

In the Home  
of Her  
Mother

Lucy Maud Montgomery  
1910

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# IN THE HOME OF HER MOTHER

L. M. Montgomery

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Katherine Taylor sprang out of the automobile under the poplars of the lawn, ignoring the outstretched hand of the man who had been her companion for the afternoon. She had always hated to touch that hand—it was so plump, so remorseless, so prosperous—in short, so expressive of the personality of its owner.

Yet she had allowed Richard Harvey to propose to her during their ride; and, although she had not yet accepted him, about nine-tenths of her mind was made up to do so. It was because of the remaining troublesome one-tenth that she had asked him to wait a week for his answer. Harvey had agreed with some ill-concealed surprise. He had not expected that she would ask for delay: he knew perfectly well that she was not in love with him, but he had no doubt that she would marry him. Moreover Katherine knew he had no doubt.

She went slowly upstairs to her room and sat wearily down by the window. Clapping her hands on her lap, she gazed frowningly out at the sharp blue sky over the tree tops. In the high, clear light of the window she did not look so young as in the poplar shadow on the lawn. There were fine lines in the clear paleness of her skin; the large gray eyes were tired; and in the heavy, glossy black hair that framed her face a gray hair was visible.

Yet she was very beautiful. Richard Harvey, when he decided that the time had come to marry, had passed in critical mental review all the eligible women of his acquaintance, and had concluded that for beauty of face, distinction of manner, and taste in dress, none could compete with Katherine Taylor. What sort of a soul might be pent up within that beautiful body he neither knew nor questioned; it was enough that she would do him credit as the bearer of his name and the mistress of his house; and he thought Katherine was a very lucky young woman to fill the bill so perfectly. Some men might have asked for a trifle more in the way of youth and freshness, and perhaps in appreciation of the gifts and graces of Richard Harvey; but he was satisfied with good looks and good breeding and good birth—though, to be sure, Katherine's mother was said to have been a little country nobody, of whom the other members of her husband's family were always ashamed. It was even said that Katherine Taylor had a grandmother living who had once taken in washing. This Richard Harvey put down as probably an envious falsehood; at any rate the obnoxious grandmother was never seen or heard of in the Taylor set, and certainly the Taylors were beyond criticism. All things considered, Richard Harvey could not understand why Katherine should have asked for that extra week.

“A little bit of bluff to enhance the value of her ‘yes’ when it does come,” he reflected, with a smile of amusement as he drove home.

Just as Richard Harvey smiled thus amusedly, Katherine Taylor was wondering drearily if, after all, old maidenhood, even in her aunt's house and circle, could be worse than marrying the said Richard Harvey.

She sprang up and paced the room restlessly. For the first time in her life she felt weak. She wished there was some one to whom she could turn for advice.

“Some one to give me strength,” she said, impatiently—“strength either to refuse Richard Harvey or marry him. Either seems equally hard. But to whom can I turn?”

To whom, indeed? Aunt Isobel? Katherine smiled bitterly, thinking of that worldly, ambitious woman. There was little doubt what Mrs. Blair Taylor’s advice, urgent advice, would be if it were asked. Mrs. Blair Taylor would think her niece no better than an imbecile to dream that there could be any question of refusing Richard Harvey and his millions. Mrs. Blair Taylor felt sore enough already over the fact that Katherine, with all her beauty and advantages, was still unmarried at thirty.

Her Uncle Blair? Again Katherine smiled—this time amusedly, to think of her Uncle Blair advising anybody. Why, he had never in his life been able to decide for himself what necktie he should wear.

Katherine felt suddenly desolate and lonely. She was at the crossways of life; everything depended on the path she chose now; and in this hour of her need there was not a soul to whom she could go, sure of wise, disinterested counsel. She had not even the memory of an old love to guide her, for she had never loved.

On the one side was the hateful, useless life of the passé society woman; on the other a brilliant existence as the sharer of Richard Harvey’s career and wealth. All Katherine’s tastes and ambitions inclined her to the latter; but deep down in her consciousness some lofty, instinctive ideal struggled with the influences of education and environment.

“If mother had lived,” she said, longingly. And then came a sudden thought of that old grandmother up in the country—her mother’s mother, whom she had never seen, who she had been told was a poor, uneducated old woman. She knew nothing of her beyond the few contemptuous references she had, in her childhood, heard Mrs. Blair Taylor make. Katherine knew that her father was supposed to have made a shocking mesalliance when he had married Lynde Cameron in some little farming settlement where he had wandered in a vacation, and that was almost all she did know of her parents, both whom had died in her babyhood. She had a picture of her father—a handsome man, whom she was accounted to resemble strongly. But of her mother she had nothing—not even a line of her handwriting or a trinket she had worn. She had never cared to ask Aunt Isobel about her; and all Uncle Blair seemed to be able to say was that Lynde was a nice little woman, and he couldn’t see why the family had kicked up such a fuss because Allan had married her.

“Of course she was poor. She taught a district school, and her mother took

in washing, they said, before Allan married her," Uncle Blair had conceded reluctantly. And it was to this old mother, who had so disgraced herself by taking in washing, that Katherine's thoughts now persistently turned. This woman was nearer to her in the ties of flesh than any living creature.

"What if I were to go to her and tell her my difficulty? Is it possible she might help me to decide wisely?"

The next morning Katherine Taylor paused at the pine-guarded gate of a little garden before the house where, as she had been told at the country station, "old Mrs. Cameron" lived. It was a tiny gray house, with square windows winking through a veil of honeysuckle vines. Gnarled old apple trees stretched motherly arms, white and pink with blossoms, about it. The little garden was trim and sweet, and fresh with springtime air, and winds, and flowers.

As Katherine opened the gate a woman came around the house, followed by a big white and yellow cat. They met in the center of the hard, moist, red path with its border of clam shells. Katherine, looking at the woman, saw an elusive, indefinable resemblance to herself in bearing and expression, and knew that this was the old grandmother she had come to seek; the realization brought a shock of surprise, for "old Mrs. Cameron" was not at all the bent, aged personage Katherine had unconsciously been expecting to see.

She was not very old—certainly not more than sixty-seven or eight. She had a tall, slender, erect figure, with sloping shoulders; she wore a dress of lilac-hued print, made in some quaint, old-fashioned way, and a crisp, capacious gingham apron. She was bareheaded, and the shadow of the apple boughs fell on her soft-crimped grayish hair, which was combed down and twisted over her ears in the style of an elder day. She had a white knitted shawl over her shoulders, and at the curve of her arm she carried a tiny, furry, gray morsel of a kitten. Her face was fresh and clear-cut, with lines, but no deep wrinkles; her mouth was shrewd and humorous, with firm corners, but her eyes captured Katherine and justified the impulse which had led her to seek this woman for counsel and help, so deep, and steady, and kindly were they, the eyes of a woman who has suffered much, and learned much, and won through struggle to victory and peace.

Into those eyes, as they looked on the tall, trim, fashionably gowned young woman before her, came a wonderful expression of maternity. She gently placed the kitten on the grass and held out her hand before Katherine had spoken.

"You are my grandchild, Katherine," she said, "and I am glad to see you. You have been long in coming, but I have always known that Lynde's daughter would come to me sometime."

Katherine took the outstretched hand, but the next moment they were in

each other's arms. A flood of affection, such as she had never felt for any human being, rushed into Katherine's heart for this plain old woman with the wise eyes.

"O grandmother," she said simply, like a child, "I have come to get you to tell me what to do."

"There, there," Mrs. Cameron patted the girl's shoulder. "We'll have a big talk by and by. You're tired now and hungry. It's pretty near dinner time. You'll just be resting while I get it, dearie."

"I haven't very long to stay this time," said Katherine regretfully. "I ran away; nobody knew I was coming; I'll have to go back this evening."

"O well, we'll make the most of the time while you can be here," said Mrs. Cameron, stooping to pick up the kitten again. "It's wonderful how well two people can get acquainted in an afternoon if they do nothing else. Come in, dearie; come right up stairs."

When they reached the little landing, lighted by a narrow window before which hung shelves filled with blossoming plants, Mrs. Cameron turned to a door at the right.

"The spare room is over there," she said; "but I'm going to take you in here. There's never been anybody but myself in this room for thirty years."

Katherine found herself in a long, narrow room, with a ceiling so low that she could touch it with her hand. The bare, beautifully white floor was spread with round, braided mats. There was a window seat of some dark polished wood, and over it hung white muslin curtains. A little round table near it held a work basket, a few books, and a blue and white striped jar. The bureau was high and black, with shining brass drawer handles. The low bed was covered with a blue and white "Irish Chain" quilt, and the snowy pillowslips were trimmed with knitted lace. The walls were hung with diamond patterned paper in shades of faded pink. On one of them hung a pale blue muslin dress, with tiny sprays of rosebuds in it.

"Do you know whose room this is?" asked Mrs. Cameron.

"My mother's," answered Katherine, unhesitatingly.

"Yes. I keep it just as it was when she lived here. That's her dress on the wall, the one she was wearing when she met your father. She was very fond of this room. She used to sit on that window board there and sew and read. I've never been able to believe she is dead. She was so full of life and spirits. When I come here I always feel as if she was here, too. I wish I had a picture of her; but she never had any taken; she had a kind of prejudice against getting her picture taken. Her father was just the same. And her that was so pretty, and clever as she was pretty. I guess"—Mrs. Cameron turned and laid a hand on Katherine's shoulder—"they haven't told you much about your mother?"

"Nothing, nothing," murmured Katherine, her eyes full of tears.

"I'm just as glad. It'll be all for me to tell, and I can tell it better than anybody else. You don't look like her; you look more like me than her, but more like your father than either of us. He was a handsome man and a good man. I never had anything against him. If he'd lived you wouldn't have been thirty years coming to see me. Why, Katherine, when you were a baby I was just a young woman, only thirty-eight. It seems just like the other day, dearie, when your mother wrote me from England, telling me you were born and longing for the time when she could bring you to show me. But she never was to come. Three months after that. Just three months, she died. Well, dearie, I'll go down and get dinner. You just rest yourself; lie down on the bed if you like. I'll leave the kitten with you for company. Ain't he a dear thing?"

Left alone, Katherine took off her hat and coat and brushed her hair before the little oval mirror which must have so often reflected her mother's face. Then she went about the room, looking at everything lovingly and reverently. She buried her face in the fragrant folds of the muslin gown; she sat on the window seat and turned over the yellowed pages of the books on the table; finally she dropped into the little rocker by the bed and laid her head on the pillow which had last been pressed by her mother's head. The kitten swarmed up her dress and curled itself up in her lap, making an absurdly loud noise of purring for so small a creature. Little flecks of sunshine fell dancing about her through the close crowding apple trees outside.

For the first time her mother seemed real to her. The world and the vanities thereof seemed very unwholesome and far away. It was profanation to think of Richard Harvey in this maiden chamber, where only the highest and holiest of virgin dreams must enter. Katherine felt as if she had received a re-baptism of youth, as if she had come into her own and her own had received her gladly. It was as if this life were her natural habitat, and the life she had lived for thirty years an alien existence spent in a quest that never gave completion or satisfaction.

"I've got home," she said, simply. "O why did I never find the way here before?"

After dinner the two women spent a beautiful afternoon. Mrs. Cameron took Katherine everywhere, over house, and garden, and orchard—everywhere her mother had been. The history of everything was told in the gracious, simple words of one who loved these things. Katherine heard all the idyllic story of her mother's wooing.

"Your father fell in love with her at first sight when he saw her in church one day. She was only eighteen, Katherine, just my little girl. I hadn't even begun to think of her getting married. She was so pretty and girlish; she had curly brown hair and big brown eyes, and she was a little, little thing, like a bird or flower. Two months from the day he saw her in church they were

married. This is the maple tree here they were married under. It is old and half dead now, but I never would have it touched. It was the fall then, and it was all red and yellow. I remember seeing the light fall through it on Lynde's white dress in spots like blood. I didn't like to see it; it seemed to me like a bad omen, though I think it is foolish to believe in things like that. Lynde was so happy that day. But I felt dreadful. I felt far worse than if she'd been marrying a poor man. It seemed as if she was going out of my life altogether, and I couldn't see how I was ever going to get along without her. We'd always been so much to each other. Her father died before she was born; he never saw his little daughter. Lynde was his name and I gave it to her. I was desperate poor in them days. I ain't so poor now. My brother, who died when Lynde was ten years old, left me enough to live on. But then all I had to keep us was the bit of rent for a little piece of land my husband had owned and what I earned doing washing and days' work for my neighbors. But we got along and were so happy. It's no matter if a body's poor if she's got something to love. Often I just sit here and think over and over about those old days and all the fun we had, planning, and talking, and working together. Lynde taught school the year before your father came. She was that proud the night she brought her first quarter's salary home to me. Nothing would do her but I must get a silk dress. I'd never had one. I had to let her have her own way, and it was the dress I wore when she was married. I never wore it again. I'll show it to you. Lynde and I made it together, and there's one place under a ruffle where there's a little bloodstain she made one day she pricked her finger with her needle.

"After they were married your father took her to England, and they had a perfectly happy year. Lynde wrote me every week. Come up to her room and I'll show you her letters. You can read them while I'm getting tea."

Sitting on the old window seat of her mother's room, Katherine read her mother's letters. They stirred her to the very depths of her being, especially those in which that little unknown mother had written about her baby.

"All my thoughts are poetry, dear mother, since baby came," Lynde Taylor had written in one letter. "She is so sweet and good, and her eyes are going to be gray like yours and Allan's. I love her best when she is asleep, and better still when she is awake!

"Some day she will be a woman. It makes my heart stand still to think of it. You and I both know now what it is to be a woman—you in your old knowledge and I in my new; and it is so beautiful to be a woman. But when I think of my little baby being one—O, my heart stands still! I pray much for her, but all I dare to pray for is that she may be very wise in the lore of all things simple, and good, and true. Nothing else matters, I think. O, I hope my little baby will never be false to her birthright of womanhood!"

"Will you give me this one letter to keep, grandmother?" Katherine asked,

when Mrs. Cameron rejoined her.

“Yes, dearie. When I’m gone you shall have them all. But I want the rest to keep as long as I live. Come down to tea now. I’ve made the little cakes your mother always was so fond of—Lynde’s cakes, we always called them. You needn’t worry a mite over getting to the station. Pete Harding’s just been in—a neighbor’s son—and he’s going to drive you over. Your train doesn’t leave till 9 o’clock, so we’ll have a lovely evening.”

In the spring twilight they sat on the front doorsteps hand in hand. The kitten slept on Mrs. Cameron’s lap, and the white and yellow cat sat gravely at her feet. Down below the garden was a little shallow pond, whose waters were silver, and pearl, and glimmer. All around it grew slender willows, and in it the frogs were singing a sweet, melancholy chorus. The moon shone down through the tall pines at the gate.

Katherine told her story, and the old grandmother listened in silence.

“He is a rich man, and he is in the midst of a successful career,” concluded Katherine. “All my friends wish me to marry him. If I do not things will not be very pleasant for me. There was so much to be said for it, so much that seemed to override any objection I could make. I have never loved, but I had my ideal of love, and I knew I should be false to it if I married Richard Harvey. I could not decide what to do, so I came to you to ask you to help me.”

“Your mother wouldn’t have done it, dearie,” was all Mrs. Cameron said.

“No; I know she wouldn’t. And her daughter will not do it either. I came to you for advice, but I do not need it now. This day and my mother’s letters have shown me what path I must take—the only path I can take, no matter what it may hold for me of difficulty and loneliness. I shall never marry Richard Harvey.”

“Maybe you won’t find the right path so hard and lonely after all, dearie. The right path is always easier to walk in than the wrong one when all is said and done.”

“Aunt Isobel will cast stumbling blocks athwart it for awhile, I expect,” said Katherine, smiling through her tears. “May I come and live with you through the summer, grandmother, until she has become resigned to my folly?”

“Yes, dearie. Come and stay with me as long and as often as you like. As long as I live I’ll be always here and always heart-glad to see you. You can have your mother’s room. But I hear Peter’s buggy rumbling over the log bridge. Are you sure you’ve got plenty on, dearie? These spring nights have awful heavy dews.”

The two women took leave of each other at the gate under the pines with a long, silent arm clasp. There was a great peace in the hearts of both.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *In the Home of Her Mother* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]