*?” and Eilidh’s sparkling eyes showed that her carelessness as to dress had been of necessity and not from any lack of feminine delight in pretty things. “If I haf a new tress, I will not be feeling like me at all, but like some other body altogether,” she said naïvely. “I ton’t think I effer had a new tress before, not that I remember, anyway. This one”—touching her skirt—“wass Mrs. Maclachlan’s, an’ she cut it short for me when it wass too old for her any more. There iss neffer money to buy tresses for me after all the babies haf their bit things—no, intect!”

Raby laughed. “Wait till you see Mollie’s box. I helped to choose your dresses, and I think you’ll like them.”

“Will I haf more than one?” she cried.

“I think very likely you will,” he smiled. “Now, Eilidh, there is something else very important we must talk about.”

“Yess? This iss ferry nice! I like it,” she said, looking up at him with eager, smiling face.

“You will have to say good-bye to the farm and the babies. How will Mrs. Maclachlan get on without you?”

“She neffer coult! I coult not leave them! Oh, no, please!” she cried in dismay. “Mother she coult not mind all the babies, an’ nurse the new wee one, an’ make the porritch, an’ clean up the house too, whateffer! I must stay an’ help her!”

“You can’t,” Raby said decidedly. “We couldn’t leave you and Mollie here. I’m not sure yet where you must live, but I think Dunrhos, where the steamers come from, you know, would be good. It’s a jolly place in winter, and you could come down for a day any time to see how the babies are getting on. You could even come and stay from Saturday to Monday occasionally. And it’s a fairly big place. There’s plenty going on, and you’d get used to streets, and shops, and electric trams, and motor-cars, and such things. You musn’t live in the wilds any longer.”

"I ton't know what all those things are," she said, her face troubled, "but I do know t'at I can't leave Mrs. Maclachlan alone with all those seffen babies an' nobody to help her at all. You woult not like me to, surely, Mr. Raby!"

"We must arrange it somehow. Think hard, Eilidh, and tell me how it can be managed. For you can't possibly stay here, you know. Is there anyone who would come and take your place?"

"If there wass plenty of money it woult be ferry easy—oh, yess! But, you see, there iss neffer any money to spare."

Raby's puzzled face cleared. "And what would you do if you had money, Eilidh?"

"Oh, t'at iss ferry easy! There iss Lizzie, you know, she lives with her mother on John M'Cluckie's farm up in Glenaroon. She hassn't any father, an' they have to work ferry hard. But John M'Cluckie is a hard master, an' they woult be ferry glad to get away from him. If Mr. Maclachlan coult gif them a wee bittie money they woult both be glad to come here an' live. There woult be room, but none to spare—the babies they ton't take up ferry much room shust yet! Then Lizzie she coult nurse the wee baby an' mind the big ones, an' her mother coult help Mrs. Maclachlan in the house, an' it woult all be fine an' easy."

"I see. Well, now, Eilidh, your father gave me a lot of money to buy things for you, and it seems to me that we might spare some of it for Mrs. Maclachlan. What do you think?"

"Oh, yess! I woult like them to haf it nearly all! For they haf been so ferry good to me, you know. I woult like—I woult like to give them all something, as well as the money for Lizzie an' her mother. Do you think there woult be money enough?"

"I think we might manage it. We'll try very hard."

"I woult so like to. Do you know, I haf neffer given anybody a present yet? For I haf neffer had efen a penny to buy it with."

Raby smiled. "You and Mollie will have to go shopping, and choose presents for them all. As for Lizzie, I'll have a talk with Mr. Maclachlan to-morrow, and arrange it. Then as soon as Mollie arrives on Saturday we'll carry you off on the yacht and show you something of the place you are to live in."

Eilidh's eyes grew wide and thoughtful as she began to get a glimpse of the prospect before her. She sat staring down the loch into the unknown future, fascinated, half afraid, marvelling greatly.

"It iss—ferry—wonderful!" she said at last, with a catch in her breath, and bending over Sandy she hid her face against him. Presently she looked up again, her eyes very bright.

"Why iss efferybody so good to me, Mr. Raby? Why do you take so much trouple ofer me? I shall haf to be ferry good shust to please you all—yess, intee! An' to please my father, for he iss good to me, too, an' ferry kind, to give me all those things. He iss a good man, iss my father!"

Next day, Raby, coming to discuss with Mr. Maclachlan the question of Lizzie and her mother, was met at the foot of the brae by Eilidh. She had seen him from the farm, and came flying to meet him, in a state of great excitement.

"Oh, Mr. Raby! I haf a letter! A letter for me! Shust think! I haf neffer had a letter in all my life before. The postman will hardly effer come up here, but he did come an hour ago, an' it was for *me*! I thought it woult be for Mr. Maclachlan, so I went to take it in, but he said, 'It iss for you, you yourself, Eilidh.' 'Miss Eilidh Munro' iss written on it. Shust think of that!"

"And who is it from?" he asked, laughing.

"Oh, I ton't know! I hafn't looked inside it yet. It iss enough shust to haf a letter."

"Gracious, child! Do you mean to say you haven't read it?"

"You see," she said reddening, "I can read the writing in books, of course, but this iss wee, wee letters, ferry pretty, but I ton't know how to read them. I haf not learned that yet. An' Mr. Maclachlan he iss up on the hill, an' mother, she told me not to go upstairs, for the wee baby-lassie iss sleepin' an' she could not talk to me. So there iss nobody to help me."

"That is hard lines! Shall I read it to you?"

"Oh, if you woult!"

"Of course I will. Where are the babies, Eilidh?" as they entered the kitchen and found it empty.

"Lizzie hass taken them away to my wee glen, so the baby-lassie woult not be wakened. Now, will you sit down, sir?"

She had been making scones when she caught sight of him and ran to meet him. The big table looked very business-like, with baking-board and rolling-pin, griddle, flour-barrel and jug of buttermilk, and a great bowl in which she had been mixing her dough. Raby seated himself on the edge of the table, and she pulled the letter from where it had lain for safety inside her little tartan shawl.

"Now, will you read it to me? An' I must make my scones while the fire iss good. I haf shust to put in the buttermilk, an' then to mix them."

She moistened her flour and began to mix, and then to knead vigorously.

Raby glanced at the letter, and laughed. "Why, it's from Molly!"

"From your sister?" she cried. "Oh, *do* tell me what iss in it!"

"Right! Here goes!" He opened the letter and began to read,

MY DEAR EILIDH,

I am very busy getting ready to come to you to-morrow, so I have only time to write a little letter to you. But I want to tell you, dear, how very much I am longing to see you. I hope you are not feeling shy about meeting me, for I know we shall be very good friends. I have always thought how nice it would be to have a little girl of my own, and I am quite sure you have often thought how much you would like to have somebody who would care about you, and love you nearly as much as your own mother would have done. That is what I want to do, if you will let me, and then I am sure we shall both be very happy. I have been making all kinds of plans, and I think we shall manage to have a very good time together. So you won't be afraid of me, will you? Now good-bye till Saturday. With much love to you and all your babies. From—

MOLLIE.

Eilidh had forgotten her scones, and stood with her hands in the bowl, gazing at him with shining eyes.

"O-o-o-oh! How *good* of her!" she said.

CHAPTER XIV. MR. NUISANCE.

"It was very, very silly of Bernard and me," Mollie said thoughtfully. "If we'd thought half a minute we'd have seen that Duncan couldn't have got those letters, or he wouldn't have been so agreeable to Bernard when he got home again. If he *had* had them, he would have denied the whole thing, and refused to do anything for Eilidh. He may have tried to get them, but if he did he certainly failed. But I never thought of that till Bernard had started for Scotland, and he doesn't seem to have thought of it at all. Of course, it *is* all right. I had that telegram after he'd reached Darmidale, though it didn't tell me much. 'All right here. Come as soon as possible,'—isn't exactly a descriptive account of what has been happening there. I wonder if Duncan did go, after all?"

She was sitting alone in a railway carriage. In a few minutes the train would start, and she would have begun her journey to Eilidh and Loch Ruel. It was late in the evening, for to have travelled by day would have meant arriving long after the last steamer had sailed. She had no wish for a night in an hotel, so had chosen to spend it in the train instead.

However, she had made preparations for the night journey, and was quite looking forward to it. She had spoken to the guard, and he had promised to see that she had the carriage to herself. The rush to the North for the Twelfth was over, and the train was not likely to be crowded. As soon as they were fairly away, she would eat the tempting little supper she had packed, and then would go to sleep on the seat as soundly as if she had been at home. If only the guard kept his word, she would be very comfortable, and if the train stopped anywhere she would be sure to wake at once.

At last, with a warning scream, the train moved slowly off, and in place of the big station, with its lights and crowds, she looked out into silence and darkness, broken everywhere by gleaming points of light.

"Good-bye to London!" she said cheerfully. "I hope daylight will see me in Scotland, or very near the border. I do love a long journey! Now, to be comfortable. I may as well make things cosy at once, since I'm alone—thank goodness! That guard's an old dear."

She unpinned her hat and put it up in the rack; unrolled her rug and spread it on the seat; shook up the pillow she had brought, and propped it on the window-sill to lean upon; opened her hamper and took out an old tam-o'-shanter and drew it over her hair—"That's my nightcap, nice and warm and soft"—placed the hamper on the floor between the seats for a footstool, opened it and began to lay out her supper.

She spread a tray-cloth on the seat, laid on it neat little packets of sandwiches, and biscuits, and cake, found her drinking-cup, and propped up a bottle of milk in the corner, and set down beside them a big bunch of grapes. Then she settled comfortably in the opposite corner, her feet on the hamper, a story-book in her lap, an evening paper in her hand.

"This is what I call cosy! I am so glad I'm alone! It feels as if this was my private train. I hope we don't stop for a couple of hours at least."

Then, with a shriek and a rattle, the train rushed out of the darkness into the glare of lights once more, and drew up in another big station.

Mollie sat up in dismay. She had forgotten this stopping-place, so soon after the start. If anyone came in now, after her arrangements were made and her things spread all over the

carriage, it would be too dreadful for anything. However, she had faith in her guard, and waited hopefully for the second start.

Right away! The flag was waving, the train moving, when along the platform came a flying figure, a long-legged somebody with a portmanteau in one hand and a bag and a bundle of rugs in the other. A porter threw open the carriage door, and, to Mollie's horror, somebody sprang in almost on top of her.

Then they were out in the night again, rushing through the sleeping country, where there were soon not even scattered lights to lessen the darkness—she, dismayed and annoyed at this sudden intrusion—he, laughing a little at his narrow escape, and triumphantly well-pleased that he had won the race.

He swung his rugs and portmanteau up into the rack, then sat down and looked round. His eyes met Mollie's indignant gaze fixed severely upon him, and he realised suddenly that he was not wanted. She had so evidently expected to have the whole carriage to herself, and had made such obvious preparations for being alone, that he could not but perceive that there was no room for him here. But though he felt at once the frostiness of the atmosphere, he could not deny himself a long moment's look at her—at the curly brown hair on her forehead, the serious dark eyes looking at him so reproachfully, the little lips pursed into a frown of annoyance.

Then he raised his hat and said politely, in the hope of appeasing her evident wrath, "Please excuse my rudeness in bursting in on you like that. I really couldn't help it. It was a very close shave."

He laughed pleasantly, but not for anything would Mollie acknowledge that he could be anything but horrid. She had nothing to say—rather, she had too much. So she remarked coldly, "You very nearly lost the train altogether"—in a tone which implied that she would not have been sorry if he had—and buried herself in her book.

She felt very much annoyed. It would have been bad enough if he had been there from the beginning. He would have been a nuisance even then. But that he should come now, after she had made all her preparations for the night! She was keenly aware of the old tam on the back of her head, the pillow under her arm, the rug drawn up over her shoulders and tucked round her knees.

Her supper spread out on the opposite seat seemed suddenly ridiculous, and she was sure he was smiling behind his paper. He had probably had his supper at an hotel, and would be amused at her sandwiches and milk and cake. How could she enjoy them while he sat there watching!—for of course he would watch, and smile when she could not see. He was a very great nuisance, and had spoilt all the fun of the journey for her.

She would have to sit up all night and pretend to read, for of course she could not go to sleep now. As for lying down on the seat, that was naturally out of the question. She wished she had not been in such a hurry to take off her hat, and was unhappily conscious that her hair was already rough and untidy.

Surely he could see he was not wanted! Surely he would have the sense to change carriages at the next station! But perhaps not—men were so stupid.

She left no doubt as to her feelings in the matter, keeping her eyes fixed on her book and never glancing towards him. From behind his paper he was watching her, as she had expected, and smiling a little at her offended attitude.

"It's a bit rough on a fellow," he was thinking. "She must see I couldn't help it. She might make the best of things, and be pleasant over it."

How well the tam suited her, hiding so little of the soft, curly hair! She was delightful even now, with that frown on the pretty face which somehow looked unnatural to it. He was sure she did not frown often. When she smiled her face must be very sweet. He wondered how he could coax away the displeasure from her brow and the pout from her lips.

Apparently the only way to please her would be to change to another carriage. But he did not mean to do that—not likely! It was not every day one had the chance of travelling all the way to Scotland—surely she was going all the way!—with as pretty a girl as this. Even if she kept up her offended attitude all the way, she was very pleasant to look at. And it was his duty to stay, he was quite sure of that. She ought not to be travelling quite alone.

He was prepared, if necessary, to respect her wish to be left to herself, but at any station some one might get in who would not be so considerate, and she might need protection. Unless some ladies should choose this carriage at one of the Midland stations, he could not safely leave her, and the next stop was not for two hours. His argument pleased him mightily, and he sat, pretending to read, but with one eye on “Miss Dignity.”

At the moment she certainly deserved the nickname he had given her. And in her own mind she had already christened him “Mr. Nuisance.”

He was pleasant enough to look at, tall and young, and rather thin, with keen blue eyes, which had a twinkle of amusement in them. How did Mollie know? Of course she had never looked at him. Nevertheless she knew, and knew also just about how many times he had looked at her, and how little of his paper he had read. Impudent! Why could he not be content to take no notice of her?

She wanted to eat her supper, for it was after ten o’clock, and she was hungry. And suddenly he awoke to the one fact, and by inference to several others. She had evidently been just going to have her supper when he entered the carriage an hour ago, and she had not touched it since. It was very absurd, of course, but she evidently did not mean to begin while he was present. He did not intend to climb out on the footboard just to satisfy her whim, but neither did he wish to cause her inconvenience.

So presently he began to make elaborate preparations for sleep. He changed his hat for a travelling-cap, unrolled a big rug and spread it on the seat, and slipped his little bag under it for a pillow. Then he sat down again and began to unfasten his boots. The wretch! What next? However, he only loosened them for comfort, and she saw that they were new. Once more, how did Mollie know? Of course she was not watching him, but was reading studiously, and quite forgetting to turn the pages of her book.

Then, with a cheerful “Good-night!” at which she frowned severely, he drew the rug round him, and was apparently asleep in five minutes.

Mollie watched him suspiciously for a time, then at last made a start on her sandwiches.

Supper finished, she sat reading for a time. But the gaslight and the jolting made her head ache, and she closed the book wearily and sat staring out into the night.

There were more lights outside now. They must be passing through a town. Another train rushed shrieking past, and she heard sounds of shunting and caught glimpses of clumsy goods trains. It must be a junction.

Then the express went rattling into a big station, and drew up. Mollie sat up suddenly, and looked out with interest to see where they were. Would Mr. Nuisance have the sense to change carriages?

He sat up also, very wide awake and with no signs of sleep about him. Mollie looked at him in severe questioning, and waited expectantly. But he had no intention of leaving her

alone in the carriage for possible worse companions. So he waited to see if anyone else would come to keep her company, and she waited for him to go, and frowned again as he showed no signs of doing so.

They watched the hurrying crowd and sleepy porters. Suddenly the carriage door was roughly opened, and a man sprang in. Another man! thought Mollie in despair, and Mr. Nuisance frowned in his turn, and was glad he had waited. A big, burly navvy who had been engaged on the railway outside the junction for some weeks, and was now returning to his home in the Black Country.

Mollie turned from him distastefully, and gazed out at the opposite platform. In spite of herself she was glad now of the presence of her first companion. "Mr. Nuisance" he might still be, but he was certainly to be trusted, and she did not like the look of this other.

The train moved out again, and she sat staring at the flying lights. She was too tired to read, and was beginning to feel drowsy. Of course she would not dream of going to sleep, but she would close her eyes for a while just to rest them.

"Mr. Nuisance" watched her with much satisfaction. He had hoped she would sleep, for he knew the result of a wakeful night journey. And now that she slept he could look at her without causing her discomfort. He proceeded to do so to his own great satisfaction, while the navvy watched them both.

Nearly two hours passed with not a sound inside the carriage, and outside only the rush and rattle of the train and an occasional shriek from the engine.

A sudden noise awoke Mollie. She sat up with bewildered sleepy eyes, then started to her feet. What was happening?

The train was still rushing on through the night, but inside the carriage, close to her, the two men were on the floor—"Mr. Nuisance" on top. They were fighting, and one of them was swearing. The other was silent, and was kneeling on him to keep him down.

"Oh, what is it? What's the matter?" Mollie cried. "Can I—can I help?"

"Mr. Nuisance" looked up, and laughed as he had done when he caught the train.

"If you wouldn't mind handing me a strap. Sorry we woke you. Little matter of business—had to be settled—thanks!"

He was strapping the man's hands together in spite of his struggling and swearing.

"Now stop that noise! Not another word!"

He rose panting, and turned to Mollie.

"I'm awfully sorry you woke. I'm afraid this will have upset you. He was after your watch. I'm sorry to say I closed my eyes for a minute, and only woke in time to see what he was after. We should be at Crewe in a few minutes. I'll give him in charge there, and we'll get rid of him."

The man, finding swearing no use, changed his tune hurriedly, and began a whining explanation about a sick wife and seven starving children. Mollie looked doubtfully at her companion.

"Must you? Give him in charge, I mean. I'd rather not make a fuss about it. Couldn't you just turn him out quietly?"

But "Mr. Nuisance" would not hear of it.

"Not much! Don't worry. I'll see to it all right."

Then the train ran noisily into a station, and he exclaimed, "Here we are! So you won't have to put up with him any longer."

He jumped out, and returned in a moment with the guard and a couple of astonished porters. They removed the prisoner, and presently Mollie and "Mr. Nuisance" had the carriage to themselves again.

"Like me to change?" he asked, as he jumped in. "I'll go to a smoker, if you like."

His eyes twinkled, and Mollie blushed.

"I'd rather you stayed, if you don't mind. I'm sorry I was so rude."

"Not rude," he said quickly. "Only—well—rather dignified, you know. I'd have changed before, but I couldn't leave you alone with that fellow. I'm sorry there's been this bother for you."

"I suppose I ought to have gone to the 'ladies only' carriage. But there are so often babies, and though I love them in the day-time, they strike me as rather out of place on a night journey."

"I should think so. It was awfully stupid of me to go to sleep. I never meant to."

"Neither did I," said Mollie frowning. "But I woke up, so I suppose I must have been asleep."

"It generally follows, certainly," he said gravely. "It was the very best thing you could do. You should try to repeat it, and keep it up as long as you can. Going right through?"

"Yes. Oh, I couldn't sleep after this."

"You should try, anyway. I wonder if I could get you a cup of tea. Bother! We're off. Sorry! I'll try next time."

"They'll all be asleep. It's the middle of the night. But thank you all the same."

After all, it was pleasanter to be on good terms with one's travelling companion than to feel his presence a continual annoyance and restraint, thought Mollie. And certainly the remainder of her journey passed more quickly than she would have thought possible while he and she sat in opposite corners and criticised one another from behind newspapers.

But he would not talk to her at first, and very soon made preparations for sleeping in earnest, leaving her to do as she liked about it. For a long time she sat staring out into the night, startled occasionally by the gleam of lights in a small station or the sudden passing of a train on its way back to London. The momentary excitement seemed to have banished her sleep for that night, and if Mr. Nuisance would have consented to talk she would certainly have kept awake all night. But he knew what was good for her, as he said to himself, so, by dint of great self-denial he lay with his back to her and at last fell asleep. And by-and-by Mollie naturally did the same.

Once more she woke before morning, but only remembered it afterwards as in a dream. The train was standing in a big station, porters were banging carriage doors and shouting something. She sat up sleepily, and Mr. Nuisance explained,

"Carlisle. Half-way house, you know. Here they come for tickets."

Mollie fumbled for hers and handed it to him.

"Like a cup of tea?" he asked.

"No, thanks. I think—I'll go—to sleep again."

She watched the bustle drowsily, with no desire to join in it. Mr. Nuisance jumped out, and walked briskly up and down to stretch his legs, but Mollie's only wish was that the train should start again so that she could finish her night's rest. At last they were on the move once more, and, with a comfortably contented feeling that they would soon be across the Border, she shook up her pillow, tucked the rug in cosily again, and was asleep in five minutes.

When she woke for the last time the carriage was full of sunshine, and through each window she caught glimpses of great green hills close at hand.

Mr. Nuisance sat at his end of the carriage reading. Mollie sat up and stared around, and he threw down his book.

“Good morning! Don’t you feel nearly ready for breakfast?”

“I’ve been asleep again!” said Mollie, in a tone of great surprise. “I never expected to. What time is it, I wonder?”

“Nearly six. An hour more to Glasgow. You’ve missed the sunrise.”

“And I was quite determined to see it! How very silly! Then we’re in Scotland now?”

“Oh, yes. You missed the Lake District, and the glimpse of the sea at Morecambe. I had a weird view of Appleby as the mist was rising—all hazy and mysterious, you know. I kept wishing you’d wake just to have a look round and then go to sleep again.”

“I wish I had. It’s very silly to have slept all the way,” Mollie said regretfully. “I meant to see everything. It’s the first time I’ve come so far north, you see, so it’s all new to me. But it’s no use thinking about it now. What a lovely morning!”

“Yes, we’re in luck. A two hours’ sail is no joke in pouring rain.”

Mollie looked at him in puzzled surprise.

“What do you mean? How do you know?”

“You see, a porter brought back your strap, and as I was putting it in its place I couldn’t help seeing your address on the label. I must introduce myself properly. My name is Kerr—Jack Kerr, I’m going to Darmidale on Loch Ruel”——

“No! Not really?”

“Yes!” he nodded. “To take charge of a small boy, young Lord Avery. Funny, isn’t it?”

“How—very—odd! Whatever made you choose this particular carriage?”

“Well, I really hadn’t time to choose, you know,” he laughed. “It wasn’t choice at all, it was instinct. I must have known somehow.”

“I should say it was the porter,” Mollie retorted.

He laughed again. “Perhaps! And you are going to Darmidale too! It is odd, for it’s a very small place.”

“Do you know it, then?” she asked, in surprise.

“Oh, I’m a native—not of Darmidale, but I’ve been there many a time for picnics. I was brought up at a wee place just across the water from the place where we get the steamer. Oh, I know almost every corner of the Firth.”

“I’m going there to teach a little girl.”

“Really? Now that’s lucky. Your girl is sure to be friends with my boy. I believe he’s a rascal. I wasn’t going to them till they came back to town, but Lady Avery sent for me to come at once if I could. The young man was apparently getting beyond her altogether.”

Mollie laughed. “Oh, I know Lord Larry. You’ll have to be very strict with him. I don’t expect any trouble of that kind. In fact, I hear my little girl is very eager to learn, and wants to know all I can teach her.”

“Unusual, but very jolly for you,” he commented. “A good pupil is a great delight.”

In the changing from train to steamer, Mollie found Mr. Nuisance a decided help. He looked after her boxes, and then, as they had over two hours to wait till the boat would start, he asked hopefully if he might not take her to get some breakfast. But Mollie smilingly declined.

"I'll be all right. Please don't trouble any more about me. Thank you very much for all you've done already. I suppose we shall meet again on the boat! Good-bye for the present," and Mr. Nuisance found himself alone on the platform.

Rather disappointed, for he had hoped to spend the time in waiting on her and seeing to her comfort, he went off to look for breakfast on his own account, and returned to the pier as soon as possible on the chance of finding her there.

Mollie, much refreshed by a cup of tea, and conscious that she was now fit to be seen, and not, as she said to herself, the dishevelled object she must have been during the night, strolled through the station and out on to the pier to enjoy the view, and to her amusement found Mr. Nuisance awaiting her. He proposed various ways of spending the remaining time—a stroll round the shops, such as they were—a tram ride along the Promenade—a walk round the bay to look at the yachts.

But Mollie was content to sit on the pier and let the sun and fresh sea breeze drive away the grimy feeling of the long night journey. There was so much to see—the broad stretch of water, the great circle of hills, the wide mouths of the lochs opposite, the ships going down to the sea or coming up to the anchorage, the yachts and rowing boats, the bustle on the arrival of steamers and trains, the barelegged children on the shore, and the sea-gulls looking for scraps at the water's edge.

Mr. Nuisance seemed to know everything, and when presently they sailed down the widening Firth, he led her into the bow and pointed out whatever he thought would interest her.

The steamer was nearly empty as they left Dunrhos Bay and turned the corner into the Straits. Mollie and her companion leant over the railing, she watching with eager eyes the widening view before her, he gazing at the hills as at old friends. On one side were rounded green slopes, on the other rocky crags with vivid patches of heather, and all and everywhere very lonely. The white farms at long intervals only emphasised the solitude, but in brilliant sunshine the very loneliness of it all added to its beauty.

"It must be terrible in winter and wet weather," said Mollie.

"Yes. It doesn't look quite so inviting when you sail through in a blinding storm of sleet or hail, with the wind sweeping down through the glens, and all the hills hidden in mist. This is Innistrave we're coming to. Now"—as they left the tiny pier behind—"you'll see Loch Ruel in a moment. Through these islands—see the sheep on that one? Look down to the left—that's the way to Arran. And now up to the right—through these wee islands again—and here we are in Loch Ruel!"

CHAPTER XV. BABIES ON THE SHORE.

Where the burn runs into the loch, after watering the Farm of the Six Babies, sat Eilidh. She was perched on the heathery mound, her hands clasped over her knees, her eyes fixed on the opposite hills, but she was not looking at them, nor yet at the islets at the mouth of the loch, nor the twin blue peaks in the distance. She was thinking very hard. It was mid-day. At one o'clock the steamer was due, and it was bringing Miss Raby. Very soon she would have to say good-bye to the farm, and the babies, and Mr. and Mrs. Maclachlan, and the great white yacht would carry her away out into the world. She felt rather frightened, rather shy, and very full of curiosity. What would this new life be like?

Beside her in the heather sat Sandy, very thoughtful also, but Sandy's meditations were only of sea-gulls and the fish in the burn, and he had no sympathy with Eilidh's troubles. His very presence was comforting, however, and from time to time she stroked him lovingly. She would have to say good-bye to Sandy, too. Would he miss her? Mrs. Maclachlan said not, but Eilidh was inclined to think he would.

A sound behind made her turn and glance up the loch. Lord Larry was strolling across the shingle towards her, whistling carelessly, his hands in his pockets. Eilidh's eyes danced. He did not know. She might tell him now. Mr. Raby had said so last night.

He stopped whistling as he approached slowly, and stood looking down at her without a word. She looked at him sharply, and saw in a moment that something was troubling him.

"What iss the matter now, Mr. Lord Larry? What haf you been at to-tay? Iss it yesterday you are worrying about? Oh, I know all about it."

"Yesterday? I didn't do anything yesterday!" said Larry indignantly.

"Oh, didn't you? It wass only shust a wee thing to you, mebbe, but it wass enough to gif me effer so much bother."

"What was it? I don't remember——"

"Oh, ton't you? I'll tell you, then, an' mebbe you will say you are sorry. I sent the babies off wi' Lizzie to the wee glen while I made scones, for the baby-lassie had been cryin' all night long, an' we had shust got her off to sleep, an' mother, too, whateffer. An' while they were there, an' all quite ferry good, what did you do but come creepin' up the rocks wi' your shootin'-pea thing, an' shot at them, poor wee things, till they all cam' runnin' away home, roarin' an' cryin', an' woke up mother an' the baby-lassie altogether! We did haf a time with them all, an' it wass all your fault. I ton't call it ferry kind of you."

"I'm sorry. I didn't think of it that way," said Larry, and sat down on the stones at her feet.

Eilidh stared at him. There was evidently something very much the matter.

"What iss wrong? Iss it anything ferry bad, Mr. Lord Larry?"

He laughed ruefully. "No, but there's no more fun for me now. I'm on my way to the pier to meet my tutor. He's coming by the one o'clock boat."

"Oh, iss he?" said Eilidh thoughtfully. Then her eyes sparkled again. "My tutor-lady iss coming by that boat too," she remarked demurely.

"What!" Larry sat up and looked at her. "Whatever *do* you mean?"

"My tutor-lady. She iss coming from London to teach me efferything. We are going away on the White Ship, to-day, or perhaps to-morrow. Then we shall live at Dunrhos, an' I will

learn all kinds of things.”

“But why—how? Whatever has happened? What *do* you mean, Eilidh?” and he stared at her with round eyes.

“Shust what I haf been saying, to be sure. My father issn’t dead, you know. He iss a ferry rich man, an’ he lives in London, an’ he hass given Mr. Raby effer so much money, all for me. Miss Raby iss going to teach me, an’ she iss bringing me effer so many things from London—dresses, you know, an’ hats, an’ coats, an’—an’ boots an’ stockings, mebbe. *I* ton’t know. But she iss coming in an hour, an’ they told me to wait here, an’ they woult meet her at the pier an’ bring her to see me. Mebbe she will know your tutor-man, if he iss on the boat too.”

“What a rummy business!” said Larry frankly, gazing at her in profound amazement. “But why hasn’t your father looked after you all this time? Where has he been hiding? And what’s making him do it now?”

“I ton’t know. Mebbe he woult not know where to find me till Mr. Raby told him. He found out all about it in some old letters—the letters yon Man tried to steal, you know. An’ mebbe he hass not been rich till shust lately, an’ had no money to send me.”

“People don’t get rich all of a sudden. What’s his name?”

“Mr. Raby said I wass not to tell, or say anything at all about him.”

“Oh, I say! What rot! Tell us, Eilidh——”

“There iss the steamer coming into the loch! You had better run, if you are to meet him at the pier.”

“Bother!” said Larry, getting up unwillingly. “I hate the very thought of him. Wish he wassn’t coming. *He’ll* wish he hadn’t before very long! Has the carriage gone to the pier, d’you know?”

“Yess, the big one wi’ the two horses.”

“I forgot to order it, so I hoped he’d have to walk. See here, Eilidh, I want to hear more about this. Are you really going away?”

“Yess, truly certain sure.”

“Well, don’t go till you’ve seen me again and told me more about it, will you?”

“I ton’t know. I shall do what they say,” Eilidh said, and thoughtfully watched the steamer.

Usually it seemed to crawl up the loch like a snail. To-day it was running over the water like one of the wee red ants up on the hillside. In a few minutes Miss Raby would be here. What would she be like?

Eilidh began to grow nervous. The letter had been kind, certainly, and Mr. Raby had said his sister was nice, but no argument will prevail against shyness. Her heart sank at the thought of meeting the strange lady from London and going away with her, away from the loch, from the farm and the babies, from Mrs. Maclachlan, who had been her second mother. A lump rose in her throat and tears filled her eyes at the thought of saying good-bye to them all, and she put her head down on her knees to cry comfortably.

Then, with a chorus of shrill shouts, a confused crowd of babies rushed down the brae and across the road. Scarlet bodies, flaxen heads, fat bare arms and legs, were all mixed up together as they fell upon her and hugged her, five small pairs of hands all trying to get round her neck at once, while Alexander struggled down from Lizzie’s arms and kicked his way into her lap.

“The weans were wantin’ to say good-bye to ye once more, Eilidh,” Lizzie explained, and Eilidh took Alexander in her arms and hugged him.

"Babies, I ton't know what I will do without you all! I will neffer be done crying for you. I ton't want to go an' leave you—no intee!"

"Speak—Gahlic!" said Jock, thumping her. That was the extent of his English, and he was very proud of it.

Eilidh laughed through her tears.

"Sit down on the stones, all of you, an' I will tell you again what I haf said to you once already."

They squatted on the shingle at the foot of the mound, Lizzie holding tightly to the tails of Jimmie's and Alexander's frocks, lest they should crawl into the burn. And while they sat gazing up at her in round-eyed interest and respect, because she was going away on the White Ship, she repeated the instructions she had already given—told them to be good boys and girls when she was not there to spank them, to be kind to the baby-lassie, not to worry mother, and not to forget Eilidh herself—"For I will be coming back to see you very soon, you know, and Lizzie will tell me if you have been good or bad."

At the sound of wheels she looked up apprehensively. But it was only the Averys' big carriage which came round the corner, Lord Larry sitting in it beside a tall young man at whom Eilidh looked eagerly. The tutor-man was asking questions, and Lord Larry, looking a trifle sulky, was answering. Then the carriage passed out of sight among the trees, and she said nervously to Lizzie, "The boat iss at the pier. My tutor-lady will be coming soon."

"You will be glad to see her, Eilidh?" said Lizzie, regarding her curiously.

"Ye-ess! Oh yess!" Eilidh said doubtfully.

"It iss very fine for you to go away an' be a lady."

"Ye-ess!"

"Shust think of the grand tresses you will haf! Oh yess, it is ferry fine for you!" Lizzie said enviously.

"Ye-ess!"

In her heart, Eilidh was trembling at thought of meeting the clever lady from London, but it would never do to let Lizzie and the babies see that. She sat thinking soberly and fondling Sandy, but the babies were anxious to make the most of her short time with them. So Jock, thumping her shoulder again, demanded, "Speak—Gahlic!" and she laughed to hide her nervousness, and began to tell, as she had done many times already, of her visit to the White Ship a week ago.

A little way off, behind a screen of raspberry bushes, Mollie and Rosamond and Bernard Raby stood looking at her. Mollie had been eagerly awaiting her first sight of her pupil, so as they hurried along the road Bernard had stopped her, and, pointing down to the shore, had said, "There she is!"

Mollie stood and looked, then drew a long breath.

"Which? The golden-haired one? Oh! Why, Bernard, you never told me! You said"—reproachfully—"you said she was rather a pretty little thing! How could you? Why she's beautiful!"

He laughed. "I wanted to surprise you. Don't let her get conceited, Mollie. She hasn't an idea she's any better looking than Lizzie there."

"And are those the babies? Why, there are dozens of them! Now you must both stay here. I want to speak to her alone"—and she went softly along the grass towards the children, keeping out of sight as much as possible.

The eyes of all the babies were fixed on Eilidh, and she was talking so busily in the Gaelic they all understood that no one noticed Mollie. She stood for a moment looking down at them—the circle of scarlet-frocked, blue-pinafores little ones, all so much alike with their fat round faces and flaxen heads, dark-haired, sharp-featured Lizzie, holding the two youngest back from the water, and Eilidh sitting above them on the mound, her bare feet in the heather, her hands clasped round her knees, her bright hair falling heavily on each side of her sober little face, and her eyes fixed on the children.

The babies held their breath as she told of the sailor-boys on the yacht, the beautiful little cabins, and the marvellous engines which made the great boat move. Then a voice behind her said, “Won’t you tell me what it all means, Eilidh?” and she sprang to her feet like a veritable baby rabbit, with shy startled eyes and frightened face. But Mollie gave her no time to feel afraid, but put her arm round her and drew her close and kissed her.

“I’m so glad to see you at last, Eilidh, dear. I’ve been thinking so much about you lately, and planning all the good times we’ll have together. And are these your babies? Now which is which? You must tell me their names, you know, for I can’t speak any Gaelic at all.”

The babies were standing in a frightened group and wondering about running away. Lizzie was gazing excitedly at “Eilidh’s lady.” And Eilidh found herself holding tightly to Miss Raby’s hand, in very great relief and thankfulness, for she knew in a moment that she need not be afraid or shy at all.

“The biggest big boy iss Jock, mem, an’ the wee-est big one iss Tam. The twins are Aggie an’ Maggie, an’ the wee ones are Jimmie and Alexander. An’ there iss a new wee baby-lassie up at the farm, you know, mem,” she added, shyly but proudly.

“I know. I want to see her,” and she kissed the astonished babies all round, before they could object. “But you are not to call me ma’am, Eilidh. You are going to be my little sister, you know. I’m quite sure Aggie doesn’t call Maggie ma’am, does she?”

“No intee!” and Eilidh laughed at the very idea.

Mollie sat down in the heather.

“Eilidh, I’m going to speak to the babies, and you must tell them what I say. Babies, in my basket”—she opened it as she spoke—“is something very nice, which has come all the way from London for you. Did you ever see anything like these?”

She took out a handful of tiny animal biscuits, and handed them round.

“Here’s a cat—and a dog—and a fish—and a bird—and here’s a horse’s head. Ah! Alexander knows what to do with them!”

The elder babies were examining the biscuits with whispered exclamations. But Alexander hurriedly thrust a snail and a butterfly into his mouth, and crunched them up with a gurgling laugh of delight, then held out his hand for more. Mollie laughingly gave equal shares all round, taking care to include Eilidh and Lizzie, then while the babies munched contentedly she turned to Eilidh.

“And do you want to go away on the yacht with us, Eilidh?”

“Yess. Oh yess, intee!” Eilidh said shyly. “But there iss only shust one thing. I ton’t want to say good-bye to the babies. I shall be so ferry sorry to leaf them.”

“Yes, of course,” Mollie said sympathetically. “But we’ll come back soon, Eilidh, and I hardly think we could take them with us, could we?”

“No intee!” and Eilidh smiled through the tears which had come at thought of the parting. “Oh, I know I haf to leaf them, but I shall be ferry sorry. If only I coult take somebody, an’ not be quite alone! If I could take Sandy, now!”

“Well, and why shouldn’t you?”

“Oh! Do you think I could? Do you truly think he could come too?” cried Eilidh, in a tone of eager longing.

“What would Mrs. Maclachlan say?”

“Oh, she would be pleased! He iss my ferry own, iss Sandy.”

“Then of course he must come. But he must learn not to fight with Sambo.”

“I will tell him. Oh, I am so glad he can come! Sandy, do you hear? You are to go with me, Sandy, dear,” and she hugged him in delight.

Mollie smiled with ready sympathy. “And now I think we ought to go out to the yacht. I’m hungry after my sail, you know. And this afternoon we have to see all the secrets in my boxes, Eilidh. There are lots of things I know you’ll like, but I’m not going to tell you about them till the right time. It will be quite exciting, won’t it?”

Eilidh’s eyes sparkled, and she forgot her shyness and felt suddenly eager to go.

“Now kiss the babies all round, and this evening we’ll come up to the farm and say good-bye properly.”

When they reached the high road, Rosamond greeted Eilidh with a kiss which assured her of hearty welcome and made her feel at home at once. Then Bernard led them all down to the beach, where the white boat was waiting, and Eilidh, with Sandy clasped tightly in her arms, crept close to Mollie as the sailor boys rowed them out to the yacht.

CHAPTER XVI. ON THE WHITE SHIP.

It was a bewildered and somewhat shame-faced Eilidh who knelt on the floor of the little cabin that afternoon while Mollie unpacked her trunks. One of them was a neat black box, with "E. M." on the lid in big white letters, and it was full of interesting things. But the sight of some of them filled Eilidh with something very like dismay, for she had never seen any like them before and scarcely knew what they were all for. But not for the world would she have confessed to her ignorance.

She had watched in eager excitement while Mollie unlocked the trunk and began to lift out the dresses which lay folded on top. These she could understand, and the sight of them delighted her. But the piles of dainty underclothing, which Mollie had chosen with such care, troubled Eilidh considerably. She began to fear she would be uncomfortable if she was to wear all these clothes.

"I thought this would be nice for everyday wear, Eilidh. We're not likely to have much more hot weather, and you'll want warm things."

It was a neat little dress of blue-gray serge, prettily trimmed with white, and Eilidh nodded eagerly.

"It iss ferry pretty. I do like it."

"It is very comfortable, you'll find, and you can do what you like in it and not mind too much what happens to it. How will this do for Sundays?"

She spread out a well-made skirt of pale-blue cloth, with a pretty little jacket to match, and

"Oh!" said Eilidh. "What a dear wee coat! Oh, t'at iss nice!"

"Yes, I think it's very nice. Now here are some pretty things."

She held up several dainty blouses, of delicate shades and soft materials, and one of white silk, with tucks and lace and embroidery.

"There! What do you think of those?"

"Oh, I ton't know! They are shust too pretty! They are fine! I neffer saw such pretty things before. But they are ferry much too good for me."

"Not a bit. They are to wear in the afternoon and evening, you know, or with that pretty Sunday costume. Now these are the very nicest things I could find in the way of petticoats and nightgowns and stockings. Aren't they pretty?" and Mollie turned over the dainty white garments with feminine appreciation.

Eilidh was not, it must be confessed, so enthusiastic over these, though she opened her eyes very wide at the sight of lace and trimming on things not meant to be seen. She said thoughtfully, as she looked at them,

"You haf taken a creat deal of trouple to get them all for me, Miss Mollie."

"My dear, I enjoyed it. I don't know when I had such a fine day's shopping. It was a great treat to me," she laughed. "Now here are your shoes. Aren't they neat? I hope they'll fit. I only brought you one pair till I could see if they were right."

She took one little brown foot in her hand, and Eilidh reddened. But Mollie was carefully considering the shoe.

"Do you think it will do? I'll get your boots and slippers a size smaller. Can you do with these, Eilidh?"

"Yess, intee! They are ferry nice, Miss Mollie."

"They're rather big, but perhaps they'll do for just now. Now I want to see you dressed. We shall soon have to go on deck for tea. What would you like to wear?"

Eilidh's eyes sparkled as she set herself for the first time to the serious consideration of her wardrobe, "I like the pretty tress," and she touched the gray frock gently.

"If I were you I'd wear the skirt of that and a nice blouse. We always wear extra pretty things for the afternoon, you know."

"Oh, do we?" said Eilidh to herself, and made a mental note of it. "Woult this one do, Miss Mollie?" she asked aloud. "This one wi' the wee pink flowers runnin' up it?"

Mollie nodded. "Let me brush your hair, Eilidh. How nice and soft it is! Who has been taking care of it for you?"

"You see," Eilidh explained shyly, "there wass one day, a long while ago, I said to Mrs. Maclachlan, woult she please cut it all away, for it wass always teasing me, getting in my eyes _____,"

"Eilidh! You very bad girl!"

Eilidh glanced at her quickly, then laughed.

"She scoltet me ferry hard, an' said I must brush it hard effery day, because my own mother woult haf liked it, an' I coul't think of her while I did it. So I haf risen early, ferry early sometimes, an' the babies haf had to wait till it wass done."

"You'll be glad some day," Mollie said, as she brushed the thick locks appreciatively. "And now for shoes and stockings!"

It was a proud but shy Eilidh who followed Mollie up to the deck, where Rosamond, Bernard, and Captain Archie were awaiting them beside a little afternoon tea table. Her pretty delaine blouse and neat gray skirt gave her keen pleasure, but her shoes and stockings and broad-brimmed white hat were not quite so delightful. However, she realised that they were necessary evils and that they looked nice, and so endured them in silence, hoping she would soon grow used to them. She thought Miss Mollie did not know how uncomfortable she felt, but Mollie knew very well, and tried hard to make her forget it.

"Now, young ladies," said Captain Archie, when all were seated and supplied with tea, and bread and butter so thin that Eilidh hid her astonishment with difficulty. "I'm ready for orders. The yacht is entirely at your service. When and where shall we go?"

"To-morrow—anywhere," said Rosamond lazily.

"To-morrow is Sunday," said Mollie quickly.

"All the better—nice and quiet—no steamers about."

"Archie wasn't speaking to you, Rose. You don't count. You're not a young lady any more. You're married," argued Mollie. "He was speaking to Eilidh and me. Archie, you might let us go to-night, and spend to-morrow quietly in some new place. I'd rather not be sailing on Sunday. We needn't go very far, you know, and there's plenty of time yet."

"Heaps of time. It's only four o'clock. Will that suit you, Rose?"

"Yes, we'd better go at once," Rosamond said thoughtfully. "I've been thinking—there are the Averys, you know. If Lady Avery hears you've arrived, Mollie, she'll be coming to call on you. And I suppose the less we tell her at present the better. You see, Duncan says people are not to know—o-o-oh! Bernard, you clumsy thing!"

"Was that your toe? Sorry! But you must be more careful, silly," and Raby nodded warningly towards Eilidh.

At the moment she was intent on the dish of cakes which Captain Archie had offered her, for never in her life before had she seen such tempting little cakes and of so many different kinds. Apparently she had not heard Rosamond's careless remark, but only a moment before she had been listening eagerly to the conversation.

"Oh! Bother! I didn't think. All right, I'll remember," said Rosamond, understanding.

"Eilidh," said Raby, "have you seen Lord Larry to-day?"

"Yess, oh yess!" she said, looking up quickly. "He cam' along the shore while I wass waiting. He wass going to the pier to meet his tutor-man," and Mollie laughed and nodded.

"Did you tell him you were going away with us?"

"Yess, an' that my tutor-lady was coming in the same boat."

Raby nodded, and changed the subject.

"Suppose we start at once, Archie?"

Eilidh looked up anxiously. "But—Miss Mollie! You said—to the babies, you know—we woul't go up to the farm"—

"Of course! We must keep our promise. We'll go ashore at once, Archie, and be back in an hour from now, ready to start."

"Right! I'll see to it."

When the boat had carried Mollie and Eilidh off to the shore again, Raby turned severely to Rosamond.

"You nearly told her the very thing I don't want her to know. She has no idea of the way her father looks at the matter, and I don't want her even to guess at it. Now the sooner we're off the better. For Lord Larry will tell his mother, and she'll be coming out here—to see Mollie, of course! But she'll ask questions at the same time. And, as we're not to tell any one who Eilidh is, the fewer questions we answer the better."

"Doesn't she look different? Doesn't she look just sweet?" said Rosamond. "I'm quite proud of her."

With them in the boat. Mollie and Eilidh carried a great basket.

"These are my presents to the babies," Mollie had said, as she took the things out of her trunk. "You are going to choose your own at the shops in Dunrhos, Eilidh. These are from me, to show them it's not a cruel step-mother who is running off with you, but a fairy godmother. You don't understand? Never mind. I'll tell you fairy tales some day soon."

The joy of the babies over the presents was worth seeing. Mollie laughed at their bright eyes and flushed faces, and Eilidh was almost as excited as the little ones themselves.

For Jock, a pair of leather reins, with bright swinging bells; for Tam, a box of picture blocks; for Aggie and Maggie, dolls, of course, in brilliant dresses and white pinafores; for wee Jimmie, a Jack-in-the-box, which frightened him nearly into a fit at first; for Alexander, a woolly lamb, which squeaked.

"They are only little presents," Mollie said, as Eilidh handed them round, "nothing like the fine ones Eilidh will bring you from the shops."

But to the babies they were wonderful, fascinating, and Mrs. Maclachlan said smiling, when all the treasures had been carried to her bedside,

"It will be midnight before they will be sleeping this night. It iss ferry kind of you, inteet, mem. You are shust too good to them altogether."

For the “baby-lassie” there were a pair of tiny knitted boots and a dainty little hood, and Eilidh said eagerly, as she showed them to her foster-mother,

“This baby will haf the finest things of all the seffen. Not one of them had pretty things before.”

“You haf brought her luck, Eilidh. She will be our lucky bairn, I’m thinking. She should be named after you. Suppose we call her Helen. T’at iss your name, an’ it iss a coot name whateffer.”

“Oh, I wish you woult!” Eilidh said earnestly. “But of course she will haf good luck, mother, for she iss the seffenth wean, so she must be lucky.”

Mr. and Mrs. Maclachlan, and Lizzie and her mother, could scarcely take their eyes off Eilidh, and their admiration pleased her as much as did the joy of the babies. When she spoke, she seemed still their own Eilidh, but it was strange to look at her and see neat black shoes and long stockings, trim gray skirt and little belt, dainty blouse and big white hat, and hair tidy and brushed till it shone.

While Mollie sat by Mrs. Maclachlan and talked of the “baby-lassie,” Eilidh withdrew to the window with Lizzie to tell her of all the delightful things in the little cabin out on the yacht, and Lizzie’s rising envy changed to grateful delight at promise of presents from Dunrhos.

“You see, Miss Mollie, she did not know you woult be here, Lizzie, or she woult have brought you something from London too. But we will bring you things from Dunrhos—oh yess! An’ what kind of things woult you like?”

The sorrow of the babies over the parting was considerably lessened by their excitement over their new playthings, and Eilidh herself was so full of eager anticipation—now that fear and shyness had vanished, that she forgot to be unhappy also, all of which cunning Mollie had intended. Some hearty hugs all round, a last kiss for mother and the “baby-lassie,” and Mollie and Eilidh ran down the brae to the white boat and were rowed away by the sailor-boys, followed by farewell shouts from Lizzie and the babies on the shore.

CHAPTER XVII. KING'S-CASTLE.

As the White Ship crept down the loch towards the sea, Mollie and Eilidh sat in the bow, as far forward as possible.

Mollie had refused to entertain any thoughts of dinner till the voyage was over.

"Time enough for that when it's getting dark and there's no more to see outside," she said. "Eilidh and I want to see everything. We've never been here before, you know. We don't know what it's like outside the loch, and we're not going to waste any time in eating. So if you want your dinner, Archie, take us there as quickly as you can."

"And where is 'there'? Where is it to be?"

"I don't care. Some quiet place for Sunday. I don't know my way about."

"Perhaps there is somewhere Eilidh would like to go?"

"Oh, could we go to Arran? I haf always been wanting to see Arran. But mebbe it will be too far?"

"Not a bit of it. Arran it shall be. But what part of Arran?"

"Iss there a place called King's-Castle?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Whereabouts is it? My acquaintance with Arran is limited to the map, and the peaks in the distance."

Eilidh looked at him quickly. "It iss by the Holy Island, sir."

"Oh, we can find the Holy Island all right! No fear of passing that by mistake. Very well. I'll take you there at once, and then perhaps Mollie will let me have my dinner."

Dinner at this time of the evening, and after tea, seemed very strange to Eilidh, but everything was strange just now, so she wondered in silence.

By Mollie's advice, Sandy was invited into the bow also, and lay curled up in his mistress's lap. Here he was safe from Sambo, who considered the deck and cabins his territory and looked on Sandy as a usurper, to be driven out of sight whenever he ventured to show even the tip of his tail. In Sandy's eyes Sambo was a noisy little nuisance, for whom ordinary scratching was too good, and who would have been far better left behind in Darmidale; so there was constant warfare between them.

By Mollie's advice, also, Eilidh ran down to her cabin and put on a warm blue coat, which had come out of the trunk, and changed her white straw hat for a blue tam-o'-shanter, which, pushed well to the back of her head, pleased her far better than the big hat. A sea breeze had sprung up with the late afternoon, and as she settled down in the bow with Mollie and Sandy she soon felt the need of her wraps. She had never been sailing before, and had not known it would be so cold.

"And why do you want to go to King's-Castle, Eilidh?"

"You see," Eilidh said shyly, "there iss my friend Rory Campbell, he hass gone to lif at King's-Castle farm. He iss a ferry good friend of mine. But when yon Man was here last Saturday—haf you heart about that?"—Mollie nodded—"He said he had met Rory on the road, an' he had a ferry sore foot, because Mr. Lord Larry had thrown a stone at him. I woult like to ask if it iss better now. He wass always ferry good to me, wass Rory."

By questions, Mollie drew from her the story of the Man's meeting with Rory, and nodded thoughtfully.

“Yes, I think we must go to see Rory. And you must tell him you are going away from Darmidale, you know.”

“An’ I will ask him how he likes my ferry pretty new dress,” said Eilidh, laughing gleefully.

“Yes,” said Mollie, but looked thoughtful, wondering how Rory would appreciate this change in his playmate’s circumstances, wondering also how old he was and what kind of boy.

“Now,” she said presently, “I want you to look about you as hard as you can and see everything, Eilidh, for you haven’t been here before, you know.”

As the yacht passed Darmidale Pier, the islands at the mouth of the loch grew larger and more distinct. How often had Eilidh looked at them from the hillside, and how well she knew them—size, and colour, and outline! The green islet down on the level of the water, with its two lonely fir trees—the great heathery ridge, which shut in the loch, and yet, she knew, was only part of another big island—how often had she and Rory talked of them and made up fairy-tales of long-ago happenings on these shores! The twin blue peaks of Arran which she had seen from the farm had somehow disappeared behind the ridge as they approached. Never mind, she was going to see them close at hand!

The entrance to the loch grew larger as the green islet drew away from the hillside and left a wide passage. The White Ship crept through silently, and here on each side lay a shining waterway between the hills—that way to Dunrhos, this way to the sea—with the great purple island coming to a point and dividing the paths.

“Look!” cried Eilidh. “There iss another wee pier!”

“That’s Innistraive,” said Mollie, and smiled as she remembered that she had learnt its name from Mr. Nuisance in the morning.

“See the sheep on yon wee, wee island! How do they get there, Miss Mollie? Aren’t they pretty?”

The sun was sinking towards the hills on the right, as the yacht turned from the strait leading to Dunrhos and set her face to the sea. Down the shining waterway she crept, between great rocky ridges, purple with tufts of heather—on the one side rising almost sheer from the water’s edge, on the other bordered by a strip of bright green bogland. Here on the right was a great house, and a white road ran from it along the foot of the cliff, and suddenly Eilidh screamed,

“What iss that? Oh, Miss Mollie, what *iss* it? There—on the road! I haf neffer seen a thing like that before!”

Mollie looked, and smiled. “That’s a motor-car, Eilidh. Do you mean to say they have not penetrated to Loch Ruel yet? Happy place! I think I’ll live there altogether. You shall have a ride in one in Dunrhos.”

“I ton’t think I woult like it. I shoult be afraid.—Oh, see! Here iss a creat town! What a lot of houses! It will be a big place that, Miss Mollie?”

“Not so very big, Eilidh. Only a village straggling along the shore.—Now,” she said presently, “this is Arran coming up from behind the hills in front. You’ll see it better presently.”

The channel between the rocky heights opened into the sea, and in front and on both sides lay a stretch of tumbling waves, touched with golden sunset light. And out of the waves rose a great gray island, a confused heap of hills and mountains, ending in a line of jagged peaks against the sky.

“Issn’t it big?” said Eilidh softly. “And the sea—issn’t there a lot of it? I neffer thought the sea would be so big.”

She gazed up with awe, almost with fear, at the frowning peaks as they drew in close to them. They looked as if they might fall at any moment and crush the yacht, which seemed suddenly tiny and weak. And on the other side lay the sea, gray and gold, with white caps here and there, bounded in the distance by a blue line of hills.

It grew stormy and cold as the sun sank behind the great mountains, which Mollie said must be the twin peaks they had seen from Loch Ruel. They passed a white village clinging to the foot of the hills, and a deep-cut bay with tree-covered shores, then rounded a point. And here what had seemed a hill slipped away from the shore and became a great pointed island, and behind it lay another wide bay, sheltered and calm.

“Well, young ladies,” said Captain Archie, just behind them, “this is the Holy Island, and we’ve brought you here in record time. Now let’s go down for dinner!”

Behind the Holy Island lay a quiet stretch of water, with yachts and boats at anchor, and beyond it a wide circle of hills, with white cottages spreading along the shore at their foot. Enquiries made next morning in the village told them that King’s-Castle lay among the trees near the southern point. After Eilidh was in bed, Mollie had strongly urged upon the others the necessity for a visit to Rory Campbell, not only to satisfy Eilidh, but for quite other reasons.

“The boy was the only one besides Eilidh who saw Duncan that day,” she said. “We’re pretty certain that it was Duncan himself, but we may as well make sure if we can. And Rory may be able to explain some things. For instance, it was very risky for Duncan to come here, where he might have been recognised by any one——”

“Therefore the closed carriage.”

“Of course. But how did he know where to find Eilidh, and——”

“Oh, I mentioned the Maclachlans when I was having it out with him.”

“Well, how did he know Mrs. Maclachlan was laid up and out of the way?”

“He pumped Master Rory, and got all he wanted out of him. He must have come meaning to get hold of some one who could give him a few hints. But we’d better see the boy and hear all he has to say.”

So after morning service—for Mollie thought it well to take Eilidh ashore and go with her to the village church,—Captain Archie and Bernard rowed Mollie and Rosamond and Eilidh ashore as near to King’s-Castle as they could guess, and all went up the beach together in search of the farm.

A couple of upturned boats on the shore, and some brown nets spread out to dry, were the whole of King’s-Castle as seen from the landing-place. But Bernard led the way up a path among the trees, and presently pointed to a white farmstead, with byres and barns and haystacks, standing in the midst of golden corn-fields.

The path led up the hill by the side of a burn, and suddenly Eilidh gave a cry.

“There iss Rory! There he iss!”

The boy rose from the bank where he had been sitting, with his bare feet in the water and a book on his knee, and stood gazing surprisedly at the strangers. Eilidh ran forward and grasped his hands.

“Eilidh!” he cried, with startled eyes and face full of amazement. “Whateffer has happened? What iss it? Iss it yourself, Eilidh? Whateffer does it mean?”

He held her hands, and stared down into her face as if he doubted his own eyes.

"It iss me myself—oh yess, Rory! We haf come to see you. How iss your foot, Rory? I do hope it iss better," she said anxiously.

"It iss better, yess. But—Eilidh! Why——"

"I'll tell you all about it, Rory," said Bernard Raby, who had hurried up. "Eilidh's father has asked us to look after her, and we're doing it, you see."

"Her father? Duncan Munro?"

"Yes," Raby said quickly. "Have you ever seen him?"

"No, but I haf heard of him often. I thought he wass dead."

"He has come to life again, you see, and wants us to look after Eilidh properly. So she is going to live in Dunrhos and work hard and learn."

"An' we shan't see you any more at all, Eilidh?"

"I will try to come an' see you, Rory."

But Rory shook his head. "I am ferry glad for you, Eilidh. It iss what you haf always wanted. But—for myself I am sorry. I'm thinking you'll forget us all now."

"Forget?—*you*? You who haf been so good to me, an' haf taken me to the school, an' taught me my lessons on the way, an' carriet me ofer the burns, an' told me tales an' stories! As if I effer coult! Rory, how can you say it?"

Rory shook his head again. He was older than she, and saw more clearly the consequences of this new arrangement.

"We will neffer forget you, Eilidh. We will always be ferry fond of you, an' will think of you often an' often. An' you came to say good-bye to me? T'at wass ferry good of you."

"Of course I came! I had to say good-bye. An' I came to hear about your foot. An' I thought you woult like to hear about my father. I thought you woult be glad, but—but—you ton't seem to be."

Her voice broke. But Rory could not pretend to rejoice in a change which would take her so far away from him. He tried to look pleased to satisfy her, but could not altogether hide his downcast spirits.

Raby hurried to the rescue.

"Rory, we want you to tell us all you can about last Saturday, when you hurt your foot and had such trouble to catch the steamer."

"The day after our baby-lassie wass born, Rory."

"Yess? There iss not much to tell."

"We want to hear about the man who took you up in his carriage."

"I wass sitting on the bank, because my foot wass so bad," Rory said thoughtfully, "when a shut-up carriage came along. In it wass a shentleman looking out of the window as if he wass seeking something. The window wass open, an' he wass shust passing me when I heard him say, 'Shust the ferry thing I wanted!' an' he cried to the driver to stop. He came to me an' said, 'Did I lif in Glenaroon?' I said yess, an' when he asked what wass the matter, I told him all about my foot. I gave him a message for you, Eilidh——"

She nodded. "He told me effery word."

"And what did you talk about on the way to the steamer?" asked Raby.

"He had ferry many questions to ask, apout folks in the glen and on the loch, an' who wass dead, an' who lived in the farms now, till I said, surely he had lived here sometime, since he knew so many of the people. He said 'Mebbe an' mebbe no,' an' asked more questions. He asked who Eilidh wass, because I had spoken of her, an' if Mr. and Mrs. Maclachlan were ferry well, an' if he woult find them on the farm when he went wi' my message."

“And what did you say to that?”

Rory looked surprised. “I said, of course, that Mrs. Maclachlan was in her bed, an’ about Mr. Maclachlan I could not tell him. I cannot think why he asked so many things.”

“I can,” Raby said grimly. “And what kind of man was he, Rory?”

“Big an’ broad, with a big red beard an’ gray hair, ferry well dressed.”

“Yes. Well, we’re very much obliged to you, Rory. Now, Eilidh, we’re going to walk along to the point here to see the view, so if you like to have a chat with Rory, we’ll pick you up on our way back to the boat.”

He went off with Mollie and Rosamond and Captain Archie, and Eilidh and Rory were left alone together.

But their chat was not much of a success, and neither of them enjoyed it. Rory was shy and gloomy and had little to say, and Eilidh was annoyed with him for his silence. She said to herself indignantly that clothes should not make any difference, and that he ought to be just as much her friend although she was wearing her pretty new dress, but already there was a change, and both boy and girl felt it.

Eilidh was still a child, but Rory was some years older, and his thoughts had lately gone far beyond hers. He had left schooldays behind and was beginning life in earnest. In his dreams of late he had looked forward to the time when he would be his uncle’s right-hand man on the farm, or would perhaps have a farm of his own. He would want some one to share it with him, and who should it be but Eilidh—the only lassie in the glen he had ever cared to have much to do with.

It had only been a far-off dream, of course, but it had seemed more real in the last few days, since he had said good-bye to her. Now it fell suddenly to the ground at the sight of her in her dainty new attire, a “fine lady” already, in looks at all events. He saw the gulf which would lie between them in the future, and felt suddenly lonely and disappointed.

So he scarcely knew how to speak to her, and she, not understanding, was annoyed and disappointed and uncomfortable. She was relieved to find his foot almost well, and he was pleased that she had come before going away, but otherwise they had small satisfaction from their chat.

Next morning the yacht steamed gaily away up the Firth, leaving Arran’s crowded peaks behind. By noon she was lying in Dunrhos Bay, and Eilidh was gazing with bewildered eyes at more houses and yachts and boats than she had ever seen before. After early lunch, Mollie and she went ashore, and Mollie introduced her to streets and pavements and tram-lines—motors and electric trams—the band on the promenade and the excitement of the pier, with its continual coming and going of steamers—to churches, Hydropathics, and, above all, to the shops.

Eilidh clung tightly to her hand, bewildered by the crowds strolling about so aimlessly, for Dunrhos is a famous watering-place and always has a goodly number of sightseers. But presently her nervousness changed to excitement and curiosity, and Mollie had hard work to answer all her questions.

Dunrhos is full of toyshops, and Mollie, anxious to make the most of the afternoon, had difficulty in coaxing Eilidh past them. There were so many things in the windows that the babies would have liked! She would have bought up all the toys in all the shops had that been possible.

At last to satisfy her they entered one of the biggest shops, and with some difficulty she made her choice.

For Jock and Tam, wooden carts and horses with real harness, and a box of soldiers each; for the twins, a doll's cradle with bedclothes complete, a perambulator, and a box of toy dishes; for Jimmie, a great indiarubber ball, and a Noah's Ark; for Alexander, a rag doll, and a wooden horse as tall as himself; for the baby-lassie, a rattle with bells, and a gaudy woollen ball. For the whole family, a big box of bricks, and a great parcel of penny toys—boats, balls, spades, tiny dolls, tin trains, and picture books. Eilidh was strongly tempted to add drums, trumpets, and penny whistles, but laughingly refrained when Mollie said, "Think of their poor mother, Eilidh!"

For Lizzie, from the toyshop came strings of glass beads and one of coral; and from a draper's shop close by, several brightly coloured ties and other things to wear.

Then Eilidh insisted on visiting a book-shop and picking out with much care a volume of Shakespeare, which Mollie presently wrapped up carefully, and addressed and sent off by parcel post to Rory at King's-Castle. For, as Eilidh explained, "He iss always reading books iss Rory, an' I haf often heard him say he would like this one, but he coult neffer get it before. I think surely he will be pleased."

"They will be ferry happy with all these fine things, my babies," she said wistfully, as she examined her purchases that evening. "I woult shust like to go back an' play with them myself, an' show the weans how to use them all."

"I think we could manage that, Eilidh. We'll take the presents back and give them to the babies ourselves, of course, and we'll ask Archie to leave us there for a week or two, before we settle down to work in earnest here. Bernard would like to finish his picture of you, and I know he hasn't done much to Rosamond's wedding-present yet. We can all live at the inn, and Rosamond and Archie can sail away and finish their cruise. Will that do?"

"Oh, t'at will be nice! Yess, it will be shust fine, Miss Mollie, an' thank you so ferry much intee!"

It was an exciting week they spent in Dunrhos, and a week of mighty revelations to Eilidh. There was a wonderful ride in a motor-car, which first terrified and then delighted her; a ride on an electric tram along the shore to Port Ardbeg in one direction, and by coach half-way round the island in the other; a trip on an excursion steamer right round the island, which she found even more interesting than sailing on the White Ship, because there was so much more going on; the old castle to explore, while Mollie told wonderful tales of its history; and a house to find in which Mollie and Eilidh should spend the winter when Bernard had gone back to his work in London, and Rosamond and Captain Archie had settled in their new home in the town where his regiment was quartered.

Eilidh's knowledge of the world was considerably enlarged, and her outlook on life very much widened, when at last the White Ship crept out of the bay and turned her nose towards Loch Ruel, with her cargo of presents for all the friends at the Farm of the Seven Babies.

CHAPTER XVIII. MEETINGS.

Lord Larry sat on the side of a boat, discontentedly throwing stones into the water. The year which had passed had made little difference in him. He was taller, perhaps, but otherwise was not much changed. It was early in July, and he had arrived on Loch Ruel with his mother and tutor the night before.

“And it’s going to be beastly dull too,” he muttered. “There’s not a creature to speak to. Suppose they think I’m going to do lessons all day! Well, I’m not then, and that’s all about it. Wish Eilidh was here! She was a good sort, and up to anything when those babies weren’t hanging round her. We could have had good fun together.”

He looked gloomily along the beach. The shore by the burn seemed to have broken out in a bad attack of blue measles, for the babies and Lizzie had come down to spend the afternoon by the water. Sundry tumbles in the burn, the pig-sty, and the cow-byre had worn out the scarlet frocks of the previous summer, and Mr. Maclachlan, being despatched to Dunrhos in quest of new garments in the spring, had brought back a great roll of blue cotton, in which the whole family, including Lizzie, were now costumed.

Larry scowled at them. They made him think of Eilidh, and she was not here.

He aimed a pebble at a seagull wading on the sands, and missed, and its “squawk,” as it flew away, seemed to be mocking him.

“It’s going to be hateful here this year. Everything’s horrid,” and he sat down again and stared gloomily at the hills across the loch.

Everything horrid! With the sparkling water, waving trees, streams dancing over the stones to the loch, and hills changing colour as the shadows floated over them! Lord Larry would not see these things, however, but sulked because he was not allowed to go rowing alone and Mr. Kerr had refused to go with him.

Something struck the middle of his straw hat. He jumped up hastily, and stared around, but could see only the babies in the distance. So he sat down again, puzzled.

Another sharp tap, on the brim this time, and a pebble fell to his knee. He started up again, angry now. Whoever was throwing stones at Lord Larry would get something he wouldn’t like as soon as he came out of his hiding-place. But no one appeared, and Larry indignantly sat down again, this time with his back to the water, and kept a sharp look-out.

Then down the rocks from the road came a girl, and proceeded to pick her way daintily over the shingle, with very great care for her neat little shoes. Larry sprang up, and stood staring.

In neatest frock of gray serge, with skirt short enough for comfort—long black stockings and shoes—gray tam with jaunty feather, set well back on the mane of red-gold hair—could it be Eilidh? It was not her sudden appearance at such an opportune moment which confounded Lord Larry, but her dainty attire and well-cared-for look.

He stood hesitating as she came carefully over the stones, with eyes fixed on the ground. The old Eilidh would never have noticed if she had stepped into the trickling water. Was she so much changed, then?

She stopped a few feet from him, and looked up, and laughed.

"I do believe he didn't know me! Did you, now? Did you know who it was, Mr. Lord Larry? Come up to the rocks, I want to talk to you. It's too wet down there. Is your mother here? And the tutor-man? I do hope he is, for I want him to talk to Miss Mollie, while you and I have fun. I don't want her to be lonely, you see. Come on, and let's talk comfortably."

Larry went to her at once.

"I'm awfully glad to see you. I was just wishing you hadn't gone away. When did you come? And how long are you staying? And where?"

"At the inn. There's not a corner to spare at the farm, or of course we should be there,—yes, indeed! and they would be glad to have us, too, but we could not sleep with the cows, you see! We just came this morning, and we're going to stay—oh, ever so long! Till September, maybe."

"Jolly! We'll have a ripping time. I'm awfully glad you've come."

"You should not say 'awfully.' It is not a nice word for you to use," said Eilidh primly, with mischief in her eyes.

"Go on! You needn't talk. I guess Miss Raby's had hard work to teach you to speak good English," Larry retorted.

"Yes, but ton't I do it ferry nicely? It iss not ferry easy to remember, though—no indeed! I will always be forgetting, and then Miss Mollie, she is not pleased, you know."

"That sounds more like you, certainly. Do you know why I didn't know you at first? It was because of the way you were walking. I believe you were worrying for fear your shoes would get wet!"

"Of course I was. I would not get them wet for anything," and Eilidh stuck out her feet before her and gazed down with much satisfaction at her shoes. "Aren't they pretty? I just love them, that I do! I would neffer let them get wet with nasty salt water."

"How like a girl! I thought you'd got more sense."

"Of course it's like a girl, and I am a girl too, I suppose? But if there is anything to go down there for," she added eagerly, "I will take them off in half a minute, and then I will go anywhere without caring. I don't mind getting my feet wet, but I do care about my shoes."

Larry laughed. "It was too bad of you to go off last year without saying good-bye. There were heaps of things I wanted to ask you. I told you not to go till we'd had another talk, but you went off that very day, and I didn't see you again."

"I had to go with Miss Mollie," Eilidh explained quickly. "And we came back here in a week, and stayed for two whole weeks, and you could have talked all the time if you'd liked—but I might not have listened! But you had gone away to London, so of course we never saw you, and it was your fault, not mine."

"We went off in a hurry. I didn't know you'd come back, you see. Let's make up for lost time now. You must tell me all about it. How has it all happened? What made Miss Raby take you away? There's something at the bottom of it all that I don't understand."

Eilidh regarded him thoughtfully. Then she asked abruptly, "Where's your tutor-man? Mr. Kerr, is that his name?"

"In the house. I asked him to go rowing with me, and he wouldn't."

"What is he like? Is he nice?"

"Oh, he's mostly all right. At times I get a bit sick of him."

"I should think," said she deliberately, "he would get a bit sick of you, too. What haf you been doing to-day to make him cross?"

Larry frowned. "They want me to do lessons every morning, and I don't see it."

"Oh, I see! You thought it would be all holidays, so you wouldn't do your lessons! And so Mr. Kerr said he wouldn't go with you in the boat! I see! What a silly boy you are!"

Such discernment did not please Larry at all.

"I'm sure you don't like lessons yourself," he said sulkily.

"Oh, ton't I? I just do then! But of course, you haf not Miss Mollie to teach you. That might make a difference. She is so ferry cleffer."

"She hasn't taught you English yet anyway," Larry scoffed. "It's only when you think about it you remember to talk properly."

"Miss Mollie says," said Eilidh, slowly and deliberately, as if thinking of her words, and very clearly, "that I speak remarkably good English under the circumstances—and if she says that I shust ton't care a button what you say, Mr. Lord Larry—no inteet!"

Larry laughed. "You were going to tell me all about it," he suggested.

"I wonder you did not go in the boat without him," Eilidh said thoughtfully.

"It's too heavy. I can't get it down to the water."

Eilidh's eyes sparkled. "Do you think we could move it together, you and me, the two of us? I would like a row, and there iss nobody to stop us."

"Will you? Come on!" and Larry sped down the beach.

In two minutes she was after him, shoes safely under her arm, stockings over her shoulder.

"Now, you pull, and I'll push. There! That's it! Now we haf done it nicely!"

"In with you! I'll give her a final shove," and he scrambled in as the boat slid into deep water.

Eilidh carefully disposed of her shoes and stockings in safety, then seated herself ready to row.

"Give me one oar, you take the other. There! Issn't it nice? I haf been wanting all winter to do something I shouldn't."

Larry laughed. "Where's Miss Raby?"

"Up at the farm, talking to Mrs. Maclachlan and nursing the baby."

"They've not got another baby, surely?"

Eilidh laughed. "Oh, no, it iss Baby Helen, who wass born last summer. She iss a ferry fine baby, the finest of them all. They were so pleased to see me this morning, those babies! Shust at first they were shy and did not know me quite, but when I had kissed them and given them toys and sweeties, they knew it was shust me again, and then they were so glad! Oh, it is nice to be back at the loch again! I thought once it would be ferry fine to live in a big town, but now I am tired of it. There is too much noise, and too many people. I would rather be here on Loch Ruel."

"Pooh! Dunrhos isn't a big town, it's a rotten little place. You should see London!"

"We are going there some day, Miss Mollie an' me, but not shust yet. I want to see it, of course, but I ton't think I would like to live there. I like to see the hills and the water. Even in Dunrhos you can always look at them across the bay."

"Now tell me all about it—about you and Miss Raby, I mean," said Larry. "Why did Mr. Raby——"

"Oh, wouldn't it be fun," interrupted Eilidh eagerly, "to row ofer to the babies and Lizzie, and take them for a sail? They woult like it so much! They neffer get for a sail, the poor babies. Come on, Mr. Lord Larry!"

"Oh, we don't want all that crowd. It's more fun alone."

"It iss *not*, and I *do* want them! Come on, there iss room enough for them all—yes indeed!"

She insisted on rowing to the shore, and Larry gave in, but hoped the babies would be too shy to accept the invitation.

Aggie and Maggie were seated on the rocks, eagerly undressing the dolls Eilidh had brought that morning, and which she herself had dressed under Mollie's guidance during the long winter evenings. Jock and Tam were sailing in the burn the boats she had given. Jimmie and Alexander were busy with new spades and buckets, and Lizzie was poring over a picture-book.

"But she should not read when she iss minding the babies, or they will all fall in the burn. I will have to tell her," Eilidh said reproachfully. "Jock! Tam! Are you coming in the boat with me?"

They sprang up, boats in hand, and stood staring. The little ones ran to Lizzie for protection, but Jock and Tam came eagerly to the water's edge imploring to be taken on board.

"Of course you shall come, every one of you, and Sandy too," said Eilidh, dropping into Gaelic for their benefit.

The embarkation was a difficult matter, but she, with some rather sulky help from Larry, held the boat steady while Lizzie lifted the children in, the little ones, after the first surprise, being as eager to go as any. Then Eilidh insisted that Sandy must be brought and lifted in also, for he, delighted to find himself at home again, had followed the children down to the shore, and had taken his old seat on the stones, where he could watch the sea-gulls and the fish in the burn.

It was a big boatload, but they were all stowed away safely at last, and the tight fit helped to keep the little ones still. At first, indeed, the strangeness of being in a boat, combined with the presence of Lord Larry a couple of feet away, sobered them into silence. But by degrees they grew restless, and only threats of being dropped overboard kept them still.

The long stretch of water, smooth as glass, and dark with the reflection of the sombre trees on the hillside, moved Eilidh strangely. It stretched away, a great unbroken lake, to the green islets which shut out the world, with neither boat nor steamer to break the loneliness. Darmidale Pier, buried among its trees, seemed asleep.

"Issn't it pretty? It shust makes me want to cry, somehow—the ferry prettiness of it all. I would like to live here, always and always!"

"You'd get tired of it," said Larry. "What will Miss Raby say when we get back?"

"I shall be ferry sorry when she scolds me, an' mebbe I shall haf to promise neffer to do it again, so we may as well have a good time for this once."

And, leaving the future thus to itself, Eilidh threw herself heartily into the enjoyment of the moment. Talking now in Gaelic with the babies, now in English with Larry, and then in a mixture of both with Sandy and Lizzie, she was the merriest of them all.

Once or twice during the row Larry tried to question her about her father, but she changed the subject each time so quickly that he began to grow annoyed and suspicious. It seemed as if she did not mean to tell him anything, and he grew more curious with each rebuff.

It was Eilidh who proposed that the babies should sing Gaelic songs, and she who set them going and led the tune. It was she who told fairy tales, learned from Mollie, and then, for Larry's benefit, told a long story of happenings here in ancient days, when strong men loved and fought for a beautiful woman, and fled with her to this loch for shelter from her enemies. It was Eilidh who refused to row into the middle of the loch, and who insisted on putting into

a corner while the afternoon steamer was at the pier, so that the babies should not be frightened. And it was Eilidh who cried at last, when Jimmie began to complain of being hungry,

"There are Miss Mollie and your tutor-man on the shore! Ton't you think perhaps we had better go home and be scolded?"

Mr. Kerr, the "tutor-man," thinking he had left his recalcitrant pupil to himself for as long as was wise, had strolled down to the shore to see what Larry was up to. There the sight of the boatload of children out on the loch made him both anxious and angry. Larry had no business to do such a risky thing. He was wondering how the boy had managed to get the boat down to the water, and what had induced him to take all the babies, since he was not by any means fond of them, when a cry of dismay made him turn sharply. So Mollie, breaking through the bushes in sudden alarm, found herself face to face with "Mr. Nuisance."

He stopped at sight of her, with surprise and something more in his face, for, like Larry, he had been anticipating a lonely time among the hills, and had feared the constant company of his pupil might grow tiresome.

"Miss Raby! I had no idea you were here."

"Do you see those disgraceful children?" cried Mollie, too anxious for them to respond to his greeting. "Oh, how can we fetch them back? Is there another boat?"

He hurried to help her down the bank.

"They'll be all right," he said, reassuringly. "The water's perfectly quiet. I'm afraid there's no boat nearer than Darmidale."

"Then you must shout to them. All the babies are there! How could Eilidh do such a thing! Or do you think Larry is to blame?"

"I think," he said gravely, "it is likely to be the mixture of the two. They're little rascals—I mean, Larry is. I don't suppose they'll come back till it suits them."

He shouted, and Mollie waved and beckoned vigorously, but the children did not seem to hear. At last, when Mollie was frantically asking what else they could do, Eilidh waved her hand in reply, and the laden boat began to draw in to the shore.

"That's all right!" said he, with evident relief. "Don't worry, Miss Raby. They'll be here in five minutes. When did you arrive?"

"Only this morning," said Mollie, her eyes fixed anxiously on the boat.

"And you are going to stay?"

"Oh, yes—for a while."

"Then," said he, looking suddenly satisfied, "I shall keep an eye on Master Larry, for it seems to me that the two together are likely to be a bit of a handful. For instance, Larry alone can't launch the boat. I suppose Miss Eilidh helped him."

"I'll speak to Eilidh," said Mollie, hurrying to the water's edge.

Kerr laughed. "Speaking is not much good where Larry's concerned. Here they come!"

"Eilidh!" cried Mollie reproachfully, as the boat grated on the shingle, and the babies stared up at them with shy faces, glowing with sun and wind and pleasure. "Eilidh, how could you do it?"

"But we haven't done any harm, Miss Mollie! The babies are all right, effery one of them, and they haf neffer had such a good time before! An' I was just longing for some fun!"

She scrambled barelegged into the water, and began to lift the babies out, with a kiss for each on the top of its head as she dropped it on the shingle. Then she brought her shoes and stockings from their place of safety, and climbed the beach after the others.

“I won’t effer do it again if you don’t want me to, Miss Mollie, and if you think you must scold about it, why I’ll have to listen. Is it the boat you’re not pleased about, or is it my shoes and stockings? You can’t think how nice it is to have bare feet again! You should shust try it and you’d see. Good-bye, Mr. Lord Larry!” and she waved her hand to her companion in disgrace, as he went off dejectedly with his tutor.

CHAPTER XIX. QUESTIONS.

The morning mists still lay on the water, and the trees were heavy with dew, as Eilidh ran down from the inn, and through the big gate on to the pier. For the early morning was her favourite part of the day, and she intended to make the most of her time in Darmidale, and not waste any of it when she might be up and doing.

There were no boats out on the loch, but John M'Cluckie was down by the pier side washing out his fishing-boat, and she was soon deep in conversation with him. He was deeply interested in her, and vastly amused by her chatter, now in English, now in Gaelic, now in the soft Highland speech, and he was delighted to answer her many questions about friends in Glenaroon, and how things had gone with them during the winter.

She was discussing the question of the crops, when she heard her name called from the road, and, turning, saw Lord Larry on his pony. Laughing at the remembrance of their first meeting, she went up to the gate to hear what he had to say.

"You are out very early this morning, Mr. Lord Larry! Was the tutor-man very angry yesterday?"

"I've come to bring a message from my mother," said he, changing the subject. "Will you and Miss Raby please come and spend the afternoon with us? We'll send the carriage along immediately after lunch. Here's a note for Miss Raby. I said I'd bring it before breakfast, because there's lessons after."

"Yes," Eilidh nodded, "there's lessons after! To-day it is geography, and writing, and poetry, and effery day there are sums and spelling."

"Oh! Then you're to work too?" said Larry, somewhat relieved.

"Of course. Did you think I would be so lazy as to do nothing at all? I would like to come and see your mother very much, and I am sure Miss Raby will be pleased to come too," said Eilidh demurely.

"Come in good time. I want to show you everything. But I mustn't wait, or I shall get no breakfast. Good-bye!" and he rode off, while she watched him enviously.

"Now that iss what I would like—a horse to ride, and go along so quick! But I suppose we can't have efferything!" and she carried the note in to Mollie.

By two o'clock the big carriage was waiting at the door, Mr. Kerr and Lord Larry being in attendance on their bicycles. They drove in state down the road, with its arch of great trees and walls of rock and ferns on the one side, and bramble bushes hiding the loch on the other, and Eilidh was highly delighted to find herself sitting behind the two horses and the coachman and footman. As they passed the Farm of the Babies she waved exultantly to Lizzie and the little ones on the shore, and laughed to see them stand gazing till the carriage had turned the corner.

Lady Avery welcomed them graciously at the doorway of the big house, and Eilidh had an attack of shyness for a moment, at thought of her first visit there with the scones and honey a year ago. But the little lady was as kind and friendly as ever, and made no reference to their former intercourse or to the amazing change in Eilidh's circumstances, which the child in her ignorance had feared.

“What a big girl you’re getting, Eilidh! I declare you’re taller than I am! Larry, boy, you’ll have to look out or she’ll leave you behind. Now run away to the garden, and show Eilidh every corner of it. Perhaps Mr. Kerr will go with you, while Miss Raby and I have a chat.”

That was not at all Mr. Kerr’s idea of enjoyment. However he went off with the children, hoping for better things in the future, and Lady Avery led Mollie across the lawn to some chairs under the trees. Her eyes followed the children as they went down the path, and rested admiringly on Eilidh’s neat little figure, dressed in a dainty summer frock of soft blue muslin, and wearing a big white hat on her bright hair.

“What a picture that child is! And how much she has improved, Mollie! Am I allowed to ask questions yet?”

Mollie looked troubled. “I’d like to tell you all about it, but, you see, I was told not to—for the present. What do you think I ought to do?”

“I suppose you must do as you were told! But I can’t help feeling curious, you know. The first time I saw her she had walked three miles through drenching rain to bring us a basket of scones, and was soaked, and I had to dry her before I could let her go! With bare feet, too! You must forgive me for making guesses, Mollie.”

Mollie laughed ruefully. “I suppose you can’t help it. I wish you hadn’t seen her before! It’s very unfortunate. But I mustn’t talk about her.”

“She told me,” said her ladyship persuasively, “that her name was Eilidh Munro.”

Mollie laughed, but was conscious of sudden colour in her cheeks.

“It’s too bad of you! I shall have to——”

“Well, I won’t then! But there is one thing I must know, Mollie. Has any one a real right to her? For if she’s nobody’s child, I would like to have her. I’ve always wanted a girl, and she and Larry pair so well. I would like her for my own, if no one has a better claim.”

“It’s very, very good of you,” Mollie said gratefully, “but it’s quite impossible. But she has no mother. If you would be kind to her sometimes, I’d be very grateful, and I know she loves you already. I do what I can, but she’s with me all the time and is used to me. She might think more of kindness from you.”

“That’s not likely, but I’ll gladly do what I can. She and Larry are good friends already.”

“There is one thing,” Mollie said thoughtfully. “I may have to leave her for a while soon. I’m to go to Rosamond when—if she wants me. I’ve not told Eilidh yet. I shall leave her at the farm, if they can take her in, but I’m rather doubtful of it. They are squeezed pretty tightly there already. But I’ll arrange that when the time comes. I’m just afraid she may be lonely.”

Lady Avery nodded. “I’ll see that she isn’t lonely. And how are Rosamond and Captain Grant getting on?”

“Look here,” said Lord Larry suddenly, when, after visiting the stables, kennels, farm and other buildings, they were exploring the woods behind the house, “you know your way about remarkably well, Miss Eilidh! You knew which way to turn for the pond, and just where the willow-tree house was, and which was the way to the swing! You must have been here before.”

Eilidh reddened and laughed shamefacedly.

“Yes,” she admitted, “I have. You see, long ago while there was no one living in the house—before effer it was your house, Mr. Lord Larry, so you can’t scold!—Rory Campbell an’ me, we used to creep in through the fence, and go all over the garden, and walk round the house, and wonder what it was like inside. We neffer did any harm, we neffer even picked up

one of your pears or plums off the grass, for Rory wouldn't let me. The other weans—children!—used to take them, and I wanted some too, but Rory said it would be stealing, and wouldn't let me touch them. But we sat on the swing, and went into the tree-house, and saw all about the garden—oh yes!”

“I don't like that Campbell fellow.”

“*Ton't* you? Well, I do, an' I like him a good deal better than I do you,” said Eilidh vigorously, with sudden remembrance of sundry happenings she had almost forgotten. “But I don't suppose Rory will care two pins whether you like him or not.”

They were sitting at tea under the trees, Lady Avery very silent and eyeing Eilidh thoughtfully, when a maid came across the lawn.

“A telegram! How exciting! Whatever can it be?” cried Larry, and his mother looked in surprise.

“For you, Mollie. I hope nothing is the matter.”

Mollie tore it open, then looked up with frightened eyes.

“Rosamond is ill, and wants me. I must go at once. But—how can I?” and she looked anxiously at Eilidh. “I've made no arrangements. I thought there was time enough. We did not expect—I can't leave her at the inn. And I can't take her with me.”

“Eilidh will come to us,” said Lady Avery decisively. “I made up my mind about that some time ago, but I thought I'd not mention it till the time came. Of course she must come. We'll be only too pleased. Now, Mollie, don't worry about her any more. When will you go? To-night, I suppose?”

“It's far too good of you! I don't think I ought to give you so much trouble——”

“Trouble? Nonsense! Eilidh, are you such a bad girl as all that?”

Eilidh laughed, then looked anxiously at Mollie.

“I'd be as good as good! Oh, Miss Mollie, iss your sister ferry bad?”

“I hope she'll soon be all right, Eilidh, but I can't tell till I know more about it.—If it really is no trouble,” she said doubtfully to Lady Avery, “it would be a great relief to me——”

“My dear girl, don't waste time talking about that. It's settled. Now how soon can you go? Is there another steamer to-night?”

“Not from Darmidale, but there would be from Innistraive,” said Jack Kerr eagerly.

“Then, my dear, off you go at once to pack your bag, and the carriage will have you round the loch in time to catch the evening boat and the night train, and you'll be in London in the morning.”

“How very good you are!” Mollie said gratefully. “I can never thank you enough. Then I'll pack Eilidh's things too and bring them back——”

“No, you won't. Eilidh and I will drive down to Darmidale in the pony-trap and fetch everything you leave behind. Now say good-bye and be off as quick as you can.”

“Now for some fun!” cried Larry, jumping up in delight, as soon as his mother and Mollie had gone, Jack Kerr having hurried off to see to the carriage.

“There will be no fun for me till I hear that Miss Mollie's sister is well again,” said Eilidh decidedly, and was as good as her word.

There was a decided weight on her spirits till the next afternoon brought a telegram from Mollie, announcing the arrival of Rosamond's baby son, and telling that both were doing well. But when Eilidh and Lady Avery had got over their great satisfaction at this event, and when a letter had followed the telegram, assuring them that there was now no need for anxiety, and

that Mollie herself had had a comfortable though anxious journey, Eilidh threw off all worry and anxious thought, and she and Lord Larry had a right royal time together.

In many of their excursions the six babies took part, for Eilidh was very loyal to them, and insisted that they should share her pleasures whenever possible. Larry objected at first, as he found that the little ones interfered with many of his schemes for mischief. But his mother sided warmly with Eilidh and helped her in every way to draw the babies into her plans, for Lady Avery fully appreciated the very fact which was Larry's objection to their company—that while the little ones were there, and Eilidh felt herself in charge, she at least would be up to no very wild tricks, and Larry was not likely to go far wrong alone. The babies and Mr. Kerr together kept the elders within bounds, and Lady Avery knew that when they were all together no one was likely to come to much harm.

So the babies were invited for tea on the lawn of the big house, for boating trips in charge of Mr. Kerr, for long drives up Glenaroon, and picnics many miles from home. They rambled in the woods and played hide-and-seek in the glens, or paddled on the shore, on the sands, in the burn. Eilidh and Larry climbed the nearer hills and fished in the river, went for short trips by steamer, and took long walks and drives. There were not many chances of enjoyment which they did not seize and make the most of.

Larry's idea had been to do no lessons at all, since he had a visitor, but to his dismay Eilidh was quite willing to give up the mornings to work, under the "tutor-man's" guidance. Mollie had explained how far she was behind other girls in the matter of lessons, and she was keenly anxious to make up for lost time. So Larry had no excuse for not working also.

During those weeks at the big house, Eilidh learned many things which Mollie would not have counted a necessary part of her education, but which she enjoyed immensely. To play cricket, tennis, and croquet—to drive the pony-trap—to ride Lord Larry's pony—and one day, on the anniversary of their first meeting, and therefore, as Lady Avery insisted, a kind of birthday, there arrived from London a beautiful little lady's bicycle, which sent Eilidh into the seventh heaven of happiness.

It was the one thing she had longed for all the last year, but Mollie had explained that she could not afford to buy her one at present. She very soon learned to ride, and thereafter she and Larry rode for many miles along the fine roads through the hills and explored all the countryside.

Nothing which Lady Avery could think of that could give them enjoyment was wanting, and both children expressed themselves as heartily glad that Mrs. Rosamond had chosen this particular time to be ill, and hoped that she would manage to repeat her illness every year.

True to her promise to Mollie, Lady Avery asked Eilidh no questions, though she felt sorely tempted to do so at times. But she thought much, and by degrees came very near to the truth, though not to a clear understanding of it. From what she had heard she made a good guess as to how matters stood, but could not understand them all.

For the present, however, she could do nothing but wait and wonder, and Eilidh was often puzzled as to why Larry's mother looked at her like that, and sat gazing at her so steadily at times. But Lady Avery, with great doubts in her mind as to how much Eilidh herself knew, never mentioned the matter to her, and moreover forbade Larry to do so either. For Larry was seized with curiosity at times as to the reasons for certain things, and would have teased Eilidh considerably, but for his mother's strict injunctions not to ask her any questions at all.

CHAPTER XX.

THE COMING OF THE BLACK SHIP.

A curtain of fog lay upon the loch, and hid even the nearest hills. The peaks of Arran and the great ridge of Bute had disappeared in cloud. Eilidh, Larry, and the babies sat on the shore at the very end of the tree-covered point, and wondered at the weird effects of the mist. It was strange to hear so much and see nothing.

From the straits at the mouth of the loch, where the steamers pass from Dunrhos to the sea, came the hooting of steamers, the shrill scream of the sirens, and the clang of fog-bells. By the repetition of all these louder and nearer, and by the swish of waves at their feet, the children knew that the afternoon steamer had come up to Darmidale Pier, but the dead white wall shut out everything but the water just in front.

Eilidh had Baby Helen on her lap, for she felt this last baby her peculiar property, and was always anxious to have her in her arms. The others were sitting round her feet listening to a story, and she had charge of them all for the afternoon, for up at the farm every one was busy and Lizzie was glad to be free to help. Larry sat on a stone a little way off, sulking because Eilidh was devoting herself to the babies. In his opinion they were a nuisance, and he grudged the time she gave up to them.

“And so”—said Eilidh, “and so——”

“Hello!” cried Larry, starting to his feet. “What’s that? Goodness me, just look!”

A dark shape came slowly through the fog out on the loch beyond the point. It did not stop, or come near, but passed them slowly—a dim object whose shape they could not see. Then the long-drawn wail of the siren whistle brought the babies to their feet with frightened faces, and, wailing and screaming her question into the fog, the shadowy thing passed out of sight.

“A ship! Whatever can she want up here?”

“A yacht,” said Eilidh. “Didn’t she look funny in the mist?” And then, thinking rapidly, “Where do you suppose she will be going? Do you think they know where they are? For if they don’t stop in a minute they’ll run right into the shore. And—and the tide is out! She’ll run on the sands—there!”

A sudden confusion and noise from the white wall up the loch, shouts, cries, frantic screaming of the whistle and ringing of bells, a splash, and more shouts.

Eilidh turned to Larry, her face white and startled.

“I haf always *said* a ship would run on those sands! Run quick, and see if you can do anything. I’ll come when I haf taken Baby Helen home. Perhaps you can help. If the people come ashore wet they will want to know the way to the inn.”

She hurried up the shore, the babies following in frightened bewilderment, not at all understanding what had happened. Larry sped off into the fog, and as soon as her charges were safe Eilidh followed.

Then she ran down the shore, whipped off shoes and stockings, waded hurriedly through the shallow water of the river, and, speeding across the stretch of wet sand, reached the scene of the accident nearly as soon as Larry.

He was in conversation with a uniformed man who had come ashore in a small boat. The stranded yacht was out of sight in the fog, but she had evidently run upon the sands.

"There's a lady and some children on board," Larry explained, turning to Eilidh. "The boat's not much hurt, and perhaps she'll float at high tide, but they're frightened and want to get out of it. Had they better go to the inn at Darmidale, do you think, or up to the hotel in Glenaroon?"

"I should think," cried Eilidh indignantly, "that your mother would be shust delighted to take them into her house! There iss plenty of room, and it is three or four miles nearer than the inn. I wonder you did not think of it yourself! You know how good your mother is!"

"I dare say she would. I didn't think of it. If you'll fetch them," he said to the stranger, "we'll show them the way up to the house. I know my mother will be pleased, and it's a long way to the inn. But we can get to the house in five minutes."

"I'll be glad to take them anywhere," said the man. "The children can't stand much, and the shock of this has been too much for them. I'll have them ashore in five minutes."

"I'll cut along and tell Mother they're coming," said Larry. "You can show 'em the way," and he sped off up to the road.

For a moment Eilidh's old shyness returned at thought of welcoming the strangers alone. But as the boat came out of the fog again, she forgot her own feelings at sight of the children, for they were only babies, and so found the way to her heart at once.

And such beautiful babies! The sailor-man carried one, and a maid the other. With round white faces, frightened blue eyes, and fair hair falling on their shoulders in dainty curls and ringlets, they were beautiful children, though at the moment in a state of great alarm. Eilidh glanced eagerly at their mother, expecting to find her as beautiful as they, but was disappointed. She was not fair, like the little girls, but tall and dark, and, though very handsome, there was something in her face which repelled Eilidh and brought back her shyness at once.

"I will show you the way," she said timidly, "if you will come with me. Larry has gone to tell his mother."

"Must we cross the sand? Ugh!" said the lady, with a shiver of disgust. "Lucienne," to the maid, "be very careful of Miss Iris, Lucienne."

"Oui, Madame. Oh, how ze sand is wet!" murmured poor Lucienne, who could not spare a hand for her dress, and whose skirts were dragging heavily about her heels.

"If you woult let me carry one of the babies, I woult be ferry careful," Eilidh said diffidently, forgetting in her shyness to speak good English, "I am ferry used to babies—yess indeed! She would be quite safe with me."

"Nonsense, child! Show us the way to this house as quickly as possible. The children should not be out in the fog."

Eilidh silently led the way up towards the road, her feet pattering on the wet sand, her shoes and stockings hanging round her neck. This lady was not as nice as the other ladies she had met, but the little girls were beautiful. Iris! What a very funny name! And how strangely the servant girl talked! Was the man who carried the baby their father, or just the captain of the yacht? She did not think he was the father.

The lady's voice broke in upon her thoughts.

"Can you tell me where Lady Avery lives? I know she has a house on the loch. Is it far from here?"

"It iss to it we are going!" cried Eilidh, in surprise. "Do you know her, ma'am? Lord Larry has gone to tell her you are coming."

"Lord Larry? Do you mean little Lord Clarence?"

"I ton't know. I neffer heard him called that before. He is just Lord Larry."

The lady gave her a puzzled look. Why was this barefooted child on such friendly terms with the Averys? Her first careless glance at Eilidh was followed by a long curious look, but in the darkness of the fog it was difficult to see clearly. What she had seen in Eilidh's face, however, had roused her curiosity and set her thinking.

"We were coming to visit Lady Avery," she said, a little more graciously. "We did not know we were so near the head of the loch. I suppose it would have been better to wait till the fog cleared, as you wished, Captain, but I was anxious to get the children ashore if possible. One never feels safe on the water in weather like this, and you know how delicate the little girls are. Fog is so very bad for them, so I was anxious to get them out of it if possible."

"We'll just be thankful it's no worse, ma'am," said the captain. "As it is we've got here somehow, and no great harm done, I hope. But if it had been rocks instead of sand we wouldn't have got off so easy."

"Keep Baby covered as much as possible. I don't want her to breathe it in. Ah! Here is the road at last!"

Eilidh led them along to the little wooden bridge over the river, and up through the grass and bushes to the high road.

"It iss so much shorter than round by the big bridge," she explained apologetically. "Here are the gates close to us now," and she ran across the road, careless of her bare feet on the stones.

Lady Avery was waiting at the big door, eager to welcome the castaways and make them feel at home.

"Come away in!" she cried. "I'm so glad we happen to be close at hand and able—why, I do believe it's Mrs. Munro!"

With sudden memory of her suspicions, she glanced swiftly from Isabel Munro to Eilidh, and from her to the little girls, then back to Mrs. Munro again. But it was evident that if her guess was right, no one but herself had any idea of the truth.

"We were coming up the loch to visit you," Mrs. Munro explained. "But we lost any idea of our whereabouts in this horrible fog, and unfortunately stuck fast on the sands. However, we're here all right at last. I just hope the children are none the worse."

"We'll give them something to ward off ill effects," said Lady Avery, but looked troubled. For if matters stood as she had come to suspect, it was an awkward position, and only she appreciated the fact.

"Lucienne, bring Miss Iris in here at once. Captain, give Baby to me. This is Captain Macnair of our yacht, Lady Avery."

"Then Mr. Munro is not with you?"

"No. He's shooting with friends in Arran—on the King's-Castle estate," and Eilidh looked up with quick interest. "We left him there a fortnight ago and have been having a most delightful cruise among the lochs. I thought we would just drop in and call on you on our way back. I hope you'll excuse him."

"I wish he had come with you," said Lady Avery. "Eilidh, dear, suppose you run away and make yourself tidy for tea?" and Eilidh, suddenly remembering her bare feet, laughed and hurried off upstairs.

When she came down again a little later, the visitors were beginning to forget the discomforts of their arrival. Mrs. Munro had laid aside her hat and coat, and was sitting by the fire which Lady Avery had insisted upon as a relief from the damp outside. Eilidh looked at

her critically, pausing shyly in the doorway. Yes, she was pretty, very pretty, with great dark eyes and masses of dark hair fashionably dressed by Lucienne—and what pretty clothes she wore! There was something familiar in her face, too, which was surprising.

“She’s like somebody—I do believe she’s a wee bittie like Miss Mollie and her sister! How funny! But I ton’t like her much. She issn’t kind or gentle.”

Lucienne was feeding the baby girls with hot milk, and Eilidh looked at them longingly. What lovely babies they were! Their velvet coats and little bonnets had been laid aside, and they were dressed in white. Iris was sitting upright in an arm-chair with a sponge-cake in her hand. She was only two years old, a fairy-like little creature, with delicate pink and white cheeks, and fair hair caught up at each side with knots of ribbon.

The younger child, a baby of a year old, sat in Lucienne’s lap, with bare pink toes stretched out to the fire, for some drops from the oars had splashed her, and her mother was in terror lest she should take cold. The little girls were very much alike in face, and both looked very fragile.

“Come away, Eilidh,” said Lady Avery. “We’ve begun tea without you, you see. Do you know what has become of Larry?”

“I think he has run away back to see what iss wrong with the yacht,” Eilidh explained, coming forward shyly.

Mrs. Munro looked at her keenly, remembering a thought which had flashed through her mind when she first saw the child on the shore. Surely she had seen her somewhere!

A dainty little lady was Eilidh now, in her neat blue skirt and pretty afternoon blouse! She had brushed and combed her long hair as Mollie had insisted she should, till it shone like gold. And on her left arm, his claws clinging to her shoulder, she held the great sandy cat who went with her everywhere.

“This is a little friend of Larry’s, who is staying with us, Mrs. Munro.”

“I hope ferry much your little girls will not be ill because of the fog, ma’am,” Eilidh said shyly. “It iss a ferry bad day for you to come to see our loch. And I haf always said some ship would run on the sands, but I am sorry it was your yacht—yess indeed!”

The results of Mollie’s careful teaching vanished from her speech as soon as she grew shy or excited, or, indeed, as soon as she forgot to be careful. Mrs. Munro laughed at the soft foreign accent, and Eilidh, instantly conscious of her fault, reddened in confusion.

“Now don’t run away. I want to look at you,” and Mrs. Munro took her hand and held her prisoner. “Surely I’ve seen—but it’s not likely—why yes, of course! How foolish of me! Surely this is the original of Bernard Raby’s Academy picture which every one is talking of? Has he painted you, child?”

“Yes, ma’am, but it was a long while ago—last year, and—and——” She was thinking of the changes since that time, but could not put her thoughts into words, so was fortunately silent.

Lady Avery’s face cleared. This offered a way out of the difficulty, if only Eilidh did not begin to ask awkward questions.

“I was sure I had seen you somewhere. It’s a fine picture, and an excellent likeness, but of course he had dressed you for the occasion.”

Eilidh glanced beseechingly at Lady Avery, fearing she might think it necessary to explain. But Lady Avery only said quietly,

“I saw the picture before it was finished. Mr. Raby painted it up here, you know. Yes, it is a splendid likeness.”

"He did me a very good portrait of Iris. Really, his work is not bad. And this is the cat who was in the picture? What a beauty!"

"Yes, ma'am, he iss mine, and I asked Mr. Raby to put him in. May I show him to your little girls?" and escaping gladly from Mrs. Munro, with whom she did not feel at ease, she went to Lucienne and the babies.

"Ton't you want to see my Sandy? See what a fine big cat he is! You won't be afraid of him, will you? He neffer hurts anybody, does Sandy."

Iris consented to stroke Sandy's great back with the little hand which was not busy with sponge-cake, and Lucienne said appreciatively,

"Ah, ze fine big puss! See, Miss Baby! See how soft are his great feet! Sharming—delightful, zat he is!"

"What is the wee girl's name?"

"Daffodil," said Iris. "We'll call her that when she's as big as me."

"What a *ferry* funny name!"

"Do you know, there was such an odd thing about that picture of Bernard Raby's," said Mrs. Munro, and Lady Avery listened anxiously, for it was a dangerous subject and she did not yet feel sure of her ground. "I saw it first in the Academy, for Bernard never showed it to anybody till it was hung, though he let us have a private view of his landscapes. But the big picture was kept quite a secret, and was a surprise to everybody. I was charmed with the picture of the child, and tried to get Duncan to go with me to see it, for he likes pretty pictures. He has no idea of appreciating good work, but he does like a pretty picture. But I couldn't get him to go. He said he didn't want to see it. And then I found that he had seen it already! Bernard had let him see it in his studio before he sent it in! I can't imagine why."

"And what did Mr. Munro think of it?"

"He expressed no opinion about it. I proposed that he should buy it, but he said Bernard wouldn't sell. So then I asked Bernard if he wouldn't sell it to us, and he agreed to let Duncan have it if he cared to. But he wouldn't! He seemed to have taken some dislike to it."

"How strange!" murmured Lady Avery. "Let me give you another cup of tea! Have you seen Mrs. Grant's baby boy yet?"

"I haf something upstairs that you would like effer so much!" said Eilidh presently to Iris, who had been feeding Sandy with her milk. "I will get it, and you will have some," and she dropped Sandy into the child's lap and hurried off.

"See! Issn't that nice? You shall help me to eat them," she said when she returned, and held out to Iris a big box of chocolates. "I have not let Larry see them yet, for I know where they will go when he does! They only came this morning. The steamer brought them. Miss Mollie sent them to me all the way from London."

"Miss Mollie?" said Mrs. Munro, and turned curiously to Lady Avery. "Is that Mollie Raby?"—And then, a sudden light breaking upon her—"Is this Mollie's mysterious pupil, whom no one knows anything about?"

Lady Avery hesitated, for she began to see how matters would end.

"Yes," she said reluctantly at last. "Mollie has been teaching Eilidh for the last few months, but just now, of course, she is away nursing her sister."

"Well, I am making discoveries to-day! I've been quite curious about this pupil of Mollie's, and she would never tell me anything about her. I asked her to come and spend Christmas with us, and to bring the child too, if necessary, but she said it was impossible. And where have you and Miss Raby been living all winter, child? Bernard would only say it was

somewhere in Scotland. I couldn't see why they need make such a mystery of it. Are your father and mother living, or do you live with Miss Raby all the time?"

"I live with Miss Mollie, ma'am, in Dunrhos," said Eilidh, looking puzzled and rather frightened, for she did not understand what it all meant.

"Eilidh," said Lady Avery quietly, "you might go and see if Larry has come in yet. If he hasn't, just run out to look for him. The tea will be cold if he's much longer. You won't lose your way in the fog, will you?"

"Not here, not in Glenaroon," Eilidh laughed. "In Dunrhos I might," and she ran off, glad to escape further questioning.

When she had gone, Lady Avery turned to Mrs. Munro.

"I can tell you nothing of Eilidh's story," she said gravely, "for I don't know it myself, and neither, I think, does she. All I know is that Bernard Raby used her as his model for the picture which has made him famous, and seems likely to make him rich as well. Since then the Rabys have taken an interest in her, and are making sure that she has a good education, for she is a clever child. Surely there's nothing extraordinary in that? I don't think there's any mystery about her which we need trouble about. Now you know as much about her as I do."

Which, but for the suppression of one little fact, was the truth.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SAILING OF THE BLACK SHIP.

"Issn't it ferry funny," said Eilidh thoughtfully, "that Iris and the baby and their mother should have the same name as me? Ton't you think it's strange?"

It was early in the forenoon, and Lady Avery and she were strolling round the garden with a basket, gathering roses for the house. The fog had lifted during the night, and it was a sunshiny morning.

"Not so very strange, Eilidh. There are plenty of Munros in the world, and especially in Scotland, you know."

"I know. There are effer so many up at Inverary. But I have never met any before."

"I have known Mrs. Munro for a long time."

"She seemed to know Miss Mollie too."

"Oh yes, she knows Miss Mollie," said Lady Avery, and wondered if she should explain the relationship, then decided that it was unnecessary at present.

"Now some white roses, Eilidh. We have plenty of red ones for to-day."

"There was something else funny Mrs. Munro said last night," said Eilidh presently, knitting her brows. "Oh, yes, I know. Who iss it she means when she talks about 'Duncan'?"

Lady Avery frowned. "That is Mr. Munro, Eilidh."

"Oh!—But issn't it funny he should have the whole of my father's name? My father is called Duncan too, you know."

"I didn't know," and Lady Avery silently made this addition to the scraps of evidence in support of her conjectures. "But it's not an uncommon name either, Eilidh. There are probably dozens of Duncan Munros in the world."

"Are there? I ton't know very many people yet, so I did not know. Do you think the little girls will be dressed yet?"

But Iris and her sister did not prove the playmates Eilidh had hoped for. Both were delicate, and suffered for a time from the upsetting of the previous day. Iris developed a feverish cold, brought on partly by fright, and the baby was fractious and out of sorts. Their mother was very nervous about them and begged permission to keep them in bed for a day or two. She nursed them herself and seemed afraid to let them out of her sight, so for a time she saw little of Eilidh and Larry, who were out of doors all day, except during lesson time.

Then, as Iris's cold seemed to her mother's anxious eyes rather worse, Mrs. Munro insisted on sending for a doctor from the nearest little town, round the point and out on the shore of the straits. And as the road round the loch came to an abrupt end at Darmidale Pier, and the cliffs rose sheer from the water, covered with heather but with no space even for a footpath, to call in the doctor meant a steamer journey out of the loch and round the point to the next pier. This was not wholly unsatisfactory, from one point of view, as it offered an excuse for Eilidh, Larry, and Mr. Kerr to take a whole holiday, and after giving the message to the doctor, to cycle along the shore almost to Ardlamont, an excursion they had never yet attempted.

The yacht floated with the tide in the early morning, and Captain Macnair took her out into deep water for safety and anchored off the tree-covered point. She was a long low boat, with black hull and slim yellow funnel, and was not, in the children's opinion, nearly so fine

as Captain Archie's White Ship. Her injuries proved trifling and were soon set right, and she lay waiting for her passengers as soon as they were ready for her.

During the first few days of Iris's illness Mrs. Munro saw little of the elder children, and her curiosity regarding Eilidh seemed to have vanished, to Lady Avery's relief. For the time her only interest was in her children, but, as her anxiety regarding them passed, she had time for thoughts of other matters, and it only needed a little thing to awaken her interest, and with it her curiosity and then suspicions.

One day Larry, having met the postman at the gate, ran upstairs, forgetting the invalids and shouting at the top of his voice,

"Eilidh! Miss Eilidh Munro! Eilidh! Here's a letter for you from London."

Mrs. Munro met him in the passage, having heard her name.

"For me?" she asked.

"No, for Eilidh. None for you to-day," and Larry went on.

Mrs. Munro went thoughtfully back to Iris's bedside, wondering if she had heard aright. She asked no questions, but during the evening picked up a book of fairy tales which Eilidh had thrown down, and glanced over the first few pages.

"Eilidh Munro, with love from Mollie Raby. Christmas."

And now she was more thoughtful than ever, but still she asked no questions, for Lady Avery had said she did not know the story, and Mrs. Munro believed her and had no intention of suggesting what lay in her own mind.

A few judicious questions to Larry gave her the clue to the rest. When and where had he first met Eilidh? Who were her best friends among the people of the neighbourhood? Where did the babies live, of whom she spoke so often?

Now she knew as much as Lady Avery, and had less scruple in making use of her knowledge. For Lady Avery, though knowing that Mrs. Maclachlan at the farm could probably have given her some very interesting information, had never asked a question on the subject, feeling that to do so would be disloyalty to Mollie. Isabel Munro had no such scruple, however, and she only wanted an opportunity to visit the farm.

Here fortune favoured her, for one morning, while Iris's cold still kept her in her room, Lady Avery announced her intention of going for the day to Dunrhos, to visit some friends who were staying at the Hydropathic, if Mrs. Munro would forgive her for leaving her. Mrs. Munro begged her not to trouble about that. She would be with the children and did not want entertaining. But she would accompany her to the pier for the sake of the drive, as she had not been beyond the garden since her arrival, and was beginning to feel the want of fresh air.

She was loud in her praise of the beautiful stretch of loch, so shut off from the world, the great circle of hills, the sea-birds on the shore, the twin mountain peaks, blue in the distance. She could find no words to praise the beauty of the road, winding along the shore, with great trees overhead, black rock cliffs, clothed with ferns and bluebells and heather, on the one hand, and on the other constant glimpses of the sleeping loch through the screen of brambles and rowan trees.

On the one side were openings every now and then to show a white-washed cottage or farm, a fairy glen, a waterfall, or burn dashing through the stones and across the road to the loch; on the other were ever-changing views of the deep blue water, and the green hills opposite, with occasionally a boat or the brown sails of a fishing-smack, and the Black Ship lying patiently waiting. Mrs. Munro declared she had never seen any place more beautiful.

And, having seen Lady Avery safely out of the loch on the busy little steamer, she drove up the road again, and on her way home stopped at the Farm of the Babies.

Lady Avery, returning late in the afternoon, was met on the pier by Eilidh and Larry, who had brought the carriage to take her home. Their faces were full of importance, and it was evident that they had something to tell. They waited with difficulty till they were all in the carriage, then broke out, both together.

"She's gone! She's away on the Black Ship! There was a telegram—another telegram!—and she had to go at once! And something's happened—we don't know anything about it yet, but she had to go and see, and do you suppose he iss ferry badly hurt?"

"What is it? Whatever is the matter?" cried Lady Avery, and at last she heard the story from Eilidh.

"A telegram came for Mrs. Munro to say, would she please go to Arran at once, as Mr. Munro had been hurt. They had been out shooting, and we don't know yet how bad it is. Mrs. Munro went away in the yacht at once, and said we must explain to you and say she was sorry. She left the wee girls and Lucienne here, because it would make them ill again to go away so soon, and she said, please would you be very careful of them, and tell the doctor to come effery day till they were quite well again, and send her a telegram in the morning to say if they were all right.

"But the funny thing is this, Lady Avery! It was effer so long before she came back, after seeing you off in the steamer—I was tracing a map on the window, so I saw her come in. At lunch she told us that she had to go away in a hurry—this was before the telegram came, mind you!—and she would start in the afternoon, and Lucienne was packing her bag, and she gave us the same messages about the children. We couldn't think why she was in such a hurry, but she didn't tell us anything about it. Then just as we were finishing our pudding the telegram came, and when she read it she looked all frightened, for fear it was ferry bad, and said she must go quicker than ever. But why she was going before it came we ton't know and we can't think."

"I hope Mr. Munro is not seriously hurt," Lady Avery said anxiously. "These shooting accidents are horrible things."

"Iss he a nice man? I do hope it issn't ferry bad, because of Iris and Baby. But why do you suppose she was going away before she heard he was hurt?"

"I don't know, Eilidh dear. I can't understand it any more than you can. Why, here's Mrs. Maclachlan! I believe she wants to speak to us."

They were drawing near to the Farm of the Babies, and Mrs. Maclachlan was awaiting them at the foot of the stony brae.

"I do hope there iss nothing the matter with my Baby Helen!" Eilidh said anxiously, as the carriage drew up.

But it was Lady Avery whom Mrs. Maclachlan wanted.

"Coult I speak to ye shust for a moment, mem? If you would be so coot as to come up to the farm I will not keep you long."

"I hope the babies are not ill?" Lady Avery said, as she climbed the brae, leaving Eilidh and Larry in the carriage, to Eilidh's great disappointment.

"Oh no, mem, they are all ferry well inteet, I thank ye. It iss not that at all."

She led the way into the kitchen, and begged her visitor to sit in the rocking-chair before the fire.

“This iss what iss troupling me, mem. This morning a lady cam’ here, an’ she cam’ in your carriage, so I thought she must be comin’ from your house. She walked in and sat down there, an’ asked all manner o’ questions.” Lady Avery’s face grew troubled, but she only nodded. “She wanted to hear all about Eilidh, an’ her mother Helen Morrison, who died twelf years ago, an’ about her father Duncan Munro, an’ what he wass like to look at, an’ if we knew where he wass gone to now. An’ I told her efferything she asked me. I neffer thought there coult be harm in telling that old story to a creat lady like her. But since she went I haf been wondering if it wass wise, an’ if I should haf tolt her. I ton’t know what else I could haf done, but it hass been troubling me effer since, so I thought I would shust ask you.”

“It would have been better not to tell her anything, but you could not know that, of course. No, you couldn’t tell there would be harm in it. Never mind about it, Mrs. Maclachlan. It’s no use worrying now. Let me see the babies. What big boys they are getting! Soon they won’t be babies any longer. Well, now, I must go back to my own children. Don’t think any more about the other matter, Mrs. Maclachlan.”

“Iss there anything wrong with my Baby Helen?” Eilidh asked anxiously, as they drove on.

“No, indeed. There’s never anything the matter with her. She’s a splendid baby. Mrs. Maclachlan just wanted to consult me about something. How does Iris seem to-day, Eilidh?”

“She iss better, I am sure! I think she could be out of bed quite well, but her mother said she must not get up yet. Lucienne let me go in to talk to her for a bittie. I should think she could get up and play with us to-morrow.”

Iris seemed so much better next morning that Lady Avery was able to telegraph thankfully that she was almost well again, and thus relieve Mrs. Munro’s anxiety on her account. All that day she waited hopefully for an answer or a letter giving some details of the accident. But nothing came, and she grew very anxious, feeling that in this case no news was likely to be bad news.

All the next day they waited, and the next, but no news came from Arran. Eilidh and Larry began to lose interest in the matter, since it did not concern them, and the little girls knew nothing of it. Whether their father was seriously hurt or not, Lady Avery felt that they were too young to understand. By the third day they were so much better that she allowed them to go out in charge of Lucienne, with Eilidh to see that they did not lose their way. Larry did not find sufficient entertainment in their company, so went off for a cycle ride alone, but Eilidh loved all babies, and was delighted with these new playmates.

At last, when three days had passed since the sailing of the Black Ship, Lady Avery telegraphed to King’s-Castle, asking for news, and in due course received a reply.

“Duncan seriously injured. Fear he cannot recover. Mollie.”

“So Mollie is there! I’m glad. She will be a comfort to poor Mrs. Munro. I wonder how she comes to be there? Well, I suppose we shall hear all about it in time. She will have to come here to fetch Eilidh. I think I won’t say anything about this till we know more. Poor children! But none of them understand. I wonder if Mrs. Munro has had a chance to talk things over with him! For she certainly knows all about it now.”

So she kept her knowledge to herself, and waited for fuller news. The children had almost forgotten the matter, and the days passed in a continual round of enjoyment. Lady Avery, grieved for the shadow hanging over them, though they knew nothing of it, did all she could to give them pleasure. Lessons were given up, since it was August and the little visitors had to be entertained.

Mr. Kerr went off to visit his parents living in a coast village on another of the great lochs not far away. Eilidh devoted herself to Iris and Daffodil, but never took them anywhere without Lucienne in charge. They were great friends, and found many games and excursions well within the powers of the delicate little ones, and which held no risk to have alarmed even their nervous mother herself.

The seven babies from the farm were invited to play in the schoolroom, or to have tea on the lawn, and Eilidh was never happier than when presiding over a long table under the trees, with Lizzie and Lucienne to pass the cakes, and nine fair-haired babies drinking milk from nine little mugs and chattering with all the might of nine busy tongues.

Baby Helen and little Daffodil, indeed, could not add much to the conversation, but they were by no means silent, and once the shy little Highlanders had grown used to the demure little English ladies, and they on their part had ceased to wonder at the number of the others and their strange language, they were all very good friends.

Iris's pale face and tiny white hands looked very delicate among the sturdy brown-cheeked farm bairns, and Jock and Tam volunteered to carry her round the garden three times without stopping if Lucienne, whom they treated with the greatest respect, would permit it. But Iris ruled them all like a young princess, and was always demanding that the "blue babies" should come and play with her.

Once the nine children were packed into the big carriage and driven away up Glenaroon to a lonely corner for a picnic. Jock and Tam rode beside the coachman, and were covered with glory in consequence, Lady Avery rode in the carriage to keep the little ones in order, and Lizzie and Lucienne followed in the pony-trap with the luncheon baskets, while Eilidh and Larry escorted the party on their cycles.

Once they drove down to the pier, picking up the farm bairns on the way, and took the steamer to Innistrave for a picnic on the shore of the straits, and all thought themselves in a new country, since the familiar loch was out of sight. Jimmie and Alexander, indeed, burst out crying in the middle of a game, because they did not know how they would get back to the farm and mother, and as Aggie and Maggie joined in, Eilidh laughingly led them off along the shore for a long walk till they reached the point where the islets lay, and taking them round the corner, pointed to the farm across the loch.

Then they went back to where Lucienne, with the doubtful help of Helen and Daffodil, was laying the cloth for lunch, and Iris in English, and the rest in Gaelic, told eagerly how funny the farm looked across the water, and how they had counted seven sheep on one of the islets.

Larry cared little for picnics with such a large and very youthful party, but he did not like to be left at home alone. So he consented to accompany them, but his presence did not add to their enjoyment. The babies did not like him because he teased them and they were afraid of him. He was impatient of their games and of the stories they begged from Eilidh, and was always begging her to come and climb a hill, or do something else in which they could not join. But she was very loyal to them, and grew indignant with him many a time, at which he grew angry also and retired into sulks. But, except Lord Larry, every one had a very good time.

And still Lady Avery waited for news.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE COMING OF THE WHITE SHIP.

"Do you know," said Eilidh one day, "to-morrow is Miss Mollie's birthday! She said she'd come back before it. I do wonder why she iss staying away so long! I hope her sister issn't ferry ill. Ton't you think we ought to do something very special as it iss her birthday, Lady Avery?"

"What would you like to do, Eilidh?"

"I would like a whole day blackberry picnic in my wee glen between here and the farm. It is shust full of berries. We must go first thing in the morning, and not come home till dark. And we'll have prizes for the one who picks most blackberries, and Cook shall make them into jam. We might have races, too, and jumping, and a tug-of-war, and you could give the prizes!"

"I'm on!" said Larry. "We'll have cycle races."

"And a prize for the best decorated bicycle," suggested Lady Avery.

"And hoop races and a skipping-match for the babies. And a singing-match, too, both in Gaelic and English—all *my* babies can sing," said Eilidh. "All those should be in the afternoon, and the blackberry picking in the morning, and then a big tea to finish up."

Lady Avery laughed. "Very well. I'll see to it. You had better tell the babies to-day."

"Oh, they will not haf any engagement! But I will tell them, so they can think about it all night."

"I'm afraid when Miss Mollie comes back she'll say your English hasn't improved, Eilidh," Lady Avery smiled. "I haven't been strict enough, and you're taking a holiday in that as in everything else."

"I do try to remember, but I can't be thinking about it all the time, you know. It iss so hard!" Eilidh pleaded. "I will try ferry hard when Miss Mollie comes again."

The whole day was given up to preparations for the picnic. Larry cycled away through the hills to buy sweets for prizes, Eilidh went off in the other direction to explain matters to the babies and set them practising for the races, Lady Avery held a consultation with Cook as to cakes and dainties, and Lucienne set to work to dress some little dolls and to trim dolls' hats, as prizes for the girls, for they had soon found that Lucienne had clever fingers and could make all kinds of dainty articles out of scraps.

Fortunately the weather, always a doubtful factor in calculations on Loch Ruel, decided to be kind, and the sun, after lying in bed for an hour or two longer than usual, broke through the morning mists and shone as if he had received an invitation himself. First thing after breakfast the pony-trap carried Eilidh, Lucienne, and the little ones to the glen, all bearing great empty baskets, and when they left the trap they found the babies awaiting them in the road.

The blackberries were ripe, and in an hour, with so many hands to help, the baskets were filled. Then they all sat in a ring to rest, and Eilidh and Lucienne told stories in turns, while the fruit was sent home in the trap and handed over to Cook. By mid-day Lady Avery arrived, and Eilidh ran to meet her, and led her into the glen, saying,

"It was here I first made friends with Mr. Raby, you know, and he drew me a picture of Sandy sitting on a rock, just as he iss sitting now! Issn't he a dear, my Sandy?"

When the races were over, and the prizes had been presented—every one had a prize, even Lizzie and Lucienne, Lady Avery had seen to that—and they sat resting and waiting for the kettle to boil for tea, the pony-trap arrived from the house again, bringing the cakes and scones which Cook had baked in the morning, and a mysterious basket which was not to be opened till they were sitting at tea.

The babies made a rush for the table at once, and waited breathlessly, while with much ceremony the basket was uncovered, and Lady Avery handed out thirteen tiny pots of jam, made from the berries they had gathered in the morning, and still warm from the pan, in spite of their journey. The babies shouted with delight, and were so pleased that they could not be induced to open the pots, but must take them home for mother to see. However, the elders let them share theirs, so every one had a taste.

And now things began to happen.

As they sat eating the last cakes, Eilidh started to her feet and stood staring—then, with a cry, darted towards the opening of the glen, where, between walls of rock, they could see a stretch of blue loch and a little piece of road. And Eilidh, springing over rocks and rushing through the burn, ran up to a tall youth, who had paused at sight of them on his way up the road.

“Whoever is it?” said Lady Avery, in great surprise. “I never saw him before.”

“It’s that Campbell fellow. Bother! I don’t like him. I thought he’d gone for good,” said Larry.

Eilidh stopped short before Rory.

“Rory! What a man you haf grown! I am half afraid of you!”

His face had lit up at sight of her. He raised his cap, gazing at her eagerly but shyly too.

“Eilidh! I’m that glad to see ye again. I was hoping for a sight of you. But I shall haf to call you ‘Miss Eilidh,’ now you are such a fine lady.”

The holland pinafore she wore over her dress was stained with blackberry juice, and the big hat on the back of her head was usually kept for the garden and was worn for comfort, not for looks. But Rory saw greater changes in her than in her dress, and felt awkwardly that she might no longer care to be so very friendly with him.

She stared at him for a moment, then stamped her foot, really angry.

“You great silly boy! I won’t haf you talk such nonsense! As if anything coult make a difference! Ton’t you tare to take off your hat to me again. I ton’t like it. And ton’t talk any more silliness to me, please. Now wait here shust one moment,” and she went flying back to Lady Avery.

“It iss a very great friend of mine, and I have not seen him for a year! Lady Avery, I must go and talk to him. You won’t mind, will you? I’ll walk up the road with him and hear all he has to say. I am so very glad to see him again!” and she sped away back to Rory.

“We haf all the farm-babies here an’ they are shust at their tea. Peep ofer the rocks, an’ you will see them, Rory. See them all in their blue frocks—the wee one by Lizzie iss my Baby Helen, who was born that night you found me and Mr. Lord Larry up the hill. Do you remember? Now, you see, I ton’t forget my old friends, do I? Ferry well then!”

Her English had vanished entirely in speaking to him. It would have seemed strange not to use the old Highland speech in talking to Rory.

“Now I’m going to walk up the road with you. How iss it you are here, Rory? Do you know, you haf nearly grown into a man! I did not think you woult be so big.”

He laughed, relieved to find that she ignored the changes though he could not forget them himself.

"I came to see my folks up the glen, Eilidh. I haf not been home since the spring, and they could spare me for a day or two. I had your letter saying you were coming home to the loch for a bittie, an' I hoped I'd see you somewhere. But I did not think I should be able to speak to you."

"Were you going to look at me from behind a tree?" she asked scornfully. "Didn't you think I'd want to see you too? An' how haf you been getting on all this time, Rory? Do you like Arran? Haf you had good crops on your farm? Haf you been working ferry hard? I have!" and she laughed up at him.

"You'll have been learning heaps o' things, I'm thinking, Eilidh? Has yon lady been teaching you all the while? The one who came with you to King's-Castle last year. I liked her face."

"Miss Mollie. Yes, she iss a dear! Oh yes, I haf learnt lots. I'm fond o' lessons now."

"An' so you should be too," he said, in his old tone. "You are ferry well off to have such a chance. I haf been studying too, but I ton't get on ferry quick alone. The schoolmaster at Lamlash, he has been helping me."

Eilidh nodded. "But you always were fond of books. You used to say you would go to college some day, an' I used to laugh and say I woult not go with you, for I did not like reading. I always used to know you were ferry cleffer, Rory."

He laughed. "I'm fearing that was a mistake on your part, Eilidh. Cleffer I am *not*, but I am fond of books an' trying to learn."

"Yess, you woult always be teaching me my lessons for the school as we went up the glen each day."

They walked to the head of the loch, talking over old times and telling the news of the year. Rory had once or twice been as far as Dunrhos, and had seen many of the things Eilidh described. He listened to her chatter, but seemed most interested to hear how happy she was with Mollie and how well they were getting on together at work and play. But near the little bridge over the river he stopped.

"You must not come farther with me now, Eilidh. I have let you come too far already. It iss time you went back to your friends and the babies."

"Not just yet! There iss effer so much more to say, Rory!"

"You an' the lord-laddie are good friends now?"

"Ye-es—oh yes, most of the time! Shust now an' then we quarrel a bittie, you know."

"Oh, do you know," said he suddenly, "I had something to tell you, and here I haf gone an' forgotten it altogether!"

"Then tell me now! Sit down on the grass and tell me, Rory."

"I'll walk down the road again with you. Then you will not haf so far to go alone. Eilidh, do you remember yon man who came to see you at the farm a year ago? He gave me a ride in his coach, an' I gave him a message for you——"

"Yes, I know, of course. An' he tried to steal my mother's letters, an' Mr. Raby an' Mrs. Rosamond's Captain were ferry angry. He said he had come from my father, but it wassn't true. What about him, Rory?"

"I haf seen him."

"Seen him? Oh, where?"

“At King’s-Castle. He was there for the shooting—you know lots of gentlemen go there to shoot the grouse——”

“I know,” she nodded quickly. “And there was an accident.”

“Haf you heard of that? Well, one day I saw them going ower the fields to the shooting, and this man was among them—a fine gentleman like the rest, going with his gun to kill the birds. I knew him at once, an’ I think he saw I did, an’ didn’t want me to see him any more, for he went away as quick as he could. But it was the same man, I knew him at once. And since that day I haf neffer seen him again. You see, there was an accident while they were all shooting together, an’ one man was shot, an’ the others all went away, because he was so badly hurt, so I neffer saw that man again.”

“Mr. Raby would like to know,” Eilidh said thoughtfully. “An’ how about the man who was shot, Rory? I know all about him. His wee girls are in the glen with my babies.”

“Iss that so? An’ they haf not heard? It will be a sad day for them, I’m thinkin’.”

“Lady Avery would not tell them he was hurt, for she said they were too wee to understand. How iss he getting on, Rory? We hafn’t heard.”

“He died this morning. Ton’t you tell the wee girls. Their own mother should do that, if they have one.”

“Oh, poor Iris! An’ the poor wee baby! Oh, I am sorry! Shust think how bad they will feel to know they hafn’t any father! Poor wee things!”

“But you hafn’t any father yourself, Eilidh, or if you have, you ton’t get ferry much good of him. Have you effer seen him yet? No? Then he issn’t much good to you, iss he?”

“No-o-o! But I *have* him all the same! And some day when he iss ready I shall see him. If I hadn’t any father I shoud be ferry sorry. I ton’t mind not living with my father and mother like other weans, because, you see, I have my father somewhere, and as for my mother, why, I have Miss Mollie all the time, an’ what more could anybody want?”

“I am ferry glad you are so happy with her,” Rory said, and bade her good-bye and went thoughtfully up the glen.

For he knew just enough to make him question. He knew the name of the man who had been hurt at King’s-Castle, though he did not understand that he was the man who had visited Eilidh a year ago, and he felt that he would very much like a chat with Mr. Raby, who seemed to understand the whole matter.

Eilidh went sorrowfully back to the glen. The picnic held no more enjoyment for her. How could she laugh and play when she thought of this dreadful news she must tell Lady Avery as soon as possible? And poor Mrs. Munro! She had not liked her, but she was sorry for her now. And poor Iris and Baby Daffodil!

But as she reached the glen the picnic came to an abrupt end. For Jock and Tam suddenly screamed together, “Oh, look, look!” and pointed to the loch. And past the tree-covered point came slowly the prow, and then the funnel, and then the whole White Ship, and slipped quietly past and anchored just in front of them.

“Captain Archie’s yacht! Oh, perhaps Miss Mollie iss on her! She said she would come back here to me!” cried Eilidh, and ran down the beach.

The others followed, till even Lady Avery and the babies were gathered on the shingle, and all watched eagerly as a white boat dropped to the water and came speeding to the shore.

“Miss Mollie! See, there she is! Oh, issn’t it good of her?” cried Eilidh rapturously. “There, you see, she has come on her birthday as she promised! Issn’t it a good end to our picnic?”

She had forgotten Rory's news entirely in her delight. As the boat touched the shingle she rushed down to meet it and to be the first to welcome Mollie.

Mollie kissed her, more gravely than usual, and Lady Avery guessed her news from her face.

"Lizzie," she said, "you had better take your babies home. We shall be busy now. Mollie, shall we send the children out to the yacht?"

"Yes.—Eilidh," and Mollie smiled for a moment, "out on the yacht there's the dearest little baby you ever saw. Don't you want to go and see him?"

"O-o-oh! Is it your sister's baby? Oh, may I go at once?"

"Yes. Take Iris and Baby and Lucienne with you. Larry, Captain Archie, and Bernard are on board. Don't you want to see them again?"

"Is Mr. Raby here too? Oh, how ferry nice!" cried Eilidh, and ran up the beach to fetch Lucienne.

"Aren't you coming too, Miss Mollie?" she asked, as the little girls were being lifted into the boat.

"Not just now. There won't be room. You can send the boat back for me."

"I'll wait, if you *like*," Eilidh said anxiously. "It could come back for me as well as for you."

"Nonsense! I mustn't keep you from that baby any longer," laughed Mollie. "I've seen plenty of him for a little while. Perhaps if you ask Rosamond very nicely, and promise to be very careful, she'll let you nurse him. Lady Avery and I are going to walk along the shore and have a chat."

Lady Avery waited till they were alone. Then she turned anxiously to Mollie.

"Mollie, tell me all about it. I've been longing for news. How is Duncan? We've heard nothing for three days."

"There was nothing to tell, or I'd have wired again. We've just been waiting—he died this morning—but we had known all the time he could not live. I'll tell you what I can. We were cruising about so that Rosamond should get strong again, and were working slowly up the coast so that I could come back for Eilidh, when we heard of the accident. The news of it caught us at Douglas in the Isle of Man. We came on at once, and arrived the day after it happened. Isabel was there already, but we heard that she had been visiting you and had left the children here. So I guessed that she knew—all about it. You understand it all too, don't you?" and she looked anxiously at her friend.

"Duncan is Eilidh's father, I suppose, and the little girls are her step-sisters? I've only guessed, Mollie, I've asked no questions."

"That was good of you. I was sure you had guessed. I soon saw that Isabel knew it all, though she would not speak of it to me. When I heard she had been here I sent for Bernard, for fear he should be wanted. That's how it is we're all here together. Yesterday Isabel sent for us to go and see Duncan. He could hardly speak—I didn't tell you about the accident. He was very badly hurt. Another man's gun went off by mistake, and Duncan was shot through the lungs. They knew from the first he couldn't recover. Well, he made us understand that Isabel knew all about Eilidh, and that we—Bernard, Archie, and I—were to be her guardians till she comes of age."

"He has provided for her, then?"

"Oh yes. I think he wanted to do her what justice he could. She and the little girls are to share alike, but of course the little ones will eventually have Isabel's share as well. But Eilidh

will have quite as much as is good for her, and rather more than it would be wise for her to know anything about at present. I'm to keep her, and I'll see that she has everything she needs.

"I shall have to treat her rather differently now," she said thoughtfully, and more cheerfully, since now her subject was life, not death. "You see, for the last year we've had just enough, but nothing to throw away. I've had to plan things so that it would be enough. But I've not been able to give her all she needed for her education, though it was enough for a beginning. I had told Bernard already that there would have to be some other arrangement. Now we shall be able to do what we like, and I shall see that she is properly taught in every subject, those I can teach her and those I can't.

"I must begin to take her about, too—even now she has only once been in a train, and that was when I took her up to Glasgow for a day! It rather frightened her, I think, though she said nothing, but only kept very close to me. But soon she will have to travel and see other countries and come to understand things better. We won't go back to Dunrhos to live. She ought to get used to something more than that quiet little place. We shall probably go either to London or Edinburgh; she'd have more chance there. By the time she's eighteen I mean her to be as well educated in every way as any girl of her age who hadn't lost the first ten or eleven years almost entirely."

"Mrs. Munro wants nothing to do with her?"

"She seemed perfectly willing to leave everything to me. She would not discuss the subject at all."

"And shall you explain matters to Eilidh? She knows of the accident, of course, and is interested for Iris's sake. Shall you tell her?"

"No," said Mollie decidedly, "not yet, at any rate. She could hardly understand it, and I know it would hurt her terribly to hear how her father treated her. I shall tell her nothing about it for a while, and I shouldn't be surprised if, when she is a little older, she puts things together and finds it out for herself. She's so quick that if she once began to question she would soon get at the truth."

"She already thinks it very funny that Iris's father should have the same name as hers."

"Yes. Now tell me how Isabel heard the story. But, of course, she was sure to, if she came here at all."

"I wonder Mr. Munro let her come, under the circumstances."

"She had no idea of coming to Loch Ruel when she left Arran, you know. Her plan then was to visit some friends at Shandon, and cruise for a few days among the lochs up there. We are to take Iris and Baby back to her at once," she added, as they stood watching the returning boat, "so I think if we can get Eilidh's things together we had better take her too. Suppose we don't tell the little ones of their father's death, but leave that to their mother! They are too young to realise it anyway."

A pretty group awaited them on the deck of the White Ship. Rosamond lay in a deck chair nursing Sandy, who of course had accompanied Eilidh on board. Eilidh herself sat in another big chair, the white-robed baby held tenderly in her arms, while Bernard Raby and Captain Archie were making Sambo beg for chocolates, to the delight of Iris and Daffodil. Lucienne was watching Daffodil lest she should fall, and Sandy was watching Sambo, ready to spit and fly if he ventured too near.

And next morning the White Ship bore them all away from Loch Ruel, Iris and Daffodil to their mother, Eilidh and Mollie to another year of hard work in a new home. The little girls sat

in the bow playing with Sambo, while Lucienne kept guard over them, her face troubled at thought of her mistress's sorrow. Rosamond, the Rabys, and Captain Archie sat in a group talking over the past and future. And Eilidh, with her big cat clinging to her shoulder, stood in the stern and waved good-bye, first to Rory, a lonely figure at the head of the loch—then to a patch of bright blue at the end of the point, where were all the babies with Lizzie and Mrs. Maclachlan—and then to the pier, to which Larry and Lady Avery had driven that they might see the last of her. Then a last good-bye to hills, trees, loch, and friendly white farms and cottages, and she turned and went soberly forward, hugging Sandy to her breast, and sat down between Bernard Raby and Mollie.

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[The end of *A Princess in Tatters* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]